Chapter 3

Reacting to a Restriction: Self Actualization in Adrienne Rich

“Poetry expresses messages beyond the words it is contained in; it speaks of our desire; it reminds us of what we lack, of our need, and of our hungers” – Rich, in an interview with Mathew Rothschild.

With more than nineteen volumes of poetry and five outstanding books of prose to her credit, Adrienne Rich is hailed as one of the leading poets of contemporary America. Her identity as a radical, lesbian feminist poet has gained her popularity. Her growth as a poet of renown is evident in her poetry.

Adrienne Rich was born as the eldest of three daughters to Arnold Rich and Helen Jones Rich. Home-schooled until the age of nine, along with her younger sister, Cynthia, Rich was brought up under the strict discipline of her father. She was introduced to a large number of books by her father who strongly believed in the value of education. He taught her the craft of writing poetry and expected her to write poems daily. At first, she wrote poems mainly to please him. But later on, she felt a connection with poems and wrote for her own pleasure.
During adolescence, when her friends were dating, she preferred writing poetry. When she was eighteen, she learnt about the Holocaust and later when she left Baltimore, she knew that she could speak about it and search her Jewish roots. Due to her parent’s indifference to the Jewish religion, Rich hardly knew anything about it. She tried to learn about the Jewish culture once she was in Radcliffe College in 1947. While searching for her Jewish roots, her only outlet was writing poetry.

Rich graduated in 1951, during the next year she traveled to Europe and England. She married a Jewish, Harvard economist Alfred H. Conrad against the wishes of her parents. Her marriage symbolized a breaking away from her father’s dominating influence. She felt a strong kinship with her husband’s family. Their Jewish culture and traditions gave her a sense of belonging which she missed in her own family. By 1955, she had published two volumes of poetry, *A Change of World* and *The Diamond Cutters*. Following the successive birth of her three sons David, Paul and Jacob, Rich hardly had any time to write poems. She was frustrated in not being able to write or have time for herself.

During this time, Rich happened to read the works of the eighteenth century writer, Mary Wollstonecraft and the French writer, Simone de Beauvoir. She was greatly influenced by these women writers and also by the African American author, James Baldwin, whose work introduced her to the Civil Rights Movement. She felt inspired by the fact that if African
Reacting to a Restriction

Americans could fight for their rights, she too could fight for her rights as a woman. The confines of motherhood and the challenges of marriage provoked her to think differently and she began to think of newer possibilities in her life. She took up her writing career once again, writing in snatches when she could find the time in the middle of her numerous household responsibilities. The outcome of this poetic experience was poetry written from personal experience and written in free style, consciously rejecting traditional norms. After almost eight years of literary silence, Rich published another volume of poems in 1963 titled *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law: Poems 1954-1962*. She began dating her poems since then. In these poems, she reveals her strenuous life as a wife, mother and poet. She recognizes her feminist sensibility and this is evident in her poems. In the title poem, she openly expresses her rage at her circumstances. She acknowledges her need to change and she writes on behalf of all women writers. She uses a personal note in these poems and she openly expresses her rage at not having her own personal space or time. She lashes out against male domination and dwells on the idea of defining her own space.


In the course of Rich’s long career, however, the tone and style of *Necessities* seems to have only been a pause during a
turbulent period in her life and in the world. Rich’s personal issues with motherhood, sexuality and artistry were now being played against the larger background of the civil rights and antiwar movements. As these social and political movements gathered force during the 1960s, Rich became more actively involved and her commitment to fighting for civil rights and her passionate antiwar sentiments began to directly affect the subject and themes of her poetry (44).

During the sixties, most of Rich’s political activities were against the Vietnam War and supporting the Civil Rights Movement. She also taught at a remedial teaching English program for African American and Puerto Rican students called SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation & Knowledge) program. This unique experience taught her a lot and changed her perspective about the marginalized and neglected people who lived their lives amidst hardship. She saw the interconnectivity of the language she taught and the lives of these students. This made her strive harder for the social and political concerns she was involved in.

Meanwhile, Rich and her family moved to New York City. She re-established her connection with her parents. In 1969, she brought out a political volume of poems named Leaflets 1965-1968, which mentions the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights revolutions in America.
The year 1970 brought about a drastic change in the poet’s life where she adamantly sought independence, which her marriage would never allow. She brought her seventeen year old marriage to an end as she found it extremely dissatisfying. Soon after, Rich and her three sons had to survive her husband’s suicide. In her book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* she writes of this time:

> In time my sons grew older, I began changing my own life, we began to talk to each other as equals. Together we lived through my leaving the marriage, and through their father’s suicide. We became survivors, four distinct people with strong bonds connecting us (32).

Personal and political events blend in her volume of poems, *The Will to Change: Poems 1968-1970*. She was able to overcome her personal sufferings and at the same time was very concerned about the political and social events in her society. She believed in the community of women for she hoped it would overcome her loneliness. She became an active leader in the Women’s Liberation Movement. Free from all dominating constraints in her life, Rich chose to enjoy her independent life to the fullest.

*Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* reveals a turning point in Rich’s poetic career as she writes as a true woman, fighting for the rights of women and exploding in anger at the subjugation of women in her culture. She explores the presence of the community of women and at the same
time, searches her identity too. On a personal level, she found it easy to balance her roles as poet, woman, mother and friend. She writes in her book, *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979 - 1985*:

> To write directly and overtly as a woman, out of a woman’s body and experience, to take woman’s existence seriously as theme and source for art, was something I had been hungering to do, needing to do, all my writing life, ... But it released tremendous energy in me, as in so many other women, to have that way of writing affirmed and validated in a growing political community. I felt for the first time the closing of the gap between poet and woman (182).

When awarded the National Book Award for *DW*, Rich rejected it as an individual and later accepted it along with the other women nominees, Alice Walker and Audre Lorde, on behalf of all women. She emphasized the importance of the community of all women, irrespective of color, over the achievements of an individual. Thus, through her actions and her poetry, Rich upholds the philosophy of the women’s movement which believed in the power of the community of all women.

In 1976, Rich met her partner Michelle Cliff. In the same year she published *Of Woman Born* where she examines the institution of motherhood in the Western world. She visualizes a new world of powerful women, equal
in their power and potentialities, regardless of color, class, sexuality or nationality. She celebrates the uniqueness and strength of women:

We need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world women will truly create new life, bringing forth not only children (if and as we choose) but the visions, and the thinking, necessary to sustain, console, and alter human existence – a new relationship to the universe. Sexuality, politics, intelligence, power, manhood, work, community, intimacy will develop new meanings; thinking itself will be transformed. This is where we have to begin (285-86).

Now that she has openly declared her sexuality, Rich urges others to speak out too. She longs for a common language for women and she decides to continue fighting for her individual rights as a lesbian feminist poet. Rich decides to ‘reconstitute the world’ as she mentions in the poem, “Natural Resources”, where the miner explores the power of women in the volume, Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977. She wants to have a ‘common language’ for all women and she uses the example of a miner who goes to explore her own life. She admits that she cannot use the words ‘androgyne’ any more, a word she had used earlier in the poem, “Diving into the Wreck”, where the diver goes to examine the wreck. Instead, now she realizes and experiences the fact that women “with no
extraordinary power/ reconstitute the world”, with their own, natural potential. She rejects androgyny and embraces female separatism. The central section of the volume is the section where Rich openly deals with lesbian love, titled Twenty-One Love Poems (1976). These poems affirm the love among women and they are quite explicit in their rendering. Rich proclaims what she believes in and therein is her power.

On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978 is another book which reveals brilliant examinations of feminist politics and the lesbian experience. She believes in the united power of all women, which is essential to win over the patriarchal society. She identifies with women of all races, irrespective of color or nationality. In 1980, Rich undergoes orthopedic surgery for arthritis and suffers a lot of physical pain. In the same year, she publishes an essay disrupting the common ideas about heterosexuality and lesbianism titled “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”. She challenges the definition given by society to heterosexuals and to lesbians. Her volume of poems, A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far: Poems 1978-1981 explores Rich’s journey through the world of women. Her poetry continues to celebrate the strength of women. She recalls her grandmothers, Mary Gravely Jones and Hattie Rice Rich who have been influential in her life and she acknowledges them. She also recalls women in history who have been unnoticed and unaccounted for
their victorious life and the poet takes it up as her responsibility to remember them.

In *BBP*, Rich writes about her lesbian life:

*Lesbian existence* suggests both the fact of the historical presence of lesbians and our continuing creation of the meaning of that existence. I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range-through each woman’s life and throughout history- of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support; if we can also hear it in such associations as marriage resistance - we begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of *lesbianism* (51-52).

Rich redefines ‘lesbianism’ to include all women relationships like sharing their inner potentials, receiving and giving mutual support in the community of women against all kinds of atrocities, and suggests that only then would they ever be able to realize the great expanse of women.
On the physical front, in 1982, Rich has to undergo orthopedic surgery again for arthritis.

Comfortable now with her coming out as a lesbian and talking about love among women, Rich now is in search of her Jewish roots. She does this explicitly in a twenty three part poem named “Sources” which was later published in the volume, *Your Native Land, Your Life: Poems* (1986). She finally talks about her Jewish heritage which her family had vigorously denied. She examines her relationship with her father and her husband, both men who were important in her life to a certain extent as she evolved as a poet and as a strong woman. Both men were dead now and she is at peace with herself about them as she addresses them in her poems. She explores her roots and she is finally comfortable with them. She identifies with all aspects of her self and recognizes her whole true self, according to her own conscious choice.

