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POETRY AND POLITICS IN ADRIENNE RICH (1951-1999)

por

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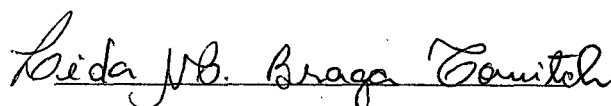
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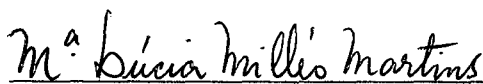
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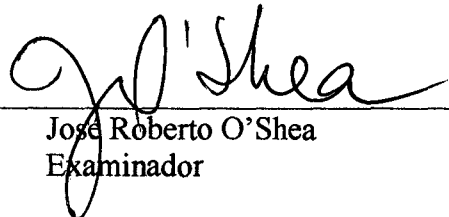


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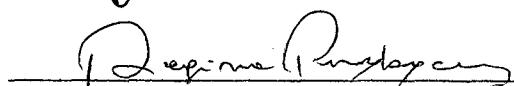
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pra minha Gaivota, 50000 anos agora

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ABSTRACT

POETRY AND POLITICS IN ADRIENNE RICH (1951-1999)**RODRIGO ESPINOSA CABRAL****UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
2001**

Supervising Professor: Dr. Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

Adrienne Rich has published 17 volumes of poems, and 4 nonfiction prose books. Since 1951, her literary achievements have increasingly stimulated critical debate, and controversy due to the intrinsic link of her work with women's liberation movements, anti-war activism, anti-Semitism and other social questions. The purpose of this study is to analyze the relation between poetry and politics in her collections of poems from 1951 to 1999, trying to accompany its development. For that, in the first chapter, Mikhail Bakhtin's and Theodor Adorno's ideas on lyric and society are discussed in relation to Adrienne Rich's essays on the matter. Subsequent chapters analyze her poems in dialogue with these theoretical premises, Rich's prose, interviews, and criticisms on her work.

RESUMO

POETRY AND POLITICS IN ADRIENNE RICH (1951-1999)**RODRIGO ESPINOSA CABRAL****UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
2001**Supervising Professor: Dr^a Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

Adrienne Rich publicou 17 livros de poesia e 4 de ensaios. Desde 1951 sua produção literária tem crescentemente estimulado debates críticos e controvérsias, devido à sua poética intrinsecamente relacionada a movimentos de libertação das mulheres, pacifismo, anti-semitismo e outras questões sociais. Este estudo tem por objetivo analisar as relações entre poesia e política na poesia de Rich de 1951 a 1999, tentando acompanhar seu desenvolvimento. Para tanto, o primeiro capítulo discute as idéias de Mikhail Bakhtin e Theodor Adorno sobre lírica e sociedade em relação às de Rich sobre o assunto. Os capítulos posteriores analisam os poemas dela em diálogo com esse embasamento teórico, entrevistas e ensaios de Rich, assim como críticas sobre a obra dela.

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Introduction

Recently, the famous critic Harold Bloom was chosen by David Lehman to edit *The Best of the Best American Poetry, 1988-1997*, published in 1998. Bloom's task was to choose seventy-five poems out of the seven hundred and fifty poems that composed the first ten volumes of the annual series. Since these ten anthologies had been edited by guest poets like John Ashbery (1988), Jorie Graham (1990), Charles Simic (1992), Adrienne Rich (1996), and James Tate (1997), Lehman—the series organizer—"thought to entrust this new task to a critic—preferably a fearless and influential one, with strong opinions, sophisticated taste, and a passion for poetry that matches any poet's," as he explains in the preface to the book.

Matching Lehman's expectations, Bloom chose "a heap of all the best [he] could find," as quoted from Bloom's introductory essay for the 1998 volume. Curiously, the critic did not select any poem from one of the ten volumes, which was the 1996 anthology edited by Adrienne Rich. Bloom justifies this omission:

One of the ten volumes is not represented at all; I failed to discover more than an authentic poem or two in it. The series editor, David Lehman, kindly suggested some possibilities, but the poets involved had done better work elsewhere in these volumes. That 1996 anthology is one of the provocations for this essay, since it seems to me monumental representation of the enemies of the aesthetic who are in the act of overwhelming us. It is of a badness not to be believed, because it follows the criteria now operative: what matters most are the race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, and political purpose of the would-be poet. I ardently wish I were being hyperbolic, but in fact I am exercising restraint, very difficult for a lifelong aesthete at the age of sixty-seven. (2)

Bloom's "restrained," but aggressive tone generates curiosity toward the excluded poems and their editor Adrienne Rich. What could be so "bad" that deserved to be excluded? Which commitment would pervade Bloom's criteria? Is not his authoritative selection a kind of censorship? In a democracy like the American, should art be limited

by a personal taste, which perhaps reflects a dominant white male elite, or should it reflect different people's needs? Why could not readers make their own choices?

This dissertation discusses some aspects of these questions, as I analyze the development of Adrienne Rich's poetry, identifying the relation between lyric and politics, and examining its social themes and historical contexts.

For that, Mikhail Bakhtin, Theodor Adorno's and Adrienne Rich's theories and ideas in connection with poetry and society are discussed in the first chapter as a support to the analysis of the poems in the following chapters. Moreover, the analyses of poems take into consideration poetic devices (images, metaphors, and form), lexical choices like the use of pronouns, the relation between early and late poems on a same subject, and their subsequent intersection with Rich's prose and criticism. Since Adrienne Rich's poetry presents an intense dialogue between her personal life and the public sphere, in the analyses, I occasionally use Rich's very name as an equivalent to terms commonly applied to represent the poet's voice, i.e., poet, speaker, lyric self, or persona.

The first chapter opposes Bakhtin's premise on the impossibility of poetry to interact with what he calls "alien discourse," i.e. society, to Adorno's propositions on the possibility of such interaction and the role of the poet in this intersection. Adrienne Rich's own ideas on the matter are also related to Bakhtin's and Adorno's. The subsequent chapters analyze Adrienne Rich's poems from 1951 to 1999 in dialogue with the theories discussed in chapter one as well as with Rich's essays, interviews, and criticisms about her own poetry.

The second chapter embraces Rich's poems written from 1951 to 1969, examining how they reflected her life as an undergraduate single girl, as a wife and mother, associating those realities to the emergence of her feminist commitment. Chapter 3

accompanies her career from 1967 to 1985, analyzing the interference of public events like the upheaval of the Vietnam War, and the strengthening of Women's Liberation movements in her poetry. The fourth chapter deals with Rich's last books from 1986 to 1999, when she develops poems more concerned, among other issues, with the privilege and responsibility of being a poet, the United States social geography, individualism, globalization, the "end" of socialism, etc.

Two criteria were used to select the corpus of thirty poems in this dissertation: 1) poems presenting a sociopolitical thematic; 2) poems which, in an interview with David Montenegro, Rich referred to as "turning point poems [in her career from 1951-1989] poems that were the result of very long struggles to understand what I was writing [and] why I needed to be writing" (268). Contemplating the first criteria the following poems were selected: From *The Diamond Cutters*, "Bears"; from *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, "The Roofwalker"; from *Leaflets*, "Nightbreak," "The Demon Lover"; from *The Will to Change*, "From a Survivor"; from *Diving into the Wreck*, "Rape"; from *The Dream of a Common Language*, "Power"; from *Time's Power*, "Delta"; from *An Atlas of the Difficult World*, the title poem, "Eastern War Time," and "Final Notations"; from *Dark Fields of the Republic*, "In Those Years," "And Now"; and from *Midnight Salvage*, the title poem, "The Art of Translation," and "Long Conversation." Considering the second criteria, the turning point poems selected were: *From A Change of World*, "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," the title poem from *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*; from *Leaflets*, "Orion"; from *The Will to Change*, "Planetarium," "The Burning of Paper in Stead of Children," "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus"; from *Diving into the Wreck*, "The Phenomenology of Anger," "Diving into the Wreck"; from *The Dream of a Common Language*, "Twenty-One Love Poems," "Natural Resources"; from *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, "For Ethel Rosenberg"; from *Your Native Land*,

Your Life, "North American Time," and "Sources." It is worth saying that some poems are analyzed in detail, whereas others are just referred to.

The academic significance of this research can be evaluated considering the importance of Adrienne Rich for American Literature, as she continues publishing poems and essays, winning literary awards, distinctions and generating debate. In practically half a century of publication, her poetry has been analyzed mainly due to its feminist and women-related features since, until the eighties, these themes seemed to dominate her books and action. Her last collections, however, present what seems to be an unfolding of this early feminist tendency into an ampler political scope.

Furthermore, since Rich's success as a committed poet has annoyed certain segments of American society and provoked polemics as the previously quoted essay confirms, her textual production becomes instigating for an academic study. In 1997, Rich called the mainstream media attention for having refused the *National Medal for the Arts* offered by President Clinton's White House. In her statement "Why I Refused the National Medal for the Arts," in the *Los Angeles Times*, Rich clarifies her attitude:

My "no" came directly out of my work as a poet and essayist and citizen drawn to the interfold of personal and public experience [. . .].

I believe in art's social presence—as breaker of official silences, as voice for those whose voices are disregarded, and as a human birthright. [. . .] Like government, art needs the participation of the many in order not to become the property of a powerful and narrowly self-interested minority [. . .].

Poetry means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of the power which holds it hostage. [. . .] A President cannot meaningfully honor certain token artists while the people at large are so dishonored [. . .] My concern for my country is inextricable from my concerns as an artist. I could not participate in a ritual which would feel so hypocritical to me. (1,4)

In proposing this "human birthright" to art, Rich establishes that every citizen has the right of producing or receiving it as a democratic tool, in accordance to his/her necessities, which tend to differ between races, gender, ethnic or religious groups etc.

Firstly moved by Adrienne Rich's poetry and secondly stimulated by the force of her essays and declarations, I was driven to believe that oppression and languages of oppression have existed in human history perhaps since the first caveman hit his/her fellow creature. As oppression repeats itself through history, it creates patterns and languages that institute conformity among the oppressed.

This chain of events seems to be unflagging, perpetuating, while the oppressed are not able to find means or a language to resist their oppressors. Examining, for instance, the fight for women rights against the repression of a patriarchal society, and their consequent advances and conquests in the twentieth century, it is inferred that through organizational political attitudes, minorities and underprivileged people can improve their human conditions.

Chapter 1

A Discussion on Poetry and Politics

"Did you do that?"

"No, you did."

Guernica's painter, Pablo Picasso, answering a Nazi officer who had asked him about the painting authorship.

In the last decades, important theorists like Mikhail Bakhtin, Theodor Adorno, and Adrienne Rich herself have joined the debate about the pros and cons of the rhetorical fusion between poetry and politics. Some affirm that poetry should not deal with politics because this would spoil its lyrical essence (the beauty of the poetic art). By contrast, others disagree, arguing that the value of poetry is increased by its connection to social and political issues.

Traditionally, art and politics have been treated as different subjects, art being an aesthetic manifestation of the self, and politics an ideological position concerning the public sphere. The very origins of poetry can explain this dichotomy. In *A Handbook to Literature*, Holman affirms that in the early Greece there was a distinction between *lyric* and *choric* poetry. Lyric poetry was meant to express "the emotion of a single singer accompanied by a lyre, and "choric" those verses which were the expression of a group and were sung by a chorus" (298). Although this distinction has become less rigid with the increasing interrelation of genres, it served to delineate the conception of the lyric as something related to the individual and his/her personal emotions.

Furthermore, some aesthetic characteristics of the lyric have contributed to trace a kind of *lyric profile* that tended to associate individualism with isolation. For example, when an early Greek lyric poet was essentially melodious, using rhythmic patterns, rhymed verses to sing his own feelings, he started concentrating on himself and ended up distancing from the public social interests. Other literary genres or types of

composition as the epic generally covered those social interests and other political concerns.

In a broader sense, for maintaining part of this division, modern and contemporary poetry have inherited from the old lyric much of their essence. This would explain in part the common sense, in which art should be related to transcendental and personal issues, feelings for example, and politics should be concerned with social problems and their possible solutions. Such perspective works as if art belonged to a somewhat aerial, imaginative and isolated realm (reminding us of a poet with his lyre in a garden, singing his experiences) while politics belonged to the common or collective sphere of daily life.

Bakhtin supports this traditional view. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel," he directly states that:

Poetic style is by convention suspended from any mutual interaction with alien discourse, any allusion to alien discourse [. . .] any sense of the boundedness, the historicity, the social determination and specificity of one's own language is alien to poetic style. (285)

Alien discourse being the other discourses that form the social, it is concluded that Bakhtin encloses poetry in a private scope, leashing it to the poet's personal language. He explains that the relation between "one's own language (as merely one of many languages in a heteroglot world) is foreign to poetic discourse" (285). For Bakhtin, although a "historically existent poet as a human being surrounded by living hetero- and polyglossia" could interact with alien discourses, "this relationship could not find a place in the *poetic style* of his work without destroying that style, without transposing it into a prosaic key and in the process turning the poet into a writer of prose." (285)

The argument Bakhtin presents for such statement is that the language of a poet is "his" language. This language has a fully immanent consciousness that expresses itself "directly and without meditation, without conditions and without distance" (285). The

poet is “utterly immersed in it, inseparable from it, [using it] as a pure and direct expression of his own intention” (285). According to Bakhtin, in poetic genres, the meaning, i.e., “semantic and expressive intentions, fully realizes itself within its own language” (285). In restricting the expression of a poet to his own immanent language, Bakhtin removes from this poet the possibility of using different voices. This restriction on a poet’s access to heteroglossia is another way of separating self and collective, limiting the channels of mediation between poetry and society.

For Adorno, in his essay “Lyric Poetry and Society,” this traditional separation between self and collective, art and politics or lyric and society is not valid. He believes that even poets and critics who conceive the lyric as something individual, isolated and opposed to society, as Bakhtin suggests, are already making a social claim within their choice. Adorno gives as example, the nineteenth century romantic poets who isolated themselves in beautiful landscapes in order to write about nature. This attitude can be interpreted either as *lyrical escapism* or as a reaction of protest because, at that time big cities like London were becoming dirty, ugly and polluted, suffering transformations motivated by the Industrial Revolution. Thus, if contextualized, a poem emphasizing the neatness and beauty of nature can be read as a political protest. Or as Adorno's proposes: “protesting against these conditions, the poem proclaims the dream of a world in which things would be different” (157).

The working mechanism of this idea is better elucidated when Adorno quotes the philosopher Hegel to explain that “the individual is rendered through the general and vice-versa” (160). For Adorno, a self-expression only flows into the artistic realm (e.g. materializing itself as a poem) when it participates of the generality or universality of the *real* world:

The generality of the lyric poem’s content is, nevertheless, essentially social in nature. Only he understands what the poem says who perceives in its solitude the

voice of humanity; indeed the loneliness of the lyric expression itself is latent in our individualistic world and, ultimately, atomistic society—just as, by contrast, its general biding validity derives from the denseness of its individuation. (156)

Adorno clarifies that the generality of lyric “is not a *volanté de tous*” (156) or the communication of what others cannot communicate. Rather, the descent into individuality, he says, is what

raises the lyric poem to the realm of the general by virtue of its bringing to light undistorted, ungrasped, things not yet subsumed—and thus the poem anticipates, in an abstract way, a condition in which no mere generalities (i.e., extreme particularities) can bind and chain that which is human. (156)

In its lyric, the poem communicates what the society is organically experiencing as exemplified before with the reference to romantic poets.

Another important point in Adorno’s argument is the issue of “spontaneity,” essential for the lyric to express genuinely its social content. He explains that, “through the individual and his spontaneity, objective historical forces rouse themselves within the poem, forces which are propelling a restricted and restricting social condition beyond itself to a more humane one” (160). Thus, moved by such forces, the poem would not be an expression of mere individuality, but the result of its natural and social biding.

Such spontaneity required by Adorno avoids what he calls misuse of art: “Can anyone but a philistine [. . .] talk about lyric poetry and society?” He answers that this suspicion “can only be obviated when lyric works are not misused as objects for the demonstration of social theses” (155). For him, in order to reveal a legitimate relation with society, in order to commit to political issues, without demonstrating social theses, lyric poems should use

their relation to social matters [to expose] something of their essential quality, something of the reason for their poetic worth. Such a relation must not lead us away from the works, it must lead us more deeply into them. This is really to be expected, however, as a moment’s reflection will show: for the meaning of a

poem is not merely the expression of individual experiences and stirrings of emotion. Rather, these become artistic only when, precisely because of their defined aesthetic form, they participate in the generality of things. (155-6)

Thus, the misuse of a lyric work occurs when it is straightly related to a given ideology. Such given ideology would interfere in the relation between poet and society, cluttering the spontaneity Adorno requires for the creation of a poem. Thus, in spite of acknowledging this reciprocity between lyric poetry and society, Adorno presents some reservations concerning the poet's behavior. For him, this relation has to flourish spontaneously, without ideological mediation.

This does not mean that the poet has to disclaim knowledge of and connection with the issues s/he is writing about. Adorno uses Goethe's premise that one does not possess what one does not understand to affirm that "knowledge has compelling authority only when it rediscovers itself in pure and utter submission to the matter at hand" (157). This pure submission avoids the "false consciousness" of ideology:

We must be especially wary of the present insufferable tendency to drag out at every slightest opportunity the concept of ideology. For ideology is untruth--false consciousness, a lie. It manifests itself in the failure of artworks, in their own intrinsic falsehood, and can be uncovered by criticism. (157)

For Adorno, the "greatness of works of art lies solely in their power to let those things be heard which ideology conceals" (157). Thus, in distinguishing commitment from tendentiousness, in his essay "Commitment," Adorno affirms that:

A committed art in a strict sense does not intend to institute measures, legislative acts, practical ceremonies as in old tendentious works against syphilis, duel, abortion or house of correction would intend; rather a committed art endeavors for an attitude. (54)¹

In this attitude, the uses of poetic devices offer the poem's committed contents a possibility of being pluralist in meaning.

On the contrary, tendentious poetry is expected to present a straightness of language in order to transfer to its readers a clearness of thought, forcing on them just

one possibility of interpretation. In tendentious poetry, the required objectivity and linearity eliminate double sense, word play, and tend to weaken the remaining fractions of art in it. This feature is supposed to damage the play of language that distinguishes poetry from other genres. Furthermore, a tendentious poet uses his/her art as propaganda for an ideology. In this misuse of art, a specific artistic form like the poem functions as an alternative channel to spread ideological, previously planned beliefs. Such planning appears in the foreground, overlaying the lyric essence that should contain the social matters spontaneously.

The search for this spontaneity drives a poet to establish a mutual interaction between poem and society, disregarding Bakhtin's affirmation that poetry is conventionally unable of such interaction. I believe that part of this mutuality lies on the interaction promoted by the poet, his/her personal experiences and the ongoing discourses, heteroglossia, and social matters in society.

