CHAPTER 2
The Dialectics of Adrienne Rich’s Thought

(i) A Biographical Sketch

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

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

pushed into the scene.
a hard little head protruding

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

begins to ooze. Certain heats
melt it.¹

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

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

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

Again I sit, under duress, hands washed.

at your ink stained oaken desk.

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

Unspeakable fairy tales ebb like blood through my head

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

for you above all to read.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> It was difficult to be writing poetry. Nothing had prepared me for what motherhood was going to be like. As I think of it now, it was not simply a question of time and energy, although it was that too, but it was the question, ... of what did it mean to be a poet at all, and particularly to sort to go for broke as a poet and to be a woman who was a wife and mother? And what themes were permissible, were recognised, were validated at that time? To have written about my life in that domestic sphere, with all its passions, tensions, contradictions, would not have been validated. I felt. So it was a large part of my experience that I was only able to write out of obliquely or not at all.³⁷

The 1950s were the days of great social and political upheaval, in which the United States experienced the surge of the second wave of feminism which had a wide ranging influence in society. Rich, being a very perceptive and sensitive observer of social changes, desired to join and take an active part in the women’s movement, but the constant demands of her domestic life frustrated her again and made her realize “either to consider myself a failed woman, or a failed poet, or to try to find some synthesis by which to understand what was happening to me.”³⁸ It forced her to meditate over the prescribed roles of women in society and their inherent contradictions and dichotomies. She found it difficult to reconcile the
Victorian Lady of Leisure, the Angel in the House with the Victorian cook, scullery maid, laundress, governess, and nurse. She complains that though motherhood is given the so called great status in the patriarchal society but it is not considered a serious work or even a work: she is simply “supposed to be acting out of maternal instinct, doing chores a man would never take on, largely uncritical of the meaning of what she does.” which uncovers the deep-rooted politics working behind all the relationships in the patriarchal society. As mother-child relationship is the primary source of all relationships. Nevertheless, her experiences during this tiring period left her more matured and experienced which provided the foundation to her later works; the suffering and pain of her life as a young mother imparted the basis for understanding the lives of a broad gamut of women.

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

Paralyzed by the sense that there exists a mesh of relationships — e.g. between my anger at the children, my sensual life, pacifism, sex. (I mean sex in its broadest
significance, not merely sexual desire)—an interconnectedness which, if I could see it, make it valid, would give me back myself to function lucidly and passionately. Yet I grope in and out among these dark webs.¹¹

But during all this drama of life she realized that politics was not something "out there" but it was something "in here" and of the essence of her condition. All this frustration, mingled with guilt and long-suppressed anger, finally exploded in her *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, which stands as a watershed in her poetic development. For the first time, she was able to overthrow the formalism and the graceful feminine style, to directly encounter the question of female identity, the position of women in society and the relationship of women to women within a perspective that was feminine, for until such time Rich says she had "tried very hard not to identify myself as a female poet."²²

This was the stage when Rich was trying to come out of the traditional hold by venturing to use the staccato rhythms of modern vernacular and synchronic images that connected her to the tradition of T.S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Charles Olson and Denise Levertov. This process of liberation was encouraged by Denise Levertov who offered alternatives to the academic standards that Rich emulated, bringing into her range of consciousness poets like William Carlos Williams, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, the Black Mountain Poets, Charles Olson and the Beat poets. It was exactly at this point as Rich says, "I felt my own experience, the terms of my own existence, were exploding the forms I had been using and the traditions I had been using. It was tremendously important. I want to say, too, that this was coming through a woman, and this was very pre-feminist: I have to tell you."³³ Though she had begun to draw more extensively upon her own experiences as a woman, wife and mother, she
was still flinching away from the extremely self-revealing poems that Sexton, Plath, Lowell and other “confessional” poets had produced: “I hadn’t found the courage yet to do without authorities, or even to use the pronoun ‘I’ - the woman in the poem is always ‘she’. Nevertheless, Adrienne Rich began to find a clear personal focus and center. As Albert Gelpi aptly observes, “this volume marks her penetration into experience that makes for a distinguishing style.”