Having fought for women and lesbian rights, Rich now joins progressive Jewish organizations to fight for their rights. Through this act, Rich tries to reclaim her Jewish heritage and culture which her father had denied. She becomes the member of the founding editorial group of a journal and expresses her views on feminism and on her culture.

disruptive happenings in it. She tries to include the sufferings faced by all Americans, irrespective of color or nationality. She mentions the exploited, abused and marginalized people of America and empathizes with them. She recounts with horror the shooting of two lesbians and recalls the terror of war on unassuming citizens and innocent children. She laments the atrocities of her country in the last decade of the twentieth century. Rich, as a political poet, is seen at her best as she questions the cruelties of a war ridden and terror stricken world and urges her readers to react against it. She uses her poetry to lend the political aspects of the world around her to the personal aspect of every citizen.

On the personal front, Rich becomes a grandmother. She undergoes spinal surgery again and has to suffer great pain. Her political convictions based on personal responses take further note in her book, *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* and in her poems, *Dark Fields of the Republic: Poems 1991-1995*. She continues her dialogue with the citizens of America and questions their passive stand against the cruelties hurled on them. Her poems take on a universal appeal as these conditions are prevalent elsewhere in the world too. She describes the horrors of war and its impact on ordinary people. Rich moves beyond her country, into the world, to create a quilt of ideas where the patches range from personal tragedies to political situations but which could be sewn together by individuals fighting for their rights and their freedom. The complex
patching up of the personal and the political in the poems of Rich continues in this volume too.

_Midnight Salvage: Poems 1995-1998_ published at the end of the twentieth century reveals an aging, activist poet who tries to salvage valuables from the wreck of culture. She examines her past themes and realizes that she has restored the language common to all women and has fought for the rights and privileges of all the marginalized and downtrodden people, irrespective of color and nationality. The epigraph to the volume suggests her state of mind, as she quotes the words of the poet George Oppen, “I don’t know how to measure happiness. The issue is about happiness, there is no other issue one has a right to think about for other people, to think about politically” (2). This suggests that one should search for happiness in a period of great turmoil in the world and in the wake of personal happiness.

During the turn of the century, she published _The Arts of The Possible: Essays and Conversations_ and _Fox: Poems 1998-2000_ and participated in many antiwar activities. _Fox_ represents her need for survival through poetry and artistic creativity. She reinstates the truthful quality of poetry and relates how it has been essential in her life. She reaffirms that she needs poetry to be an outlet for her individual life as a woman and is happy with the outcome.
Rich was appointed as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 2002. She published another volume of poems named *The School Among The Ruins: Poems 2000-2004* where she confronts dislocations in contemporary America and hopes amid utter hopelessness, a lesson well learnt from the school that is among the ruins. In her poems of these times, one can see a more poignant presentation of her themes that talk about the dialogue within and across gender, race and nationalities. She urges to find happiness and hope in the middle of potential dangers and unexpected situations. Here we see an aging, yet bold as ever, poet who takes note of the present situations and comments about it, ignoring her own physical ailments due to her recurring surgeries for arthritis. Instead of complaining and lamenting, she chooses to be hopeful and happy. The optimistic, cheerful attitude of the poet encourages the readers to be thus, despite the despairing situations in the world caused by war and terrorism. She decries these atrocities deliberately done by thoughtless people and she empathizes with the innocent victims. Yet she teaches them to be hopeful and urges them to explore further into their own lives and of those around them.

Rich continues to stamp her mark and her unique identity in the heart of her readers. She is one of a kind in the world of women, her country and the world over. A self actualizing poet in every sense of the term, Rich continues her sojourn courageously.
Through an analysis of her poetry, it can be traced how the social needs are fulfilled in the poetry of Rich. In and through her poems, she merges the public and the private worlds she experiences, thereby bringing about a new feministic perspective. Humanistic psychology deals with the physical, spiritual, mental and social aspects of a person that leads him to achieve his fullest potential. The higher ideals of the Maslowian hierarchy level is sought to be achieved. Mapping out the progression of ideas by studying the poems of Adrienne Rich makes one realize how she strives to grow towards self actualization through her own experiences.

The lowest levels, the physiological and security needs are fulfilled among the said American poets which leaves them with the other three levels. A systematic analysis of the poetry of Rich can help to trace her progression from a young poet to an independent, self actualizing poet. By the age of thirty, Rich had published the first two books of poetry, CW and DW which were written in the traditional way. Both these titles suggest that Rich was trying to bring about a change through her poems. Like the glittering diamond, she was ready to be cut by the cutters so as to sparkle. She uses her own experiences and strives to come out through it triumphantly. Her social need to be accepted is evident in the publication of her volume, Snapshots. For the first time, she boldly proclaims that she is stifled by her household chores. She feels that she has no time for herself or for her creativity because of her numerous, mundane household chores.
She rebels against this and boldly voices her opinions for the first time in the title poem of the volume. This can be considered as a peak experience of transformation in the life of the poet, from an ordinary woman to a bold, feminist poet, in her own right. Women struggle to come out of their predicament and they finally find the courage to triumph. Rich writes in the poem, “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law”:

Well,

she’s long about her coming, who must be more merciless to herself than history.

Her mind full to the wind, I see her plunge breasted and glancing through the currents, taking the light upon her at least as beautiful as any boy or helicopter, poised, still coming,

her fine blades making the air wince but her cargo no promise then:

delivered palpable

ours. (108-22)
The delivered ‘cargo’ is something that women can claim as their own, having nothing to do with their male counterparts. Borrowing an image from Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, the poet observes that though women have taken a long time in coming forward, they have at last begun to glow in a new light. Women have now started to emerge out of themselves as helicopters and deliver their own cargo which is no doubt their triumph in themselves. Thus the self actualizing aspect of attaining motivation from one’s inner being is initiated here. What the poet suggests is that a woman should neither remain satisfied with her inner glow, nor should she remain basking in that light, instead she should take up an uninhibited leap with her capabilities to establish her identity in her own right. The image of the ‘snapshots’ points to the posed, frozen images which can never be the ‘she’. What is required is the free, un-abandoned animation. This recognition by Rich in 1958 helps her in her growth to be a political feminist and a champion for women’s rights in the later years.

Rich slowly cultivates her need to be accepted by other people. She realizes her social need to be loved and she enters the real world, discarding the confines of domesticity which is clear in *Necessities*. In the title poem of the volume, she writes:

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. (1-5)

Further on in the poem, the blue color changes to red and then green after she copes with life’s trials. She tries to identify herself with the prominent women of the time, semanticist Wittgenstein, feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and cinematographer Louis Jouvet. But she finds herself completely exhausted and she decides to be herself and to remain alone, while coping with life’s tribulations as is evident in the following lines of the same poem:

Till, wolfed almost to shreds,
I learned to make myself

unappetizing. Scaly as a dry bulb
thrown into a cellar

I used myself, let nothing use me
Like being on a private dole. (20-25)

The metamorphosis continues in Rich and she declares that she is ready to face the world in two forms, “trenchant in motion as an eel, solid / as a cabbage-head” (27-28). This rare, unique metaphor suggests the boldness of the emerging poet. The beginning of the ongoing process of
becoming a self actualized person is highlighted here. A self actualizing person is a non-conformist and her concern is the development of her own inner potentialities. To be a non-conformist, one requires the challenges which come from the world around. A woman especially meets with greater odds with higher stakes, and this should not make her meek, instead it should ignite her soul to rise upward. The domestic metaphor towards the end of the poem, of “old women knitting, breathless / to tell their tales” (42) with its warmth and kindliness is typical of a woman poet, who creates spaces within her limited sphere.

Continuing her search for her own identity as a woman, Rich uses Beauvoir’s image again in the poem “In the Woods”:

My soul, my helicopter, whirred
distantly, by habit,

... only to find it all
going differently for once
this time: my soul wheeled back
and burst into my body.

Found! Ready or not. (30-31, 41-45)

This ‘helicopter’ of her inner being unexpectedly pulls ‘back’ into her body and finds her own self. Another concept of self actualization is
Reacting to a Restriction

evident here. She tries to find happiness and contentment in her own inner self. She is at last able to understand that she has her own potentialities and she must use them to emerge as a successful poet in a woman’s world.

Later on, Rich begins to understand that a poet’s world should extend beyond her self to accept other people. She begins to see poetry as a kind of action beyond the individual self. She writes in the poem “Leaflets”: “I am thinking how we can use what we have / to invent what we need” (134-35). She deals with the social issues during the time and rages against the crimes committed against innocent people. In the poem, “Tear Gas”, Rich mentions in a short note at the beginning of the poem: “October 12, 1969: reports of the tear-gassing of demonstrators protesting the treatment of G.I. prisoners in the stockade at Fort Dix, New Jersey” (5). This poem which refers to the political problems surrounding her gives Rich a chance to speak about her pent-up emotions about the terrors around her. She says that the tears of fear, rage, violence and force should be shed freely than suppressing it under false pretensions of pride, courage and indifference. It is clear that the poet has a will to change the existing circumstances by using the language of her mind. She feels that appropriate language is quite important, “wanting a word that will shed itself like a tear / onto the page / leaving its stain” (27-29). As a true self actualizing person, she is committed to the problems of society and tries to highlight them through her poems. She refers to her own experiences and to the political
Reacting to a Restriction

situations around her. She points out that change is inevitable. She urges her readers that they ought to resist the injustices they have to suffer and Rich leaves an example in her poems for her readers to emulate. She writes:

The will to change begins in the body not in the mind
My politics is in my body, accruing and expanding with every act of resistance and each of my failures

... that act is in me still

... I need a language to hear myself with to see myself in a language. (41-43, 45, 53-55)

She refers to her childhood and says that this resistance has been in her since then, but it is only now that she has acquired the courage to face it and she has finally found a way of expressing it through her poems. She hopes her words will never be forgotten.

