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ADRIENNE RICH: TOWARDS A FEMINIST POETICS

por

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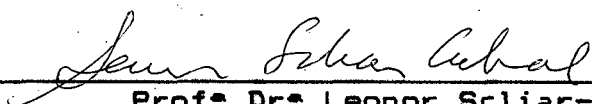
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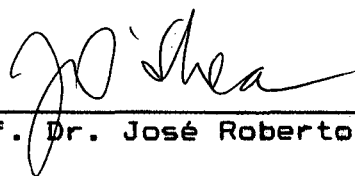


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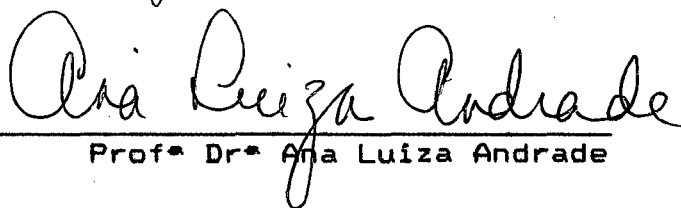
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To

Dirceu Ribas Veiga Júnior

and

Lucy Gomes de Oliveira

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation investigates Adrienne Rich's process of awakening consciousness and her contribution to feminist criticism in establishing criteria and defining principles for literary investigation. It demonstrates that through Rich's critical choices of strategies, language, themes and imagery - one can trace her basic revisionist posture which is essential for the establishment of a feminist/female poetics.

This analysis contemplates most of the articles contained in Rich's two collections of prose (1966-1985) and on ten poems selected from her first seven books of poetry (1951-1973). The analysis is based on the proposals and insights of feminist criticism, besides theories that involve relations of power, domination, ideology and myths as applied to gender relations.

The study of Rich's poetry in the context of her process of awakening consciousness and of feminist criticism in general demonstrates the connections among the perception, comprehension and transformation of the relations of domination that have determined the secondary roles of women in society and in literature.

## RESUMO

Esta dissertação investiga o processo de despertar da consciência de Adrienne Rich e, também, sua contribuição à definição de critérios e princípios para a crítica literária feminista. Demonstra-se que essa autora, ao escolher criticamente estratégias, linguagens, temas e imagens, torna possível traçar sua postura revisionista, essencial ao estabelecimento de uma poética feminista e própria da mulher enquanto gênero.

Esta análise contempla artigos contidos em dois livros de prosa (1966-1985) e dez poesias selecionadas de seus sete primeiros livros de poemas (1951-1973). Fundamentei a análise em propostas e *insights* da teoria e crítica feminista, aliando-as a teorias que envolvem relações de poder, dominação, ideologia e mitos, procurando aplicá-las às relações de gênero.

O estudo desses poemas e artigos críticos de Adrienne Rich, no contexto do seu processo de despertar da consciência e da crítica feminista, demonstra as conexões existentes entre percepção, compreensão e transformação das relações de dominação que determinam os papéis secundários da mulher na sociedade e na literatura.

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## INTRODUCTION

Women have traditionally been assigned secondary roles in literary history. This fact, which is a result of women's inferior social position in patriarchal culture, has attracted the interest of many thinkers and writers, who have disagreed with and tried to change such unjust and undesirable status quo. Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir are some who have carried out this task.

Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), claims for education, employment, legal and political rights for women together with human rights in general. She laments the trivial concern with women's education and stresses the importance of stimulating women's ability to reason, instead of instructing them only to inspire love. For her, women's inferiority is due to the way they have been raised and formally educated in society.

Almost two centuries later, Virginia Woolf publishes *A Room of One's Own* (1929), the first major work in the area of woman and literature that exposes the problems of women writers in androcentric culture. Woolf believes that man and woman write differently (109), not only because they are biologically distinct human beings, but also because they are brought up in different ways. Social and historical circumstances, plus a millenary culture in which male values prevail, have made women face outward and inward barriers which have directly affected their art. Some of the obstacles are the mythical images of women created by male oriented society, which are presented as natural



in everyday life; these same mythical images pervade the woman writer's instrument of communication: language. Indeed, Virginia Woolf believes that the English language is unsuited for women's use (79,85). She advises women to be courageous enough and write their female selves freely by breaking the sentence and the sequence of the expected traditional order imposed by a male centered culture.

In the article "Professions for Women" (1931), Virginia Woolf reaffirms the necessity of women writers to battle with myths of femininity, materialized into images created by androcentric society. For her, women writers face "phantoms", which are nothing but prejudices and conventions that women must overcome. "Killing the Angel in the House" is the first step for the woman writer (57-59), for the reason that the angel prevents women from expressing themselves freely. The angel, according to her, tells lies, is charming, sacrifices herself, has no wish or mind of her own, but rather sympathizes with the wishes and minds of others. The beauty and gracefulness of the angel is her purity. So after killing the angel, the woman must speak about her body and sexuality, about the passion which according to the myth of femininity does not suit her. But as Virginia Woolf says, "telling the truth about [her] own experiences as a body" is the most difficult task, because inwardly and externally woman in general "has many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome" (60). In summary, if woman wishes to write like a woman, she has to demystify not only the female mythical images which surround her psyche, her consciousness or inward world, but she has also

to demystify the way she has been led to interpret the outward world.

In 1949 Simone de Beauvoir publishes her famous historical, biological, sociological, mythical and psychoanalytical research on woman: *The Second Sex*. In her book she emphasizes that the myth of femininity has hindered woman's development in all areas of life. By the myth of femininity DeBeauvoir means the myth of woman as the "Other", as man has made her. Simone de Beauvoir's understanding is that man has established himself as the One, (the essential, the subject, the transcendent) by means of instituting woman as the Other (the inessential, the object, the immanent being). Man-one needs the existence of woman-other, so as to accomplish his desire of being a subject. Recognizing that this myth has been perpetuated by the educational and social tradition of patriarchy, Simone de Beauvoir devotes one chapter of her book to depicting the misogyny of some classic male writers in portraying images of woman. In the chapter entitled "Myth and Reality", de Beauvoir affirms that the ambivalence of the variety of myths of women, such as those of angel and monster, reflects man's dreams, hopes and fears regarding woman. The myth of woman as the other has been very advantageous to the ruling gender because it justifies man's domination. The female artist, therefore, becomes afraid of showing herself. She does not show her anger, she is not authentic (717-723). The woman writer has been captured by these myths, but she has to destroy them, so as to give birth to a female aesthetics (291, 717-720).