I am supposing so, because in Adrienne Rich's poems some segments of society, their voices and feelings are constantly interacting with Rich's personae. This spontaneous interaction is much more vivid, humanistic and liable to errors, excesses and faults than any propagandistic text could be. The presence of this interaction tends to confer reliability to the writer, because his/her audience perceives that the poem is not a tendentious apology against a social injustice, or the expression of a cold ideology, but the result of a human experience in dialogue with a given social or political reality. This dialogue arises from the influences that a poet suffers from the contexts of production: where his/her poems are written, why they are written, for whom, under which political, historical, geographical and socio-economical situations. Such contextual heed, which is not relevant for Bakhtin, permits the interaction between the social and the poet. The poet lives in a society that furnishes him events, facts and

feelings to be written about. The society, on its turn, receives it back under the skin of poems.

In her collection of essays *What is Found There: Notes on Poetry and Politics* (WIFT), Adrienne Rich affirms that the reading of a poem "is not a spectacle nor can it be passively received" (83). For her, a poem only exists if it is read. In "Someone Is Writing a Poem," she claims that when a poem is being read it has to do with its reader. The reader has to *exist* in the poem. This identification is responsible for the reinforcement of the magnetic force that words carry in a poem. She states that, while writing, a poet sets down words "in a force field" (83). Part of this force field would be the personal history of words themselves, i.e., how the poet has personally dealt with them, "used them, doubted and relied on them in [his/her] life" (87). The other part of this *poetical power* would concern how the reader reacts to the words in the poem. How s/he feels movements, pauses, sounds, spaces, images and words that constitute the poem.

In the essay "As If Your Life Depended on It," Rich expands this idea by demanding responsibility both on the part of the reader and the poet:

You must read, and write, as if your life depended on it. ... To read as if your life depended on it would mean to let into your readings your beliefs, the swirl of your dreamlife, the physical sensations of your ordinary carnal life; and, simultaneously, to allow what you're reading to pierce the routines, safe and impermeable, in which ordinary carnal life is tracked, charted, channeled. (32)

At the same time she charges readers with this critical awareness posture, she uses irony to question some myths surrounding committed literature.

To read as if your life depended on it—but what writing can be believed? Isn't all language just manipulation? Maybe the poet has a hidden program—to recruit you to a cause, send you into the streets, to destabilize, through the sensual powers of language, your tested and tried priorities? (33)

In the passage above, there is a certain irony concerning Adrienne Rich's own work, because it is difficult to think about a "hidden program" in her poetry. Rich's poetry is

in constant dialogue with other texts produced by herself as, for example, public letters, interviews, lectures, notes refusing prizes offered from institutions she criticizes, and a vast collection of essays covering social, political, and artistic issues. Such dialogue helped Rich to construct a transparent context that supports her poetry, excluding the possibility of a “hidden agenda.”

Sporadically through her career and more strongly in her most recent volume of poems *Midnight Salvage*, Rich has opened space in her poems for the intersection of these other texts. Although this issue is more appropriately discussed in the next chapters of this work, its very nature is opposed to Bakhtin's statement. He believed that the interweaving of prose and poetry would maculate and seriously damage the poetic style, turning it into prose. In Rich's poetry, such interweaving promotes artistic innovation, turning poetry into a successful hybrid genre.

In this sense, bringing Hayden White's concepts to this question “snaking” boundaries between poetry and prose that can be perceived in a poet like Adrienne Rich cannot be taken as the annihilation of the poetic style. In his book *Tropics of Discourse*, White clarifies some reasons for the dissolution of such boundaries:

The insistence by modern Structuralist and text critics on the necessity of dissolving the distinction between prose and poetry [reveals an attempt] to identify their shared attributes as forms of linguistic behavior that are as much constitutive of their objects of representation as they are reflective of external reality, on the one side, and projective of internal emotional states, on the other.
(125)

Since there are theoretical currents admitting, recognizing or liberating the intersection of poetry and prose, Adrienne Rich's work gains relevance when she makes use of this possibility.

Perhaps it is due to her strong engagement that she proportionally demands more on her readers, asking them to give their contribution while making connections, while interpreting. This reader-centered view of poetry seems to be similar to Adorno's view.

As mentioned before, for Adorno, the reader has to be social, otherwise s/he will not grasp the meaning of a poem.

The issue of being *engagé* and how to be so is a constant preoccupation in Rich. She considers her readers when reflecting on these questions, in "Someone Is Writing a Poem:"

I can't write a poem to manipulate you; it will not succeed. Perhaps you have read such poems and decided you don't care for poetry; something turned you away. I can't write a poem from dishonest motives; it will betray its shoddy provenance, like an ill-made tool, a scissors, a drill, it will not serve its purpose, it will come apart in your hands at the point of stress. I can't write a poem simply from good intentions, wanting to set things right, make it all better; the energy will leak out of it, it will end by meaning less than it says. (84)

In order to have a reader able to identify the concerns above and able to be in dialogue with the poet, Rich affirms that poetry needs to be better taught in schools and would have to be theme of "excellent, exciting" programs on television and radio. She also suggests "poetry videos, like music videos, to bring poems to a mass audience" (WIFT 35). Projects like that would be a way of putting poetry in front of society again. Though this would require a significant financial resources in terms of technology and people, it would be one way of shaking the regular structures of entertainment of the passive media nowadays.

In "The Space for Poetry," Rich cites a long list of bizarre, vulgar, populist, sadist and curious events used by "a communication system designed to separate, fragment, disinform mass audiences" (36). According to her, those marketing exciting programs

take the place of ideas, of real collective debate, vision or catharsis; [They are] excitements that come and go, flash on and off, so fast that they serve only to isolate us in the littleness of our own lives—we become incoherent to one another.

So when I speak of the lack of public space for poetry, I don't mean a mass audience of the kind that exists for commercial films, top-forty music, MTV, "best-selling" books, network television. [. . .] Poetry remains an art that can be and continues to be, produced cheaply, whose material requirements are modest. (36)

For this reason, her concept of mass audience would be different from what the owners of the means of communication have been thinking. Since Rich understands poetry almost as an artisans' outcome in an increasingly technological world, her most feasible suggestions for making poetry more available, and thus encourage the dialogue between poets and society, is a verbal, organic and interactive relation of poet and reader. Rich suggests:

There must be several thousand poetry readings—in coffeehouses, in galleries, in small basement performance spaces, on campuses, in synagogues and churches, at outdoor festivals and demonstrations, in public libraries, prisons, and community centers, in bookstores, at conferences, in theaters, bars, living rooms, barns; in the amphitheater of an urban hospital. (36)

When Rich affirms that she cannot simply plan and execute a poem about a certain subject, she is affirming a source of spontaneous and subjective criteria guiding her creation: "I can't write a poem that transcends my own limits, though poetry has often pushed me beyond old horizons, and writing a poem has shown me how far out a part of me was walking beyond the rest" (WIFT 85). These somehow mysterious ways in which a poem arrives on a piece of paper can be associated with what Adorno refers to as the spontaneity that avoids tendentiousness.

Although using different strategies, both Rich and Adorno are concerned with the same topic: removing from genuine political poetry the label of being tendentious, manipulative, and dishonest. The Brazilian critic José Guilherme Merquior joins the debate affirming that the social content of a poem should be located "in the subjective axis of its lyrical language²" (122). Merquior calls this process *lirismo social*, "social lyricism" (78). He employs this terminology when analyzing Carlos Drummond de Andrade's political poems that, according to Merquior, have their sociological value increased by the poet's expression of his individuality and subjectivity. For Merquior, social lyricism unfolds in a "sociological literature;" without aiming to be a simple

document, social lyricism presents a revealing social analysis as important as the ones commonly done with scientific procedures.

Rich believes that a poem is social if its readers make sense of it socially, in relation to their contexts. If this occurs, the elements in the poem assume an energetic sense. Rich does not demarcate a specific "place" for the social in a poem. On the contrary, she seems to use all the textual and contextual possibilities of a poem to express its social content. By textual possibilities I mean poetic choices—form, metaphors, sounds, etc.— by contextual possibilities I refer to historical facts, and Rich's interviews and essays, which retake or motivate ideas and feelings expressed in the poems.

Adorno affirms that the context allied with thematic elements "without which no verbal art can express itself [. . .] will need to be interpreted as much as the so-called formal elements [. . .] for only by means of such interpenetration does the lyric poem actually capture the historical moment" (164). In this sense, it can be said Rich's position is in accordance to Adorno's, since her poetry demonstrates a very accurate and responsible lyricism in terms of its formal elements and their consequent relation to the "historic moment," denoting her preoccupation in contextualizing her poetry.

By "responsible," I mean the social commitment that pervades her work, making her a poet concerned about the political reality of her country and planet. By "accurate," I mean Rich's rigor on lexical choices. In an interview with Montenegro in 1991, Rich confirms that even the ordinary poetical act of choosing a metaphor has a political responsibility in it. For her, in choosing metaphors, the poets must be "as aware as possible of the history and politics of the image or metaphor [they are] choosing" (259).

Perhaps one way of being aware of the power and history *behind* a chosen metaphor and somehow control it is to relate its image to the experiences lived by the

poet. In this case, through the personal data applied to a poem, the poet could be more assured of the figures s/he is invoking, since they would be straightly related to his/her own life, something s/he is supposed to be aware of. In an article entitled "Self-Reflection as Action: The Recent Work of Adrienne Rich," Charles Altieri makes some restrictions on this possibility when "the personal charge" is understood as confessional poetry. He accuses confessional poetry of reducing the quality of poems in poets like Wright, Hugo and Merrill, either for "subsuming [their self-consciousness] into craft and subtle sensations" (342), lacking responsibility for posing the poet's self in roles he does not answer for, or inversely for being "so conscious of his position that [his poems] offer only attitudes to strike" (342). Except for these reserves, Altieri is in favor of confessional poetry, finding in Rich's recent writings a poet that

develops a discursive lyric speech strong enough to absorb and transform the passive qualities of the scenic style into figures for a poetic will reconstructing the mind and forming a self committed to political identity. (343)

For him the result of this alleged equilibrium between the poet's personal life and its interaction with society is a projection of poetry "as a force within social life, a force that literally exemplifies a woman's capacity to integrate subjectivity and community, memory and potential, self-reflexive mediation and believable speech" (343).

When asked by Ruth Prince in an interview for the *Radcliffe Quarterly* if poetry could play a role in social change, Rich answered:

Yes, where poetry is liberative language, connecting the fragments within us, connecting us to others like and unlike ourselves, replenishing our desire. It's potentially catalytic speech because it's more than speech: it is associative, metaphoric, dialectical, visual, musical; in poetry words can say more than they mean and mean more than they say. In a time of frontal assaults both on language and on human solidarity, poetry can remind us of all we are in danger of losing—disturb us, embolden us out of resignation. (3)

Rich's answer works as if, for being portrayed by poetry, a given social or political question became something else. This "something else" would have the capacity to

“remind” the readers of the political question that originated it, “embolden [them] out of resignation.” In addition, for being artistically described, a given social question can be historically perpetuated in a people's culture, serving as element of reflection and discussion. Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* can be mentioned as an example of this political function of art. In depicting the horrors of the bombing of the Basque city of Guernica by German airforce during the Spanish Civil War, Picasso perpetuates a historical moment, focusing on the victims of war, suffering women, children, and animals. Through its artistic expression, the painting has a timeless characteristic that can serve as an alert for future generations of something to be avoided. Probably this perpetuation could not provoke direct social changes in large scale, but individual modifications through the contact with the exposed issue.

In her essay, *The Hermit's Scream*, Adrienne Rich asks herself "What is political activism, anyway" (57)? She answers "It's something both prepared for and spontaneous—like making poetry" (57). Her point is that when one has certain necessities and feelings privately and secretly, they can be feelings and necessities of a generation or a social group. Thus having the necessity of being a political activist can be compared to the poet's necessity of writing poems. Rich sees in poetry a potential to assemble these needs:

There is no general, collective understanding from which to move. Each takes her or his risks in isolation. We may think of ourselves as individual rebels, and individual rebels can easily be shot down. The relationship among so many feelings [and necessities] remains unclear. But these thoughts and feelings, suppressed and stored-up and whispered, have an incendiary component. You cannot tell where or how they will connect, spreading underground from rootlet to rootlet till every grass blade is afire from every other. This is that "spontaneity" which party "leaders," secret governments, and closed systems dread. Poetry, in its own way, is a carrier of the sparks, because it too comes out of silence, seeking connection with unseen other. (57)

It can be noticed that certain ideas are recurrent in Rich's speech. The image employed above of poetry as fire can be linked to the previously viewed images of poetry as *force*

field, or as *magnetic charge*. The mission or, in Rich's terminology, the *responsibility* those images seem to have is to present the reader means within which poetry can be read as a social modifier.

The idea of burning is very similar to the idea of a revolution. The principle is the same: setting fire in order to propagate energy. This energetic poetry would be used to evoke a society, sensitizing it and hopefully increase its critical awareness. Also, poetry as "a carrier of sparks" contains an uncontrolled potentiality, which is feared by "party leaders, secret governments and closed systems," for no one knows the force of such "sparks."

Consider closed systems, when artists, the press and citizens are constantly watched, and censorship restrains the expressions of society by the abuse of authority, prisons and torture. In dictatorial regimes like these, poetry has proved to be a valuable instrument for resistance, political awareness and collective motivation. Because of its devices—metaphors, word plays, puns, etc.—interacting with a restrained alien discourse, poetry offers ways of cheating censors and alerting readers.

In spite of these evidences, it cannot be denied that for a significant part of society poetry is still only related to subjects like red roses, romance, pain, nostalgia, and tightly elaborated meters, patterned rhythm and rhymes, the "old rules about 'love and dove,' 'moon and June'" (15), as the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky observed in *How Are Verses Made?* For Adrienne Rich this traditional view of poetry is responsible for the divergence between art and politics. In her essay "Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet" (BBP), she states that part of this divergence has its origins in literary anthologies in which poets were classified as "great" or "minor" reflecting "the taste of a particular time or of particular kinds of people" (241). In this literary canon,

poets frequently were thought to be "inspired by some transcendent authority and spoke from extraordinary height" (241). She argues that this

falsely mystical view of art assumes a kind of supernatural inspiration, a possession by universal forces unrelated to questions of power and privilege or the artist's relation to bread and blood. In this view, the channel of art can only become clogged and misdirected by the artist's concern with merely temporary and local disturbances. The song is higher than the struggle, and the artist must choose between politics—here defined as earth-bound factionalism, corrupt power struggles—and art, which exists on some transcendent plane. (246)

On acknowledging that such mystical view of art denies the artist the right of dealing with social issues, "questions of power and privilege," Adrienne Rich defends her trajectory as a poet engagé. As Rich explains, one of the reasons for this fear of a political art is that "it might persuade us [society] emotionally of what we think we are rationally against; it might get to us on a level we have lost touch with, undermine the safety we have built for ourselves, remind us of what is better left forgotten" (247).

In short, political art would have the potential capacity of offering a language (or languages), would be able to question the established order of society, by alerting people of social problems through an emotional (lyrical) mode. This mode, for being distinguished from the formality of a sociologic essay or for not having the objectivity and fleetingness of a journalistic text, would cause a stronger impact on its readers. From this impact, different reactions could come up, from indifference or rejection to emotional responses, self-reflections, identification or even practical attitudes.

Although committed art seems to have a social value (depending on its aesthetic qualities), some critics censure it, in different ways. According to Rich, in *BBP*, those critics state that:

political poetry, for example, is doomed to grind down into mere rhetoric jargon, to become one-dimensional, simplistic, vituperative; that in writing 'protest literature' – that is, writing from a perspective which may not be male, or white, or heterosexual, or middle-class – we sacrifice the 'universal'; that in writing of injustice we are limiting our scope, 'grinding a political axe.' (247)

Anne Herzog shares an akin idea. For her, since Rich's poetry became more political in nature,

critics express one of two reactions in their reviews: rejection of the politics as being too strident and the poetry as irrecoverably damaged by the politics, or recognition, then dismissal, of the politics in an attempt to somehow explain them away in order to preserve the poetry. (259)

In relation to those statements, Rich herself identifies a criticism leaning towards contradiction: "political poetry is suspected of immense subversive power, yet accused of being, by definition, bad writing, impotent, lacking the breadth" (BBP 247). It implies a question: how a so-called "bad writing" can present power? Rich herself seems to have an answer. In an interview to *The Seattle Times* in February, 1999, she affirmed: "political poetry is a term used [by the critics] with hostile intent, implying that [the poet] have discarded aesthetics for propaganda. [. . .] But poetry is large enough to contain the world" (2). Apparently, Rich believes in poetry's "worldly" or universal capacity of absorbing different discourses, and therefore encompassing both aesthetics and politics.

For her, a poem cannot be separated from the poet's everyday life. Since 1956, she has begun dating her poems by year, in an attempt to indicate to her readers how the social and political changes in the world related to her testimony. It was a way she found to show a "sense of being engaged in a long continuous process," which placed her poetry "in a historical continuity, not above or outside history" (BBP 247).

In the following chapters, the concepts and ideas discussed here will be in dialogue with analyses of Adrienne Rich's poems from 1951 to 1999, essays and interviews in an attempt to track the development of her poetry in social and political terms.

Chapter 1 — Endnotes

¹ Original passage in Adorno's "Engagement" ("Commitment"):

A arte engajada no seu sentido conciso não intenta instituir medidas, atos legislativos, cerimônias práticas, como antigas obras tendenciosas contra a sífilis, o duelo, o parágrafo do aborto, ou as casas de educação correcional, mas esforça-se por uma atitude. (54)

² In Portuguese: "no eixo subjetivo da linguagem" (122).

Chapter 2

From the Mimicry of a Male Poetry to the Birth of a Feminist Poetry (1951-1969)

Adrienne Rich's first collection of poems, *A Change of World*, was first published in 1951, when she was still an undergraduate in Radcliffe, for the Yale Younger Poets Series, after being selected by the renowned poet W. H. Auden. Rich was 22 years old then, and as she herself observes in her 1971 essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" (WWDA) and, by that time, she wrote under the influence of a male writing tradition remounting to Robert Frost, Dylan Thomas, John Donne, W. H. Auden, MacNiece, Wallace Stevens, and W. B. Yeats.

In her book *An American Triptych*, Wendy Martin refers to *A Change of World* as containing "artfully crafted poems about her experience and preoccupations as an undergraduate [demonstrating] command of poetic technique as a young poet" (174). Her incipient talent was praised by critics for its moderation of language, discipline and "respect to their elders" as Auden wrote in the preface of her book.

However, under the formality and bashfulness of her first volume, there are glimpses of what her work would represent in the next decades. Martin states that "praise for meeting traditional standards gave her the courage to be innovative and to break social and poetic conventions in her later work" (175). On analyzing her male writing influences, Rich verifies that:

Poems are like dreams: in them you put what you don't know you know. Looking back at poems I wrote before I was twenty-one, I'm startled because beneath the conscious craft are glimpses of the split I even then experienced between the girl who wrote the poems, who defined herself in writing poems, and the girl who was to define herself by her relationships with men. (171)

An example of this split between a conscious craft and these glimpses predicting some characteristic of her future poetry can be identified in a poem like "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers"¹.

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

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. (1-12)

Composed in three carefully rhymed stanzas, the poem can firstly seem an homage to the speaker's aunt's skills in stitching a panel with tigers. However, a detailed reading reveals images and symbols that suggest a relation of oppression concerning Aunt Jennifer and her husband.