One of the most explicit of Rich’s resistance poems is named “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children” in the volume, The Will to Change, published in 1971. This poem is based on the daring deed of a priest, Daniel Berrigan who burnt draft records which was cheered by antiwar activists as is clear in the poet’s note at the beginning of the poem: “I was in danger of verbalizing my moral impulses out of existence. Daniel
Reacting to a Restriction

Berrigan, on trial in Baltimore”(2). Rich affirms that a change is necessary and she uses authoritative language to affirm it. Rich says that she knows that words are useless in trying to dissuade people from the evils of war, yet she is willing to take the risk in order to clarify language, at least for her own satisfaction as she writes: “knowledge of the oppressor / this is the oppressor’s language / yet I need to talk to you”(38-40). She relates this historical incident to a personal one where her son and his friend burn their mathematics text book. Her son’s friend’s father rebukes the children for their acts and forbids them from seeing each other for a whole week. Rich is indignant at this man’s arrogance in banishing her son by his own decision without even asking her opinion or consulting her about it before implementing it. She is greatly irritated by this act of male supremacy. Here she acts as the spokesperson for all women in general who are struggling to put an end to male domination. She says: “I know it hurts to burn” (94). The oppressor does not feel the pain for it is the oppressed who suffer. Rich feels that she is among the oppressed; the oppressors here being men. Thus by describing a political problem and by mentioning a personal problem, Rich blends both problems at the same time, and also rages against the terror of war and other social injustices. Rich succeeds in highlighting her feministic views, thus urging women to come out of their self imposed silence and defend their cause. Rich, the emerging, confident and self actualizing poet, is seen at her best in this poem, with her mission
of liberating women from male supremacy and she does this with a great sense of responsibility.

Rich suggests in the poem “The Blue Ghazals” that poetry is a kind of action beyond the individual self, “The moment when a feeling enters the body / is political. This touch is political” (75-76). Her emergence as a political poet is self evident in these lines.

The ongoing process of writing poems makes Rich think of poems as ‘shooting scripts’ and no longer as ‘snapshots’. The poem, “Shooting Script”, describes the continuous movement in the poet’s mind, bidding farewell to her static life and urging her to move forward in life. These poems are not ‘snapshots’ but the ‘shooting’ of movies, an on-going process. At the end of the poem, the poet tells the inner self: “to read there the map of the future” (227) and “To pull yourself up by your own roots; to eat the last meal in / your old neighborhood” (235-236). The poet decides to move on, into the future and explore new areas of life.

Rich’s social needs come to its height as she acknowledges her love for other women in her life. Her feministic ideas are at its supreme level in the poem, “The Phenomenology of Anger” where she declares:

The only real love I have ever felt

was for children and other women.

Everything else was lust, pity,
Reacting to a Restriction

self-hatred, pity, lust.

This is a woman’s confession. (108-12)

She vents her anger against male patriarchy very strongly and at the same time, openly declares her love for women.

Rich goes further in the exploration of her own self as she analyses her past life with her husband, Conrad. She left her husband after seventeen years of marriage to live her own, independent life. Mellowed in life, Rich now understands why she had problems with her husband. In a poem entitled “From a Survivor”, in memory of her married life, Rich writes that they had considered themselves special people with no faults: “Like everybody else, we thought of ourselves as special”(9). But it is only now that she realizes that their marriage is like the bond of ordinary people who are susceptible to faults of their own, like anybody else in their culture. She recalls her husband as she has a clearer picture of him now. She realizes that her husband’s body is “no longer / the body of a god / or anything with power over my life” (14-16). This highlights her freedom from the male oppression she had to suffer for seventeen years of her life and from which she is now free. She declares that she is now living her life as she wants to and is sorry that her husband also did not do so with his life. She mentions this in her life:

and you are wastefully dead
who might have made the leap
we talked, too late, of making

which I live now
not as a leap
but a succession of brief, amazing movements

each one making possible the next. (18-24)

The ongoing process is mentioned here, Rich revealing that each moment in her life, lived fully, according to her own dictates, makes possible for her to live the next moment and the future wholeheartedly. She revels in her new found freedom. She strongly denies male domination and thus emerges as the bold representative of women of the twentieth century.

Now that Rich has realized her true, inner strength, she boldly goes forward to acknowledge it in her poem, “From an Old House in America”:

my power is brief and local
but I know my power

I have lived in isolation
from other women. (110-13)

She acknowledges her woman power and her shared power with other women, the sexuality and the capacity for bearing children which is something that men cannot share. She declares defiantly; “I cannot now lie down / with a man who fears my power” (174-75). Women now insist that
men should abolish their patriarchy if they want to fulfill their desire for love. They challenge men boldly, “What will you undertake?” (295). Thus women join forces against men and their superiority and declare themselves powerful in their own right, using their own capabilities. Women finally learn to love and be loved in the way they want it to be, not as dictated by men. They associate with other women and accept each other wholeheartedly. Their social needs are satisfied and they are now ready to move on to the next level towards self actualization, namely the esteem needs. They now know who they are, they dictate their own terms and they urge other women to do so too. Rich emerges as a feminist poet in her own right, a leader who urges fellow women to participate with her in her growth toward the ultimate accomplishment of her inner potentials.

This stage comprises the evolution of a young poet into a mature, uncompromising, feminist poet, conscious of her potential and having the courage to exhibit it and start living according to her own dictates.

An analysis of the fulfillment of the esteem needs in the poetry of Rich is examined here. From a feminist poet, she continues her ongoing process of becoming a political activist. She is concerned about the well being of her fellow beings and of other women in particular. She uses her creativity to endorse her feministic ideologies and she dreams of a common language where women can say whatever they want. She uses her energies as a woman to nurture the interrelationships among women. Her esteem for
other women is highlighted in the poems in the volume, *DCL*. The mental framework of Rich and her fellow women are set up in a manner where women are held in high regard and so are their ideas. This volume affirms the position of women in American history. It also connects the identity of the poet with the community of women. They have faith in their interdependence and this faith shines in the lives of all women described in the volume, including the life of the poet.

Rich tries to further establish the power of women by citing famous women. She cites the life of the famous scientist, Madam Curie in the poem, “Power”, where she eulogizes the woman scientist who risked her life for the cause she believed in. Rich explores the inherent power of the woman scientist and the tragic results of indulging in it. Marie Curie had the power but her scientific discovery of radium consumed her own life:

She died a famous woman denying
her wounds
denying
her wounds came from the same source as her power. (14-17)

Marie Curie gave her life for her discovery. Rich questions whether this kind of power is necessary. Women must use their power to live on. The poet easily relates with the famous woman:

she must have known she suffered from radiation sickness
her body bombarded for years by the element
she had purified. (7-9)

She seemed to deny that her discovery was putting an end to her own life. This is one type of women power – the self sacrificing power. Rich hates this kind of sacrificing power in women, which drains them of their life. Instead she wants them to gain strength from their power and to live with it. She strives to achieve mastery of her power and live triumphantly.

Another kind of power is depicted, in the poem, “Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev”, which narrates the story of a climbing team of women, who lost their lives in a storm. Elvira Shatayev, the leader of the team is excited that they could achieve their goal. In this poem, women’s consciousness is attained by women who learn to celebrate their uniqueness. They achieve their goal but have to risk their lives for it. They do it happily as they have the satisfaction of finally realizing their dream. Their courage and determination to conquer is applauded by the poet:

Now I am further

ahead than either of us dreamed anyone would be

I have become

the white snow packed like asphalt by the wind

the women I love. (22-26)
She is content that they have chosen this climb, for their own sake, regardless of the hardships they have to face and they revel in their achievement. Rich comments:

through changes elemental and minute
as those we underwent
to ring each other here
choosing ourselves each other and this life
whose every breath and grasp and further foothold
is somewhere still enacted and continuing. (46-51)

Here the women are seen to choose their own destiny by their own decision. The power of women is enacted here. Women share their love for each other and they have a common aim. They go through their hazardous experience by their love and interdependence as a community of courageous women, who dared to achieve heights on their own. Rich quotes Shatayev’s words in her diary:

Now we are ready
and each of us knows it I have never loved
like this I have never seen
my own forces so taken up and shared
and given back
After the long training the early sieges
we are moving almost effortlessly in our love. (52-58)
Here Rich may be talking about herself too, through the words of the leader. After many hurdles, she now writes effortlessly as a woman, about her own experiences. The poem ends on a strong note:

\[
\text{We will not live}  \\
\text{to settle for less We have dreamed of this}  \\
\text{all of our lives. (69-71)}
\]

Women have, at last, recognized their own potential and now they will live according to their own choices. This has been their goal all along and now as they have almost succeeded in it, they will never stoop below this goal. Rich is tired of women stooping to half their heights and this will never be allowed again.

