

Re-Writing Gender: Adrienne's Rich's Feminist Concerns

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims at considering and tackling Adrienne's Rich's Feminist Concerns. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the beginning of the organized movement known as feminism, which sought to end men's oppression of women. Critic Karen Offen points out that it wasn't until the 1880s that the term "feminism" started to be widely used in Europe as a synonym for women's emancipation. It was, the supporter of women's suffrage. Hubert Auclert, who coined the term "feminist," first used it in her 1882 publication of *La Citoyenne* (1982) and Eugenie Potonie-Pierre and the feminist organization Solidarite held a "feminist Congress" in Paris in May 1882. According to Rich, women struggle to communicate their sentiments of helplessness as their identities as mothers are destroyed by patriarchy. They can only watch what is occurring to themselves like mute onlookers because they are torn apart into their own components and pitted against them. They are unable to declare, "These are my children, and I will keep them." As soon as a woman becomes aware that a kid is developing inside of her, she bows to it and adopts the patriarchal script. She gives in to the influence of theories, ideals, archetypes, and descriptions of her new existence, despite the fact that none of these things were created by other women and have all been secretly circling about her ever since she first became aware of herself to be female and so capable of giving birth. Women are urged by Rich to consider what, out of all that welter of image-making and thought spinning, is worth salvaging, if only to grasp better a notion so fundamental in history, a condition that has been taken from the mothers themselves to reinforce the power of the dads.

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Introduction:

Adrienne Rich's diverse body of work has left a lasting legacy for the feminist movement, garnering significant critical attention. Adrienne Rich's poetry is a perceptive illustration of a poet whose work had a formal, self-centered beginning without politics: only a poet who has continued to forge a significant voice in overtly political contexts by paying attention to experience. Poetry was written by her as she realized that politics was not something "out there," but rather something "in here" that was causing her problems. Her political poetry can be read in two ways: as a study of women's lives in modern society, or as a study of human nature's concerns about community and identity. Her themes revolve around two opposing ideas: language's ability to influence awareness and our living experience, as well as its significance. Adrienne Rich's poetry is an insightful example of a poet whose writing was initially stiff, self-centered, and devoid of politics, but who has progressed to firmly establish one's political position as a key voice through sensitivity to experience. Rich eventually comes to the realization that women need the opportunity and permission to acknowledge and articulate the truths of their past experiences. Women's right to speak their truths should pay attention to their inner selves only through this expression of conversing between oneself, disclosing one's secrets to other ladies, comparison of injuries, and verbal exchange between patriarchal Institutions are susceptible to change and challenge.

Discussion:

One is not born a woman, One becomes one.

Simone de Beauvoir (1949), *The Second Sex*

Ah, but I'd chosen to be

A woman, not a beast or a tuber!

Adrienne Rich (1965), "Winter"

This paper critically analyzes and depicts how the gender of Rich influences her genre. Her poetry seeks validation from the community of women and therefore includes voices of other women artists and activists. She also addresses the common woman who is engaged in the daily routine of reconstituting and remaking the world. Her attempts of redefine herself as a woman and a poet will be considered in this research. Rich is a deeply committed artist and she speaks against the dislocations of the times, critiquing both women and men. Her re-visioning of gender has to include both the sexes and her poetry addresses itself to America of which she is both a citizen and alien.

The 1960s feminist movement was deeply concerned with personal and family life. Considering the rise of extreme feminism and the family and personal lives drew the attention of the focus of a political organization that described its issues as political. This sparked a process of reconsidering the lines as they had previously been isolating families from other societal structures and challenging the Biological institution of the family. This

fresh perspective began perceiving and considering the family as a social structure, a historical phenomenon, and a unit that is change.

Adrienne Rich's writings reflect the journey of thought and ideology in the history of feminism. A poet who had adopted the New Critical mode as a literary tool is actually able to discard it for a less formal and looser style which would incorporate and articulate her growing feminism. Innate honesty and courage move Rich to reveal her choice to be a woman in her own right and as different from an animal or a vegetable. The dialects of materialism in patriarchal ideology has thrust upon women the position of a non-being, an outsider, or the other. To attain the status of a human being who is equal, bold and free in society is yet to be accomplished. Adrienne Rich's poetry tries to envisage and realize such a humanly possible and patriarchally journey. The contradictions inherent in her position as a feminist and poet are woven and worked into the fabric of her text. Her growth as an artist and her increasing consciousness of herself as a woman find expression in the progress of her writings from *A Change of the World* published in 1951 to *Fox and Arts of the Possible* published in 2001, and *The School Among the Ruins* in 2004.