She produces her tigers under his control, represented by "The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band [that] / Sits heavily upon [her] hand." Physically a wedding ring is light, but this one has a "massive weight" heavily *sitting* on her hand. These images construct an opposition between the couple: as a woman she has a creative force, but her husband, represented by the wedding ring, seems to control her initiative. In spite of his dominance, she embroiders tigers that "do not fear men." Tigers are both admired and feared by their force. It is said that even demons would runaway from them, a belief that explains the placement of tiger statues in front of buildings or for grave decoration. Through this symbol, her creation assumes a form of power. It is worth noting that this idea is ironically interlaced with the use of a regular meter and a craft obedient to

traditional patterns of poetry. Such formal structure can be read as a correlative of Aunt Jennifer's household confinement.

Furthermore, Aunt Jennifer is paralyzed in the poem; her only action is to stitch the tigers, her stillness contributing to compose her submission. In the last stanza, suddenly the speaker foresees Aunt Jennifer's death, however with no significant emotional change in her (personae's) mood. Jennifer's death seems only to confirm the paralysis of her life. Her remaining art, however, concedes her a sense of immortality and a freedom from the dominance she experienced while married. For presenting art as an alternative to perpetuate women historically and as a medium for women's liberation, "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" is considered one of the first feminist poems of Adrienne Rich.

In *The Aesthetics of Power: The Poetry of Adrienne Rich*, Claire Keyes notes that, at that time, Rich could not gather enough force to take over the voice of the poem, otherwise she could have written it in the first person. In a way, she was still learning how the surrounding women in her life (friends and relatives) lived and dealt with questions of creativity and domesticity. For Keyes, the tigers represent Jennifer's "unfulfilled longings" (22). They possess strength and freedom, characteristics many (perhaps most) of domestic women were lacking at that time.

In WWDA, Rich herself notes that, as an undergraduate, "it was important to [her] that Aunt Jennifer was a person as distinct from [herself] as possible—distanced by the formalism of the poem, by its objective, observant tone—even by putting the woman in a different generation" (171). Such distance as "asbestos gloves" (171) allowed her to handle issues she could not "pick up barehanded" (171). In this sense, the tigers can also be seen as elements of mediation between her longings and her poetic limits.

Although this latent tendency towards feminism is recognized by most of the critics, some of them like Kevin Stein deny it. For Stein, "early in her career Rich was

the darling of the literary patriarchy" (32). He supports such declaration by analyzing Auden's foreword to Rich's first collection. Stein understands Auden's praise only as condescension of a male inserted in a patriarchal system towards a young woman poet.

Stein's attitude can be considered harsh and unfair. He treats Auden's review (the first one written upon Rich) as a document of rebate, almost as if Auden's forewords to *A Change of World* were bones thrown in to a training dog in the craft of her predecessors. Stein misses two important points: 1) Considering its one-page length and the purpose of prefacing Rich's poem, it can be affirmed that Auden was more inclined to present the 1951 winner of Yale Series Award than to analyze her poems individually. 2) Even if Auden were interested in a deeper analysis of Rich's first collection, he probably would not have the temporal detachment needed to perceive the first glimpses of feminism, hesitant amid a conservative craft. Moreover, an elaborate concept of feminism and its importance in relation to historical facts and to art was not so spread and available in 1951 as it was in 1996 (year that Stein published his criticism). Therefore Stein demands too much on Auden and heavily diminishes young Rich's art, ignoring her first signs of feminism.

Despite recognizing these contours of feminism, Claire Keyes comments on *A Change of World* maintaining the criticism on Auden's preface: "In this way the poetry of Adrienne Rich was introduced to the public. She is a good imitator" (16). Though Keyes had recognized in her individual analysis of poems the Rich's skills in mastering a male literary tradition and craft, she does not acknowledge the limits which the historical context had imposed on Auden.

Auden probably compared Rich to her predecessors to eulogize her. Any negative criticism he could have made would be read directly as a criticism against him, since he was the editor of the Yale Series Award. He was the one to have chosen and discovered

Adrienne Rich among other poets. Besides, in that early post Second World War context, I believe that to be compared to Frost and Yeats was an important fact for a young poet, either a woman or a man. Specially in a woman's case, it was the only way of belonging, of moving from a situation of non-existence, without publishing, as Emily Dickinson had faced, to a situation of public recognition.

After that literary baptism, her poems started to reflect more and more her personal life. In 1953, she married Alfred H. Conrad, a Harvard economist, and started to live in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1955, she gave birth to her first son and published *The Diamond Cutters and Other Poems*. Once her marital and maternal life reduced immensely her time of creation, she felt divided between the demands of her new life and her incipient career. At that period, she saw her artistic needs as a poet being replaced by the domestic roles her husband, and in a way the American society in the fifties expected from her as a wife and mother.

This condition became worse as she gave birth to two more children, as described in *WWDA*: "About the time my third child was born, I felt that I had either to consider myself a failed woman and a failed poet or try to find some synthesis by which to understand what was happening to me" (173). Thus, she started to reflect more and more on the role society imposes on women, questioning patriarchal ideas like motherhood as an institution that restrains women in their biological destiny, making them renounce a series of opportunities in benefit of their children.

It is important to remember that such reflection of hers took place in the fifties, when women were beginning to untie from domesticity and patriarchal values. This context was very unproductive for Rich, who wrote just two books from 1955 to 1963, but served as an intense thought stimulator, outlining many of the steps she would take in the following decade. Thus, compressed by the demands of a marital life, in her

second collection of poems Adrienne Rich continued to affirm her name among the established patterns of poetry, without looking for a distinct voice. In an issue of the Yale Review in 1956, Randall Jarrell defined Rich as an "enchanted poet" (127), a "poet whom we see behind the clarity and gravity of Miss Rich's poems cannot help seeming to us a sort of princess in a fairy tale" (127).

An example of her continuity in terms of style is the poem "Bears." Consisted of four tercets and one quatrain, the poem uses the figure of "bears" to express, on a first level of understanding, the speaker's assemblage of fear, astonishment and pride for having dreamt of "wonderful bears," but a certain lament for awakening and losing them.

Wonderful bears that walked my room all night,
Where are you gone, your sleek and fairy fur,
Your eyes' veiled imperious light?

Brown bears as rich as mocha or as musk
White opalescent bears whose fur stood out
Electric in the deepening dusk,

And great black bears who seemed more blue than black,
More violet than blue against the dark—
Where are you now? upon what track

Mutter your muffled paws, that used to tread
So softly, surely, up the creakless stair
While I lay listening in bed?

When did I lose you? whose have you become?
Why do I wait and wait and never hear
Your thick nocturnal pacing in my room?
My bears, who keeps you now, in pride and fear? (1-16)

This early Rich could manage to explore brilliantly the sonorous aspects of a poem, fusing olfactory and visual senses. Since bears represent force, Rich's sonic bears can stand for her creative power, as a young poet immersed in late night thinking, scared and proud of her huge bear-like thoughts.

However, she does not provide evidence for this creative power, neither for any other interpretation connected to the external world. Her poem still denotes her mimicry of conservative poetic patterns, repeating the animal-mediated strategy for voicing her needs as “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” had demonstrated. In spite of that, “Bears” exposes a certain “accent” of Emily Dickinson’s influence, which may indicate Rich’s incipient movements out of the male tradition in poetry. Such resonance of Dickinson in Rich can be verified in the presence of nature forces in a domestic environment as Dickinson’s volcano in her poem number 1705, “Volcanoes be in Sicily,” which ends with the famous image: “Vesuvius at Home.” Although Rich’s second collection showed this increasing separation from a male poetics, in her twenties she was still unaware of the possibilities of a committed poetry when related to social causes. This is visible in the domestic space of “Bears,” which restrains the speaker’s scope to a nocturnal bedroom location without relating it to any external question.

As an example of contrast, if Rich had written “Bears” later in her life, the poem quite probably would lose this house-restricted geography. In this hypothesis, the bear’s disappearing in her dream could have been “rewritten” to protest in favor of the pandas endangered of extinction in China, for instance. Nevertheless, locked inside the patriarchal pressures of the poet’s marriage and incipient motherhood, “Bears” (through its melody) functions almost as a nursery rhyme, suckling and appeasing Rich’s longings for a poetry able to discuss her role as wife.

As her second book *The Diamond Cutters* continued the mimicry of conservative poetry, her poems were not yet able to fulfill her longings or to discuss women-centered and political issues openly. In spite of that, the title poem “The Diamond Cutters” contains a particularity that years later would drive Rich to consider a shift toward the importance of the images in a poem.

Superficially, the poem, which presents a tone of tribute for African cutters of diamond, suffers a considerable shift in its last two lines: "And know that Africa / Will yield you more to do." Although the persona had the intention of exalting the importance of the miners' work, these two lines can also be read as a sarcastic claim for exploitation. In this sense, the cutters would be overworking since the African continent would yield them "more to do." Besides, the poem would assume a sadistic and ecologically incorrect voice, encouraging the devastation of natural resources. Finally, this voice would do better representing the owners of diamond mines, but not the miners as the title indicated.

Rich's latter interpretation ruins her 1955 tribute, at the same time it confers the poem a possibility of interpretation completely outrageous to the cutters and ironic as a whole. The particularity mentioned above was curiously detected by Rich herself, who made a political rereading of this poem 29 years after its publication. These practically three decades unaware of what a single metaphor had caused is explained in the notes of her anthology *The Fact of a Door Frame* (1984). In an interview with David Montenegro in 1991, Rich blamed herself for not being conscious of the actual situation of African diamond miners when she wrote the poem. For her, the empirical, imaginary experience of a miner of diamonds is not sufficient for a poet to use it. Rich's re-vision of this early poem concludes that a poet cannot lack in self-experience and knowledge in choosing a metaphor. Indirectly, this remark would break a poet's necessity to rely totally on his/her instincts, or as Adorno names it "spontaneity" to write a poem, since s/he must be aware of the themes and images, which suggest some control and thinking over the first insights.

By the sixties, Rich started to substitute the traditional male aesthetic that she had learned from her father and in Radcliffe for a poetics more related to her personal life,

and in this sense more passionate. Dealing with personal issues gave her the necessary confidence to make experiments with her poetry. In a statement during a poetry reading given in 1964, thus in between *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* and *Necessities of Life*, Rich discusses this shift her technique of writing had undergone to explain the transformation her poems suffered:

I find that I can no longer go to write a poem with a neat handful of materials and express those materials according to a prior plan: the poem itself engenders new sensations, new awareness in me as it progresses. Without for one moment turning my back on conscious choice and selection, I have been increasingly willing to let the unconscious offer its materials, to listen to more than one voice of a single idea. Perhaps a simple way of putting it would be to say that instead of poem *about* experiences I am getting poems that *are* experiences, that contribute to my knowledge and my emotional life even while they reflect and assimilate it. ("Poetry and Experience: Statement at a Poetry Reading" 165)

In this excerpt, she clearly reveals having written previously plotted poems. For having been written "according to a prior plan," these poems lack the spontaneity Adorno and a later Rich herself would find crucial to write a poem.

In the same statement, Rich associates this lack of spontaneity to her academic learning of poetry: "In the period my first two books were written I felt that a poem was an arrangement of ideas and feelings, pre-determined, and it said what I had already decided it should say" (165). She was taught to write that way, but gradually she noticed that such predetermination and the "craftsman" labor of adjusting the poems to meet impositions of a given poetic tradition restricted their force. Thus, from this newborn poetry of the sixties, Rich demanded an active role, willing to produce organic poems, or in her words "poems that *are* experiences." These experiences imply an extra function of contributing to her "knowledge and emotional life even when they reflect and assimilate it" (165). She arrived at this demand for an active role in her poetry by rereading her initial poems and concluding: "Even the ones I liked best and which I felt

I'd said most, were queerly limited; that in many cases I had suppressed, omitted, falsified even, certain disturbing elements, to gain that perfection of order" (165).

Although Rich did not specify what those "disturbing elements" consisted of, perhaps they can be related to the glimpses of feminism in her early poetry visible in a poem like "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers." This assumption is based on the fact that from the *Snapshots* volume on, she started to lose connection to the traditional "perfection of order," increasing her commitment to feminist issues.

In this regard, Adrienne Rich's eight years of "pregnancy" to give birth to *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* is justified as a period in which the poet was generating a form and a technique compatible to the necessities of her emotional life, something a poem like "Bears" could not express. From 1955 to 1963, Rich faced an editorial gap filled with the essence of domesticity, with the birth and raising of three children. The publication of *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (SDL), in 1963, clearly marks a transition between her artfully crafted if male-influenced poems of the two previous books to a more incisive form of poetry.

Her third collection is directly turned to the problems faced by a young woman, wife and mother in a Cold-War-time America that started to change very fast with the popularization of television, the progressive participation of women as an economic force and the consequent empowerment of women movements. These changes brought serious consequences to the traditional male-sustained family so common until the Second World War.

Rich was in the middle of these transformations. On the one hand, she already had a degree, two praised books published, and she was young and energetic. On the other hand, she was a wife and a mother, functions that severely lessened her time for artistic creation during the fifties and early sixties. The anguish generated during that time was

responsible for a meditation about her roles as a woman, wife, mother and poet. Into the womb of this tension between institutionalized duties of motherhood and the hindrance of Rich's necessity of expressing herself, *SDL* was given birth in 1963, as the ugly, crying and bloody firstborn of a different kind of poetry in Rich's career.

Its *ugliness* can be associated to the new stylistic Rich adopted from this book on. In *SDL*, she abandoned the mimicry of male consecrated poets, discarding a great amount of her rhymes, the use of iambic verse and the majestic (princess-like) aura of her previous works. Thus, in contrast with those traditional patterns for poetry, which have conferred her the status of *princess*, it can be affirmed that *SDL* is an *ugly* form, as newborns are said to be. Nevertheless, if the critic or reader is detached from a standardized and traditional view of poetry, s/he will have more flexibility to reach other levels of comprehension, understanding *SDL* as not necessarily ugly, but different. Thereby, Albert Gelpi, in an essay recovering the development of Adrienne Rich's themes, techniques and imagery, presents a different point of view, concerning the transition Rich's poetry experienced in *SDL*:

Adrienne Rich's earlier poems were praised for their subtlety of rhythm and tone, and these unmetred lines [in *SDL*] lose none of their subtlety for being more strongly stressed and more freely paced. But in becoming more concrete, her poetry was becoming primarily more visual than aural. (286)

Gelpi goes further in his analysis and links the existence of a photographic poem called *Snapshots* to this shift from the aural to the visual. For him, "poetry functions as a vehicle for seeing and fixing what one comes to see" (286). Thus poetry would be the camera, and poems its photos (snapshots). His idea is supported by the fact that, in *SDL*, Rich began to date each of her poems, in an attempt to freeze time, as photographs do, informing their seers/readers of the historical context surrounding the poem.

Perhaps part of this enlargement in Rich's visibility comes from the use of the first pronoun "I" in her poems, something absent from her previous texts. In *WWDA*, she

details the reasons for the eight-year delay in publishing and reflects on why she was not able to use the personal pronoun by that time:

In the late fifties I was able to write, for the first time, directly about experiencing myself as a woman [. . .] in fragments during children's naps, brief hours in a library, or 3:00 A.M. after rising with a wakeful child . I despaired of doing any continuous work at this time. Yet I began to feel that my fragments and scraps had a common consciousness and a common theme, one which I would have been very unwilling to put on a paper at an earlier time because I had been taught that poetry should be "universal," which meant, of course, nonfemale. (175)

This "nonfemaleness" is intrinsically linked to her experience at that time. The formalist taught of the "universal" in poetry that Rich learnt at Radcliffe is quite similar to Bakhtin's ideas discussed in chapter one. For him, poetry would not be able to bind personal and public spheres. Through Rich's passage, it is clear that in her poetry of the fifties the interweaving of personal and public realities was not allowed. Her speakers' distance from her private reality, the use of animals mediating the voice of the poems and the mimicry of a traditional poetics can be considered elements of this "nonfemale universal" and its impositions on her female personal experiences. For Adorno, however, personal experiences can participate in this universality depending on the aesthetic form of their expression.

Fragmented in ten sections (or photographs), the poem *Snapshots* reduces the persona's responsibility in conferring it unity, at the same time it empowers her with omnipresence over different situations. These situations demonstrate Rich's capacity in collecting female routines in the public realm, in order to expose them more critically. Fusing close, private, female scopes into the "generality of things" spread in different stanzas, the author presents flashes of women's lives.

In its flashes, "Snapshots" seems to buckle down to constitute the organic *experiences* mentioned before. In its 10 sections, each one depicts a different voice, as Rich informs us: "I have been increasingly willing [. . .] to listen to more than one voice

of a single idea" (165). In the poem, the three first stanzas address three different women. The first stanza depicts a woman recalling her youth and vanity:

You, once a belle in Shreveport,
with henna-colored hair, skin like a peachbud,
still have your dresses copied from that time,
and play a Chopin prelude
called by Cortot "*Delicious recollections*
float like perfume through the memory." (1-6)

This first fragment indicates a possibility of integrating public and personal in poetry. The "you" addressed in the poem can refer to the poet in a kind of dialogue with herself. By extension, this "you" can refer to any woman that lived her youth in the forties and fifties or any other that could fit the proposed domestic and romantic situation. Thus, Rich is not just writing a third person poem about an episode distant from her personal experience as she did in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," but rather addressing her reader from a perspective based on individuation which by its "denseness," as Adorno notes, achieves a "general biding validity." (156).

Through the snapshots, the speaker can either register a social situation lived by different women or claim for a change in their attitudes.

5.
Dulce ridens, dulce loquens,
she shaves her legs until they gleam
like petrified mammoth-tusk" (49-51)

These three lines which form the whole fifth section of the poem can be used to depict how the persona manages to summarize customs society has piled over women. In other words, they show the persona moving from a particular to a general realm. The first line "sweetly laughing, sweetly speaking" borrowed from Horace (and thus from tradition) serves to illustrate the atmosphere that surrounds leg shaving in a hairdresser, in some cultures something done among talking and cheerfulness. Moreover, the use of this

motto from Latin, corroborates the lack of questioning that pervades a woman shaving her leg. She does that naturally, as one laughs and speaks.

The devotion over such banal activity is treated with irony by the persona. The shaved legs gleam like a mammoth-tusk. Since mammoths are long time extinct animals, it is inferred that the legs are fossilized i.e., they are something valuable for the others to admire in a museum for example, but they are not represented as useful walking legs, which could stand for independence and self-initiative.

As in my analogy, I am associating SDL to a newborn entity reacting to the world it has just come in, it is natural to notice its crying, that comes in the shape of words, as in SDL Rich employs other voices in her poetry, and uses the pronoun "I" to portray the life of other women. The use of different voices goes against the premise Bakhtin had acknowledged as elements which constitute the existence of a poet's work. Moreover, this heteroglossia, unavailable in Rich's previous works, is a manner of freeing herself from the confinement present in a poem like "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers." For that Rich appropriates the writings of traditional male writings to obtain authority, as well as quotes remarkable women like Emily Dickinson: "Reading while wait / for the iron to heat, / writing, *My life had stood—a Loaded Gun—*" (43-45).