In the late 1960's the international feminist movement proposes to reassess the cultural importance and contribution of

woman, trying to rethink and recreate her identity. Writers and critics alike begin to focus more consistently and specifically on the issue of woman and literature, contributing therefore to the process of feminist criticism in defining principles and establishing criteria for literary investigation. Foremost among the women poets who consciously concentrates on her role as a woman in society and literature is Adrienne Rich, who can therefore be seen as representative of the process.

The American poet and critic Adrienne Rich was born in 1929 in Maryland, and has been writing poetry since her childhood. In the 1960's she began her political activities, first in the protests against the Indochina War and later the Vietnam War. In the 1970's Rich engaged in the feminist movement and since then she has closely associated her role as a poet with feminist politics. Throughout her poetry and criticism Rich has shown that feminism and poetry are concerned with the transformation of personal and collective conscience, so as to create a more just society.

In her influential article "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" (1971), Rich discusses some of the problems of being and becoming a woman writer in the male controlled literary field. Like many women critics and or poets, such as Muriel Rukeyser (1971), Gilbert and Gubar (1979), Elaine Showalter (1985), Rachel DuPlessis (1985) and Alicia Ostriker (1987), Adrienne Rich believes that only a revision of conventional gender roles in society and literature can lead women writers to become aware of their condition and thus take a political stand in rewriting their own literary history. For Adrienne Rich

"re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (1979:35). Indeed, Rich's article "When we Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" is cited by almost every feminist critic who wants to point out the one who first defined the practice of revisionism. Adrienne Rich's basic proposition is a radical process of revision of both the private and public spheres, so as to enable the woman writer to break with conventions and mythology, and finally start a fundamental transformation of reality: to move from the category of "other" ("object") towards the category of "subject".

This trajectory and the definitions that it entails is what I propose to examine in this dissertation. I have chosen Adrienne Rich because by becoming painfully aware of her condition in patriarchal culture, she has, unlike other female writers, written consciously as a woman and tried to find appropriate and innovative ways to describe this new psyche; she has invested her poetry with the urgency of a personal quest - and succeeded, as the great recognition she has received in the wider critical community clearly attests. Besides, she has critically analyzed other female writers' and her own development in the context of feminism, providing an invaluable document of the contemporary feminist stance.

My objective is to investigate Adrienne Rich's contribution to the establishment of a new poetics through her revisionist attitude in private and public life. This will be carried out by means of the following research questions: What problems has

Adrienne Rich encountered in her career as a female writer? How has Adrienne Rich dealt with these problems in her literary work? How has Adrienne Rich treated other poets critically? How do her personal, artistic and political views reinforce each other? Which are the predominant themes and recurrent imagery in Adrienne Rich's poetry? What are her main propositions for the woman poet? By answering these questions I will be able to assess her contribution to the establishment of a distinctly female poetic mode.

By examining how the ideology of patriarchy has lost its effects upon Adrienne Rich, as a result of her revisionist and critical attitude regarding her private and public life, I hope to identify specifically feminist postures in poetry, such as the choice of themes, language and voice.

In pursuing my objective, I intend to follow some steps which are somehow the structure of the dissertation itself.

Chapter One will present theoretical considerations, so as to provide a general overview of the way gender politics operates in literature. I will briefly describe and discuss the politics of gender interaction in society, by investigating concepts such as politics, power, domination, ideology and myth as connected to the woman's issue. Then, I will show how these concepts interact with literature, specifically with feminist literary criticism, and with the main subject of this dissertation, which is Rich's revisionist proposal for a new and more womanly oriented poetics. I will also investigate the work of critics such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Elaine Showalter, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Alicia Ostriker, to provide a background for understanding

Adrienne Rich's rupture with a conventional private world (consciousness raising through revision), and the effects of this rupture in her critical articles and poetry (revisionist posture regarding themes, images, which is called as revisionist mythmaking strategies applied in poetry).

In Chapter Two I will carry out the analysis of some of Adrienne Rich's critical articles, especially those in which she addresses her own development and some more general feminist issues.

Having detected common concerns and proposals between feminist criticism and Adrienne Rich, I will then move towards Adrienne Rich's poetry in order to determine her way of dealing with her predicament as a woman and as a poet, and her way of offering alternatives to solve it. In Chapter Three, therefore, I will choose some poems ranging from 1950 to approximately 1970 to exemplify the development of her revisionist posture in poetry.

Finally, in the conclusion of the dissertation I will be able to trace the evolution of Adrienne Rich's "poetics" - an evolution which closely follows the contemporary feminist trends in literature.

The importance of this study lies upon the opportunity to analyze and discuss the contribution of a contemporary woman writer to the emergence of a feminist poetics, which is based on the recognition of female voice, feelings and experiences, on the need for revision of social and cultural norms, on the eradication of polarities, and specially on language. Likewise, it is important to research the emergence and development of feminist literary criticism with its basic proposition for

revising the politics of gender in literature and in society. So, considering that literature does not only reflect a social and cultural reality but helps to shape the reality we live in as well, it is relevant to exemplify a woman writer's process of breaking, freeing herself and her language from male centered ideology. Finally, this study is a valuable document and an example for the ones who understand and believe that the relations of gender are not necessarily a relation of domination.

## CHAPTER I

### FEMINIST CRITICISM

The issue of woman and literature starts to receive more specific and consistent attention in the 1970's with the rise of feminist criticism: a critical process which questions and challenges the literary status quo and opposes many of the existing practices by establishing gender as an instrument of analysis, in the same way that Marxist criticism has established class as its basis.

One of the most famous initiators of feminist literary criticism, who has dealt with gender implications in the literary field, is Kate Millett. In her book *Sexual Politics* published in 1970, Millett affirms that gender inequalities are a product of androcentric culture; so woman's subservience, as depicted both in fiction and in literary history, further from being a natural state is a product of the sexual politics of patriarchy. This sexual politics is based upon a relation of domination, perpetuated among other ways by misogynist texts, such as through mythical images of women created by a male-oriented culture. Millett devotes great part of her book to exposing sexist ideology in male texts.