In an earlier poem, “Planetarium” in The Will to Change, Rich celebrates Caroline Herschel, an astronomer, who became famous in her own right, while helping her brother William, in the discovery of Uranus. Women’s consciousness was yet to be realized then but Rich acknowledges it as a great discovery:

\[
\text{I am an instrument in the shape}  \\
\text{of a woman trying to translate pulsations}  \\
\text{into images for the relief of the body}  \\
\text{and the reconstruction of the mind. (42-45)}
\]
Women’s achievements are applauded and are given credit. Rich recognizes her dual role as an American woman and as a poet. She acknowledges it in her poems.

Similarly in a poem in *DCL* named “Paula Becker to Clara Westhoff”, Rich celebrates the life and convictions of two women friends whose friendship brings forth their power to use their maximum capabilities in all their activities. Paula, the painter, talks to her friend Clara, the sculptor and declares their joint decision:

*How we used to work*

*side by side! And how I’ve worked since then*
*trying to create according to our plan*
*that we’d bring, against all odds, our full power*
*to every subject. Hold back nothing*
*because we were women. (64-69)*

The bold declaration of the two women friends to work to their fullest capabilities echoes the wish of the poet as she is determined in living her life to the fullest too. Women are conscious of the ‘odds’ they have to face and they prepare themselves to face it and overcome it on their own, with their ‘full power’ and they emerge victorious. The poet too is conscious of her power and the power of women on the whole and it is with this view in mind that she strives to bring in a whole ‘new’ poetry and give it to the world she lives in.
Rich’s dream of creating a common language among women makes her a rebel once again against male domination of the world and the language of men. She is clear about her choice this time, her choice of loving women as she reveals in “Splittings”: “I choose to love this time for once / with all my intelligence” (50-51).

Twenty-One is the culmination of the desire of the poet to bring in a bonding between women. It is a complicated procedure which challenges the existing norms of the world. Men are excluded and the poems take on an overtly feminist approach. Rich declares her passionate love for other women explicitly:

a touch is enough to let us know
we’re not alone in the universe, even in sleep

... 

But we have different voices, even in sleep,
and our bodies, so alike, are yet so different
and the past echoing through our bloodstream
is freighted with different language, different meanings-
though in any chronicle of the world we share
it could be written with new meaning
we were two lovers of one gender,
we were two women of one generation. (174-75, 181-88)
Two women who choose to be together is an extraordinary choice in a world different from their perspective. Though they defy conventions, they are extremely happy in their choice:

If I could let you know-
two women together is a work
nothing in civilization has made simple,
two people together is a work
heroic in its ordinariness. (203-207)

Women here are extremely happy in their convictions and they are glad with their conscious choice: “I choose to walk here. And to draw this circle” (237).

What makes Twenty-One different is the fact that women have finally chosen to change the attitude and their mind about loving women, to free themselves from the framework of patriarchal norms and thus liberate themselves in their minds as well as in their actions. Two women lovers share what they think is beautiful but the society around them think differently. To survive in this world of contradictions is what women lovers have to learn even in their intimate relationships. They finally accept their relationship in their mind and frankly declare them through their poems and that is what makes these poems outstandingly different. Rich uses her poetry to connect between women and between their relationships and succeeds in it.
The third section of the volume entitled “Not Somewhere Else, But Here” pays tribute to the wonderful women whom the poet knew in her life. She writes for her own self and finally finds the courage to speak of her own love for another woman. She also addresses her lover in this section. She writes: “Courage / to feel this   To tell of this   to be alive / Trying to learn unteachable lessons” (26-28). She attains the courage to live ‘here’ in this world and ‘not somewhere else’ and revels in it. This section contains poems for the various women in her life. Poems like “Sibling Mysteries” for her sister and the elegiac “Mother Right”, all talk about very personal issues and experiences the poet has seen or experienced personally.

The poem, “Natural Resources” brings to mind an earlier poem, “Diving into the Wreck” which talks of a diver in search of a treasure in the midst of a wreck. Here, in “Natural Resources”, the explorer is a miner who searches for the glittering emerald stone. This miner is a woman who is trained to explore thoroughly. She is determined to find her own course and explore on her own. She boldly declares that she is tired of doing what others expect her to do and she is determined to live her own life. In this poem, Rich brings in the metaphor of the spider who patiently builds her web again and again. But she says that she is impatient of being a victim to external circumstances always. She refuses to succumb to it any longer:

I am tired of faintheartedness,
their having to be *exceptional*
to do what an ordinary woman
does in the course of things
I am tired of women stooping to half our height
to bring the essential vein to light

... 

This is what I am: watching the spider
rebuild – “patiently”, they say,

but I recognize in her
impatience – my own –

the passion to make and make again
where such unmaking reigns

the refusal to be a victim
we have lived with violence so long

... 

These are words I cannot choose again:

Humanism androgyny. (92-97, 102-09, 144-45)

These words are quite the opposite of what she had professed in the wreck in the earlier poem, “Diving into the Wreck”. For now, the poet has found the treasure which is the constant, ordinary acts of female labors, which preserve and remake the world in which they live. She insists that it
is the women folk who preserve as well as rebuild the community they live in, by their tireless, insistent labors. Finally, she recognizes this and has the courage to declare it. She concludes this poem with the ultimate declaration:

I have to cast my lot with those
who age after age, perversely,
with no extraordinary power
reconstitute the world. (174-77)

She acknowledges the services of countless women who, through their ordinary acts, rebuild the world. She finally acknowledges the natural resources of women who strive in their power to rebuild the world on their own terms and who take the world forward along with them.

In the poem, “Towards the Solstice”, Rich urges women folk to realize their inner strength instead of waiting to find their strength from without. It is within them, she declares:

It seems I am still waiting
for them to make some clear demand
some articulate sound or gesture,
for release to come from anywhere
but inside myself. (89-93)
She recognizes that something new must be formed and she dwells on the idea of the beginning of a wholly new poetry. This emerges from Rich’s wholehearted commitment to womenfolk. At this juncture of her life, Rich begins to yearn for the ‘common language’ for the ‘new poetry’ under the pressure of her need to explore the various relationships – women to women relationships like mothers and daughters, sister-siblings, lover and lover, friendships and the spirit-sisters of past and future. She values her relationship with her women friends very easily. She declares in “Transcendental Etude”:

\[
I \text{ am the lover and the loved,}
\]
\[
\text{home and wanderer, she who splits}
\]
\[
\text{firewood and she who knocks, a stranger}
\]
\[
\text{in the storm, two women, eye to eye}
\]
\[
\text{measuring each other’s spirit, each other’s}
\]
\[
\text{limitless desire,}
\]

\[
\text{a whole new poetry beginning here. (141-47)}
\]

Women have the power inherent in them, in their daily, common activities. The only thing is that they have to recognize this power and enjoy their equal status in this world. Rich is sure that women can change the existing pattern of the civilization with their power. She urges women to strengthen their relationship with each other. Her self esteem and her esteem for fellow women are at its height here.
Claire Keyes, in her book, *The Aesthetics of Power*, comments on this poem:

Adrienne Rich wants to convert the world through women’s power-to-transform. *Transform* means to change the nature, function or condition of – to *convert*. Whether she accomplishes this remains to be seen. More to the point, she articulates her dream as a conscious goal. Thus she earns the label of visionary poet. As visionary, Adrienne Rich has an awareness of the whole that transcends time and space. As poet, she can both articulate her vision and urge others towards its realization. (179)

Rich is able to conclude the poem by upholding to a common language found in the loving and caring ordinary acts of women. They all begin with each individual woman and then it is extended to all women who come into contact with each other. Their interdependence enables women to create something wholly new and unique. This powerful vision of women working together brings in a whole new poetry. Thus, the poet relates to other women in a unique way and derives extreme happiness out of it. She rejoices in her companionship with other women and creates a new poetry, different in itself because of its unique experiences. She is proud to be a woman poet who can share with other women and write openly about their experiences. Rich thus strives to understand the true
nature of poetry and sums it up beautifully in the poem, “Origins and History of Consciousness”:

the true nature of poetry. The drive
to connect. The dream of a common language. (11-12)

She undertakes to materialize this dream in and through her poetry.

Moreover, Rich wants to connect all women, irrespective of age, caste or race, in this interrelationship. This is definitely a progressive step in her growth towards self actualization. Rich goes on to highlight women power and is very explicit in some of her poems. She writes in the poem, “Hunger (For Audre Lorde)” about the power women have in themselves, but fail to recognize:

We shrink from touching
our power, we shrink away, we starve ourselves
and each other, we’re scared shitless
of what it could be to take and use our love. (44-45)

As women have now identified their love, Rich feels that they should go ahead and use it, boldly declaring them capable of it. In this poem, she also addresses the problem that African American women face in their struggle to identify themselves:

I’m alive to want more than life,
want it for others starving and unborn,
to name the deprivations boring
into my will, my affections, into the brains
of daughters, sisters, lovers caught in the crossfire
of terrorists of the mind. (64-69)

She is highly concerned about the women in her society who still
need to come out of their silence and suppression and stand boldly in their
own power. She encourages other women to recognize their inherent power
which is lying dominant in their life and urges them to use it to vindicate
their own sufferings. She underscores the fact that women need not be
silent anymore. They need to utilize their inner power in their own way.