These subtle changes in perspective and style were not approved by the critics. Snapshots “was ignored, was written off as being too bitter and personal. Yet I knew I had gone beyond in that book. I was very conscious of male critics, then, and I was like flunking a course.” Rich observed in an interview in 1975. But she was not disturbed by this criticism, and published Necessities of Life in 1966 focusing on death as the sign of how occluded and erased she felt when her own sense of realising her rightful subject matter and voice was denied. It was nominated for the National Book Award; in the same year Rich was Phi Beta Kappa poet at Harvard College and then moved to New York City, where her husband accepted a professorship at City College New York. This was a period of tremendous socio-political disturbances in America, which greatly influenced the personal and poetic evolution of the poet. Her earlier, “inchoate feelings of personal conflict, sexual alienation and cultural oppression were finding increasing articulation in the larger social/political currents gathering force throughout the sixties, from the civil rights movements to the anti-war movement, to the emergent women’s movement” as observed by Deborah Pope. As the U.S. involvement in Vietnam escalated, Rich and her husband actively participated in their anti-war protests. She was also very active politically in protests against the Indo-China war. In 1966-68 she taught at Swarthmore College, and 1967-69 was Adjunct Professor of Writing in the
After the assassination of Martin Luther King, Rich started teaching in City College’s SEEK program, which was “designed to bring young, largely black and Puerto Rican high school students into the college mainstream - students who had been previously discarded by the college as not being capable of absorbing higher education, but who had been profoundly betrayed by the public school system in the city.” The experience proved an “education in democracy”: “It had a tremendous impact on me, and therefore on my poetry. In many ways it was the beginning of my political education.” This program raised highly political questions about the conflict of cultural codes of expression and the relations of language to power, issues that have constantly been addressed in Rich’s work. She was further strongly influenced by the writings of Black authors such as the novelist James Baldwin and the Algerian political philosopher Frantz Fanon, whose analysis of power and oppression gave shape to her feminist ideas in the making. Simone de Beauvoir’s pathbreaking book The Second Sex exercised a great influence upon Rich, it “opened my mind very wide, except that there seemed to be no one with whom I could talk about it.” In 1968, she got Eunice Tietjens Memorial Prize of Poetry Magazine. She also taught at Brandis University (1972-73) and the City College of the City University of New York (1974-75). The diverse institutions at which she taught exemplify the scope of her concerns and abilities.

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

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

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

Just as she blends the poet and the persona. Rich attempts to mix the private and the public worlds, making the words speak to larger issues of political change and social justice. She expresses her anger about the language that has been used to maintain oppression. In “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children”, she says: “knowledge of the oppressor/this is the oppressor’s language/yet I need it to talk to you”. and “there are books that describe all this/and they are useless.” Rich hopefully turns to the techniques of modern film making as a model for the “reconstruction” of “the oppressor’s language”.

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In 1970, Rich walked out of her marriage and later the same year her husband, Alfred Conrad, committed suicide which shattered her already fragmented life. She somehow managed to live together with her three sons treating each other as equals. Thinking about the splintered emotions following this accident in her life, Rich writes in "Shooting Script":

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

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

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

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

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

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

Adrienne Rich's choking anger and frustration, over the wreck patriarchy had enacted on literal and psychic landscape, had become unbearable and she plunged headlong in the wasteland with a loaded camera "to explore the wreck".\textsuperscript{54} What Rich searched for is "the wreck and not the story of the wreck/ the thing itself and not the myth."\textsuperscript{55} Closely connected
with this struggle for power and action was her strong, deepening determination to write directly and overtly as a woman, out of woman's body and experience. She realized that the new social order must begin with the truths of the female body as opposed to the male mind: "we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, the corporal ground of our intelligence." She conceived of a gynocentric or woman-centered universe which would face and correct the anti-female bias of patriarchy. In her poem "Tear Gas", she asserts. "The will to change begins in the body not in the mind/My politics is in my body...."