Pointing out that the relation between genders is a political relation, Millett grounds her analytical explanation on the conception of domination of the sociologist Max Weber (31). In the Weberian sense, 'domination' is a special kind of power and consists in the possibility of imposing one's will (the



dominator's will) upon the acts, behavior of other people (the dominated's will) (Weber, 696). Little physical force has been required in order to maintain this domination, because, according to Weber among the possible kinds of domination, the one which applies to woman's case is the 'domination by authority' - power of mandate and duty of obedience (696). Man's authority has been so efficient, his 'mandate' has influenced so much over woman's will and acts that she has assumed his 'mandate' / her 'obedience' as if it had been adopted by herself (690).

Legitimated through long established male values, practices, beliefs and customs, the domination of woman by man has come to constitute the basis of patriarchal ideology as we understand it today.

Ideology, according to Branca Moreira Alves in *Ideologia e Feminismo: A Luta da Mulher pelo Voto no Brasil* (1980: 25-26) and to John Thompson's *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (1984: 3-11), is expressed by a systematized set of ideas, values, meanings, beliefs, symbolic practices and patterns of behavior, directed towards the preservation or transformation of the social order. In a society of gender inequalities, Moreira Alves points out the dominant gender, institutionalizes, and reproduces a systematized set of ideas, values, meanings and patterns of behavior, which aim at legitimating and perpetuating power over the dominated gender. By masking its basic aim -- domination -- ideology presents itself as the correct, the coherent and the universal perception of reality. In fact, the elements which shape this reality attend to the interests of the dominant gender, and are perpetuated as natural through the rituals and

practices established by culture. Led to interiorize her inferior condition as something natural and a-historical through her process of socialization (Millett, 35; Alves, 27), which is unconscious, woman takes for granted her condition as the "other".

According to Kate Millett the ideology of patriarchy is the most pervasive ideology of our culture (35). Affecting all areas - including literature - by attributing and perpetuating the inferior condition of woman, it has been responsible for the existing myths and images of women as both characters and writers.

Many thinkers and writers have approached and applied myth in different senses. C. Hugh Holman in *A Handbook to Literature* defines myths -- in its traditional sense -- as the following:

Anonymous stories having their roots in the primitive folk-beliefs of races or nations and presenting supernatural episodes as a means of interpreting natural events in an effort to make concrete and particular a special perception of man or a cosmic view. (333)

An example of the application of myth -- in its more sophisticated sense -- is the positive signification bestowed by early modernist poets. Holman cites Yeats and T.S. Eliot as mythmakers who reassessed past values through the appropriation of myths, because for them modern society was too fragmented (333-334).

But, according to Roland Barthes in his book *Mythologies* (1972), myth is a type of speech - a system of communication, a language - a carrier of an ideological message; myth transforms

history into nature (109-129) i.e., naturalizes what has been historically determined.

So, as elements of the process of ideology, myths have been one of its more effective tools. As Barthes affirms, myth is the most appropriate instrument of dominant ideology (142). Myth masks its real intention, which is that of maintaining the status quo, through the distortion of reality (109-129):

In passing from history to nature myth makes a saving: it abolishes the complexity of human action, gives it an elemental simplicity; it organizes a world without contradictions because without depth, a world displayed in the obvious. Myth creates a happy clarity... things appear to mean by themselves. (142)

Myth impoverishes reality as it "prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fact and ready for a signification, such as types, caricatures, pastiches, symbols" (127). As ideology, Barthes adds, myth takes hold of everything, of law, of aesthetics, of morality, of household, and also of literature (148). In this way, patriarchal myths of women - portrayed into images, types and symbols - represent male-made reality. Mythical images of women serve to mask contradictions (conflicts), and thus accomplishing its main function of domination, by showing oversimplified mythical images of woman, such as the dichotomous stereotypes of angels or monsters. So, myth, as applied in this study, has a negative connotation.

As seen in the Introductory Chapter, Simone de Beauvoir shows in *The Second Sex*, how the myth of "otherness" has served the interests of the ruling gender. The materialized images of

women into types, which are full of mythical meanings, are seen as oversimplified uncritical models which hold women into lack of "subjectivity", into immanence.

Myths as serving the interests of dominant gender are also approached by Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*. For her the stereotypes of "masculinity" and "femininity" - which link the female with docility, passivity, ignorance, and the male with aggression, activity, intelligence - are all based on the needs and values of the ruling gender, so as to fulfill male aspirations of supremacy (35). All myths, such as that of Eve - the sinner, the evil woman - and on the other hand the Virgin Mary - the saint, the good - have made women feel inferior, insecure and puzzled concerning their female values, needs and aspirations (35-81) .

Indeed, the ideology of patriarchy with its mythical images of women has been one of the great obstacles for women writers. The need to form their own consciousness, based upon alternative concepts of reality and expressed through a new or counter-ideology has been recognized by writers and critics as a result of the feminist movement of the 1960's.

Denouncing the obstacles which prevent women from becoming writers, several women connected to literature have undertaken to examine their female artistic selves in patriarchal culture. According to Tillie Olsen in *Silences* (1972), women's literary education follows predominantly male patterns, causing them to accept the notion that the act of creation is not as natural to a woman as it is to a man. As a result, the patriarchal ideology disseminated in the educational system has made women silence

themselves. In 1975 Patricia Meyer Spacks publishes *The Female Imagination*, in which she declares that the imagination of women writers is limited by the way reality is presented to them, considering that women's lives have been oriented towards the denial of the "self" (194-195). Women writers, thus, face conflict between the individual imagination and society's demands. Furthermore, Spacks questions the female equivalent for *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Whereas the self image of the artist is one of freedom (169), the image of woman has been one of enclosure, causing in the woman writer a sense of frustration, ambiguity and anger. Indeed, as Ellen Moers points out in *Literary Woman* (1976), women were not traditionally stimulated to be writers as men were. Whereas men went to coffee houses, grouped into literary movements, looked for predecessors for guidance or patronage, went on adventurous trips and had appropriate literary education in universities, women were restricted to the domestic world, chaperoned in trips, limited in friendship, offered very little or no access to universities, so as to learn literary craft (64). In order to be a woman writer, Moers explains, one has had to rely on a male literary tradition which has very little to do with woman's world and creativity. As a consequence, women either avoided writing or silenced themselves completely. Thus, as both Spacks and Moers point out, some characteristics of female aesthetics, such as symbols, metaphors, settings, are directly affected by their condition in society.

