A CRITICAL STUDY OF ADRIENNE CECILE RICH'S WORKS IN A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

By

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Under the Supervision of

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ABSTRACT

The present study entitled “A CRITICAL STUDY OF ADRIENNE CECILE RICH’S WORKS IN A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE” has been divided in five chapters followed by a conclusion.

The introductory chapter entitled “The Dynamics of the Feminist Movement” attempts to discuss the different facets of the feminist movement. Tracing the history of the feminist movement it tries to focus on the philosophical forces working behind it. Through the Anglo-American and the French feminist perspectives it tries to uncover several efforts in literature to render women to a lower subject position and perpetuate their subordination in society.

Chapter Two, “The Dialectics of Adrienne Rich’s Thought”, is a study of the biographical details about Adrienne Rich with a view to trace the history of the growth of her poetic and literary attitude. It is a fact widely acknowledged by critics that the formative influences upon a writer play a vital role in shaping and designing the artist’s attitude to, and the modes of meeting, the realities of life that call for a response. We also propose to include those aspects of Adrienne Rich’s early spectrum of circumstances and influences that most strongly reflect themselves in her
attitude to art and literature and are finally responsible for her evolution as a radical feminist thinker.

Chapter Three. "Language, Power, and Politics of Sexuality", discusses new developments in the field of language that have changed all the concepts about it. Now, it is not merely a passive mode of communication conveying ideas and experiences but it has rather become a living thing which plays with human beings and shapes realities. Adrienne Rich shows great awareness of the politics of literature to keep women silent, restricted and, therefore, powerless. Her poetry is a continuous process of exploration of how language has trapped women and how they have been led to believe and practise what patriarchal order has asked them to do. But she wants a change, a change that comes through women looking at literature differently than they have ever looked at; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over them.

Chapter Four. "Women in Patriarchy: The Problem of Identity", discusses in detail the condition of women in patriarchy and women’s constant struggle to dismantle the image of women projected in patriarchy that confines their whole existence. Identity emerges as an unresolved question for women as patriarchal ideology leaves no space for women and tries to disintegrate their very existence in the world. Adrienne Rich considers the patriarchal structure of society as the root of women’s
oppression, and her entire poetic career is an effort to change this social structure in which women are relegated to a lower position in comparison to men and are constantly in search of their identities. Her work offers an alternative vision, one that condemns the sins of patriarchal order and goes on to praise the strengths and virtues basic to everyone, precisely the life-reclaiming strengths and virtues of women through the ages.

Chapter Five. "Lesbian Continuum: A Celebration of Women’s Liberation", is an attempt to give a brief sketch of the Lesbian movement and the theoretical basis of lesbianism. Drawing insights from Michel Foucault’s theory of sexuality and the workings of discursive power, Rich writes about the images of male power and the way it operates. Rich attacks the institution of compulsory heterosexuality as a theoretical and political stumbling block for feminism and proposes the concept of lesbian continuum which comprises the giving and taking of political support, exchanging difficulties and ideas, and evolving a culture of sisterhood which recognises and strengthens women’s resistance to patriarchy and power. The chapter also gives a detailed criticism of Rich’s theory and its importance in today’s theoretical world.

In “Conclusion” an attempt has been made to bind up the present study. It will consist of the various findings arrived at during the course of the present study. The poetry of Adrienne Rich presents a clear-sighted
example of a poet whose work had begun in a formal self-regarding manner devoid of politics: but a poet who has gone on, by virtue of attention to experience, to establish a major voice in forms clearly political. Her poetry attained maturity when she started realizing that politics was not something “out there” but something “in here”. and the essence of her condition. Her political poetry should be read in two ways: as an exploration of the life of women in contemporary culture and as an exploration of general human concerns for identity and community. Her themes revolve around two poles: the power and potential of language to determine consciousness and our lived reality and the importance of personal experience and reflection in the creation of social community.
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2005
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Mr. Sanjeev Kumar Kaushal has carried out this study on “A Critical Study of Adrienne Cecile Rich's Works in a Feminist Perspective” under my supervision for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. This is his original work and I hope it will be a new contribution to the knowledge in this area.

He is allowed to submit the work for the Ph.D. degree of the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

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(i) What is Feminism?

Proposing the "riddle of the nature of femininity" as an unresolved question that" people have knocked their heads against" throughout human history. Sigmund Freud, in his article "Femininity", argues that "men" have not "escaped worrying our this problem" but "to those of you who are women this will not apply--you yourselves are the problem." But Freud was well aware of the fact that women had been "worrying" over the problem of "femininity" at least as long as men. Although "femininity" may be defined as a group of attributes referred to biologically sexed females, what exactly those attributes are and the extent to which any given account of femininity is natural or cultural, have been discussed extensively by women themselves. When Charlotte Bronte's heroine, Jane Eyre, speaks passionately to the reader of the gendered division of emotions: "Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel". She is questioning and revolting against the commonsense understanding of femininity of her time, and as a result, its scientific as well its social basis. Both in life and fiction. "one can both live a gendered identity in all its complexity, and hold its received definition at arm's length."

Freud wanted his readers to think over the practice of associating passivity with women, and activity with men. He considered it "inadequate.... to make masculine behaviour coincide with activity and feminine with passivity .... Women can display great activity in various directions. men are not able to live in company with their own kind unless they develop a large amount of adaptibility". He debates that "Even if" one
were to say that psychologically femininity gave preference to "passive aims". "a passive aim may call for a large amount of activity". He cautions his readers not to give activity and passivity crude gender alignments as it serves" no useful purpose and adds nothing to our knowledge".

The basic idea that Freud tries to convey is that the conventional binaries that designate gender are convenient but mistaken social fictions, and that all human beings are potentially bisexual – that their choice of sexual object is the outcome of an impeded and complex psychic trajectory.

Feminism as an organized movement, to undermine the oppression of women by men, started in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Critic Karen Offen points out that 'feminism' as a term began to be used extensively in Europe as a synonym for women's emancipation only in 1880s. It was, the woman's suffrage advocate, Hubert Auclert, who first described herself as a 'feminist' in her periodical La Citoyenne in 1882, and a 'feminist Congress' was organized in Paris in May 1882 by Eugenie Potonie-Pierre and the woman's group solidarite.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* used the word 'feminist' first in the *Supplement* to the dictionary in 1993, reprinted and revised in 1972, with two meanings: as an adjective it denotes 'pertaining to feminism or to women'; as a noun, a feminist is 'an advocate of feminism'. In the early editions of the dictionary feminism appeared, marked 'rare', as meaning alternatively 'the state of being feminine' or 'a feminine or woman's expression', neither of which seems to be what it means today. The *Supplement* deletes 'rare', gives a derivation for the word from the French *féminisme*, and adds two more possibilities: feminism is the 'advocacy of the rights of woman (based on the theory of the equality of the sexes)': it is also a pathological description of 'the development of female secondary
characteristics in a male'. The word 'feminine' has also been given six distinct meanings in the original dictionary and two in the Supplement. It first means: 'Of persons and animals, belonging to the female sex. Female. Now race; second: 'In the same sense, of objects to which sex is attributed, or which have feminine names especially one of the heavenly bodies. Third: feminine means 'of or pertaining to a woman, or to women: consisting of women: carried on by women'. Fourth: 'characteristic of, peculiar or proper to women; womanlike, womanly'. Fifth: a descriptive usage or insult, 'Womanish, effeminate'. Lastly, the grammar usages of the word, as in the feminine genders of nouns which describe objects or concepts that are not inherently female. The Supplement adds to the grammar usages of the phrase 'feminine ending', meaning weak rhyme: and 'Eternal Feminine' as a translation of Goethe's concept of das ewig-Weibliche, interestingly it means that the Eternal Feminine has not been around all that long.7

This entire process of listing of meanings clearly show that the word feminism does not have a single fixed meaning. The earliest meanings of feminism view it as 'the state of being feminine' and 'a feminine or woman's word or expression'. What for later generations has become a word caught up in the issues of political advocacy and agency, referred first of all to biology and to language, words which might be rewritten as 'nature' and 'culture', or, in fact as 'bodies' and 'language'. Feminism has a lot to do with bodies and with how those bodies speak in such a way that their sex is registered in their language.

Defining the word 'feminism', historian David Boucher writes: "Feminism includes any form of opposition to any form of social, personal or economic discrimination which women suffer because of their sex".8 In other words feminism includes all forms of collective action against such discrimination, from political organization to cultural separatism.
(ii) The Feminist Movement: A Brief Sketch

The story of women’s struggle for liberation and equality is not new, it is interwoven with the history of human civilization itself. But it had never acquired that force and momentum with which it emerged in the nineteenth century as a unified force to dispel all discriminations and prejudices against women on the basis of sex. Women now came to realize that their disqualification and subordination in all the fields of life was simply because of their being women. Their growing resentment over the patriarchal attitudes and the rigid social structure forced them to stand against all discriminations firmly, which ultimately resulted as the “Feminist Movement”. The Movement shook the very foundations of all existing social systems. Like a fierce storm destroying everything that comes in its way, the Feminist Movement swept away all the dead leaves to let the new ones come to life.

There have been two great waves of feminism. The first began in the USA in the 1830s, spread rapidly to Europe and ended in the 1920s with women achieving the right to vote. The second wave also surfaced first in the USA during the early 1960s which gripped the entire Western World and made it realize its impetuosity. In many other countries too, women launched campaigns for equality according to their particular social and cultural settings.

The Feminist Movement was not a sudden phenomenon. It took a long time to come in its present form and the journey was not an easy one but rather beset with incessant struggles. Encouraged by the historical changes in the philosophical perspectives emphasizing on individual freedom, the “rights of man”, and universal education, women participated enthusiastically in the abolition movement, which gave the Feminist
Movement a real political shape. They viewed the condition of the slaves as a religious abomination and a national disgrace. They exposed the whole patriarchal social system and demanded the amendment in the US Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, for the freedom and equality of all. But nothing as such was going to change for women. They began to realize that their own situation was not different from that of the slaves. Harriet Martinean summed up the whole case in rather apt words: “One of the fundamental principles announced in the Declaration of Independence is that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. How can the political condition of women be reconciled with this?”

The early initiatives towards a more specific organisation of women as feminists came from these activists in the civil rights movement, and later also from women involved in protest actions against the war in Vietnam. Thus, the “new” feminists were politically committed activists who were not afraid to take a stand and fight for their views. However, the American movement was formally launched at a convention at Seneca Falls in July, 1848, organised by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The convention issued a Declaration of Sentiments and twelve resolutions calling for reforms such as property rights for married women and greater access to education, trades and professions, including the Church. It emphasized on the fact that: “... the history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpation on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her”.

Included in the list of twelve resolutions was one which read: “Resolved. That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise”. Although it is
considered the official beginning of the woman’s suffrage movement. The movement was never confined only to the demand of suffrage.

Voting rights were seen as radical in the period but, as the century wore on and other rights were conceded, the suffrage gradually became the main and only issue for the movement. But the entire situation took a dramatic turn when free male slaves got the right to vote by 1866, and the women who had campaigned so long and so hard against slavery were denied it. But resentment over the race issue divided the movement. In May, 1869, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organised the National Woman Suffrage Association. Later on, Lucy Stone and others organised the American Woman Suffrage Association. But it was to take another thirty years of hard struggle, hundreds of individual state campaigns, defeats, divisions and uncertainty before the vote was finally won. The 19th Amendment or Anthony Amendment was first presented to the Congress in 1878, was rejected, and continued to be rejected in every session, up to 1920, when women finally became full political citizens.¹³ Thus, the first grueling phase of the American feminist movement was over. But it was not all the movement had aimed for. In fact this was only one element in the wide ranging feminist critique questioning the fundamental organization of society. The women’s movement virtually ended in 1920, and with the exception of few organizations feminism was to lie dormant for forty years.

In the 1960s, for the first time since the women’s vote was won, feminism surged again with new energy and aspirations as an important political force in the Western world. By now people also began to have a more democratic view of the feminist demands. Speaking about the new dimensions of the movement Maran Lockwood Carden says: \[\ldots\]
concerns the individual’s right to find out the kind of person he or she is and to strive to become that person".  

It was Betty Friedan, who, with the publication of her famous book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, provided the much needed philosophical and ideological direction to the movement. She undauntingly declared that all women had been victimized by a set of ideas – a "feminine mystique" – which permeated society and defined female happiness as a total involvement in the roles of wife and mother. She writes "We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: ‘I want something more than my husband and my children and my house’.  

That “more” she defined as a career. She declared that a woman’s horizons were circumscribed from childhood onwards by the assumption that her highest function in life was to care for her husband and rear her children. In effect the home had become a “comfortable concentration camp” which infantilized its female inhabitants and forced them to leave their adult frame of reference. Just as Victorian culture had repressed women’s need to express themselves sexually, modern culture denied them the opportunity to use their minds.

Adopting a more academic perspective, Ellen and Kenneth Keniston placed particular emphasis on the fact that young girls had no positive models of career women to imitate. The declared that those forms of oppression were most effective with which the victim covertly cooperated, and women provided a case in point. Denied of any culturally approved alternative to homemaking, most females internalized society’s view of their place and role. and accepted a “voluntary servitude” in the home rather than risk losing their femininity." Carrie Chapman Catt was also of the view that the movement had an aim to “destroy the idea that obedience is necessary to women: to train women to such self-respect that they would
not grant obedience: and to train men to such comprehension of equity that they would not exact it". 18

So, during the 1960s American women faced a very confusing situation as to how to strike a balance between the traditional ideas of women's place in society and the increasing reality of female involvement in activities outside home. They still wanted to get married and have children but they also desired to experience the world beyond, to soar freely in the regions denied to them by culture and other ideological restrictions. Their own identity, personality and the intimate self were at stake. They were not ready to ignore that voice demanding "more" which inspired them to realize their own identity.

Thus, the new feminist movement places a great importance upon the gender issue and the role of women in society. The feminists feel that society has bound them in such a way that they cannot and should not do anything against what has already been framed for them. They argue that the biological differences between men and women have been too much emphasized whereas as the fact is that the different socialization processes account for the greater part of the observed differences in their behaviour.

It was increasingly felt that nothing can be achieved without having an organization for women to defend their rights as the media and the political bodies were very hostile to the idea of feminism. It materialized in the form of National Organization of Women (NOW). With 300 charter members, both male and female. NOW announced its incorporation at a press conference in Washington D.C. on October 29, 1966. Betty Friedan was elected the first president. Dr. Kathryn Clarenbach, chairperson of the board and Richard Graham, treasurer. 19 The Statement of Purpose announced its goal:
... to take the action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men.²⁰

NOW provided a platform for a strong political lobby for women's rights as well as a philosophical forum for new feminist ideas. In this way it functioned initially as an umbrella group for all women from altogether diverse backgrounds and diverse expectations for the organization.

(iii) The Question of Gender

The Feminist Movement of the 1960's was seriously concerned with family and personal life. With the emergence of radical feminism and the slogan "The personal is political", the family and personal life caught the attention of a political movement which characterized its concerns as political. This started a process of rethinking of the lines traditionally separating the family from other social institutions and a questioning of the family as a biological institution. This new focus started recognizing the family as a social institution, as a product of history, and as capable of change.

These concerns emphasized the need for theory to analyse family, its origin, history and interrelation with other social institutions. This need manifested itself in anthropology and psychoanalytic theory. The findings of these disciplines suggested that the traits and practices associated with men and women varied widely from culture to culture: gender roles were not fixed; and sexuality could not be explained in merely biological terms. Psychoanalyst and anthropologist Robert J. Stoller, in his book Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity (1968), made a clear distinction between sex and gender. Stoller used the term 'gender' to
refer to the complexities of those "tremendous areas of behaviour, feelings, thoughts, and fantasies that are related to the sexes and yet do not have primarily biological connotations." Stoller's work greatly influenced Kate Millett when she made the statement in *Sexual Politics* that "male and female are really two cultures" as she doubted "the validity and permanence of psycho-sexual identity" as a fact of life.

Perhaps, it was Gayle Rubin who, in her influential essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex", tried to define the relationship between sex and gender through the contrast between nature and culture. Rubin argued that every known society has what she calls "a sex/gender system" that is:

a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be.

In her essay Rubin shows how men enjoy having certain rights in their female kin, while women do not have the same rights either to themselves or their male kin and in fact they may be used as bride wealth, trophies, gifts and may be traded, bought, and sold. Rubin writes that "sex is sex but what counts as sex is culturally determined and obtained." One of the main insights of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is that there is no simple sense in which 'sex is sex', and that our ideas and beliefs concerning sexuality have been changed over the last hundred years, in fact, they are still changing. Thus, sex and gender are closely interconnected, but not because one is 'natural' while the other represents its transformation into 'culture'. Rather both are unavoidably cultural categories that refer to ways
of describing and understanding human bodies and human relationships. Our relationship to ourselves and to others.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that gender is a symbolic form of 'public action' whose repetition allows for our recognition as describing and desirable subjects. Butler writes:

Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.\(^{25}\)

Butler's theory of signification sounds as if gender is a matter of choice, of picking up and discarding identities at will. In fact, Butler has herself cautioned against this kind of misguided reading of *Gender Trouble*. Gender identity is not something we can freely choose, but one that we also struggle against, that sustains us at the same time as it constrains us.

Teresa de Lauretis in her book *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (1987) pointed that today's representations of gender are constructed by a number of "technologies of gender" such as cinema or advertising and that we, as gendered subjects, can be viewed to be "constructed across a multiplicity of discourses, positions, and meanings, which are often in conflict with one another."\(^{26}\) de Lauretis thinks that these discursive contradictions provide an opportunity to form new gender identities. But Chantal Mouffe argues that "despite their heterogeneity, discourses and practices do not take place in isolation" but communicate with each other to form" a common effect."\(^{27}\) As a result "the feminine" is permanently set up "as a subordinated pole to the masculine". A process in
which "the symbolism linked in a given society to the feminine condition plays a fundamental role". There can be no mitigation of gendered inequalities unless this symbolism is successfully confronted.

(iv) Feminist Criticism

The Feminist Movement was strongly literary from the beginning as it emphasized on the importance of fighting the false depiction of women in literature. Feminism, therefore, has always been crucially concerned with books and literature, and so, feminist criticism should not be seen as an offshoot of feminism which is remote from the ultimate aims of the movement, but as "one of its most practical ways of influencing everyday conduct and attitudes".

Giving it a sort of definition J.A. Cuddon writes in his dictionary:

It questions the long standing, dominant, male, phallocentric ideologies (which add up to a kind of male conspiracy), patriarchal attitudes and male interpretations in literature (and critical evaluation of literature). It attacks male notions of value in literature by offering critiques of male authors and representations of men in literature and also by privileging women writers. In addition it challenges traditional and accepted male ideas about the nature of women and about how women feel, act and think or are supposed to feel act and think and how in general they respond to life and living. It thus questions numerous prejudices and assumptions about women made by male writers, not least any tendency to cast women in stock character roles.
Thus, feminist criticism is concerned both with the representation of
ewomen in literature and with changing women’s position in society by
liberating them from oppressive restraints. Central to these restrictions are
essentialist definitions of woman which assume that human nature is
universal and culture has no role in constructing and fixing identity.

Since 1969 there has been an explosion of feminist — writings
without close parallel in the history of previous critical
innovations, in a movement that, as Elaine Showalter has
remarked, display the urgency and excitement of a religious
awakening.1

Feminist criticism, as it is practised now, is not a unitary theory, but
includes a great variety of practices i.e., from psychoanalytic, Marxist and
post-structuralist — theories, and is constantly developing and changing, so
instead of speaking feminist criticism in the singular it makes more sense to
speak of feminist criticisms in the plural. Nevertheless, almost all feminist
criticisms share some common “assumptions and concepts that constitute a
common ground for the diverse ways that individual critics explore, the
factor of sexual difference and privilege in the production, the form and
content, the reception, and the critical analysis and evaluation of works or
literature.”2

1) They all agree that the entire social structure of world civilization is
patriarchal, that the world is organised on terms dictated by men, and to the
advantage of men. The woman is defined as negative or the “other” to the
man who is the defining and dominating “subject”. Male is regarded as the
norm, as the central and neutral position from which the female is a
departure. Simone de Beauvoir puts it in this way “Thus humanity is male

13
and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him: she is not regarded as an autonomous being ...." 33

She is subordinate to man as she lacks the identifying male organ, the symbol of male power, the centre of the entire culture and civilization. Women are forcefully trained to internalize this all pervading patriarchal ideology of male superiority, and so are conditioned to denigrate their own sex and contribute in their own subordination.

2) They believe that gender differences are socially constructed though they are presented as natural or normal. There is an important distinction between sex and gender. Sex is used to indicate the biological differences between man and woman, but gender signifies the socially constructed differences which operate in most societies and which lead to forms of inequality, oppression and exploitation between the sexes. Both femininity and masculinity are socially constructed and invested with various qualities, values, images and narratives which constantly circulate in society and which shape and determine people's attitudes and lives. In this way the masculine in our culture has come to be identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational and creative, while the feminine represents the passive, the acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional.

3) The feminist critics consider literature as both "agents of reinforcement and of subversion in the ways that they construct or represent gender relations". 34 The patriarchal or androcentric ideology pervades the canonical writings written almost entirely by men for men. All the great literary works focus on male protagonists – Oedipus, Ulysses, Hamlet, Tom Jones, Captain Ahab, Huckleberry Finn- who represent masculine qualities, ways of thinking and feeling. Female characters, in comparison to the male characters, "are marginal and subordinate, and are represented either as
These works, as they lack autonomous female characters, unconsciously force the female reader to identify herself with the male protagonists and in the process adopt male values and ways of perceiving, feeling and acting. Thus, they convert women into men who think and act like men and reinforce their own subjugation.

(4) They also believe that not only literary works but the traditional ways of analyzing and criticizing these works, the entire aesthetics, which represent themselves as objective, disinterested, and universal, are also a part of masculine ideology and interests and are thoroughly gender-biased.

Thus, a feminist critic's task is manifold, focusing on the reconstruction of all the ways they deal with literature so as to do justice to female points of views, concerns, and values. They may be broadly listed as follows:

1. Enlarge and re-order or if necessary displace the canon, aiming at the rediscovery of a hidden tradition of women's writing.
2. Re-evaluate women's experience.
3. Examine the "image of women" in literature both by men and women.
4. Challenge representation of women as "Other", as "lack", as part of "nature".
5. Examine power relations.
6. Re-organize the role of language in presenting a social construct as natural.
7. Examine the role of gender politics in constructing men and women.
8. Explore the possibilities of an écriture féminine.

9. Re-read psychoanalysis to explore the male and female identities.

10. Question Roland Barthes' notion of the death of the author and examine its implications.

11. Expose the ideological politics of “neutral” or “mainstream” literary interpretations.

12. Convert the acquiescent, passive reader into “the Resisting Reader” as Judith Fetterley puts it, who does “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” as Adrienne Rich desires her to do.

(v) The Tradition of Feminist Writing

When Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her path-breaking book The Second Sex (1949), “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman .... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature ... which is described as feminine” She questioned the very authenticity of the culture and its weapon, literature, which had created a false image of women and with the power of patriarchal system converted this false image into a reality. She opened the door for new critical thinking which had a long traditional force with it. It includes Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), which discusses male writers like Milton, Pope, and Rousseau; Olive Schreiner’s Women and Labour (1911); Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own (1929), which vividly portrays the unequal treatment given to women seeking education and alternatives to marriage and motherhood. John Stuart Mill’s The Subjection of Woman (1869) and Friedrich Engel’s The Origin of the Family (1884) also contributed to this tradition of feminist writing.
Contemporary feminist literature has portrayed the conditions, the pains and the problems of women in a very sensitive and sympathetic way. Presenting their plight, Ann Rosenberg writes:

They all want to come and drink from our wells.
Drown in my pussy in liquid passion.
Scan my topography.
Search all the crevices.
And ultimately bury their bones, the dogs.39

(a) Anglo-American Feminist Writing

Feminist critics during the 1970s were preoccupied with the idea that women writers had been silenced, by and large excluded from literary history. They desired to rediscover the lost work of women writers in order to provide a context that would be helpful for contemporary women writers. They also wanted to express 'what it is to be female', to declare the experience and perceptions that had never been heard. Well aware of the fact that critical attention focused mostly on male writers, these critics demanded a status and recognition for women authors. But they did not aim to put women into the male-dominated tradition: instead, they wanted to write the history of a tradition among women themselves.

The kind of feminist criticism which began in the late 1960s and 70s, was political and polemical in nature given the political orientation of women in society. Indeed, a substantial amount of feminist criticism goes beyond literature to explore the socio-economic status of women: their economic position (as women) and the problems they face in a prejudiced world of male publishers and critics. Mary Ellmann's Thinking About Women (1968) inaugurated this new feminist literary movement in America. She expressed her view that Western culture at all levels is
conditioned by the tendency to comprehend all phenomena in term of "original and simple sexual differences". She criticizes male literature for projecting femininity in eleven major stereotypes: formlessness, passivity, instability, confinement, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy and finally "the two incorrigible figures" of the Witch and the Shrew. She points out that male critics even when objective, automatically choose adjectives and phrases that tend to make the woman's poetry charming and sweet (as woman should be) as opposed to serious and significant (as men are supposed to be). But as *Thinking About Women* was less political and more academic, it could not gain that popularity with which Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) stunned the world and set it on fire. She examines how patriarchy, "the birthright priority whereby male rules females" plays politics in human relationships by stereotyped lines of sex category. She defines the "essence of politics" as power and explains all cultural phenomena purely in terms of power politics:

One must acknowledge that the chivalrous stance is a game the master group plays in elevating its subject to pedestal level .... As the sociologist Hugo Beigal has observed, both the courtly and romantic versions of love are 'grants' which the male concedes out of his total power. Both have had the effect of obscuring the patriarchal character of Western culture and in their general tendency to attribute impossible virtues to women, have ended by confining them in a narrow and often remarkably consribing sphere of behaviour.

She addressed herself to such writers as Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, D.H. Lawrence and Jean Genet who provide "instances of sexual description". The most striking aspect of Millett's criticism is the boldness with which she reads "against the grain" of the literary text. She openly
presents her perspective and shows how precisely such conflict between the reader and the author/text can reveal the hidden implication of a work. and thus rejects the traditional hierarchy of text and reader. As a reader, Kate Millett is not submissive or lady like: "her style is that of a hard-nosed street kid out to challenge the author's authority at every turn" as Toril Moi puts it. which is perfectly suitable to feminism's political purposes.

Finding a female tradition. Tillie Olsen conceives of a "women's movement" that generates curiosity about women writers. In her Silences, she writes that, "it is the women's movement, part of the other movements of our time for a fully human life, that has brought this forum into being; kindling a renewed, in most instances a first-time, interest in the writings and writers of our sex." Patricia Spacks in The Female Imagination (1975) described the literature of female experience and its excited consumption by newly conscious women students. Like Sexual Politics it assumed that novels referred directly to the world or to the self of the writer but it fell short of specific historicizing of that world or the self.

Taking Olsen's idea further. Ellen Moers in Literary Women (1976). talks about "a literary movement apart from, but hardly subordinate to the mainstream: an undercurrent, rapid and powerful". beginning in the late 18th century with Jane Austen. Literary Women was the outcome of a long process of reflection on women that began in 1963 when Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique was published, a book that forced Moeres to change her views on the need to treat women writers as a separate group. The reasons of this change were. first, the satisfying results of such a separation. then the fact that "we already practice a segregation of major women writers unknowingly". and finally, a deeper understanding of the true nature of women's history. Thus Moeres reflects the development of many academic women: from suspecting all attempts at separating women from the main
stream of historical development as a form of anti-egalitarianism, they started accepting the political necessity of seeing women as a distinctive group if the common patriarchal practices of subsuming women under the general category of 'man', and therefore silencing them, was to be effectively defeated. Literary Women was the first attempt at describing the history of women's writing. It linked female characters and authors as heroines in the realm of female history, placing a female tradition of influence along with men's and finding female modes and myths in literature.

Elaine Showalter, in A Literature of Their Own (1977), dismisses this idea of a women’s movement which suggests a steady and continuous development in women’s writing. She agrees with Moers' view that "women studied with a special closeness the works written by their own sex" but the "holes and hiatuses" the absences, gaps and descriptions have broken this history, and instead stresses, with Germaine Greer, on the "phenomenon of the transience of female literary fame" or the fact that only a small group of women celebrated "dazzling" literary prestige in their own lifetimes but vanished without trace from the records of posterity. Showalter concludes:

Thus each generation of women writers have found itself in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex. Given this perpetual disruption, and also the self-hatred that has alienated women writers from a sense of collective identity, it does not seem possible to speak of a 'movement'.

So finally it is the responsibility of all women individually and collectively to reconstruct the fractured tradition. Showalter also disagrees
with Patricia Meyer Spack’s concept of a “female imagination” as it runs dangerously close to reiterating the common stereotypes and can confirm the belief in “a deep, basic, and inevitable difference between male and female ways of perceiving the world”\textsuperscript{51}, instead she believes that “the female literary tradition comes from the still evolving relationship between women writers and their society”\textsuperscript{52}.

Showing how the female literary tradition from the generation of the Brontes to the present day formed a “literary subculture”. Showalter argued that “women themselves have constituted a subculture within the framework of a larger society and have been unified by values, conventions, experiences, and behaviours impinging on each individual”\textsuperscript{53}. She categorizes three major phases of historical development of all literary subcultures, such as Black Jewish, Canadian, Anglo-Indian, or even American.

First is the phase of imitation, in which women writers imitated dominant male tradition, and of internalization, the standards of art and society. The second phase is of protest against these standards and values, and of advocacy of minority rights and values including autonomy. Third is the phase of self-discovery, a search for identity, emphasizing on female writing and female experience. She also calls these stages, Feminine, Feminist and Female. Toril Moi explains that the first is “a set of culturally defined characteristics”, the second “a political position”, the third “a matter of biology”.\textsuperscript{54} The Feminine phase starts with the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840s, and lasts until the death of George Eliot in 1880; the Feminist phase is from 1880 to 1920 and the Female phase is from 1920 onwards, which entered a new stage of self-awareness about 1960.

Explaining further these developments in literary criticism from “androtexts” to “gynotexts”, Showalter distinguishes between “feminist
critique” and “gynocritics”. “Feminist critique”, concerned with woman as reader, deals with works by male authors and is a “historically grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena.”. “Gynocritics”, which deals with woman as writer, is concerned with “the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution or the laws of a female literary tradition”. She recommends “gynocritics” as it provides directly “what women have felt and experienced”. Here the text becomes the transparent medium through which “experience” can be gleaned. This view of texts reflects the traditional emphasis of Western patriarchal humanism.

Showalter’s major contribution to literary history in general, and to feminist criticism in particular is her emphasis on the rediscovery of the women writers who were either forgotten or neglected. It is because of Showalter’s efforts that many such women writers are getting recognition they actually deserve. Speaking in high terms Toril Moi says. "A Literature of Their Own is a veritable goldmine of information about the lesser-known literary women of the period. This epochal book displays wide-ranging scholarship and an admirable enthusiasm and respect for its subjects".

In the mid-1970s, along with the ongoing emphasis on equal rights and opportunities, there was a new celebration of the distinctive experience of women. For this celebration, a new emphasis on mythology was laid on, as history with dull record of oppression and repression was supposed to be insufficient. In such an atmosphere the poet and critique Adrienne Rich wrote Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (1976), glorifying motherhood, creativity, female bonding, and the lesbian experience and gave her dream of a common language uncovering the female self. In On Lies, Secrets, and Silence (1979), her selected essays
written between 1966 and 1978, Rich defined a female consciousness which was "political, aesthetic, and erotic, and which refuses to be included or contained in the culture of passivity." She emphasized the need of revision, the new way of reading and looking, to discover a new psychic space, a new history, and a new language, bringing together ethics, living and thinking.

Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and 'Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective' (1980) further celebrated motherhood by revising the traditional Freudian psychology that focused on the male Oedipal drama and penis envy of the girl. Chodorow, in contrast to Freud, linked the child's sense of identity with the mother. Instead of Freud's concept of the unconscious, she preferred the idea of gender imprinting and role-playing. The idea received considerable acceptance as it linked the unmodifiable psychological with the more accessible sociological.

Mary Daly, an immensely popular writer among women students on American campuses in the 1970s, in *Beyond God the Father* (1973), blamed men of having stolen language from women, a theft enacted in *Genesis*. She urged women to transform and take back their language. In *Gyn/Ecology*, she aimed to go beyond the male myths encoded within the language and beyond a male-centered logic of binary oppositions based on the gender division to develop a new female syntax which would naturally express the female body.

Dale Spender, in *Man Made Language* (1980), asked some probing questions about the power of language. Instead of simply celebrating women's writings, she expressed a concern about separate languages for men and women:
The English language has been literally man made and … it is still primarily under male control … This monopoly over language is one of the means by which males have ensured the invisibility or "other" nature of females, and this primacy is perpetuated while women continue to use, unchanged, the language which we have inherited.60

In 1979 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar published The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Imagination. In this famous and monumental study, Gilbert and Gubar try to solve the dilemma of all women who find themselves handicapped in the patriarchal system as Anais Nin puts it, "... this 'I am God', which makes creation an act of solitude and pride, this image of God alone making sky, earth, sea, it is this image which has confused woman"61 Gilbert and Gubar point out that the Author, in "the male metaphors of literary creation that depend upon such an etiology"62 becomes the Divine Creator, the Father, the sole origin and meaning of his work. They ask a very important question: "What if such a proudly masculine cosmic Author is the sole legitimate model for all earthly authors? Or worse, what if the male generative power is not just the only legitimate power but the only power there is?"63 Thus the entire creative field is inherently masculine and there is no place for women, the "Cyphers", as Anne Finch calls them:

… we beside you but as Cyphers stand
To increase your Numbers and to swell the account
Of your delights which from our charms amount
And sadly are by this distinction taught.
That since the Fall (by our seducement wrought)
Our is the greater loss as ours the greater fault.64
Since creativity is masculine, the very images of femininity are also male constructions. Therefore, for the female artist, the necessary process of self-identification is complicated by all these patriarchal images and "definitions that intervene between herself and herself" that inevitably leads them to suffer from the "anxiety of authorship". If the author is defined as male and she herself as his creature, how can she venture to take up the pen, symbolising the phallus? Answering this question they put forward the main thesis of the book:

Women from Jane Austen and Mary Shelley to Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic, works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning. Thus these authors managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards.

These female writers are "duplicitous" whose consciousness is opaque to man and whose mind will not but itself be penetrated by the "phallic probings" of the masculine thought. They expressed their own female anger in a series of duplicitous textual strategies, assaulting and revising, deconstructing and reconstructing the images of women constructed by male literature of both the angel and the monster, the sweet heroine and the raging "mad woman". A famous example of the mad woman is Bertha Rochester in Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre (1847). Such a figure is, as Gilbert and Gubar put it, "usually in some sense the author’s double, an image of her own anxiety and rage". But their insistence on the identity of author and character, author as the upholder of all meaning, draws them to the Western patriarchal philosophy of The Author – the
Father – The God, where a woman does not have any place. So if we really want to reject the model of the author as God the Father of the text, we will have to reject the *critical practice* that projects the author as the “transcendental signified”, the real source, origin and meaning of the text. If we want to undo this patriarchal practice of *authority* we will have to accept Roland Barthes’ theory of “the death of the author”. Once the author is dead, the practice to decipher a text becomes quite futile; the *multiplicity* of writing where “everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*” becomes the right approach to see the writing:

The space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better now on to say *writing*), by refusing to assign a ‘secret’, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law.  

In the 1980s, feminist criticism involved more multi-voiced critiques of literature which the formulation of a single women's tradition could not address. Cora Kaplan’s article ‘Pandora’s box: subjectivity, class and sexuality in socialist feminist criticism’ dealt with a more problematic notion of feminist criticism which neither used women's repression and exclusion from literary institution as its key, nor did it rely on the authority of women's psycho-sexual experience. It paired two different models of feminist criticism in relation to Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*. She discussed how the psycho-analytic model of Mary Jacobus's decodes the literary psyches as emblems of repressed Victorian femininity, while the socio-
feminist model of Judith Newton makes the psyche simply a repository of social values. Kaplan believes that these two approaches can be integrated to form a third reading where women's literary sexuality as a displaced representation of experience can stand for instabilities both of class and gender.

Many Jacobus's *Reading Women* attacks directly on feminist literary history in the persons of "herstorians". These included critics take Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar. Jacobus calls them "essentialists". Especially disapproving Showalter's concentration on female writing, she disputes the idea that women writers should be privileged in criticism since the category of women writer is inevitably problematic itself and since an intervention of psychoanalysis is required to show how 'difference' is produced. She believes that it is only through psychoanalysis that women's writing can be liberated from the determinism of origin or essence, which is reiterated not probed in the herstory approach.

In 'Gynesis' (1982) and *Gynesis* (1985). article and book, Alice Jardine follows Jacobus in taking issue with American feminist criticism. She accuses American historical criticism of having a naive empirical view of reality, of failing to understand that "'Truth' and 'reality' are ... radically and irrevocably problematized". It also fails to grasp that it is not the self, a woman or a man, that speaks but "language, the unconscious, the textuality of the text": the "assurance of an author's sex within the whirlpool of de-centering is problematized beyond recognition ..." According to Jardine, the drawback in American gynocritics is its dependence on premodernist notions of subject, experience and representation. This dependence results in a lack of theory and a reactionary praxis, while old ways of thought and knowledge are left in place.
(b) French Feminist Writing

Whereas Anglo-American critics have, for the most part, been concerned with empirical and thematic studies of the writings by and about women. French feminist critics have been concerned with the theory of the role of gender in writing, taking as its starting-point the insights of major post-structuralists, especially Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida. While it includes both the existential philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir and the materialist analysis of Christine Delphy, the psychoanalytic critiques of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous, all focus on the relationship between female subjectivity and forms of language. Despite their differences, these critics shape certain preconceptions. First, they believe that Western patriarchy is a symbolic order with a language/discourse characterized by objectivity and rationality. Change in socio-economic structure will involve linguistic change in this symbolic order which might be stimulated by new models drawn from the maternal. Second, they claim that all Western languages, in all their features, are basically male-engendered and male-dominated, and that discourse is predominantly "phallocentric" as Jacques Derrida puts it. Third, the literary text is never primarily a representation of reality, or a reproduction of a personal voice expressing the personal experience. Fourth, they argue that in the new and varied psycho-social, linguistic constructs we might release the repressed Other, or femininity, into culture. Hence French feminists are interested in the texts which draw attention to processes of representation. They believe that processes can reveal gender-specific subjectivities and that these are the processes of meaning making which create gender misrepresentations, not only in literature, but also in the political world. They are thus concerned with the possibility of a woman's language and of écriture feminine that will not "automatically be
appropriated into this phallogocentric language. for such appropriation
forces her into complicity with the linguistic features that impose on
females a condition of marginality and subservience. or even of linguistic
nonentity”. 73

There has always been felt a lack of a woman’s language as Virginia
Woolf suggests in her book. *A Room of One’s Own*. that language use is
gendered. so that when a woman turns to novel writing she finds that there
is “no common sentence ready for her use”. 74 The female writers are seen as
suffering the handicap of having to use a medium (prose writing) which is
essentially a male instrument fashioned for male purposes. Putting this in a
right perspective Dale Spender in her *Man Made Language* (1980) says:

The semantic rule which has been responsible for the
manifestation of sexism in language. can be simply stated:
there are two fundamental categories, *male* and *minus male*.
To be linked with male is to be linked to a range of meanings
which are positive and good: to be linked to minus male is to
be linked to the absence of these qualities. … The semantic
structure of English language reveals a great deal about what
it means to be female in patriarchal order. 75

To remove this handicap Helene Cixous posited the existence of an
*écriture féminine* in her essay ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’. *Écriture
féminine* denotes “writing which is typically. characteristically feminine in
style, language, tone and feeling, and completely different from (and
opposed to) male language and discourse”. 76 though it has nothing to do
with biological determinism as women often write in male discourse and
man can write in a feminine way. Therefore. she has preferred to call it a
“writing said to be feminine” (or masculine) or. more recently, a
"decipherable libidinal femininity which can be read in writing produced by a male or a female". It facilitates the free play of meanings within the framework of loosened grammatical structures. Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* is closely related to Derrida's concept of writing as differance. Once she put that feminine texts are texts that "work on the difference", strive in the direction of difference, struggle to undermine the dominant phallogocentric logic, split open the closure of the binary opposition and revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality. This difference is not a binary opposition to the phallocentric discourse, but a celebration of creativity in difference as multiplicity and heterogeneity. As Cixous says that we cannot talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes.