Thus, in "Snapshots" each fragment brings different women in particular situations that move through domestic activities, criticizing their excessive vanity, and in the last section, proposing change. After having assumed many voices, at the end of the poem, Rich seems to be released to assume a leader's voice: "Sigh no more, ladies. / Time is male / and in his cups drinks to the fair" (94-96). Reinforced by the heteroglossia, this proposal is framed by an aesthetic form which employs short lines. Reduced in length, they gain strength due to the use of imperatives to counsel and command the reader, specifically women readers. This technique is quite different from

elaborated sentences and the iambic verse showed in the fifties, which sometimes confined meanings just to keep rhyme or meter. As many of these features are recurrent in Rich's following books, it is concluded that *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* gave birth to a kind of poetry that would guide her subsequent writings.

However, as no profound change is easily received, this book received negative criticism. Closing the analogy proposed before of SDL as the ugly, crying and bloody firstborn of Rich's new poetry, those negative reviews would be part of the labor her first social poems faced to enter the world. The importance of the poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" can also be verified by its influence on later poems like "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus" that reproduce even some of its images and words, expanding their ideas, as chapter three will demonstrate.

Although Adrienne Rich had not selected any poem of *Necessities of Life*, published in 1966, as turning points in her artistic development, this volume confirms the changes and maintains the direction she opted for from SDL on.

In a review first appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune*, the poet John Ashberry testifies Rich's movement:

Adrienne Rich is a traditional poet, but not a conventional one. She has made progress since those schoolgirlish days when she would come home from a Bach concert worried that "A too-compassionate art is half an art." Such rhetorical questions are now left behind. She speaks in dense short lines that suggest the laconic exchanges of a couple who have outlived more elaborated forms of communication. (279)

The quoted line, which in Wendy Martin's view describes how the earlier Rich "relied on the aesthetic creed that used art as a bulwark against unruly passion" (175), was taken from Rich's 1951 poem "At a Bach Concert." When compared to the poems in her first two volumes, the shift her poetics underwent in the sixties can be considered definitive, however from the mid sixties on, Adrienne Rich's poetry would suffer new incisive changes as the next chapter will analyze.

Chapter 2 - Endnotes

¹ The poems analyzed in this study were extracted from *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: Poems, Prose, Reviews and Criticism*. Exceptions are made for the poems "Bears," and "Rape" extracted from *The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems Selected and New 1950-1984* and the poems in *Dark Fields of the Republic* and *Midnight Salvage*, which were taken from the respective collections. Emily Dickinson's referred poems were collected on the worldwide web.

Chapter 3

Possibilities of a Feminist Poetry

Antiwar Activism, Androgyny, Social Lyricism and Lesbianism (1969-1986)

Leaflets (1969) is the first book Adrienne Rich wrote after having moved to New York City in 1966 and the last book she published as a heterosexual wife. In the seventies, after her husband's death, she would increase the amplitude of her feminist poetry, widening it up to lesbianism-related themes. This collection stabilizes the increasing feminist awareness Rich had been experiencing since *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, expanding its themes to questions related to her Jewish identity, to the Vietnam War, and to the so-called Cold War. The very act of "leafleting" suggested by the title can be associated to Rich's significant participation as activist in anti-war and women liberation movements in New York.

"Nightbreak" is a poem that synthesizes this thematic expansion in her poetry. In his essay "Adrienne Rich, North America East," Terrence Des Pres affirms that "the poet's openness to the world makes her vulnerable to the world's horror, especially the violence her own nation visits upon helpless children elsewhere [...]" (364). "Nightbreak" presents a political way of demonstrating how the public sphere interferes in the personal as the speaker tries to sleep but is impeded by the horrors of 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
The enemy has withdrawn
between raids become invisible
there are
 no agencies
 of relief
the darkness becomes utter

Sleep cracked and flaking
sifts over the shaken target (24-37)

If in the fifties, Adrienne Rich showed a tranquil speaker, able to sleep and even dream with ordinary issues as demonstrated in the poem "Bears," in the late sixties she is disturbed by "pieces" and "rifts" of the Vietnam War (1954-1975). These disturbing fragments are related to facts and news about the conflict, which in the poem act as splinters broken off from the bombings to provoke "wounds" in her "body." Rich's speaker acts as a receiver of the atrocities of the war. To a certain extent, the speaker's wounds are reflected in her insomnia and preoccupation.

Rich behaves as she were a real participant in the war, as if a distant fact like the bombarded village had caused actual wounds in her body, and not only on her psychological level—in her discernment or feelings about that military event as the news commonly cause. The wounds pervade the poem and can be associated with the empty spaces rifting its form and metaphorically enlarging the personae's excoriations. In addition, these gaps widen the meter and break the rhythm of the poem. Read aloud, as pauses, they suggest moments of reflection for the reader. On its turn, the lack of punctuation can be seen as a strategy to increase the bleeding in the "wounds," and to disturb the reading, emphasizing the speaker's mental turmoil in relation to the war.

Towards its end, the poem indicates pessimism:

What breaks is the night
not day The white
scar splitting
over the east (38-41)

In the passage, the night, an allusion to obscurity, terror and unrest, breaks the day. Commonly day would represent clarity, peace and in the poem's context hope, but the speaker describes it as a "white scar" (39-40) whose image can emblematically represent the suffering caused by the west (USA) "over the east" (41) (Vietnam). Even

this sad representation of the day is overcome by the "nightbreak," darkening any chance of optimism in the poem.

However, the closing image describes how the day would be, had it not been broken by the night. In this supposition, the metaphor "white scar" can mean that the nocturnal wounds were healed and scarred during the day, and the poem moves to suggest an end to the war:

The crack weeping
 Time for the pieces
 to move
 dumbly back
 toward each other. (42-46)

In this final movement, the persona imagines a soft, dumb or female-like (in the sense of silent) manner of ending the sufferings of war. Its wounds and splinters are simply moved back "toward each other" (46) as a rewound videotape, leading to the reestablishment of that lost harmony.

Other poems in Rich's fifth collection keep her thematic expansion, dealing with different political questions. In "The Demon Lover," written in 1966, the possibility of a nuclear attack is considered:

We were all sitting at table
 in a kitchen in Chicago.
 The radio had just screamed
 that Illinois was the target.
 No one felt like leaving,
 we sat by the open window
 and talked in the sunset.
I'll tell you that joke tomorrow,
you said with your saddest smile,
if I can remember. (57-66)

The fragment represents a lyrical form in which the poet exposes her citizen fragility in relation to the imminence of a devastating nuclear war. The decision of not leaving (even because there would be no escape from radiation) can be seen as an attitude towards the continuity of life, as if the people involved were demonstrating a fondness

to their friendship on the verge of enjoying their life style until the very last moment. At the same time, the use of articulated language to express hope: "*I'll tell you that joke tomorrow*" (64) is disavowed by the body language's "saddest smile" (65). This subtle opposition constitutes a lyric sorrow that pervades the situation, and manifests a human-centered criticism against war.

Thereby, in *Leaflets*, Adrienne Rich combined different poetic forms. On the one hand, the collection alternates the presence of such lyric elements with slogans Rich brought from her activism in New York. In the poem "Implosions," a single-line stanza exemplifies this use of slogans: "All wars are useless to the dead." On the other hand, the collection incorporates classical elements. In the poem "Orion," for example, Rich used the mythical giant hunter who pursued the Pleiades to depict her change in relation to this male hero, passing from admiration to criticism. Other significant changes in her work would be seen in her next book.

The Will to Change: Poems 1968-1970 published in 1971, as its title points out, marks Adrienne Rich's will to promote change through and in her poetry. In the five-section poem "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children," Rich for the first time inserts prose in her poetry:

1. My neighbor, a scientist and art-collector, telephones me in a state of violent emotion. He tells me that my son and his, aged eleven and twelve, have on the last day of school burned a mathematics textbook in the backyard. He has forbidden my son to come to his house for a week, and has forbidden his own son to leave the house during that time. "The burning of a book," he says, "arouses terrible sensations in me, memories of Hitler; there are few things that upset me so much as the idea of burning a book." (1)

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

housewife neighbors sharing secrets and experiences concerning sexuality and motherhood. In this prose fragment, the speaker's neighbor, a man, is presented as an authoritarian force forbidding children. Some lexical choices start placing him as an enemy—he has emotions, but of a "violent" sort, and in his relation to art, as a collector, he is indirectly designed as a selfish person, for desiring to own works that should belong to the collectivity.

After the prose presentation of setting and characters, the poem gains a metrical structure. Rich uses this to cite an encyclopedia and some books, among them *The Trial of Jeanne d'Arc*, the French peasant heroine whom the persona affirms to dream of "too often." Those books were cited to summarize the speaker's feelings towards them: "love and fear in a house / knowledge of the oppressor / I know it hurts to burn" (19-21). As a poet Rich loves books, even so, she recognizes in them the "knowledge of the oppressor," that brings fear. With an ambiguous expression—"I know it hurts to burn"—Rich closes the first section of the poem. The hurt can refer either to her male neighbor's hurt, who as an oppressor would feel attacked by the burning of the mathematics textbook, which would symbolize a weakening in his power, or to Joan of Arc's burning, an episode that served to deprive a female force from its strength, since Arc was burned at the stake as a witch to discourage other women from following her heroine's conduct.

In the second section, Rich reinforces the idea of "knowledge of the oppressor" (38) identifying it as being the "oppressor's language" (39). Despite her awareness, she recognizes needing "it [this oppressive language] to talk to you" (40). This "you" is anaphorically referring to her readers and cataphorically referring to a representation of the oppressed individuals as showed in the third section of the poem:

3. *People suffer highly in poverty and it takes dignity and intelligence to overcome this suffering. Some of the suffering are: a child did not had*

dinner last night: a child steal because he did not have money to buy it: to hear a mother say she do not have money to buy food for her children and to see a child without cloth it will make tears in your eyes. (41)

According to the *Norton Critical Edition's* footnote, this prose excerpt "was written by one of Rich's students in the Open Admissions Program at City College of New York" (41). Since this quotation does not observe basic grammar rules such as the distinct third person singular forms in the present tense as "a child *steal*" or "she *do not*," it is evident that Rich is appropriating an underdog language. Her strategy is to dialogue with this oppressed discourse, italicizing it and giving it visibility, since non-standard languages are often excluded from poetry. When contrasted to a poem like "Orion" in her previous volume, which recurred to a classic reference of Greek Mythology, Rich's conduct in her sixth book signalizes the will to change proposed in its title.

The fourth section of the poem reaffirms the ideas of fear and love of books in the first section, opting for a radical conclusion:

What happens between us
has happened for centuries
we know it from literature
still it happens
[.....]
there are books that describe all this
and they are useless (73-74)
[.....]
no one knows what may happen
though the books tell everything

burn the texts said Artaud (64-67, 73-74, 82-84)

The *Norton Critical Edition* provides a footnote to explain that Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) was a French surrealist poet who claimed for the burning of books, "values and structures that inform Western culture" (42). The attachment of this idea enlarges the content of a poem that seemingly started as an elaborate defense of a "supermother" towards her (naughty) son, then contrasted the existence of (an implicitly man-made)

literary system that oppresses the ones who do not have access to it by social or gender exclusion and concludes by proposing its burning.

Due to the force of the 4th section, in the final part of the poem, Rich returns to prose:

5. I am composing on the typewriter late at night, thinking of today. How well we all spoke. A language is a map of our failures. Frederick Douglass wrote an English purer than Milton's. People suffer highly in poverty. There are methods but we do not use them. Joan, who could not read, spoke some peasant form of French. Some of the suffering are: it is hard to tell the truth; this is America; I cannot touch you now. In America we have only the present tense. I am in danger. You are in danger. The burning of a book arouses no sensation in me. I know it hurts to burn. There are flames of napalm in Catonsville, Maryland. I know it hurts to burn. The typewriter is overheated, my mouth is burning, I cannot touch you and this is the oppressor's language. (86)

The fact of composing late at night can help her to gather courage and tranquility to express radical ideas since she is guarded by the murky mystery of the night. From this dark perspective she looks at or thinks of the daylight happenings. In her final reflections, Rich points out that oral and non-standard language as Joan of Arc's and Frederick Douglass' (American black abolitionist) have demonstrated power, due to its identification with the oppressed.

Thereafter, Rich applies segments of her student's prose cited in the 3rd section: "People suffer highly in poverty" and "Some of the suffering are." In voicing the oppressed, she admits limitation on her task: "I cannot touch you now," written with that formal spelling without contraction. Rich also subverts the neighbor's (the oppressor's) language: "The burning of a book arouses no sensation in me." This device equilibrates the struggle for reason. In the sequence, the burning is extended to the Catonsville episode, in which nine pacifists active in protest against the Vietnam War were tried and imprisoned for burning "several hundred draft records [i.e. papers] at a Selective Service office in Catonsville" (40). With this fact, Adrienne Rich supports her point, accusing the oppressor's language (and its "papers") of murdering innocent and

oppressed people. The utilization of a historical fact as Catonsville concedes Rich force to defend the "Burning of Papers Instead of Children," not only her own children, but also young soldiers.

Concerning this passage, Rich attains a sophisticated form of interweaving personal and public discourses, assembling social differences within the public sphere in the poetic discourse. In the poem "Planetarium," written amid the spatial race years that took men to the moon (but excluded women), Rich presents ideas that allow a better understanding of how this interweaving occurs.

In the poem, a woman speaker restores the importance of the astronomer Caroline Herschel. The speaker is in accordance to Johanna Smith's essay "What is Feminist Criticism?" where she sets purposes of gynocriticism:

To (re)study well-known women author's, another [objective] is to rediscover women's history and culture, particularly women's communities that have nurtured female creativity. Still another purpose is to discover neglected or forgotten women writers and thus to forge an alternative literary tradition, a cannon that better represents the female perspective by better representing the literary works that have been written by women." (263)

In "Planetarium," Rich revives the forgotten figure of an astronomer. In doing so through poetry, she instruments her poem with the purpose of rediscovering "women's history." This strategy is politically interesting; through her lyric, she rises oppressed women from a forgetfulness caused by patriarchal exclusions of female figures. As their history is emphasized, factual injustices are denounced—since many of those women had their merits stolen, denied or were burnt and killed because of their ideas.

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 galatic cloud so deep so invol-
 luted that a light wave could take 15
 years to travel through me And has
 taken 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. (35-45)

Clearly, she places her artistic function as a poet as more important than her biological function as a woman. In addition, she states that her ordinary life as a woman, the one which suffers pulsations is justified if instrumented, if translated into images by her poetry. These images in her poems have a power of relieving the body and reconstructing the mind, which logically had been affected by these pulsations.

Whether these "pulsations" come from elsewhere or from the speaker's inner self, this idea can be connected to Adorno's idea of mutuality of discourse between poet and society. The poet receives the pulsations and tries to translate them into images, into language. Rich's speaker is in syntony with Adorno, since he acknowledges the innate right a poet has of writing on the society s/he is a member of.

When the speaker claims to be an instrument of translation, she is being sincere to this writing right and to her inner beliefs, personal history and readers. In addition, she responds to "pulsations" that derived from her personal life, and not from a given ideology. In the moment of creation these inner elements pass from a stage of internalized forces (pulsations) to a stage in which they are externalized as images.

Alice Templeton in her book: *The Dream and the Dialogue: Adrienne Rich's Feminist Poetics*, affirms that

Rich's poetics depends on a reader's experience of her poetry. It is an event of cultural engagement in which the poems, resonating with and against each other, urge the reader to test various hermeneutic and ideological stances, and it requires the dialogic interaction among poet, poem, reader, and cultural context. For these reasons, the reader is indispensable to Rich's feminist poetics. (3)

The reader is the one to receive, for example, the "Planetarium" images. Through his/her perception the images can be understood or retranslated into several different possibilities. Such freedom conceded to the reader can be interpreted as a demonstration of the persona's disengagement from a given ideology. In addition, since Rich is

concerned with issues from multiple fields (astronomy, war, cinema, etc.) and considering that she usually does not provide notes for historical and women-related facts approached, it can be said that from *The Will to Change* on, her poetry became more reader demanding.

Another evidence of Adrienne Rich's genuineness and spontaneity in the late sixties is the perception of her poetry as something able to fail. Rich does not inform about the existence of a theory or previous study guiding her "light wave" (40) movements towards a more committed poetry, as she is still *trying* "to translate pulsations" (43). Even the translated elements, or images, are not sufficiently material or malleable to be understood linearly. She is dealing with a great amount of feelings, forces, customs and myths, or simply "pulsations," that are captured by the poetic discourse and named.

This discussion draws the conclusion that, back in 1968 when "Planetarium" was written, Rich already demonstrated roots that would allow the increasing interrelation of lyric and politics in her poems. These roots were fixed under important elements like her domain of the conservative craft and tradition, which gave her the credit to try other forms, and the aggregation of personal issues in her poetry, that opened her thematic to social problems. Since many of her social questions were faced by other women, Rich started to assume the role of a spokesperson of the women's liberation movement. In *The Will to Change*, this role is better identified in the poem "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus" as an almost heroic voice, Rich promises devotion to the causes she defends, in a conscious attitude that paradoxically takes place in a dream.

I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain powers
and those powers severely limited
by authorities whose faces I rarely see.
I am a woman in the prime of life
driving her dead poet in a black Rolls-Royce
through a landscape of twilight and thorns.

A woman with a certain mission
 which if obeyed to the letter will leave her intact.
 A woman with the nerves of a panther
 a woman with contacts among Hell's Angels
 a woman feeling the fullness of her powers
 at the precise moment when she must not use them
 a woman sworn to lucidity
 who sees through the mayhem, the smoky fires
 of these underground streets
 her dead poet learning to walk backward against the wind
 on the wrong side of the mirror. (3-18)

Part of the dreamy atmosphere of the poem is borrowed from scenes and images of Jean Cocteau's film *Orphée* (1950). These images pervade the poem, transmitting to it a tone differentiated from reality.

Claire Keyes analyzed the poem in relation to the myth of Orpheus. In her reading, the speaker assumes the role of a dead poet. For Keyes, the persona's task is obstructed by "authorities whose faces [she] rarely see[s]," at the same time she makes use of modern elements from the male sphere, such as the Rolls Royce or the friendship with the Hell's Angels.

On a first reading, the title "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus," can refer to the very moment or act of Orpheus' death. However, a close reading reveals that the poet really dreams she is the personification of the "Death of Orpheus," she is the humanized figure of Death that takes Orpheus's life and not the dead Orpheus as Keyes had affirmed. Part of the difference between these interpretations lies in the sources used. Keyes based her reading on the literary myth, while Rich is influenced by the film.

In the movie, Cocteau's, who is a Frenchman, exhibits a Latin representation of Death, which shows Death played by a powerful woman dressed in black, moving in a black Rolls Royce escorted by motorcyclists equivalent to the Hell's Angels. Rich seems to be fascinated by her. It is important to remember that in the Anglo-Saxon culture, Death is a male character with an important presence in poetry, as in Emily

Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" (Johnson's 712). Perhaps, as an Anglo-Saxon, Keyes had a natural difficulty to understand Death as female. Rich took advantage of this Latin female Death and subverted the patriarchal existing symbol of a male Death. Politically, her attitude can be interpreted as a way of diminishing men's power over women, since a male reference for Death (as well as for God) demonstrates a patriarchal orientation of language.