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

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

A man is asleep in the next room

He has spent a whole day
standing, throwing stones into the black pool
which keeps its blackness
Outside the frame of his dream we are stumbling up the hill
hand in hand, stumbling and guiding each other
over the scarred volcanic rock.\textsuperscript{61}

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

\begin{quote}
my visionary anger cleansing my sight
and the detailed perceptions of mercy
flowering from the anger
\end{quote}

I am the androgyny
I am the living mind you fail to describe
in your dead language
the lost noun, the verb surviving
only in the infinitive
the letters of my name are written under the lids
if the unborn child.\textsuperscript{62}

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If Adrienne Rich is at the end of a line of great modern poets, as Auden points out, she is the pioneer of a great new age in poetry, one who will see women's poetry come to the forefront. Mathilde's experience is "more than a personal episode" not merely because it fits into a larger historical moment, but because her experience encapsulates the common experience of women including Rich. First, Mathilde exist for love, relying for her happiness on a man—her lord. Second, the work she does with her hands is regarded not as art but as a "pastime", proper for ladies. Third, her work expresses her creative power and her envy of man's freedom to roam, to fight, to conquer, but she cannot admit this. Finally, her personal feelings butt in her work: knots appear into the tapestry when she thinks too much about the farewell scene. "too sharp for speech."#77 Mathilde remains silent about these common experiences. Rich's poetry moves from this silence to an aesthetic that validates Mathilde's "pastime" – "the patient handiwork"#78 involved in such women's art as weaving. Needle work, the laborious confection of female artistry, becomes the repeated symbol of the ambiguously triumphant womanly lot in her poetry. Her poetry revolts against the unquestioning veneration of power that has a negative and destructive function toward a new definition of power based upon a
women's capability to feel the particularity and commonality of female experience. Rich's evolving poetic consciousness is increasingly attracted by the inside story where knots catch the imagination in such a tapestry as Mathilde weaves.

These poems clearly show the early stage in Rich's evolution toward a feminist poetry. Well-mannered and feminine on the surface, seemingly content with passivity, dependence, and restraint, these poems have the ability to speak differently if read just a little carefully. In fact the very title of the book A Change of World seems prophetic as it anticipates the radical changes about to occur in American Society, her own life, and poetry in the coming decades. The "fluttering" hands and genteel manners have the strength of tigers. "prancing proud and unafraid." 79

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

Be serious, because
The stone may have contempt
For too familiar hands

Respect the adversary
Meet it with tools refined.
And thereby set your price. 80

But her task is not limited to this only as she knows. "Africa / Will yield you more to do." 81 She feels:
We come like dreamers searching for an answer
Passionately in need to reconstruct
The columned roofs under the blazing sky.
The courts so open, so forever locked.

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

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

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

The man she finds is a preacher, a “man of God indeed. / ... whose heart/ Thrust all it knew of passion into one/Chamber of iron inscribed Thy will be done.”

One night when the woman returns home late with the preacher, her husband, feeling indignation and raging like fire, rapes her: “I knew/That he could kill me then, but what he did / Was wrench me up the stairs, onto the bed.”

The poem attains its climax when the woman recalls the memories of the night of her husband’s death:

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

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

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

He concludes that.

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

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

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

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

Who will unhorse this rider
and free him from between
the walls of iron, the emblems
crushing his chest with their weight?

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

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

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

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

She laments how women replicate a sad history of opposing each other: “The argument ad feminam, all the old knives / that have rusted in my back. I drive in yours”. 99 In this patriarchal culture, the woman who is no longer young and seductive loses what little power she has “the drained and flagging bosom of our middle years”. 100 The middle aged and older woman is mired in anxiety, just as the independent woman is suppressed by guilt or the fear of being unfeminine. In such a depressing situation, female energy is turned inward manifesting itself as guilt, anxiety, hysteria, anger converting into self-hate and even madness and suicide: “A thinking woman sleeps with monsters / The beak that grips her, she becomes”. 101
Rich urges to all women to realize the demeaning effects of being praised for mediocrity, for “slattern thought styled intuition” as “time is male/ and in his caps drinks to the fair.” She asks a fundamental question: “has nature shown /her household books to you, daughter-in-law. / that her sons never saw?” The poem recalls Emily Dickinson and Mary Wollstonecraft, authentic individuals who broke the reductive pattern of relationships and expectations and prefigured modern, independent woman: “Well / she’s long about her coming, who must be / more merciless to herself than history.” She imagines a prototype for the potent, creative woman who is like a glider pilot, unconstrained and airborne. “Her mind full to the wind”, this woman is a helicopter safely delivering precious cargo; yet her daring flight is also defiant. “poised, still coming, / her fine blades making the air wince”.