Cixous strongly believed in the inherently bisexual nature of all human beings, therefore she warned against the dangers of confusing the sex of the author with the 'sex' of the writing he or she produces. She thought it necessary for the existence of *écriture féminine* to abolish "the classic conception of bisexuality", "squashed under the emblem of castration fear and along with the fantasy of a 'total' being (though composed of two halves)," which "would do away with the difference experienced as to operation incurring loss, as the mark of dreaded sectility". This "self-effacing, merger-type bisexuality" is designed to cater to the male fear of the Other (woman) in so far as it allows him to fantasize away the inescapable signs of sexual difference. Against this, Cixous proposes what she calls the other sexuality, which is multiple, variable and even changing, consisting as it does of the "non-exclusion either of the difference or of one sex". One of the characteristics is the "multiplication of the effects of the inscription of the desire, over all parts of my body and the other body". Instead of removing the differences, it
stirs them up, follows them and increases them. She says that "woman is bisexual": man – it’s a secret to no one– being poised to keep glorious phallic mono-sexuality in view”.

And this is precisely the reason that she denies the possibility of ever defining a feminist practice of writing:

... for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which does not mean that it does not exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system: it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.

Later on she gives it a sort of definition which echoes Derrida’s concept of *ecriture*:

To admit that writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death – to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of one and the other, not fixed is sequence of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamised by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another.

For Cixous this kind of writing is somehow uniquely the product of female physiology, which women must celebrate in their writing: “Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes...” *Ecriture feminine* is based on the “feminine libidal economy” of gift and generosity against the thrift of a “masculine libidal economy” which is
centered on the phallus and discretely bounded. In fact, *écriture féminine* will subvert the proper, phallocentric reason because in putting her body forward woman wields the force of the repressed. So, woman’s voice which has been choked within patriarchal cultures resonates with a song that opens on to a volcanic laughter-trembling the old grounds of logic, overturning the heaps of reason, splitting the law to pieces and making rubble of man’s property. In a memorable image, Cixous writes that if one dares to look at Medusa (the figurehead of the suppressed and feared feminine), one will see that she is laughing, and beautiful.

Cixous finds the source of *écriture féminine* in the mother and mother-child relationship before the child acquires, “conventional” language, in a pre-Oedipal stage. The mother’s voice, like a melodious song, melts and suffuses our entire being, pulsating the music of entire creation in our bodies. It takes the speaking / writing woman in a space beyond time (eternity), a space where there is no naming and no syntax. Thus, the writing woman is immensely powerful: hers is a *puissance féminine* derived directly from the mother, an always and ever flowing fountain of perpetual strength: “The more you have, the more you give the more you are, the more you give the more you have”.

Inspite of certain divergences, Irigaray’s vision of femininity and feminine language is almost similar to that of Helene Cixous. Like Cixous, Luce Irigaray posits a ‘woman’s language’, which she calls “*le parler femme*”, or “woman’speak”, which is multiple, diverse, heterogeneous and “fluid” in style, breaking syntax and developing towards a new syntax of “auto-affection”. This language has a morphological basis associated with the structure and shape of the genital organs and so it evades male phallocentric monopoly. This style of writing resists and explodes all the
established forms, figures, ideas and concepts. Irigaray says that a different approach is required “to hear an ‘other meaning’ which is constantly in the process of weaving itself, at the same time ceaselessly embracing words and yet casting them off to avoid becoming fixed, immobilized”. 87

Discussing woman’s position as the ‘other’ in Western culture, Luce Irigaray says that the concept of sexual difference is based on the visibility of difference where the eye decides what is clearly true and what is not. Thus the basic fact of sexual difference is that the male has a visible sex organ, the phallus, and the female has not: so in difference with the male, the female has nothing.

The female difference is viewed as an absence or negation of the male norm. Taking this crucial point, Irigaray posits that in the binary structure of language, the male and the masculine is the norm, the positive and the superior, whereas the female and the feminine is believed to be an aberration, the lack, the negative and the inferior. She says that in our culture woman is outside representation: “The feminine has consequently had to be deciphered as forbidden [interdit], in between signs, between the realised meanings, between the lines”. 88 She is the negative required by the male-subject’s “specialization”, which is a basic concept in Western philosophical discourse: the necessity of postulating a subject that is capable of reflecting on its own being. She says that western culture functions like a mirror (speculum mundi) which reflects back man as the master of the universe, and the universe and God in the image of man, while it distorts the image of woman as imperfect, lacking, or a hysterical subject. Therefore in our society representation, and all social and cultural structures, are products of what she perceives as a fundamental hom(m)osexualité [homo (same) and hommo (man)]: the male desire for the
same. But woman is denied the pleasure of self-representation and she is cut off from any kind of pleasure that might be particular to her.

Caught in the specular logic of patriarchy, woman is left with just two options; either to remain silent, producing “incomprehensible babble” or to “enact” the specular representation of herself as a lesser male. The second choice, the woman as mimic, provides woman a tool to work at “destroying” the discursive mechanism of patriarchy. She advises that one must assume the feminine role deliberately. Here, the feminine is not a natural predisposition for women but a conscious utilization of a deconstructive tactic which Irigaray calls “mimicry”. She warns that it is a dangerous undertaking “to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it”. Clarifying it further she says that, “It means to resubmit herself – inasmuch as she is on the side of the ‘perceptible’, of ‘matter’ – to ideas, in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make ‘visible’, by an effect of playful repetition what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language.” Hers is a theatrical presentation of the mime: miming the miming imposed on women, a subtle specular move that intends to “undo” the effects of phallocentric discourse simply by “overdoing” them. It shows that it is possible for women to “exceed” and “disturb” the phallocentric logic.

Julia Kristeva takes the notion of *écriture féminine* to further heights. Her semiotics emphasizes the marginal and the heterogenous as that which can overturn the central structures of traditional linguistics. Philip E. Lewis points out that all of Kristeva’s work up to 1974 constitutes a great effort to define or understand what she calls the "signifying
In order to understand this process she replaces Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic Order by the semiotic and the symbolic. The interpretation between these two terms constitutes the signifying process.

In her essay 'The System and the Speaking Subject' the symbolic is associated with authority, order, fathers, repression and control. This aspect of language carries the idea that the self is fixed and unified, which she describes as "a language with a foreclosed subject or with a transcendental subject-ego". By contrast, the semiotic is characterized not by logic and order, but by "displacement, slippage, condensation" which implies a much looser, more randomized way of making connections, one which increases the available range of possibilities. This aspect of language is associated with the pre-Oedipal primary processes, the pulsations which Kristeva sees as predominantly anal and oral; and at the same time dichotomous (life v. death, expulsion v. interjection) and heterogeneous. The continuous flow of pulsations is gathered up in the chora (from the Greek word for enclosed space, womb), which Plato in the Timaeus explains as "an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible". But Kristeva redefines Plato's concept and concludes that the chora is neither a sign nor a position, but "a wholly provisional articulation that is essentially mobile and constituted of movements and their ephemeral states .... Neither model nor copy, it is anterior to and underlies figuration and therefore also speculiarization, and only admits analogy with vocal or kinetic rhythm".

Kristeva considers significance a matter of positioning. She believes that the semiotic process must be split if signification is to be produced.
This splitting of the semiotic *chora* is the *thetic* phase and it enables the subject to attribute differences and therefore signification to what was the endless heterogeneity of the *chora*. Kristeva follows Lacan in placing the mirror phase as the first step that "opens the way for the constitution of all objects which from now on will be detached from the semiotic *chora*." and the Oedipal phase, which threatens of castration, where the process of splitting is fully achieved. Once the subject has entered into the Symbolic Order, the *chora* will be almost completely repressed and can be viewed only as pulsional *pressure* on symbolic language: as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences in the symbolic language. The *chora* is a rhythmic pulsion rather than a new language. It forms the heterogeneous, disruptive dimension of language, that which can never be trapped in the closure of traditional linguistic theory.

For some feminists this imaginative 'semiotic' female world and language conceived by the French feminists Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva is a vital source of possibilities, the value of which is to receive the imagining of alternatives to the world which we, particularly women, now have. For others it dangerously hands over the world of the rational to men and keeps for women a traditionally emotive, intuitive, trans-rational and 'privileged' arena. Thus, the language question remains to be one of the most contentious areas of feminist criticism.

Adrienne Rich's concept of a common language shares similarities with the concept of language given by the French feminists. There are many other similarities between them. Both rewrite Western narratives, the one mythologically and the other predominantly psychologically. They desire to destroy the binary oppositions, including the fundamental one of male and female and invoke mythology, mysticism and the goddess. The basic
assumptions of gendered subjectivity, even the diffused and floating one that deconstruction and revised psychoanalysis suggest. are very similar, as Rich also focuses on sexuality, difference and repression. Rich, along with French feminists, champions female relationships with her "here and now".

The political effect is also similar. In 'Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman' (1977), Adrienne Rich announced that she found the word 'revolution' a dead relic of Leftism, part of the dead-end of male politics: instead, like Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, she aimed at transformation through language using poetry which concentrates on the power of language. "the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe. It is as if forces we can lay claim to in no other way, become present to us in sensuous form." The striking suggestiveness, the valorizing of poetry of chant, incantation, and dream, provides expression found no where else: "Think of the deprivation of women living for centuries without a poetry which spoke of women together, of women alone, of women as anything but the fantasies of men. Think of the hunger unnamed and unnameable, the sensations mistranslated."
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CHAPTER 2

The Dialectics of Adrienne Rich’s Thought

(i) A Biographical Sketch

Piece by piece I seem
to re-enter the world: I first began

a small, fixed dot. still see
that old myself: a dark-blue thumbtack

pushed into the scene.
a hard little head protruding

from the pointillist’s buzz and bloom
After a time the dot

begins to ooze. Certain heats
melt it.1

The writer of these lines Adrienne Cecile Rich, the personification of undying courage and fathomless vigour who could “dare inhabit the world/trenchant in motion as an eel. solid/as a cabbage head”2 to become a “middling perfect.” was born in Baltimore, Maryland, May 16, 1929. Her father, Dr. Arnold Rich, was a recognized pathologist at Johns Hopkins University, “one of the few Jews to attend or teach at that institution.”3 Her mother, Helen Jones, studied first to be a concert pianist and composer at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, and later received education in Paris and Vienna, simultaneously giving lessons at girls’ boarding schools to finance her studies. Both parents set strong examples with their versatile interests in and disciplined approaches to the arts. Her mother used to
practice piano for several hours each day. "There were chamber music
groups that met in our house. My parents knew artists." Reflecting on the
cultural milieu of her childhood, Rich says:

I was a very lucky and privileged child who was growing up
in a house where people read poetry aloud to me, where there
was a lot of music played, where very early I was impressed
with the power of the written word. And so when I began to
do what all children do, which is, imitate what they see
around them. I was given a great deal of encouragement.

She began writing poetry as a child under the encouragement and
supervision of her father who was an exacting task master and instructed
her to "work, work/harder than anyone has worked before" and to strive for
excellence. A great believer in "formalism and strict meters" he "was
offended by the so called free verse" and asked her to read primarily
Romantic and Victorian writers: Keats. Tennyson. Arnold. Rossetti
Swinburne. Carlyle. and Pater. In her poem, "Juvenilia", Rich portrays
herself as a young poet seeking her father's approval with her "sedulous
lines":

Again I sit. under duress. hands washed.

at your ink stained oaken desk.

Unspeakable fairy tales ebb like blood through my head

as I dip the pen and for aunts. for admiring friends.

for you above all to read.

copy my praised and sedulous lines.
Thus, as a young writer, Rich`s imagination was regulated by her father`s standards, which she laboured hard to achieve.

Talking about her father in *Of Women Born*, Rich compares him with Bronson Alcott, the nineteenth century transcendentalist who took his family to live in an experimental commune to subsist on fruit while he pursued his educational and social theories. Though her mother “possessed unusual talent, determination and independence for her time and place,”9 but once married she relinquished her musical career to fulfill domestic responsibilities. Rich writes that

My father, brilliant, ambitious, possessed by his own drive, assumed that she would give her life over to the enhancement of his. ... she marketed by street car. and later, when they could afford a car, she drove my father to and from his laboratory or lectures. often awaiting him for hours. She raised two children, and taught us all lessons, including music.10

Not only did Helen Jones give up her concert career for marriage and motherhood, but her child-rearing responsibilities were more extensive than usual as Adrienne and her younger sister Cynthia received their early education at home.

Rich started writing verse around the age of four. Two juvenilian works, *Ariadne: A Play in Three Acts and Poems*. J.H. Furst (Baltimore), 1939 and *Not I, But Death: A Play in One Act*. J.H. Furst. 1941. show the kind of encouragement she got for the writing instinct. In high school only, she realized that poetry was “perhaps the most important activity that I knew, for me.”11
After attending Roland Park Country School, Rich left her family home to attend Radcliffe College, "where [she] did not see a woman teacher for four years." and where she learned poetic craft from the male poets she read as an undergraduate - "Frost. Dylan Thomas. Donne. Auden. MacNeice. Stevens. and Yeats." In 1951, she graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Radcliffe, the year her first collection of poems *A Change of World* was published, which was selected by W.H. Auden for the Yale Younger Poets Award. In introducing the book, Auden praised Rich for her technical mastery of form, delicacy and "capacity for detachment from the self and its emotions." He writes:

Miss Rich, who is, I understand, twenty-one years old, displays a modesty not so common at that age, which disclaims any extraordinary vision, and a love for her medium, a determination to ensure that whatever she writes shall, at least, not be shoddily made.

Praising her "versification" and "intuitive grasp of much subtler and more difficult matters like proposition, consistency of diction and tone." Auden was especially attracted by her respectful decorum as a poet: "The poems ... are neatly and modestly dressed, speak quietly but do not mumble, respect their elders but are not cowed by them, and do not tell fibs." "The Uncle Speaks in the Drawing Room" demonstrates Rich's command of poetic technique even in this early phase:

I have seen the mob of late
Standing sullen in the square.
Gazing with a sullen stare
At window, balcony, and gate.
Some have talked in bitter tones.
Some have held and fingered stones.
After graduation, Rich travelled in Europe and England on a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1952-1953. In 1953, she married Alfred H. Conrad, a Harvard economist, and moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, and lived there until 1966. Rich continued writing poetry though there was little social support for her artistic creativity, as 1950s were the years of intense domesticity, in which women subordinated their lives to men as did their mothers and grandmothers before them. As Rich herself writes, “[These] were the fifties, and in reaction to the earlier wave of feminism, middle-class women were making careers of domestic perfection working to send their husbands through professional schools then retiring to have large families.” Rich was not an exception in this case as she also started doing all the “feminine” jobs “the day after I was married: I was sweeping the floor. Probably the floor did not really need to be swept; probably I simply did not know what else to do with myself.” To be “like other women” had always been a problem for her, but now she herself had been included in that fold: “This is what women have always done.”

In 1955, two years after her marriage, Rich gave birth to her first son, David, under a deadening effect of measles, fighting all alone in the hospital, as all her communication with her parents had come to an end when she decided to live an emotional life and a selfhood beyond her father’s needs and theories. In fact, she had failed in becoming a “perfect daughter” and had revolted against her father like a poem revolting against the author as,

She had finally resisted her father’s Victorian paternalism, his seductive charm and controlling cruelty, had married a divorced graduate student, had begun to write ‘modern’, ‘obscure’, ‘pessimistic’ poetry, lacking the fluent sweetness of Tennyson, had had the final temerity to get pregnant and bring
a living baby into the world. She had ceased to be the demure and precious child or the poetic, seducible adolescent.\textsuperscript{21}

This was a highly turbulent period for her, always wanting someone to support her emotionally especially her mother: “I wanted her to mother me again, to hold my baby in her arms as she had once held me”\textsuperscript{22}.

Rich’s second volume of poems \textit{The Diamond Cutters and Other Poems} was published that very year, which received the Ridgely Torrence Memorial Award of the Poetry Society of America. This was also praised and recognised for strengths similar to those of her first volume. Praising the volume Randall Jarrell called her “an enchanting poet”\textsuperscript{23}, “a sort of princess in a fairy tale”\textsuperscript{24}, “one who deserves Shakespeare’s favourite adjective, \textit{sweet}.”\textsuperscript{25} “Her scansion”, he exclaimed, “is easy and limpid, close to water, close to air: she lives nearer to perfection ... than ordinary poets do, and her imperfections themselves are touching as the awkwardness of anything young and natural is touching.”\textsuperscript{26} But at the same time, it does not mark a development of her talent: Rich herself has admitted that she was already dissatisfied with the volume by the time it came out.

In 1957, Rich gave birth to her second son, Paul, and in 1959, against her own wishes, was born her third son Jacob. She found that as a mother of three young children, she had no time to write poetry. “Their voices wear away at my nerves, their constant needs, above all their need for simplicity and patience, fill me with despair too at my fate, which is to serve a function I was not fitted.”\textsuperscript{27} She writes further “\textit{I love them. But it is in the enormity and inevitability of this love that the suffering lies.”}\textsuperscript{28} She felt grief and anger: grief at the waste of her valuable time and anger at her “mutilation” and “manipulation” of the relationship between mother and child, which is the great original source and experience of love. The
profusion of motherly tenderness and love was always there: “I saw his eyes open full to mine, and realized each of us was fastened to the other, not only my mouth and breast, but through our mutual gaze: the depth, calm, passion, of that dark blue, maturely focused look.” But at the same time she could not deny the demands of her own identity as a poet, as for her “poetry was where I lived as no-one’s mother, where I existed as myself.”

She considered motherhood as “one part” of the female process not an identity for all times and urged for “selves of our own to return to.” In this emotionally and artistically difficult period when she was struggling with conflicts over the prescribed roles of womanhood versus those of artistry, over tensions between sexual and creative roles, love and anger, her husband was willing to “help but this ‘help’ was an act of generosity: that his work, his professional life was the real work in the family ... I understood that my struggles as a writer were a kind of luxury, a peculiarity of mine. ... ‘whatever I ask he tries to give me.’ I wrote in March 1958, ‘but always the initiative has to be mine.’” She felt that she was no longer in control of her life and was passively drifting “on a current which called itself my destiny.” She realized that she was loosing touch with her own energy and her true self. In one of her notes she writes, “I weep, and weep and the sense of powerlessness spreads like a cancer through my being.”

She had almost stopped writing poetry and could not publish anything for eight years after her second volume, partially from fatigue, the female fatigue of suppressed anger and the loss of communication with her own being; partially “from the discontinuity of female life with its attention to small chores, errands, work that others constantly undo, small children’s constant needs.” She felt that she was dying out of suffocation and anger.

At this time, Boston was home to Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, Anne Sexton, and other younger poets just coming to prominence.
Though Rich met and knew most of them, she was not able to participate in the lively Boston literary scene. She recalls in one of her interviews, "I was there in Cambridge, trying to keep up with three children and domesticity and hiring a baby sitter so I could go up to the third floor of the house and write. Or quite often, not write just sit." Revealing deeper dissatisfaction she writes:

It was difficult to be writing poetry. Nothing had prepared me for what motherhood was going to be like. As I think of it now, it was not simply a question of time and energy, although it was that too, but it was the question, ... of what did it mean to be a poet at all, and particularly to sort to go for broke as a poet and to be a woman who was a wife and mother? And what themes were permissible, were recognised, were validated at that time? To have written about my life in that domestic sphere, with all its passions, tensions, contradictions, would not have been validated. I felt. So it was a large part of my experience that I was only able to write out of obliquely or not at all.

The 1950s were the days of great social and political upheaval, in which the United States experienced the surge of the second wave of feminism which had a wide ranging influence in society. Rich, being a very perceptive and sensitive observer of social changes, desired to join and take an active part in the women's movement, but the constant demands of her domestic life frustrated her again and made her realize "either to consider myself a failed woman, or a failed poet, or to try to find some synthesis by which to understand what was happening to me." It forced her to meditate over the prescribed roles of women in society and their inherent contradictions and dichotomies. She found it difficult to reconcile the
Victorian Lady of Leisure, the Angel in the House with the Victorian cook, scullery maid, laundress, governess, and nurse. She complains that though motherhood is given the so called great status in the patriarchal society but it is not considered a serious work or even a work: she is simply "supposed to be acting out of maternal instinct, doing chores a man would never take on, largely uncritical of the meaning of what she does." which uncovers the deep-rooted politics working behind all the relationships in the patriarchal society, as mother-child relationship is the primary source of all relationships. Nevertheless, her experiences during this tiring period left her more matured and experienced which provided the foundation to her later works; the suffering and pain of her life as a young mother imparted the basis for understanding the lives of a broad gamut of women.

It took eight years for Rich to publish Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law, that won the Hopkin Prize of Poetry Magazine, in 1963. Though these years were not creatively fruitful, she continued to be awarded in recognition of her work: in 1956 she got Grace Thayer Bradley Award (Friends of Literature) for The Diamond Cutters: in 1960 she was Phi Beta Kappa poet at the College of William and Mary: in 1960, National Institute of Arts and Letters Award for Poetry; she lived in the Netherlands while on a Guggenheim fellowship in 1961-62: in 1962 she won a Bolligen Foundation grant for the translation of Dutch poetry: in 1962-63 she received an Amy Lowell Travelling Fellowship. But the struggle with her being persisted, when she found it difficult to acquire time for herself. She was "reading in fierce snatches, scribbling in notebooks, writing poetry in fragments." She wrote in a notebook at that time:

Paralyzed by the sense that there exists a mesh of relationships – e.g. between my anger at the children, my sensual life, pacifism, sex. (I mean sex in its broadest
significance, not merely sexual desire)—an interconnectedness which, if I could see it, make it valid, would give me back myself to function lucidly and passionately. Yet I grope in and out among these dark webs.  

But during all this drama of life she realized that politics was not something “out there” but it was something “in here” and of the essence of her condition. All this frustration, mingled with guilt and long-suppressed anger, finally exploded in her Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law, which stands as a watershed in her poetic development. For the first time, she was able to overthrow the formalism and the graceful feminine style, to directly encounter the question of female identity, the position of women in society and the relationship of women to women within a perspective that was feminine. For until such time Rich says she had “tried very hard not to identify myself as a female poet.”  

This was the stage when Rich was trying to come out of the traditional hold by venturing to use the staccato rhythms of modern vernacular and synchronic images that connected her to the tradition of T.S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Charles Olson and Denise Levertov. This process of liberation was encouraged by Denise Levertov who offered alternatives to the academic standards that Rich emulated, bringing into her range of consciousness poets like William Carlos Williams, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, the Black Mountain Poets. Charles Olson and the Beat poets. It was exactly at this point as Rich says, “I felt my own experience, the terms of my own existence, were exploding the forms I had been using and the traditions I had been using. It was tremendously important. I want to say, too, that this was coming through a woman, and this was very pre-feminist: I have to tell you.” Though she had begun to draw more extensively upon her own experiences as a woman, wife and mother, she
was still flinching away from the extremely self-revealing poems that Sexton, Plath, Lowell and other "confessional" poets had produced: "I hadn't found the courage yet to do without authorities, or even to use the pronoun 'I' - the woman in the poem is always 'she'." Nevertheless, Adrienne Rich began to find a clear personal focus and center. As Albert Gelpi aptly observes, "this volume marks her penetration into experience that makes for a distinguishing style."

These subtle changes in perspective and style were not approved by the critics. *Snapshots* "was ignored, was written off as being too bitter and personal. Yet I knew I had gone beyond in that book. I was very conscious of male critics, then, and I was like flunking a course." Rich observed in an interview in 1975. But she was not disturbed by this criticism, and published *Necessities of Life* in 1966 focusing on death as the sign of how occluded and erased she felt when her own sense of realising her rightful subject matter and voice was denied. It was nominated for the National Book Award; in the same year Rich was Phi Beta Kappa poet at Harvard College and then moved to New York City, where her husband accepted a professorship at City College New York. This was a period of tremendous socio-political disturbances in America, which greatly influenced the personal and poetic evolution of the poet. Her earlier, "inchoate feelings of personal conflict, sexual alienation and cultural oppression were finding increasing articulation in the larger social/political currents gathering force throughout the sixties, from the civil rights movements to the anti-war movement, to the emergent women's movement" as observed by Deborah Pope. As the U.S. involvement in Vietnam escalated, Rich and her husband actively participated in their anti-war protests. She was also very active politically in protests against the Indo-China war. In 1966-68 she taught at Swarthmore College, and 1967-69 was Adjunct Professor of Writing in the
Graduate School of Arts, Columbia University. After the assassination of Martin Luther King, Rich started teaching in City College’s SEEK program, which was “designed to bring young, largely black and Puerto Rican high school students into the college mainstream - students who had been previously discarded by the college as not being capable of absorbing higher education, but who had been profoundly betrayed by the public school system in the city.” The experience proved an “education in democracy”: “It had a tremendous impact on me, and therefore on my poetry. In many ways it was the beginning of my political education.”

This program raised highly political questions about the conflict of cultural codes of expression and the relations of language to power, issues that have constantly been addressed in Rich’s work. She was further strongly influenced by the writings of Black authors such as the novelist James Baldwin and the Algerian political philosopher Frantz Fanon, whose analysis of power and oppression gave shape to her feminist ideas in the making. Simone de Beauvoir’s pathbreaking book *The Second Sex* exercised a great influence upon Rich. It “opened my mind very wide, except that there seemed to be no one with whom I could talk about it.” In 1968, she got Eunice Tietjens Memorial Prize of *Poetry Magazine*. She also taught at Brandis University (1972-73) and the City College of the City University of New York (1974-75). The diverse institutions at which she taught exemplify the scope of her concerns and abilities.

Adrienne Rich’s active involvement in the political matters during that period had a profound effect on her poetry. That had increasingly centered around social and political issues. From 1956 onwards she began dating her poems in a clear move to challenge the so-called universality and political innocence attributed to poetry exposing its historicity and ideological loadedness along with the emotive connection with the poet’s
personal life. Her poetry at this stage was a clear portrayal of the ‘Personal is Political’ movement in America. Stylistically, Rich started drawing on contemporary rhythms and images, especially those derived from the cinematic techniques of jump cuts and collage.

In 1969, *Leaflets*, a record of her responses to the war, the college campus rebellions, Black Power, and other social and political upheavals during the period, was published. Here she tries to record the lives of those who have meticulously been avoided by the literary world. In 1971, she published *The Will to Change*, which received the Shelley Memorial Award of the Poetry Society of America. It depicts Rich’s anger at the waste of human energies, especially those of women in patriarchal society. Here she explores women’s efforts to define their own reality. Identifying herself with Caroline Harschel in “Planetarian”. Rich makes her own direct statement of commitment for her art as an instrument for change:

... I am an instrument in the shape

of a woman trying to translate pulsations

into images for the relief of the body

and the reconstruction of the mind.51

Just as she blends the poet and the persona, Rich attempts to mix the private and the public worlds, making the words speak to larger issues of political change and social justice. She expresses her anger about the language that has been used to maintain oppression. In “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children”, she says: “knowledge of the oppressor/this is the oppressor’s language/yet I need it to talk to you”. and “there are books that describe all this/and they are useless.”52 Rich hopefully turns to the techniques of modern film making as a model for the “reconstruction” of “the oppressor’s language".
In 1970, Rich walked out of her marriage and later the same year her husband, Alfred Conrad, committed suicide which shattered her already fragmented life. She somehow managed to live together with her three sons treating each other as equals. Thinking about the splintered emotions following this accident in her life. Rich writes in “Shooting Script”:

Now to give up the temptations of the projector: to see instead the web of cracks filtering across the plaster.

To reread the instructions on your palm: to find there how the lifeline, broken, keeps its direction.

To read the etched rays of bullet-hole left years ago in the glass; to know in the every distortion of the light what fracture is.

To put the prism in your pocket, the thin glass lens, the map of the inner city, the little book with gridded pages.

To pull yourself up by your own roots: to eat the last meal in your old neighbourhood.53

These cracks, splits, broken lines, etched rays and fractures express the fragmentation in Rich’s life, which lent her poetic career ever new directions, new combinations of chance, necessity and free will which adopted new poetic forms of expression.

Adrienne Rich’s choking anger and frustration over the wreck patriarchy had enacted on literal and psychic landscape had become unbearable and she plunged headlong in the wasteland with a loaded camera “to explore the wreck”.64 What Rich searched for is “the wreck and not the story of the wreck/ the thing itself and not the myth.”55 Closely connected
with this struggle for power and action was her strong, deepening
determination to write directly and overtly as a woman, out of woman’s
body and experience. She realized that the new social order must begin with
the truths of the female body as opposed to the male mind: “we must touch
the unity and resonance of our physicality. the corporal ground of our
intelligence.” She conceived of a gynocentric or woman-centered universe
which would face and correct the anti-female bias of patriarchy. In her
poem “Tear Gas”. she asserts. “The will to change begins in the body not in
the mind/My politics is in my body....”

How radically Rich’s mind and poetry were changing at this period
can be seen in Diving into the Wreck: Poems, 1971-72 (1973) which created
much controversy. This collection won the National Book Award in 1974
which she refused as an individual but accepted, in the name of all women
who were silenced. with two other nominees Alice Walker and Audre Lorde
dedicating the occasion “to the struggle for self-determination of all
women. of every color. identification or derived class.”

Rich realized that this is “A man’s world. But finished/They
themselves have sold it to the machine.” “Nothing will save this. I am
alone/kicking the last rotting logs/with their strange smell of life, not
death/wondering what on earth it all might have become.” It became
important for Rich at such a point of crisis to form a female community to
enable women to express their true power, which lies submerged like
Dickinson’s dormant volcano. as:

A man is asleep in the next room

He has spent a whole day
standing, throwing stones into the black pool
which keeps its blackness
Outside the frame of his dream we are stumbling up the hill
hand in hand, stumbling and guiding each other
over the scarred volcanic rock.

Rich believes that the woman, as she stands, outside the death-dealing culture and its power games, can be a visionary who points the way to redemption trying to save man from himself. Therefore, this anger, instead of blinding her, gives her a new insight to see the truth in its true form. Rich thinks anger can be a kind of genius if it is acted on, and herself practised it in such a way that it ignites her imagination and frees her from the social bonds she does not respect. Anger is an energizing force:

my visionary anger cleansing my sight
and the detailed perceptions of mercy
flowering from the anger

I am the androgyny
I am the living mind you fail to describe
in your dead language
the lost noun, the verb surviving
only in the infinitive
the letters of my name are written under the lids
if the unborn child

Speaking about the purifying rage which sustains the effort to create the independent reality, Deborah Pope writes:

Rich’s voice is most characteristically the voice of witness.
oracle, or mythologizer, the seer with the burden of verbal
privilege' and the weight of moral imagination, who speaks for the speechless records for the forgotten, invents anew at the site of erasure of women's lives.\textsuperscript{63}

After the full awakening, Rich finds that she cannot go on sharing the dry inner landscape in which even the nightmares are restricted by argument and fact. In "August" she says:

His mind is too simple, I cannot go on sharing his nightmares
My own are becoming clearer, they open into prehistory which looks like a village lit with blood where all the fathers are crying: My son is mine!\textsuperscript{64}


Thinking of the sea I think of light lacing, lancing the water the blue knife of a radiant consciousness bent by the waves of vision as it pierces to the deepest grotto.\textsuperscript{65}

Blue has become for Rich the colour of creative thought and action. It may be related with sharp instruments, as in "the blue knife" here: or elsewhere, as "blue energy", "hyacinths like blue flame" and other images of burning that are related to strong, positive life-forces. This volume includes a
sixteen-part poem. "From an Old House in America" in which a country house provides a metaphor for the lives of the women who lived in it. The woman who planted the narcissus flower beds; the woman whose old postcards, sent to her from Norway, Holland, and Corsica, were thumbtacked to the wall. Rich depicts the lives of such women. "mostly unarticulate". In several remarkable, brief portraits with admiration for the courage in holding together the fabric of their lives, Rich imaginatively reconstructs the lives of women from the simple ordinary things they have left behind. But the reality of history fills her with painful empathy for women whose real creative power has been denied to them.

In 1978 Rich published *The Dream of a Common Language* which presents a more optimistic vision of community, a vision of being one with all life, with faith that this vision can be fulfilled and with hope that men may learn the art of survival from women. Rich's poetry has moved away from anger into a tone of quiet celebration. The impersonal and distancing "she" of earlier poems and the strong personal "I" of later poems merge into each other to form the communal "we" of shared love.

(ii) Rich's Evolution as a Radical Feminist Thinker

Adrienne Rich's poetry presents a spectrum of the evolving consciousness of the modern women. Written in a period of rapid and dramatic social change, her poetry delves deep into the experiences of women who reject the patriarchal definitions of femininity by separating themselves from the political and social reality that suppresses and subordinates females. As a feminist poet Rich emphasises the importance of "an imaginative identification with all women" and dedicates herself to the recreation of a female community that is devoted to a nurturing ethos and a reverence for life. Her voice as a feminist poet is quite clear from the
very initial stage of her poetic career though marginally subdued and hidden under the magical web of beautifully written language.

But this restrain is the precondition for creativity and a certain set of attitudes about art and life. "A too compassionate art is half an art. / Only such proud restraining purity / Restores the else betrayed, too human heart." says Rich in "At a Bach Concert." Her style of writing at this stage is a part of the strategy — like asbestos gloves which allowed her to handle materials she couldn’t pick up bare-handed and a sort of protecting glass for the strong winds that threaten the flame of life:

I draw the curtains as the sky goes black
And set a match to candles sheathed in glass
Against the keyhole draught, the insistent whine

Of whether through the unsealed aperture.
This is our sole defense against the season:
These are the things that we have learned to do
Who live in troubled reasons.

In spite of its "proud restraining purity." the poem clearly conveys the tension and the difficulty of confirming with a world seemingly out of control.

In her poem "Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers" clearly surfaces her suppressed desire to overthrow the old patriarchal system even while maintaining the formalism. The tigers in question are on a woven screen that Aunt Jennifer makes by hand: they represent ironically the very freedom and naturalness denied to her by marriage and the domestic life she leads which eventually kills her.
When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on prancing proud and unafraid.\(^70\)

The “ring” referred to is the wedding ring. Whereas in a great deal of literature marriage is viewed as the central embodiment of order and harmony, here the idea is reversed. The order that marriage brings is one of submission that robs Aunt Jennifer of pride and movement. It is as if she has become a circus animal trained and terrified into submission. The poem clearly challenges traditional ideas and values. It speaks for women, making their case against the way(s) men order the world and impose mastery over women.

The tigers, in their vigor, energy, activity, and liberty, are images of virility projected by the woman but not claimed by her as one with her being. Her achievement in her “craft” does not translate into personal power in life. She herself is fearful of the “ordeals she was mastered by”. Though tigers are her own creations but she could not never sublimate herself within them and their fearless spirit and remains ambivalent towards them, because this identification could be dangerous as it would be unwomanly, especially since tigers prance around in “sleek chivalric certainty”\(^71\) “proud and unafraid”.\(^72\) But there are some suppressed, unresolved questions which turn the poem in a different direction. Does it not appear feasible to perceive a sly ambiguity in Rich’s use and placement of the word “\(lie\)”? What will these hands lie about? That they were terrified? That the creation of the “Bright topaz denizens” stemmed naturally from a woman’s hands? The tigers, projections of Aunt’s fantasy life, express their own confidence, freedom, and beauty, free from men: “They do not fear the men beneath the
tree: / They pace in sleek chivalric certainty”. By projecting such an
image, Adrienne Rich tries to move toward a more strong and open
assertion.

“Mathilde in Normandy” furthers the stand adopted by Adrienne
Rich in “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers”. It presents the popular legend that Queen
Mathilde, the wife of William the Conqueror, made the Bayeaux Tapestry,
which delineates the Norman Conquest of England. It proclaims that great
moments in history do not announce themselves as such to individuals
living through them. The poem seems to be blaming women for not rising
above “the personal episode” and for being indifferent to the great
importance of political and social events:

Here is the threaded headland,
The warp and woof of tideless beach, the flight.
Recounted by slow shuttles, of swift arrows.
And the outlandish attitudes of death
In the stitched soldiery. That this should prove
More than the personal episode, more than all
The little lives sketched on the teeming loom
Was then withheld from you: self conscious history
That writes deliberate footnotes to its action
Was not of your young epoch. For a pastime
The patient handiwork of long-sleeved ladies
Was esteemed proper when their lords abandoned
The fields and apple trees of Normandy
For harsher hunting on the opposite coast.”

On the superficial level everything appears to be calm and quiet, as
the “bright sun” and women’s weaving suggest. But “the knots [which]
came / When fingers' occupation and mind's attention / Grew too divergent^75 force us to look at the other side of the picture. Though Rich tried to detach herself and be formal in her approach while discussing matters related to women, as it was a part of the strategy she adopted, the intimacy of her tone, her patience with mistakes, her careful attention to the details of memory - the "wooden ships". "grey ocean dimming" and "sick strained farewells"^76 - approve her incipient feminism, her advocacy of personal feeling in the creation of art. and her subtle advancement of women's handiwork as a valid art form.