A hardcore feminist, Rich openly declared her relationship with her
partner, Michelle Cliff. This enabled her to write poems in favor of women
all the more. *A Wild Patience* stresses the patience with which she and
other women have endured their sufferings. She expresses her rage and her
love which are explicit themes in this volume. This volume is feministic to
the core as it includes poems with love towards other women friends,
recalls women of the earlier centuries, talks about the poet’s own
grandmothers and includes many other women relationships. In “The
Images”, the poet addresses her anger and her tenderness and talks about it
as being the two sides of her self. She acknowledges the love and warmth
shared by two women and thus advocates lesbianism:
We are trying to live
in a clearheaded tenderness –
I speak not merely of us, our lives
are “moral and ordinary”
as the lives of numberless women –

but I know my imagination lies:
in the name of freedom of speech. (34-38, 42-43)

Rich insists that women ought to speak their minds and establish their own laws if they want to live free lives, free from the shackles of man-made norms.

Rich quotes from the Webster dictionary on a poem’s title, “Integrity” as “the quality or state of being complete; unbroken condition; entirety” which aptly describes the condition women have to achieve in order to declare their individuality. She writes this poem in her ‘forty-ninth year’ which she describes as a ‘critical’ time when “a wild patience has taken me this far” (1). She states:

but really I have nothing but myself
to go by; nothing
stands in the realm of pure necessity
except what my hands can hold.

After so long, this answer.

... 
Anger and tenderness: my selves.
And now I can believe they breathe in me
as angels, not polarities.
Anger and tenderness: the spider’s genius
to spin and weave in the same action
from her own body, anywhere-
even from a broken web. (23-28, 34-40)

She finally names her selves: anger and tenderness. She highlights
the image of the spider weaving its own web from its own body. This
spider image reinforces the power of women who imbibe their strength
from their inner being. The idea of realizing one’s own strength and using
it to its fullest capability emerges strong in this poem. For the poet and for
other people like her, their strength lies in their own individuality and in
their combined power, strengthened by their interrelatedness.

Rich reinstates this power for another woman in the poem, “For
Julia in Nebraska”, as she renders a glowing tribute to the ‘brave linguist’,
Willa Cather:

Brave linguist, bearing your double axe and shield
painfully honed and polished,
no word lies cool on your tongue
bent on restoring meaning to
our lesbian names, in quiet fury
weaving the chronicle so violently torn. (31-36)

Anger and tenderness are predominant here in her love for lesbians. She recalls the spider image in the concluding lines, pledging her devotion to her fellow women strongly:

Live, Julia! What was I writing
but my own pledge to myself
where the love of women is rooted?
And what was I invoking
but the matrices we weave
web upon web, delicate rafters
flung in audacity to the prairie skies
nets of telepathy contrived. (73-80)

Her self esteem as a lesbian, feminist poet and her esteem for her fellow women are at its height here.

Once the feminist aspect is clear, her lesbianism declared, Rich sets out to discover another aspect of her personality – her Jewish heritage which she had been taught to deny all her life. In a compelling poem of twenty three parts, “Sources” from the volume, Native Land Rich comes to terms with her Jewish roots and she is exuberant in her findings. She manages to track down her Jewish heritage and who she actually is. Her self exploration helps her to identify with her culture and in turn with her
own self. She retraces her roots and her life. In the poem, the poet is returning to her house in Vermont after sixteen years and is seeing her past in a new perspective. She thinks of her source of power and seeks her own identity. She knows she is a “Southern Jew, split at the root” (36-37) but she acknowledges this and sees it as her strength: “Everything that has ever / helped me has come through what already / lay stored in me” (24-26).

She believes that her strength lies in her identity as a person in her own right. She accepts that her experiences have made her the person that she is today:

There is a whom, a where

that is not chosen    that is given   and sometimes falsely given

in the beginning we grasp whatever we can
to survive. (56-59)

She recognizes and accepts who she is, at last. She is happy that she is now free to acknowledge her roots.

In the poem, Rich directly addresses her dead father. She sees her father and his role in a new perspective under ‘a powerful, womanly lens’ (108). Through this ‘lens’, she sees her father as a suffering Jewish alien:

I saw the power and arrogance of the male as your true watermark; I did not see beneath it the suffering of the Jew, the alien stamp you bore, because you had deliberately
arranged that it should be invisible to me. It is only now, under a powerful, womanly lens, that I can decipher your suffering and deny no part of my own. (105-10)

For years, she had seen him as an over-powerful, authoritarian, but now she sees him differently. She attains a healing clarity of her true identity as a woman, free from the shackles of powerful male dominance. Rich moves on, convinced that “there is something else: the faith / of those despised and endangered” (214-15) and she feels rooted with the Jews. Later on, she addresses her dead husband too, to whom she refers to ‘the other Jew’ – ‘the one’ (243) she left her father for. She likens her father to her husband:

The one both like and unlike you, who explained you to me for years, who could not explain himself … The one who, like you, ended isolate, who had tried to move in the floating world of the assimilated who know and deny they will always be aliens. Who drove to Vermont in a rented car at dawn and shot himself. For so many years I had thought you and he were in opposition I needed your unlikeness then; now it’s your likeness that stares me in the face. (245-47, 248-53)

Rich finally understands the two men in her life at last. Her new perspective has given her a better understanding of them and she is happy about it.
Rich states her ambition clearly in the twentieth section of the poem, which enables her to assert her goal in life. She finally “becomes the woman with a mission, not to win prizes / but to change the laws of history” (311-12). This, for her, is a definite step for her towards self actualization. Once more, she addresses her husband directly, something that she had not done till then:

To say: no person, trying to take responsibility for her or his identity, should have to be so alone. There must be those among whom we can sit down and weep, and still be counted as warriors…but we will have to make it, we who want an end to suffering, who want to change the laws of history, if we are not to give ourselves away. (357-60, 363-65)

Rich finally admits her need of belonging and she says that she finds this in the company of women. She finds solace and solidarity among women. She assumes responsibility for her own self and her society and thus transfers the power of womanhood to all women. She concludes the long poem brilliantly:

I mean knowing the world, and my place in it, not in order to stare with bitterness or detachment, but as a powerful and womanly series of choices: and here I write the words, in their fullness: powerful; womanly. (385-89)
Rich strongly asserts her place in the society of women as a powerful woman who lives according to her own dictates. She confronts her sources, reconciles with the past and plunges boldly into the future, determined to read the future through her own, powerful, ‘womanly lens’ in which she triumphs superbly.

Through the powerful lens of womanhood, Rich boldly faces the unseen future, strong in her convictions, having faith in her capabilities, moving forward after realizing and reconciling with her past and her Jewish identity. She is no longer confused about her identity or her roots but is totally clear about it. This realization gives her the strength to go forward and be a leading woman poet as well as a powerful leader in her own right.

Her self esteem intact, she continues with her mission of bringing power and prestige into the lives of other women around her. As a result of her conscious choice to act with the strength of her womanly power, she chooses to be involved in the society. We can see the blossoming of a mature, confident, adult, woman poet, conscious of her strengths and achievements.

Upholding what she believes in, Rich continues to write poetry as a free individual. She makes her privileges clear in another poem, “North American Time” where she exalts verbal privilege:
We move but our words stand
become responsible
for more than we intended

and this is verbal privilege

... Words are found responsible
all you can do is choose them
or choose
to remain silent. Or, you never had a choice,
which is why the words that do stand
are responsible

and this is verbal privilege

... Poet, sister: words—
whether we like it or not—
stand in a time of their own. (24-27, 41-47, 60-62)

Rich upholds her personal and social responsibilities and she urges
others to think and act upon their choices too. Through this poem, she
stresses the accountability that poets must have of their words.

Rich appreciates the power of time in the lives of people. All are
under the just control of time and changes are inevitable. She writes in
“Living Memory”: 
Reacting to a Restriction

Time’s power, the only just power—would you give it away? (157-59)

Only through the past experiences can the future be imagined. This poem brings hope in a troubled world. The poet is optimistic as always.

In the 1980s, as Rich becomes an established, feminist poet, she recognizes her place in the world and tries to reexamine her life and her influence as a poet. She relates to her country and its predicaments in the contemporary society as it faces different situations due to natural and man-made calamities. She tries to explore her own country in her own terms. In “An Atlas to a Difficult World”, a poem which is in thirteen parts, Rich moves from the personal to the political, from local to national causes and tries to understand her country from her own perspective. She explores her own territory and urges her readers to do so too. She acknowledges that the declarations which are made elsewhere affect and disrupt the ordinary lives of people who have to bear the consequences. But in the midst of it all, domestic abuse continues even after natural calamities and she mentions the woman who does not use her power, “even though she was really the stronger” (46). Rich also tries to turn to nature for redemption, a rare thing for her, as she tries to dispel despair:

I don’t want to know wreckage, dreck and waste, but these are the materials...
and so are the slow lift of the moon’s belly
over wreckage, dreck and waste, wild treefrogs calling in
another season, light and music still pouring over
our fissured, cracked terrain. (48-53)

Accepting the freshness of nature and the joy of living ordinary lives
and doing ordinary tasks in themselves has been made extraordinary for
self actualizers as they revel in finding joy in the middle of despair and
gloom. At the same time, Rich is concerned by the destruction and
disinterestedness caused by her fellow citizens and she urges them to
respond strongly. She surveys and mourns the disaster brought about by the
sheer neglect of her people and she questions it:

A patriot is not a weapon. A patriot is one who wrestles for the
soul of her country
as she wrestles for her own being, for the soul of his country

. . .

to remember her true country, remember his suffering land:
remember
that blessing and cursing are born as twins and separated at birth
to meet again in mourning
that the internal emigrant is the most homesick of all women and
of all men
that every flag that flies today is a cry of pain.
Where are we moored?
Where are the bindings?
What behooves us? (428- 29, 434- 40)

Rich mentions the utter ruthlessness of human beings towards each other without any love or compassion. She relates the incident where a lesbian was murdered by a man just because he did not approve of her lesbianism. She also comments on the loneliness of people in the advanced world. Materialism has prospered but human values have diminished. Rich, as a self actualizing poet, strongly condemns this loss of values. Loneliness prevents people from confiding with one another while others take advantage of confidences for selfish gains. The outcome of this deception is bitterness, anger and destruction which are despicable.