Rich's fascination is expressed by metaphors like "I'm a woman with nerves of a panther," an image that reproduces Death's powerful character in the movie. Those metaphorical definitions of what kind of woman she is are juxtaposed forming a chaotically-displayed universe in which the persona lives and in a way commands. There is firmness in her actions: she faces the authorities, she has this certain mission. In sum, she feels her female powers as if the poem itself were a celebration of the discovery of these powers.

However, the poem is not directly connected to the public sphere, it is just the persona's dreamy and therefore unconscious desire. The title asserts the euphoria in the poet's voice, in acknowledging that the poem is a dream, i.e., the reported celebration is unreal or at most works as a wish of the way things might have been to women. Within this wish, the speaker swears herself to lucidity, i.e., promising to be conscious. Her consciousness is translated by images, and what she sees, amid a blurred scene of confusion and violence, is her dead poet. I analyze this dead poet as a reference to the male poets who have influenced Rich's early poems, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Since "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," Adrienne Rich increased the concerns with women matters and the efforts to compose a women-centered poetry. In "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus," these concerns evolved to a source of alliance and dialogue

between speaker and readers. First, the persona creates an opposition between (public) authorities and her. After that, she uses a discourse of self-enforcement, which confers her heroic traces. At this point, when read aloud by other women, some lines in this poem can work as an evocation of forces, as a kind of prayer claiming for power, as if the speaker were liberating them. For purging her emotions and possibly relieving her readers', in *The Will to Change*, Rich incorporates a heroic or messianic element in her voice as a poet, proper to generate followers and to make her a spokeswoman. The (female) critic Keyes reveals a womanly admiration for Rich that confirms this vision of Rich as a heroine:

Significant [. . .] is that Rich assumes the role of the bard among *her* people. As a woman who dares to transcend patriarchal barriers in becoming this "bard," Rich enacts a transformation that is personal, poetic, and political. Rich can, therefore, become a model for *us* [my emphasis]; her courage, her personal honesty, and her achievement are estimable. (122)

In the early sixties, Rich criticized aspects and customs of patriarchal society in a sudden way that sounded discrepant to her earlier texts. In the 1971 collection, she assured herself of those propositions and found a language to explain the brusque change her poetry experienced in "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," asserting herself as "an instrument in the shape of a woman" and as a "woman sworn to lucidity." If compared to "Planetarium" and "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus," the poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" demonstrates words and images that help to expose roles patriarchy inputs on women, anticipating issues of her later poems. An evidence of this anticipation is the recurrence of some phrases like "In the prime of your life" as in the second stanza of SDL:

Your mind now, moldering like wedding-cake,
heavy with useless experience, rich
with suspicion, rumor, fantasy,
crumbling to pieces under the knife-edge
of mere fact. In the *prime of your life* [my emphasis]. (7-11)

Here the expression emphasizes the futility and waste of potentialities by referring to an early womanhood. It is a harsh alert over women's behavior, directly addressing a (woman) reader in the prime of her life. This alert can also refer to the poet in self-reflection, dialoguing with herself and then fusing personal and public spheres. In "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus," Rich reused this expression. The speaker here is more conscious of her powers and their repercussion, indicating to the readers that they should value the force in the prime of their lives.

In this sense, the poems in *The Will to Change* mark Rich's arrival at a stage she had willed to accomplish in SDL. In her sixth book, she consecrated herself to a lucid poetry and swore commitment to a women-centered poetry in a sometimes celebratory, sometimes elucidative manner. Thus, *The Will to Change* shimmers with its images the core of the feminist poetry Rich would achieve in her 7th volume, *Diving into the Wreck* (1973).

In 1974, one year after being published, *Diving into the Wreck* received the National Book Award. Rich accepted it along with two other nominees: Audre Lorde and Alice Walker. They decided to share the prize as a way of refusing the terms of patriarchal competition. This fact illustrates the way Adrienne Rich "embraced feminist ideology and became a spokesperson for the movement," as Keyes comments.

It is crucial to consider that the resonance obtained by Rich was firmly linked to her poetry since, in the early seventies, Rich was still an incipient author of prose. Thus, her poems, which had presented different elements as irony a decade before in *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, straight connections to political activism in *Leaflets*, or the recognition of a heroic, dreamlike and audacious tone in *The Will to Change*, increase in *Diving into the Wreck* the will Rich had manifested back in 1964: to write poems that are experiences.

Her development, however, cannot be linearly identified, since some poems still carry extremist positions. "Rape" for example generalizes all men as potential rapists, once she depicts a neighborhood policeman (someone trustable) as a rapist. In "For a Sister," the persona declares on the first line: "I trust none of them" (175) an attitude that can be extended to all men. In her review of *Diving into the Wreck*, the writer Margaret Atwood points out:

[Rich's] poems convince me most often when they are true to themselves as structures of words and images, when they resist the temptation to sloganize, when they don't preach at me. "The words are purposes. / The words are maps," Rich says, and I like them better when they are maps (though Rich would probably say the two depend on each other and I would probably agree). I respond less fully to poems like "Rape" and references to the Vietnam War—though their truth is undeniable—than I do to poems such as "From a Survivor" (282)

In short, what Atwood appreciates in Rich's political poetry is its lyricism, which is a point quite similar to the social lyricism concept seen before. This kind of lyricism is more visible in poems that merge personal aspects of her life in social situations also experienced by her readers. "From a Survivor," written in 1972, is an example of this interaction. In this poem, the speaker is making a kind of audit of her relationship with her husband: "Like everybody else, we thought of ourselves as special" (9) and a reflection of the way in which she frees herself from his body: "it is no longer / the body of a god / or anything with power over my life" (14-16). Towards the conclusion, Rich criticizes his suicide "Next year it would have been 20 years [of marriage] / and you are wastefully dead" (17-18). His absence concedes her a clearer notion of time and, from the perspective of a survivor, she lives her life "not as a leap / but a succession of brief, amazing movements / each one making possible the next" (22-24).

Such propagation of personal issues in the public realm (since the poem is read) facilitates the reader's interaction with the poem. In presenting an overview of *Diving into the Wreck*, Atwood affirms that "*Diving into the Wreck* is one of those rare books

that forces you to decide not just what you think about it, but what you think about yourself. It is a book that takes risks, and it forces the reader to take them also" (280). As a reader, Atwood recognizes the efforts Rich demands on her readers, attitude that confirms Templeton's assertion on "the dialogic interaction among poet, poem, reader, and cultural context" (3).

Atwood was moved by *Diving into the Wreck* because it was a book of her own time. It mirrors, for instance, the effervescence of women's liberation movements, talking about issues that activists and intellectually-committed artists like Atwood were experiencing on a daily basis. In this context, Rich's 1973 volume functions as a herald and a catalyzer of energies and thoughts. Even without temporal distance, Atwood perceived the difference between poetry and the regular feminist discourse by that time.

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 manifestoes; nor is it a proclamation, though it makes proclamations. Its is instead a book of explorations, or travels. The wreck she is diving into, in the very strong title poem, is the wreck of obsolete myths. (280)

Atwood found in Rich's poems not a repetition of ongoing discussions concerning feminism, nor another means to reinforce existent ideologies related to women liberation. Rather she identified a poetry that within its proper features found its own way of reacting to a given situation. Among these features (images, sounds, form, symbols, etc.) there is the use of myths, which Atwood perceives as obsolete and wrecked.

Undoubtedly, the myth has an important role in the narrative title poem "Diving into the Wreck," and consequently in the whole volume. It appears right on the first line, as something read, studied, and analyzed. The speaker's first movement is to read the book of myths, perhaps as a necessary background for the enterprise to come. In a way,

it works as if the persona were assuring her readers of the seriousness of her journey, for in regular diving the diver undergoes a physical warm up (but not a literary one as the speaker did).

The arrangements that immediately follow are more commonly related to the activity of diving. She loaded the camera and checked the edge of the knife blade, then she put on her body armor and her mask. After such preparation, the poem starts to take the reader down, into an ocean of symbols, leading to the final one at the bottom: the wreck.

During this diving, the speaker feels like an insect, small inside the hugeness of the liquid surrounding environment:

I crawl like an insect down the ladder
and there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin (30-33)

In such situation, even physical and geographical truths are mistrusted. The ocean as a vast body of water that links continents and provide minerals and food to billions of beings can be associated to maternal nourishment. Thereby, the water that composes it can be identified as belonging to the female realm. In the poem, the persona is immersed in the ocean, without perceiving its limits; this could mean that the persona is unable to name its immensity and potentialities.

At this rate, the ocean represents the unknown, the uncontrolled medium that takes the diver to his/her objective: the wreck. One possible interpretation for this liquid medium is language, or poetry itself. The diver is diving into poetry in order to reach (understand) the sunken (failed) ship in which a patriarchal culture is based. As Rich's speaker goes down, the ocean becomes darker and the purpose of the journey is clearly revealed.

I came to explore the wreck.

The words are purposes.
 The words are maps.
 I came to see the damage that was done
 and the treasures that prevail.
 I stroke the beam of my lamp
 slowly along the flank
 of something more permanent
 than fish or weed

the thing I came for:
 the wreck and not the story of the wreck
 the thing itself and not the myth (52-63)

The objective is to look at "the damage done" with poetic eyes. It is through poetry that Rich visualizes the reality, retelling it in a poetic narrative form that, as Atwood observes, forces the reader to decide what to think about it and about him/herself. This occurs because the elements in "Diving into the Wreck" suggest symbolic levels, demanding interpretation. Thus, "the thing itself," i.e., "the wreck" focuses not on myths or histories about the wreck, but on the results, on what is drowned, "the damage that was done" (55).

Since "the thing itself" is wrecked, presumably in some historic or utopian period men and women knew how to "fluctuate" or live on the earth, before the wreck. In this ideal period, humans would express their very nature, in a free context, out of social impositions or gender roles. In opposition, "the wreck" and its myths (that the diver had read before the enterprise) encompass the ways our culture has imposed differences upon men and women, differences that wrecked an equally mythicized harmony that presumably Adam and Eve could have experienced on the Eden as the progenitors of the human race.

In this sense, the speaker's search ends with an unexpected discovery:

This is the place.
 And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
 streams black, the merman in his armored body
 We circle silently about the wreck
 we dive into the hold.

I am she: I am he (71-77)

In his book *Symposium*, Plato runs over the origins of the myth to explain that:

the original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature, which had once a real existence, but is now lost, and the word 'Androgynous' is only preserved as a term of reproach. (157)

The androgynous race consisted of a state of perfect harmony, until being separated by the gods in two halves (men and women), as Plato explains: "so ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man [human being]" (158).

When the diver finally arrives at the wreck, "This is the place," the persona's essence is revealed. Adrienne Rich's speaker is an androgynous figure: "I am she: I am he." Its androgyny can be interpreted as a way Rich found to reestablish the supposed or desired harmony that existed before the wreck.

For Kevin Stein, the poem's diver

seeks nothing less than an understanding of the cultural battle and of how its history has determined the way men and women view their respective societal roles [. . .] Rich's diver desires to find the words that compose the vocabulary of power and thus control its means of distribution. (39)

This search for a vocabulary ends in the androgyny conceded to the diver. For Stein, "it is a measure of reconciliation [. . .] between men and women" (39). This idea is reinforced by the last lines of the poem in which the diver affirms to carry "a book of myths / in which / our names do not appear."

Keyes observes that: "If our names do not appear in the myths, they have no reality for us. If we are male-female, female-male, then pure "masculinity" is a myth; femininity likewise" (155). Wendy Martin extends the meaning of this androgyny beyond the sexual barriers. For her, this new human being dissolves the differences between "subject and object, mind and matter," (190) identified by her as a "Judeo-

Christian heritage of a divided world where light is separated from darkness, earth from water, [. . .] a world in which mind is divorced from the body, spirit from matter, self from society" (190).

Anywise, the issue of androgyny presented by Rich as an alternative to diminish the pressure that the myth of sexual differentiation has exerted upon society seems to be a transitory alternative in her poetry. The idea reoccurs in the poem "The Stranger," in the same volume, in which she states that: "I am the androgyne." In this poem, beyond sexuality and myth, the theme is also related to language and the psychology of beings. Perhaps a reason for abandoning the androgyny idea is Rich's disillusion with the utopian possibilities of the androgyny, as the repeatedly quoted passage of the poem "Natural Resources," written 5 years later in 1977 demonstrates: "There are words I cannot choose again: / *humanism androgyny*" (134-135).

In her next book: *Poems Selected and New 1950-1974*, published in 1975, the poet seemed to reevaluate her poetic work, while she dedicated her time to prose texts.

In its foreword, she cites difficulties faced by the woman who wrote the poems:

One task for the nineteen- or twenty-year-old poet who wrote the earliest poems here was to learn that she was neither unique nor universal, but a person in history, a woman and not a man, a white and also Jewish inheritor of a particular Western consciousness, from the making of which most women have been excluded. The learning of poetic craft was much easier than knowing what to do with it—with the powers, temptations, privileges, potential deceptions, and two-edged weapons of language.

I have never had much belief in the idea of the poet as someone of special sensitivity or spiritual insight, who rightfully lives above and off from the ordinary general life. (xv)

In 1976, Adrienne Rich published the prose treatise *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, a remarkable volume on women's liberation movements and, up to our days, Rich's best selling book, according to Amazon.com bookstore. Also in 1976, Adrienne Rich published *Twenty-One Love Poems* in a booklet edition and began life with the writer Michelle Cliff.

These "Twenty-One Love Poems" stamp her revelation as a lesbian poet and definitely discard the androgyny issue presented three years before. Thereby, if the intersections of Rich's private life and her poetry are considered, the 1972 "androgyny" can be interpreted as a transitional phase between her husband's death in 1970 and the meeting of a homosexual love some years later. In addition, "Twenty-One Love Poems" mark Adrienne Rich's return to traditional aesthetic concerns. The 22 poems that compose the collection are constructed under the "patriarchal tradition of the Elizabethan love sonnet," (41) as Kevin Stein points out. Nevertheless, in Rich's typewriter the traditional heterosexual craft addresses a daring lesbian love.

(THE FLOATING POEM, UNNUMBERED)

Whatever happens with us, your body
 will haunt mine—tender, delicate
 your lovemaking, like the half-curved frond
 of the fiddlehead fern in forests
 just washed by sun. Your traveled, generous thighs
 between which my whole face has come and come—
 the innocence and wisdom of the place my tongue has found there—
 the live, insatiate dance of your nipples in my mouth—
 your touch on me, firm, protective, searching
 me out, your strong tongue and slender fingers
 reaching where I had been waiting years for you
 in my rose-wet cave—whatever happens, this is. (1-12)

Since Rich's poem does not strictly follow a classic structure, it is inferred that Rich subverts both form and content of what would be an "Elizabethan sonnet," in order to toughen in an outspoken and erotic way the theme of a lesbian love. When contrasted to Auden's review back in 1951, this book shows how Rich has profoundly changed. Although she returned to the use of artfully crafted poems, their themes are not moderated, nor respectful to their older, qualities Auden had praised in Rich's first volume. The poem above is a good example of Rich's boldness. Also, the fact of being unnumbered, although situated amid poems 14 and 15 concedes "The Floating Poem" a

mobility to roam around the other 21 poems, which describe all phases of a relationship (from beginning to decline).

In this sense, "The Floating Poem" implicitly presents a kind of lesbian sexual elevated quality over the heterosexual, since its woman lyric self is able to recall her experiences vividly even when the relationship is over, bestowing on it a certain mobility. This mobility suggests not only the repetition of the love scene along the narrative, but its recurrence in the poet's memory, regardless of "whatever happens" opening and closing the poem.

Carol Christ informs in her essay "Homesick for a Woman, for Ourselves: Adrienne Rich." that

women relationships take place within a world that has been defined for centuries by men and that only recently is beginning to be defined by women. In Rich's vision, women's relationships with men reveal men's inability to feel, their fascination with power and control, while women's relationships with women reveal energy that can transform a culture of power and death into a culture of life and rebirth. That Rich's recent poetry has a political dimension has been obvious to serious readers of her poems—both to those who have found Rich's politics annoying and distracting and to those who have found this element enlightening and exhilarating. That Rich's poems also have a spiritual dimension has been less clearly recognized. (75)

When compared to "Rape," or "Phenomenology of Anger," poems in *Diving into the Wreck*, it is concluded that the political in these "Twenty-One Love Poems" is intrinsically connected to its form (for subverting a tradition) and lyric. Whereas in "Phenomenology of Anger," for instance, the persona directly threw dry offensive lines to "the enemy" (58): "I hate you / I hate the mask you wear, your eyes" (78-79). It works as if in "Phenomenology" what is said would be more important than how to say it, as if the anger could not coexist with a more elaborate lyricism as in her love sonnets.

In "Twenty-One Love Poems," both form and content increase the references to a lesbian love. Besides, there is no vindication or propaganda, men are not accused of crimes, nor hated, they are barely mentioned in the 22 poems. Instead, the speaker sings

her love naturally, as a traditional romantic male poet would do, in the nineteenth century, backed by the sonnet frame. Thus, rather than screaming for equal rights, Rich wittily appropriates and undermines a male tradition to validate her praise for love between women.

In 1978, Adrienne Rich published *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977*. In this volume, she republishes the *Twenty-One Love Poems* and the *New* poems from the 1975 collection along with other poems as "Power," "Natural Resources," and "A Woman Dead in her Forties." In "Power," the speaker analyses the Polish-born chemist and physicist Marie Curie, the first person to be awarded the Nobel Prize twice. She did pioneering research on radioactivity, and the poem examines the effects of this feat on her body:

she must have known she suffered from radiation sickness
 her body bombarded for years by the element
 she had purified
 It seems she denied to the end
 the source of the cataracts on her eyes
 the cracked and suppurating skin of her finger-ends
 till she could no longer hold a test-tube or a pencil

She died a famous woman denying
 her wounds
 denying
 her wounds came from the same source as her power (6-17)

Wendy Martin identifies in "the long caesuras between phrases of the final sentence" an underscored "difficulty of Marie Curie's struggle—a triumph that, ultimately, killed her" (208). In this puzzling end, Rich may be making a reference to her own poetic career, in which wounds and sufferings came from the same source as her poetic power. Although she had not died of her wounds, some of the women that "lived inside her" (the undergraduate single girl, the wife, the mother) died or were transformed.

In her eleventh collection of poems, published in 1981, this ongoing transformation gains another facet. The very title — *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me*

This Far: Poems 1978-1981— anticipates its content. The pronoun "this" in the title informs the reader of how "far" the poems in the book are from those conservative crafted poems in her first collection, since in this collection Rich increases her discussion on lesbianism and women-related issues in general.