If Adrienne Rich is at the end of a line of great modern poets, as Auden points out. she is the pioneer of a great new age in poetry. one who will see women's poetry come to the forefront. Mathilde's experience is "more than a personal episode" not merely because it fits into a larger historical moment. but because her experience encapsulates the common experience of women including Rich. First. Mathilde exist for love. relying for her happiness on a man–her lord. Second, the work she does with her hands is regarded not as art but as a "pastime", proper for ladies. Third, her work expresses her creative power and her envy of man's freedom to roam, to fight, to conquer, but she cannot admit this. Finally, her personal feelings butt in her work: knots appear into the tapestry when she thinks too much about the farewell scene. "too sharp for speech." Mathilde remains silent about these common experiences. Rich's poetry moves from this silence to an aesthetic that validates Mathilde's "pastime" – "the patient handiwork"^78 involved in such women's art as weaving. Needle work. the laborious confection of female artistry. becomes the repeated symbol of the ambiguously triumphant womanly lot in her poetry. Her poetry revolts against the unquestioning veneration of power that has a negative and destructive function toward a new definition of power based upon a
women's capability to feel the particularity and commonality of female experience. Rich's evolving poetic consciousness is increasingly attracted by the inside story where knots catch the imagination in such a tapestry as Mathilde weaves.

These poems clearly show the early stage in Rich's evolution toward a feminist poetry. Well-mannered and feminine on the surface, seemingly content with passivity, dependence, and restraint, these poems have the ability to speak differently if read just a little carefully. In fact the very title of the book A Change of World seems prophetic as it anticipates the radical changes about to occur in American Society, her own life, and poetry in the coming decades. The "fluttering" hands and genteel manners have the strength of tigers, "prancing proud and unafraid."

The second book The Diamond Cutters and Other Poems (1955) continues Rich's emphasis on caution and control in art and life. The title poem presents, as a model, the diamond cutters' techniques of cutting and polishing the gem:

Be serious, because
The stone may have contempt
For too familiar hands
................................
Respect the adversary
Meet it with tools refined.
And thereby set your price.\(^8^0\)

But her task is not limited to this only as she knows. "Africa / Will yield you more to do."\(^8^1\) She feels:
We come like dreamers searching for an answer
Passionately in need to reconstruct
The columned roofs under the blazing sky.
The courts so open, so forever locked.82

There is a sense of exile, separation and homelessness: like Lucifer, the poet feels banished - to the moon, to ashen-prairies of the absolute, to a ruined villa, to an endless desert journey. Though she longs for, and even predicts the recovery, it is still spectral and unseen. However, in “The Middle-Aged” she seems to get mastery over the destructive emotions, not merely outcrying, but probes deeper into the intense and widely diffused feelings to find out the reasons of her suffering:

.... to be young
Was always to live in other people’s houses
Whose peace, if we sought it, had been made by others.
Was ours at second hand and not for long.
........................................................................................................

They were so kind.
Would have given us anything; the bowl of fruit
Was filled for us, there was a room upstairs
We must call ours: but twenty years of living
They could not give. Nor did they ever speak
Of the coarse stain on that polished balustrade.
The crack in the study window, or the letters
Locked in a drawer and the key destroyed.
All to be understood by us, returning
Late, in our own time - how that peace was made.
Upon what terms, with how much left unsaid.83
“The Perennial Answer” tells the story of an aging widow in a rural New England setting. The tone is as blunt and harsh as life in general. The woman introduces herself as one who would “have the blackest word told straight, / Whether it was my child that couldn’t live/Or Joel’s mind, thick-riddled like a sieve. / With all that loving festered into hate.” She is not ready to submit herself passively and wants to live her life as she would like to. She cannot have any respect for a marriage that feels like “a room so strange and lonely/ She looked outside for warmth”.

The man she finds is a preacher, a “man of God indeed, / ... whose heart/ Thrust all it knew of passion into one/Chamber of iron inscribed Thy will be done.” One night when the woman returns home late with the preacher, her husband, feeling indignation and raging like fire, rapes her: “I knew/That he could kill me then, but what he did / Was wrench me up the stairs, onto the bed.” The poem attains its climax when the woman recalls the memories of the night of her husband’s death:

…. I slept alone
In this same room. A neighbour said she’d stay.
Thinking the dead man lying down below
Might keep the living from rest, she told me so:
“Those hours before the dawn can lie like stone
Upon the heart - I’ve lain awake – I know.”
At last I had to take the only way.
And said, “The nights he was alive and walking
From room to room and hearing spirits talking.
What sleep I had was likelier to be broken.”
Her face was shocked but I was glad I’d spoken.
“Well if you feel so –” She would tell the tale
Next morning, but at last I was alone
In an existence finally my own.
The woman in the end realizes that it is the convention which has denied her of her freedom, and there is no other way, if she wants freedom, but to break free herself of any restriction. She ultimately breaks her silence and discloses the lies and secrets that held her marriage together. Though it shocks her neighbour but she achieves "an existence finally my own." Like her persona, Rich, at this stage, also tries to learn to speak and overthrow the burden of maintaining the traditions of the fathers in literature. She starts thinking seriously about her growth as a woman writer whose aesthetic is grounded upon her own sense of being a woman with a woman’s own power – not something siphoned off from a man. Though she still regards maleness as power, as she suggests in her essay, "The Kingdom of the Fathers". "the idea of power has for most women, been inextricably linked with maleness, or the use of force; most often with both."\(^89\)

Adrienne Rich’s third volume *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* shows a change in Rich’s attitude and handling of her poetic approach. Beside her experimentation with the patterns and subject matter of her poems, she introduces a male persona or presents herself as a man in many of her poems. Justifying her new approach according to Jungian psychology, Albert Gelpi explains that

The poet is at this point imagining herself in terms of her ‘animus’, the archetypal masculine component in the woman’s psyche which corresponds to the ‘anima’ or archetypal ‘female’ component in the man’s psyche. Each person man or woman, is a combination of – or, more accurately, an interaction between – male and female characteristics: the anima in the man and the animus in the woman express the dynamism of that interaction, which, if
creative, will open the passage to an accommodation of
opposites in an identity.\textsuperscript{90}

He concludes that.

The psychological and artistic point which the \textit{Snapshots}
volume dramatises is Adrienne Rich's rejection of the terms
on which society says we must expend our existence and her
departure on an inner journey of exploration and discovery.
As a woman-poet, she finds herself, perhaps unconsciously to
a large extent, making the initial discoveries in the dimension
and through the lead of her animus.\textsuperscript{91}

But if we take a closer investigation of such poems we find that they
are not simply “animus” poems, as Gelpi says. but beyond that Rich is
evolving a radical sense of the nature of the self which is not divided into
gender specific roles. Rich shares with the feminist modernists the vision
that challenges the “fixity” of gender and believes in the interchangeability
of self and costume. It propounds that nakedness is no more “true” than its
costume, nor should anyone “be confined to a uni-form, a single form or
self.”\textsuperscript{92} Thus, they challenge the males’ perception of the ultimate reality of
gender. Gender itself becomes a costume and everything is in a state of
transition. If gender is not fixed, then costume does not become extremely
significant: it can be treated with irony and ambiguity.

In “The Loser”, Rich adopts a male persona and the poem is
introduced with an explanatory note: “A man thinks of the woman he once
loved: first, after her wedding, and then nearly a decade later.” \textsuperscript{93} In “The
Knight”. Rich presents a knight going for an expedition. He is in a warrior’s
armour, looking magnificent.
A knight rides into the noon.
and his helmet points to the sun.
and a thousand splintered suns
are the gaiety of his mail.\(^4\)

But all this glory is outwardly and is a part of his armour or costume only. Within this grand and splendid cover lies a disgraceful set of \textit{"rags and tatters/that cling to the flesh beneath"} and he is unable to sustain the weight of the armour that \textit{"wear his nerves to ribbons/under the radiant casque."}\(^5\) Rich beautifully presents the contrast that the knight is a knight only in his costume, not in substance. It is his costume that dominates and creates his identity as a knight. She marvelously penetrates about the burdens and derelictions of traditional warriors. But at the same time, the woman in her aspires to help the knight and relieve him of the burdens he carries:

\begin{quote}
Who will unhorse this rider
and free him from between
the walls of iron, the emblems
crushing his chest with their weight?\(^6\)
\end{quote}

Thus, there is a complete change in Adrienne Rich's attitude toward manhood as power as she explores the reality of manhood and finds it nothing but a costume that should be thrown away. There is no regret here for a world of lost values. Her aim here is to free the self from the clutches of the false identities of man or woman. \textit{"The Knight"} cuts deep into the myth of manhood to reveal a reality beyond \textit{"proper"} gender roles.

Other poems in this volume clearly show that Rich broke out of her armour – the poetic convention. The change reflects, to an extent, the trend in American poetry in mid-twentieth century to move away from meter. set
stanzas, and rhyme to a more open form, accompanied with the move away from objectivity to a more subjective approach. Rich's breakthrough in poetry, however, is also intimately connected with the growing consciousness of herself as artist and woman. As she says:

In the late fifties I was able to write, for the first time, directly about experiencing myself as a woman – until then I had tried very hard not to identity myself as a female poet. Over two years I wrote a ten-part poem called “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” (1958-60) in a longer looser mode than I’d ever trusted myself with before. It was an extraordinary relief to write that poem. 97

*The Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* explores the female heritage of dissipated energy, dependency and self-hate. Caught in the idea of “feminine mystique” or the “true woman”, woman looks to men for approval and makes herself simply a piece of ornament: “she shaves her legs until they gleam/like petrified mammoth-tusk”. 98 negating her true self.

She laments how women replicate a sad history of opposing each other: “The argument *ad feminam*, all the old knives / that have rusted in my back. I drive in yours”. 99 In this patriarchal culture, the woman who is no longer young and seductive loses what little power she has “the drained and flagging bosom of our middle years”. 100 The middle aged and older woman is mired in anxiety, just as the independent woman is suppressed by guilt or the fear of being unfeminine. In such a depressing situation, female energy is turned inward manifesting itself as guilt, anxiety, hysteria, anger converting into self-hate and even madness and suicide: “A thinking woman sleeps with monsters / The beak that grips her. she becomes”. 101

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Rich urges to all women to realize the demeaning effects of being praised for mediocrity, for “slattern thought styled intuition” as “Time is male and in his caps drinks to the fair.” She asks a fundamental question: “Has nature shown / her household books to you, daughter-in-law, / that her sons never saw?” The poem recalls Emily Dickinson and Mary Wollstonecraft, authentic individuals who broke the reductive pattern of relationships and expectations and prefigured modern, independent woman: “Well / she’s long about her coming, who must be / more merciless to herself than history.” She imagines a prototype for the potent, creative woman who is like a glider pilot, unconstrained and airborne. “Her mind full to the wind”, this woman is a helicopter safely delivering precious cargo; yet her daring flight is also defiant. “Poised, still coming, / her fine blades making the air wince.” Though there are risks involved in this process of self discovery of being “exposed larger than life, / and due to break my neck” but she is determined and questions “Was it worth while to lay — / with infinite exertion — / a roof I cannot live under?” Rich clearly prefers “Giants, the roofwalkers” whose labours outside in storm seem to her as heroic as they are dangerous:

A life I didn’t choose
chose me: even
my tools are the wrong ones
for what I have to do.

Her language by now had started to be more expressive of the uncertainties of bold conception of selfhood:

I’m naked, ignorant,
a naked man fleeing
across the roofs.
In “Prospective Immigrants Please Note” she proposes to take a journey into the future without having any preconceived idea of where she is going, though there are risks involved in it as “The door itself / makes no promises. / It is only a door.” The opening of the door is extremely important because it signals a fundamental change in her approach to experience. It shows her determination to take risks, to experience conflict and acute anxiety, to suffer ambiguity and to perceive her life as being open-ended: “Things look at you doubly/ and you must look back and let them happen.” Rich is committing herself to the present – the process. Since the past does not offer ways viable for the modern woman, she has to discover the meaning of her life for herself. Praising this volume Albert Gelpi observed in his essay “Adrienne Rich: The Poetics of Change” that it marks her “penetration into experience that makes for a distinguishing style. Her themes … begin to find their clarifying focus and center.”

In Necessities of Life Rich keeps the ground she had taken and moves steadily to inhabit the world and to establish contact with that self which was largely suppressed and almost forgotten. Severing all connections to the past which threaten to consume all her energies, she asserts: “I used myself, let nothing use me …. / What life was there, was mine”. This process of separation with the socio-historical context is an essential phase of identity formation for the oppressed feminists:

You are falling asleep and I sit looking at you
old tree of life
old man whose death I wanted
I can’t stir you up now.

In “In the Woods” the poet realizes the moment of sensuous release: “If I move now. the sun/naked between the trees/will melt me as I lie.” But this release does not come easily and creates a turmoil in her life as it brings
a disbelief in “Difficult ordinary happiness” which alienates her from “the common lot.” Rich can never accept a self that does not include others, especially women, and this makes her “feel like a traitor to my friends / even to my enemies.” To unite herself again to “the common lot”, she thinks about death especially of a dead woman: “rouged in the coffin, in a dress/chosen by the funeral director”. Though indirect. Rich’s image of the dead woman is her closest female identification. Through its self-obliterating tone, the poem extends to include “the common lot”, those who may never approach illumination or the poet’s posture as that special person who accomplishes transcendence and issues a communique. Rich wants to have it both ways: to be the poet, the namer of these special, “ordinary” experiences, and to be one of those who finds it difficult to believe in ordinary happiness. These necessities reflect Rich’s awareness of her growing strength as a poet and the conflict it stirs up with her self-concept as a woman. To be a poet, to alienate herself. “in the woods” or anywhere else is against the traditional role of a woman. The paradoxes, that she, a poet, is finding truths that are away from the reach of the common knowledge and is yet different from most poets as she is a woman and again different from most women because she is a poet. create her identity.

This release which brings body and mind together extends to the unconscious mind in “The Trees”:

The trees inside are moving out into the forest.
The forest that was empty all these days
…… ……… ……… ……… ………

All nights the roots work
to disengage themselves from the cracks

Yet the struggle to keep in touch with the elemental forces, “the necessities of life” is never easy, as she declares in the closing lines of “Like This Together”:
Only our fierce attention
gets hyacinths out of those
hard cerebral lumps,
unwraps raps the wet buds down
the whole length of a stem.\(^{119}\)

Rich realizes that her growing consciousness as a woman is an essential aspect of her unique creative power. She adopts a female persona who shapes language by choosing her own signs, naming her own names. Her language at this stage becomes charged with immediacy, as she has become more capable of imagining a listener in her poetry and of bringing that listener into poetic structures. A marital relationship is depicted in “Like This Together”. Rich’s own life seems to flow into her poetry and the problems she has been grappling with in her poems help her to rearrange her life. In 1964, the year after this poem, Rich records this process into her own words: “instead of poems about experience, I am getting poems that are experiences, that contribute to my knowledge and my emotional life even while they reflect and assimilate it.”\(^ {120}\)

“Like This Together” presents two worlds: urban and natural. The poem’s imagery flows between these two worlds. By connecting them Rich tries to connect people in this very fashion. Though it is not a good connection at all but by doing so Rich explores the limitations and inadequacies of language and the disruptive frictions thus created. Finally, the poem breaks the silence and enters into clear speech, but its way is jumbled with ruined language: buzz words, clichés and misnomers. The search is for words that understand or “fit” us so that transformation can take place.

There is a clear cut understanding that death lurks behind everything, that we are trying to escape from it or it is affecting our responses to things,
the knowledge that, after all, time is not ours. Existence is persistence, but
this poem is an affirmation, in the extremity of our situation, of the will to
persist. The woman in the poem has the power to choose whether to speak
or remain silent and it is this power to choose that plays a key role in the
poem. Her deliberate silence after seeing the “Canada geese”, which her
husband likes, poses a question as to what kind of communication could
revive the marriage. Her silence denies to maintain the status quo of a
relationship that has brought two people to the river where they sit “like
drugged birds/ in a glass case.” 121

Rich’s growing subjectivity does not force her to withdraw from the
world, as was the case with Emily Dickinson, but on the contrary, inspires
her for a more intimate relationship with people and with social forces. In
“Face to Face” she imagines what it must have been like to live in the
relative isolation of the American wilderness: “Never to be lonely like
that”. 122 But this idea reveals a paradoxical longing for a prior mode of
existence. It is not so much the physical beauty of the world that fascinates
her, but a way of being in the world:

   How people used to meet!
   starved, intense, the old
   Christmas gifts saved up till spring.
   and the old plain words.

   and each with his God-given secret.
   spelled out through months of snow and silence.
   burning under the bleached scalp: behind the dry lips
   a loaded gun. 123

   If people were so separated from one another, the joy of coming
together, of speaking, must have been extraordinary. Here language
becomes extremely powerful, a loaded gun that could kill. It shows how repression has distorted life and reminds one of the poems by Emily Dickinson “My Life - had stood a Loaded Gun”. Rich discusses this poem in her essay “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson”:

There is one poem which is the real ‘online begetter’ of my thoughts ... about Dickinson; a poem I have mused over, repeated to myself, taken into myself over many years. I think it is a poem about possession by the daemon, about the dangers and risks of such possession if you are a woman, about the knowledge that power in a woman can seem destructive, and that you cannot live without the daemon once it has possessed you. The archetype of the daemon as masculine is beginning to change, but it has been real for women up to now.\textsuperscript{124}

Connecting herself with Dickinson who perceived her poetic power as a lethal weapon – “a loaded gun” which is a masculine trait, Rich acknowledges the essential relationship of language and power and the necessities of life. The gun has the energy of rousing echoes in the mountains and lighting up the valleys: it is also deadly. “Vesuvius”, it is also its owner’s defender against the “foe”. For Rich, “active willing and creation in women are forms of aggression. and aggression is both the ‘power to kill’ and punishable by death.”\textsuperscript{125} “A loaded gun”, an unwomanly trait, becomes the source of real interest as it shows what it means to be both woman and poet.

Speaking in high terms, Robert Boyers in his essay “On Adrienne Rich: Intelligence and Will” writes, “Adrienne Rich achieves in the poems of this volume a dignity and casual elevation that are altogether rare in the
poetry of any period. Imagination here is in the service of intelligence in a way that might well dampen the poetic ardor of most poets, more committed as they are to the sheer vagrancies of creative inspiration. The poems show no decline of invention, no thinning of poetic texture and nothing which can be called simply reasonable constraint. They have the imprints of a rare and distinguished personhood which can be called an implicit celebration of our being.

Increasingly aware of the political implications of the personal life, Rich discovers that the personal and political spheres of life cannot be separated and her life is a part of a larger social fabric. The poems in Leaflets explore the possibilities for reweaving the fabric of our private and public lives. “A new era is coming in” she cautions us in “The Demon Lover” and makes us aware of the part we have to play in shaping the world. Though patriarchal culture threatens to render these efforts futile but “we have to make it”. Going deep down in the political sources of her pain, Rich makes it her mission as a poet to crumble down all existing social realities to construct or reconstruct a new world. Rich thereby transcends the traditional dichotomy between art and life, aesthetics and politics. Her poetry becomes a record of this transforming process, and for this reason it is highly political. She desires to use it as an instrument to change people’s lives: “I wanted to choose words that even you / would have to be changed by.” For this she wants to break down all the barriers to communication which is the driving force of “Leaflets”

I want to hand you this leaflet streaming with rain or tears

but the words coming clear

... ....... ........ .......

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I want this to reach you
who told me once that poetry is nothing sacred
- no more sacred that is
than other things in your life -
to answer yes. if life is uncorrupted
no better poetry is wanted.¹³⁰

Here the “I” is the poet herself and there is no effort to hide this direct appearance of the poet. She addresses a “you” who once told her that poetry is not sacred like other things in life. She answers that if life becomes uncorrupted poetry automatically becomes like that, but if life is not sacred, poetry is required to draw it out of the mire. The importance of poetry lies in its ability to uplift and enlighten. Upholding this view, the poem closes with its proclamation:

I want this to be yours
in the sense that if you find and read it
 it will be there in you already
and the leaflet then merely something
to leave behind, a little leaf
in the drawer of a sublet room.

What else does it come down to
but handing on scrapes of paper
 little figurines or phials
no stronger than the dry clay they are baked in
 yet more than dry clay or paper
because the imagination crouches in them.¹³¹
The lines are long and marked by statements and judgements. They challenge our sense of form by creating their own form. There is a rush and urgency in them as they move into those zones which are usually set aside for prose. They defy any rule. Poetry is not sacred: it does not need to rhyme: it can sound like prose. But the motive of the poet is very clear. She wants the reader to adopt the poem: “I want this to be yours.” Reading the poem should arise something in the reader, that is already there, and then there is no need for any form.

The poem as “leaflet” can be abandoned. We are bound to be surprised at what Rich says, because if poems are “scraps of paper”, then they cannot be sacred, and we find that Rich has now become the poetic scoffer she introduced earlier. She makes us believe that poetry is, indeed, profane. So are the other art forms: “little figurines or phials”. Once she reaches this point, her images take the poem into metaphysical regions. Indeed, “the imagination crouches” in all art forms. ‘Crouches’ reminds us of the power of the imagination to spring. Rich’s female principle of growth is visible even in the syntax as the long first sentence grows by accretions like the rings on a tree increasing outward to achieve larger dimensions. The first if clause starts the imaginative faculty, and we start believing that “all true images/ were scooped out of the mud.” 132 Rich’s method is revolutionary in that she goes to the primal source of art. In the same way, she makes us aware of the fact that we are also originated from the very mud “where our bodies crush and flounder”. 133 So our fate is not different from that of the “true images” and have to go through the same process of firing. Thus artistic transformation is linked to personal transformation, not only for the poet but for all of us who read her “leaflets”.

Rich realized this personal transformation when she was writing the poem “Orion”. Orion is a winter constellation that rises in the western sky.
Huge and warrior like, it becomes an appropriate metaphor for her insight that power is invigorating. As Rich was feeling a loss of contact with herself, she projected her sense of power, the active principle, the energetic imagination, the “half brother”, into the constellation, Orion. Since her childhood Rich had identified herself with the masculinity of the constellation Orion:

You were my genius, you
my cast-iron Viking, my helmed
lion-heart king in prison.
Years later now you’re young
my fierce-half brother…

But now she finds herself in a mesh of relationships where “the stars in it are dim / and maybe have stopped burning”. Orion’s energy does not provide any help against the entanglement of domestic routine: “Indoors I bruise and blunder. / break faith. leave ill enough / alone. a dead child born in the dark.” She feels powerless and her relationships seem unproductive and sterile. “A man reaches behind my eyes / and finds them empty”. eating crumbs of her life. In such a condition when the entire world seem to be falling to pieces. Rich finds herself unable to stop this fragmentation, and in utter despair turns again to Orion. He is the source of strength who from “a star like eye / shooting its cold and egotistical spear”. Albert Gelpi calls this poem “an animus poem”. Referring to the Jungian theory, he says that “for a woman the animus represents her affinity with light as mind and spirit and her capacity for intellection and ego-consciousness.” Now it becomes difficult to reconcile this masculinity with a female persona. Alicia Ostriker tries to resolve this problem in her essay “In Mind: The Divided Self in Women’s Poetry”. She says that women poets often present their poet personas as male. “a proud, controlling, even predatory force” while
the woman in their poems is seen as “pathetically needy”. Illustrating the nature of this polarity in Diana Wakoski’s poetry she writes: “The two sides of her self are appropriately also an all and a nothing, a strong and a weak.”

This syndrome is clearly visible in Rich. She seems to be swinging between love and egotism. She accepts that the words “cold and egotistical” are applied to her. She has got two choices: love – womanly, maternal and altruistic love – a love defined and ruled by the weight of an entire culture: and egotism – a force guided by men into creation, achievement, ambition, often at the expense of others, but justifiably so. But later on she rejects these alternatives as false ones and emphasises that “love” itself is in need of “re-vision”.

“The all and nothing syndrome in female romantic fantasies.”

This syndrome is clearly visible in Rich. She seems to be swinging between love and egotism. She accepts that the words “cold and egotistical” are applied to her. She has got two choices: love – womanly, maternal and altruistic love – a love defined and ruled by the weight of an entire culture: and egotism – a force guided by men into creation, achievement, ambition, often at the expense of others, but justifiably so. But later on she rejects these alternatives as false ones and emphasises that “love” itself is in need of “re-vision”.

“Orion” is a beautiful picturization of the experience of woman as creative artist and the ensuing joy and despair she feels. It proposes that “re-vision” of love is not enough, and Rich is required to put into question her identification, as an artist, with the male principle, a perception shaped by her study of Gottfried Benn’s essay “Artists and Old Age”, as she notes in a later gloss on “Orion”.

The real achievement in this volume, says Nancy Milford, was in “the kind of poet she had risked becoming; living in a time of break-up, oppression and violence, she took these things for her own ground and she was partisan.” She turned from her earlier position as a remote observer to a committed political activist establishing a fundamental connection between herself and the world:

In the bed the pieces fly together
and the rifts fill or else
my body is a list of wounds
symmetrically placed
a village
blown open by planes
that did not finish the job.\textsuperscript{145}

No longer is she an indifferent individual but part of the entire community, and her identification with the oppressed is intensified.

The will to change has been the center of Adrienne Rich’s thought and work and \textit{The Will to Change} is her best evocation of the fully matured and imaginative woman aware of the complexities of her mind and body in a changing world:

\begin{quote}
I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain powers
and those powers severely limited
by authorities whose faces I rarely see.\textsuperscript{146}
\end{quote}

Her “mission” is quite clear “which if obeyed to the letter will leave her intact.”\textsuperscript{147} She is concerned with discovering what women have been and can be in a world where power has totally been denied to them. Her poetry becomes necessarily involved with the examination of the results of women’s powerlessness: with a redefinition of the nature of power; with the search for new sources of power for women: and with a celebration of the transfer of power from men alone to both men and women. She considers it essential for women to reveal every motive, every shabby instinct and cheap thrill that drives them on to achieve power, though the language is “the oppressor’s language”. But they have no choice except to make an effort to express themselves in the language that has no words to depict their experiences: and in the process perhaps they will find a new language. This process of self-realization requires the courage and will to change and to fill
the fractures of language: “The fracture of order / the repair of speech to / overcome this suffering.”

Like a visionary, who can perceive the unforeseen and guide us to a safe future, she wants us to wake up and realize our reality and place in the world, so as to make us decide to change this dismal situation we live in. The will to change comes from the ability and determination to see:

What we see, we see
and seeing is changing.

I am bombarded yet I stand
I have been standing all my life in the
direct path of a battery of signals
the most accurately transmitted most
untranslatable language in the universe
I am a galactic cloud so deep so invo -
luted that a light wave could take 15
years to travel through me And has
taken ....

In 1970 Rich left her marriage, and this traumatic period of “splits” is clearly discernible in the fragmented lines of “Shooting Script.” Throughout the poem, the language is direct and spare, but the sequence as a whole seems to be attacked by the past memories from the center, fracturing its stanzas into individual fragments: “To read there the map of the future, the roads radiating from the / initial split, the filaments thrown out from that impasse....” The poem, in Rich’s words, is defoliated, its
leaves falling from its trunk. Beginning with a translation of the Persian Poet Ghalib, stating: “We are bound on the wheel of an endless conversation. / Inside this shell, a tide waiting for someone to enter.” It ponders over the possibilities of the breaking out of the “impasse” of “a poetry of false problems, the shotgun wedding of the mind, the subversion of choice by language” and insists on the future as the dimension of choice. She finds an “alternative” i.e. “to purge the room with light to feel the sun breaking / in on the courtyard.” It ends with her decision to give up “the temptations of the projector” projecting one image “over and over on empty walls” and to move: “To pull yourself up by your own roots” guided only by the web of cracks filtering across the plaster. On her shift from formalism to a new version of truth, Helen Vendler writes. “If this is a revolution, it is one bound like Ixion on the wheel of the past – environmental past in the plaster, genetic past in the lifeline, traumatic past in the bullet-hole. And if it is revolution, it is one which does not wish to deny the reality of past choices and past modes of life.”

*Diving into the Wreck* is a poetry of risk, search and appetite. The risk is the risk of exploring an unknown environment, where the most trivial activities must be handled, and will become accomplishments. The search is a search for the means of survival. This poetry is very serious, but it is not like so much of women’s poetry in the past, death enamored. For it is the poet’s appetite, her undeniable life force, which sustains these operations. Adrienne Rich describes her own response to the poems in this volume on the dust cover of the book:

“A coming home to the darkest and richest sources of my poetry: sex, sexuality, sexual wounds, sexual identity, sexual politics: many names for pieces of one whole. I feel this book continues the work I’ve been trying to do – breaking down the
artificial barriers between private and public, between Vietnam and the lovers’ bed, between the deepest images we carry out of our dreams and the most day light events “out in the world”. This is the intention and longing behind everything I write.157

Rich’s awareness of herself as a sexual being – a woman who has been wounded – becomes the most important theme in this volume. Being a feminist, she regards her sexuality as a part of the larger fabric of sexual politics, that is, male domination. Rich’s concern with these issues determines the nature of her poetry, its tools, themes, images, and audience. What emerges is an angry feminist voice. It is here in this volume that she presents adventures behind the common definitions of sexuality and beyond the damages done by acculturation and conditioning. Here she makes her strongest political identification with feminism, in her efforts to define experiences unique to women or to define the wrecks done by the false definitions of sexual identity. Her attention is primarily focussed on the long standing question in her poetry: what is it like to feel oppressed, betrayed and unfulfilled. Her clear radical feminism sometimes sets poems off balance, but it is a matter of presentation and not – as some critics say – because she has radically changed the direction of her poetry.

Rich is angry at the destruction of civilization by men in an effort to dominate women. This anger is quite visible through the titles like “Burning Oneself In” and “Burning Oneself Out.” “The Phenomenology of Anger” traces the evolution of “cleansing anger” exploring the connections between anger, depression and madness. Depression is the internalization of anger which can result in “self-hatred. a monotone in the mind.”158 Women commonly experience depression as they are taught not to express anger – it is unfeminine to be angry. Madness and suicide are the extreme situations
when anger becomes irresistible resulting in the death of the self. Rich is against this repression of anger and dreams of destroying her enemy with her own weapons:

... When I dream of meeting the enemy, this is my dream:

white acetylene
ripples from my body
effortlessly released
perfectly trained
on the true enemy

raking his body down to the thread of existence
burning away his lie
leaving him in a new world: a changed man.

Rich envisions a superwoman who has the power to bring about the transformation in the world. Her Amazon can fight out the oppressor who is "gunning down the babies at My Lai" and destroying crops with "some new sublimate." She has the courage to say "I hate you" to this man of no feeling, living with the dream of a community of people who are in touch with their emotions, who are in harmony with nature: "I would have loved to live in a world / of women and men gaily / in collusion with green leaves."

Adrienne Rich advocates for the creation of a community of women which can provide them an opportunity to explore their collective
consciousness and shared experience in order to transcend the fragmentation and alienation of their lives: "The fact of being separate/enters your livelihood like a piece of furniture." But for this, women will have to be more honest to themselves and will have to speak the truth of the patriarchal repression: "you give up keeping track of anniversaries. / you begin to write in your diaries / more honestly than ever." She knows that "the words / get thick with unmeaning / yet never have we been closer to the truth / of the lies we are living ..." Rich has taken the title of the poem from Ibsen’s play where she explains the use which the male artist and thinker – in the process of constructing culture as we know it – has made of women in his life and work: and about a women’s gradual awakening to the use her life has been put to. Rich tries to awaken the same fighting spirit in women:

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 woman’s garment. trying to save the skein.

Women will have to work collectively to undo the damage done to themselves. Rich again uses the knitting metaphor which she has been using for the reconstructive power of women. She uses this image to suggest that women have to recreate themselves, using their traditional powers – female art forms and perhaps a new power – female bonding.

In “Diving Into the Wreck” Rich explores the birth of the transformed self. The underwater ruin she is diving into is the wreck of the obsolete myths, particularly myths about men and women. It is a metaphor
for their dead self and the dead civilization which created it. The archetypal
descent into the underworld takes place, however, complete with the
apparatus of modern technology. The explorer is equipped with armour,
knife, mask, camera and a book of myths. The purpose of this journey into
“the deep element” is to explore “the wreck and not the story of the
wreck.”

The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.

It is a dive into the unconscious to touch the dark, powerful,
elemental forces of life – and to bring the knowledge into the conscious
mind. It is a quest for something beyond myths, for the truths about men
and women, about the I and the you, the he and the she, or more generally
about the powerless and the powerful.

In “Trying to Talk to a Man”, the explosive and difficult relationship
between man and woman is developed through the image of bomb testing.
The woman in the poem feels more helpless in the company of the man than
without him because his “dry heat feels like power / your eyes are stars of a
different magnitude: they reflect lights that spell out: EXIT.” For her to
live with him is like testing bombs in the desert. The bomb test is a
metaphor for the ultimate deadly contest between husband and wife, but the
poet’s response to the “condemned scenery” is complex: for her the final
testing is internal, the danger is in “ourselves.”

Helen Vendler, in her article “Ghostlier Demarcations, Keener
Sounds” writes that the forcefulness of Diving into the Wreck comes from
the desire not to huddle wounded, but to explore the caverns, the scars, the
depths of the wreckage. Concerned with sexual politics, the poems in this volume culminate Rich’s development from the modest poet of her first book of poems to the quiet but firm subversive of her second. When she articulated the complaints of “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law”, she prepared us for the poetry of “visionary anger” we encounter in Diving into the Wreck. Margaret Atwood in her article “Unfinished Women” writes that Diving into the Wreck was fueled by an immense pounding energy, a raw power, “raw” in the sense of “wound”. It was played on a kettle drum with an axe, to a warehouse filled with riot casualties. Poems in this volume move like dreams, simultaneously revealing and alluding, disguising and concealing. The truth, it appears, is not just what we find when we open a door: it is itself a door, which the poet is always on the verge of going through. Attempting to see clearly and record what has been seen – the rapes, the wars, the murders, the violations and mutilations – is half of Rich’s effort: for this a third eye is needed, an eye that can see pain with “clarity”. The other half is to respond, and the response is anger: but it is a “visionary anger”, which hopefully will precede the ability to love.
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CHAPTER 3
Language, Power and Politics of Sexuality

One of the questions that has pursued Adrienne Rich throughout her poetic career is whether, and how, innovative or so-called avant-garde poetic language is necessarily or even “potentially revolutionary”: Do they simply use a “language so deracinated that it is privy in its rebellions only to a few?”¹ This question automatically leads to its opposite: “Must a radical social imagination clothe itself in a language worn thin by usage or debased by marketing, promotion, and the will to power?”² She has constantly been forced by these “unsilenced questions”. She believes in the necessity for a poetic language “untethered” from the compromised language of state and media. She says, “we need poetry as living language, the core of every language, something that is still spoken, about or in the mind, muttered in secret, subversive, reaching around corners, crumpled into a pocket, performed to a community, read aloud to the dying, recited by heart; scratched or sprayed on a wall. That kind of language.”³

Rich believes in what Marx says that “Language is the presence of the community”⁴ and she has tried hard to represent that community, the common human beings, in her poetry. The title of Rich's The Dream of a Common Language reminds us of Wordsworth's advocacy of a “common” language for poetry in his preface to the Lyrical Ballads. Wordsworth was rebelling against an extremely refined poetic language that limited the audience of poetry along class lines. Like Adrienne Rich, Wordsworth's aim was to restore, through poetry, the integrity and value of emotional life, which connects us together as human beings below layers of rationality and civilized behaviour. But Rich is profoundly against Wordsworth's dictum that “the poet is a man speaking to men”.⁵ For her, the poet is a woman
speaking to other women, and her “dream of a common language” symbolizes her desire to address that audience. Though she explains elsewhere “the point ... is not the ‘exclusion’ of men; it is that primary presence of women to ourselves and each other ... which is the crucible of a new language.”

The concept of “dream of a common language” has provoked much critical debate as to what it exactly means. The word “common” is interpreted in different ways – plain and ordinary on the one hand, accessible and shared on the other – but the meaning of “dream” is equally important, implying an aim, the visionary state of poetic thinking, may be a second language, preconscious and unbroken, like a rockshelf of linguistic resource underlying poetry in general. For a feminist poet the status of language as she finds it will be a very difficult problem. “a knot of lies / eating at itself to get undone.” How can the integrity of female experience be kept intact once “rendered in the oppressor’s language”? Rich’s answer to this question is implicit in her sense that “Only where there is language is there world.” Her language is time’s strong vernacular, the idiom of being-in-the-world where “being” is female and “the world” as always, is still a kingdom of the fathers. Against the patriarchal theoretical system she places her art and her life because it is a system given to conquest and illusions of mastery, hostile to earth and the flesh.

(i) Theoretical Perspectives on Language and Power

Developments in the field of language during the 1950s and 60s, proved that language was no more merely a passive mode of communication, conveying ideas and experience. The Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), challenged the concept that language was a “natural” phenomenon, just “there in effect”. He proposed that
language is an arbitrary and conventional system: arbitrary in the sense that there is no inherent relationship between the word and its meaning. Meanings are attributed to the words by the human mind which are maintained by conventions. It follows that if language as a sign system is constructed by such arbitrariness then it is not a reflection of the world and of experience, but a system that is quite separate from it. Clarifying it further, he said that language constitutes our world, it does not just record it or name it. Language itself constructs, shapes and predetermines what we perceive and think. Therefore, all ‘reality’ is constructed through language, and nothing exists as being simply ‘there’ in an unquestionable way – everything is a linguistic/textual construct. Thus, instead of people constructing language to their own ends, they are shaped and constructed by language. For Saussure language is basically a social phenomenon, not individual:

The arbitrary nature of the sign explains in turn why the social fact alone can create a linguistic system. The community is necessary if values that owe their existence solely to usage and general acceptance are to be set up: by himself the individual is incapable of fixing a single value.\(^9\)

In the 1950s the British philosopher J.L. Austin evolved the concept of the performative nature of language. Performatives, instead of describing, actually perform the action to which they refer. They are neither true nor false, but rather appropriate or inappropriate according to the situation or “felicitous” or “infelicitous” to use Austin’s terminology. Austin says that the sentence ‘I promise to pay you’ is not narrating any state of affairs but performing the act of promising: the statement is itself the act. Adding another dimension to this theory of performatives, Jacques Derrida puts that performatives can only function in the larger spheres of
conventions where they identify themselves as forms of or quotations of regular formulas. Giving the example of a marriage ceremony where the priest asks the man “Do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife” and the man replies “I do”. Derrida points out that if the man says “OK” rather than “I do” he may not get married. He says that if the formulation does not repeat a “codified” form or is not identifiable as conforming to an iterative model it will not have the desired result. So language is performative because it does not simply convey a message but also performs acts by conforming itself to the established discursive practices.

Conforming to a deeper and more crucial role of language in constructing and defining the identity and location of the individuals in social configuration Hélène Cixous points and that:

no political reflection can dispense with reflection on language, with work on language. For as soon as we exist we are born into language and language speaks (to) us, dictates its law. a law of death: it lays down its familial model, lays down its conjugal model, and even at the moment of uttering a sentence, admitting a notion of ‘being’, a question of being, an ontology, we are already seized by a certain kind of masculine desire. the desire that mobilizes philosophical discourse.