Though there are risks involved in this process of self discovery of being “exposed larger than life, / and due to break my neck” but she is determined and questions “Was it worth while to lay – / with infinite exertion – / a roof I cannot live under?” Rich clearly prefers “Giants, the roofwalkers” whose labours outside in storm seem to her as heroic as they are dangerous:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The trees inside are moving out into the forest.
The forest that was empty all these days
.....       .........  ........
All nights the roots work
to disengage themselves from the cracks

Yet the struggle to keep in touch with the elemental forces, “the necessities of life” is never easy, as she declares in the closing lines of “Like This Together”:  

76
Only our fierce attention
gets hyacinths out of those
hard cerebral lumps,
unwraps raps the wet buds down
the whole length of a stem.\textsuperscript{119}

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

but the words coming clear

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

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

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

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

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

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

You were my genius, you
my cast-iron Viking, my helmed
lion-heart king in prison.
Years later now you're young
my fierce-half brother...\textsuperscript{134}

But now she finds herself in a mesh of relationships where "the stars in it are dim / and maybe have stopped burning".\textsuperscript{135} Orion's energy does not provide any help against the entanglement of domestic routine: "Indoors I bruise and blunder. / break faith, leave ill enough / alone, a dead child born in the dark."\textsuperscript{136} She feels powerless and her relationships seem unproductive and sterile. "A man reaches behind my eyes / and finds them empty".\textsuperscript{137} eating crumbs of her life. In such a condition when the entire world seem to be falling to pieces, Rich finds herself unable to stop this fragmentation, and in utter despair turns again to Orion. He is the source of strength who from "a star like eye / shooting its cold and egotistical spear".\textsuperscript{138} Albert Gelpi calls this poem "an animus poem". Referring to the Jungian theory, he says that "for a woman the animus represents her affinity with light as mind and spirit and her capacity for intellection and ego-consciousness.\textsuperscript{139} Now it becomes difficult to reconcile this masculinity with a female persona. Alicia Ostriker tries to resolve this problem in her essay "In Mind: The Divided Self in Women's Poetry". She says that women poets often present their poet personas as male. "a proud, controlling, even predatory force" while
the woman in their poems is seen as “pathetically needy”. Illustrating the nature of this polarity in Diana Wakoski’s poetry she writes: “The two sides of her self are appropriately also an all and a nothing, a strong and a weak.” She calls this “the all and nothing syndrome in female romantic fantasies.”

This syndrome is clearly visible in Rich. She seems to be swinging between love and egotism. She accepts that the words “cold and egotistical” are applied to her. She has got two choices: love – womanly, maternal and altruistic love – a love defined and ruled by the weight of an entire culture: and egotism – a force guided by men into creation, achievement, ambition, often at the expense of others, but justifiably so. But later on she rejects these alternatives as false ones and emphasises that “love” itself is in need of “re-vision”. “Orion” is a beautiful picturization of the experience of woman as creative artist and the ensuing joy and despair she feels. It proposes that “re-vision” of love is not enough, and Rich is required to put into question her identification, as an artist, with the male principle, a perception shaped by her study of Gottfried Benn’s essay “Artists and Old Age”, as she notes in a later gloss on “Orion”.

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

In the bed the pieces fly together
and the rifts fill or else
my body is a list of wounds
No longer is she an indifferent individual but part of the entire community, and her identification with the oppressed is intensified.

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

I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain powers
and those powers severely limited
by authorities whose faces I rarely see.²

Her “mission” is quite clear “which if obeyed to the letter will leave her intact.”² She is concerned with discovering what women have been and can be in a world where power has totally been denied to them. Her poetry becomes necessarily involved with the examination of the results of women’s powerlessness: with a redefinition of the nature of power: with the search for new sources of power for women: and with a celebration of the transfer of power from men alone to both men and women. She considers it essential for women to reveal every motive, every shabby instinct and cheap thrill that drives them on to achieve power, though the language is “the oppressor’s language”. But they have no choice except to make an effort to express themselves in the language that has no words to depict their experiences: and in the process perhaps they will find a new language. This process of self-realization requires the courage and will to change and to fill
the fractures of language: “The fracture of order / the repair of speech to / overcome this suffering.”

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

What we see, we see
and seeing is changing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fellow-creature: sister.
sitting across from me, dark with love
working like me to pick apart
working with me to remake
this trailing knitted thing, this cloth of darkness.
this woman's garment, trying to save the skein.

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

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

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

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

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

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