Rich concludes the poem by dedicating it to the countless, unknown lives, who live in loneliness, boredom, sickness and old age and ‘who are counted out’ by others. She encourages these people and requests them not to give up on their life. She feels that it is only through her poems that she can reach out and console these countless lives who are suffering. She empathizes with them as a true self actualizing person and tries to elevate their suffering. She speaks of “a beauty built to last / from inside out” (441– 42) and urges her readers to think better of their situation and to recognize the strength that lies within oneself. She reaches out to the fellow
sufferer and becomes one with them in their suffering. She concludes with these lines:

    I know you are reading this poem listening for something, torn
    between bitterness and hope
    turning back once again to the task you cannot refuse.
    I know you are reading this poem because there is nothing else
    left to read
    there where you have landed, stripped as you are. (490-93)

Rich feels that being stripped of fellow feeling and companionship is truly being lonely even if her society is blessed with all the material benefits wealth can afford. In and through her poems, Rich conveys the importance of being sensitive to the needs of other people. She believes that human communication and interrelatedness is far more valuable than materialism and she vouches for it through her poems. The need to associate with others and to respect them individually is highlighted through these poems of Rich as she marches towards her ultimate goal of self actualization. Her esteem for other people around her progresses her growth as a self actualizer. She has emerged triumphant so far and she moves forward, taking her readers and other women, irrespective of race, along with her on her journey towards the ultimate goal of self actualization.
During the last decades of the twentieth century, we find Rich, the poet, the woman leader, lesbian and political activist at peace with herself and her personal life. But we can see that she is visibly troubled by the chaotic situation of the world around her. So in the volumes of poetry published in this decade, Rich has various dialogues with her country and with its citizens. The conflicts that the poet confronts are raised as questions which are quite difficult to answer. But she believes that she is, at least, able to raise these questions to arouse the world around her and make them aware of the adverse situations of the times.

In the poem “What Kind of Times are These”, in Dark Fields, Rich poses poignant questions about the political unrest and terrorist activities in her own country, as is evident in these lines:

this is not somewhere else but here,

our own country moving closer to its own truth and dread,

its own ways of making people disappear. (6 – 8)

Rich’s theme in this volume is highlighted by the urgency of the times. She stresses the need to respond according to the urgency of the situation. Rich continues to blend the private moments and the public events in her life as she states in the poem, “And Now”:

I tried to listen to

the public voice of our time
tried to survey our public space
as best I could
– tried to remember and stay
faithful to details, note
precisely how the air moved
... when the name of compassion
was changed to the name of guilt
when to feel with a human stranger
was declared obsolete. (7 -13, 17-20)

The insensitivity of the people to the drastic events happening around them is highlighted here. People have lost their compassion and feeling towards fellow sufferers and the poet is aghast at this. She tries to draw her readers through her poems to the utter senselessness of the situations. She urges people to respond spontaneously and urgently. This attitude towards social interest and problem centricity is another noted feature of the self actualizer. The self fulfillment needs can be complete only when such a person genuinely feels for the sufferings of other people.

Rich emerges as the spokesperson of the marginalized and suffering people of America. She succeeds in empathizing with the personal and public experiences in the poem, “Inscriptions” which has six sections.
Reaching out to the others, the differences of other people – differences
like race, class, gender or generation – urges one to identify and empathize
with them. In the first section, the poet states:

by choice took on the work of charting
your city’s wounds ancient and fertile
listening for voices within and against.
My testimony: yours: Trying to keep faith
not with each other exactly yet it’s the one known and
unknown
who stands for, imagines the other with whom faith could
be kept. (8 – 14)

She empathizes with the choices of the comrade and sketches his life
in detail. Peace comes after war, bringing with it hope for the survivors.
History changes and with it changes the life of the people. Different
emotions tend to lead life forward, “– appetite terror power tenderness” (32).
Daring voices continue to be heard despite adverse circumstances. Silences
can also be deafening: “I had been wondering why for so long so little / had
been heard from that quarter” (76-77). The section, “Edgelit”, concludes the
poem where the poet confronts the reality of death which is inevitable for all.
Rich celebrates life at the age of sixty five and feels that she is equipped to
face everything in life, including death:

In my sixty-fifth year I know something about language:
it can eat or be eaten by experience
Medbh, poetry means refusing
the choice to kill or die

but this life of continuing is for the sane mad
and the bravest monsters. (34 – 39)

The desire to live life to the fullest extent and to continue the life
process keeps the poet moving ahead. The waxing and the waning of the
moon bring changes, nevertheless, the light shines. Likewise, truth shines,
dispelling the darkness around:

You who like the moon arrives in crescent
changeable changer speaking truth from darkness. (51 – 52)

The poet continues to speak the truth. She assesses her life, gazing
and desiring for different things in life before she succumbs to the
inevitable death. She has a clear perception of reality and she is happy that
she has achieved a fulfilled life. She writes:

It’s not of aging
anymore and its desire
which is of course unending

it’s of dying young or old
in full desire. (58 – 62)
This poem speaks of the poet’s desire of living a full and contented life, and at the same time, providing an example for others to follow.

At the age of seventy, Rich tries to salvage happiness amid the turbulence of the twentieth century which is at its end. She explores the possibilities of achieving happiness and it is this quest that helps the poet to progress in life. Her search for real happiness comes out of a love of her own life and of those around her.

Rich contemplates on this issue of happiness and gives an optimistic answer to her readers. She believes that one ought to be happy irrespective of the circumstances. She remarks in “Camino Real”:

– Why measure? in itself it’s the measure–

at the end of a day

of great happiness if there be such a day

drawn by love’s unprovable pull

I write this, sign it

Adrienne. (58 – 61)

Rich endorses her name and believes optimistically that personal happiness can be achieved. Rich, however, achieves personal happiness by living the life she wants to live, by making her own decisions and through writing poetry in her own style. She imprints her own style of writing and
art in the poem, “A Long Conversation”:

I am my art: I make it from my body and the bodies that produced mine. I am still trying to find the pictorial language for this anger and fear rotating on an axle of love. If I still get up and go to the studio – it’s there I find the company I need to go on working. (239 – 243)

Rich uses longer sequences and paragraphs, conversations and small poems- all in her own style and preferences, thus signifying her diverse attitudes towards life in its wholeness. She triumphs in salvaging happiness in the darkness of chaos and terror and she is fully justified in her actions of being a self actualized poet.

In the volume, Midnight Salvage Rich asserts her right to speak out her own mind. She insists on attaining personal happiness despite the obstacles faced and she emerges victorious as a self actualized person at the age of seventy. This mature poet can look back at her life at this point of time and can go forward in life, proud of her achievements as an individual, a poet, a woman in her own right, capable of achieving happiness and contentment in her life. She is happy with her efforts and continues being so, in and through her life and poetry.

The poem, “Midnight Salvage” deals with an inexperienced driver who accidentally runs down an old man, round the corner, into a yard named
Midnight Salvage. The poet, instead of blaming the young driver, suggests that he needs to have more practice and patience when he is out driving:

the young driver did not know that road
its curves or that people walked there
...such skills he did not have being in life unpracticed

but I have driven that road in madness and driving rain
...lucky I am I hit nobody old or young
killed nobody left no trace
practiced in life as I am. (95-96, 99-101, 104-06)

This poem denotes the attitude of an older woman, who is not against anyone but who has enough sense to wait and watch and who has acquired the patience for it:

This horrible patience which is part of the work
This patience which waits for language for meaning for the least sign.
...we wanters we unwanted we wanted for the crime of being ourselves. (107-09, 126-27)

To be true to oneself is liberation, according to the poet. She finds pleasure in this freedom and is happy about it.
The poet has come thus far so as to wait with patience and write her poems. She involves her readers in her process of discovering her art along with her. But she also continues to be her own individual and writes as she wishes. She recognizes the reality which comes along by being your own self, against the traditions and rituals, but she is, as always, prepared to be her own self and be free.

The poem, “Fox” of the volume of the same name, is a powerful poem talking about the power of art and creativity and how it brings about the power of women. The older and mature poet is looking back at her own life as a poet and describes how she suffered to live a life of truth and individuality like the ‘fox’ mentioned in the poem. For her, the ‘fox’ becomes an image of survival of her poetry and creativity. She writes:

I needed fox
.
.
I needed recognition
.
.
I needed history of fox briars of legend it was said she had run through
I was in want of fox. (1, 3, 6-8)

Rich reinstates that she needed to write poetry in order to survive though she had to face the ‘briars’ of truth and be bruised by it. She is
likened to a vixen that had the courage to come out of the briars in spite of its skin being torn.

The courage of the vixen is forceful and fearless and she needs this attitude to face her future life. The poet looks at her life and the image of the vixen and it signifies something which is “tearing and torn endless / and sudden” (18). Nevertheless, she has emerged victorious in the strength of the women in her life. The poem ends with the powerful, womanly image:

it blurs
into the birth-yell of the yet-to-be human child
pushed out of a female the yet-to-be woman. (19-21)

The mature, aging poet, through this powerful poem, experiences yet again a renewal of her courage and her conviction in the fraternity of women survivors.