In a sense, *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (AWP) is in dialogue with concepts Rich presented in her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," such as "lesbian existence" and "lesbian continuum." In the essay, published one year before AWP, Rich explains why she chose those terms. She says:

The word *lesbianism* has a clinical and limiting ring. *Lesbian existence* suggests both the fact of the historical presence of lesbians and [their] continuing creation of the meaning of that existence. I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include 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 sexual experience with another woman. (217)

Some of the poems in AWP reflect these further concepts on lesbian identity and show the distance Rich has traversed from her ideal of writing poems detached from a prior plan, as she expressed back in 1964. Rich tried to write these poems during the sixties and seventies and fully achieved her objective with the sophisticated lyricism of *Twenty-One Love Poems*, which reflected much of the "women-identified experience."

Claire Keyes observes that in AWP Rich's spontaneity is under the influence of her prose writings against the "patriarchal evil." Keyes argues that Rich no longer evokes her poems to obtain knowledge, but conversely inputs knowledge and ideologies in her poems:

A Wild Patience no longer gives the sense that the poet knows what she knows "through making poems." [as affirmed in 1964] Competing with the knowledge gained from poems is a prior knowledge of patriarchal evil, "colonization," and the victimization of women—as in a poem like "Frame." Competing also is a commitment to a focus on women and women's concerns and to lesbianism. This specialization leads to poems about Ethel Rosenberg but not Julius [Rosenberg], about Willa Cather ("For Julia in Nebraska") because she was a lesbian, for "Mother-in-Law," "Heroines," "Grandmothers." Rich definitely chooses her subjects; one wonders if they ever choose her. (200)

Despite this criticism, Keyes recognizes a crack in this "prior plan" in the conclusion of "For Ethel Rosenberg," when the lyric self considers the limits of her feminist politics. Ethel Rosenberg was convicted and killed in the electric chair in 1953, with her husband, for conspiracy and espionage. Until its final stanzas, Rich is talking about language and power, and using her poetry to fuse personal and public spheres, as she appropriates facts in Ethel Rosenberg's life for her own purposes.

Rich's persona appropriates Rosenberg's history to speculate that, for example, she would have been

charged by posterity
 not with selling secrets to the Communists
 but with wanting *to distinguish*
herself being a bad daughter a bad sister (49-52)

The definitions of "bad" daughter and sister were provided by testimonies (i.e. a language used to accuse) that Rosenberg's own mother and brother gave against her. This means that her death was provoked by lack of a language able to defend her. In Rich's poetic version of the facts, Rosenberg was convicted by the oppressor's language, incrusting in her own family, as the speaker says: "Her mother testifies against her / Her brother testifies against her" (62-63) and repeats: "her mother testifies against her / her sister-in-law testifies against her" (101-102).

In its last section, however, the persona imagines that Ethel survives her sentence. In this hypothetical escape from death, the persona admits that, in surviving, perhaps Ethel would not continue her activism in the way Rich imagined:

If I dare imagine her surviving
 I must be fair to what she must have lived through
 I must allow her to be at last

political in her ways not in mine
 her urgencies perhaps impervious to mine
 defining revolution as she defines it

or, bored to the marrow of her bones
 with "politics"
 bored with the vast boredom of long pain (110-118)

In these lines Rich admits that people can fail when submitted to great difficulties, adapting their conducts to avoid suffering. This thought is quite different from the heroic voice Rich's poems presented in *The Will to Change*, for example, and points to a flexibility in Rich's imagination that allows her to admit "that maybe the personal is not the political after all, for she imagines that Rosenberg might retreat," (201) as Keyes notes in the two last stanzas of the poem:

small; tiny in fact; in her late sixties
 liking her room her private life
 living alone perhaps

no one you could interview
 maybe filling a notebook herself
 with secrets she has never sold (119-124)

There is a lyric force in this closing which pervades a sign of maturity in Rich's political view towards Ethel Rosenberg and in general. When Rich concedes her a lyric possibility of survival, Rosenberg is seen isolated in her own world. Such loneliness can be associated to both internal peace and indifference to the world's questions.

Anywise, in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, after almost two decades (from 1963-1981) of a poetry intrinsically associated with feminism in several scopes, Rich's women-centered thematic seems to achieve a limit. This does not imply stagnation, but a turn into a new stage. Hence, the next chapter discusses the later phase of Adrienne Rich's career, from 1986 to 1999.

Chapter 4

From Verbal Privilege and Difficulty to Salvage (1986-1999)

Published in 1986, *Your Native Land, Your Life: Poems*, as the title suggests, marks Rich's proposition in discussing her country in relation to her life. This book was written from 1981 to 1985, a period in which the author published two essays: "Split at the Root: an essay on Jewish Identity," in 1982, and "Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet," in 1984. These essays confirm the observation in the last chapter that *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* would modify Rich's intense use of women-identified themes in her poetry, releasing her to write about other issues, more related to the placement of the poet in his/her country.

"Split at the Root" is Rich's self-analysis recovering important facts in her life, like her Jewish background, her father's influence, her days as a schoolgirl, her heterosexual dilemmas as wife and mother, and ultimately her "lesbian existence." I believe that such reflection was necessary to organize her longings for new themes as she states in an interview with Montenegro:

Certainly a lot of my other essays have points of intersection with poems, probably none so much as "Split at the Root" with "Sources"—which I was writing about the same time. I was having a lot of difficulties with the poem, and then I wrote the essay and came back to the poem feeling very freed because I'd worked out a great deal in the essay, and then didn't have to spell it out in the poem at all.

In the poem, it was concentrated? Yes.

And, in a sense, resolved? If such things ever are. (267)

Resolved or unresolved, important questions of her past intersect in poem and essay in a kind of autobiographical dialogue interweaving genres.

In his 1991 postscript for his essay "Adrienne Rich: The Poetics of Change," Albert Gelpi affirms that "'Sources,' like all Rich's major poems, is an act of

consolidation [of the past] and a transition to a new departure” (299). Aspects of this new departure are showed in the last section of the poem:

I have wished I could rest among the beautiful and common weeds I can name, both here and in other tracts of the globe. But there is no finite knowing, no such rest. Innocent birds, deserts, morning-glories, point to choices, leading away from the familiar. When I speak of an end to suffering I don't mean anesthesia. I mean knowing the world, and my place in it, not in order to stare with bitterness or detachment, but as a powerful and womanly series of choices: and here I write the words, in their fullness:
powerful; womanly. (381-389)

From *Your Native Land, Your Life* (YNL) on, Rich starts to search for a poetry able to extend her perceptions of the world and her “place in it.” Thus, she looks for a language, a “knowing,” to name the moment she lives in her country. The essay “Blood, Bread and Poetry: The Location of the Poet,” published two years before YNL discusses the “series of choices” leading a poet to write the way s/he writes. In the essay, Rich considers what art means in a “society committed to values other than profit and consumerism” (250), like Nicaragua, and in the American capitalism. In the former, people were supposed to have “a *belief* in art . . . [as] a precious resource to be made available for all, one necessity for the rebuilding of a scarred, impoverished, and still-bleeding country,” whereas in the latter, art is seen “as commodity, luxury, or suspect activity.” Towards the conclusion, Rich questions herself:

What happens to the heart of the artist, here in North America? What toll is taken of art when it is separated from the social fabric? How is art curbed, how are we made to feel useless and helpless, in a system which so depends on our alienation? (250-1)

The poem “North American Time” discusses those questions. As the title indicates, the poem depicts the speaker's attempt of freezing a specific moment or “Time” in North America. This time is related to the speaker's reflections on the so-called politically correct way of speaking that sets a kind of self-censorship even in the speaker's freest activities, e.g. walking in the street or dreaming:

When my dreams showed signs
of becoming
politically correct
no unruly images escaping beyond borders
when walking in the street I found my
themes cut out for me
knew what I would not report
for fear of enemies' usage
then I began to wonder (1-10)

As demonstrated in previous chapters, Rich's speakers rely on dreams to express themselves, "Bears," "Nightbreak," and "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus" are examples of this feature. In "North American Time," the politically correct tendency interferes even in the speaker's dreams, i.e., in the persona's inner place for the unconscious and unrepressed images. Since such static also affects her conscious period, she begins to wonder. In his essay "*Mischling* and *Métis*: Common and Uncommon Languages in Adrienne Rich and Aimé Césaire," Jonathan Monroe observes that the poem evolves from

the mobility and open-endedness brought about by the suppression of conventional punctuation and the strategic use of enjambments to call the speaking subject's status into question from on line to the next, these lines figure a struggle against any use of language that would demand strict adherence to a preestablished grammar or ideology. (299-300)

Thus, the other eight sections of the poem develop the speaker's reflections and wondering on her country's moment.

The second section discusses the responsibility a writer should have, because of the implications of his/her texts: "Everything we write / will be used against us / or against those we love" (11-13). It is worth noting the persona's movement from "I" to "We," in this section. Rich specifies her target audience among the ones who are attacked because of what they have written—The "We" refers to poets in general—since Rich informs what literary genre she is considering: "Poetry never stood a chance / of standing outside history" (16-17). In closing this section, Rich argues that the

writers change, but through their words remain and “become responsible / for more than we [poets] intended / and that is verbal privilege” (25-27). Her point is: once one is able to express him/herself, when one uses language to mean something, they are privileged for having expressed what many (oppressed) could not express.

In the third part of the poem, Rich exemplifies the previous idea:

Try sitting at a typewriter
 one calm summer evening
 at a table by a window
 in the country, (28-31)

Rich invites fellow poets and readers to assume the role of a writer, in a condition of total solipsism, recuperating a very bucolic idea of a writer. Then, she challenges them to experience their writer’s function as something apart from their actual lives:

[. . .] try pretending
 your time does not exist
 that you are simply you
 that the imagination simply strays
 like a great moth, unintentional
 try telling yourself
 you are not accountable
 to the life of your tribe
 the breath of your planet (32-40)

The word “planet” is the end of the section; after it, the reader is left alone, thinking. The lack of punctuation seems to reinforce the speaker’s attitude of setting this reader free to follow the flow of imagination.

Although having affirmed that poetry has a congenial link to history, the persona encourages this writer to be detached from a social context. There is an irony when the speaker instigates: “try telling yourself / you are not accountable” (38-39) for your “tribe” and “planet.” Since Rich invited her readers to try to imagine this implicitly contradictory situation, there is a risk of them failing in their attempt. Rich, however, does not present a solution for the exercise proposed. Rather, in the fourth section of the poem she states that:

It doesn't matter what you think.
 Words are found responsible
 all you can do is choose them
 or choose
 to remain silent. Or, you never had a choice,
 which is why the words that do stand
 are responsible

and this is verbal privilege (41-47)

Counter-arguing Bakhtin's view presented in the first chapter, these words interact with alien discourse precisely for helping constitute it. Rich states that "it does not matter" whether the poets she is addressing succeed or not in supposing to be detached writers, because their "Words are found responsible." This means that words belong to a linguistic system and are used by local and global communities of individuals that refer to and make sense of the world through words themselves. Rich classifies those individuals in two segments: the ones who choose words or write (becoming responsible for their choices) and the ones who remain silent, resigned. There is also a third segment, the ones who "never had a choice" or a language to express themselves. The poem "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children," analyzed in the prior chapter, presents an example of this third segment, which is oppressed by the lack of a language able to express their needs. Because of them, the ones who have the chance and to choose to manifest themselves and express their needs are said to possess "verbal privilege."

Besides, Rich's lexical choices in sections II and IV sound like a parody of police jargon "You have the right to remain silent. Everything you say can be used against you in a law court." This dialogism reinforces the relation of oppression between powerful (authorities) and powerless (oppressed). Taking into account Rich's 1968 poem "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus," in which she declares to be a woman "with certain powers/ and those powers severely limited / by authorities whose faces I rarely see," it

is concluded that in the eighties her poetry changed, using those “certain [language] powers” to appropriate the authorities’ voice facing them, whereas in the sixties she avoided such confrontation.

In section V, the poem demonstrates *how* to use such verbal privilege. For that, the persona urges her readers/poets: “Suppose you want to write / of a woman braiding / another woman’s hair—” (48-50). The braiding is described from the point of view of a woman that knows the art of braiding, in a way designed to transport the reader to the scene. Besides this personal knowledge, the speaker states that:

you had better know [. . .]
 [.]
 why she decides to braid her hair
 how it is done to her
 what country it happens in
 what else happens in that country

you have to know these things (53; 55-59)

Such search for public and personal contexts are in accordance to Theodor Adorno’s view, in which the universal is mediated by the personal, i.e., the writings of a poet as a member of a society have a natural right—for Rich a responsibility—of capturing particularities of its time.

In the sixth section, the persona narrows down the generality of her addressees: “Poet: sister: words— / whether we like or not— / stand in a time of their own” (60-62). Since in the fifth section she had stated that “you have to know” the contexts surrounding a writing, there is a curious apparent contradiction when the speaker claims that there is:

No use protesting [against words' own time]. *I wrote that*
before Kollontai was exiled
Rose Luxemburg, Malcolm,
Anna Mae Aquash, murdered,
before Treblinka, Birkenau,
Hiroshima, before Sharpeville,
Biafra, Bangladesh, Boston,

Atlanta, Soweto, Beirut, Assam (62-70)

This apparent contradiction of the personae's initially denying the importance of the context is undone in the last lines of the section: "—Those faces, names of places / sheared from the almanac / of North American time" (62-73). Because of the last lines, the list of places and personages, which Monroe calls "litany" (305), functions as examples of contextualized social problems, wars and violence that, for having caused abundant suffering, should be taken into consideration. However, this does not happen since they are "sheared from the almanac / of North American time." Rich seems to treat with irony and a certain anger the separation of the words in a poem from the context in which they are/were inserted. Thus, although she affirms to the sisterhood of poets that there is "No use protesting," her final lines justify her attitude. There is "no use in protesting" because in North America faces and places (attempts at contextualization) are "sheared," i.e., in the US, "the context is never given" (83), as she explains in section VII.

The seventh section elucidates and contextualizes her anger and irony:

I am thinking this in a country
 where words are stolen out of mouths
 as bread is stolen out of mouths
 where poets don't go to jail
 for being poets, but for being
 dark-skinned, female, poor.
 I am writing this in a time
 when anything we write
 can be used against those we love
 where the context is never given
 though we try to explain, over and over
 For the sake of poetry at least
 I need to know these things (74-86)

The written things are misinterpreted on purpose and then used against their poets because the contexts in which they were produced are not considered in a tendentious reading. Rich and the supportive audience of poets demonstrate a good will in "try to

explain, over and over" (84) the contexts of production, "for the sake of poetry, at least" (85) which reveals some aesthetic preoccupation.

Rich wrote this poem 15 years before Harold Bloom's essay commented in the introduction of this study, but many of the issues he criticizes in committed poets or, for him, "the enemies of the aesthetic" (2) were already reason for discussion in Rich's poetry. In dictatorial regimes, poets go to jail "for being poets," but in a segregating society like the American, they face prejudices that can "jail" their work. This occurs if their writings are not in accordance to editorial expectations, which constantly reflect the particular taste of a male WASP dominant elite. Bloom meets these expectations.

In section VIII, the speaker retakes a calm and reflexive tone. With her anger under control, Rich imagines this scene:

Sometimes, gliding at night
 in a plane over New York City
 I have felt like some messenger
 called to enter, called to engage
 this field of light and darkness.
 A grandiose idea, born of flying.
 But underneath the grandiose idea
 is the thought that what I must engage
 after the plane has raged onto the tarmac
 after climbing my old stairs, sitting down
 at my old window
 is meant to break my heart and reduce me to silence. (87-98)

Harbored by the convenience of a night flight, and enjoying the ample visibility of New York City lights, she confesses to have "felt like some messenger." Momentarily, "North American Time" reminds Rich's heroic posture in the sixties, in the prime of her life. However, on thinking about "what [she] must engage" when the flight (the grandiose idea) is over, she feels tired, and a simple act like "climbing" her "old stairs" demands effort. In her house, she sits at her window, an attitude that represents her preoccupations with the external world. There, what she must engage "is meant to break [her] and reduce [her] to silence." This passage raises some questions: what has

happened to the powerful woman "with the nerves of a panther" from the sixties? Where is the curious diver and dreamer poet of the seventies? Is she really heartbroken and reduced to silence in the eighties?

The final section answers these questions. Although reality breaks her dream of being a messenger or a spokeswoman, silencing her, and though she concludes that in the USA time is pain, other elements in the world, like the possibility of change, suggested by the lyric image of a raising moon, motivate her to continue writing:

In North America time stumbles on
 without moving, only releasing
 a certain North American pain.
 Julia the Burgos wrote:
*That my grandfather was a slave
 is my grief; had he been a master
 that would be my shame.*
 A poet's words, hung over a door
 in North America, in the year
 nineteen-eighty-three.
 The almost-full moon rises
 timelessly speaking of change
 out of the Bronx, the Harlem River
 the drowned towns of the Quabbin
 the pilfered burial mounds
 the toxic swamps, the testing-grounds

and I start to speak again (99-115)

Rich uses the voice of the Puerto Rican poet and revolutionary Julia de Burgos (1917-53) as if assuring herself that her efforts are not in vain, that there is grief and dignity in voicing the voiceless, but no shame. Moreover, in stating the year, Rich makes a point of contextualizing her poem, since she had affirmed that in North America the "context is never given" (83). After giving the context, she describes a timeless (and thus decontextualized) moon. It can be said that this natural satellite, for its beauty, is a lyrical element that stands for change associated with the moon's revolutions.

Rich sees this lunar light of change "out of" (111) places that represent different types of oppression. While the moon illuminates her, these poor or polluted places

remain in the dark. This darkness can also be associated with the absence of context on the realities of the referred places. For example, what kind of people live in Bronx, how they live, or what was the history of the five towns drowned (or "sheared?") by the Quabbin reservoir in Massachusetts. If her readers lack this previous knowledge, which can occur because some of the places she is referring to are omitted or were "sheared" from the North American time, her poem encourages them to search for this further knowledge, increasing their critical awareness. In this sense, Rich's poetry does not provide a single and clear answer for a given social problem, as a tendentious text could propose. Rather, it offers its readers a possibility of whetting their minds. Motivated by the social lyricism of the moon as a metaphor for social change, Adrienne Rich breaks the silence in section VIII and starts "to speak again" (115).

Time's Power: Poems 1985-1988, published in 1989, is an evidence of Rich's continuum speaking. In the collection, the poem "Delta" is an account of how difficult it is to track Rich's movements, as Marcia Oliveira observed in her dissertation "Adrienne Rich: Towards a Feminist Aesthetic," which dealt with feminism in Rich's poetry from 1951 to 1973. In "Delta," Rich seems to play with her readers and critics' attempts of taking her for granted:

If you have taken this rubble for my past
 raking through it for fragments you could sell
 know that I long ago moved on
 deeper into the heart of the matter

If you think you can grasp me, think again:
 my story flows in more than one direction
 a delta springing from the riverbed
 with its five fingers spread (1-8)

Thus, flowing in several directions, the "river" Rich moved to Santa Cruz, California in the mid eighties. This change seems to have enlarged the geographical amplitude of her poetry. If, for example, in "North American Time," Rich referred mainly to sites in New

York City area (in spite of the spacious title of the poem), her 1991 collection, *An Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems 1988-1991*, depicts several places, drawing multiple maps.