Women’s relation with language becomes all the more important as they themselves serve as the “signs” of communication between different groups in the patriarchal culture, as Claude Lévi-Strauss points out in his book The Elementary Structures of Kinship (1969). For Lévi-Strauss marriage is a kind of human communication as it operates basically like a linguistic system: the exchange of women in marriage confirms the
continuity of the social set up, while the exchange of words performs a similar action for the linguistic system. He says: “The emergence of symbolic thought must have required that women, like words, should be things that were exchanged”. In a society defined and dominated by man, woman can only be seen under two incompatible aspects: as “the object of personal desire” and as “the subject of the desire of others” or the relational sign between men. Thus the focal point of Lévi-Strauss is that, a woman is both a person and a sign, a human being and a depersonalized entity, so her relationship with language - of women and/in language - will depend on whether she is taken as being a person or a sign.

Exposing the politics at work in language and the role it plays in creating the power groups in society rendering the other powerless, Lévi-Strauss argues that in a marriage ceremony the sentence “I now pronounce you man and wife”. the word “man” points to the essence of a male being, while the word “wife” presents woman, not as a person, in her essence, but as a dependence, simply as a relational sign. It echoes Simone de Beauvoir’s well known assertion: “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her. she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other”. In order to achieve equality between man and woman this statement should be changed to either “I now pronounce you man and woman” or “I now pronounce you husband and wife”. The change of words in the statement shows how marital relationship is viewed in the patriarchal system and how it plays the politics of rendering women to a lower subject position in society. and how such a statement perpetuates sexual discrimination. But one thing which, from the point of view of language, is important is that marriage, before becoming a social reality, is a verbal deed. The speech act that legalises and institutes marriage is preceded by a
dialogue between both the participants who perform a speech act by answering “I do” to the question “Do you take this woman or this man to be your lawful wedded wife or husband”? Thus marriage becomes a text, where legal, social and emotional aspects are formed by language. The words “I” and “thou” of the marital utterance are not simply linguistic signs, signifiers which do not ascribe specific human beings, but depersonalised structural subjects. The participants are speaking subjects, performing their roles in a very mechanistic fashion, speaking the script, whether they acknowledge it or not, that have been written by yet another subject, which Tzvetan Todorov calls, “the subject of enunciation”. The subject of enunciation, is not any person identifiable through biographical or psychological information but rather a strategic position, a structure indifferent to individual wishes, what Michel Foucault calls the “author-function”. The subject of enunciation, says Nelly Furman, “delineates the choices available to individual writers and reveal the position they take in established forms of discourse”. Patriarchal system works as the subject of enunciation for whatever happens in society. All discourses are necessarily regulated and defined by the patriarchal cultural values. Therefore, as Stephen Heath explains:

... any answer to the questions posed will be in terms of the identification of a discourse that is finally masculine, not because of some conception of theory as male but because in the last resort any discourse which fails to take account of the problem of sexual difference in its enunciation and address will be, within a patriarchal order, precisely indifferent, a reflection of male domination.

Theories of the 1960s suggest that language and socio-historical events are inseparably bound with each other, and particular situations
produce particular kinds of language which in turn shape and determine events. Language is produced by a definite set of social relations which operate at a certain time and place. This kind of language is never impartial or ideologically free, but shaped to transmit particular kinds of knowledge designed to conform to the machinations of power and domination seeking to achieve control over human life.

This view of language as an instrument of political and social control in which 'truth' becomes more relative and practical rather than absolute and ideal, working only in a specific historical context, was promulgated most effectively by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Revealing the nexus working between language, knowledge, truth, and power he says that Western history cannot be separated from the way 'truth' is produced and inscribes its effects. We live in a society which to a great extent marches in time with truth—by truth he meant that ours is a society which produces and circulates discourse with a truth function, discourse which passes for the truth and holds specific powers.  

Thus, the social world is made up of a plurality of discourses originating and operating around the institutions which they are part of: the discourses of gender and race have been functioning with slight changes throughout Western history in ways that give importance to certain groups and naturalize the inferiorization of others.

Once the power of politics in language, in the construction of the entire face of society has been exposed, it becomes too naïve to think of literature as something separate from the world or that it just reflects the world in a passive and mirror-like way. The new theoretical knowledge rejects this mimetic view of literature and questions the position of literature as a transcendental, aesthetic sovereign and as a privileged mode of discourse. It says that it is as much a part and product of the world as any
other signifying process and is as much a part of reality as a reflection on it. In her study of some of the major works of American fiction, Judith Fetterley shows how literature under the garb of universality is discriminatory in nature. She writes that:

One of the main things that keeps the design of our literature unavailable to the consciousness of the woman reader, and hence impalpable, is the very posture of the apolitical, the pretence that literature speaks universal truths through forms from which all the merely personal, the purely subjective, has been burned away or at least transformed through the medium of art into the representative. When only one reality is encouraged, legitimized, and transmitted and when that limited vision endlessly insists on comprehensiveness, then we have the conditions necessary for that confusion of consciousness in which impalpability flourishes."19

In her examination she deconstructs a few fictional works to expose how men’s attitudes towards women mould their form and content. Thus, she gives rise to a new reality and new vision bringing a different subjectivity to bear on the so-called transcendental nature of literature.

Fetterley says that American literature is masculine in nature and a simple study of the canon reveals and tries to impose its male identity, though it claims to be universal but that universality is defined specifically in male terms. In fiction, for example, as in Mailer's An American Dream, the writer is so possessed by the power that sexism brings to men that he is prepared to transcend any limits to maintain it. He creates conditions where the supremacy of men over women can be repeatedly exemplified. The pains Mailer undergoes here to conceal the issue, blur the reality, and
confound the consciousness are so frenzied that the antithesis he constructs
to defend his thesis becomes in fact his message. and his confusions shed a
pallid illumination. The ritual of scapegoating to expurgate all the ills of a
person is entirely male: the sacrificial scapegoat is the woman/wife and the
purged survivor is the man/husband. Such fictions invite the female reader
to participate in an experience. she has already been exiled from: she is
required to identify with a person whose definition is opposed to hers thus,
she is forced to search for an identity in a space where nothing relates to
her. Literature is permeated with examples of “immasculation” of women
by men. They are always trained to think as men. to identify with a male
dream and to approve the male system of values as natural and legitimate,
where misogyny is the central principle.

In her paper “Women and the Literary Curriculum”. Elaine exposes
the process of Showalter immasculation through the medium of literature.
She says that the average young woman entering college comes to
understand that the texts in her course are

selected for their timelessness. or their relevance. or their
power to involve the reader. rather than for their absolute
standing in the literary canon. Thus she might be assigned any
one of the texts which have recently been advertised for
Freshman English: an anthology of essays. perhaps such as
The Responsible Man, ‘for the student who wants literature
relevant to the world in which he lives’. or Conditions of Men.
or Man in Crisis: Perspectives on The Individual and His
World. or again, Representative Men: Cult Heroes of Our
Time. ... By the end of her freshman year. a woman student
would have learned something about intellectual neutrality;
she would be learning in fact, how to think like a man.20
Evaluating "the effects of this long apprenticeship in negative capability on the self-image and the self-confidence of women students" that lead to self-hatred and self-doubt. Showalter concludes: that Women are estranged from their own experience and unable to perceive its shape and authenticity they are expected to identify as readers with a masculine experience and perspective, which is presented as the human one. Since they have no faith in the validity of their own perceptions and experiences, rarely seeing them confirmed in literature, or accepted in criticism, can we wonder that women students are so often timid, cautious, and insecure when we exhort them to "think for themselves"?

Thus, the condition of a female reader becomes awkward. Intellectually she is male, thinking like male, imagining herself male but sexually female. she has in fact no identity of her own. Exclusion from a literature which paves the path towards crystallization of one's identity is to experience a particular form of powerlessness. This powerlessness is not merely the result of one's negation to allow one's experience to be articulated, defined, and realised in art and literature but as Judith Fetterley puts, it springs from "the endless division of self against self. the consequence of the invocation of identity as male while being reminded that to be male – to be universal, to be American – is to be not female. Elizabeth Hampsten too voices the same concern in her article "A Woman's Map of Lyric Poetry". Alluding to Thomas Campion's "My Sweetest Lesbia". she puts forth the question. "And Lesbia, what's in it for her?" As Lillian Robinson suggests, "and, always, cui bono – who profits?" The questions "who profits", and "how" are decisive as they clearly expose the deeply entrenched drama of literary sexual politics.

Contemporary feminisms have included the wide ranging political implications of language in their political agenda. The question "why is
language a feminist issue?” has many deep-rooted implications which force
a feminist to question her very identity and through this questioning achieve
her true self. This examination is a pointer to the process of how women
have been silenced and excluded from language. This introspection
becomes instrumental in discovering a female voice. It also helps in
unraveling how “naming” has been a totally male prerogative which
actually accounts for the misrepresentation of the identity of women in art
and literature.

Speaking about the inauthenticity and alienation of a woman's voice
in patriarchy. Mary Daly writes in *Man Made Language*:

The fact is that the female saying ‘I’ is alien at every moment
to her own speaking and writing. She is broken by the fact
that she must enter this language in order to speak or write. As
the ‘I’ is broken, so also is the Inner Eye, the capacity for
integrity of knowing/sensing. In this way the Inner Voice of
the Self’s integrity is silenced: the external voice babbles in
alien and alienating tongues.

This does not mean that women have always and everywhere been
silent but they could never use it to their advantage. Their reach to language
is severely limited, as Rebecca Hiscock observes that gossip, story telling,
private letters, and diaries have been the only genres available to women
which itself speaks of the politics involved in the assignment of roles as
none of these are prestigious enough, and some, like gossip, are actually
deprecated. These are *private* forms of language, limited to the boundaries
of home; in the public sphere, which includes culture, religion and all the
institutionalized knowledge these genres have no reputation and currency.
This silencing of women is actually the reason of an absence of female voice and concern within a higher culture. It is not that women cannot or do not speak, but rather they are severely restricted from speaking, either by social taboos and restrictions or by the so-called rules and regulations of custom and practice which are ironically applicable only to women. Even where it seems that they could speak, if they decided, the conditions forced upon their lives by society make this difficult. Silence is sometimes chosen by women so to save themselves from being ridiculed or attacked. Anthropologists have reported of societies, where restrictions were formulated as regulations with severe punishments attached to their violation, where women were denied the right to speak in public or in the presence of men or where they could not use certain words and expressions. Actually, powerful groups fear that the ability to read and write, if it is allowed to the powerless, will facilitate opposition and threat to the hegemonial position of the powerful group. As Alice Walker clearly states:

What does it mean for a black woman to be an artist in our grand-mothers’ time? In our great-grand-mothers’ day? It is a question with an answer cruel enough to stop the blood. How was the creativity of the black woman kept alive, year after year and century after century ... it was a punishable crime for a black person to read and write?28

It shows how Black women were totally denied any reach to literacy and the extent to which they underwent penalties and punishments for any effort to acquire it. Almost the same has been the fate of women all over the world who tried to enter into the privileged realm of knowledge and learning reserved only for men. Speaking of poetry as a privileged meta-language in Western patriarchal culture Cora Kaplan writes that though other written forms of high culture – theology, philosophy, political theory,
drama, and prose fiction – are also, in part, “language about language, in poetry this introverted or doubled relation is thrust at us as the very reason-for-being of the genre.” Men have been involved in a politics to keep women away from this privileged way of writing. Writing is not an organic growth out of general linguistic abilities, but a technology: and like other technologies it has been monopolized by the powerful.

In a very interesting study of Romantic poetry, J.R. de J. Jackson in his *Romantic Poetry by Women: A Bibliography* (1993) mentions that there were 1,402 first editions of volumes of poetry published by women during 1770 and 1835. This statistical data shows that most Romantic poets were women. It is difficult to assign any reason other than sexism for the fact that all of this body of work has until very recently been totally unacknowledged and most people generally know Romantic poetry by the Big Six (Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats). He argues that it certainly cannot be said that all 1,402 books were carefully and critically examined and regretfully put aside as inferior. because what seems likely to have happened, though never documented, is that Romantic poetry is something men wrote and women did not because they could not or should not. But what makes the present extremely interesting is that generations of coarse cultural amnesia is being replaced by a pleasant rediscovery of a sizable extent of the achievements of the past.

Perhaps the most clear example of this deep-seated sexism is the then Poet Laureate Robert Southey’s letter to the young Charlotte Bronte who wrote to him in 1837 for advice as she set out on her career as a writer. He replied:

*Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties.*
the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation.\textsuperscript{\textdagger}

Southey's attitude, in spite of his being the Poet Laureate, clearly exhibits the prevalent prejudice in the dominant culture that women writers in the period had to negotiate their way round if they were to exist as writers at all.

Grappling for reasons of female inferiority in expression of language Cora Kaplan says that the predominance of male perspectives expressed in common and high speech are on account of the taboo imposed on the female child. She talks about two extremely prominent and distinct stages at which the woman's clearly weaker position in language is fixed. The first stage, the Oedipal stage, where the child, constructed as a speaking subject, has to admit sex difference and conform herself with women and restricted speech. The second stage, which is puberty, further broadens distinctions between girls and boys with the appearance of adult sex difference and reach to public discourse outlined for men.

In a painting by Odilon Redon a woman's face in ivory cameo, enclosed in a green oval mist, holding two fingers to her lips, and a cupped paw to her ear has been picturised. It is titled Silence. Commanding silence, she is its material image. A speaking silence – image and command united – she is herself spoken to, in fact spoken twice - first by the artist who has placed his silence in a female figure, and secondly by the viewer who takes as natural this abstract identification of woman – silence and commentary imaging of women's speech as whispered, subvocal. the mere escape of trapped air ... s h h h h h h.

Kaplan argues that her speech seems more restricted by some function in which she is enclosed as deeply as in the embryonic mist.
Whatever role she plays, the silence she commands and enacts is on behalf of some sleeping other. She says.

In enforcing our silence and her own she seems to protect someone else's speech. Her silence and muted speech ... is both chosen and imposed by the acceptance of her femininity. It has none of the illusory freedom of choice that we associate with a taciturn male. It is not the silence of chosen isolation either. For even in a painting significantly without other figures it is an inextricably social silence. 

A very important debate within the study of sexism in language is the question of naming, how the issues of gender are represented in languages. Feminists have always argued that "those who have the power to name the world are in a position to influence reality". They say that women lack this power and consequently many a female experience remains without a name. This absence of words for certain feelings and ideas of women, those the male language-makers have decided not to 'name', exposes the politics of sexism in language, because these experiences do not fit in with the official male world-view. In absence of the proper words to express the feelings and ideas of women they may remain drifting, and unacknowledged by the majority, thus our languages are not proper carriers for conveying women's most pressing concerns. Women feel that most of the existing languages, instead of helping them in expressing their true selves, come in their way to self-realization and make them alien to themselves. As Monique Wittig puts it, "The women say, the language you speak poisons your glottis, tongue, palate, lips. They say, the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you. They say, the language you speak is made up of signs that rightly speaking designate what men have appropriated."
In her book *Beyond God the Father*, Mary Daly writes that "Women have had the power of *naming* stolen from us. We have not been free to use, our own power, to name ourselves, the world, or God". Languages are sexist: that is, they ‘name’ the world from a masculine point of view and according to the stereotyped beliefs about the sexes. She points out that in the mythology of the Judeo-Christian world it is ‘man’ as Adam who gives names to God’s creation. This male monopoly of naming has far reaching results. Many feminists believe that the names given to the world are not mere reflections of reality, nor arbitrary signifiers with no relation to it. Rather, they claim, the names are a culture's strategy of fixing what will ultimately become reality in a world of overwhelming chaotic sensations, all pregnant with a number of possible meanings. It is not simply a matter of certain words being sexist, but of sexism entering into different levels of language from morphology to stylistic conventions in specific ‘fields’ of discourse, which are less general and more contextual. One has to be conscious while considering different fields of discourse in different terms, as conventions of sexism in discussions of poetry are different from that of rape reporting. Even the underlying assumptions are different from each other. Thus ‘sexist language’ cannot be taken as simply the ‘naming’ of the world from one, phallocentric perspective: it is better conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon occurring in a number of quite complex systems of representations, each of them having a historical background.

Actually, our linguistic practices often reveal and perpetuate ideas about things which do not come under law, but have great cultural importance. This is one of the reasons that feminists have emphasized on language and discourse so enormously: our ways of talking about things expose the hidden attitudes and assumptions we may not accept consciously, thus examining the deep - seatedness of sexism. To reveal this
sexism at work in language. we can examine two reports of an incident related to a married couple whose have was broken into. The first report from the *Daily Telegraph* says:

A man who suffered head injuries when attacked by two men who broke into his home in Beckenham, Kent, early yesterday, was pinned down on the bed by intruders who took it in turns to rape his wife.\(^{36}\)

The second report is from the *Sun*.

A terrified 19-stone husband was forced to lie next to his wife as two men raped her yesterday.\(^{37}\)

What is surprising here is that the act of rape is being projected as a crime against a man rather than a woman. It is the experience of the man in this incident which is foregrounded in both reports. He is the first person to be mentioned, and also the grammatical subject of the main clause. What is important for a feminist to see is that he is the subject of verbs *suffered* and *was* forced, while we can meaningfully inquire who is the one actually forced and suffers in a rape. The woman - in both reports referred as "his wife" - is mentioned only in the end of a long complex sentence. Her rape comes, in the *Daily Telegraph*, after the man’s "head injuries" and the violation of "his home". and in the *Sun*, the rape itself is less shocking than the fact that the husband was forced to witness it.

This analysis shows that it is not only through certain words but also through the arrangement of words and the total representation and picturization of an incident that sexism can be gleaned. As there are no words, except a symmetrical lack between man and wife in the *Daily Telegraph* report, which can be charged of sexism, we need to focus on specific "discursive practices" where sexist assumptions are embodied by
linguistic choices, than to go on emphasizing that ‘language’ is generally and universally sexist in itself. Here Dale Spender’s notion of male-controlled or “man-made language” becomes significant as it recognises the importance of human agency in constructing and changing linguistic practice. Thus, we are required to examine languages as cultural structures whose norms are secured in things like dictionaries, grammars, style books, and glossaries – each of which has historically been compiled and arranged by men.

There is yet another area which draws the feminists’ attention pertaining to the different styles of language – specially speech – used by women and men and the areas women have been excluded from. There have been many prejudices against women’s speech which have historically been backed and supported by the male dominated culture. From Jonathan Swift, who, in A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue. 1712, developing the malignant influence of women on language, opined that women’s language abounds in vowels and liquids, to the 20th century linguist Otto Jespersen, who, criticizing women for their lack of innovation, called their language “languid and insipid” while he referred to men as “the chief innovators of language”. Women’s language has been criticized without showing any authentic proof for such criticism. Many people may agree with Jespersen calling women’s language “a set of pearls joined together on a string of ands” but the linguist Robin Lakoff, in her pioneering work Language and Woman's Place refers to these lacks as political and cultural constructs rather than as natural sex differences. She believes that women are forcefully made to learn a feeble, trifling, and deferential style as part of their socialization, which is essentially a training for their subordination. She considers women's style as a reflection of their powerlessness and men’s power over them.
Another approach accepts the differences in language by men and women, but instead of taking them as signs of inferiority, it calls them the authentic manifestation of a female culture. This approach is supported by Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Annie Leclerc, Deborah Jones and many others who believe that if we can stop evaluating things by sexist male standards, the aspects now tagged “trivial”, “trifling” and “deferential” will appear as “women-centered” and “supportive”.

Aware of the politics of literature to keep women silent, restricted, and therefore powerless. Adrienne Rich poses a fundamental question regarding what is to be done if the very language and literature, that should be aimed at endowing knowledge and freedom to the reader, is used to restrict the reader’s freedom and to convince her of her unworthiness to collaborate in the production of the work? Adrienne Rich has no illuminating answer to this question, but simply to question and revise the notion of the “classic” which has been used as a term of “unquestioning idolatry”:

Revision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is a part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves. how our language has trapped as well as liberated us. how the very act of naming has been till now a
male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore live—a fresh. A change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if we are not going to see the old patriarchal order re-assert itself in every new revolution. We need to know the writing of the past and know it differently than we have ever known it, not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.⁴⁰

This energizing encounter with literature is in essence a mode of interpretation that will give women the power of renaming or naming in a new perspective. The purpose of the re-visioning is to make women the resisting readers than the acquiescing readers. By refusing to acquiesce, they can start the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted in them. As a result of this exercise the texts will no longer be studied the way they have been studied and thus they will lose their power to trap women unknowingly to their designs. It offers feminist readings of texts which examine the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism and women-assign in semiotic systems. This is revolutionary in content as most alternative feminist reading has not been able to accomplish this task. But Adrienne Rich cautions women that this task of examining and exploring literature is a difficult one, as they attempt to find language and images for a consciousness they are just coming into and with nothing in the past to support them.

To clarify this further Rich sets out to answer the questions posed by the anthropologist, Jane Harrison. Harrison inquires, "why do women never want to write poetry about Man as a sex—why is woman a dream and terror to man and not the other way round? Is it mere convention and propriety, or something deeper?"⁴¹ These questions cut deep into the myth-
making tradition, the relationship of men and women, and the psyche of the woman writer. Rich says that historically men and women have performed very different roles in each others' lives. While woman has been a luxury for man, been used as the painter's model, and poets muse, and has worked as a nurse, cook and bearer of his seed, man has performed a totally different role for the female artist. Rich gives an example of how language has been manipulated by the male writers for their benefit and how the sexual politics works in day-to-day life that denies any space for a woman writer.

Henry James in his article “Notes on Novelists”, repeated an incident described by the writer Prosper Merimee who had spent a night with George Sand:

He once opened his eyes, in the raw winter dawn, to see his companion, in a dressing-gown, on her knees before the domestic hearth, a candle-stick beside her and a red madras round her head, making bravely, with her own hands the fire that was to enable her to sit down betimes to urgent pen and paper. The story represents him as having felt that the spectacle chilled his ardor and tried his taste; her appearance was unfortunate, her occupation an inconsequence, and her industry a reproof – the result of all which was a lively irritation and an early rupture.42

Adrienne Rich says that this kind of male judgement, along with the misnaming and baffling of her needs by a culture controlled by males, has caused great problems for the woman writer: the problems of contact with herself, problems of language and style, problems of energy and survival.
In the writings of Sylvia Plath and Diana Wakoski, Man is presented as, if not a dream, a fascination and a terror, and the source of this fascination and terror is nothing but Man’s power – to control, to oppress, to select, or reject the woman. And, in the poetry of both these women, it is ultimately the woman’s sense of herself – embattled, possessed – that confers to poetry its dynamic charge, its rhythms of struggle, need, will, and female energy. In Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own, Rich finds a “sense of effort, of pains taken, of dogged tentativeness” in the love, which reminds her of her own situation. This tone is the tone of a woman who knows her anger but has decided not to appear angry, who is “willing” herself to be quiet, isolated, and even “charming” in a room full of men where things have been talked about which assault her very integrity. Virginia Woolf wrote for women but was aware of the male presence so she drew the language out into an exacerbated thread in her determination to express her own sensibility and yet guard it from the masculine presences. It is only occasionally that the passion in her voice can be heard: she tried to sound as calm as Jane Austen, as Olympian as Shakespeare, because that is the way the men of culture desired a writer should sound.

(ii) Adrienne Rich’s Views on Language and Power

Adrienne Rich is of the view that men have never written especially for women or keeping in view women’s criticism when they pick up their materials, themes and language. But on the contrary all women write for men even when, like Virginia Woolf, they are supposed to be addressing women. Rich finds the cause of this incapability of women writers to write about women only in their inability to handle the language which is masculine by nature. Rich says that when a women writer:
goes to poetry or fiction looking for her way of being in the world, since she too has been putting words and images together: she is looking carefully for guides, maps, possibilities: and over and over in the ‘words’ masculine persuasive force’ of literature she comes up against something that negates everything she is about: she meets the image of woman in the books written by men. She finds a terror and a dream. she finds a beautiful pale face. she finds La Belle Dame Sans Merci. she finds Juliet or Iess or Salome but precisely what she does not find is that absorbed, drudging, puzzled, sometimes inspired creature, herself, who sits at a desk trying to put words together.¹⁴

Adrienne Rich offers a revision of the androcentric texts and strategies from a feminist perspective as an important step for dismantling the sexual politics involved to keep women away and incapable to use language and literature for the expression of the turmoil going within and without their lives. The critique of androcentric reading strategies is essential, for it opens up some ideological space for the recuperation of women’s writing. Women will have to choose, as Rich writes of Emily Dickinson, in her poem “I am in Danger – Sir –”, to have the argument out at last on their own premises.

In her exemplary essay: “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson”. Adrienne Rich presents a tacit commentary on the process of reading women’s writing. While a feminist study of male texts appeals to women to be resisting readers. Rich offers three metaphors that announce a very different attitude towards her subject.
The methods, the exclusions of Emily Dickinson's exercise could not have been my own: yet more and more, as a woman poet finding my own methods, I have come to understand her necessities, could have served as witness in her defense.\textsuperscript{15}

I am travelling at the speed of time, along the Massachusetts Turnpike .... 'Home is not where the heart is', she wrote in a letter, 'but the house and adjacent buildings ... I am travelling at the speed of time, in the direction of the house and buildings.... For years, I have been not so much envisioning Emily Dickinson as trying to visit, to enter her mind through her poems and letters, and through my own intimations of what it could have meant to be one of the two mid-nineteenth century American geniuses, and a woman, living in Amherst, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{16}

For months, for most of my life, I have been hovering like an insect against the screens of an existence which inhabited Amherst, Massachusetts between 1830 and 1886.... Here [in Dickinson's bedroom] I become again, an insect, vibrating at the flames of windows, clinging to the panes of glass, trying to connect.\textsuperscript{17}

The first is the example of judicial metaphor where the feminist reader presents herself as a witness in defence of the woman writer. Here gender plays a very important role. The feminist reader comes forward to defend the woman writer against patriarchal misreadings that try to distort her work and make it insignificant. The second metaphor refers to a principal doctrine of feminist criticism that a literary work cannot be understood in isolation from the social, historical and cultural contexts
within which it was written. As if to agree to the condition Dickinson had imposed on her friends. Rich travels through space and time to visit the poet on her own premises. She goes to Amherst to visit the house at 280 Main Street where Dickinson lived. She visits her corner bedroom on the second floor that had been "freedom" for her. Rich, ultimately, tries to get in Dickinson's mind, but to achieve this it is not enough to read her poems and letters. To get into her mind and heart, one must take a journey through "the house and adjacent buildings".

Why did Dickinson choose seclusion? Why did she write poems she would not publish? What did these poems about queens, volcanoes, deserts, eternity, passion, suicide, rape, power, madness, the demon, the grave mean? Rich considers all these questions as related with one another, as for her the revisionary reading of Dickinson's work is a part of the revisionary re-reading of her life. Rich writes that:

I have a notion that genius knows itself: that Dickinson chose her seclusion, knowing she was exceptional and knowing what she needed. It was, moreover, no hermetic retreat, but a seclusion which included a wide range of people, of reading and correspondence.... she carefully selected her society and controlled the disposal of her time. Not only the 'gentlewomen in plush' of Amherst were excluded: Emerson visited next door but she did not go to meet him.... Given her vocation, she was neither eccentric nor quaint: she was determined to survive, to use her powers, to practice necessary economies.48

Rich believes that to write the kind of poetry which penetrates so far beyond the ideology of the "feminine" and the conventions of womanly feelings. Emily Dickinson had to "enter the chambers of the self in which
Ourself behind ourself, concealed -

Should startle most -

and to relinquish control there, to take those risks, she had to create a relationship to the other world where she could feel in control."

The metaphor of visiting presents another aspect of feminist readings of women's writing. The practice of interpreting the text not as an object but as the revelation of the subjectivity of the absent author—the "voice" of another woman. I or Rich reading Dickinson's poems and letters is not enough, these are the doorways to the "mind" of a "woman of genius". So she uses her imagination and her rhetorical power to "evolve the figure of powerful will" who is at the heart of the text. To read Dickinson, then, is to try to visit her, to listen to her voice, to make her live in oneself, and to feel her impressive "personal dimensions." But Rich clearly knows that visiting Dickinson is simply a metaphor for reading her poetry. As she acknowledges in the third metaphor. In reading, one encounters only a text while the author is absent. Probably the most striking rhetorical device employed by Rich in this essay is her use of the personal voice. Her approach to Dickinson is deliberately and brazenly subjective.

Rich's metaphors together with her use of the personal voice indicate some key issues underlying feminist readings of female texts. On the one hand, reading is essentially subjective. On the other hand, it should not be so completely. One should respect the autonomy of the text. The reader is a visitor and should follow the primary laws. She must avoid unwarranted intrusions—she must be careful not to confiscate what belongs to her host, not to force herself upon the other woman. Furthermore, reading is at once an inter-subjective encounter and something less than that. In reading Dickinson, Rich tries to enter her mind, to feel her presence. But there is a
screen, an inanimate object. Its subjectivity is only a projection of the subjectivity of the reader.

Adrienne Rich proposes the central inspiration, the regulative ideal, that constructs the feminist reader’s approach to these issues. If feminist readings of male texts are inspired by the need to disrupt the process of immasculation, feminist readings of female texts are inspired by the need “to connect”, to revive, or to formulate the context, the tradition, that would connect women writers to one author, to women readers and critics, and to the large community of women. Of course, the revival of such a context is an essential ground for the non-repressive unification of women’s point of view and culture into the study of a Humanities that is worthy of its name.

Adrienne Rich has always been aware of the power of language to transform and change our lives. Language has a real and tangible importance in the lives of women. She says:

When we become acutely, disturbingly aware of the language we are using and that is using us, we begin to grasp a material resource that women have never before collectively attempted to repossess ... as long as our language is inadequate, our vision remains formless, our thinking and feeling are still running in the old cycles, our process may be “revolutionary” but not transformative. 51

Rich emphasizes the inauthenticity and alienation of women’s experience in patriarchy. She believes that the inauthenticity of our language may undermine our capacity to transform ourselves and the world we live in, however we can find an authentic self through a process of personal and political transformation. For Rich, language is among the most important sources of women’s present alienation, and if they do not pay
attention to it all their labour for transformation will go waste. And if they start paying attention, it is also potentially a resource of their transformation. Language “breaks” us; but if repossessed it can also remake us.

Emphasizing the necessity of poetry, a criticism of language, in the modern world. Rich says that it becomes all the more important as many people still think that language is “only words” and that an old language is capable enough to describe the world we are trying to transform. Poetry, she says, by simply arranging words in new configurations and establishing relationships between words created through echo, repetition, rhythm, rhyme, can do wonders and make us hear and see our words in a new dimension:

I am the wall at the lip of the water
I am the rock that refused to be battered
I am the dyke in the matter, the other
I am the wall with the womanly swagger...

Her entire work sustains her belief that, “Poetry is above all a concentration of the power of language which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe”\(^5\). But women have. Rich says, not been allowed to use poetry to speak out of women collectively, of women alone, of women as anything but the fantasies of men. It is as if “forces we can lay claim in no other way”.\(^5\) Rich realizes that patriarchal culture has deprived women of the time and space required to create literature. The period, college years, when women can make literature, they are given the male writers to study, and in fact literature itself has been lost, misread and kept away from them. Therefore, in the absence of women’s poetry i.e. language, it is almost impossible to imagine and name the sensations, longings, hunger, alienation which die silently in the hearts of women “unnamed” and “unnameable” and “mistranslated”.

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Even in the modern times women fear to express explicitly what they feel. Poet Judy Grahn, who wrote “A Woman Is Talking To Death”: a poem of bitter lamentation which paved a new path for poetry making use of the “new words” which were written by women, writing entirely to and for women, was so frightened that she decided not to write poetry for a while. The subtle presentation of images of death at work are constantly informed by the authors’ own experiences, testimony in trials that never got heard - historical violence against women, including feudal wives, witches and the rape victims: the degradation of the poor, the black and the women to non-human status: the violence- of neglect, of rejection, of severe brutality or accidental torture – that the powerless inflict on themselves and each other: the exploitation of female mind and body by the patriarchal culture. It is through the power of language that the seemingly unconnected pieces produce the effect of a musical whole exposing the contradictions of the patriarchal culture which not only blames the victim but sets her to blaming other victims and in this way makes the wheel of powerlessness moving.

(iii) Body and Language

Many feminists make a very strong connection between language and their body, especially the female body and perceive it as a positive relation. They believe that anatomy is textuality. In fact, organic or biological criticism is one of the most “sibylline” and perplexing theoretical formulations of feminist criticism, as Elaine Showalter terms it. Though feminist criticism rejects the literal biological inferiority, some theorists seem to accept the metaphorical implications of female biological difference in writing. Gilbert and Gubar in The Madwoman in the Attic, frame their analysis of women’s writing around metaphors of literary paternity. They maintain that: “In patriarchal western culture … the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose
pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. Women’s writing, as it lacks phallic authority, is greatly marked by the anxieties of this difference: “If the pen is a metaphorical penis, from what organ can females generate texts?” Though they do not give any answer to this question, but it is a serious question of much feminist theoretical discourse.

Adrienne Rich and other feminists have taken up this question very seriously and have come forward to rethink and redefine biological differentiation and its relation to women’s writing. They argue that women’s writing begins from the body and their sexual differentiation is their source. In Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, Rich makes her declaration:

I have come to believe, as will be clear throughout this book, that female biology - the diffuse, intense sexuality radiating out from clitoris, breasts, uterus, vagina, the lunar cycles of menstruation; the gestation and fruition of life which can take place in the female body – has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate. Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons: it will. I believe, come to view our physicality as a source, rather than a destiny, in order to live a fully human life we require not only control of our bodies (though control is a prerequisite); we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence.

Rich believes that the male fear for the female capacity to create life has manifested itself in different forms of hatred for every aspect of female
creativity. To curb this creativity, women have been forced to stick to motherhood and their faculties looked down upon as inferior. "inappropriate", "inconsequential", an attempt to become "like men", or an escape from their "real" duties: marriage and childbearing. Rich says that this notion to "think like a man" has been both "praise and prison" for women who make an effort to escape the body-trap. This has lead many women to claim that they are first "human beings" and women just by chance. Rich believes that female body has been made so problematic for women that they prefer to shrug it off and live as a "disembodied spirit". But with new inquiries into the actual power inherent in female biology, women are starting to change their ideas and look at it beyond the maternal function. Rich herself decided "to heal the separation between mind and body; never again to loose myself both psychically and physically in that way". For Rich body is the source of all her inspiration and ideas:

The will to change begins in the body not in the mind
My politics is in my body, occurring and expending with every act of resistance and each of my failures.
Locked in the closet at four years old I beat the wall with my body that act is in me still.
No, not completeness:
but I needed a way of saying
(this is what they are afraid of)
that could deal with these fragments
I needed to touch you
with a hand, a body
but also with words
I need a language to hear myself with
to see myself in."
This championing of body has come under criticism from different quarters of feminist criticism. Feminists fear that this invocation of anatomy risks a return to the crude essentialism, the phallic and ovarian theories of art, that oppressed women in the past. A critic who writes from the body tends to be confessional and often innovative in style and form. But such criticism makes itself extremely vulnerable, as the professional taboos against self-revelation are very strong. However, when it achieves success, it is given the power and dignity of art. Its existence is a tacit admonition to female critics who keep on writing, according to Adrienne Rich, from somewhere outside their female bodies.

But Adrienne Rich’s preoccupation with the “corporeal ground of our intelligence” has been criticised as it can become acutely prescriptive. There is a possibility here in which this revelation of bloody wounds becomes an introductory ritual totally separate and disconnected from critical insight. The dissident French feminist journal Questions Feministes puts it's argument in these terms:

It is at times said that women’s language is closer to the body, to sexual pleasure, to direct sensations and so on, which means that the body could express itself directly without special mediation and that, moreover, this closeness to the body and to nature would be subversive. In our opinion, there is no such thing as a direct relation to the body. To advocate a direct relation to the body is therefore not subversive because it is equivalent to denying the reality and strength of social mediations, the very same ones that oppress us in our bodies. At most, one would advocate a different socialization of the body, but without searching for a true and eternal nature, for this search takes us away from the most effective struggle
against the socio-historical contexts in which human beings are and will always be trapped.60

This critique concentrates on the fundamentally social nature of the body itself. Actually the authors think it of no use to point out that language is also an irrevocable part of the cultural rather than the natural sphere. The study of biological imagery in women’s writing is helpful and important as long as we recognize the other factors involved in it. It is only through the ideas about body that women conceptualize their existence in society; but there is no expression of the body which is unmediated by linguistic, social and literary structures. The difference of woman’s literary practice, therefore, must be sought, as Miller says, in “the body of her writing and not the writing of her body”.61

(iv) Silence and the Dream of a Common Language

Adrienne Rich is a poet with a mission. She does not write to win prizes but to change the laws of history. It is precisely this mission that sets her apart, for instead of choosing academic poetry, she hurled herself into the political arena. She wants women to train in history so that they can see what has been done to them and how they have been subordinated and denied their real powers. To start this, she questions the very existence of the social institutions like heterosexuality and motherhood. She believes that it is only through ignorance that women have been vulnerable to the projections of male fantasies as they appear in art, in literature, in the sciences, and in the media. Rich suggests “not anatomy, but enforced ignorance, has been a crucial key to our powerlessness”.62 So ultimately it is an ideological chain which has bound them to their place, “all science and all scholarship and all art are ideological: there is no neutrality in culture”.63 They are ideologies of male supremacy, constructions of male subjectivity.
Rich wants women to come forward to rip off the disguised mask of innocence and impartiality and reveal the political and ideological aspects of man-made institutions. It is not an easy task to undertake. They will have to train themselves properly and learn to read "the silences, the empty spaces, the language itself, with its excision of the female, the methods of discourse" which tell more than the context. Once they learn to watch for what is left out, to listen for the unspoken, to study the patterns of established science and scholarship with an outsider's eye". They will be able to trace the ideological constructions.

Rich herself adopted the same strategy when she set out to write poetry. Her early poems seem to be of utter disappointment from a feminist perspective, as they seem to affirm the masculine thinking and way of expression. But, as a matter of fact, they present what Elaine Showalter calls "a double-voiced discourse containing a 'dominant' and a 'muted' story". The dominant story, for most female writers, corresponds with mainstream patriarchal values where power is a male prerogative, while the muted story presents the "maternal precursors", to use Showalter's phrase.

Though Showalter applied this theory to women's fictions, it can also be applied to poetry. The reader faces an "object/field problem", while finding out the double-voiced discourse in literature by women, where the dominant story and the muted story pose different possibilities to interpret the text: Is it a vase that is seen or a face? Once the face becomes clear, you no longer regard the vase conventionally or vice versa. The "plots" of Rich's early poems may present an orthodox "vase", but the muted story comes forth as the real "face" of the poet. And it is in this muted story that Rich's feminist vision lies.

Elizabeth Abel writes in her editorial note to *Writing and Sexual Difference* that "female characters and female authors alike emerge as
ingenious strategists who succeed in devising some mode of assertion.” Women writers are “resilient” and make their assertions in resourceful ways. Adrienne Rich emerges as an “ingenious strategist”, with her womanhood in a male-dominated culture contributing to the double-voiced discourse in her early poems. Though she initiated the male writers and was appreciated by W.H. Auden for technical excellence, she invented “a mode of assertion” unnoticed by Auden. The subtlety of this assertion contributed to the eagerness with which Auden included her into the circle of men poets without paying too much attention to her being a woman.