The politics of gender relations, the ideology and myths which serve its dissemination and perpetuation have, therefore,

imposed barriers for the full development of women writers, as Adrienne Rich has well pointed out in "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1971). Rich states that whenever a woman writer looks for directions, she finds out only male products, a tradition alien to her. Instead of achieving self-identification, she becomes lost and confused. Thus, male control of literature with its ideological control and "the-myth making tradition" regarding gender roles and relations have created many "problems of language and style, problems of energy and survival" (36-37). Rich insists that the myths and images of women as products of culture have been a genuine confusion for the female who tries the art of writing (39).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) share with Rich the view that gender politics have involved women into a variety of contradictions, tensions and anxieties. The "anxiety of authorship", as Gilbert and Gubar point out, consists in the uneasiness women have felt in the role of writers. Women have not traditionally felt entitled to the authority invested in "attempting the pen" (50-51). Women writers have felt divided in a society where social demands regarding female authors either compelled them to write according to male principles - to write like an angel and thus become accepted, or to listen to her inner self and, by writing her femaleness, write like a monster, and in this way be excluded from literary tradition (53-101). Gilbert and Gubar affirm that before moving towards literary autonomy, the woman writer must "come to terms" with the mythical images of herself, created by a male oriented society. Both authors believe that before killing the dualistic

images of the angel and the monster inwardly and outwardly herself, as Woolf suggests in "Professions of Women", the woman writer has to begin understanding "the nature and origin" of such images (17). Only thus can the woman writer begin to build her female voice, to have authority, to author a text, to have the power to originate and to name, to give birth to the word.

Similarly to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar other feminist literary investigations, such as Elaine Showalter's *The New Feminist Criticism* (1985), Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn's *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (1985) and K.K. Ruthven's *Feminist Literary Studies* (1985), have been fundamentally concerned with gender as a determinant in literary production, reception, circulation, interpretation and criticism. The result is a demand for a radical revision of both female's private and public spheres and of theoretical presuppositions in the literary field, which have been completely grounded on male experience.

As a relatively new and many-faceted area of study, feminist criticism cannot be said to have a consistent and unified body of theories and methods in the application of gender difference to reading, writing, and literary interpretation. As a matter of fact, significant debates have taken place within its field. Annette Kolodny in "Dancing Through the Minefield" (1980) advocates that no single methodology can be in the service of such complex issue as women's position in literature. Whereas Kolodny suggests "playful pluralism" - multiple critical schools and methods - others are afraid that anti-theoreticism and anti-methodolatry can restrict feminism to an exaggerated

subjectivism. Following this later view, Cheri Register proposes complete objectivism. In "American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction" (1975), Register's dogmatic position goes so far as prescribing functions for a literary text so as to gain feminist acclaim. Between these two extreme poles is Elaine Showalter. In her essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics" (1979), Showalter explains that although the lack of theory and method has exposed feminist criticism to constant attacks and to a resistance to being accepted within the larger critical community, one has to be careful not to accelerate the process of establishing rigid tenets for feminist criticism at the risk of threatening its authenticity. In the Introduction to her book *The New Feminist Criticism* (1985), Showalter reminds us that in its evolutionary phase one of the reasons for the increasing discussions upon theoretical issues has been the variety of trends within feminist criticism.

Among these many trends, one cannot fail to mention French feminist criticism with its connections to Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction and Semiotics. Some of its exponents are Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, who assume that gender difference is constructed through the acquisition of language, rather than through social assignment and cultural practice. Also important is the British tradition, more Marxist in its postulates, trying to connect gender and class to feminist literature; one of its main focus has been on the study of ideology and subjectivity, with Michelle Barrett, Catherine Belsey, Greene and Kahn as some of the major names in this enterprise. In contrast to the French and the English, the American current of feminist criticism has



been criticized for its eclectic nature and for its insistence on the socio-historical approach. However, as pointed out by Janet Todd, in *Feminist Literary History* (1988), this socio-historical enterprise was pioneering and is still inspirational; its approach is historical and contextual, and its main departure is women's experiences.

In opposition to traditional criticism, one of the main topics of feminist criticism is the combination of the theoretical and the personal, for feminists do believe that literature and personal experiences are inseparable and political. Janet Todd cites Millett, Gilbert, Gubar and Elaine Showalter as the main exponents of the socio-historical mode, which she characterizes as liberal and humanist in its assumptions. Despite its differences in approaching the subject, all trends are specifically concerned with gender in literary analysis; furthermore, as Todd adds, the European trends have richly influenced the American socio-historical mode - empiricist in its origins - and have, likewise, been influenced by it. All these tendencies have contributed not only to revise androcentric literary modes but also to build feminist critical practices -- most of which are directly related to the personal experiences of women writers, creating thus a new way of interpreting reality and also a new female consciousness.

Because I have relied primarily on the socio-historical mode for my analysis of Adrienne Rich it will be necessary to examine more closely the revisionist strategies outlined by Elaine Showalter and others. In 1979 Showalter publishes the essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics", in which she recognizes

revisionist modes and stages which characterize the practice of feminist criticism. Its first stage, feminist critique, revises male texts so as to expose sexist ideology by depicting and portraying the oversimplified images of women which have helped to perpetuate and disseminate the female condition as the "other" in society and in literature. Some exponents of this practice have been Simone de Beauvoir, as shown in the previous chapter, Kate Millett, as already pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, and others.

The second stage, gynocritics, focuses on women writers and aims at the recovery and rereading of female literature throughout time and space. This mode is also concerned with style, themes, genres, images and patterns of individual or collective female writers. Gynocriticism also includes the research of female creativity, linguistics and the problems of woman with male constructed language. The controversial issue of a unique female language, the trajectory and study of individual or collective female literary traditions are its main concerns. The program of gynocritics is to build a female frame for the analysis of women's production, based upon a female culture, so as to free literary criticism from male modes and models. This culture is to be built considering the experiences of women, the female way of interpreting reality and the formation of a specifically female consciousness. Some names are important in regard to gynocriticism, such as Patricia Meyer Spacks, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, as mentioned before.

From this trend, a third stage has emerged which is especially important since one of its major exponents - Adrienne

Rich - is the object of this dissertation. One of the concerns of this trend is to define a female way of writing, the expression of a female aesthetics, revealing a unique female consciousness.