Indeed, the title of the volume confers its poems (or maps) a sophisticated function: being an atlas. This atlas is supposed to delineate not only the world, but also its difficulties. Thus, through the title, Rich enables her poems to deal with worldly social issues. In the title poem, the difficult world is the United State of America, but other poems in the volume extend the speaker's scope to a larger geography.

A second reading of the title reveals Rich's awareness of how demanding her task is. In Greek mythology, "Atlas" was a Titan, son of Iapetus and brother of Prometheus and Epimetheus, condemned to support the sky on his shoulders. By association, according to the Webster's dictionary an "atlas" is a person who supports a heavy burden; a mainstay. Thereby, Rich names her book "Atlas," perhaps acknowledging her labored task of dealing with the difficult world.

An Atlas of the Difficult World is a book written towards the end of the Cold War, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, and mainly during the Gulf War. For the first time, a war was broadcasted by television via satellite in real time, increasing the interest of the world in a given fact and enlarging the power and importance of news coverage corporations like CNN. Thus, terms like global village and globalization started to be more frequently pronounced since 1991. In the following years of the nineties, the popularization of communicational tools like faxes, mobile phones, personal computers, e-mail and the Internet would reinforce this worldwide connectability.

Situated in the beginning of this time in which technology was also highly used to make wars (guided missiles, radars, biological warfare) or to inform the population about them, a sixty-two-year-old Adrienne Rich reacted by writing a kind of poetic

version of the facts. The title of the collection seems to engulf the importance of a global poetics (though individually-based) as a response to equally important global and individual issues.

In an interview with Paulo da Costa for the electronic magazine *CiberKiosk*, Rich affirms: "Poetry reaches into places in us that we are supposed to ignore or mistrust, that are perceived as subversive or non-useful, in what is fast becoming known as global culture. *Global culture* is of course not a culture: it's the global marketing and imposing of commodities and images for the interests of the few at the expense of the many" (1). In this sense, *An Atlas* presents poems referring to scattered places on the Earth, such as California, New York, Berlin, Iraq, Jerusalem or Saigon. The title poem is divided in 13 sections, which somehow reflects the diffraction of the world that satellites have tried to unify, and that Rich's *Atlas* tries to register.

The first part of the poem binds some voices in a long first stanza, as to demonstrate that poetry is a discourse able to gather the heteroglossia of society. Some of the voices are ironic towards the lack of commitment:

One says: "I can lie for hours
reading and listening to music. But sleep comes hard.
I'd rather lie awake and read." One writes:
"Mosquitoes pour through the cracks
in this cabin's walls, the road
in winter is often impassable,
I live here so I don't have to go out and act,
I'm trying to hold onto my life, it feels like nothing." (21-26)

The fragment above shows two different voices trying to set apart from the happenings, but becoming uneasy with that. The first voice affirms that "sleep comes hard" (22) and the other voice does not "act" to change the situation, and fenced in its individualism says: "I'm trying to hold onto my life, it feels like nothing" (26).

Rich opens the second section of the poem with an exposition: "Here is a map of our country:" (line 78). This line is an invitation for the readers, as the persona concedes

them through the pronoun "our" the right of sharing the map. This increases the interaction between poem and audience. Although many of the sites mentioned in the poem are symbolic references ("Sea of Indifference" (79), "desert where missiles are planted like corns" (82), etc.) the reader knows that these places exist under an official nomenclature. Their task is to match a regular geographical map to this poetic one, offered by Rich. In an essay titled "Clampitt and Rich as Public Historians in the 1990s," for example, the critic Charles Vandersee identifies line 91: "These are other battlefields Centralia Detroit," as sites in "which striking workers historically experienced as "battlefields"" (2). Through the identification, the reader can connect the image presented in the poem to the actual location, the comparison supposed by stimulating his/her perception of the social matters exposed.

The title of Helen Vendler's essay "Mapping the Air" seems to refer particularly to this second section. Maps commonly present political borders and natural and artificial features of a place's terrain, but not aerial characteristics. Since Rich's *Atlas* is actually referring to earthy locations, Vendler's title can be understood as an intricate form of saying that Rich's *Atlas* is useless. Vendler states that the addressees of Rich's poems, whom the critic refers to as victims "are *all* morally innocent" (216) (my italics). For her, Rich divides her poetry into good and evil: "the good are the weak, the social underdogs—women, blacks, lesbians, the poor, prisoners, Jews, mothers of the disappeared" (217). According to Vendler, in spite of distinguishing culprits and victims, Rich fails as a "reformer" in social improvement. Vendler points out that between Rich's condemnatory energy and active sympathy, pervades "an air of lament rather than of certainty" (217). Vendler's essay depicts how Rich had managed to denunciate social injustices, analyzing them to name oppressors. Despite recognizing Rich's initiative, Vendler affirms that Rich "*never* places herself among the reprobate

(even in imagination), and *never* tarnishes the victims with evil qualities of their own" (217) (my italics). The use of a word like "never" seems to be tendentiously generalizing, mainly if we consider that Rich has delineated this dichotomy between victim and victimizer, maybe from 1968 on, placing herself among the reprobates and sharing their language through the use of heteroglossia as demonstrated in a poem like "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children."

Rich sees herself part as a "reprobate," and part as a victimizer, as she has referred to in "Splitting at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity." In addition, since in a poem like "For Ethel Rosenberg" Rich admits having been politically oppressive in her way, Vendler's generalization loses its strength. A brief reflection on Adrienne Rich's existence as a Radcliffe undergraduate poet in a male environment, wife, mother, feminist, antiwar activist, Jewish, and lesbian would serve to justify her natural identification with the oppressed. In her essay, Vendler does not take into account the prejudice, suffering, anger and political fight that Rich has been facing during her lifetime because of her political attitude.

Back in 1968, she had committed herself as "a woman sworn to lucidity," "a woman with a certain mission," and in the next decades she kept her word. This implies more than commitment, a vow that can explain Rich's misplacement among the dominant, "not even in imagination," (217) as Vendler noted. Conversely to what Vendler proposed, Rich defends more and more the oppressed, the victims, starting from her own context as a woman and gradually intensifying her defense by assuming several voices to expose their problems or by opening her personal experiences to these questions.

"North American Time" is a call for the importance of being accountable to the world as a poet, interweaving personal and political realms. In "An Atlas," the incisive

mentioning of American landscapes and geographically distant cities and states in its first sections is an evidence of this dialogue between poet and society.

In the fourth section, the speaker keeps mentioning places in a fragmented way. According to Alice Templeton this separation reinforces the social distances in the US:

In *An Atlas of the Difficult World*, poetry provides a map or, more accurately, a "mural" of the United States, a promising but "difficult world" characterized by extreme physical differences (ocean and farm), by contradictions (violence and beauty), by desperation and fantasies of innocence, by unfathomable waste and possibility. (154)

Despite these contradictions, in section IV, Rich calls the reader's attention to a natural beauty supposed to unify the country:

Late summers, early autumns, you can see something that binds
the map of this country together: the girasol, orange gold-
 petalled
with her black eye, laces the roadsides from Vermont to
 California (176-180)

The color and abundance of the flowers Rich describes as "Spendthrift" is compared to "human wastefulness, the pollution of the land and water, and the discouragement of those who could repair the damage" (157) as Templeton points out. In addition, the form of the poem intensifies Rich's insistence on highlighting the segregation of the United States. The girasol, described as "orange gold-/petalled," can stand for an allusion to the US, beautiful, but divided (in petals). The isolation of the word petal and its placement just below the word "country" contributes to fix this idea of a petalled (divided) country.

Section V brings historical moments that, in accordance to Templeton, acknowledge "that one of the circumstances that bind human community is a vulnerability to violence and accident" (158). Instead of flowers and nature, this section unifies the country with both positive and negative historic aspects, recalling for

example the end of the Civil War in Appomattox, Virginia, battles with Indians at Wounded Knee, state troopers' abuse of civilians in Los Alamos, Alabama and thus:

Catch if you can your country's moment, begin
 where any calendar's ripped-off: Appomattox
 Wounded Knee, Los Alamos, Selma, the last airlift from Saigon
 [.]
 —catch if you can this unbound land these states without a cause (201-203;
 206)

Rich demands knowledge of her readers, as she had done in "North American Time." In "An Atlas," however, she challenges them, saying "Catch if you can," for it is not easy to catch (memorize, know and feel the implication of such facts). One reason for this difficulty could be their exclusion from the "almanac of the North American Time." Recognizing the difficulties of her poetry in understanding "the difficult world," Rich asks herself and her reader: "Where are we moored? / What are the bindings? / What behooves us" (212-214) ?

Section IX retakes an idea of loneliness similar to her 1971 poem "Song," written about one year after her husband's death. In "Song," Rich discusses how it is to be lonely: "You're wondering if I'm lonely: / OK then, yes, I'm lonely / As a plane rides lonely and level" (1-3). In the poem published in *Diving into the Wreck*, Rich uses metaphors to concede her loneliness a transitional aspect; she is lonely like a "plane," i.e., she is also moving and somehow enjoying beautiful and hard to access landscapes. Through images invoking a certain freedom in solitude, and the hardness of facing this state, she criticizes long term relationships:

You want to ask, am I lonely?
 Well, of course, lonely
 as a woman driving across country
 day after day, leaving behind
 mile after mile
 little towns she might have stopped
 and lived and died in, lonely (8-14)

In the final stanza, she insists on exalting positive aspects of her solitude as she demonstrates a strength to move through difficulties, as suggested by the image of the speaker's rowing a boat surrounded by ice in the last sunset of the year, i.e., during the winter. The lyric self gathers these natural difficulties and defines them as potential energy (fire):

If I'm lonely
it's with the rowboat ice-fast on the shore
in the last red light of the year
that knows what it is, that knows it's neither
ice nor mud nor winter light
but wood, with a gift for burning (21-26)

Twenty years later, in 1991, Rich returns to the issue of loneliness: "On this earth, in this life, as I read your story, you're lonely" (326). In "An Atlas of the Difficult World," however, the solitude is amplified as it is found in public places as bars, beaches or even among friends, couples, and during sexual intercourse:

Lonely in the bar, on the shore of the coastal river
with your best friend, his wife, and your wife, fishing
lonely in the prairie classroom with all the students who love
you . . .
You grieve in loneliness, and if I understand you fuck in
loneliness. (327-334)

In its two other stanzas, the poem identifies happiness in remote sites, such as the Mohave Desert and the Grand Canyon. There is a sense of communion with nature that would replenish the speaker's longings for a companion, as civilized places would not. This idea is similar to "Song's," except for the geographical contextualization given in "An Atlas," but absent in "Song." In part X, Rich continues developing the theme of solitude. This time she appropriates three prose passages from George Jackson's book *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. According to Vandersee, Rich's quotations from Jackson's letters in her poems is a technique for using "history in unconventional but authoritative ways" (7).

If in section IV, nature united the country, in section XI its force is described as an element of destruction and disintegration. Earthquake, drought and freeze confer Monterey Bay and California an atmosphere of desolation. Rich associates these natural disasters to the outbreak of the Gulf War. Instead of girasols blossoming, Rich notes flags. Within this frozen and warlike country, the speaker tries to place herself:

Earthquake and drought followed by freezing followed by war
Flags are blossoming now where little else is blossoming
[.....]
Loyalties, symbols, murmurs extinguished and echoing?
Grids of states stretching westward, underground waters?
Minerals, traces, rumors I am made from, morsel, minuscule fibre, one woman
like and unlike so many, fooled as to her destiny, the scope of her task?
One citizen like and unlike so many, touched and untouched in passing
—each of us now a driven, a nucleus, a city in crisis
some busy constructing enclosures, bunkers, to escape the common fate
[.....]
some for whom the war is new, others for whom it merely continues
the old paroxysms of time
[.....]
some for whom peace is a white man's word and white man's privilege
(406-7;411-17;421-2;424)

The passage above demonstrates an Adrienne Rich no longer able to represent heroically other women. Contrary to Helen Vendler's statement that Adrienne Rich "never" includes herself among the reprobates, in this section, Rich affirms herself to be like any other citizen, as she endeavored to describe.

Closing the section, Rich restricts the concept of "a patriot," cutting its relation to the armed forces: "A patriot is not a weapon" (428), and criticizing the ongoing war in the Persian Gulf: "A patriot is a citizen trying to wake / from the burnt-out dream of innocence, the nightmare / of the white general and the Black general posed in their camouflage, / to remember her [the patriot's] true country, remember his suffering land: remember" (431-433). According to the editor's note, the generals mentioned are "General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, U. S. army commander in the Gulf during the Gulf War, and General Colin Powell, head of the U. S. Joint Chiefs of Staff" (156). In the last

lines of the section, the female patriot is called to remember (like a refrain) the questions on section V: "Where are we moored? / What are the bindings? / What behooves us" (438-440)?

Section XIII "(Dedications)" demonstrates a kind of clairvoyant control over the map drawn in the previous sections. With this power, the lyric self affirms "to know" the persons she is addressing. They are distributed by several locations in her atlas, performing different functions:

I know you are reading this poem
 late, before leaving your office
 [. . .] I know you are reading this poem
 standing up in a bookstore far from the ocean
 [.]
 I know you are reading this poem
 in a room where too much has happened for you to bear
 [.]
 I know you are reading this poem
 as the underground train loses momentum and before running
 up the stairs
 toward a new kind of love
 your life has never allowed
 I know you are reading this poem as you pace beside the stove
 warming milk, a crying child on your shoulder, a book in your hand (457-485)

The poem travels through a social cartography that reinforces the intense need of different segments of the same society for poetry. Adrienne Rich describes persons reading poetry in solitude, aloof from one another. Implicitly, in the twelve lengthy poems preceding "(Dedications)," there is the idea of poetry as a force able to bind people and by extension the country together, since nature (with its earthquakes and freezes) and history (with its wars and massacres and solitude) failed in uniting the atlas harmonically, binding just its difficulties. In this sense, the use of long Whitman-like lines, is a way of validating her attempt of singing her country, as the bard had done in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, her "whitmanesque horizontally driven lines" (160), as Templeton calls them, reflect Rich's movement from the East coast to

California in the mid eighties, as Albert Gelpi noted in the 1991 postscript for "Adrienne Rich: The Poetics of Change":

for a poet with strong sense of place, the move in 1984, after the years in Cambridge and Manhattan, Vermont and western Massachusetts, to Santa Cruz and the California coast [. . .] [is] registered in the changing [longer] shape and pace of the poems. (297)

Other poems in the collection keep Rich's concerns for geography and social matters. "Eastern War Time" consciously *talks to* "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus." There are several correspondences in terms of structure, images and metaphors allowing the recognition of Rich's intentions to write about two different historical moments. Nevertheless, although the persona remains female, she is not so self-assured or heroic anymore, as section XI in "An Atlas" showed. If in 1968, the poem had a tone of celebration, in 1991, it is under fire, facing wartime. Nothing has been conquered yet, or at least the things that in the sixties women judged to be conquered are not so useful and effective in the last decade of the century. The sentence recurrent in both poems "I am a woman" carries the time differences among them. In 1968, by saying "I am a woman," Rich reaffirmed the necessity of asserting her female condition in a society that experienced the upheaval of the women liberation movements. In the nineties, however, she is no longer celebrating this *discovered* femaleness, rather she is complaining, denouncing and fighting against, those "authorities" she barely saw in the sixties.

In the nineties, the images employed are more drastic and tragic and there is a lack of magic. The title "Eastern War Time" seems to point to the whole poem as a definition for the events contemporary to it. Thus, the dreamy (or magical) atmosphere presented in the 1968 poem is substituted by a harsh view of reality, in which the persona is not celebrating anymore. She is not contemplating the facts, but directly interacting with them. This is visible in the nineties' persona: "a woman standing / with other women dressed in black / on the streets of Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem" (18-20) or

"a woman standing in line for gasmasks" (22), and in other political and historical events.

Therefore, Adrienne Rich's poems in *An Atlas of the Difficult World* seem to be politically committed in a more direct and history-related way, since the speakers do not recur to dreams, unnamed or mythic places to express themselves. Thus, in the nineties her poetry became more engagé in relation to geo and sociological issues. For that, Rich voices a memory composed of unjust and violent events:

Memory says: Want to do it right? Don't count on me.
 I'm a canal in Europe where bodies are floating
 I'm a mass grave I'm the life that returns
 [.....]
 I'm a field with corners left for the landless
 I'm accused of child-death of drinking blood
 [.....]
 I'm a woman bargaining for a chicken
 I'm a woman who sells for a boat ticket
 I'm a family dispersed between night and fog
 [.....]
 I'm a corpse dredged from a canal in Berlin (1-3, 5-6, 10, 17)

In *Dark Fields of the Republic: Poems 1991-1995*, published in 1995, Rich enlarges her view of history, questioning the boundaries between the collective and the individual. The poem "In Those Years" synthesizes this idea:

In those years, people will say, we lost track
 of the meaning of *we*, of *you*
 we found ourselves reduced to *I*
 and the whole thing became
 silly, ironic, terrible:
 we were trying to live a personal life
 and, yes, that was the only life
 we could bear witness to

But the great dark birds of history screamed and plunged
 into our personal weather
 They were headed somewhere else but their beaks and pinions drove
 along the shore, through the rags of fog
 where we stood, saying *I* (1-14)

If in "Eastern War Time" Rich wrote from a past perspective, "In Those Years" her speaker projects a possible future by wondering about what "people will say," when they look back. Thus, the poem sounds firstly like an analysis of our present time, since people in the future would be saying—supported by the certainty of the future time—that "in those years," i.e., in the nineties, in the readers' present time, "we lost track" (1). Starting from a predictive perspective, the analysis arouses the readers' curiosity and hooks his/her attention. In affirming that in the current time we (poet, reader and society as a whole) moved from a previous stage of communion—"we," "you"—to the present stage of a reduced "I," Rich's speaker criticizes selfish and individualistic values.

The opposition between "We" and "I" is used to explain why we lost track: "the whole thing became / silly, ironic, terrible:" (5-6). The use of colon suggests that the speaker is going to explain why the individual no longer searched for his/her fellow: the individuals [we] "were trying to live a personal life" (7). In our competitive society commodities as e-commerce, for example, or silent families in front of TV sets diminish the interaction among people. Moreover, in search of personal success, in our self-centered existences, we no longer care about the other.

In the second and final stanza of the poem, the speaker uses a sophisticated lyric to warn us. The adverb "but," opening the final stanza, starts to give the poem an optimistic tone. Although in those years (our present) we were living self-committed lives, history (represented by "great dark birds") overflowed, "screamed and plunged / into our personal weather." This means that history, characterized by a movement (track) towards the collective (history as the gathering from small tribes, villages, city-states, burghs, to huge empires and republics), offers us a possibility of retaking this lost track. For that the "beaks and pinions" of history's "dark birds" are screaming and diving into the "rags of fog" of "our personal weather." However, we seemed not to give attention

to these birds, and stood saying "I," as isolated weak nestling little birds asking for help, food and communion with our beaks wide open saying "I."