Rich's gender is central to her poetic development. This provides her with not only the thematic substance for her poetry, but also lends her a poetic voice to express her rage and angst. In her statement at a Poetry Reading in 1964, she offered a surrealistic and cognitive mode of writing in that, she "let the unconscious offer its materials, to listen to more than one voice of a single idea" (Gelpi,1975). Instead of "poems about experiences", she began writing "poems that are experiences" (Gelpi, 1975). Rich, thus, writes not just about women but she is the woman in her poems. It is as if her gender has become her genre. Her womanhood (not in the patriarchal sense) and her identification with it enable her work and invest her with the poetic power to focus and thematize her writings. In doing so she challenges the conventional assumptions about the pre-scripted role of woman in social formations. She successfully transcends notions of how women are supposed to think and act. Her essentially feminist concept of herself makes her poetry experimental (without posturing) and a delightful reading experience. Her views of herself in particular and woman in general are non-conformist, unconventional, frank and self-assessing. Her confrontation "with the naked and unabashed failure of the patriarchal politics and patriarchal civilization" (Rich, 1973) has made her sound strident and didactic. This reflects the act of the poet in becoming conscious against the established order as

Every act of becoming conscious

(it says here in this book)

is an unnatural act. "Rich,1973)

Rich tries to find an answer to this question raised by Virginia Woolf regarding patriarchy in *Three Guineas*: "where in short is it leading us, the procession of educated men?" (1966). Her negotiations with her woman-ness, family and society help to redefine herself as a woman and an artist too. She speaks not only for herself but also for other women. She can put forward her idea of a woman-centered, woman-oriented, woman-created world of civilization which like "the sea in another story" and "not a question of power" (Rich, 1973). The advocacy of such separatism and confrontational stances would obviously cause intense

pain and loneliness. This, in turn, threshes through her verse and prose essays. Rich feels "signified by pain":

Living the rest of my life

not under conditions of my choosing

wired into pain. (1981)

Now the problem is how to live "in a damaged body, in a world where pain means to be tagged, uncured ungrieved-over" (Rich,1986). Since her poetic voice flows from the conflicts and contradictions, from the needs and desires of her life, it is important to cast some light on the biographical circumstances leading to her poetical maturity. Simone de Beauvoir significantly remarks "it is from the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting" (Bennett, 1986). The circumstantial and psychological evidences indicate the development of Rich's mind and art. However, there is no tendency to treat poems as a kind of documentary evidence about the poet's life. She wrote in "the Geneses of Yom Kippur 1984" that a "poem is not a slice of the poet's life, although it obviously emerges from intense places, the poet's life and consciousness and experiences" (Gelpi,1975). The creative process encounters experiences and transmutes them "not only into words but into something new" (1975).

Born on May16, 1929, in a hospital in the Black ghetto in Baltimore, Maryland (USA), Adrienne Cecile Rich was the eldest child of a Gentile mother and a Jewish father. As a child, she enjoyed the privileges of the world of "acceptable folk which was white, gentile, (Christian, really) and had 'ideals' (which colored people, white 'common' people were not supposed to have)" (1986). This also meant not offending a person's sense of identity "by telling her or him a Negro or a Jew" (1986). Her Jewish ancestry did not play a major role in her childhood for two reasons. In his effort to assimilate with the rest of the white Americans, her father, Arnold Rich, was almost painstaking in his effort to hide this act. According to Jewish law, her mother's gentile heritage prevented her from being a Jew. Also, if it was true that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (1983), then according to feminist lesbian theory, she could not count herself as a Jew too.

Rich was brought up as a prodigy and made to "feel special", a "token " woman who was privileged by birth and class. Her education including a reading of works of male poets such as Tennyson, Keats, Arnold, Blake, Rossetti, Swinburne, Eliot, Pound, Wallace Stevens, Walt Whitman etc. Mindful of her father's praise and dispraise, she wrote poetry for him for twenty years. Auden chose her first volume of poems *A Change of World* (1951) for the Yale Younger Poets Award. In his forward to the collection, he praised Rich fir for her craftsmanship that adequately matched the subject in hand, and for avoiding the desire to be "original".

In the past century, the tendency has been to pay a lot of critical attention to the affinity-rivalry between the poet and her or his literary precursors. The "new criticism" with its advocates in Eliot, Auden and other male poets of the time generally advises literary readers to ignore those details in literature which are biographical in nature or gender specific. Good and therapy great literature always communicates "universal" truths and transcends the author, her or his life and personal concerns. In reality, all great authors whether it is Homer

or Sappho, Milton or George Eliot, speak of, to and for their own times and milieu. They "write only what their lives enable them to say" (Bennett 1986). Adrienne Rich's later works decode the poetic re-creation of herself and her experience, which make her verse personal as well as public. The honesty and commitment of her poetry towards herself and other women confers a rare integrity on the poet.