Exhaustive discussions and research regarding a unique female language have taken place within feminist criticism. After examining four theories regarding gender differences in women's writing - biological, linguistic, psychological, and cultural, Elaine Showalter, in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981) argues that the specific features of women's writing are outcomes of their complex cultural locus in relation to the general dominant culture. Showalter contends that female culture is never purely woman defined, for its productions have to cross the boundaries of the dominant male culture in order to be uttered. Such is the case of language, which is the raw material for writers, and which is pervaded by dominant ideological elements and myths. Woman's use of language reveals a double-voiced discourse, containing both dominant and marginal stories, images, themes, metaphors, tone, plots, and so on. Thus, the first task of feminist criticism, according to Showalter, is to plot the cultural locus of female literary identity and to show how the forces of such locus intersect with the woman writer's cultural field, so as to discover, understand and show the situation of woman's literary text, in order to discern between inherited male patterns and a typically female mode. As a result, the study of a female language, which is the third revisionist feminist trend, not only demands that female writing be recognized as such, but also revises theoretical suppositions

which have taken for granted the universality of discursive forms.

More recently, in the Introduction of her collection of essays *Speaking of Gender* (1989), Elaine Showalter states that a meaningful change in the humanities area has taken place in the 1980's: the rising of "gender" as a "category of analysis". Placed together with other important categories of analysis, such as those of class and race, gender difference has been accepted not only as a matter of difference - man/ woman and male/female - but also as a matter of power and domination. As Showalter points out, whereas feminist criticism of the 1970's focused specifically on female modes of reading and writing, feminist criticism of the 1980's has emphasized the study of gender as determining distinct modes of reading and writing.

The fundamental task of establishing a female cultural tradition has been achieved through revision. By examining male and female texts, analyzing the basis of the construction of gendered culture, detecting and understanding the forces that intersect in any woman writer's cultural field, a new way of interpreting reality has been articulated.

Revisionism is defended by a great number of female critics and writers as a strategy for achieving a more woman-centered poetics. Some of the most influential advocates of revisionism are Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, Elizabeth Meese, Greene and Kahn, among others. Showalter agrees in *The New Feminist Criticism* that the fundamental ideas of feminist criticism have come from revisions and reconsiderations of literary theory itself. Gilbert and Gubar believe that for a woman writer to

define herself as an author she must revise and therefore redefine the terms of her socialization (1979:49), which implies a revision of her private and public spheres including a revision of the mythical images imposed by a male centered culture. In "Life Studies, or, Speech After a Long Time of Silence: Feminist Critics Today" (1979), Sandra Gilbert affirms that feminist critical awareness is born together with a revisionary sense of transformation. In another article, "What do Feminist Critics Want? A Postcard from the Volcano" (1980), Gilbert argues that feminist criticism must revise the ideas and meanings of literary history and literary interpretation. She also says that woman has been culturally alienated due to her muted condition, and only a revision of the basis of her condition can lead her to a new direction. Gilbert stresses the need for the prefix 're-' in any practice towards a female literary theory, such as re-viewing, re-reading, re-imagining, re-thinking, re-writing, re-vising, re-interpreting, so as to re-make not only history and culture but also literature. In sum, feminist criticism urges a "re-vision of ourselves, our texts, our traditions", according to Gilbert (44). For Gilbert and Gubar revision shall lead any feminist to face her condition as woman, to face the politics of gender in patriarchal society and, fundamentally, to "redefine the terms of her socialization (1979:49), which means that women should revise the process by which she has interiorized the dominant (patriarchal) rules, norms, behaviours, values and myths.

In the same way, Elizabeth Meese, in *Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism* (1986), in the

chapter entitled "Sexual Politics and Critical Judgement", affirms that "the principle task of feminist criticism, in providing a necessary re-vision of the politics of 'truth', is to make its own ideology explicit". If we seek to transform the structures of authority, we must first name them, and in doing so, unmask and expose them for all to see. Likewise, we should be suspicious of gaining our 'equality' within an undisturbed hierarchical system. Furthermore, this "new politics" must not be based upon negation but upon the positive deconstruction and reconstruction of woman through the efforts of feminist practitioners (17). The feminist critic, in order to work toward the transformation of society, "attempts a particular kind of duplicity: she works within the present order so that she can destroy it; she borrows its tools in order to subvert it" (147).

In *Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Woman*, Greene and Kahn reaffirm the feminist need not only to revise concepts previously thought as universal, which indeed have served particular interests, but also to reestablish a female perspective concerning their experiences and cultural contributions. Greene and Kahn's main stance is that gender is a social construction, and thus the central task of feminists is to "'deconstruct' the social construction of gender and the cultural paradigms that support it" (2). Thus feminist literary critics take charge of the connection of ideology and literature by focusing on the ways ideology has been inscribed within literary forms, styles, conventions, genres and the institutions of literary production. Roland Barthes's, in *Mythologies* (1973), has called these critics as 'myth deciphers', and Greene and Gayle

borrowed this term for feminist critics. Thus, "a feminist interpretation of literature involves decoding many of the same systems of significations with which social scientists are concerned" (6). In sum, for Greene and Kahn, one of the revisionist solutions for feminist criticism in accessing a more womanly oriented theory is deconstructionism. Based upon Jacques Derrida's model of deconstruction, both authors think in terms of binary oppositions (private/public, nature/culture, male/female, subjective/objective), which "implies the subordination of the second element to the first" (26). As Greene and Kahn explain, "deconstruction aims to expose and dismantle an epistemology built on a set of hierarchical oppositions in which 'man' always occupies the privileged position" (26). For them, only deconstructionism can dismantle a historical male-centered criticism and its systems of theories or critical procedures. This kind of criticism attempts to show what is not visible, what is 'muted'. Its strategy enables the muted group to speak.

One of the revisionist critics who will base my analysis of the changes of Adrienne Rich's poetry is Alicia Ostriker, who in *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*, explores a collective female tradition in American poetry. Her study aims at evincing the writers' choices in exploring experiences central to their gender and in discovering "forms and styles appropriate to their exploration" (1987:7), which ends in transforming the history of poetry. Focusing on the phases which characterize the emergence of a cultural movement in terms of woman's poetry, Ostriker revises and recognizes several

stages of development characterized by specific choices in tone, subject, theme, plot and form, as it follows.

In reviewing her study, I am particularly interested in the characteristics of female poetry after the explosion of early modernism. During the 1950's formalism, nostalgia and conservatism sprung from postwar America. The New Criticism required a rigid orthodoxy in literature and literary innovations were not sought or expected. According to Ostriker, it was not a good time for women writers. The typically female poetry "springing from the will to change was hibernating but not dead" (56). Women's production of that time was thus marked by the notion of confinement and constraint. Indeed, the poetry of this period conveys a humble and modest persona. The poet appears to be consciously uncritical of her condition. These poems followed masculine patterns of content and form.