As the Princeton student Abby Corson-Rikert noted, "the image of a screen of fog is critical in Rich's exposure of our isolation" (2). In her paper "Touching the Sky," Corson-Rikert identifies this fog in other poems of *Dark Fields of the Republic*. The man in the poem "You Drew up the Story of your Life" fears his "fogsmeared planet." "Voices," the fifth section of the poem "Inscriptions" describes "the delicate power of fog," and in "You can call on beauty still and it will leap," the seventh part of the poem "Calle Visión," talks about a "fog [that] melts the falling stars," as if our isolation deprived us even from looking for hope upward in the sky.

Besides this concern with solitude and individualism, the collection deals with other themes that Rich had already discussed in *An Atlas*. The poem "And Now," for instance, extends Rich's intimacy with her readers already manifested in "(Dedications)." In "(Dedications)," she knew where and under which circumstances her readers were reading her poetry. In "And Now," she declares her love towards them:

And now as you read these poems
 —you whose eyes and hands I love
 —you whose mouth and eyes I love
 —you whose words and minds I love

don't think I was trying to state a case
 or construct a scenery:
 I tried to listen to
 the public voice of our time
 tried to survey our public space
 as best I could (1-10)

As Rich uses a poem to elucidate her writing procedures, affirming to be alone (as the repetition of "I" denounces) but in contact with the public realm, she counterargues Bakhtin's separation of poetry from "alien discourse:" "I tried to listen to / the public voice of our time" (7-8). Besides, her poetry meets some of her prose statements. Her

essay "The Muralist" published in *What is Found There: Notes on Poetry and Politics* (WIFT) is in dialogue with the passage above:

The social fragmentation of poetry from life [alien discourse] has itself been one of the materials that demanded evolution in my poetic methods, continually pushed at me to devise language and images that could refuse the falsely framed choices: ivory tower or barricades, intuition or documentary fact, the search for beauty or the search for justice. (Of course a change in poetic methods means other kinds of change as well.)

When I can pull it together, I work in solitude surrounded by community, solitude in dialogue with community, solitude that alternates with collective work. (53)

Part of the evolution she is referring to can be found in Adrienne Rich's *Midnight Salvage: Poems 1995-1998*, published in 1999. In this collection she keeps the poetic process of dealing with social questions, which was intensified from *Your Native Land, Your Life* on. However, in *Midnight Salvage*, she diminishes the vehement geographic location that characterized poems like "North American Time," "An Atlas of the Difficult World" or some poems in *Dark Fields*, as Adam Newey, a *Midnight Salvage's* reviewer, affirms:

Midnight Salvage moves in from the vast landscapes of her last book, *Dark Fields of the Republic*, to smaller, more intimate spaces and urban snapshots: a New York subway, a Harvard restaurant, the house of the photographer and revolutionary Tina Modotti. Rich is a demanding writer who requires her readers to make up a lot of imaginative ground. Her verse has a decidedly vitreous quality: sharp and clear, but with a tendency to shatter into overlapping perspectives that initially confuse as much as they enlighten. (1)

The four-part poem "The Art of Translation," in its second part, reveals Rich's refinement or "vitreous quality" in terms of poetic language:

It's only a branch like any other
green with the flare of life in it
and if I hold this end, you the other
that means it's broken

broken between us, broken despite us
broken and therefore dying
broken by force, broken by lying
green, with the flare of life in it (1-8)

With this concise two-stanza poem, Rich summarizes "The Art of Translation," (poetry itself as an act of translation) its difficulties and potentialities. She expends a minimum of words to obtain a multiplicity of meanings that make her poem transcend a single interpretation. As the branch is broken as soon as poet and reader interact, this mutual attempt of translation, represented by the image of poet and reader holding the branch is impossible.

This difficulty in communication is in accordance to Rich's thought in "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children:" "language is map of our failures" (85). In spite of these failures, since "Planetarium," in the sixties, Rich has tried this translation:

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. (35-45)

Despite the recognition of impotence in "translating," the book in general presents a hopeful tone, rarely seen in Adrienne Rich's poetry. This feeling that events can turn out for the best can explain the title of the collection, as if hope (salvage) arrived late (at midnight). This midnight can be associated to Rich's maturity, since she was 70 when the book was released. The title poem expresses this hope among moments of criticism.

In its second section, the poem presents a conflict between academe and poetry. Rich treats with irony presumably W. H. Auden's statement that "poetry makes nothing happen."

Under the conditions of my hiring
I could profess or declare anything at all
since in that place nothing would change
So many fountains, such guitars at sunset (1-4)

Rich is bored with scholarly atmosphere, as she depicts her office in a university: "Did not want any more to sit under such a window / . . . / in that borrowed chair / with its collegiate shield at a borrowed desk." She justifies her weariness in the last stanza:

just hanging there. Unfortunately, that's the weakest aspect of this book. While Rich's earlier work boasted sharp, confident endings, these seem limp. (1)

Kushner seems to be very attuned to the journalistic text commitment to a rigid standard pattern of English and does not perceive that the lack of punctuation can be seen as a way of tearing the frontiers between poem and society. Although she had observed a positive point in the double colons, she was unable to conceive the poem as a flux of imagination not totally submitted to strict grammar rules.

The paired colons are part of Rich's efficient poetics in *Midnight Salvage*. In the third section of the title poem, they anticipate Rich's declaration of hope in the second and final stanza:

But thought I was conspiring, breathing-along
with history's systole-diastole
twenty thousand leagues under the sea a mammal heartbeat
sheltering another heartbeat
plunging from the Farallons all the way to Baja
sending up here or there a blowhole signal
and sometimes beached
making for warmer waters
where the new would be delivered : : though I would not see it

18) (10-

At the end of the century, Adrienne Rich's hope is mediated by a whale or a dolphin, in a way that resembles her "animal poems" of the fifties when she was trying to find a distinct voice and used tigers and bears to conduct her poems towards a more woman-centered focus. In the later nineties, Rich seems to try the discovery of a voice that allows her to express her hopes. The marine mammal movement from "twenty thousand leagues under the sea" to "warmer waters," and from Farallons islands to Baja¹ combined with its delivery, suggest a sense of natural harmony and continuity of life. As this happens with the so-called irrational animals, it is implied that our civilized culture can also find its harmony.

Considering the oceanic environment, it is important to contrast this poem to "Diving into the Wreck." In "Diving," there is solitude in the depth of the sea, as the speaker is in loco observing the wreck. In "Midnight Salvage," she imagines the scene, as if she could glimpse a hopeful future, symbolized in the marine mammal newborn after its long delivery travel. In WIFT, the essay "What if?" dialogues with this hope, discussing the main purpose of poetry for Adrienne Rich:

A revolutionary poem will not tell you who or when to kill, what or when to burn, or even how to theorize. It reminds you (for you have known, somehow, all along, maybe lost track) where and when and how you are living and might live—it is a wick of desire. It may do its work in the language and images of dreams, lists, love letters, prison letters, chants, filmic jump cuts, meditations, cries of pain, documentary fragments, blues, late-night long-distance calls. It is not programmatic. [. . .].

Any truly revolutionary art is an alchemy through which waste, greed, brutality, frozen indifference, "blind sorrow," and anger are transmuted into some drenching recognition of the *What if?*—the possible. *What if?*—?—the first revolutionary question, the question the dying forces don't know how to ask. (241-242)

Through its refined lyricism, its marine images talking of a natural change, "Midnight Salvage" asks us about a possible "what if."

The seventh part of "Midnight Salvage" discusses with a slowness of movements and images resembling sickness how difficult it is for a committed poet to reach this stage of revolutionary poetry:

The horrible patience which is part of the work
 This patience which waits for language for meaning for the
 least sign
 This encumbered plodding state doggedly dragging
 the IV up and down the corridor
 with the plastic sack of bloodstained urine (1-6)

The second and final part of the poem sounds like an urge to write more poems, despite the difficulties presented:

Only so you can start living again
 waking to take the temperature of the soul
 when the black irises lean at dawn
 from the mouth of the bedside pitcher
 This condition in which you swear *I will*

submit to whatever poetry is
I accept no limits Horrible patience (7-12)

The circularity of the poem, represented by the repetition of the expression "horrible patience" reinforces her promise of "submitting" (12) to poetry. Although this poem treats the poetic creation as derivative from sickness, it is expected that the poet, after having waited for the "horrible patience," can "relief her body and reconstruct her mind" through poetry.

Other poems in the collection continue assembling voices and appropriating literary and political documents in prose. In an interview with Paulo da Costa for the Portuguese electronic magazine *CiberKiosk*, Rich affirms: "Increasingly I think of poetry as a theatre of voices, not as coming from a single "I" or from any one position. I want to imagine voices different from my own" (3). In the poem "Long Conversation," for instance, Rich seems to elaborate to the maximum this technique. Rich did not section this poem, perhaps for increasing the extension and interpenetration of its "conversations." Thus, along its seventeen pages, the poem gathers passages from William Blake, Coleridge, Karl Marx, Che Guevara, Richard Nixon and others less famous figures. On page 60, Rich summarizes this heteroglossia:

All kinds of language fly into poetry, like it or not, or even if you're
 only
 as we were trying
 to keep an eye
 on the weapons on the street
 and under the street (1-6)

Her prose fragments demonstrate poetic force, as on page 64, where refers to some of her lyric ideas as the marine mammal in "Midnight Salvage:"

I can imagine a sentence that might someday end with the word, love. Like the one written by that asthmatic young man, which begins, *At the risk of appearing ridiculous . . .* It would have to contain losses, resiliencies, histories faced; it would have to contain a face—his yours hers mine—by which I could do well, embracing it like water in my hands, because by then we could be sure that "doing

well" by one, or some, was immiserating nobody. A true sentence, then, for greeting the newborn. (—Someplace else. In our hopes.) (64)

Despite these hopes (hers and her readers), Rich concentrates her life and work in a powerful statement "I am my art." Her art furnishes her a sense of ligament to her parents, at the same time it renews her sixties' oaths on commitment to her beliefs. In the later nineties, Rich still tries to translate pulsations, anger, and fear (sociopolitical matters) into images and language, which rotates "on an axle of love," lyricism, and poetry. On page 67, this poetry is the force that keeps her working:

I have no theories. I don't know what I am being forgiven. I am my art; I make it from my body and the bodies that produced mine. I am still trying to find the pictorial language for this anger and fear rotating on an axle of love. If I still get up and go to the studio—it's there I find the company I need to go on working.

Chapter 4 — Endnotes

¹ The Farallons are rocky islets located approximately 23 miles west of the Golden Gate Bridge and the San Francisco Bay Entrance. Baja is the Mexican term for southern part of the California peninsula.

Conclusion

This study was an attempt of accompanying Adrienne Rich's career from her first collection of poems *A Change of World*, published in 1951 up to her latest volume *Midnight Salvage*, released in 1999. Since these analyses considered social and lyrical elements as intertwined in her poems, it was necessary to meet a theory able to support such junction, traditionally viewed as antagonistic. For that, the first chapter opposed Mikhail Bakhtin's views to Theodor Adorno's and Adrienne Rich's on the relations of poetry to the society.

The second chapter examined the male writing influences on the young undergraduate Rich. The poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" revealed well adjusted, traditional and rhymed elements that characterized Rich's poetry in the fifties. "Bears," from her second collection, presented a certain "presence" of Emily Dickinson's influence, which gradually started to reflect Rich's distance from this mimicry of conservative patterns of poetry. In the early sixties, her third volume, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, demonstrates Rich's movement towards a feminist expression. As Rich states in her essay, "When We Dead Awaken," the writing of the title poem functioned as a relief for her, who found in her newborn poetic language means to reply to some of the anguishes of imposed patriarchal roles on women.

The third chapter explores her discovery of poetry as an instrument "for the relief of the body / and the reconstruction of the mind" (44-45), as she says in "Planetarium." In *Leaflets*, released in 1969, Rich demonstrates how some anguishes collected in the public realm, as the ones provoked by the Vietnam War, penetrated into her private life and reflect in her poetry. In this sense, her poems are used for her own relief and presumably for her readers', if they identify with the situations exposed.

The idea of poetry as an instrument for the “relief of body and the reconstruction of the mind” is retaken and amplified in the 1968 poem “Planetarium,” published in *The Will to Change* (1971). In this volume, Rich starts to identify the oppressor’s language as a cause of many injustices and sufferings. The poem “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children” verifies in the oppressed the lack of a language able to confront the oppressor. In her poems, Rich starts to voice these mute oppressed in different manners such as: quoting prose fragments of their own speech to increase their visibility, restoring history-forgotten or denied women figures, and interweaving her personal life to public events. Chapter three deals with other collections: *Diving into the Wreck* (1973), which consolidates a women-centered poetry, putting aside previous themes like antiwar poems, and *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978) which, as the title indicates, suggests a common ground in language for oppressed and oppressor, yet with conflict.

Enclosed in this book, “The Twenty-One Love Poems” indicate the core of this dream, as Rich returns to use a traditional form of poetry like a revised form of the sonnet to sing love between women. Closing the chapter, *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* (1981) depicts an Adrienne Rich expanding her views on feminism and lesbianism in dialogue with concepts of “lesbian existence” and “lesbian continuum,” discussed in her essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” In the collection she also self-evaluates her women-centered poetics and admits limits in the scope of her “political way,” as the poem “For Ethel Rosenberg” indicates.

The fourth chapter analyzed the later phase of Adrienne Rich’s poetry. “North American Time” discusses the role of the poet in a segmented society that, to diminish tensions among different ethnical and social groups, produced an artificial “politically correct” way of referring to them. “An Atlas of the Difficult World” is a long poem

divided in thirteen sections in which the poet visits the geography and the history of United States enhancing its polarities, and denouncing social injustice and violence originated by the country's segregation. Firstly nature, and in the final section, poetry are seen as elements able to bind the country's geography, diminishing its discrepancies.

In the 1995 collection *Dark Fields of the Republic*, the poem "In Those Years," criticizes the exacerbating individualism and inwardness of our time. Finally, Rich's last volume *Midnight Salvage* combines poems dealing with many of the social and political questions seen in the previous books with hope.

Observing this trajectory of half a century, it is concluded that Rich's books have always showed some degree of political commitment. In the early fifties, her poetry reproduced masculine patterns of poetry, but within that some poems presented glimpses of a women-related poetics, mediated by images of animals. In the sixties, this early feminist thematic was expanded, her 1963 volume *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* presented free verse, timid appropriations of other voices and criticisms towards women's domestic routines. In the late sixties, as she moved from Massachusetts's countryside to New York City, she initiated a political antiwar activism, and increased her feminist commitment. Written amid the effervescence of important political events like the Vietnam War, Martin Luther King's death, and Women's Liberation movements, *Leaflets* and *The Will to Change* translated these social matters into poems. During the seventies, Rich increased her commitment to women issues publishing volumes of poetry and prose and becoming one of the most remarkable spokeswomen of the feminist movements.

Critics usually concentrate their studies in this period of her career; some have even labeled her poetics as feminist. If we take for granted that any ideal aiming at women liberation means a desire for sociopolitical and economic equality of women

and men, then Adrienne Rich's poetry never left its feminist artery. In this sense, her late writings unfold her previous feminism into a broader amplitude of commitment to other social causes. Since the late eighties, Rich has tried to locate herself in her country and in world history and cartography, widening her discussion on women-related issues. The innovation is that, lately, Rich has found a self-confidence that has enabled her to open her images to real situations. Such self-assurance was absent, for example, in 1968 poems like "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus" or "Nightbreak," which portrayed speakers enclosed in dreamy or domestic realms. This characteristic is also seen in the seventies, in poems like "Diving into the Wreck" or "Twenty-One Love Poems," oneiric settings to pursue (with a certain radical feminism and lesbianism) the dream of a common language able to level women's and men's differences.

Thus, from *Your Native Land, Your Life* (1986), Rich's poetry achieved a way of combining its previous feminist postures with a wider sense of placement in relation to the world. *An Atlas of the Difficult World*, for instance, locates injustices, prejudices and sufferings in the actual historic and geographic map of the United States. Presumably, this proximity of society's actual realm to lyric elements is believed to increase the readers' interest in Rich's poetry, as they recognize themselves in the poems. The closing section of "An Atlas," "(Dedications)" expresses this sense of identification through poetry.

Furthermore, Rich's last collection *Midnight Salvage* indicates an evolution in Rich's heteroglossia. Perhaps backed by her age and experience, Rich uses the referred self-confidence to increase the blending of female and male voices in her poetry. This attitude enriches the hybridization of her poems and demonstrates a reduction in the radical feminism showed in the seventies, as if she allowed herself the feeling of a certain hope in the future and a consequent communion among human beings.

However, this is not a simple task, as she declares in "Final Notations," written in 1991:

it will not be simple, it will not be long
 it will take little time, it will take all your thought
 it will take all your heart, it will take all your breath
 it will be short, it will not be simple

it will touch through your ribs, it will take all your heart
 it will not be long, it will occupy your thought
 as a city is occupied, as a bed is occupied
 it will take all your flesh, it will not be simple

You are coming into us who cannot withstand you
 you are coming into us who never wanted to withstand you
 you are taking parts of us into places never planned
 you are going far away with pieces of our lives

it will be short, it will take all your breath
 it will not be simple, it will become your will (1-14)

This demanding poetry, this lifework that chose her—"A life I didn't choose / chose me," —as she predicted in the 1961 poem "The Roofwalker," has taken all her will, thought and heart.

Throughout her career, Rich has renewed her devotion to this committed poetry, affirming to have "a certain mission," and to be "sworn to lucidity," in the sixties; diving into the essence of feminist afflictions and dreaming about a poetry able to propose a solution for her matters in the seventies. In the eighties, the poem "North American Time" reaffirmed her proposition of starting "to speak again," and in the final decade of the last century, among war, pollution and "noise," provoked by her use of heteroglossia, Adrienne Rich allows herself a sweeten voice: "I can imagine a sentence that might someday end with the word love" (64), continuing the complex task of fusing lyric and politics in her poetry.

Suggestions for Further Research

For having accompanied Adrienne Rich's poetry and non-fictional prose during all her publishing period, it is expected that this study has raised relevant questions for the academic debate on her poetics. However, due to the great amount of materials and their significant quality, it was impossible to produce analyses contemplating all Rich's "turning point poems". Some of them as "Phenomenology of Anger," "Natural Resources," were barely mentioned and others like "Frame," "Grandmothers," "Yom Kippur 1984" were not even included in the corpus.

Space restraints in the dissertation guidelines also resulted in shortened analyses of poems, mainly the lengthy ones in her last collections, from which I had to choose some fragments. Therefore, studies encompassing these gaps might prove useful. Adrienne Rich's Jewish heritage, for example, and its consequent relation to her poetry might produce interesting research.

Comparative studies of Adrienne Rich's poetry to other so-called feminist activist poets like Muriel Rukeyser and Audre Lorde would be very useful to examine different forms of commitment. An analysis contrasting Rich's and Charles Simic's relations to history and politics could produce valuable work. Finally, I wonder that a comparison between Adrienne Rich's political poems and Carlos Drummond de Andrade's "social lyricism," as Merquior named it, might reveal interesting cultural and aesthetic contrasts.

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