The opening poem "Storm Warnings" in *A Change of World* sets the tone of the volume. The formalism of the poem acts like a protective device, like "asbestos gloves", in the same way that the imagined room is locked in order to escape the inclement violent weather "as a defense against the season" and these "are the things we have learned to do/ who lived in troubled regions" (Rich, 1970). In case the oppressed desires of a woman find their way into embroidery as tigers that "prance" and "do not fear the men beneath the tree" as they 'pace in sleek chivalric certainty'. Then the poet learns to use the persona of the aunt as a safety shield. Certainly the only thing that Rich is sure of in these poems is her invisibility, which is maintained by her distance from the subject strategy. The imposition of form and restraint on the poems results in the creation of beautiful polished pieces of verse gleaming like the diamonds that the cutters cut and polish in the poem "*The Diamond Cutters*". However, beneath this façade of formalism, she is aware of a split within her- between "the girl who wrote poems, who defined herself in writing poems, and the girl who was to define herself by her relationships with men" (Gelpi, 1975). This duality of the imaginative psyche is unresolved and is metaphorically reflected in the image of the glass which "has been falling all the afternoon" (Rich, 1970). The poet has to exhume these "unpurged ghosts" (Rich, 1970) before encountering her own self and connecting to it.

Another strategy that becomes apparent in Rich's early works is what Elaine Showalter terms as the "double voiced discourse" (Keyes, 1986). Her poems contain two texts or stories. One is the obvious dominant discourse that carries the patriarchal culture forward and is bound by tradition. The other is the muted text that hints at female voices revealing their repressions and dissatisfactions. In poems like "An Unsaid Word", and "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers", the major story is of the woman's willingness to bow to male domination as she keeps silent while the man is mentally free to "forage" alone (Rich, 1970). In this way, she is able to keep her man. The style and, syntax, and diction are graceful and elegant in the male poetics of the time. The seven line-poem "An Unsaid Word" is "an object lesson in the sexual politics of the fifties" (Keyes, 1986) and the "feminine mystique" of the forties and fifties that Betty Friedan speaks of in her book of the same name. In "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers", the muted woman's voice is represented through the embroidered tigers. The title of 'Aunt Jennifer's Tigers' also reflects the duality of this discourse. The idea that a meek woman like aunt Jennifer has anything to do with tigers is laughable and paradoxical. Ironically her "terrified hands" are "ringed with ordeals" (Rich, 1998) and can only control the powerful tigers that she embroiders on the screen. They symbolize what she was denied in life. This use of the double voice discourse can be seen as a metaphor for the divided self of the woman and the artist. In spite of being creative, she has neither the freedom nor the power by learning to use language in order to express her creativity instead of the other way round. She has to "language" woman's silence and voice her hitherto unspoken thoughts.

The use of the dual discourse continues in Rich's poetry until she is able to speak in her own voice and make herself visible and heard. Even then, her voice seeks validity in the inclusion of other women's voices. The continuing dynamics on intertextuality calls attention to the creativity in the woman which has power to transform life. This power is not to be

mistake for political, economic or social power where it is seen as force and violence. It is Rich's purpose to develop a female aesthetic which will bring forth "radical change in human sensibility" (Gelpi,1975) that Auden wrote about in his Foreword to *A Change of World*. This kind of "women-centered poetic tradition" (Keyes, 1986) will validate woman's art and experiences. For the poet this movement towards change will re-write the genre and its complex ramifications. Her later poetry brings the realization that Rich has de-linked herself from the poetic principles of revered, canonical poets such as Emerson, Eliot and Stevens and Frost, and emerged as a political poet. For her the personal has become political. What she desires is the "breaking down (of) the artificial barriers between private and public" (Rich, 1998).

On the subject of art, Rich also engages with the metaphor of creation which runs as a thread of undercurrent throughout the texture of her writing. This is suggested through the images of embroidery of "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers). The idea that woman creates art through work, which is largely devalued and ignored by society, is perhaps, related to the female tradition of silence and unspoken thoughts. As she grows in consciousness, she tries to cast off the burdensome mantle by adopting a longer and looser style of writing in her later poems. Her themes begin to find focus and clarity as she recognizes her position as a woman and poet in the second half century America. As her sensibilities and awareness refine into conscious being, material for her poetry seems to emerge on its own and voice her deepening subjectivity. She would like to find a "cloud sufficient to express the sky" (Robson,2001). Yet, there is a retaining force which leads her to question:

Who will unhorse the rider

And free him from between

The walls of iron, the emblems

Crushing his chest with their weight? (Rich, 1957).