Rich believes that this “modesty” and disguise are very important aspects of the strategy adopted by the female writer, as she cannot express herself explicitly in this patriarchal system. A mask is worn to gain approval or place which the woman cannot openly attain or demand for herself. That mask may be of language or tone, perhaps a gentle acceptance or modesty, and in fact restraint of actual feelings is another form of disguise. Whereas men have the freedom of expression, women have to withhold in order to survive. But this repression of feelings, Rich believes, is dangerously harmful as it turns against the self and impedes the natural growth of women’s faculties, and makes them envy men’s powerfulness.

Rich writes:

Outside of the mother’s brief power over the child – subject to patriarchal interference – women have experienced power in two forms, both of them negative. The first is men's power over us- whether physical, economic or institutional.... Like other dominated people, we have learned to manipulate and seduce, or to internalize men’s will and make it ours, and men have sometimes characterized this as “power” in us; but it is nothing more than the child’s or courtesan's “power” to
wheedle and the dependent’s “power” to disguise her feelings – even from herself – in order to obtain favors or, literally to survive … women have also felt man’s powerfulness in the root sense of the word (potere, posse, or pouvoir – to be able, to be capable) – expressed in the creations of his mind. Powerfulness is the expressive energy of an ego which unlike ours, was licensed to thrust itself outward upon the world.68

When power is associated with maleness, force, or both, woman’s experience of it becomes negative, as she does not exist anywhere. Either she is the one the power is worked upon or else considered incapable of “expressive energy” because she is not male. Adrienne Rich’s early poems express these negative experiences of women, the results of which can be viewed in her double-voiced discourse. These are poems of their time and yet a criticism of their time with resonance of more complicated intentions.

Adrienne Rich’s female personas in certain important poems seem to accept the roles assigned to them but at the same time desire for more active expression: the ability to change sex roles and social structures that restrict woman’s freedom. This ambivalence is caused by equating power with virility and questioning the propriety of woman’s having such a masculine quality.

The poem “An Unsaid Word” beautifully presents woman’s negative experience of power. Marked by the themes of denial, escape, and disguise, it concerns a “good” woman who could get the attention of her man through her power to seduce him. She decides not to do this, thus the “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 the hardest thing to learn.\(^6\)

Here, there is a double voice in the poem, where the dominant one prevails. A woman's willing submission to sexual roles that permit a man to roam freely contrasts with a woman's restricted movement as she stands still "where he left her". In effect, the woman appears as the fulfillment of male fantasy, for she muffles her power and remains silent, her words of desire or complaint "unsaid". Because this woman is modest and unassuming, she keeps her man.

The dominant voice is perceptible in the gracefulness of the style as well, which is formed in its scansion, its rhyme scheme, its syntax and diction. The poem is beautiful in its formal elegance. Its thought is articulated in a syntactically perfect, single sentence that scans its basic iambic tetrameter asserting itself most elegantly in lines 4 and 7. The fluidity of the syntax is enhanced by the rhyme scheme (ab ab aaa), which seems effortless, graceful, and unstrained. The speaker identifies with the persona and the friendly tone of this identification makes distinction between the speaker and the persona difficult to discern. Entering into the persona's consciousness, the speaker knows what the woman could do but does not, what the woman desires but denies. She realizes how difficult it is to maintain the self-restraint required to keep the relationship intact with a man and she confers the credit she deserves.

The muted voice is discernible in the relationship between the title of the poem "An Unsaid Word" and the first phrase: "she who has the power". For there it is a woman's true power, not her negative experience of power,
lies in language. Instead of language using women, as the formal language of this poem uses Adrienne Rich, women must “begin to grasp [language as] a material resource that women have never before collectively attempted to repossess”.\(^{70}\) Those unsaid words are woman’s power: to draw back that power is “the hardest thing to learn”.\(^{71}\)

The feminist vision, though uncertain, comes forth in the amorphous last line that produces an unconscious irony. Why is “this the hardest thing to learn”? And what does this refer to in its poetic context? Presumably, it is for the man’s freedom that she rejects her desire for him. Her rejection of her own needs complicates the entire matter. This line can be interpreted the other way: it is difficult to learn the pretexts required to perform a woman’s role. Those pretexts restrict a woman’s activity, “stands where he left her”, while allowing the man his full freedom. In fact, his freedom appears predicated upon the restrictions imposed on the woman. She finds these restrictions incarcerating because she has to deny her most elemental feelings.

Rich’s ambiguity in the last line takes the entire poem in a different direction by presenting a comment on the prescribed sex roles that force a woman to such negative experiences as denial and disguise. Though Rich could not express openly her ideas, but the irony of the last line allows the muted voice to break through the graceful, orderly surface of the poem. Thus, Rich through her restrained style of writing, presents a clear picture of the woman’s negative experience of power. Further complicating the matter, she sees power as virility. Then, the ambivalence toward such power in her early poems is true to her vision that patriarchal controlling power is basically hostile to woman and to life on earth.

British social anthropologists, Edwin and Shirley Ardener in their theory of the “dominant and muted” groups presented an influential model
of how language works in a culture and how gender affects its workings, which helped feminists to understand the workings of language in society. This theory says that while every group in a society will create its own ideas about reality, not every group has equal access to the “mode of specification” — i.e. the linguistic system through which realities are publicly constructed. This is controlled by the dominant group. Relatively less powerful groups are “muted”: their reality does not get represented. As Shirley Ardener explains:

[T]here are dominant modes of expression in any society which have been generated by the dominant structures within it. In any situation, only the dominant mode of the relevant group will be ‘heard’ or ‘listened to’. The muted groups in any context, if they wish to communicate, must express themselves in terms of this model, rather than in ones which they might otherwise have generated independently.  

What Shirley Ardener wants to say is that muted groups have to perform a kind of translation: their reality differs from the dominant one, but cannot be expressed in its own terms. And as a result, she claims,

This dominant model may impede the free expression of alternative models of the world which subdominant groups may possess, and perhaps may inhabit the very generation of such models. Groups dominated in this sense find it necessary to structure the world through the model (or models) of the dominant group, transforming their own models as best they can in terms of the received ones.
The particular muted group to which the theory is applied in the Ardeners’ work is women. Women have a different reality, but they are forced to encode it in terms of men’s reality.

Muting should not be confused with actual silence. As Shirley Ardener comments, “They [the muted groups] may speak a great deal. The important issue is whether they are able to say all they would wish to say, where and when they wish to say it.” Nor is muting a condition in which a group has no distinctive view of reality to communicate. Edwin Ardener emphasises: “the muted structures are ‘there’, but cannot be ‘realized’ in the language of the dominant structure.” According to the Ardeners, then, women have their own model of the world, and they have the capacity to use language. The problem is that the two things do not fit together, whereas for men, the dominated group, language and reality map on to one another unproblematically.

The feminist linguist Cheris Kramarae expresses her idea that women are a muted group because they find it easier to understand men than men understand women because a muted group needs to understand the dominant model in order to “translate” its own into acceptable terms, whereas the reverse is not true. The notion that women will express more dissatisfaction than men with dominant modes of expression, and will search for alternatives as dominant modes does not fit properly with women’s reality. She also says that women will have difficulty with public speaking and that their sense of humour will be different from that of men.

Mary Jacobus in her article, “The Question of Language”, proposes that “women have access to language only by recourse to systems of representation which are masculine.” She does not dream of a distinct woman’s language but assumes woman’s mimicry of man’s language.
Within that mimicry, which she calls “an acting out or role playing within the text”, the women writer has got some room that marks her distinctiveness as a writer. Mimicry of male models, says Jacobus, “allows the woman writer the better to know and hence to expose what it is she mimics”. These theories of muted voices and mimicry can also be applied to the poetry of Adrienne Rich, particularly in her early work.

Adrienne Rich’s mimicry of male models contains aberrations that Mary Jacobers would call “errors”. Jacobus says that “Errors … must creep in where there is a story to tell, especially a woman’s story”. In The Diamond Cutters, poems that deal with the gender related issues are testimonies to those fascinating “errors” that make Adrienne Rich less a fairy-tale princess and more a poet on her way toward finding a female aesthetic. Error, sin, and degeneration capture Rich’s poetic consciousness as central metaphors in The Diamond Cutters. i.e., “Living in Sin” and “From the Land of Sinners”. In “Lucifer in the Train”, she addresses Satan directly as a prototype of all mortals. for “Once out of heaven, to an angel’s eye/Where is the bush or cloud without a flaw?” The world of the Diamond Cutters is a “fallen world”, as Albert Gelpi puts it, where even love is not pure. for “to love a human face was to discover / The Cracks of paint and varnish on the brow”. To such a fallen, flawed, cracked, and error-ridden world, it becomes the artist’s responsibility to be extremely careful. Rich’s rejection of her male models through her less-than-perfect mimicry is not a mistake on her part but a conscious effort to disagree with a revered male authority when gender issues are in question. Two of her poems, “Autumn Equinox” and “The Perennial Answer”, where the influence of Robert Frost is vividly clear, exemplify Rich’s efforts to disagree.
"Autumn Equinox" offers a good opportunity to investigate the range of Frost's influence on Rich and the so called "errors" that happen to be there in her mimicry. As the poem makes use of Frostian blank verse and the long interior monologue, there are echoes of "After Apple Picking" in the starting of the poem, which establishes a New England setting and a persona who works outside during the change of the season:

The leaves that shifted overhead all summer
Are marked for earth now, and I bring the baskets
Still dark with climpings of another season
Up from the cellar.82

The earth’s season mimics the season of the old, retired couple in the poem, a Frostian commonplace. In contrast to "After Apple Picking" or "Mending Wall", the worker is a woman, but Rich fixes upon different points of emphasis. Her persona, a woman beyond fifty, is married to a professor, having no children, a fact about which she is curiously silent. This silence dramatically contrasts with the eruptions in Frost's "Home Burial". The silence in Rich's poem can have different meanings and open new vistas of understanding, and it is through this silence that the poem overturns the skillful Frost mimicry, raising questions about marriage, frustrated creativity, and the potential for change in men and women.

The poem opens up with a contrast where the woman is working outside and her husband, Lyman, is at home absorbed in a study of Dryden's Satires. When it gets dark, it is the wife who "come indoors to light the lamps".83 She is surprised at her husband's obsession with study — "that least acidulous of men".84 This idea makes her think of a possible reversal in their personalities. His obsession with satire reminds her of herself as she used to be:
While I, who also spent my youth and middle-age
In stubborness and railing, pass the time
Now, after fifty, raking in the sun
The leaves that sprinkle slowly on the grass.
And feel their gold like firelight at my back
In slow preoccupation with September. \(^{85}\)

Apparently, there is a change in her personality, but unlike that of her husband it is for the better. She is full of life, motion and light, while he is inert – “eyes alone moving/Like a mended piece of old clock work”\(^{86}\).

While he seems to have become malignant, she appears in harmony with nature, the leaves she rakes – “their gold like firelight at my back”. Rich delineates the aging of her persona as a transformation: the dross of her life – the leaves she rakes – rendered golden and creating a halo around her. Her husband when she has left behind has shown no progress and has become less than the man he used to be. When he was working as a professor, she served as his attendant, having no career of her own. He never shared his ideas with her and in a way gave her reasons to take her life and squeeze it dry. But she emerges as a totally different personality who is in full command of herself. The possible reasons of these change are discussed as:

For Lyman

The world was all the distance he pursued
From home to lecture – room, and home again.
..............................................................
I bit my fingers, changed the parlor curtains
To ones the like of which were never seen
Along our grave and academic street. \(^{87}\)
Thus the woman rejects the convention while the husband becomes convention itself. The moon light fascinates her and draws her out in the open field to see the beauty of nature. She imagines that “the moon must shine on finer things. / I had not seen” and hates the pictures hanging in Lyman’s study room – “the crazy tower of Pisa”, the “Pyramids”, and “Cologne Cathedral”.

I hated them
For priggishly enclosing in a room
The marvels of the world, as if declaring
Such was the right and fitting role of marvels.

If this could be seen as “typical neurotic Frost”, as Randall Jarrell calls somewhere else, it also provides Adrienne Rich an opportunity to understand better, and in a way to expose, what she mimics. While Frost deals with woman’s silence in a general way, Rich deviates from her master and delves in the deeper recesses of the nature of silence. This woman hates her husband’s love to confine the “marvels”, which for her is a confinement of life itself. She is ambivalent about her husband and her marriage, but remains silent and does not discuss it with him. She is calm and quiet, but her silence does not render her powerless in any sense. Instead it makes her an embodiment of life itself and a symbol of transformation. For Rich, transformation is “a process which will leave neither surfaces nor depths unchanged, which enters society at the most essential level of the subjugation of women and nature by men”. She is of the view that every common woman is the embodiment of the extraordinary will – to-survival, a life-force that transcends childbearing: unquenchable, chromosomatic reality. Only when they can count on this force in each other, everywhere, know perfectly that it is there for them, will they cease abandoning and being abandoned by “all our lovers”.

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Adrienne Rich considers the problem of speech, of language as the primary problem. She wants women to break the long-established silences, "liberating ourselves from our secrets", and understand the terrible negative power of lie in the relationships between women. In fact, women have been forced to lie for survival. But to lie habitually, as a way of life, is to loose contact with the unconscious, and unconscious requires truth. It ceases to speak to those who want something else more than truth. Rich says that an honourable relationship, where the partners have the right to use the word love, is a process, delicate, violent, often terrifying to both persons involved, a process of refining the truths they can tell each other. Rich understands silences that come from woman's conditioning, particularly when such silences preserve a relationship. In "Autumn Equinox" the wife recollects the memories of her newly married life after her experience of loathing for her husband's pictures:

Night, and I wept aloud, half in my sleep.
Half feeling Lyman's wonder as he leaned
Above to shake me. "Are you ill. unhappy?
Tell me what I can do"

"I'm sick. I guess-
I thought that life was different than it is".
"Tell me what's wrong. Why can't you ever say?
I'm here you know"

Half shamed. I turned to see
The lines of grievous love upon his face.
The love that gropes and cannot understand.
"I must be crazy. Lyman -- or a dream
Has made me babble things I never thought.
Go back to sleep -- I won't be so again".91
Her husband repeatedly asks her the reason of her weeping, but she remains silent about it. She knows that he loves her and this fact forces her to think that she "must be crazy". Is not his love enough? What else could she desire for? Vague and insubstantial, she suppresses her discontent and becomes silent. But this silence leaves many a complex question unresolved when a woman is faced to make difficult choices in a marriage that threaten to confine her and shrink her possibilities. But ultimately the wife gives in to her husband and their marriage endures. The silences in the poem are more telling. They indicate Rich's lapses from Frost's influence and set the poem as characteristic of her development not just as a writer who subverts her influences in order to establish her own poetic identity, but also as a feminist visionary who knows woman's silences from within and whose aim is to transform those silences.

Most of the work on women and silence written by women clearly show that silence is a problem for women, that they are, in some sense, both intimidated into silence and stifled by silences. Adrienne Rich writes in "Cartographies of Silence" that:

Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed
the blueprint to a life
It is a presence
it has a history a form
Do not confuse it
with my kind of absence"

But there is a very important distinction between silence as a consciously chosen strategy, as in the case of Adrienne Rich, and silence as
a restraint imposed upon one. Silence as a strategy can be instrumental in
gaining power and control over one's life and the circumstances she lives
in. Trinh T. Minh-ha writes that "silence as a refusal to partake in the story
does sometimes provide us with a means to gain a hearing. It is a voice, a
mode of uttering and a response in its own right. Without other silences,
however, my silence goes unheard, unnoticed; it is simply one voice less, or
more point given to the silencers".  

Adrienne Rich, by trying to break the silence through her wonderful
command over language, connects a woman with her real power and makes
her coming into "an existence finally my own". She wants women to talk
about their "secret emptiness" and "frustrations" as it will enable them to
overcome the negative and destructive emotions which will harm them.
Rich, herself, in her early married life, felt the deadly effect of her choked,
suppressed emotions when she was unable to use her creative powers in the
right direction. For her the poems written during that period were "mere
exercises" and all the praises that came her way didn't mean anything for
her as she felt disconnected from herself and alienated from the woman folk
which she is an inseparable part of. Artistic creation for her was like a
violation, a belated reaction to male penetration rather than something
possessing and controlling. Though these poems are more than "mere
exercises", but her instinctive originality in these poems lies not in formal,
stylistic matters, but in her new insight into what it means to be a woman in
the kingdom of the fathers. This is actually what she was looking for and
when she joins these insights with her wonderful command on poetic craft,
she begins to find her own voice.

In this search of the voice of the self, Adrienne Rich sees language as
the necessity of life. Now the trees inside struggle to come out in the forest'
which was empty all these nights and she is sure that it "will be full of trees
by morning". It is impossible now to check the irresistible gush of emotions that will shatter down the structure holding her:

The leaves strain toward the glass
small twigs stiff with exertion
long-cramped boughs shuffling under the roof
like newly charged patients
half – dazed, moving
to the clinic doors.

It is necessary to give a definite form and shape to the rumblings to recognize the self, as it becomes visible only when we have the eyes to see it and it comes through language. So, for Rich, language is not simply a way of expression but the creative power that creates the self and our existence in the world. It is only through language that we exist as human beings. Thus for women language is the necessity of life if they want to realize their existence and utilize the power that this realization brings, as language and power are intrinsically related to each other and they in turn to women for their actualization.

By insisting upon language as the necessity of life Adrienne Rich’s movement enters into a new realm. Silence, which her personas in the first two books employ as a strategy to wield power, is also exercised by the personas in the fourth book to create more lively possibilities for themselves and others. The essence of this liveliness is the rebirth or revival that characterises transformation opposed to the power-to-control. this transforming power inheres in language that is right, useful, and life enhancing.

In her essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision”, Adrienne Rich says that poetry is created out of the transformative power of
the writers, but for women writers the handling of this power poses several problems:

If the imagination is to transcend and transform experience, it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment. You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate: nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name. For writing is renaming. Now, to be maternally with small children in the old way, to be with a man in the old way of marriage, requires a holding-back, a putting-aside of that imaginative activity, and seems to demand instead a kind of conservatism. I want to make it clear that I am not saying that in order to write well, or think well, it is necessary to become unavailable to others, or to become a devouring ego. This has been the myth of the masculine artist and thinker: and I repeat, I do not accept it. But to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way is in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination. The word traditional is important here. There must be ways, and we will be finding out more and more about them, in which the energy of creation and the energy of relation can be united.😊

Thus Rich's aesthetics (the energy of creation), mingles with the personal (the energy of relation), but language remains the hinge-point to the transforming power.
In “I am in Danger-Sir-”, a title taken from Emily Dickinson’s letter, these patterns of meanings reach to a culmination. She provides Adrienne Rich with a model of a woman who has “it out at last/on [her] own premises”. Language, for Dickinson was a necessity of life, as it is for Adrienne Rich. The poem presents an analysis of the relationship between language and the poet. Rich considers Dickinson’s withdrawal from the world as caused by an intense focus on language, as if she could not live with the “spoiled language”, as Higginson described Dickinson as “my partially cracked poetess at Amherst”\(^{97}\) and was forced to go back to a world created by the language of her poetry:

> you, woman, masculine
> in single-mindedness.
> for whom the word was more
> than a symptom –

> a condition of being.
> Till the air buzzing with spoiled language
> sang in your ears
> of Perjury.

> and in your half-cracked way you chose
> silence for entertainment.
> chose to have it out at last
> on your own premises.\(^{98}\)

This poem beautifully sums up the main concerns Rich has in this volume. First, it presents language as a necessity of life: “a condition of being”. Second, it approves Rich’s criticism of words that misunderstand: “spoiled language / sang in your ears / of Perjury”. Third, it considers
silence as a viable choice given the conditions. Here Rich makes some tacit connections between woman, the poet and power. She realizes that Dickinson’s power as a poet emerged out of a desperate struggle for self-definition, in a way to fight for her right to use language in her own style. Rich’s own struggles as a poet clearly enter in this poem and she projects onto Dickinson her own concerns. This connection is most clearly reflected in the way they both “chose silence for entertainment”. Rich’s silence is expressed through the subversion of her male masters or the use of womanly silence as a motif in her poems. Identifying herself with Dickinson, Rich writes in her essay “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson” (1975). “The methods, the exclusions, of Emily Dickinson’s existence could not have been my own. Yet more and more, as a woman poet finding my own methods, I have come to understand her necessities could have been witness in her defense”.

Primary among those necessities was a language which was not “spoiled”. Thus, Rich undertakes the task of transforming her own silences, the unsaid words, into a powerful language as she finds this in the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Diana Wakoski. She writes in *The Washington Post Book World* that “In both Plath and [Diana] Wakoski a subjective, personal rage blazes forth, never seen before in women’s poetry. If it is unnerving it is also cathartic, the blow torch of language cleansing the rust and ticky-tacky and veneer from an entire consciousness”.

In the final phase of the 60s, Rich’s mind was rapidly changing. There was a clear shift in her poetic consciousness from an attachment to the male principle to an identification with the female principle as the center of transforming power. This locating of female principle within herself leads Adrienne Rich to a liberation of the self where poetic power makes sense only if her personal transformation through her art extends outward.
beyond the self to include the others. Now she perceives herself as an “instrument in the shape of a woman” who has the power to transform and can bring about “the relief of the body and reconstruction of the mind”.

Though she realizes “the fullness of her powers” and knows that she is “a woman sworn to lucidity”, at the same time she is aware of the fact that this lucidity is not so easy to come as the language she uses is not her own: “This is the oppressor's language” which has a deep-rooted sexism in it. In an article “Teaching Language in Open Admissions” Rich writes that language and literature have been used against the unprivileged men and women, to keep them in their place, to mystify, to bully, to make them feel powerless. She arrives at the conclusion that “language is power, and that, as Simone Weil says, “those who suffer from injustice most are the least able to articulate their suffering; and that the silent majority, if released into language, would not be content with a perpetuation of the conditions which have betrayed them. But this notion hangs on a special conception of what it means to be released into language: 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” Adrienne Rich’s aim is to assist the finding of language by those who did not have it and who have been used and abused to the extent that they lacked it. If language is the essential necessity of life, then the handling of language will make us more human: in full control of the situatedness of life.

Utterly dissatisfied with the “oppressive language” of the male world, Adrienne Rich craves for a new language that will enable her to establish a relationship with other women:

I am afraid

of the language in my head
I am alone, alone with language
and without meaning
coming back to something written years ago:
our words misunderstand us
wanting a word that will shed itself like a tear
on to the page
leaving its stain

I need a language to hear myself with
to see myself in
a language like pigments released on the board

I want you to answer me
when I speak baldly
that I love you, that we are in danger
that she wants to have your child, that I want us to have mercy
on each other
that I want to take her hand
that I see you changing

and I want you to listen
when I speak baldly
not in poems but in tears
not my best but my worst
that these repetitions are beating their way
toward a way where we can no longer be together
where my body no longer will demonstrate outside your stockade
and wheeling through its blind tears will make for the open air
of another kind of action
Rich dreams of a common language which can cut across the boundaries of separate words and things, and bring women together. The aim of Rich’s exploration is not the cultivation of “better women writers”, but of women who will begin to write outside the “law” of language, beyond the reach of male critical approval. Thus language itself in Dream seems to be in the act of changing its meaning within the framework of Rich’s ideological time. This changed sense of time appears to be her most radical statement so far. It not only attacks the prevailing aesthetic but attacks the temporality of that aesthetic, our chronological sense of ourselves – and it is in this deliberately time warp that the Dream of a Common Language begins.

Rich wants us to dream collectively, suspend our waking sense of time’s authority, assuming all and nothing, as in a dream. As an expert explorer of the unconscious, she asks us to formally consider the dream as the single metaphoric device whose radar will guide us to “consciousness”. Again for Rich, the poet is a woman speaking to other women and her “dream of a common language” becomes symbolic of her wish to address that audience. Though, men are not excluded from this dream as Rich explains, “the point . . is not the ‘exclusion’ of men; it is that primary presence of women to ourselves and each other which is the crucible of a new language”. The poems are particularly written for women and about women.

Adrienne Rich’s concept of “dream of a common language” has been criticized by postmodern thinkers. North American scientist and philosopher Donna Haraway in her influential article “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” says in a straight-forward manner, “The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of a perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalising and imperialist one”. She is right that a great deal of feminist discussion about sex
differences in language tries to combine women around a specific style, whether folk-linguistic or 'real'. Adrienne Rich is also looking for a common language for women that can express their shared experiences. She feels that the assumption of shared experience does not take into consideration the fact that gender divisions are unstable and there are many differences between women. In Julia Kristeva's terms, it allows too much to the 'metaphysical category women', and so falls into the patriarchal trap of failing to question the male/female dichotomy. It also gives way to a generalized view of all women as if they are all alike. The post modernists believe that this is a kind of imperialism that either ignores other women's realities or assimilates them to some version of its own.

Haraway thinks that the "dream of a common language" is a dream of totality and harmony, a nostalgic yearning for a lost tradition of social relations. She says that the latest developments in bio-technology and information-technology are enforcing new social relations for women all over the world. If on the one hand bio-technology is changing women's relation to reproduction and their bodies, on the other hand, information-technology is changing the world economy into a global economy of ultra-technologised production in which a workforce (primarily female) becomes scattered, segregated, deskillled, moved in and out of the labour market at will, and dealt more like machines than human beings.

These development show that human beings are now being considered as parts that can be slotted in or taken out in the service of a larger system. Haraway imagines a postmodern human being who is a combination of human and machine: "a kind of disassembled and reassembled postmodern collective and personal self". She adds: "This is the self that feminists must code". Though Haraway does not make any
direct statement but her remark that Cyborg is "the self that feminists must code" – seems to imply that it is of no use fighting new developments with old strategies. She considers it a futile effort to protest that we are but human beings and desire to go back to a more wholistic way of life. Even considering that such a way of life once existed, it cannot exist any more. you cannot turn the clock back on subjectivity. She suggests that we should use the potential offered by a Cyborg "personal and collective self".

When Haraway says that the problem is to "code" that self she means that the definition of a Cyborg is yet to be assigned. It will once again show the importance of language and meaning in constructing our ways of being in the world. Now it is for the feminists to code the new self.

Haraway, however, herself does not give any suggestion for codifying the new self and concludes her essay by saying, "this is a dream not of a common language but of a powerful, infidel heteroglossia". The word heteroglossia means "diverse/different tongues", while infidel means "without faith". So Haraway dreams of a diversity of voices, but all of them heretical, defying any loyalty to the traditional beliefs of their culture, thus, once again making women the outsiders, the speaker from the margins. It is not her emphasis on marginality, but her emphasis on diversity and plurality that makes Donna Haraway distinct from Luce Irigarary or Julia Kristeva. Her dream is of a "polyvocality" of language, a play of different voices in which no one will silence or drown out any other.

To conclude then, feminist postmodernism both carries and takes issue with the project of feminist semiology. Lacanians follow the complex constructions of masculine and feminine subjectivities in language, and dream of a world whose illusory constructions will be broken down. Postmodernists believe that we are living in such a world already, and we had better claim its potential before someone else defines it for us. The
Lacanians have the confidence that the “repressed” or “suppressed” feminine language will break through, restoring to women what they have been deprived of. They believe that “the feminine” itself is a myth, as Donna Haraway puts it. “Gender might not be global identity after all, even if has profound historical breadth and depth”.

What can be the possible language of a Cyborg like? Donna Haraway says, “Cyborg writing is about the power to survive not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other”. We can put it like that we should not dream for a new language or an old one forced away from us long back, but seize what is available and use it meaningfully to achieve our goals. She gives the example of the writing of the Chicana feminist Cherrie Moraga, who fabricates an oppositional identity by using a amalgamation of two existing languages. English and Spanish Haraway does not suggest, in any sense, a passive acceptance of the language of the oppressor, but a biting of the hand that feeds us, though it cannot mean looking for a language outside history, for a mythic unity contained in a shared, pristine word.

Postmodernist view, if scrutinized from close quarters, seems to have its own limitations and is far removed from reality. They criticise the concept of the universal ‘Woman’ as Utopian, and it is true to an extent as the content of gender division and the degree of gender inequality is greatly in variance over time and space. Needless to say, a woman working as a sweeper, a Hollywood actress and a woman of the royal, elite class would have few points of similarity in their experience of life. The relationship between a slave woman and the plantation owner’s wife in pre-Civil War America – to take an example discussed extensively by feminists - was hardly one of sisterhood and gender solidarity.
But does this really allow us to neglect gender as the basis for feminist analysis. In fact it can never be done as it challenges the very inception of theory itself which is based on a measure of abstraction. The similarities between women from different social set-ups are abstract rather than concrete. Basically the restrictions imposed on a woman irrespective of her social political, economic and cultural diversity and the resultant identity imposed on her are on account of being a woman and not a man. If making this observation is totalising and imperialist then so is all theoretical discourse, any attempt of reaching beyond the simple bearing of witness to our own lives is termed as failure.

Now the postmodernist rejection of Adrienne Rich's "Dream of a Common Language" seems to be right as a perfectly true language, a perfectly faithful naming of experience is simply an impossibility. And as we know that no actual person actually speaks 'language'. as language is an abstraction: in reality there are only languages. and it is impossible to overcome this rather fundamental division.

But this is a very literal adoption of a common language. Actually this should be taken as a metaphor. The basic idea and motivation behind this metaphor is not so much total unity as contact or communication – the desire of women to speak, to listen, to move as far as possible towards a basic understanding of oneself. In fact, the context in which Adrienne Rich creates this phrase "dream of a common language" is too often forgotten when the phrase itself is quoted:

No one lives in this room
without confronting the whiteness of the wall
behind the poems, planks of books,
photographs of dead heroines.
Without contemplating last and late
The true nature of poetry. The drive to connect. The dream of a common language.\textsuperscript{112}

The impulse behind this idea is not to deny difference and history, but to connect. In fact this is a rather modest impulse. It inevitably falls far short of the mystical, quasi-telepathic unity invoked in, for example, Suzette Haden Elgin's fantasy of Laadan, literally a perfectly faithful naming of women's experience. It is, however, an impulse that cannot be dismissed as totalising and imperialist. In fact, Adrienne Rich's desire behind this dream of a common language is not more than a way of speaking and writing that makes space for differing voices to speak, engage with one another and be respectfully acknowledged. As Rich beautifully says in one of her poems:

\begin{quote}
I long to create something
that cannot be used to keep us passive:
I want to write
a script about plumbing, how every pipe
is joined
to every other
the wash to pure water and sewage
side by side

or about the electrical system
a study of the sources of energy
till in the final shot
the whole screen goes dark
and the keepers of order are screaming\textsuperscript{113}
\end{quote}
It is this aspect of language that tends to escape the attention of semiologists, postmodernists, and many linguistic theorists. Feminists should not, as Rich believes, ignore it. Adrienne Rich strongly believes that women are not addressed in the same way as men. Women do not address others on the same terms as men. Patriarchal relations break in every act of communication. If we want to understand the role that language plays in women’s subordination, and what it can do for their liberation we need to attentively comprehend the questions of communication and address.

Clarifying her aim in using language, as to make it available to those who did not have it and to those who have been used and abused to such an extent that they lacked it. Adrienne Rich writes, in her article “Teaching Language in Open Admissions”, that we should use language “to provide tools and weapons for those who may live on into a new integration. Language is such a weapon, and what goes with language: reflection, criticism, renaming creation. The fact that our language itself is tainted by the quality of our society means that in teaching we need to be actively conscious of the kind of tool we want our students to have available, to understand how it has been used against them. and to do all we can to ensure that language will not some day be used by them to keep others silent and powerless”. Adrienne Rich is very democratic in her vision and wants to create a world where no one is an oppressed and neither is there an oppressor.
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23. The Resisting Reader. p. xii.


27. Rebecca Hiscock. "Listening to her self". as discussed in *The Feminist Critique of Language*, p 4


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49. ibid. 175.

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53. idem.

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56. idem.
58. ibid. p. 40.
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85. ibid. p. 34.
86. ibid. p. 34.
87. ibid. p. 35.
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CHAPTER 4
Women in Patriarchy: The Problem of Identity

Adrienne Rich considers the patriarchal structure of society as the root of women's oppression, and her entire poetic career is an effort to change this social structure in which women are relegated to a lower position in comparison to men and are constantly in search of their identities. Her work offers an alternative vision, one that condemns the sins of patriarchal order and goes on to praise the strengths and virtues basic to everyone, precisely the life-reclaiming strengths and virtues of women through the ages.

Examining the different facets of the modern world-culture, history, customs, religious rituals, wars, technological developments, movies, politics, international relations etc. in a broader perspective, Adrienne Rich realizes that the fragmentation of the world is caused by the power of the masculine world, that is the power-to-control and the sexual politics this power leads to. She believes that it is only women who can clearly see the destructive nature of this power, as they are marginalized in the patriarchal system and do not participate in the politics of sexuality. Her explorations into sexual politics lend her to the fact that all men are guilty of crimes against women and life as a whole. Even the protectors cannot be believed, as in "Rape", where the neighbourhood cop is seen as the mirror image of the rapist. Rich cannot trust them and advises the daughters. "Men can do things to you". The crimes of men reaches from the individual rape of one woman to more universal destruction:

I suddenly see the world
as no longer viable:
You are out there burning the crops
with some new sublimate
This morning you left the bed
we still share
and went out to spread impotence
upon the world.¹

This realization of the masculine world as impotent and destructive, evolves
a radical feminist vision that condemns the exaggerated forms of
masculinity as the evil and hails the evolution of a female power as the
good. This vision is further developed in her poems that present a female
imagery, speak in a female voice, and invoke women to express the “unsaid
word” in a powerful female language.

(i) The Problem of Identity

The American philosopher Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) discusses the
concept of identity and its importance for a feminist. Rejecting the notion
that identity is made up of certain essential features of women. Butler
proposes that identity is a construct of social and cultural ideologies. They
pose themselves as natural and enforce norms that define what it is to be a
woman, further they warn and intimidate to expel those who do not abide
by these norms. French philosopher Louis Althusser expresses almost the
same idea that ideology turns people into subjects: that is they are
*interpolated* by forms and strategies of communication which determine
their vision in a particular way and make them realize themselves as free
individuals totally free to work as they wish whereas the truth is the other
way round. but it is convenient for the ruling groups to make people live
under this illusion.
In *Gender Trouble*. Butler says gender is considered as performative, that it depends on what one does, not on what one is. It is created by one’s acts, in the way that a promise is made by the act of promising. One becomes a man or a woman by repeated acts, which are, like acts of speech, determined by social conventions and cultural rules. So our being a man or a woman depends on the socially established ways, but this does not suggest that gender is a choice, and we can decide for us to be a man or to be a woman. Actually to be a subject at all is to be gendered:

No one can be a person without being male or female. “Subjected to gender but subjectivated [made a subject] by gender,” writes Butler in *Bodies that Matter*. “the ‘I’ neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves.”¹ Nor should the formation of gender be considered as something achieved by a single act; rather, it is the reiterative and citational practice, the obligatory repetition of gender norms that create and constrain the gendered subject.

Making her point clearer further, Butler says that the expression “It’s a girl!” or “It’s a boy!” with which a baby is received into the world is the starting point of the construction of the subject through language. The naming of the girl commences the never ending process of girling, the making of a girl, through an “assignment” of obligatory reiteration of gender norms, “the forcible citation of a norm.”² To be a subject is to accomplish this “assignment” of reiteration, but as we almost always fail to secure the expected marks in the examination, some never even completely adopt the gender criteria we are forced to meet with. Therefore a gap appears for not fulfilling the “assignment”, and for Butler, this gap opens the possibilities for resistance and change. Thus, if the repetition of an utterance on a particular occasion makes something happen (you made a
promise) for Austin, the compulsory reiteration can create social and historical realities (you become a woman) for Butler.

During the 1980s, discourses and movements based on issues of identity had a great impact on the world at large. Questions of cultural, religious, national, linguistic, and sexual identity captured the focal positions, forcing questions of economic justice, for the moment, to the background. Cultural revivalism, national liberation, religious "fundamentalism" and sexual affirmation all fused to construct some of the most vocal and perceptible political and social movements of modern times. The formation of identity is now a major concern posing difficulties for the social scientists. Identity is no more talked about in terms of identity crisis, alienation, or role conflict, but thought of in relation with the possibilities and forms of resistance expressed by fractured, hyphenated and multiple identities associated first with psychoanalytic, then structuralist and lately with post-structuralist and feminist critiques of an essentialist subjectivity on which earlier theories regarding identity were founded. One of the major issues behind this concern with identity and in identity politics is the relationship between marginalisation and a politics of resistance, and positive, empowering choices of identity and a politics of difference.

In earlier theories, the problem of identity was related to the issues of manipulation and alienation. An idealised past was always there behind the worries to define and explain identities by stable gender roles, ethnic origin, occupation, life stage and specially class. Though there was an opportunity to go beyond what they were born into through social mobility, education and through other chances that modern life offers, but it was a limited movement and they were expected not to break the stable identities.
Now the subject has been deconstructed of its centrality and identities have become multiple, fractured and layered. But this decentring of the subject is often viewed less as an indication of marginalization and oppression than as the basis for a politics of difference where marginal identities become a source of empowerment and resistance. Identity politics is now considered as an area of cultural and political resistance within society and is often seen as indicative of a turn to a new type of postmodern or late-modern society. The space of identity is heterogeneous, folded, fragmented and paradoxical in which a clear singular subject position is not possible. So, in a world where identities cannot be fixed to singular uncomplicated subject positions, identity becomes all about multiple location and performativity within that location. In this condition the main issue attached with such spatial uncertainty is identification. It is through identifications with others, identifications that can be multiple, overlapping or fractured, that identity – that sense of self recognition and belonging with others – is gained.

The reference to "the subject" here can be understood in at least three ways. Firstly, it implies the human subject and the concepts of what it means to be called, or to name oneself, "a woman" or a "a man". Related with this is the notion of a collective subject, "women": feminists generally speak about women as a group, some even use the term "class", with common needs and purposes. The third meaning of 'subject' is subject as a discourse. We can take feminism itself as a subject, a subject of inquiry, and ask what are the implications of this preoccupation with the human subject for the political and intellectual practice of feminism.