The second phase is centered on the quest for an autonomous definition of self. In the 1960's, when the woman poet begins the exploration of her identity, she confronts two selves: on one hand there is a feminine heritage which has been male delineated, and on the other hand there is a wild and almost unexplored female latent side. As Ostriker has observed "a woman seeking for identity is like a woman attempting to give birth to herself" (59). As the subservient, marginal and muted part in the traditional gender relation, where man is the dominator, the woman poet feels marginalized, inferior and inadequate. As the other in a relation where man is the subject, the woman poet finds herself without any autonomy; she feels inadequate for her identity has been defined by others. She has been assigned two



antagonistic roles: the angel or the monster, resulting in crisis. This crisis leads to a blurred identity, in spite of being undesired by her. Poems of this phase reveal a fragmented woman who is unable to join her divided selves or to achieve her wholeness. This self-division reflects in the style and/ or the substance of her poetry: whereas the style may be hard, cold, rigid, rational, demonstrating control, impersonality, and dispassionateness through the use of parody and mockery, the substance may be her daily life and feelings where she questions the roles of daughter, wife, mother, the domestic routine, the classroom, the job market. The poet may show her indignation with these roles through the position of complainer. She is torn, alone, "unlearning to not speak" (60), confused and tormented ("Divided Selves: The Quest for Identity", 90). Ostriker also points out that when searching for an identity woman has encountered the complications arising from a desire to draw the proper "maps of the female body, the female passions, the female mind and spirit" (90), thus attempting the demythification of these mysteries.

In the attempt to define her proper identity, the woman poet's inclination is to start with her body as a means to analyze reality. By looking for the meanings of her body and thus speaking of them as connected with reality, women poets have shown during the last two decades a move away from unorthodoxy. In doing so women writers have broken with the convention that it is unfeminine and prohibited for a female poet to write about her attitudes towards the body. It must be remembered that female biology has been male organized so as to serve the species

through pregnancy, childbirth, lactation. Furthermore woman has been related to nature as an object to be desired or feared; this suits De Beauvoir's thought that women should threaten "traditional interpretations of woman as the desired and dreaded other" (DeBeauvoir 108), by resisting conventional significations and implying alternatives. Women poets have explored "their bodies with decreasing embarrassment and increasing enthusiasm" (Ostriker 92). Women writers have written about the sensations of making love, about their faces and hands, their menstrual periods, their necks and breasts, as a means to release their anatomy so long entrapped in taboos. Several strategies arise from this need of expressing bodily experiences: some reject the body on account of its vulnerability; others affirm the body as a source of power. The body as a source of power - for example - gives rise to some specific imageries, which revise elements of nature through the reference of female body, such as: water, moon, earth, and living things. These metaphors serve as examples of women's alternative vision, differing from the traditional vision. The female body related to the imagery of water, for example, comes to mean security instead of the conventionalized feminine dread. This attitude of women poets shows their awareness regarding the linking of body and intellect and the politics of both.

In the fourth phase towards her task of self-awareness the woman writer releases her anger and violence as a reaction to the realization of man's power and woman's powerlessness. This is a necessary phase because the poet comes into contact with the repressed anger and breaks conventions by expressing it in verse.

This enables the woman poet to foster her process of consciousness raising. There are three patterns in an increasing order of complexity within the story of female rage: the victimization, the huge explosion of violence and the critique of gender polarization (Ostriker 127). The victimization writing is characterized by woman's indignance towards man's rationality and control. One position is the demythification of the masculine power, through the image of man as cold, abstract, mechanical, armoured, firm, inflexible, authoritative. Another pattern of releasing anger is when the woman poet responds with violent language, "generating an extraordinary eruption of vengeance fantasies... twisting and inverting the plot of victimization" (140). The woman poet thus becomes aggressive, furious, scornful, embodying what is most dreaded and repressed in traditional feminine imagery. A revenge fantasy with an inversion of plot - table turning fantasies - may be, for example, a woman killing a man. Madness, murder, suicide are all violent imageries used by the female poet as a way of releasing her anger. These destructive images may be the only liberating act for the feeling of powerlessness of the woman poet. The desire to die, to kill and to become mad derive from her powerlessness for they would bring the obliteration of consciousness. The poet uses these destructive desires to disguise her position and diminish her powerlessness, yet a more effective solution for her problem is not accomplished.

Finally, in order to analyze and depict the politics of anger and violence in female poems one has to consider the principle of duplicity. This principle, which may be encountered

in most female poems of all phases, as well as in other genres, clearly transmits one message and covertly a contrary one. Indeed, this principle requires from the reader a decodification of the unspoken message. "I want to kill" may also mean "I want to die", and "I want to die" may also mean "I want to kill" (Ostriker, 1987: 149). The duplicitous nature of female rage in poetry may explain the politics of anger: the origins of anger which is due to a gender relation where woman is the dominated, and also the consequences of woman's indignation regarding this situation.

The release of anger is a necessary step for the process of a critical consciousness towards a more genuine female self, culture and poetry. Instead of proposing a solution for the gender relations of power these poems exhibit a woman rebelling angrily against gender images and relations. The woman poet becomes aggressive, exhibiting a conventional masculine feeling and behaviour proper of the system she condemns. Sometimes the female persona's anger may be misdirected towards the wrong target, that is, at other women, instead of at patriarchy. These woman poets are most of the time authoritarian, oppressive, violent, offensive, aggressive and destructive. The release of anger is only a phase which characterizes the woman poet's consciousness of her cultural position. This attitude does not suggest a different gender structure from that of dominance-submission, but only retaliates and serves to reinforce gender polarization. The poet entraps herself and the readers into the idea of an immutable, disgusting and hopeless situation. In chapter five Ostriker writes about the quest of female love

and desire. She uses the term "imperative of intimacy" to describe how women poets have revised and eradicated conventionalities regarding the meaning of love connected to woman. Love can be either the erotical love in relation to lovers independently of sexual option, the friendly love regarding family, and the integration of the self. The "imperative of intimacy" challenges the traditional meaning and boundaries of love, with the classical gender polarities of dominance and subordination, by proposing touch, mutuality and interaction with her self and with other women. These poems propose the healing and the union of the divided selves not only within the woman (individual and personal) but also among all women (communal and public). Another feature of these poems is the close intimacy between woman (private) and poet (public), of poet and reader, of body and intellect, of angel and monster. In sum, "the imperative of intimacy" implies the eradication of any dualism, any polarity, any divisions which have served to reinforce any relation of power. So, the imperative of intimacy refuses to distance a woman's self from her other selves, a woman from other women, by driving the female poet to "the dream of a common language". This is no more than a communal identity and implies a common and unique consciousness, a common and unique world (history and culture), a common and unique system of communication, a common and unique literary heritage more female oriented.