The poem, “For This”, beautifully inscribes the aging, yet mature, poet’s enduring relationship with art and poetry. Here, Rich refers to ‘this’ as her poetry and expounds its essentiality in her life. She underlines the fact that poetry has been very essential in her survival as a woman and as a poet. She dwells on how her poetry has always helped her to express truthfully her convictions and her desires. She declares that poetry is “higher than my heart” (16) and it is also her source of energy and survival.
She believes faithfully in the power of the language, after dwelling in it victoriously for the past fifty years. She states:

language uncommon and agile as truth
melts down the most intractable silence. (22-23)

She goes on to liken her poet’s ethics to that of a lighthouse keeper, an image which is very compelling and apt. A lighthouse keeper has the immense duty of keeping the mariner’s lives out of harm’s trouble by guiding them away from dangerous ledges. This safe guidance happens in the life of the poet also. Poetry cannot choose to be unfaithful:

as if the lamp could be shut off at will
rescue denied for some
and still a lighthouse be. (28-30)

Likewise, poetry is for all people, irrespective of race, class, gender or nationality. The poet realizes this fact and reinforces the value of poetry and the idea of telling the truth is deemed a necessity. Rich has been thus far successful in her life as a poet, faithful and accomplished in her goal of being truthful to her own self and in acting according to her own dictates. A mature self actualizing poet is seen here, satisfied and fulfilled in her life as a radical, lesbian, woman poet.

At the end of the twentieth century, Rich has lived an enriching life and she is contented. Realizing her social and esteem needs, she is seen to be moving to the highest level in the need hierarchy theory - the level of
self actualization. At the age of seventy two, Rich is justified in feeling that she has lived a full life, living life to the fullest capacity, according to her own choices. Fox is dedicated to her partner, Michelle Cliff again, after twenty five years. This volume is filled with themes which the readers of Rich are familiar with, poems which are at once retrospective and looking forward into the new century.

The poet’s love for human life is clearly seen in this volume. The intermingling of the public and the personal events continue in this volume too. Being content with her life does not prevent Rich from being concerned about the well being of others around her. She is visibly disturbed by the violence and suffering that war and terrorism bring about. In the poem “Veterans Day”, she highlights the plight of wounded soldiers and grieving families. These pathetic sights are everyday realities which make the poet grieve for them. This hurt is universal, so this poem strikes an instant chord in the mind of readers. She starts the poem with a striking yet realistic picture:

No flag heavy or full enough to hide this face
this body swung home from home sewn into its skin

Let you entrusted to close the box
for final draping take care

what might be due
to the citizen wounded. (1-6)

She decries the governmental policies which are made regardless of the destruction caused to innocent people, whose lives are disrupted due to the recklessness of thoughtless people.

The helplessness of the unarmed, unassuming, oppressed citizen is contrasted with the power and authority of the oppressor. Rich vouches for the oppressed and clearly states that people ought not to live in constant fear and oppression but ought to be able to live freely, without fear. She asks:

but isn’t this what it means to live—
pushing further the conditions in which we breathe? (45-46)

Her outrage against the cruelties of the authorities makes her a champion of the common folk who often end up as victims of unnecessary and unexpected violence. She speaks out against the violence caused by war. She cares about all old people too, not just the veterans of war. She realizes the loneliness and helplessness of old people and encourages her readers to think of them too. In her seventies, Rich herself can vouch for their miseries but the difference is that she is content with her life and finds happiness with the life that she has chosen to live. In the poem, “Signatures”, she applauds an old woman, whose art is her poetry and her creativity and who thoroughly enjoys her work which is her identity and her signature. It is the poet’s signature as well:
Here an old woman’s best country is her art
or it’s not her country
Here the old don’t pity the old
As when young we scale our rock face
relentless, avid

looking sometimes back at the whole terrain:

– those scrapings on the rocks
are they a poet’s signature?
a mother’s who tried for all her worth to cling
to the steep with the small claws gripping her back? (7-16)

Rich acknowledges the mother and also the woman who strives hard
to attain her creativity; she signs and acknowledges her passion for poetry.
This poem depicts a self actualized poet who is happy that she has chosen
her path in life and who is now content of actually living her life to her
fullest possible capacity.

Life changes its course and leads itself. The poet feels that changes
are for the better and one must make use of it and enjoy the present. Her
dreams are being fulfilled everyday in the course of her life and she is
passionate about her personal space. This poem can be considered as a
tribute to life and the self actualizing poet, Rich, in her seventies, is just the
right person to do it.
“Waiting For You At The Mystery Spot”, captures the poet on vacation with her friend. She is happy in their company and experiences the joy and happiness that companionship brings. She enjoys the happiness she witnesses among the tourists too:

tiny beings flashing around
in the sun secure in the knowledge their people were nearby
grandfathers, aunts, elder brothers or sisters, parents and loved friends
You could see how it was when each tour was called and gathered itself
who rode on what shoulders, ran alongside, held hands
the languages all different

... each one saying

*I love you but*

*I must draw away Believe, I will return*

Then: happiness! (18-23, 27-30)

Rich exults in relationships and celebrates the joy it brings to the people around her. She is enamored by the reactions of the people and the wonder of it all. She enjoys seeing the happiness and warmth that is found in relationships. She is sincere in her life with her friends and she shares her life with them. Thus she finds her life fulfilling and this is exactly what
the self actualized person experiences. She is found in the pinnacle of her happiness and satisfaction at the end of the twentieth century.

But at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Rich confronts the circumstances where war and terrorism create chaos and confusion. But even in the midst of these adverse situations, people live on, hoping for a better future and enjoying the pleasures of the present in ways which suit them. Rich continues to blend the personal and the public events of her life in the volume *Ruins* also. The self actualized poet tries to instill hope in the mind of her readers despite discouraging and adverse circumstances. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Rich recognizes the turmoil faced by the ordinary people – people whose lives have been turned upside down due to various political conditions in the country. She vividly describes the chaotic situations and the terror faced by people and children in the midst of terrorist violence and disorder.

The title “The School Among The Ruins” itself points to the dislocations caused due to unexpected situations. But even in the face of crisis, hope is highlighted. In the ‘school’ among the ‘ruins’, there is something to learn and to hope for. In most of the poems, Rich talks about the individual sorrow that each faces, amid all the political unrest. “To be bruised: in the soft organs skeins of consciousness” in the poem, “Equinox”, explains the wounds that affected her innermost being. She tries
to reason out what one actually longs for and she maintains that she is “at war with words” as these words can either bring in peace or bring about war.

In “The School Among The Ruins”, the poet teaches children to hope and go on living though all outward situations point otherwise. She highlights the tense situation and the impact of public crisis over individual lives. She dwells on the importance of hope that children ought to learn in this ‘school of ruins’. She hopes for a better tomorrow and to strive for it in spite of the negative, desperate situations. She insists that triumph occurs when there is hope for the future despite present depressing situations. The poem, with its seven sections, beautifully describes the situation in a school where an ordinary day is disrupted by violence. The first section describes a normal busy day for the teachers and students of the school. But in the second section, the whole scenario is changed. The situation is tense and is described aptly by the poet:

rooms from the upper city

tumble cratering lower streets

cornices of olden ornament  human debris

when fear vacuums out the streets

When the whole town flinches

blood on the undersole thickening to glass. (20-25)
These words highlight the unrest seen around. Unexpected violence drastically changes the normal lives of innocent, unsuspecting people. The ordinary routine of the school is disrupted and the children cannot leave the school as usual:

School’s now in session day and night
children sleep
in the classrooms teachers rolled close. (28-30)

The changed situation of the classroom continues in all the sections. The last five sections deal with the brave methods in which teachers handle the terror stricken children and try to calm them in the midst of forced calamity. Teachers and students are trapped inside a school building. They cannot leave the building, nor do they have sufficient food or any other means to sustain them. The attackers have forced them to be inside the school building. The children are forced to learn survival in the midst of utter hopelessness. The grim situation of not having fresh food to eat, of children asking for their mothers, of answering questions of why all this is happening are overwhelming. The readers empathize with the suffering children along with the poet. Empathy for the sufferers as well as anger is felt at the gruesome situation created by the creators of violence. The captives try to identify their situation with a hungry stray cat which is seen hunting for food, and try to save and eat what leftovers they have. The captives also try to sleep in the tents while fighter planes shriek overhead.
They point to the wild cat and learn its ways of surviving in the wild:
“She’ll teach us  Let’s call her / Sister” (67-68). Hope is given in a situation where there is little hope. Hope in the midst of ruin, hope for a better tomorrow, “when we get milk we’ll give her some” (69).

The situation where the teacher teaches the children ‘responsibility’ and the students eat ‘fresh’ food is reversed completely when terror strikes. The lessons change and food is scarce, but they learn to live during this crisis:

A morning breaks without bread or fresh-poured milk
parents or lesson plans

diarrhea first question of the day
children shivering  it’s September
Second question: where is my mother?