The subjectivity based on the theories of Lacan and Althusser, that decides identity as not something fixed or essential but located in language and ideology came to be regarded as the product of an interpellating process
in which individuals seemed to be located apparently as free agents, but actually were the products of the ideologies of capitalist societies. Foucault sees subjectivity as historically and discursively constructed. According to de Certeau discourses locate subject positions within a space of power-knowledge where we can write, not life scripts but little stories, poems, language games, in which we can rearrange our identities and our identifications with others in partial and changing ways. While this space in which identities are constructed can be viewed as all pervasive, it provides to some people a freedom in which any thing and any kind of identity is possible within a post-modern world. The rejection of an essentialist view of the subject has not taken to the over determination of identity by discourse but to arguments about a new voluntarism and vitalism in which identity becomes a matter of choice and style. This is what has come to be known as identity in the post-modern world. There is no master script, a super model which we can look up to shape our own identity. Whether we accept this reality or not, it is around this issue that the current problem of identity is situated. “This is the world of identity as difference and as recognition; dominant identities which defined themselves against a host of Others, whose Otherness was something dangerous and marginal, have lost their hegemony.” However, this difference is not just at the peripheries and beyond but is prevalent and everywhere, having become, if not hegemonic, then at least something that is to be taken into consideration; a powerful place from which the vestiges of the old but significantly weakening authority of essentialism is challenged. Making this concept more clear Hall argues that the non-essentialist conceptions of identity grow around a play of difference within identity positions which are expressed through dialogues between their constituent parts. He says that a Black cultural identity is constructed through the different positions of presence Africaine,
presence Europeane. and presence Americaine and this difference is used to form a unity and sense of shared identity.\textsuperscript{7}

For Bhabha this difference is not always an uncomplicated location. It does not clearly define what is central and what is marginal: rather it operates through a changing similitude of different locations from which identities – or pieces of identities – emerge. often in tension and partial connection with others. It is not just those who have been pushed to the margins experience the identities in difference. rather it is a condition which everyone experiences in society. We may have privileged subject positions as men, as middle class, as White, as Westerners. and so on but it is also possible at the same time to have marginal positions. A young White, rich, Western man may still have the marginal position in terms of his sexual orientation or in terms of some disability on his part. The opposite is also true. Those whose identities are situated on the margins : working class Black men, for example, may still have better positions than others – Black women for example. However, it is very difficult to say anything with certainty. There is no fixed classificatory method by which degrees of difference and marginality can be measured and ranked.

Dealing with the question of identity Julia Kristeva reaches at the conclusion that all identities are unstable: the identity of linguistic signs, the identity of meaning and consequently, the identity of the speaker. She calls this instability of language, meaning and subjectivity, the “subject in process” to convey the incomplete condition of the subject which is always becoming but never stable. Here ‘process’ beside being the process in the literal sense is also a legal process where the subject is committed to trial, because our identities in life are always questioned, brought to trial, overruled.\textsuperscript{8}
Jaqueline Rose mentions that the *prescriptive* (what women *should* do) and *descriptive* (what is demanded of women, what they are *expected* to do) nature of patriarchal culture frustrates any attempt of stable identity. She calls it "failure" of identity. But this "failure" is not a moment to be repented in a process of adaptation, or development into normality, which ideally takes its course. "Instead 'failure' is something endlessly repeated and relieved moment by moment throughout our individual histories." It can be seen not only in the symptom, but also in dreams, in slips of the tongue and in forms of sexual pleasure which are pressed to the margins of the norm. Thus "failure" is not the inadequacy of certain individuals to achieve full subjecthood but rather that "resistance to identity at the very heart of psychic life." Linking psychoanalysis with feminism, Rose calls it "one of the few places in our culture where it is recognised as more than a fact of individual pathology that most women do not painlessly slip into their rules as women, if indeed they do at all." Freud also accepts this increasingly in his work. He turns from his earlier controversial description of the little girl struck with her "inferiority" or "injury" in front of the anatomy of the little boy and wisely accepting her fate ("injury" as the *fact* of being feminine), to an account which quite clearly explains the process of becoming "feminine" as an "injury" or "catastrophe" for the complexity of her earlier psychic and sexual life ("injury" as its *price*).

Both Julia Kristeva and Jacqueline Rose recognise that there are psychological and political arguments to support this figure of the fragmented, unrealized female subject. Kristeva thinks that to function in the system, the individuals need to attain a certain type of stability. Though this stability is an illusion which is frequently challenged, but it is an important illusion to maintain our everyday living. At the same time women need a different notion of subjectivity, if any political change is desired, that
can represent women as capable and purposeful. Feminism has to manage a way between psychoanalysis and politics and, as Rose thinks, the idea of the subject as at odds with social norms presents a useful point of disjunction for any radical politics. It is an inconsistency in the social system which feminism can exploit.

Catherine Belsey also explores the construction of the individual through and in language. "The subject is constructed in language and in discourse and, since the symbolic order in its discursive use is closely related to ideology, in ideology." It is in this sense that ideology, as Althusser argues, constructs individuals as subjects where subjectivity appears "obvious" that they are autonomous individuals, having subjectivity and consciousness which is the source of their beliefs and actions. "That people are unique, distinguishable, irreplaceable identities is 'the elementary ideological effect'." Though the obviousness of subjectivity has been challenged by the linguistic theory originating from Saussure, Emile Benveniste argues that it is only in language that we can posit ourselves as the subject "I" of a sentence. Realization of the self is possible only through contrast, differentiation: "I" cannot be thought of without the conception of "non-I", "you", and dialogue. the fundamental condition of language, implies a reversible polarity between "I" and "you". "Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a subject by referring to himself as 'I' in his discourse."

But within ideology it appears "obvious" that the individual speaker is the source of the meaning of his or her utterance. Post-Saussurean linguistics gives a more complex relationship between the individual and meaning, because it is language itself which, by making difference between concepts, offers the possibility of meaning. In fact, it is only when the
individual takes up the position of the subject within language that it is able to produce meaning. As Jacques Derrida puts it:

what was it that in Saussure in particular reminded us of? That ‘language [which consists only of differences] is not a function of the speaking subject.’ This implies that the subject (self-identical or even conscious of self-identity, self-conscious) is inscribed in the language, that he is a ‘function’ of the language. He becomes a speaking subject only by confirming his speech ... to the system of linguistic prescriptions taken as the system of differences. ...\(^{15}\)

Thus ideology conceals the role of language in the construction of the subject. As a result people ‘recognise’ (misrecognise) themselves in the ways in which ideology “interpellates” them. They start working by themselves and “willingly” accept the subject – positions necessary to their participation in the social formation. Here the subject is not only a grammatical subject, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions, but also a “subjected being” who succumbs to the authority of the social formation represented in ideology as the Absolute Subject (God, the king, the boss, Man, conscience):

The individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the subject. i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection.\(^{16}\)

But this construction of identity is done differently in different cultures, so there is no single identity. Judith Butler defines this destruction of identity as a liberating opportunity for the construction of new subjectivities and new political configurations. She sees feminism’s loyalty to identity politics as restrictive and limiting. The new way for women lies in the “subversive”
practices, in the devices of performance. parody and pastiche to undermine the status of "the real" and "the natural." Butler says. "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." Thus what our culture comprehends by feminine behaviour is not the result of a feminine identity: instead, our understanding of a feminine identity is produced. within signification. through the repeated performance of words and actions which we code as "feminine."

(ii) Understanding Patriarchy

Kate Millett is generally recognised as the first feminist thinker to introduce the term "patriarchy" into contemporary feminist debate. A radical feminist, Millett sought to emphasise the overt and often hidden "sexual politics" that men exercise to maintain their established hegemony over women. According to Millett, the important tools in this practice of male oppression are the ideologies at work in masculine definitions of gender and sexuality. a hegemonic process facilitated by the fact that social, economic and political institutions are in male hands:

... our society. like all historical civilizations. is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry. technology, universities. science, political office and finance – in short: every avenue of power within society, including the coercive force of the police. is entirely in male hands."

Millett's analysis of patriarchy was one that tried to understand how women become conditioned into colluding in their own oppression. She answers this question that women were forced to accept inequality by the
social denouncement of those women who "sought to escape the confines of socially correct 'feminine' behaviour."

Patriarchy literally means the rule of the father or the "patriarch". However, patriarchy is a problematic word as it has a narrow, traditional meaning — not necessarily the one feminists give it. In its narrow meaning patriarchy refers to the system, historically derived from Greek and Roman law, in which the male head of the household had absolute legal and economic power over his dependent female and male family members. People using the term in this sense often imply a restricted historicity for it. Patriarchy started in classical antiquity and ended in the 19th century with the granting of civil rights to women and married women in particular.

This usage is problematic because it deforms historical reality. The patriarchal dominance of male family heads over the other members is much older than classical antiquity; it starts in the third millennium B.C. and is firmly established at the time when Hebrew Bible was written. Further, it can be argued that in the 19th century male dominance in the family simply adopts new forms and is not ended. Thus, the limited definition of the term “patriarchy” tends to foreclose accurate definition and analysis of its continued presence in today’s world.

Patriarchy in its wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men control power in all the important institutions of society and that women are divested of access to such power. It does not mean that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence and resources. One of the most difficult tasks of women’s history is to trace with accuracy the different forms and modes in which patriarchy
appears historically, the shifts and changes in its structure and function, and the adaptations it makes to female pressure and demands.

The subordination that women experience in patriarchal system takes different forms – discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence – within the family, at the place of work, in society. The details may be different, but the theme is the same. Juliet Mitchell, a feminist psychologist, uses the word patriarchy to refer to kinship systems in which men exchange women, and to the symbolic power that fathers exercise within these systems. It is this power that creates the “inferiorised” psychology of women. Sylvia Walby in her book, *Theorising Patriarchy* calls it “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.”

It is important to understand patriarchy as a system because this helps in rejecting the notion of biological determination. Kate Millett presents a far-reaching analysis of patriarchy, traced across cultures and history as the primary political intuition, the expression of the distribution of political power based on an original sexual division of labour. Patriarchy is thus seen as the hierarchical institutionalization of the unequal roles and status given to the two biological genders – “the birthright priority whereby male rules females.”

Patriarchal ideology ensures the socialization of individuals according to already given and thus “stereotyped lines of sex category.”

Patriarchy manifests its control in almost all the spheres of society. Men control women’s productivity both within the household and outside. in paid work. Within the household women provide all kinds of free service to their children, husbands, and other members of the family, throughout their lives. In what Sylvia Walby calls the “patriarchal mode of production” women’s labour is expropriated by their husbands and others.
living there. According to a UN statistics women do more than 60% of the hours of work done in the world, but they get 10% of the world income and possess only 1% of the world’s property. Women’s reproductive power is also under control. In many societies women are not allowed to decide how many children they want, when to have them, whether they can use contraception or go for an abortion, etc. Apart from individual male control, male dominated institutions like the Church or State (i.e. religion and politics) also make rules concerning women’s reproductive capacity. This is institutionalised control. For instance, in the Catholic Church the male religious hierarchy decides whether men and women can use birth control methods, which methods are allowed, whether women can terminate an unwanted pregnancy, and so on. In almost every country, women have been continuously demanding the freedom to decide when, whether and how many children to have. It shows how strong this control is and how reluctant men are to surrender it.

The patriarchal state also tries to control women’s reproduction through various family planning programmes. It is the state that decides the size of the country’s population and accordingly, actively encourages or discourages women to have children. In India there has been an aggressive birth control programme to curtail family sizes to a great extent. In Malaysia, on the other hand, women have been encouraged to have several children, in order to develop a sizeable domestic market for the country’s industrial products. The famous Baby Boom of the 1950s in the U.S. is an apt example of the state’s intervention in the family planning and of the state’s implicit endorsement of the ideology of motherhood.

This ideology of motherhood is one of the main issues of the radical feminist analysis of women’s situation. They say that women are subjugated primarily because the responsibility of mothering and nurturing
is forced on them by patriarchal society. Furthermore, it also decides the conditions of their motherhood. It is this ideology that creates feminine and masculine character types which strengthen patriarchy; it creates and widens the gap between private and public, it limits women's mobility and growth and reproduces male dominance.

Another very important area of women's subordination is the control over their sexuality. Women are forced to provide sexual services to their men according to their needs and desires. A whole body of moral and legal rules exist to suppress the expression of women's sexuality within and outside marriage in every society, whereas male promiscuity is simply ignored. Men can also force their wives, daughters and other women in their control into prostitution, i.e. trading their sexuality. Rape and the threat of rape is another way of controlling women's sexuality through an invocation of "shame" and "honour".

A radical feminist analysis points out that women under patriarchy are not only mothers but also sexual slaves, and patriarchal ideology typically opposes women as sexual beings to women as mothers. With the partial exception of mothers, the patriarchal culture defines women as sexual objects for the pleasure of men. The analysis says that rape may not have existed in every society, but it is a defining feature of patriarchy. It views rape as an effective political device, a political act of oppression exercised by members of a powerful class on members of the same class. Radical feminists also concentrate their attention on institutionalized prostitution, pornography and compulsory heterosexuality as other examples of control over women's sexuality under patriarchy.
(iii) Rich on Patriarchy

It is against this background, this cross-current of feminist thinking about the problems of patriarchy that one has to study Adrienne Rich's understanding and tackling of the problem. While Kate Millett emphasises the ideological forces pressurizing women to accept the prevailing power-structured relationship of gender, Adrienne Rich visualizes the play of physical force and its threat combined with the ideological force in the subjugation of women. She writes:

Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour – determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.\(^{35}\)

The notion of patriarchy that Rich develops is most closely related with juridico-discursive model of power, though there are differences between, for example, Marxist, radical, socialist and psychoanalytic feminist concepts of patriarchy. The emphasis on male power as hierarchically located, oppressive and ideologically substantiated remains true for both.

Rich thinks that the time has come now when a feeling is developing among people of the world that patriarchal system cannot answer for itself; that it is not inevitable and gradually losing its autonomy; that the cross-cultural global subjugation of women by men can no longer be either denied or defended. Women writers like Jane Harrison, Helen Diner and Virginia Woolf have raised questions and challenged the prevalence of patriarchal values. Simone de Beauvoir calls this world “a man’s world.” Even male
writers like J.J. Bachofen, Robert Briffault. Frederick Engels and Erich Neumann suggest that the patriarchal family is not an inevitable “fact of nature”. But according to Rich, they “still stop short of recognizing the omnipresence of patriarchal bias as it affects even the categories in which we think, and which has made of even the most educated and privileged women an outsider, a nonparticipant, in the molding of culture”. Rich calls patriarchy “the Kingdom of the Fathers:” the sexual understructure of social and political forms.

It is very difficult to define the power of the fathers as it permeates through everything, even the language has not remained unaffected by it. It is diffuse and solid: symbolic and literal: universal and local at the same time. It manifests itself in everything that appears. In patriarchy a woman has only that much of power which it is willing to consent and that too for a limited period. Sociologist Brigitte Berger says that until recently an originally masculine intellect and spirit have dominated in the interpretation of society and culture – whether this interpretation is accomplished by males or females. Originally masculine assumptions have shaped the entire moral and intellectual history.

Comparing the patriarchal society with matriarchal societies. Robert Briffault in his book The Mothers shows that they are not interchangeable with a different sex in authority, he uses the term “gynocracy” for a situation in which women could have economic control and command through property. He indicates that the matriarchal elements in any society have had a functional source - i.e. the maternal function of gestating, bearing, nurturing, and educating children: and it was because of this function that women exercised a great deal of activity and authority which is now referred to the male sphere outside the family. In his matriarchal society female creative power is pervasive and women have organic
authority. Unlike the power men exercise on women in patriarchy which Rich calls the power-to-dominate but wants to change to the power-to-transform which for her, is the truly significant and essential power. Rich agrees with Briffault’s view that there would be a kind of free agreement about the authority of women in a matriarchal society because of her involvement with the essential practical and magical activity of that society. He therefore visualizes matriarchy as organic by nature. Patriarchy according to Briffault comes into existence when men revolt against this organic order, by forming economic domination and by controlling magical powers previously considered the realm of women.

Rich is of the view that at the center of patriarchy is the individual family unit which developed with the idea of property and the desire to see one’s property transferred to one’s biological descendants. Simone de Beauvoir links this desire with the craving for immortality:

... the owner transfers, alienates, his existence into his property; he cares more for it than for his very life; it overflows the narrow limits of his mortal life-time, and continues to exist beyond the body dissolution - the earthly and material incorporation of the immortal soul. But this survival can only come about if the property remains in the hands of its owner; it can be his beyond death only if it belongs to individuals in whom he sees himself projected, who are his.28

Rich says that a crucial moment in human consciousness came when man realized that it was he not nature which impregnated woman. With this new sexual possession supported by property ownership and the desire to transcend death, came the institution in existence that we call patriarchal
family with its supernaturalizing of the phallus, its division of labour on
account of gender, its emotional, physical and material possessiveness, its
concept of monogamous marriage until death (and its harsh penalties for
adultery by the wife), the “illegitimacy” of a child born outside marriage,
the economic dependency of women, the unpaid domestic services of the
wife, the submission of women and children to male authority, the fixing
and continuation of heterosexual roles.

In patriarchy every mother is supposed to give forth her children
within a few years of their birth to the patriarchal system of education, of
law, of religion, and of sexual codes: she is, in fact, expected to prepare
them to enter that system without any revolt or “maladjustment” and to
strengthen it in their own adult lives. Rich says:

Patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative
influence, imprinting future adults with patriarchal values
even in those early years when the mother-child relationship
might seem most individual and private: it has also assured
through ritual and tradition that the mother shall cease, at a
certain point, to hold the child – in particular the son – in her
orbit. Certainly it has created images of the archetypal Mother
which reinforce the conservatism of motherhood and convert
it to an energy for the renewal of male power.39

Rich says that women find themselves at a loss how to express the
feelings of powerlessness as their identities as mothers crumble down in
patriarchy. They are cut apart from their own parts and put against them and
they cannot do anything against it but like mute observers see things
happening to themselves. They cannot say “these are my children and I’ll
keep them.” The woman submits herself and accepts the script of patriarchy
as soon as she realizes that a child is growing in her body. She succumbs to the power of theories, ideals, archetypes, descriptions of her new existence, though none of which have come from other women and all of which have been hovering covertly about her since she first perceived herself to be female and therefore potentially a mother. Rich invokes women that they need to know what. "out of all that welter of image-making and thought-spinning, is worth salvaging, if only to understand better an idea so crucial in history, a condition which has been wrested from the mothers themselves to buttress the power of the fathers."\(^{30}\)

(iv) Patriarchal Ideology and Its Importance

Rich uncovers yet another dimension of patriarchal domination which leads to self destruction, a different form of violence in women. Taking into account the suicides committed by women poets like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton and many other women, Rich reaches at the conclusion that in patriarchy self-destructiveness is "the sole form of violence permitted to women."\(^{31}\) She calls it "an imaginative obsession with victimization and death."\(^{32}\) This aspect becomes important in feminist debate as it arises an identification in other women that can lead to many more suicides. According to Rich there are four ways in which women destroy themselves. The first is self-trivialization. Women take patriarchal propaganda as the truth – that they are not capable of major creations; are non-serious in their work: always find the needs of others more demanding than their own; are satisfied to produce intellectual or artistic work where they imitate men and lie to themselves and each other, in which they do not strive to their fullest possibilities. The second is horizontal hostility – contempt for women: "the fear and mistrust of other women, because other women are ourselves."\(^{33}\) The conviction that women are never really going to do anything, that their self-determination and survival are secondary to
the "real" revolution made by men, that our worst enemies are women. They become their own worst enemies when they allow their "inculcated self-hatred" to turn such shadow projections on each other. The third kind of destructiveness is misplaced compassion. Quoting an example of a woman who was raped, Rich says that her first — and typical — instinct was to feel sorry for the rapist, who forced her at knife point. Rich says that when women start feeling compassion for themselves and each other instead for their rapists, they will start to be immune to suicide. The fourth is addiction: addiction to "Love" — to the idea of selfless, sacrificial love as somehow redemptive, a female career; addiction to depression — the most preferable way of living out a female existence, since the depressed cannot be held responsible; addiction to male approval: as long as they have a man to guarantee for them, sexually or intellectually, they feel somehow all right, their existence seems to be approved though whatever price it comes for.

Thus self-trivilization, contempt for women, misplaced compassion and addiction are the four ways through which women destroy themselves. Rich says, "... if we could purge ourselves of this quadruple poison, we would have minds and bodies more poised for the act of survival and rebuilding."34

(v) The Domestication of Motherhood

In Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution Rich presents motherhood as a potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children which has been constructed as a cultural institution with an aim of ensuring that potential - and all women - shall remain under male control. It has restricted over one-half of the human species from the decision affecting their lives. What Rich sees as one of the
most fundamental and bewildering of contradictions is that patriarchy has
delivered women from their bodies by imprisoning them into categories of
"private" and "public". There have been societies where women as mothers
enjoyed both respect and power, but for most of what we know as the
"mainstream" of recorded history, motherhood as an institution has
confined and degraded female potentialities.

There is a Persian myth of the creation of the world in which a
woman creates the world by her natural creativity which cannot be
duplicated by men. She gives birth to a great number of sons. The sons,
perplexed by this act which they cannot perform, become frightened. They
think, "who can tell us, that if she can give life, she cannot also take life".
And so because of their fear of this mysterious ability of the woman, and of
its reversible possibility, they kill her. [35]

Thus, the power of the mother has two aspects: the biological power
or capacity to give birth and nourish human life, and the magical power
given to her by men, either in the form of goddess-worship or the fear of
being controlled by her. There is no written history to prove this fact, but
history proves that women have been crushed under patriarchal domain for
this reason. A great number of women in history have become mothers
without their choice, and an even greater number have given their lives
bringing life into the world. Rich calls motherhood "a penal servitude" as it
leaves no choice to women. In patriarchy motherhood becomes the great
mesh in which all human relationships are entangled, in which our most
elemental assumptions about love and power are concealed. Patriarchy
works as a vicious circle where there is no possibility for any woman of
forming any identity other than fixed by it. It is such a mirror in which if a
woman looks, she finds she is becoming her mother.

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Depicting this typical condition of a woman in patriarchy. Rich shows the despair and powerlessness of women while following their men:

I am washed up on this continent
shipped here to be fruitful
my body a hollow ship
bearing sons to the wilderness
sons who ride away
on horseback. daughters
whose juices drain like mine
into the arroyo of stillbirths. massacres.36

The woman of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and other Puritan settlements, the African women brought as slaves to the American South, and the women of the mining camps and frontier settlements of the West learnt the power to survive in harsh conditions:

I never chose this place
yet I am of it now

..........................
when the men hit the hobo track
I stay on with the children
my power is brief and local
but I know my power37

This “local” power offers Rich a place to start, a place of identity from which to speak. But her identity refuses “isolation. the dream/ of the frontier woman” and instead reach out to the community in the final line “Any woman’s death diminishes me.”38
In this poem Rich meaningfully shows the coexistence of women and nature:

striated iris stand in a jar with daisies
the porcupine gnaws in the shed
fireflies beat and simmer
caterpillars begin again
their long, innocent climb.\textsuperscript{39}

Their daily routine, rested in “plain and ordinary things” contrasts with the abstract laws of the fathers: “he with fingers frozen around his Law/she with her down quilt sewn through iron nights”.\textsuperscript{40}

The concluding stanzas run through American and Western European history to the prehistoric, invoking a mythology in which female power is not domesticated:

their terror of blinding
by the look of her who bore them

if you do not believe
that fear and hated

read the lesson again
in the old dialect.\textsuperscript{41}

In place of the unproductive law of the fathers, Rich invokes “The Erinyes”. The Greek goddesses of vengeance who inhabit the netherworld caves, to demand redress for the damage done to women in the Western civilization in the name of reason, logic, and intellect. Rich sees here a necessity for a new cultural direction. In an effort to repair centuries of misogyny, she now puts women at the center of history.
Adrienne Rich believes that the reality that the foundation of male-female relationships has been laid on the status of the female as the property of the male, or of male-controlled institutions creates a difficult situation for both women and men. It is quite painful to admit that women’s identity has been dictated and fragmented by others, or that they have allowed their identity to depend on the fragmentation and exploitation of others. This is not easily accepted and faces resistance which is always the case when unsanctioned, long-stifled realities start to move and express themselves. This resistance can be expressed in various forms. Protective deafness – the inability to listen to what is actually being said – is one. Trivialization is another: the reduction of a disturbing new complexity to a caricature, or a clinical phenomenon. It is very striking to note that in spite of the reality that the world has been constructed exclusively by men and only for their benefit, and that they have plotted together for centuries to discriminate against their mothers and sisters, wives and daughters, lovers and friends, women do not have words to name it.

Until very recently, most of the women did not have the freedom to be or not to be a mother: even today, this freedom is under control. Rich says that:

this elemental loss of control over her body affects every woman’s right to shape the imagery and insights of her own being. We speak of women as “non mothers” or childless: we do not speak of “non-fathers” or “childless men”. Motherhood is admirable, however, only so long as mother and child are attached to a legal father: Motherhood out of wedlock, or under the welfare system, or lesbian motherhood, are harassed, humiliated or neglected.
The authority of the fathers decides how, when, and even where women should conceive, bear, nourish and indoctrinate their children, but now women are beginning to express the experience of motherhood both as mothers and daughters.

Adrienne Rich writes that she herself could understand the centrality of the institution of motherhood and how it is linked with the fear of difference that infects all societies, only when she started distinguishing the two strands, motherhood as experience, an enforced identity and as a political institution. Under this institution, all mothers are viewed basically as mothers: all mothers are supposed to experience motherhood unambivalently and in accordance with the patriarchal values; and the non-mothering woman is viewed as deviant.

Rich says that as the “deviant” is outside the law, and “abnormal”, there is a tremendous pressure on all women to accept the role of “mothering”. She says that:

- to speak of maternal ambivalence: to examine the passionate conflicts and ambiguities of the mother-daughter relationship. and the role of the mother in introducing her daughters to subservience and her sons to dominance: to identify the guilt mothers are made to feel for societal failures beyond their control: to acknowledge that a lesbian can be a mother and a mother a lesbian. contrary to popular stereotypes: to question the dictating by powerful men as to how women, especially the poor and non-white, shall use their bodies, or the indoctrination of women toward a one-sided emotional nurturing of men. is to challenge deeply embedded phobias and prejudices.\(^{15}\)
These realities anger and frighten, precisely because they touch women at the quick of human existence. But to avoid them, or to trivialize them, to let the feeling they arouse unexamined is “to flee both ourselves and the dawning hope that women and men may one day experience forms of love and parenthood, identity and community that will not be drenched in lies, secrets, and silence.”

(vi) Personal is Political

The fact that patriarchal ideology has a disorienting effect on the lives of women, also inspires them to recognize these social forces to understand and analyse their situation in a better perspective. When this very realization dawns on women, it opens a gate, for some women, to come out of the darkness and express the reality to the whole world and thus break the chains of the “private” self to be liberated in the world outside. These realities provide a motive and impulse toward a more enduring lucidity, a search for greater honesty, and for the acceptance of bigger issues of which their personal suffering is a symptom, a specific example. This breaking of mental barrier that separates private from public life is felt in itself like an enormous surge toward liberation. The effort to understand what has been named the “Personal” as part of a greater reality, has been a critical process for feminism, more crucial for feminism than it is for any other movement against oppression. There is a fundamental assumption about women’s oppression that they as a group belong to the “private” sphere of the home, the hearth, the family, the sexual, the emotional, out of which men emerge as adults to act in the “public” sphere of power, the “real” world, and to which they return for mothering, for approach to female forms of intimacy, love and comfort unavailable in the world of male struggle and competition.
Rich says that when women start to think, speak, and write in terms which challenge these dichotomies, they face a prevailing reflex of fear. This fear is not simply of seeing a familiar model of the world thrown into question, but the fear of potential change that will follow it. When they start describing sexuality, motherhood, the so-called innate or natural behaviour, as part of the public world “out there” – that is, as coloured by power politics, rights, property, the institutionalized ownership by men of women and children – they face severe anxiety on the part of most men and many women. Even the acceptance that marriage is an economic institution – a fact which was very clear to the ancestors well into the 19th century – badly disturbs the modern, liberal, middle-class facade of free choice, love and partnership, “liberated marriage” and equality between the sexes in private life. “The suggestion that motherhood is not only a core human relationship but a political institution, a keystone to the domination in every sphere of women by men, evokes outcries of distress, or of vituperative denial, from people with a heavy emotional and practical investment in leaving unexamined this ‘sacred calling’.” It is immediately taken for granted that the experience of maternity itself is under threat, that the maternal emotions will be nullified if women examine closely the politics of motherhood.

Rich believes that the dread of change intersects with a dread that lucidity and love cannot coincide, that political awareness and personal intensity are opposites. that consciousness should destroy tenderness, intimacy and loyalty. Lucidity, political awareness, and consciousness are compared with intellectual nihilism, with depersonalization, with the spirit of objectification. It shows how western culture in its intense patriarchalism has polarised thought and feeling. In such a society which is so disjointed, incognito, and alienating, tenderness and intimacy are precious and scarce.
and – apart from all other forces that oppose feminism – it is no surprise that people dread the loss of what emotional intensity they still have.

Most of the men fear feminism because of their fear that if women become full human beings they will stop to mother men, to provide the breast, the lullaby, the uninterrupted attention given by the mother to the infant. “Much male fear of feminism is infantilism – the longing to remain the mother’s son, to possess a woman who exists purely for him.” These infantile requirements of adult men for women have been sentimentalised and romanticised as “love.” Now the time has come to identify them as arrested development, and to re-examine the concept of preservation of “the family” within which those needs are given full freedom of expression even to the point of violence. Rich thinks that as the law and the economic and social order are greatly in favour of men, the infantile requirements of adult males are justified by a system of power which does not justify the needs of adult women. “Institutionalized marriage and motherhood perpetuate the will of male infants as law in the adult world.”

(vii) The Tragedy of Mother and Daughter Relationship

Giving a new direction to the feminist movement, Rich says that before any bond of sisterhood between women, there has existed a relationship – “transitory, fragmented, perhaps, but original and crucial – of mother and daughterhood.” This cathexis between mother and daughter is the great unwritten story. Perhaps there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically identical bodies, one of which has rested in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has taken pains to give birth to the other. But this relationship has been reduced and trivialized by the patriarchal laws. It is the mother and son who appear as the eternal, determinative binary in all theological
doctrines, arts, sociology and psychoanalytic theories, an obvious fact that all these have been produced by sons. Rich says that like strong relationships among women in general, the relationship between mother and daughter has been extremely intimidating for men. She quotes an example from the Upanishads to show the position of daughters in the ancient times:

[The woman] nourishes her husband’s self: the son, within her … The father elevates the child even before the birth, and immediately after, by nourishing the mother and by performing ceremonies. When he thus elevates the child … he really elevates his second self, for the continuation of these worlds … This is his second birth.49

The relationship of all women as daughters with mothers is primary to their existence. The first experience, for any woman, of warmth, nourishment, softness, security sensuality, closeness and love comes from her mother. That initial oneness of one female body with another can be denied, felt as suffocating possessiveness, as rejection, snare, or taboo; but it is, initially, the whole world. In the beginning, the son also has the same experience of a female body. The institutionalized heterosexuality and motherhood forces the girl-child to transfer those feelings of tenderness, sensuality and mutuality, from her first woman to a man. If she wishes to become what is called a “normal” woman - that is a woman whose most intense psychic and physical powers are affiliated with man.

Through her own experience Rich says that this primary relationship is gradually broken creating “old, smoldering patches of deep-burning anger.”50 In the institution of motherhood, women are always failures: the mother for not raising the children to the father’s expectations and the
daughter for not working according to the plans of the father. Rich writes in her book *Your Native Land, Your Life*:

For years I have struggled with you: your categories, your theories, your will, the cruelty which came inextricably from your love. For years all arguments I carried on in my head were with you. I saw myself, the eldest daughter raised as son, taught to study but not to pray, taught to hold reading and writing sacred: the eldest daughter in a house with no son, she who must overthrow the father, take what he taught her and use it against him. All this in a castle of air, the floating world of the assimilated who know and deny they will always be aliens.

After your death I met you again as the face of patriarchy, could name at last precisely the principle you embodied, there was an ideology at last which let me dispose of you, identifying the suffering you caused, hate you righteously as part of a system, the kingdom of the fathers.

This burden of fulfilling the plans and designs of the father creates a schism in mother-daughter relationship, as the mother is supposed to focus all her attention and energy to her husband, ignoring the demands of the daughter. Rich always felt that her mother had chosen her father over her and had sacrificed her to his needs and theories. When she gave birth to her first child, her mother could not come to help her as she had married against her father’s will and had turned to be entirely different than what he wanted her to make. She had always been fighting with her father for her right to an emotional life and a selfhood beyond his needs and theories. There was an
untold tension among all of them. even Rich could not tell how much she needed her mother when she visited her in the hospital:

... neither of us could uncoil the obscure lashings of feeling that darkened the room. the tangled thread running backward to where she had labored for three days to give birth to me, and I was not a son. ... I wanted her to mother me again, to hold my baby in her arms as she had once held me....

Virginia Woolf in her novel To The Lighthouse created what is supposed to be the most complex and passionate vision of this schism in modern literature. It is one of those few documents where a woman has portrayed her mother as a central figure. It is said that during Virginia’s childhood her mother. Julia Stephen concentrated most of her attention in caring for her husband and his lifework, the Dictionary of National Biography. Both Virginia and her sister Vanessa had to seek each other for mothering. Mrs. Ramsay in the novel. with her “strange severity, her extreme courtesy”.. her care to others’ needs (especially those of men). her charismatic beauty. even as a woman of fifty who had given birth to eight children – she is no simple idealization. She is the “delicious fecundity ... [the] fountain and spray of life [into which] the fetal sterility of the male plunged itself”: at the same time that “she felt this thing that she called life terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you give it a chance.”

She observes the sterility of man without any hostility, yet she does not like women much. and spends her life in catering to the needs of men. When the young painter Lily Briscoe. in which Woolf transcribed herself. is sitting with her arms around Mrs. Ramsay’s knees and her head rested on her lap. she craves to become one with her. in “the chambers of the mind
and heart of the woman who was physically touching her ... Could loving as people called it make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? For it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself ... But Mrs. Ramsay rejects her feelings. This relationship has got double meanings: the daughter desiring intimacy with her own mother, a woman desiring intimacy with another woman, not her mother but a woman toward whom she turns her emotional desires.

Recreating the myth of Demeter and Kore in the second section of “Sibling Mysteries”. Rich celebrates the nurturing and healing power of “woman’s flesh”. In the pre-Homeric mythology, Kore is the maiden who starts the annual growth cycle, and Demeter, her mother, represents the generativity of the earth. In the change from the growth-centered religion of the Great Mother to the male religion celebrating domination and mastery, Kore is stripped of her power to start life. In the Homeric myth of Demeter, Kore (Persephone) is raped by Hades, kidnapped and taken to the underworld: this rape and kidnap of Persephone is the symbol of the male usurpation of female energy and power. In the pre-Homeric myths, Persephone was linked with cyclic flux and the inevitable rhythms of birth, growth, and decay, but after her rape and abduction by Hades she could never regain her lost energies and powers. Demeter is sad not only because her daughter’s physical sanctity has been violated but also because now men have started possessing women and controlling seasonal changes. This loss of the daughter is the loss of their shared vision of life. Demeter revenges herself for the loss of her daughter by denying the grain — of which she is queen — to grow.
When her daughter is restored to her – for nine months of the year only, as she had to return to Hades for a part of a year – she restores fruitfulness and life to the land. But the Homeric hymn tells that Demeter’s supreme gift to humanity, in her celebration at her daughter’s return, was not the return of vegetation, but the establishing of the sacred ceremonies at Eleusis. Some critics have interpreted Kore’s enforced stay with Hades as a necessary sacrifice that made her capable of attaining womanhood. But Demeter laments over the captivity and loss of her daughter’s freedom. The world of prosperity and growth has been destroyed by Kore’s abduction, and the deterioration of winter symbolizes this loss of Demeter’s bond to Kore.

In patriarchal culture, the rape of Kore symbolizes that women must be violated to experience womanhood, whereas the pre-Homeric legends give respect to women’s energies to cultivate the earth and give birth to children. When Demeter gave birth to Kore, she completed her life cycle as maiden and mother: in her daughter, this cycle was to be perpetuated. The rape of Kore gave men the symbolic power to control women’s sexuality. In the original myth, fertility, reproduction, and death are inherent to life, and male and female sexuality are part of a fundamental system that produces offspring just as the combination of seed, earth, and water produces a new plant.

In “Sibling Mysteries” Rich portrays the conflict caused by having to live in “two worlds / the daughters and the mothers / in the Kingdom of the sons.” However, the memory of the mother forms an inherent relationship between mother and daughter that cannot be broken: “Sister gazed at sister/ reach through mirrored pupils/ back to the mother.” Rich considers this relationship between two sisters and between the daughters and their mother.
as the primary social relationship, and through this poem attempts to bring this deeply rooted pattern to consciousness:

the daughters were to begin with
brides of the mother
then brides of each other
under a different law.\textsuperscript{58}

Emily Dickinson’s depiction of her relationship with her sister Lavinia as “early, earnest, insoluble” and her observation that “without [Lavinia] life were fear, and Paradise a cowardice, except for her inciting voice”\textsuperscript{59} echoes the relationship celebrated in Rich’s poem.

In her study of the bonding patterns of mothers and daughters, Nancy Chodorow points out that the psycho-social developmental process for women in our culture constructs a female psyche that is “relational” and a male psyche that is relatively “self-contained”.\textsuperscript{60} According to Chodorow, women are mothered by women and then are supposed to transfer this love to their fathers in order to develop heterosexuality; therefore, they have an inclination to perceive themselves in terms of relationships and are more bisexualy oriented than men.\textsuperscript{61} The recent anthropological studies show that in prehistoric societies and contemporary hunter-gatherer groups the mother-child relationship is the strongest social force.

Rich believes that the loss of the daughter to the mother and the mother to the daughter is the real female tragedy. We recognise Lear (father-daughter split), Hamlet (son and mother), Oedipus (son and mother) as great embodiments of the human tragedy; but the schism of mother-daughter relationship is still unrecognised. Thousands of daughters perceive their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are
fighting to get free of, the one through whom the limitations and disruptions of a female existence were necessarily transmitted. Rich says that it is very easy to hate and reject a mother than to perceive beyond her to the forces acting upon her. Daughters have a fear, which the poet Lynn Sukenick calls “matrophobia,” not of one’s mother or of motherhood but of becoming one’s mother. But as a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia there is also a deep inherent pull towards her, a fear that if one slackens one’s position one will identify with her completely.

Exploring the legacy of self-hate and suppression passed on from mother to daughter. Rich says:

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers’ bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and to overlap with our mothers’: and in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery. This mother-daughter separation, according to Rich is a modern example of the separation of Demeter and Kore of the 7th century B.C. Rich presents the Eleusinian celebration of the reunion of Demeter and Kore as an antidote to the distortion of the relationship between mother and daughter in a patriarchal culture. She emphasises that this celebration must be translated into modern experience as a need for “courageous mothering”. This mothering is entirely different from the old, institutionalised, sacrificial, “mother-love”. Keeping the fact in mind that culture imposes a sense of limit on women, the most important thing that a woman can do for another is to illuminate and widen her sense of actual possibilities. For a mother it is
not merely a fight with the reductive images of females in children's books, movies, television and schools, but an effort to widen her boundaries and to refuse to be victim: and then to move forward from there. Insisting upon the need of "mothers who want their own freedom and ours". Rich says that "the quality of the mother's life – however embattled and unprotected – is her primary bequest to her daughter, because a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to struggle to create livable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist."64

Rich calls for a female bonding that will acknowledge the strength and variety of women's capabilities and powers, but this vision must be fulfilled through gentleness, as the quality defined in "Natural Resources:"

... gentle is active
gentleness swabs the crusted stump

invents more merciful instruments
to touch the wound beyond the wound

......... ........ ...... ......... ....