Finally, in the chapter "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythology" (1987) Alicia Ostriker advocates what she terms "revisionist mythmaking" as the major strategy for

redefining both a female consciousness and a female culture. Ostriker shows that in this way woman is able to hold a more authoritative stance. For Ostriker myth depersonalizes people, thus, in order to allow their muted or marginal experience to surface women poets must revise and debunk the myths embedded in male language and experience, regarding gender relations and roles. The result of such practice is a female transformative poetics, in which the poet moves from the position of other towards the position of subject. This tactics of "revisionist mythmaking" is one in which the poet simultaneously revises and "deconstructs a prior 'myth' or 'story'" (classical and modern myths, fairy and folk tales), which was formerly accepted and defined by the dominant culture and "constructs a new myth which includes, instead of excluding, herself" (212). Ostriker continues affirming that "whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist" (212). This means that the poet may use traditional figures, tales, thoughts, gender archetypes or stereotypes aiming at revising, demythifying, destroying and then proposing others more female-centered. The apparent rigidity of myths presented in types such as archetypes or stereotypes are challenged and replaced by open forms less crystalized, such as prototypes, which are the original and fundamental types opened to transformations. These women poets are rather worried in contributing with values and types accessible to discussions and changes than imposing closed and rigid significances. With this attitude women poets show to be against repeating the inflexible

attitudes of the male-centered culture and literary criticism they criticize. Indeed Rich declares in her article "When We Dead Awaken" that revisionist attitude is "an act of survival" ... and "we need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" so as to tell another story (37). This reflects, therefore, a new consciousness and a new interpretation of reality. Ostriker affirms that by transforming the self the woman poet is at the same time transforming culture.

Another revisionist critic is Rachel Blau DuPlessis who in her book *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers* (1985) carries out a critical study of how some women writers of the twentieth century attempt the production of culturally needed and feasible meanings, by revising, delegitimizing and inventing new open-ended stories based upon existent myths. DuPlessis' study is grounded on the belief that any literary text or literary convention, such as plot, character, tone and theme, expresses ideology. For her any literary convention depicts and interprets social experiences, and thus influences the way people think, behave and see world. As DuPlessis asserts, stories are ideologies that 'shape' our concept of reality. Thus, considering that literary conventions function according to dominant ideology, the solution is revision of cultural and literary conventions, attempting for counter-ideological solutions regarding the fundamental contradiction.

As a matter of fact the proposal of those writers, as critically analyzed by DuPlessis, is that of creating strategies

for writing beyond the established limits by using types and forms which are further from male idealized gender roles and images and nearer to female reality. Writing in this way, or re-writing, means that the muted side of woman is then explored through revision and manifested through language. DuPlessis focuses on the many specifically revisionist strategies employed by contemporary novelists and poets, including the one which particularly interests us: "revisionary mythpoesis". Similar to Ostriker's strategy the name of this kind of strategy as chosen and applied in this study is "revisionist mythpoesis", or "revisionist mythmaking".

In "'Perceiving the Other Side of Everything': Tactics of Revisionary Mythpoesis", DuPlessis affirms that contemporary women poets are revising "culturally resonant material", such as classical and modern myths, biblical matters, and fairy tales. Working with Roland Barthes' concept of myth, she sees the aim of a critical revisionist mythpoesis as that of transforming, crossing over the established cultural values and conventions in literature, by exposing its contradictions.

There are two main tactics of "revisionary/revisionist mythpoesis" which reveal the poet's attitude towards the poetry: displacement and delegitimation. This first occurs whenever there is a dislocation, a movement of attention to the other side of the story. This is what Virginia Woolf called as "breaking the sentence" in *A Room of One's Own* (1977), as seen in the previous chapter. According to DuPlessis, displacement is an engaged identification with otherness, "a participant observer's investigation of the claims of those parts of culture and



personality that are taboos, despised, marginalized" (133). Whenever there is a displacement of attention to the other side of the story, it means that what was previously marginalized and despised about women becomes the focus. This 'displacement' brings about a commitment with the writer's category of the other. The persona is conscious of her condition, but she feels unable to change the situation. The new sentence comes from the other side of everything, articulating things which were not noticed before; the new sentence gives authority to the teller and power to the story, so as to confront the cultural weight of society. Another aspect of displacement is that it puts the female ego and voice at the center of the tale through a reversal of the traditional plot, role, image, and/or story regarding gender roles and images.

The second tactics of the critique of myth is "delegitimation" of "the known tale, a critique even unto sequences and priorities of narrative" (108). This implies the revision and critical creation upon the established story: tone, theme, imagery, gender roles and images. One example may be a conventional feminine persona or protagonist who is the other and turns to be a female unconventional subject of the tale, story or poem. Delegitimation is just like "breaking the sequence", which is the other tactics suggested by Virginia Woolf (1977). It is a break with conventional morality, values and politics. By breaking the sequence of plot structures through the changing of the sequence of events of a previous story, the woman poet allows her own consciousness to take precedence over cultural literary

conventions. That is, there is a change of consciousness and therefore a break with the establishment.

DuPlessis also approaches revisionist mythmaking in the article "The Critique of Consciousness and Myth in Levertov, Rich, and Rukeyser" to illustrate how poets Denise Levertov, Adrienne Rich and Muriel Rukeyser have "invented self-exploratory and culturally reevaluative quest plots, so that the act of cultural criticism became their central lyric act, from the critique of language and consciousness to its necessary extension, the discussion of the individual in history" (124). The first task of the woman poet is to "kill the angel in the house", which implies "the critique of old feminine consciousness" (124), and also of the prevailing culture with its ideology, myths, stereotypes and archetypes, besides the eradication of gender taboos. The second task implies in the revision and destruction of patriarchal ideology with its myths through "aggressive truth-telling from female experiences" plus the "expression of muted insights" (125). So, by breaking the sentence and sequence of traditional myths which support critical perceptions about the nature of women, and by reevaluating myths which invalidate and cripple women, Rukeyser, Levertov and Rich have contributed to the transformation of traditional practices and new theories for feminist criticism. According to DuPlessis, if women writers had not gone beyond the "ending" of the implied story, they would have been doomed to be muted forever.