Rich still describes a woman's predicament in terms of the male and articulates as well, the theme of the burden of history in determining the fate of woman. Further reading of her poems requires to cope with the 'unpredictable leaps' and restlessness of her imagination and sensibility. The title of the poem is a tour-de-force as it raises myriad questions regarding the predetermined roles of women in society. There are a number of poetic photo frames put together as an album depicting women in different roles established by men, and re-enforced by the acquiescent passivity of women. Each photo is shot with an accuracy that immediately sensitizes the imagination to react psychosomatically with muscles and nerves tightening in tension. Rich would like to cast too bold a shadow or smash the mold straight off. What she does is to give snapshots of defiant women artists like Emily Dickinson, who stands out as an image of resistance and achievement. In addition she heralds the future fulfillment of women given through the dramatic image of the figure of the women at the climax of her poem :

Her mind full to the wind, I see her plunge

Breasted and glancing through the currents

Taking the light upon her

At least as beautiful as any boy

Or helicopter. (Rich, 1967).

Even now the beauty of the woman is compared to that of a boy which the poet probably does unconsciously. Or may be as she declares later:

This is the oppressor's language

Yet I need it to talk to you. (Rich,1993).

Conclusion:

Adrienne Rich has created a lasting legacy for the feminist movement thanks to the diversity of her work, which has garnered significant critical attention. Adrienne Rich's poetry exhibits a perceptive an illustration of a poet whose work had a formal, self-centered beginning without politics: only a poet who has continued. due to paying attention to experience, to forge a significant voice in overtly political contexts. Poetry by her as she began to understand that politics was not something she "out there," but rather something that is "in here" that is the root of her problem. Her Political poetry can be interpreted in two different ways: as a study of the life of Women in modern society, as well as a study of human nature worries about community and identity. Her themes center on two opposites: the ability of language to influence awareness and our living experience and its significance. Adrienne Rich's poetry is an insightful illustration of a poet whose writing was first stiff, self-centered, and lacking of politics; but, a poet who, through sensitivity to experience, has progressed to firmly establish one's political position as a key voice. Rich eventually she comes to the idea that women require the chance and permission to acknowledge and articulate the truths of their past-experienced life. Women's right to voice their truths ought to pay attention to their inner selves only by way of this expression of the conversing between oneself, disclosing one's secrets to other ladies, comparison of injuries and verbal exchange between patriarchal Institutions are susceptible to change and challenge.

إعادة كتابة الجنس: مخاوف أدريان ريتش النسوية

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ملخص البحث:

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى النظر في مخاوف أدريان ريتش النسوية ومعالجتها. شهد أواخر القرن التاسع عشر وأوائل القرن العشرين بداية الحركة المنظمة المعروفة باسم النسوية، والتي سعت إلى إنهاء اضطهاد الرجال للنساء. تشير النافذة كارين أوفن إلى أنه لم يبدأ استخدام مصطلح "النسوية" على نطاق واسع في أوروبا حتى ثمانينيات القرن التاسع عشر كمرادف لتحرير المرأة. كانت مؤيدة لحق المرأة في التصويت. هوبرت أوكليرت، الذي صاغ مصطلح "النسوية"، استخدمه لأول مرة في منشوراته عام 1882 لـ La Citoyenne (1982)، وعقدت أوجيني بوتوني بيير والمنظمة النسوية "Solidarite مؤتمراً نسوياً" في باريس في مايو 1882. وفقاً لريتش، تكافح النساء للتعبير عن مشاعرهن من العجز لأن النظام الأبوي قد دمر هوياتهن كامهات. يمكنهم فقط مشاهدة ما يحدث لأنفسهم مثل المنفرجين الصامتين لأنهم ممزقون إلى مكوناتهم الخاصة ويواجهونهم. إنهم غير قادرين على التصريح، "هؤلاء هم أطفالي، وسأحتفظ بهم." بمجرد أن تدرك المرأة أن طفلاً ينمو بداخلها، تنحني له وتبني النص الأبوي. إنها تستسلم لتأثير النظريات والمثل والنماذج الأصلية وأوصاف وجودها الجديد، على الرغم من حقيقة أن أيا من هذه الأشياء لم تخلقه نساء أخريات وأنهم جميعاً كانوا يدورون حولها سراً منذ أن أدركت نفسها لأول مرة أن تكون أنثى وقادرة على الولادة. حث ريتش النساء على التفكير فيما يستحق الإنقاذ، من بين كل هذا الاضطراب في صناعة الصور وغزل الأفكار، إذا كان ذلك فقط لفهم فكرة أساسية جداً في التاريخ بشكل أفضل، وهي حالة تم أخذها من الأمهات أنفسهن لتعزيزها. قوة الآباء.