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.65

Maggie Humm. a great admirer of Adrienne Rich, in Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critic (1986), presents a woman-centered project very similar to that of Rich. In On Lies, Secrets, and
Silence. Rich defines female consciousness as political, aesthetic, and erotic which cannot be included or contained in the culture of passivity. Re-vision, a new way of reading and analyzing, achieves a new psychic space, a new history and a new language, bringing ethics, living and thinking together. Rich’s achievement, according to Humm. was “a challenging libidinal theory of radical feminism” and “an almost pantheistic celebration of female history.”

Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing, a work of fiction about a young woman’s search for a missing (supposed dead) father as well as her internal search for memories of her dead mother, foregrounds questions about paternity/maternity, language and identity. By rewriting the myth of a questing hero, Atwood tries to repeat the social patterns of female identity by giving importance to maternal relations, which are normally devalued in classical myth. Surfacing is almost contemporary to Rich’s Of Woman Born and both the books enjoy a same climate of thinking in contemporary feminism about motherhood. Rich divides the image of motherhood into “experience”, which can be energizing section of all women’s lives, whether or not they choose to be biological mothers, and “institution” which is the social construction and diminishing of motherhood. Rich celebrates the “experience” of motherhood by connecting it to prehistory and endowing “experience” with mythic symbols and figures. Atwood’s heroine in the same way goes back to her own “pre-history” to make an effort to understand the importance of a maternal presence/absence in her life by returning to the island where she lived as a child. But her search for the father leads her to reunion with the mother, who is at home in the wilderness. Mistress of the Animals. It reminds of the reunion of Demeter and Kore, which Rich celebrates in her poetry. In a strange, subconscious way, Atwood’s heroine begins to recognise and feel her own power through
her moment of vision, her brief, surprising visit to her mother. She has tried her way back — through fasting and sacrifice — beyond patriarchy. She cannot live there: the primitive is not the solution: she has to go back and live out her life in this time. But she has had her illumination: she has seen her mother.

In *Beyond God the Father* (1973) Mary Daly accuses men of having stolen language from women, a theft enacted in *Genesis*. Consequently women should transform and get their language back. In *Gyn/Ecology* she wants to go beyond the male myths encoded within the language and beyond a male-centered logic of dyadic oppositions based on the gender division to form a new female syntax which would naturally express the female body.

The major questions discussed by the French feminists are: if literary language shapes our literary knowledge, how can we rethink literary perceptions and structures? Where does the ‘feminine’ appear in literature and what new subjectivities might it suggest? For French feminists, new literary subjectivities are already functioning in the “maternal function” which precedes our entry into the symbolic and hence into literature. The material bodies of mother, the relationship between mother and infant, form psychic, subjective images and rhythms which are never lost from our unconscious, though they may be forgotten. Aspects of literary style rewrite this maternal moment in literature. There are two critical processes in French feminist criticism. First is a reconstructive activity aimed at breaking up the “given” arrangements of meaning. Second is a re-visionary activity, which Rich talks about, aiming to find the forgotten “syntax” of the semiotic present in juxtapositions, slips of language and intertextuality.
Politics of Location

In the foreword to *The Fact of a Doorframe*, Rich writes:

One task for the nineteen- or twenty-year-old poet who wrote the earliest here was to learn that she was neither unique or universal, but a person in history, a woman and not a man, a white and also Jewish inheritor of a particular consciousness, from the making of which most women have been excluded.

Rich’s entire poetic life presents her rejection of the dual idealism of the unique, which seeks an authentic self repressed by patriarchal society, and the universal, which seeks a female essentialism. Recognising the differences beyond the simple binary of male/female, Rich emphasises the myriad differences among women, men, places, times, cultures, conditions, classes and movements. She discourses that she must first locate herself, hold her accountable for where she is in her particular place, historical moment and personal history: “I need to understand how a place on a map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create.”

At the beginning of her essay, “Notes Toward a Politics of Location”. Rich remembers her childhood game in which she and her friend used to write each other letters addressed like this:

Adrienne Rich
14 Edgevale Road
Baltimore. Maryland
The United States of America
The Continent of North America
The Western Hemisphere
The Earth

The Solar system

The Universe.69

After a few pages she writes:

I wrote a sentence and x’d it out. In it I said that women have always understood the struggle against free-floating abstraction even when they were intimidated by abstract ideas. I don’t want to write that kind of sentence now. the sentence that begins ‘Women have always ....’ We started by rejecting the sentences that began ‘Women have always had an instinct for mothering’ or ‘Women have always and everywhere been in subjugation to men’. If we have learned anything in these years of late twentieth-century feminism, it’s that that ‘always’ blots out what we really need to know: when, where, and under what conditions has the statement been true?70

Here Adrienne Rich emphasises on three central issues: the risk of generalizing about women or the failure to acknowledge differences between women: the importance of locating oneself and one’s words, a place in history where one’s particular identity is constructed: and the misconception of considering ourselves at the center. Therefore, a politics of location is essential both in understanding the similarities and differences between women and in realizing one’s own sense of selfhood. Women need, in Rosi Braidotti’s words, “to be as aware as possible of the place from which one is speaking.”71 They should also be aware of the locations of the other women. Rich shows a deep anxiety about the perils of speaking for other women or of taking one’s own needs and experiences as common
to all women, but at the same time there is an urgent need for feminists to speak together – in both senses of that phrase, to speak to each other to build up understanding and to speak with a collective voice to fight those reactionary forces which would happily divide and win.

Rich’s dilemma of the location of the center for women is not the outsider’s position which she had earlier taken with Virginia Woolf: “As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.” Rich now changes her position and says, “As a women I have a country; as a woman I cannot divert myself of that country merely by condemning its government or saying three times ‘As a woman my country is the whole world’.” Rich’s emphasis on “location” keeps her tied to the material world and away from the temptations of philosophical idealism and transcendence that try to hide the material conditions of different people’s lives.

Giving this question of location an entirely different platform, Rich wants to start with the closest geography – the body. It is the place which anyone can claim with certainty, which Karl Marx called “the first premise of all human history.” Rich considers body as the ground from where women can speak with authority as women. Instead of transcending body they should reclaim it. There is a need to reconstruct our thinking and speaking with the body, to begin “with the material, with matter, mamma madre, mutter, moeder, modder, etc., etc.” She emphasises the great importance of recapturing the body, and breaking through the limits imposed on women’s understandings of the body by patriarchies, in order to both control and exploit what is perceived as women’s physicality, their bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of their intelligence.
Rich considers that much real female power is inherent in female biology and through reclaiming the body women will acquire access to that power. If it is true as she once said, women are dominated by lashing them to their bodies, then little progress has been made in untying the chains. One of its reasons is the fact that a feminist analysis of women, the body, and menstruation has been so ethnocentric and universal in its claims that it cannot provide the basis for the more subtle analyses that might help. Rich’s discussion of menstruation, for example, is heavily loaded with concern about the origins of a menstrual taboo which she perceives near to universal. In her view, the menstrual taboo signifies the dread of woman and the mystery of her motherhood. But her interesting comments on impurity do not seem to have drawn a great deal of feminist attention and have not been properly followed up. Julie Marcus in her book *A World of Difference* tries to draw out the implications of the body in women’s subordination, to tell the ways in which universalizing approaches like that of Rich can be presented more precisely by making them more specific and by showing how the differences between women are narratively and structurally constituted.

Adrienne Rich’s works are often been interpreted as being biologically determinist, as she asks women to reconsider their relationships to their bodies, to female biology. Answering to this criticism, Rich argues that there is no woman for whom her body is not a fundamental problem. "In arguing that we have by no means yet explored or understood our biological grounding, the miracle and paradox of the female body and its spiritual and political meanings, I am really asking whether women cannot begin, at last, to think through the body, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized – our great mental capacities, hardly used: our highly developed tactile sense; our genius for close observation: our complicated.
pain-enduring, multi-pleased physicality.” Rich thus locates in women’s reproductive capacity the source of a benevolent femininity, an identity to be enjoyed, nurtured and intensified throughout the life. Rich believes that the repossession by women of their bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the controlling of the means of production of workers. The female body has been both territory and machine, virgin wilderness to be utilized and assembly-line turning out life. We have to create a world where every woman is “the presiding genius” of her own body. In such a world women will definitely create new life, bringing forth not only children but the visions, and the thinking, essential to sustain, console; and change human existence – a new relationship to the universe. Sexuality, politics, intelligence, power, motherhood, work, community intimacy will acquire different meanings: thinking itself will be transformed. This is the place we have to begin.
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CHAPTER 5
Lesbian Continuum: A Celebration of Women’s Liberation

In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich tries to establish the fact that women are different from men. Here Rich attempts to define women’s feelings and give them some meaning in order to make the sense of difference valid. The change to defining ‘difference’ as lesbian identity is the major theory of her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” Rich suggests in an interview with Marlene Packwood that lesbian identity is an essential part of radical feminism: “I think it has to be about transformation. And that’s where I see lesbianism and feminism having very common ground.” Feminist writings on sexuality up to that point had concentrated mainly on the relation between reproduction and social controls. Rich builds on de Beauvoir’s thesis that women are originally homosexual, but she moves on from Beauvoir to concentrate on elements like desire and fantasy which is an important contribution of lesbian criticism to feminism. She was moving in an area riddled with contradictions. What enables her to talk about ‘difference’ with coherence is “a kind of clarity that we get from being that extra degree an outsider.”

Rich wants to separate lesbianism from the gay movement in order to make it a part of general female experience. She does not reject heterosexual relationships, since she believes that patriarchy has imposed arbitrary sexual dichotomies (lesbian or heterosexual) which have no meaning. Rich wants to erase these false dichotomies. She changes our normal way of thinking by asking, “If women are the earliest sources of emotional caring and physical nurture ... why in fact women would ever
redirect [to men]". Rich concludes that the future for feminist criticism is to delineate more strongly, all the forms that lesbian existence assumes. She does not want women to find the lesbian continuum necessarily in themselves but rather to help uncover and describe the cultural mystification of lesbian spheres.

This is of great importance for feminist analysis. When Rich talks about the construction of lesbianism she has actually a psychical and literary construction in her mind. If you take up ‘lesbian’ or ‘heterosexual’ position, it reproduces oppression, because ‘lesbianism’, as representation, depends on the ever-present heterosexual order of reality. But, Rich, by enormously enlarging the categories of lesbianism and therefore redrawing its system of representation, can place contradictions, overlaps, and distinctions which may change patriarchal ideology.

Rich joins critics like Michel Foucault in redrawing the sexual maps. Rich, like Foucault, is writing about images of male power and the way it operates. For both, sexuality is the key to understand the controls and regulations of capitalism. It is only with the help of sexuality that the workings of power can be understood as it provides the link between otherwise disparate discourses. Rich differs from Foucault at one point as she does not consider that the main characteristic of sexuality is the way it uses confessions to codify practices, for her, the main characteristic of sexuality is male violence. Lesbianism, she considers, is especially hated in patriarchy and projected by men as the feminine evil. Therefore, for Rich lesbians intensely need to create separate defined spaces of existence.

(i) **Theoretical Basis of Lesbianism**

In his *Introduction to History of Sexuality* Michel Foucault suggests that one of the artifices of power in the modern period is to make us assume
that power is monolithic, functioning only through uniform techniques of repression and silencing. Such a belief deludes us into assurance that if we openly talk about sex, it will bring about our freedom. Foucault attacks such naïve confidence, suggesting that the economy of power is both more all encompassing and less homogeneous. Power can operate physically on bodies, but discursively it carves up the whole world through language different bodies are assigned to different categories and different actions are specified in relation to norms as praiseworthy, deviant, punishable, or criminal. Discursive power penetrates every where, giving a specific name to every possible variant of human action so as to control the world and leave nothing unexamined, unknown, uncatalogued. Along with creating subjects, this power constructs sexual categories that structure the world in certain ways. The 19th century started, what Foucault calls, the “explosion of discourse” which in the field of sexuality created new vocabularies and categories for designating desires and actions that could then become subjected to medical, legal, and other institutional and state interventions. Foucault suggests that the increasing size of medical, biological and pedagogical discourses do not show any openness about sexuality. Rather the proliferation of sexual categories limit sexuality to particular norms. Commenting on the medical categorization of homosexuality, he says:

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy to a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodisism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration the homosexual now was a species.\^{}4

Power operates discursively to create homosexuality when it separates out and names as homosexual certain actions that had formerly been included in the grab-bag term sodomy. This new effort to be more precise, more
“scientific” in categorizing human sexual behavior, itself demands that behavior be scrutinized with more care than ever before.

Another person who influenced the entire homosexual thinking is Oscar Wilde. He has come to personify many a trans-historical and trans-cultural model of homosexual identity, at once both enabling and limiting.

(ii) A Brief Sketch of the Lesbian Movement

As a movement, lesbianism started with the Stonewall Riots of 1969. When the police raided the Stonewall Tavern in New York City the riots started. Many gays, lesbians, transvestites fought back. The succeeding battles and riots got widespread publicity. The first meeting of the British Gay Liberation Front was held at the London School of Economics on Nov. 13, 1970, and the first Annual Gay Pride march on April 1, 1972. Since then, the gay liberation movement has been fighting social, legal, medical and religious oppression and trying to locate a whole new cultural space for the so far marginalised community. By the end of 1970s many women had “come out” as lesbians in the women’s liberation movement and gradually started bringing together different threads of their existence: teaching lesbian literature, forming networks and support groups, and exploring postulations about a lesbian—centered literary criticism. They started widening the horizons of literary scholarship by pointing out to what had been for decades “unspeakable” — lesbian existence — thus calling, in novelist Jane Arnold’s words, “what was never been”. As women in a male-dominated academy, they explored the way they wrote and read from a different and “other” perspective. As lesbians in a heterosexist academy, says Bonnie Zimmerman, “we have continued to explore the impact of ‘otherness’, suggesting dimensions previously ignored, and yet necessary to understand fully the female condition and the creative work born from it.”
Even before 1969 many lesbians had joined NOW (National Organization of Women, founded by Betty Friedan) chapters or women’s liberation groups. But most of them had remained silent about their sexual preference. But now they broke the silence and started raising their own issues. From the very beginning there were serious conflicts in many groups between gay and “straight” women as heterosexual feminists emphasized that lesbian issues had nothing to do with feminism. Many feminists, most of them straight and White wanted to define “women’s issues” in a limited way, both for practical purposes and because gay rights were so controversial that they feared if feminism got associated with them, the movement would suffer. The lesbians, on the other hand, believed that social attitudes would never change as long as they remained in the closet: that they had to identify themselves as lesbians and struggle for their civil rights. One lesbian wrote that, “...the worst part of being a homosexual is having to keep it secret.... the daily knowledge that what you are is so awful that it cannot be revealed.”

In the women’s movement, this conflict between lesbian and straight feminists surfaced for the first time in the New York chapter of NOW. It was a time when every “normal” person was expected to have a heterosexual life, and under these circumstances some lesbians unwillingly developed one. Others revolted: “It was bad enough to have to hide from colleagues in the office, but to hide from other women in the movement was too much.” wrote Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love in a 1972 book that chronicled NOW’s lesbian-straight tribulations. Gradually, some lesbians began to come out. Rita Mae Brown was one of the first to take up the issue. For many NOW members, lesbianism was a sensitive area as they had to defend themselves against accusations that all feminists were lesbians. As the few out-of-the-closet lesbians were pressurising the
organization to take a stand on lesbian rights. the word got around that Betty Friedan herself regarded the lesbian issue a "lavender herring" - and a lesbian, a "lavender menace". Friedan was afraid that if the enemies of the movement succeeded in equating feminism with lesbianism, it would hamper her goals of achieving women's rights. But as the time progressed, the conflict within NOW escalated and Rita Brown and others resigned from the organization. Dolores Alexander, an important member of the organization was expelled from the organization on the suspicion of being a lesbian. Finally, the lesbians found the right opportunity to present their case. From May 1 to 3, 1970 a conference, called the Congress to Unite Women, was held in New York City. Four hundred feminists from all over the East Coast assembled for the Congress. A paper entitled "The Woman-Identified Woman" was presented.

It was one of those rare, turning points in the history of the movement. Afterwards, many things changed for ever, as the ideas presented in the paper were so fierce and powerful that they gripped the imagination of many feminists. Resolute to play a role in the movement, badly perturbed by being called sexually "deviant", the lavender menace group decided to present lesbianism as a political: rather than a sexual, choice. Defining the lesbian, they said:

A lesbian is a rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society – perhaps then, but certainly later – cares to allow her. These needs and actions, over a period of years, bring her into painful conflict with people, situations, the accepted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, until she is
in a state of continued war with everything around her and
usually her self... To the extent that she cannot expect the
heavy socialization that goes with being female, she can never
truly find peace with herself. For she is caught somewhere
between accepting society’s view of her – in which case she
cannot accept herself and coming to understand what this
sexist society has done to her and why it is functional and
necessary for it to do so.10

In the following months, the lavender menaces attracted a host of
new members. They also changed their name to Radicalesbians.
Meanwhile, many feminist groups faced new problems because with the
stereotype stripped away, everybody was wondering which women were
lesbians. It was a matter of fear for both who were still in the closet and
straight women who wanted to talk about their own perplexity but could not
distinguish those who might share it from those who would be offended to
hear about it. A few out-of-the-closet lesbians were angry because straight
women treated them as if they were men and flirted with them. During
1970, the lesbian-straight issue kept boiling beneath the surface in women’s
groups. By the end of the year, this issue became public when Kate Millett
was pilloried by Time magazine. The attack temporarily brought to a close
much of the women’s movement, but the conflict continued for a few more
years. At the center of it were the feminists who emphasized that lesbianism
was not simply a sexual choice but was, in fact, primarily a political choice.
They argued that if every one felt free to love anyone of either sex, male
supremacy couldn’t last. They exhorted true feminists to seek love and
affection from other women, and they also presented lesbians as model
feminists.
During 1971 lesbians founded new groups and identified themselves as lesbian separatists. The most popular of these groups, the Furies, was formed in Washington, D.C., by twelve women, including Rita Mae Brown and Charlotte Bunch, who finally became one of the major feminist theorists. The Furies set about evolving a lesbian feminist political analysis. As Bunch said, "...I belonged to a minority that was loathed...I had to know why the simple act of loving other women sexually...was so taboo and threatening to others."

There are a few fundamental questions asked by all the lesbians but they are still searching for their answers. In this context Bonnie Zimmerman puts forth a number of queries: Does a woman’s sexual and emotional preference affect the way she writes, reads and thinks? Is lesbianism present in the classroom and in scholarship? Is there a lesbian aesthetic different from a feminist aesthetic? What should a lesbian critic do? Can they establish a lesbian “canon” on the pattern of feminist critics’ female canon? Can lesbian feminists evolve insights into female creativity that might enrich all literary criticism? The answers to these questions vary from critic to critic but there is a set of assumptions which all accept – that a woman’s identity is not defined only by her relation to a male world and male literary tradition, that powerful ties between women are of great importance in women’s lives, and that a sexual and emotional orientation of a woman deeply influences her consciousness and therefore her creativity. Those critics, who have deliberately decided to read as lesbians, argue that this perspective can be uniquely liberating and can give “new insights into life and literature because it assigns the lesbian a specific vantage point from which to criticize and analyze the politics, language and culture of patriarchy.”

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One way in which this "uniquely liberating" perspective takes shape is as a "critical consciousness about heterosexist assumptions." Heterosexism is the group of values and structures that considers heterosexuality to be the only "natural" way of sexual and emotional expression. "the perceptual screen provided by our [patriarchal cultural conditioning." Equally important, heterosexism assumes that every woman is either bound to a man or wishes she were. Women are considered as wives and mothers.

The Furies started examining heterosexism, and considered heterosexuality as a political institution rather than a personal choice. "because relationships between men and women are essentially political. they involve power and dominance." They pointed out that all the institutions that oppressed women were based on the supposition that women would always put men first. Bunch argued that heterosexism was "a cornerstone of male supremacy." She informed that women who established a relationship with men were rewarded with heterosexual privileges that included economic security and social status. That forced them to behave as the patriarchal society wanted them to behave and maintain a status quo. Bunch suggested that the straight women, who did not discern what heterosexual privilege was, should "try being a queer for a week."

Heterosexual feminists rather tried to ignore the lesbians' implied criticism of heterosexuality as an institution, and focused all their energies on defying any notion that lesbian sexual relationships were the only true patterns for liberated womanhood. This suggested that heterosexual feminists of the '70s rarely examined the patriarchal assumptions upon which traditional definitions of heterosexuality were based, nor did they try to redefine the terms of their intimate relations in line with the radical
restructuring visualised in other areas of social life. By this lack of awareness they risked accepting that being a heterosexual was an essential part of their existence, and because of this reason they were reluctant to consider the possibility that sexual orientation was itself a social construct and would be meaningless if social and ideological punishments and privileges attached to illicit and licit forms of social expression were taken off.

(iii) **Adrienne Rich’s Concept of Lesbian Continuum**

The Radicalesbians’ concept of the “woman-identified woman” was proposed to be more than a depiction of sexual preference: they wanted to stop the competitiveness that divided women in patriarchy, thence to strengthen political and personal ties. They were of the view that the desire to define identity through sexual orientation would disappear in an androgynous utopia where the social meanings given to such “roles” had dissolved. Later on Adrienne Rich took these ideas further. In her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Rich widened the concept of the “woman-identified women” by presenting a new concept of a “lesbian continuum.” In this way Rich further displaced the focus on sexual love and emphasized the strength and love to be derived from female friendship and support networks. She suggested that because of the strong relationship between mothers and infants, a female’s first and fundamental attachment was to other women. She questioned: why, then, would women go to men? What social forces could “wrench women’s emotional and erotic energies” away from other women? Rich believed that the wrenching was done by “compulsory heterosexuality,” sexual choice forced by methods that ranged from rape to visions of romantic love. Her concept of “lesbian continuum” included all women-identified experiences, whether sexual or intense non-sexual experiences such as “bonding against male tyranny.”
Making her purpose clear for writing this essay, Rich writes in the foreword that it was written to defy the erasure of lesbian existence from feminist literature, which was not only anti-lesbian but anti-feminist in its consequences, and to distort the experience of heterosexual women at the same time. It was not written to widen separations but to encourage heterosexual feminists to scrutinize heterosexuality as a political institution which makes women powerless and so to change it to make women realize the depth and breadth of woman identification and woman relationship that has flowed like a persistent, though stifled, theme through, the heterosexual experience. She wanted to bridge the gap between lesbian and feminist, and thus to change their perspective of "unexamined heterosexuality." 

Rich challenges the assumptions that women have an "innate" sexual orientation towards men, and that, as put forward by Doris Lessing in *The Golden Notebook*, (1962), the lesbian is simply acting out her bitterness toward man. She is also concerned with two other questions: how and why has women's preference of women as passionate friends, life partners, coworkers, lovers, community been suppressed, invalidated, pushed into hiding and disguise: and the virtual or complete neglect of lesbian existence in the whole gamut of literature, including feminist writings. She believes that any theory that considers lesbian existence as a peripheral or less "natural" phenomenon, as only "sexual preference," or as the reflection of either heterosexual or male homosexual ties is profoundly weakened thereby, whatever its other contributions and feminist theory also cannot afford to have distance with lesbianism.

Rich discusses four contemporary books by women writers. Nancy Chodorow’s *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Dorothy Dinnerstain’s. *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arguments and the Human Malaise*, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English’s. *For Her Own Good: 150 Years*
of the Experts’ Advice to Women and Jean Baker Miller’s Toward a New Psychology of Women. All the authors believe that the social relations of the sexes are disorganised and deeply perplexing, if not crippling, for women; all of them want a change. Rich believes that they would have been more exact, powerful, and truly a force for change had they “dealt with lesbian existence as a reality and as a source of knowledge and power available to women, or with the institution of heterosexuality itself as a beachhead of male dominance.”21 None of these books have raised the question whether, given a different context, women would choose heterosexual relation and marriage heterosexuality is taken as the “sexual preference” of “most women”, either directly or indirectly. Though these books are concerned with mothering, sex roles, relationships, and social prescriptions for women, but none of them interrogates compulsory heterosexuality as an institution strongly affecting all these, or questions the notion of “preference” or “innate orientation” even indirectly.

Though Nancy Chodorow sounds more logical in her argument that women, and only women, have to look after the child in the sexual division of labour it has led to an entire social organization of gender inequality, and that men as well as women must work as primary careers for children if that inequality is to change. She has tried to prove that men are “emotionally secondary” in women’s lives, that women have a “richer, ongoing inner world to fall back on… men do not become as emotionally important to women as women do to men.”22 She concludes that because women have women as mothers, “the mother remains a primary internal object to the girl, so that heterosexual relationships are on the model of a nonexclusive, second relationship for her, whereas for the boy they re-create an exclusive, primary relationship.”23
Rich argues that Chodorow ignores the pressures and restrictions that have historically forced women to have relation with men and punished them for coupling with women. Chodorow tries to nullify lesbian existence when she says that “lesbian relationships do tend to re-create mother-daughter emotions and connections, but most women are heterosexual.”

She joins further: “This heterosexual preference and taboo on homosexuality, in addition, to objective economic dependence on men, make the option of primary sexual bonds with other women unlikely — though more prevalent in recent years.”

Rich criticizes Chodorow for ignoring the hidden socializations and the overt forces which have pressurised women to accept marriage and heterosexual romance, pressures ranging from the selling of daughters to the silences of literature to the images created by the media. But Chodorow seems to be trying to reform a man-made institution – compulsory heterosexuality – as if, in spite of deep emotional impulsions and complimentsaries drifting women toward women, there is an occult/ biological heterosexual inclination, a “preference” or “choice” which drifts women toward men. Rich suggests that heterosexuality, like motherhood, should be considered and studied as a “political institution” – even, or specially by those who think they are, in their personal experience, the harbingers of a new social relation between the sexes.

Rich asks a few fundamental questions. If women are the primary sources of emotional love and physical care for both female and male children; why does not the search for love and caring in both sexes naturally lead towards women; why actually women would always redirect that search; why species existence, “the means of impregnation and emotional/erotic relationships should ever have become so rigidly identified with each other: and why such violent strictures should be found necessary...
to enforce women’s total emotional, erotic loyalty and subservience to men.” Rich finds almost all her answers in the “compulsory heterosexuality” that tries to obliterate the entire existence of women.

Deriving basically from Kathleen Gough’s essay “The Origins of the Family”. Rich enunciates and elaborates upon eight characteristics of male power which include the power of men:

1. to deny women [their own] sexuality—[by means of clitoridectomy and infibulation: chastity belts: punishment, including death, for female adultery: punishment, including death, for lesbian sexuality: psychoanalytic denial of the clitoris: strictures against masturbation: denial of maternal and postmenopausal sensuality: unnecessary hysterectomy: pseudolesbian images in the media and literature: closing of archives and destruction of documents relating to lesbian existence]

2. or force it [male sexuality] upon them — [by means of rape (including marital rape) and wife beating: father-daughter, brother-sister incest: the socialization of women to feel that male sexual “drive” amounts to a right: idealization of heterosexual romance in art, literature, the media, advertising, etc: child marriage: arranged marriage: prostitution: the harem: psychoanalytic doctrines of frigidity and vaginal orgasm: pornographic depictions of women responding pleasurably to sexual violence and humiliation (a subliminal message being that sadistic heterosexuality is more “normal” than sexuality between women)]
3. to command or exploit their labour to control their produce – [by means of the institutions of marriage and motherhood as unpaid production: the horizontal segregation of women in paid employment: the decoy of the upwardly mobile token women: male control of abortion, contraception, sterilization, and childbirth: pimping: female infanticide, which robs mothers of daughters and contributes to generalized devaluation of women]

4. to control or rob them of their children [by means of father right and “legal kidnapping”: enforced sterilization: systematized infanticide: seizure of children from lesbian mothers by the courts: the malpractice of male obstetrics: use of the mother as “token torturer” in genital mutilation or in binding the daughter’s feet (or mind) to fit her for marriage]

5. to confine them physically and prevent their movement:— [by means of rape as terrorism keeping women off the streets: purdah: foot binding: atrophying of women’s athletic capabilities: high heels and “feminine” dress codes in fashion: the veil: sexual harassment on the streets: horizontal segregation of women in employment: prescriptions for “full-time” mothering at home: enforced economic dependence of wives]

6. to use them as objects in male transactions——[use of women as “gifts”: bride price: pimping: arranged marriage: use of women as entertainers to facilitate male
deals—e.g., wife-hostess, cocktail waitress required to
dress for male sexual titillation. Call girls, "bunnies".
geisha, kisaeng prostitutes, secretaries]

7. to cramp their creativeness—[witch persecutions as
campaigns against midwives and female healers, and as
program against independent, "unassimilated" women:
definition of male pursuits as more valuable than female
within any culture, so that cultural values become the
embodiment of male subjectivity: restriction of female
self-fulfillment to marriage and motherhood: sexual
exploitation of women by male artists and teachers: the
social and economic disruption of women's creative
aspirations: erasure of female tradition]

8. to withhold from them large areas of society's knowledge
and cultural attainments—[by means of non-education of
females: the "Great Silence" regarding women and
particularly lesbian existence in history and culture: sex-
role tracking which deflects women from science,
technology, and other "masculine" pursuits: male social
professional bonding which excludes women:
discrimination against women in the professions]²⁸

These are some of the modes through which male power manifests
and upholds itself. It becomes quite clear from Rich's analysis that what
women are facing is not a simple force but a pervasive cluster of forces.
ranging from physical violence to domination of consciousness. which
implies that a tremendous potential counterforce is having to be checked.
While some of the ways by which male power is exercised, are easily
recognizable, some ways are hidden under ideological cover which are to be uncovered. The way pornography functions and shapes consciousness is a serious matter, as it projects women as objects of sexual appetite having no emotional context, individual meaning or personality but only a sexual commodity to be consumed by males. The most detrimental message conveyed by pornography is that women are natural sexual prey to men, that sexuality and violence are interconnected, that for women love is essentially masochistic, physical torture is erotic. Rich believes that pornography does not simply produce a favourable condition in which sex and violence are interchangeable, but it also "widens the range of behaviour considered acceptable from men in heterosexual intercourse" behaviour which repeatedly robs women off their autonomy, honour, and sexual power, including the power of loving and being loved by women in mutuality and uprightness.

The fact that we consider rape as violence and intercourse as sexuality, removes rape from the sexual range completely. And this placing of rape in the field of "violence" away from the field of sex, permits one to oppose it without raising any questions about the range to which the institution of heterosexuality has demarcated force as a normal part of sexual intercourse. It is never asked whether, under conditions of male domination, the idea of "consent" has any meaning.

Taking into account the daily eroticization of women's subjugation, Rich questions the psychoanalytic perspective that the male need to control women's sexuality is the result of some primordial male "fear of women" and of women's sexual inconsistency. Rich argues that it is more likely that men do not fear that they will have women's sexual appetites forced on them or that women desire to suppress and devour them but that women could be completely listless toward them, that men could be permitted
sexual and emotional – therefore economic – approach to women only on women’s conditions, otherwise being left on the margin of the matrix. Rich incorporates insights from Kathleen Barry’s research which connects all enforced conditions under which women live subject to men: prostitution, marital rape, father-daughter and brother-sister incest, wife battering, pornography, bride price, the selling of daughters, purdah, and genital mutilation. She perceives the rape paradigm – where the victim of sexual violence is considered responsible for her own victimization – as leading to the rationalization and acceptance of other types of subjugation where the woman is supposed to have “chosen” her destiny, to accept it passively, or to have invited it perversely through indiscreet behaviour. But contrary to it, Barry upholds that female sexual subjectivity is present in “ALL” situations where they cannot change the conditions of their existence. Instead of “blaming the victim”. Barry focuses on the “pathology of sex colonization” itself, the ideology of “cultural sadism” projected by the pornography industry and by the overall identification of women basically as “sexual beings whose responsibility is the sexual service of men”.  

Barry depicts what she calls a “sexual domination perspective” through which sexual exploitation of and violence against women by men has been presented as invisible by treating it as natural and inevitable. From this perspective, women can be strained to any limit to meet the sexual and emotional needs of men. Barry suggests that the only way of coming out of this slavery is to know it perfectly in all its manifestations. It is only through “knowing” and facing it directly that women “can learn to chart our course out of this oppression, by envisioning and creating a world which will preclude sexual slavery”. She warns women: “Until we name the practice, give conceptual definition and form to it, illustrate its life over time and in space, those who are its most obvious victims will also not be able to name it or define their
experience.\textsuperscript{32} Thus Barry agrees to the fact that the difficulty of naming and conceptualizing the sexual slavery of women is because of compulsory heterosexuality which compels a woman to see man's sexual drive as "natural" and inevitable and consider herself and her sexual life only in terms of male sexuality. It further leads to male identification – the casting of one's social, political, and intellectual loyalties with men: put them above women in reliability, honour, status, and importance in most places, ignoring any comparative quality that women can have, including oneself.

Adrienne Rich argues that women are driven to this sexual slavery through continuous socialization, the media, the family, and the institution of motherhood. She writes: The assumption that:

most women are innately heterosexual stands as a theoretical and political stumbling block for feminism. It remains a tenable assumption partly because lesbian existence has been written out of history or catalogued under disease, partly because it has been treated as exceptional rather than intrinsic, partly because to acknowledge that for women heterosexuality may not be a "preference" at all, but has to be imposed, managed, organised, propagandized, and maintained by force, is an immense step to take if you consider yourself freely and "innately" heterosexual.\textsuperscript{33}

Rich believes that women will require enormous energy and courage to question heterosexuality as "preference" or "choice" or "natural". but if they do this and break this silence it will open new vistas of freedom and power leading them to new paths and a new vision in personal relationships.
RICH makes a distinction between **lesbian existence** and **lesbian continuum**. Lesbian existence consists in both the breaking of a taboo and the renouncing of a compulsory way of life. It is a direct or indirect assault on male right to approach to women. It is an "act of resistance" to patriarchy. In this kind of a relationship women are living together, not necessarily in a sexual relationship but rather in an atmosphere of loving and sharing both emotional and political support. But lesbian continuum refers to:

- a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience: not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between women and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support...we begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of 'lesbianism'.

This continuum comprises the giving and taking of political support, exchanging difficulties and ideas. and evolving a culture of sisterhood which recognises and strengthens women's resistance to patriarchy and power. Lesbianism becomes conceptualized here as a sexuality which is not about unequal power relations, about violence or domination, but as a safe space for women. It is also an effort to discover the erotic in female terms: as that which is not confined to any single part of the body or only to the
body itself: as an energy which is not only diffuse but, as Audre Lorde has
defined it, omnipresent in “the sharing of joy whether physical, emotional,
psychic,” and in the sharing of task: as the empowering bliss which “makes
us less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of
being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-
effacement, depression, self-denial.” In this way Rich reverses the
relations between gender and sexuality presented in both naturalizing and
some psychoanalytic theories. Instead of heterosexuality being essentially
intertwined with femininity, lesbianism becomes the hallmark of
authenticated female existence: the sign of the woman-identified woman.
However, in Rich’s discussion lesbianism appears to be less about sexuality
and more about resistance for women against patriarchy. Echoing Rich’s
concept Sheila Jeffreys also considers the demolition of heterosexual desire
as an essential step on the way to women’s liberation. Cora Kaplan,
however, argues that such a stand amounts to “naturalistic essentialism”,
asserting that for Rich “female heterosexuality is socially constructed and
female homosexuality is natural…. Political lesbianism is more than a
strategic position for feminism, it is a return to nature.”

In Rich’s concept anything that provides an experience specific to
women only, like the infant suckling at the mother’s breast which attaches
the woman back to the body and sensations of her mother, is a lesbian
experience. In this way every woman moves in and out of this continuum,
whether she identifies herself as lesbian or not. Thus the threads that
connect women to one another are spread throughout history. If the degree
and ways, through which heterosexuality was imposed, are studied
carefully, a whole range of women-identified relationships appear clearly,
whether the Beguines of the twelfth century, the more celebrated Lesbians
of the women’s school around Sappho of the 7th century B.C., the secret
economic networks reported among African women, the Chinese marriage-resistance sisterhoods or Emily Dickinson. One fact very clearly comes out that "women have always resisted male tyranny". Rich says that a feminism of action, though often supported by a theory, has regularly "re-emerged" in every culture and in every period. Rich rejects outright Dinnerstein's viewpoint that women have simply cooperated with men in the "sexual arrangements" of history.

Rich argues that heterosexuality is imposed on women both forcibly and ideologically. There is an actual identifiable system of heterosexual propaganda, of interpreting women as existing for the sexual use of men, which extends beyond "sex role" or "gender" stereotyping or "sexist imagery" to comprise a great number of verbal and non-verbal messages. Rich calls this "control of consciousness". The possibility of a woman who refuses to be a sexual commodity – the lesbian possibility – is "buried, erased, occluded, distorted, misnamed, and driven underground." Rejecting Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's study that women who married, remained married, yet lived in a deeply female emotional world, "preferred" or "chose" heterosexuality, Rich suggests that women have married because it was essential to survive economically, to have children who would not face economic deprivation, to be respectable, to do what was supposed of women, and because heterosexual romance has been depicted as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment. They might sincerely or ambivalently have complied with the institution, but their feelings and sensuality have not been subdued or restricted within it. Rich calls this "double life": an "apparent acquiescence to an institution founded on male interest and prerogative". This life has been characteristic of female experience. Toni Morrison, in her novel *Sula,* beautifully depicts this double life which women live:
Nel was the one person who had wanted nothing from her. who had accepted all aspects of her. Nel was one of the reasons *Sula* had drifted back to Medallion. The men had merged into one large personality: the same language of love, the same entertainments of love, the same cooling of love. Whenever she introduced her private thoughts into their rubbings and goings, they hooded their eyes. They taught her nothing but love tricks, shared nothing but worry, gave nothing but money. She had been looking all along for a friend, and it took her awhile to discover that a lover was not a comrade and could never be for a woman.41

Rich believes that lesbians have historically been denied of a political existence through "inclusion" as female versions of male homosexuality. And by projecting lesbian existence equal to male homosexuality, as both are denounced, there is an effort to "erase" female reality once more. Rich visualizes lesbian experience as a completely female experience like motherhood, with specific oppressions, meanings and powers which cannot be realized if women simply place it with other sexually denounced existences. Just as the term *parenting* hides the specific and important reality of being a parent who is actually a mother, the term gay has the potential of blurring the very outlines women are supposed to be aware of, which are of decisive significance for feminism and for the freedom of women as a group.