One: I don’t know where your mother is  Two: I don’t know
why they are trying to hurt us
Three: or the latitude and longitude of their hatred  Four: I don’t know if we
hate them as much  I think there’s more toilet paper
in the supply closet  I’m going to break it open.  (38-49)
The lesson taught is undying hope even in the midst of extreme devastating circumstances. The grim reality of the situation is looked into, the unknown details acknowledged truthfully but at the same time assuring that their school haven is safe since it is their own territory. The poet continues:

Today this is your lesson:
write as clearly as you can
your name home street and number
down on this page
No you can’t go home yet
but you aren’t lost
this is our school

I’m not sure what we’ll eat
we’ll look for healthy roots and greens
searching for water though the pipes are broken. (50-59)

The terror and confusion that the trapped children confront is aptly described by Rich. The teachers desperately try to pacify the terrified students. The readers empathize with the trapped, innocent people whose daily, routine life is disrupted and turned upside down by the unfeeling terrorists. They also applaud the courage and determination of the victims in the terrifying situation.

The poem ends with the captives trying to adjust to the adverse situation. They try to distract themselves with stories and songs even while
they have to wipe off human debris from their bodies. But they learn to adjust and continue to hope that the current situation will change. Precise words by the poet in the last two stanzas sum up the tense atmosphere:

    I’ve told you, let’s try to sleep in this funny camp
    All night pitiless pilotless things go shrieking
    above us to somewhere
    . . .
    “We sang them to naps  told stories  made
    shadow- animals with our hands
    wiped human debris off boots and coats
    sat learning by heart the names
    some were too young to write
    some had forgotten how”. (70-72, 77-82)

The traumatic situation continues and it has a lasting impression in their terror-filled lives. The situation is tense and the emotions are high and this is precisely what Rich intends to convey through her poem. But she also assures them through the actions and words of the teachers that they can overcome the situation. The situation is the same but the people have learnt to cope. They are filled with fear but they have to go on living and they do it to the best of their ability. They hope that in the near future, the atmosphere would change for the better. This is the lesson of hope that they learn in this ‘school’ among the ‘ruins’. Hope amidst hopelessness and
survival amidst utter desolation are the two important lessons learnt in this ‘school’ among the ‘ruins’.

Political circumstances disrupt individual lives immensely. Innocent people have to suffer for no fault of their own but there is still hope in the midst of disillusionment. This lesson is quite important in the twenty-first century. Dislocations and disruptions are inevitable in this century but the spirit of boldly prevailing in the midst of destruction and despair is worth practicing. While Rich expresses her concern over the adverse political and social unrest her fellow citizens face, she recounts in the title poem how these situations affect ordinary lives of individuals. She empathizes with the individuals and tries to give them the great lesson of hope in the midst of adversity.

“USonian Journals 2000” talks about the situation in the United States of North America where things change rapidly due to different political situations. Change is inevitable and Rich feels that she is dislocated in her own country. She writes:

A country I was born and lived in undergoes rapid and flagrant change. I return here as a stranger. In fact I’ve lived here all along. At a certain point I realized I was no longer connected along any continuous strand to the nature of the change. (1-4)
She recalls an incident where an explosion disrupts the normal life of unassuming people. A shooting incident upturns an ordinary day. The intensity of the chaotic moment is described in these lines:

Something happened then everything. A man’s voice screamed, then whined: a police siren starting up seemed miles away but then right there. I didn’t see any blood. We ran in different directions, she toward, I away from, the police. (17-21)

She feels that at the moment of panic, most people think only of themselves and are indifferent to what is happening around them so long as they are not affected by it.

All are frightened at the unexpected turn of events in their life but their reaction to the disaster is entirely different:

I’d like you to see how differently we’re all moving, how the time allowed to let things become known grows shorter and shorter, how quickly things and people get replaced. How interchangeable it all could get to seem.

... This is what I mean though: how differently we move now, rapidly deciding what is and isn’t ours. Indifferently. (23-26, 37-38)

Rich suggests that people ought to take the situations around them more seriously and respond positively to the demanding needs. She likes to
be involved and this is clear through her poem. Her daring words make her 
a self actualized poet par excellence.

Rich goes on to talk about the dislocations that voices can bring in 
this busy world. Modern amenities tend to let people be selfish and self- 
centered. She quotes a few examples. People talk aloud using their cell 
phones, disrupting the people around them and not caring about it either. 
“Private urgencies made public, not collective, speaker within a 
bubble”(61-62) is what Rich says of this habit of talking aloud on the cell 
phone irrespective of whether other people are disturbed or not. This is 
what Rich calls the ‘USonian speech’.

Rich concludes the section by referring to the value of language. 
She explains that language has the power to bind and to dissociate, to 
exclude the speechless, to nourish self deception and has the capacity for 
rebirth and subversion.

In the sixth section of Ruins, the poet talks about the seven 
scenarios of dislocations. First, she tells about the dislocation of staying in 
the city, far away from home:

Still learning the word

“home” or what it could mean

say, to relinquish

...  

You must go live in the city now
must endure the foreign music
of the block party
finger in useless anger
the dangling cords of the window blind. (1-3, 7, 10-13)

Restlessness and loneliness is evident in these lines. Dislocated from
the warmth of home to new places in the city are disheartening and one
must endure it, rather than enjoy it.

In the following section, Rich contrasts the dreadful places to the
utopian places. In these places, “In a vast dystopic space the small things /
multiply” (14-15) and one has to learn to live with the dislocations
according to what one is capable of:

you grasp or share a clot of food
according to your nature
or your strength
love’s ferocity snarls. (22-25)

Confusion and dislocations continue in the third section also which
describe infections that affect all alike, in the city and the world, where all
people are affected except the solipsist who is unconcerned about
everything else. The government hospitals are places of dislocation where
ex-warriors are treated in poverty-stricken atmospheres. Courageous
Reacting to a Restriction

warriors of yesterday are patients today – dislocated from their wartime splendor to poverty stricken pain and disorder. Defiance or disdain brings in dislocations too, in the fifth section of the poem. Revolution in love by stating what is on one’s mind or defiance of any sort brings in punishments, leaving scars of a permanent nature. Innocence in love leads to the knowledge of reality with scars as reminders, a dislocation one has to live with, forever. But not starting over is a blunder and a dislocation which has no excuse. Compromising in times of failure is inexcusable. The poet writes:

    your blunder
    not to start over
    but to turn your back, saying
    all anyway is compromise
    impotence and collusion
    from here on I will be no part of it
    is one way could you afford it. (73-79)

The seventh and final section of the brilliant poem deals with the dislocation of returning home, after being wounded and finishing a lonesome journey, crossing three continents:

    internationalist turning toward home
    three continents to cross documents declarations
searches queues

and home no simple matter
of hearth or harbor
bleeding from internal wounds

he diagnosed physician
without frontiers. (86-93)

Boundaries don’t matter to a wounded person as they are carried over with the person. Dislocations in any way can be heartrending and it has to be dealt with.

Rich gravely analyzes the Palestinian-Israel issue in the poem, “Transparencies”. She expounds the values of the spoken word and tries to convey the tense situation faced by the people on both sides:

_We are truly sorry for the mess we made_

is merely routine word that would cancel deed

That human equals innocent and guilty

That we grasp for innocence whether or no

is elementary That words can translate into broken bones

That the power to hurl words is a weapon

That the body can be a weapon

any child on playground knows. (6-13)
The poet is distressed over the cruelties that people bring upon one another and she bewails the situation.

Titles of other poems in the volume like “Alternating Currents” and “Dislocations” point to the disruptions of the turbulent times. Amidst all this unrest, people live on, learning from shared experiences and keeping alive the memories of both the good and the bad times. Dislocations from the security of home and loved ones often cause discomfort and confusion. Poverty and war bring in dislocations too. Courageous warriors of yesterday are wounded patients of today, dislocated from their wartime splendor to poverty stricken pain and disorder. Dislocations can be disheartening, but at times, changes bring consolation too. Change is inevitable and one needs to confront it courageously.

In the poem “Tendril”, Rich mentions the outstretched tendrils longing for home, tendrils itching their way ‘through the cracks in the fused imperious shell’ (22). Further, ‘the tendrils retract’ (28) amid fellow strangers and finally the tendril becomes the poet herself. She looks at herself and realizes that she is also porous like all other human beings. She feels that, like the tendril, she too can reach out to other fellow beings, sensitive to their needs as well as her own. She is happy with her sensitivity but at the same time is troubled by the routine and destructive life she sees around her. Disorder and destruction often causes people to look into the future with suspicion rather than with hope. But
she conveys the truth that there is hope for the future. She reaches out to her fellow beings as she herself learns lessons from the ‘school’ of suffering among ‘the ruins’ of ‘human debris’ and she wishes to change her future for the better, for the well-being of her fellow beings. Dislocations and alterations succeed in making the poet a better person, conscious of other people and not just living her own life. She uses her poems to make the world a better place, a better society where people tend to the needs of each other and to live in relation to one another. ‘Not for her but still for someone?’(80), the poem ends on an optimistic note. Her personal life is now intermingled with all the collective realities around her and she is wise and mature because of it. A self actualized poet to the core, she is mindful of her responsibilities to the people around her and fulfills it to the best of her ability.

Rich, through her latest volume of poems, applauds the courage of ordinary people in this twenty first century, who go on living in the midst of adverse situations. Dislocations in the current situations do not eventually dislocate the daily lives of people who know the great lesson of hope. This is what keeps people going on in this twenty first century and their fortitude is acknowledged by the poet. Rich confronts the upheavals constantly occurring in this world of today and emerges strong as always, bringing her readers along with her through the path of hope and promise, encouraging them to move forward in life, irrespective of the dislocations.