Rich perceives women identification as a fountain-head of energy and female power which is "curtailed and contained" under the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. The rejection of this reality and conspicuity of women's passion for women, women's preference of women as friends, life partners, and community, and the effort to obliterate such bonds and
disintegrate under intense force, is an effort to perpetuate their slavery which means an unpredictable loss of the power of all women to change the social structure of the sexes, to free themselves and each other. Rich says that the “lie” of compulsory heterosexuality not only affects the feminist scholarship but colours every aspect of a woman’s life. This lie is many-layered. In Western culture, one layer is the romantic one which expresses that women are essentially attracted to men even when that pull is suicidal, it is still an “organic imperative”. In the practice of social sciences it expresses that the primary love between the sexes is “normal” that women need men who can provide social and economic security, that those women who do not submit their primary intensity to men must be, in functional terms, denounced to an even more dissolute outsider-hood than their outsider-hood as women. There is another layer of the lie that women are attached to women out of hatred for men. Lesbian existence is also projected as mere shelter from male tyranny, rather than as “an electric and empowering charge” between women.42

(v) Lesbian Continuum in her Poetry

Adrienne Rich’s poetry presents a wide spectrum of lesbian experience and takes her concept of lesbian continuum to new heights. In “The Blue Ghazals” she writes that “The moment when a feeling enters the body / is political. This touch is political.”43 This realization comes from the fact that sex is not enough to link men and women:

Plugged-in to her body
he came the whole way
but it makes no difference
If not this then what
would fuse a connection44
She struggles to understand the "tragedy of sex" and reaches to the conclusion that "this world gives no room/ to be what we dreamt of being." She decides to dissociate herself from the heterosexual culture and fight against it: "I identified myself as a radical feminist and soon after – not as a political act but out of powerful and unmistakable feelings – as a lesbian." In "Diving into the Wreck," Rich talks about the confusions of history and sexuality, the damages, the riches rotting and waiting to be opened. The speaker perceives herself as poet of a necessary, unmediated truth – the truth of the wreck – that has been deformed by the patriarchal book of myths. "The drowned face always staring/toward the sun" implies that this wreck is the death of patriarchal culture, dead because its eyes can turn only toward the sun. Later, the speaker, subsuming all gender positions in her voice, proclaims. "I am he/whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes." The "open eyes" allude to "those are pearls that were his eyes." the great sea-change undergone by the dead father. The truth of the wreck deformed by masculine myth is that sea-change is a good thing. The "ribs of the disaster" are "curbing their assertion": out of "disaster" the (self-) destruction of patriarchal culture, comes the "assertion" of the female "treasures that prevail" in the "deep element". The speaker continues with her role of the wreck's sea-changed paternal owner to tell the truth about the patriarchal existence, its rotten cargo of semi-precious exploited goods, taken for profit out of colonized mother-earth by men, its useless, "fouled" instruments of navigation which effectively "once held to a course". These are not the treasures which prevail. Finally the poem reaches the conclusion that the very act of facing the wreck, the task of rewriting the story of the wreck, the story of sea change, as a book of feminine truth rather than a book of false patriarchal myth, is the real treasure that prevails:
We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.\textsuperscript{52}

"Back to this scene" implies the womb-return metaphor that underlies the whole poem. The last four lines clearly manifest the poem's feminist position: the book of myths' deformation of the truth of the wreck is a result of its erasure of "our" names from the cultural history. The maternal feminine element in which we take our plunge in this poem is destructive only to dying patriarchy. For women it is a source of new cultural truth-telling, a fountain-head for a whole new poetry "beginning here".

In the early 1970s, Rich took the risk of uncovering the suppressed sexual and psychological materials that she had once covered and from which she had subsequently reverberated. She proclaims that freedom in her poem "Re-forming the Crystal". Addressed to man, this poem gives him his due, and discharge. The speaker tries to imagine how male sexuality "feels" and what does it "desire". This woman has got new energy and she "calculates" what has gone with her:

In my head I am already threading the beltways
that rim this city,
all the old roads that used to wander the country
having been lost.
Tonight I understand
my photo on the license is not me
my
name on the marriage contract was not mine.53

She realizes how her mother was "silenced" by her father even before her birth. Shattering down the old identities, she desires to make a new identity based on the relationship with other women. This desire is not "trivial": "I can compare it with the greatest of those accidents. But the energy it draws on might lead to racing a cold engine, crackling the cold spiderweb, parachuting into the field of a poem wired with danger, or to a trip through gorges and canyons, into the cratered night of female memory, where delicately and with intense care the chieftainess inscribes upon the ribs of the volcano the name of the one she has chosen".54

Importantly this poem shifts straight columns of poetry with paragraphs of prose. Catharine Stimpson calls Rich a "sophisticated" learner of the genetics of the text who tenaciously crosses autobiography with biography: polemic with scholarship; political theory with literary criticism".55 Partly, her experimentations with genetic connections are the "deconstructive" signs of post-modernism. In greater part, her blending of "subjective" and objective genres, advocacy and argument, exhibits her vision of their inseparable existence. Her style also symbolises the position of contemporary, educated women who cannot be forced to select between public and private lives, they can live both – at the same time. They cannot be forced to select between writing about public or private concerns, they can pick up both – at the same time.

In an interview with Diana Middlebrook in Poets in Person. Rich says, "It was enormously important to me that lesbian poets... were clearly writing and visibly writing as lesbians and so I feel as though I was very
much empowered to go on and write out of those parts of myself by the fact that other women were clearly doing that. Her poetic temperament also exhibits a turn towards an exploration of relation between women. Poems like “Waking in the Dark”, “Incipience”, “Dialogue”, “The Phenomenology of Anger”, “Translations” and “Meditations for a Savage Child” vividly presents her dissatisfaction with existing heterosexual relationships and her increasing faith in the lesbian relationships which include sex in its “broadest” sense, not merely sexual desire. Thus, “After Twenty Years” shows women together in one space. Their relationship is ambiguous. As they are “in the prime of life” they could be sisters, friends, lovers or different other selves as the poem later suggests. “It is strange to be so many women” but it proclaims that she/they will “flow into history now as the women of their time”.

The important aspect of these poems is that even where they can be read as a woman’s exploration of self, this exploration is perceived as a relational one, a conversation between one female self and another. There is a constant process of trying to understand that other female self: thus in “Translations” the persona imagines a woman whose man is in another relationship as having a ‘sister’ turn ‘enemy’ through this act which the new female lower cannot discuss as a grief “shared, unnecessary / and political.” An urge for all inclusive sisterhood that transcends differences among women is very intensively felt in Rich’s poetry. Hers is an ideal world where everyone is free to live one’s life the way one wants it to. Drawing on Plato’s cave myth. Rich says of lesbian existence in her poem “Origins and History of Consciousness”.

I want to call this life.

But I can’t call it life until we start to move
Beyond this secret circle of fire
Where our bodies are giant shadows flung on a wall
Where the night becomes our inner darkness...  

Rich wants to reject the practice of defining women in relation to men. Like Monique Wittig, Rich presents lesbian love as a paradigm of female sexuality which cannot either be defined by men or exploited by a phallocentric political system.

Rich’s most sustained declaration of lesbianism is her sequence “Twenty-One Love Poems”. Olga Broumas says that, “The gesture of these poems is one of desire for a totality of living, openness, communication and trust, in the new, the immediate, the real”. Rich is concerned here with two civilizations. The first is “this still unexcavated hole/ called civilization, this act of translation, this half-world” in which women are forced to live. Rich’s disloyalty to this “civilization” is immediately clear, for the culture of the sons of educated men displays at its peak its most meaningful artifacts: the imagery of violence, human distortion, gynephobia, horror. Rich wants to put beside this civilization, as opposition and reproach, another conception of civilization – one that is women-centered, women-identified, women-created. As women do not have any model before them except the present repressive patriarchal system, so they will require a lot of energy and imagination to create this new world for them. She writes “No one has imagined us”. She wants to convey that no man, no work of literature, no part of patriarchal culture has ever thought of the possibility of two women together, loving each other and this as the starting of a new woman-centered civilization. For this difficult task women need to grasp their “lives inseparable/ from those rancid dreams, that blurt of metal, those disgraces.” Expressing “the desire to show you, to everyone I love/
move openly together." This poem offers a *femmage* to a lesbian love-relationship. Against the violent past, "freighted with different languages, different meanings" the persona asserts. "The woman who cherished / her suffering is dead. I am her descendant. / I love the scar tissue she handed on to me. / but I want to go on from here with you." This forms a refusal to be cast in the role of victim; it is an act of defiance further revealed in the statement that "Only she who says / she did not choose, is the loser in the end." Affirmation, in this sequence of poems, comes in the form of voluntarism, the emphasis upon the possibility of control: "No one’s fated or doomed to love anyone./ The accidents happen, we are not heroines. / they happen in our lives like car crashes." culminating in the concluding poem in which versions of the word "choose" figure thrice. The resolution that "I mean to go on living" is emphasized in the full realization that "two women together is a work / nothing in civilization has made simple" because "we’re out in a country that has no language/no laws" and "whatever we do together is pure invention." "Twenty-One Love Poems" explores emotional complexity and ambivalence in addition to the pleasures and joys of a relationship, and these poems admit the loneliness and separation that result from failed love:

and I discern a woman
I loved, drowning in secrets. fear wound round her throat
and choking her like hair. And this is she
with whom I tried to speak. whose hurt. expressive head
turning aside from pain. is dragged down deeper
where it cannot hear me,
and soon I shall know I was talking to my own soul."
Although the poet’s lover fails to accept the relationship publicly, these poems affirm shared love while accepting pain, anger, and fear:

this we were, this is how we tried to love.
and these are the forces they had ranged against us.
and these are the forces we have ranged within us.
within us and against us, against us and within us.\textsuperscript{75}

These poems, poignantly present Rich’s concept that institutionalized heterosexuality robs women of their freedom, dignity, and sexual potential, which also includes the potential of loving and being loved by women in mutuality and integrity. She puts emphasis on the fact that the nature of female sexuality is defined as shame and guilt in order to control women’s behaviour.

(vi) Theoretical Importance of Rich’s Thoughts

If women want to change themselves and their social relations, if they want to liberate themselves and each other, they must revive that lesbianism hidden or denied, feared or despised. Lesbianism, says Catherine Stimpson, is an “imperative”. not because Rich claims so, but because it is a “wellspring” of identity that should be sprung if women want to demand any authentic identity at all. Rich says, “It is the lesbian in us who is creative, for the dutiful daughter of the fathers in us is only a hack.”\textsuperscript{76} Through her theories Rich tries to reverse the accusatory slander that lesbianism is “unnatural”. For her, what is “unnatural” is not the lesbian presence but the absence, of women’s bodies, to be “homesick….for a woman….\textsuperscript{77} In the 1970s, her theories were influenced by, and influences on, the cultural feminism that was a vital factor in feminist thinking, particularly about sexuality, culture, and identity.\textsuperscript{78} Restructuring and
eroticizing the 19th century ideologies of gender, with their endorsement of female and male divisions. Cultural feminism seems to categorise the world into female and male; to idealize female sexuality and being, and to demonize male sexuality and doing. Ironically, it has the effect of perpetuating a conservative ideology that prefers divinely authorised gender roles and "female" and "male" behaviours. It seems to consider gender and sex as altogether separate categories. Judith Butler says that if we accept that gender is constructed and that it is not in any way "naturally" linked to sex, then the distinction between gender and sex seems to be increasingly unstable. In that case, gender is greatly independent of sex, "a free-floating artifice" as she puts it, asking the question as to whether "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender. Butler thinks that sex was always already gender, so that the sex/gender distinction is actually not a distinction at all. She rejects the view that either gender or sex is an "abiding substance" by arguing that a heterosexual, heterosexist culture establishes the coherence of those categories in order to perpetuate and maintain what Adrienne Rich calls "compulsory heterosexuality" – the dominant order in which men and women are required or even forced to be heterosexual. Butler emphasises that gender identities that do not conform to the system of "compulsory and naturalised heterosexuality" reveal how gender norms are socially instituted and maintained.

Regarding Rich's article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" as a "necessary first step" to further thinking, Ann Ferguson finds "serious flaws" in it from a socialist feminist perspective. Building on de Beauvoir's premise that women are originally homosexual and lesbianism is a deliberate refusal to resign to the compelling force of heterosexual ideology, a refusal that works as an underground feminist resistance to patriarchy. Rich argued that "lesbian continuum" could include
all women identified experience whether or not women desire sexual experience with women. Thus, constructing a lesbian – feminist approach to lesbian history Rich writes that “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 the ways that women-loving women have been nay-sayers to male possession and control of women.”

Ferguson argues that to use such an approach to find out “nascent undefined feminism” in any historical era, the feminist historian should know what she is searching for. She should have a clear understanding of the implications arising from the concept lesbian so as to be able to identify such women. While Rich visualizes lesbian identity as a transhistorical and crosscultural phenomenon, on the contrary, Ferguson considers it a historical phenomenon, which cannot be applied to all societies and all periods of history. Ferguson thinks that Rich’s view that the extent to which a woman is sexually and emotionally free from men while connecting with women measures resistance to patriarchy “oversimplifies and romanticizes” the idea of such resistance without actually defining the conditions that make for successful resistance rather than mere victimization. Though she agrees with Rich’s view that some of the clinical definitions of lesbian try to separate the erotic from female friendship and thus limit the erotic itself.

Ferguson finds another problem in Rich’s definition of lesbian continuum. According to her, Rich does not clearly differentiate between three different aims of definitional strategy: first, valorizing the concept lesbian; second, providing a socio-political definition of the contemporary lesbian community; and thirdly, reconceptualizing history from a lesbian
and feminist perspective. These aims are conceptually different and may not be attainable by one concept – the lesbian continuum.

Rich gives two primary suppositions in her defence of the lesbian continuum as a construct to understand female resistance to patriarchy. First, she supposes that the institution of compulsory heterosexuality is the key mechanism underlying and perpetuating male dominance. Second, she thinks that all heterosexual relations are compulsory relations. As Rich does not provide any arguments to sustain these crucial suppositions. Ferguson takes it as a serious flaw. She does not consider the suppression of lesbian relations the sufficient factor to male domination. Rather there are some other factors that contribute to the overall structure of male domination through the institution of heterosexuality like the control of female biological reproduction, male control of state and political power and economic systems that include discrimination based on class and race.

Ferguson argues that by targeting heterosexuality as the key mechanism of male domination Rich romanticizes lesbianism and overlooks the actual condition of individual lesbian or heterosexual women’s lives. Calling women who put resistance to patriarchy the lesbian continuum supposes, not only that all lesbians have resisted patriarchy, but that all real patriarchal resisters are lesbians or approach lesbianism. It also negates the “old lesbian” subculture that includes many non-political, co-opted, and economically strong lesbians. It negates the existence of some heterosexual women who are feminists and maintain an equal relationship with men. Such women would reject that their relationships are coercive, or even that they are compelled to make their needs, self-respect, or relationship with women secondary. But Rich herself make it very clear in her afterword to the essay:
I never have maintained that heterosexual feminists are walking about in a state of "brainwashed" false consciousness.... In this paper I was trying to ask heterosexual feminists to examine their experience of heterosexuality critically and antagonistically, to critique the institution of which they are a part, to struggle with the norm and its implications for women's freedom....

Ferguson considers the concept of "compulsory heterosexuality" itself problematic. Rich seems to suggest that women who are naturally lesbians are forced by the social systems of patriarchal family to "turn to the father", hence to men. Ferguson argues that if a girl's natural love for her mother is itself because of the social fact that women, not men, mother, then neither lesbianism nor heterosexuality can be said to be women's natural or unforced sexual preference. If humans are originally bisexual or transsexual at birth, it will not work to propose that lesbianism is the more authentic sexual preference for feminists, and that heterosexual feminists who do not shift their sexual preference are simply deceiving themselves about their true sexuality.

Ferguson says that a socialist – feminist analysis of male supremacy perceives the systems that oppress women as more complicated and difficult to dislodge than does the utopian and idealist simplicity of lesbian separatism. They are multiple systems of dominance which some times approve as well as disapprove one another: capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexism, racism, imperialism. Women require, she says, autonomous groups of resisters which can oppose each of these forms of domination; but they also require connections among themselves. If feminism as a movement is really revolutionary, it cannot give precedence to one form of male domination (heterosexuality) to the exclusion of others. "One's sexual
preference may indeed be a political act, but it is not necessarily the best, nor the paradigmatic, feminist political act. Naming the continuum of resistance to patriarchy the lesbian continuum has the political implication that it is.***^86

Ferguson agrees with Rich that some trans-historical concepts are required to emphasis the continuity of women’s resistance to patriarchy. But she believes that these concepts should not overlook either the political complicity of the present challenges as feminists or the historically specific political consciousness as lesbians. “Rich’s argument, on the one hand that compulsory heterosexuality is the key mechanism of patriarchy, and on the other hand that the lesbian continuum is the key resistance to it, has both of these unfortunate consequences.”^87

Emphasizing the need of categories that exactly name and categorize the actions and lives of women, both dead and alive, who, within their given conditions, resisted the historically specific forms of domination that owned their womanly existence. Jacquelyn N. Zita rejects Ferguson’s criticism of Rich’s concept as being ahistorical, static, or falsely universalizing. She emphasises the need to understand Rich’s concept in terms of the political interpretation that she brings to her lesbianism, and that the point of debate is not whether the historically specific definition of lesbian (given by Ferguson) accurately names the lesbian existence of women, but what is being named and why. She also questions Ferguson’s three point criteria for evaluating definitional strategies. She argues that much of what is needed of the definition is concerned with the use, in this case the community use, that will be made of the term.

Ferguson’s defines a lesbian as one who “is a woman who has sexual and erotic-emotional ties primarily with women or who sees herself as
centrally involved with a community of self-identified lesbians whose sexual and erotic-emotional ties are primarily with women: and who is herself a self-identified lesbian. This refers to a rather cautiously chosen (often privileged) group of lesbian-identified women, living in the subcultures of advanced capitalist-societies. This type of culturally defined lesbianism gives a sense of continuity and belongingness by means of a community membership. The constancy and continuity of one’s actual lesbian identity depend upon community regard and respect, an identity which permeates heedless of the episodic character of a woman’s actual lesbian practices. According to Ferguson, “homosexual practices by themselves are not sufficient to constitute a homosexual identity.”

On the other hand Rich’s definition of lesbian concerns itself with the continuity of resistance that women have always shown in independent, non heterosexual and women-centered ways. Continuity is achieved by naming that straggle a lesbian struggle. The sense of continuity and shared identity is not achieved by symbolic transactions between self and other within a special linguistic community. Zita says that it is an ethnographic ascription which depends on the criteria of woman-centered resistance used to separate groups of lesbian existence from the dominant culture. She argues that Ferguson’s definition of lesbian has already snapped the roots of this continuity as her definition refers to a very modern form of lesbian existence. Rich’s concept of lesbian continuum seems to be much more promising because it is based on a commonality that unifies the different facets of lesbian living into a shared unity. This commonality comes out directly from the existence of compulsory heterosexuality as an institution, based on coercive regulations that have been essential to enforce and maintain women’s erotic loyalty and subservience to men. As Rich says, “We can say that there is a nascent feminist political content in the act of...
choosing a woman lover or life partner in the face of institutional heterosexuality. The realization of this love for one another and the courage to act on those feelings, however:

fleeting and minimal, is an awakening of the lesbian continuum in our lives. It is as if the lesbian continuum exists in the transcendental sense as a series of ‘hints’: a multitude of pulls, tugs, palpitations, and desires surfacing in the intimate episodes between women, in their discovery of mutual powers and attractions, and in the many moments quickly eclipsed by the return of repression.

These moments and impulses can be linked together to form a continuous lesbian identity, one that not only names these desires but holds to them, an identity that will acquire its expression within the historical context in which a woman lives out her existence.

Though Ferguson is partly correct in saying that Adrienne Rich fails to sort “successful resistance” from “mere victimization” by joining together “many forms: of primary intensity between and among women,” but this does not nullify the importance of Rich’s concept. In Rich’s vision, women who resist the bride price are part of the same continuum as the modern lesbian-identified dyke, “the revolting hag” and this resistance is continuously against different historically specific forms of male-dominated mastery over the female body and its cultural expression. As the historical conditions change, the possibility of resistance and its success or failure also change accordingly. The value of Rich’s concept lies in the fact of it being a “strategic term” which, Zita defines, “not only elucidates the ways in which women have always resisted male tyranny and compulsory heterosexuality, but also ways in which these episodic resistances can be
solidified and crystallized into an autonomous culture of resistance. If this cultural practice is to become revolutionary in true sense, then a sense of continuity with the past and a determined feeling of a continuum against which the degree of a women's resistance can be measured appear to be "desirable and necessary." The concept of a "lesbian continuum as a strategic term becomes a tool for articulating and making intelligible our lesbian-feminist living."^94

Zita gives four reasons for adopting the lesbian continuum. Firstly, by using this term women can stop the hysteria about "the lesbian miracle", that something eventually occurs to women out of nowhere and sometimes overnight. Secondly, by broadening the meaning of woman-centered resistance, the concept of lesbian continuum makes the quality of resistance the focal point in the life of a woman. As Rich point out, "we begin to observe behaviour, both in history and individual biography, that has hitherto been invisible or misnamed: behaviour which often constitutes, given the limits of the counterforce exerted in a given time or place, radical rebellion. And we can connect these rebellions and the necessity for them with the physical passion of woman for woman which is central to lesbian existence: the erotic sensuality that has been, precisely, the most violently erased fact of female experience."^95 Zita argues that by naming these past resistances as lesbian, women can define the lesbian option as a mode of resistance to patriarchy qualitatively different from other modes because it contains the sexual component. That is, the lesbian option, as an erotic, emotional, social, and political pledge to other women offers an option that cannot, like the options of androgyny or dual parenting, be included within the institution of heterosexuality. Likewise, it cannot be rejected as a simple negation or reaction to dehumanised heterosexuality- "it is radically other and expensive."^96 She says that the concept of lesbian continuum provides
an opportunity to ask "a whole new array of questions" related to the institution of heterosexuality. Questions that need further theoretical and political explorations. If the institution of heterosexuality is a key institution of patriarchy, the lesbian continuum offers a background against which different strategies of resistance can be evaluated.

Thirdly, it is "anti-clinical in orientation". It cleanses the concept lesbian of its clinical fixation by defining it as a political term. This continuum is not totally "reactive", rather it contains lesbian existence as a source of power and knowledge available to women, as a reality that would continue to exist outside of its present historically required form of resistance to patriarchy. Finally, the concept of lesbian continuum liberates the imagination from the either/or clinical categories of patriarchal sexual indoctrination. With the help of a continuum women can start to appreciate aspects of heterosexual women’s lives. The various ways in which women have always cared for other women without caring for men, seen each other without seeing men, and associated with each other without associating with men can be further developed by a shared and guilt-free lesbian sensibility. Zita compares the lesbian-identified consciousness with the Marxist concept of class consciousness, an awareness that exists in occult forms until gets the right conditions for the emergence of a revolutionary subject. In both of them radical resistance is always present, it only requires the right opportunity to come out. In the same way, the concept of lesbian continuum empowers women to question the polarity that divides straight and lesbian women. It does so by questioning these differences, while acknowledging the similarities, a questioning which does not allow dishonesty or dread about women’s mutually found differences. Zita writes, "the idea of lesbian continuum opens to new interrogation the institution of heterosexuality as one of the core institutions in the oppression and
exploitation of women’s lives. Only against the background of a lesbian continuum does the institution of heterosexuality stand out in sharp relief. A socialist feminist analysis that does not take compulsory heterosexuality seriously as the central factor in female oppression loses this insight.”
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263
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Conclusion

The poetry of Adrienne Rich presents a clear-sighted example of a poet whose work begun in a formal self-regarding manner devoid of politics: but a poet who has gone on, by virtue of attention to experience, to establish a major voice in forms clearly political. Her poetry attained maturity when she started realizing that politics was not something “out there” but something “in here” and the essence of her condition. Terrence Des Pres writes that, “thinking through the body is the bedrock of moral intelligence of much of feminist writing, a way of judging the world in direct relation to physical need and physical vulnerability, including the vulnerability of childbirth and nurturing generally.” Rich wants women to view their physicality as a “resource” rather than a destiny.”

In “Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity” Rich writes that, “The experience of motherhood was eventually to radicalize me.” Part of that radicalizing process involved Rich’s relationship to both poetry and history. In 1956 she started dating her poems by year, which marks her clear political stand:

I did it because I was finished with the idea of poem as a single, encapsulated event, a work of art complete in itself; I knew my life was changing, my work was changing and I needed to indicate to readers my sense of being engaged in a long continuous process.

This act of dating her poems was a rejection of new critical values that placed the poem outside of its cultural and historical contexts. In Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law, where Rich began dating her poems for the first time, the voice of the poet is personal and female, a technique she
deliberately adopted in an attempt to move away from the constrictions of formalism and experiment with poetic form in order to find ways to express the fragmentation and confusion she faced as a woman living in American culture in the 1960s. Albert Gelpi writes, "The verbal and metaphorical compression and the formal symmetry of the poems from the fifties had given way in the sixties to an unmetered, unrhymed line and an open form which allowed for a searching of her experience on psychological and political terms." Poems in Snapshots capture images of women, known and unknown, located within an oppressive cultural space that denies them full subjectivity.

According to Charles Altieri, Adrienne Rich's political poetry should be read in two ways: as an exploration of the life of women in contemporary culture and as an exploration of general human concerns for identity and community. Her themes revolve around two poles: the power and potential of language to determine consciousness and our lived reality, and the importance of personal experience and reflection in the creation of social community. Her writing assumes that in understanding ourselves through the past and through the language we share about that past we can try to break free of the powerful, oppressive, and misguided cultural constructs that have such power over us. Language devoid of personal experience brings deception and the space for abusive power, blockades to the politics to which Rich's poetry is committed. For Rich, vision must have an affinity for action. To a great extent, all poets are concerned with transformation. In the very making of a poem a transformation is involved from perceived reality or experience into a verbal utterance shaped by the poet's imagination and craft. But for Adrienne Rich transformation goes beyond the act of writing: it spreads to the culture at large through the
Adrienne Rich works hard to liberate women from patriarchal oppression. Her poetic discourse, in a broader sense, serves as a critique of the cultural representation of the feminine body. "The women’s body, with its potential for gestating, bringing forth and nourishing new life, has been through the ages a field of contradictions: a space invested with power, and an acute vulnerability; a numinous figure and the incarnation of evil: a hoard of ambivalences, most of which have worked to disqualify women from the collective act of defining culture."\(^5\) In Rich’s political metaphor, "patriarchal culture... has literally colonized the bodies of women."\(^6\) In challenging patriarchy’s “colonizing” of the feminine body, Rich forms new discourses of sexuality that reclaim women’s power to reshape their psychic, social, and cultural lives.

With this awareness of the feminine body, Rich labours to empower it both as subject and semiotic force in her poetry. And it is here that her poetics parallels the _écriture feminine_ of French theorists Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva. Like Cixous’s dissemination of women’s “cosmic” desire that overthrows the tyranny of masculine sexuality, centred in the phallus and encoding the body through the domination of its political anatomy. Rich’s “Re-forming the Crystal” presents the same dispersal of erotic desire. Rich’s feminist philosophy finally leads to broader “testing-grounds” of political change.

In contemporary feminism the concept of _difference_ has a central position. Like Julia Kristeva and Mary Daly. Rich uses psychoanalysis and anthropology to show that a feminine subject is differently constituted from a masculine subject. The question of motherhood, in _Of Woman Born_, has
proved to be a remarkably productive topic for Rich since she considers that mothers, not just women, are the repressed subject in patriarchy. In *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, and later writings in *Signs* and elsewhere, Rich takes that relation between reproduction and sexuality into a more radical definition of difference. In presenting a sexuality different from men, Adrienne Rich has evolved complex arguments about the differences between women, as well as between women and men, and therefore is challenging many normative values even in contemporary feminism.

A sense of identity with other women moves Rich more than any other experience (after childbirth). In the 1974 edition of her *Selected Poems* she changed the pronouns of protagonists to women. She discusses several types of female groups, from the Cambridge women in *Of Woman Born* to the more theoretical examination of Elizabeth Stanton and Susan B. Anthony’s relationship in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*. Rich discusses these groups to prove that feminist culture must emerge from an alternative feminist intellectual tradition based on friendship: “To name and found a culture of our own means a real break from the passivity of the twentieth-century Western mind.” The creation of woman’s culture is the only necessary antidote to the passivity of isolation. Hoping that the community of women will supplant the violence of patriarchal society, Rich believes that women must explore their collective experience in order to transcend the isolation of their lives.

Rich’s demand for a separate, female-identified physical and semantic space brings her close to the feminism of writers like Mary Daly or Luci Irigaray. Although Rich presents this space as primary to feminism, it is not necessarily an essential component. That is why Rich, unlike Daly, is prepared to examine in more detail the interrelationship between socialization and psychical patterns. And Rich’s proposals for alternative
models of social institutions are her best contribution to that wider feminist critique.

In “Towards a Woman - Centered University” Rich presents her idea of a women’s community:

If a truly universal and excellent-network of child care can begin to develop, if women in sufficient numbers pervade the university at all levels ... there is a strong chance that in our own time we would begin to see some true “University” of values emerging from the inadequate and distorted corpus of patriarchal knowledge.

Rich wants a society where women can experience their deepest needs and requirements for survival as sanity rather than insanity. A society where one is not required to apologize for whatever forms one wants for one’s life — whether the traditional form of family, or homosexual, or something else. A society where one simply need not waste so much energy constructing a viable existence, where mere survival would not take such a toll. A society where one does not dictate the other. Men can also join in this community and save their own lives in the process. Rich writes in a review in *Ms*:

This new culture, created and defined by women, is the great phenomenon of our century. I believe that in any genuinely human retrospect it will loom above two world wars, and several socialist revolutions ... Women’s art, though created in solitude, wells up out of community ... and, by its very existence, it strengthens the network of the community.
Rich reaches to the conclusion that what women need is the opportunity and the approval to name and describe the realities of their lives, as they have known them. For the expression of their truths women should listen to their inner selves. It is only through this expressing of the self, the speaking of women with other women, the telling of their secrets, the contrasting of wounds and the sharing of words that the patriarchal institutions can be challenged and changed. In fact, this listening and telling of women has been able to break many a silence and taboo; literally to transform forever the way they perceive, what they all, collectively, have experienced, as the daughters of women, as the mothers of children, is a tale of great importance: a tale only beginning to be told. Rich urges women to establish a close relationship with other women, and take the responsibility to express their experiences, to effort seriously to listen to each other, whether in private or in public. “In order to change what is, we need to give speech to what has been, to imagine together what might be.” In her poem “Sibling Mysteries” Rich beautifully shows how this work of listening and telling can be done by women:

Remind me how the stream
wetted the clay between our palms
and how the flame

licked it to mineral colors
how we traced our signs by torch light
in the deep chambers of the caves.

An elaborate interweaving of assonance and consonance - especially the complex patterning of the e’s and l’s - emphasizes the bond shared by
two sisters with their mother, a bond that transcends their individual separateness: "our lives were driven down the same dark canal." Rich in this poem captures the themes of chthonic mysteries, the primordial origins of the family, the denial of female power, and the craving to return to the mother. Throughout the poem, the refrain "Remind me" has been used to recapture the prehistoric past. The poem is extremely rhythmic and lines move easily and gracefully yet controlled: "Remind me how we loved our mother's body/ our mouths drawing the first / thin sweetness from her nipples." The images are striking and resonant, appealing to sight and touch: "smelling the rains before they came / feeling the fullness of the moon/ before moon rise." In an intricate structure of sound and sense – "and how we drew quills / of porcupines between our teeth / to a keen thinness" – Rich recreates the world of women's primordial power, a world that Dickinson was also trying to revive.

There comes a point where Rich seems to become impatient with the speed with which things are happening when there is an urgency in each woman’s life that may be lost, washed away like dishwater, as history does not move fast enough for her.

Trying every key in the bunch to get the door even ajar not knowing whether it is locked or simply jammed from long disuse trying the keys over and over then throwing the bunch away staring around for an axe wondering if the world can be changed like this if a life can be changed like this.

Her patience gives way and she searches for "an axe" to wield against an unyielding door. She cannot wait any longer to see changes happening by themselves. instead she will have to make them happen by crumbling down
the obstacles, the age old social systems, resisting the free flow of growth and happiness. She imagines of a new world in which women have their identities firmed in their bodies, are powerful, full of their own power, not the old patriarchal power-over but the power-to-create, power-to-think, power-to-express and concretize their visions and transform their lives and that of their children. This power will speak in them more and more as they repossess their bodies, including the discretion to mother or not to mother, and how, with whom, and when: for the fight of women to become self-determining is rooted in their bodies. She wants to destroy the institution of motherhood but not the experience of motherhood. Rather she wants to liberate the creation and nourishment of life into the same field of decision, tight, surprise, imagination and conscious intelligence, as an other difficult, but freely selected, work.

Rich imagines how it would feel to live in such a society. What would it imply to mother in a society where women were greatly valued and respected? What would it signify to bear and raise children in the fullness of power to care for them, furnish for them, in dignity and pride? What would it imply to mother in a society which had genuinely taken into consideration the issues of racism and hunger? What would it imply to mother in a society which was fully utilizing the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, physical faculties of women, in all their difference and diversity? would it imply to live and die in a culture which regarded both life and death, in which both the living world and the bodies of women were finally liberated from centuries of violation and domination. Rich calls this “the quantum leap” of the radical feminist vision. She advises women to handle this situation with courage and intelligence, firmly holding their feet on the ground where they presently are. “But nothing less than the most radical imagination will carry us beyond this place, beyond the mere struggle for survival, to that lucid
recognition of our possibilities which will keep us impatient and unresigned to mere survival.\textsuperscript{17}

Adrienne Rich's vision of a woman whose powers are balanced between the self and the world around her is quietly but poignantly presented in her poem "Transcendental Etude." The woman driving alone on an August evening surprises a deer and her fawns and thinks about the fruitfulness of nature. Her "nerves singing the immense/fragility of all this sweetness, / this green world" that "persists stubbornly".\textsuperscript{18} She thinks that a lifetime is not enough to understand it all. She realizes how unprepared we are for this study and Rich introduces the study of music as the metaphor for how we should progress: to start with the simplest exercises and slowly move to the difficult ones, "practicing till strength/ and accuracy become one with the daring / to leap into transcendence."\textsuperscript{19} But rejecting the temptation to become virtuoso, "competing/ against the world for speed and brilliance,"\textsuperscript{20} we have to cut away the "old force" and "disenthral ourselves" because

- the whole chorus throbbing at our ears
- like midges. told us nothing. nothing
- of origins. nothing we needed
- to know. nothing that could re-member us.\textsuperscript{21}

After cutting away the dross there dawns a new realisation of unity "a whole new poetry beginning here."\textsuperscript{22} The poem underlines the connections between past, present and future, nature, civilization, self and other. Here Rich emphasises the need of reverence toward life in its different forms, human and natural. The title of the poem, according to Wendy Martin, is double edged as Rich desires to be grounded in life, not released from it. For Rich, transcendence implies the dissolution of artificial
categories that hide the diversity of experience; moreover, transcendence also implies the possibility of living in harmony with nature, a promise to development, not destruction – life, not death. This knowledge and acceptance of the deep relation between nature and human life brings a vision that defeats the traditional separation of mind and body, self and other:

I am the lover and the loved.
 home and the wanderer, she who splits
 firewood and she who knocks, a stranger
 in the storm.\textsuperscript{23}

The poem ends with a beautiful section where a woman is quietly transformed into a mythic figure as her composition becomes a hope for all mankind:

Vision begins to happen in such a life
as if a woman quietly walked away
from the argument and jargon in a room
and sitting down in the kitchen, began turning in her lap
bits of yarn, calico and velvet scraps.
laying them out absently on the scrubbed boards
in the lamplight.\textsuperscript{24}

To this pattern, the woman adds “small rainbow – colored shells” “skeins of milkweed”, “the dark blue petal of the petunia”\textsuperscript{25}, and other fragments from the natural and animal world:

Such a composition has nothing to do with eternity.
the striving for greatness, brilliance –
only with the musing of a mind
one with her body. experienced fingers quietly pushing
dark against bright. silk against roughness.
pulling the tenets of a life together
with no mere will to mastery,
only care for the many-lived, unending
forms in which she finds herself.
becoming now the shred of broken glass
slicing light in a corner. dangerous
to flesh. now the plentiful. soft leaf
that wrapped round the throbbing finger. soothes the wound:
and now the stone foundation, rockshelf further
forming underneath everything that grows.  

Reuniting consciousness that has been fragmented by the patriarchal hierarchical culture, this poem captures the fluidity, concurrence, variety and diversity of experience instead of making one perception subservient to another. The past is not rejected here; instead, it provides a platform for the future. Like the “rockshelf” that works as the foundation for life in nature, the past sustains present and future lives. In this image of the woman, Rich captures her images of poetry, her concepts of language and form. her feminine consciousness with visionary power.

The wide range of Adrienne Rich’s work has merited extensive critical attention and she has left a legacy to the feminist movement which will be long lasting. Since the publication of *Diving into the Wreck*, critics have considered Rich’s poetry and prose as constituting a radical feminist politics that has significantly contributed to women’s desire in challenging a dominant, male-oriental culture. Most of the critics agree on Rich’s technical skills – her powers of expression, rhetorical energy, penetration of
observation, and knowledge of poetic tradition — however, her clear political position has given rise to protest from critics who do not agree with her views. Some don’t approve the intimate bias in her poetry. others disparage what they see as a didactic tone in her work. Her politics and her visionary anger have sparked a heated debate about the place of ideology in poetry. Some critics think that the combination of ideology and traditional poetics has given Rich the scope for experimentation. as Cooper says, “the combination that has always produced the strongest literature.”** Templeton evaluates that “Adrienne Rich’s poetry has always raised profound questions about the cultural uses of poetry. For over forty years her work has moved critics to comment on the nature of poetic art. its political significance. the character of poetic tradition, and the value of poetry as a cultural and political activity.”**

Rich’s poetry appeals not only to women involved with the feminist movement but also to the general audiences. Margaret Atwood, in a New York Times review of Rich’s Diving into the Wreck, writes. “If Adrienne Rich were not a good poet, it would be easy to classify her as just another vocal Women’s Libber. substituting polemic for poetry. simplistic messages for complex meanings. But she is a good poet, and her book is not a manifesto, though it subsumes manifestos: nor is it a proclamation, though it makes proclamations.”** Rich’s dealing of women’s issues has not restricted critical appreciation to women. Helen Vendler writes about Diving into the Wreck that Rich “forsakes distinctions between men and women. for the most part, and sees us all as crippled creatures, scarred by that process of socialization and nurture.”** Charles Altieri finds that Rich’s voice incorporates a concern for identity and community that is not gender specific. Terrence Des Pres writes. “One doesn’t have to be a woman to see the decency of feminist concerns …. Being female is not in itself the
Poet Ruthann Robson has recently written in her review of *Midnight Salvage*. "Looking back at Rich’s work, there were also always the voices of men – of men who were poets and resisters of fascism. Just as there has always been an unstinting political context into which the language of poetry intercedes." As in earlier works Rich’s latest poetry is political, positing human desire in all its forms as resistance: to death, stagnation, oppression, and totalitarianism.
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