Both Ostriker and DuPlessis point out the necessity for women writers to revise, analyze and empty the previous myths of their old signification, and then replace this myth by filling it

with a more female signification, according to the female writer's new interpretation of reality. In sum, by breaking the sentence and the sequence of plot structures, women are not only able to express their formerly muted experiences, feelings, desires, values, but also to create a more female culture and poetry.

Indeed, the strategy of "revisionist mythmaking", as a whole, aims at transforming consciousness and culture through the demythification of male ideology and its myths, by proposing a more female oriented consciousness and culture not so closed and inflexible to changes as conventionally presented by stereotypes and archetypes. Prototypes of gender roles and images are offered as solutions; most of the time the writer shows to be opened to other transformations, sometimes presented as prototypes of gender roles and images.

In "A Common Language: The American Woman Poet", Barbara Gelpi's revisionist position leads her to apply a model of literature from underprivileged groups in order to describe the phases that a female literary culture may develop gradually towards a more authentic female literary culture and history. Gelpi recognizes five ways which characterize the female poet's reactions in regard to their dominated cultural condition. Anger - indignation regarding her cultural locus - is the basic reaction, which consequently leads to other reactions. In the first stage the female writer ignores her historical condition. As she suppresses her anger much of her creative potentiality tends to be trapped in her psyche. Considering that the writer is uncritical of her condition she may identify with the oppressors,

and may also show fear of the unknown without attempting any self-investigation. In the second phase the writer acknowledges her victimization but as something natural and immutable; she can become aggressive and feel self-scorn, self-hatred, body-hatred, man-hatred, mother-hatred. The female writer as a victim is a moaner; her poetry may be a lamentation. In regard to this phase of woman's awakening consciousness, Rich affirms in "When We Dead Awaken" that "much of woman's poetry has been of the nature of the blues song: a cry of pain, of victimization, or a lyric of seduction" (48). Thus the female writer shows in her poetry the double consciousness which is the result of the conflict between her own feelings and desires and the ones assigned to her. Then, in the third stage the female author releases her anger, her indignation, as a reaction against seeing herself as a fated victim. This is the creative anger and thus the writing may be violent and excessive (270). Gelpi, nevertheless, argues that this is only an intermediate phase towards others in which the female writer, instead of complaining or releasing her anger starts to demythicize male ideologies and myths and consequently the attempt of creating a more female self and culture. For Gelpi, anger cannot be "a permanent source of creativity" (270). In this way the writer transcends the phase of releasing anger, towards a new vision of self and culture and therefore a new basis for creativity (270). This is the fourth phase in which the female writer starts to re-integrate the self replacing the victim creature or the paralyzed complainer by the woman in search of her identity, her place, culture and poetry. According to Gelpi these stages above, though not always in a fixed order

or sequence, may characterize the woman process towards a new female literary tradition. For Gelpi these steps or categories do not always serve for aesthetic analysis. They serve fundamentally for defining a female state of consciousness, and also for conveying the historical progression of the female writer as appears in her works.

The steps above with their categories and modes and also the female poet revisionist attitude, on which the steps are based, show that female poets are doing away with the concept that conventional gender patterns and myths are natural, immutable and ideal. The myth that woman cannot be a poet who creates her own literary strategies so as to write her femaleness is therefore destroyed. In the place of this myth a new woman poet emerges; a new woman in search of her identity and of her own values, customs, language and images; a new woman creating her own myth based upon her own experiences and emotions. These women poets, such as Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich have been creating their own literary tradition by going, searching and writing beyond the established 'endings'.

Such a revisionist attitude has, in fact, motivated and directed the careers of many female writers in recent decades. But one certainly can not talk about revisionist attitude without referring to the poet and critic Adrienne Rich, who was the first to theorize, in the article "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision" the strategy of "revision". Adrienne Rich has been one of the great exponents of the revisionist mythmaking strategy, from her process of awakening consciousness onwards. Revisionist mythmaking has been of great use in demonstrating the

constant transformations of Rich's poetry towards a female poetics.

Revisionist position in general is, indeed, the basis for the analysis of Rich's articles and poetry. In order to support the analysis of the changes of Adrienne Rich's poetry throughout her career, I base my analysis on the theoretical propositions presented above. Adrienne Rich, as seen next, is the outstanding example of a woman writer who revised and transformed her private and public life completely, showing how a woman writer can take consciousness of her condition, and instead of giving up, propose another ideology and other more woman oriented myths.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CRITICAL CONCERNS OF ADRIENNE RICH

The revisionist attitude which has been the foundation of feminist criticism and theory has motivated and conducted Adrienne Rich's career. It has also provided the basic solution for the many problems she encountered as a woman and a poet in a male centered culture. In this chapter I will examine the elements that have formed Adrienne Rich's worldview and their influence on her poetics. The focus will be on the critical essays comprised in her two books, *On Lies, Secrets and Silences, Selected Prose 1966-1978*, published in 1979, and *Blood, Bread, and Poetry 1979-1985*, first issued in 1986 (from now on referred to as OLSS and BBP).

In OLSS Adrienne Rich shows the process of re-discovering, re-seeing, re-reading, re-analyzing, re-building (re-vising) herself, the reality surrounding her and also her poetics. As a consequence of her process of transformation, it does not show a linear and smooth development. Rich says, "I trust the contradictions and repetitions in this book to speak for themselves" (18). Sometimes she disagrees with herself, while at others she finds herself tender and severe in relation to her being and acting. Adrienne Rich confesses that this book is "part of the effort to define a female consciousness, which is political, aesthetic, and erotic", and which declines the inclusion in "this culture of female passivity" (18). Adrienne Rich draws and defines her revisionist attitude by revising her

own poetry, the texts of other female poets, and also some social issues. In the process Rich questions male centered culture, its ideology, its institutions, its effects upon women and men. She tries to understand, demythicize and unveil the lies (the distortions regarding women's images and desires), the secrets (what both genders have been hiding about women), and the silences (what woman has never said for fear, or for ignorance), regarding women from the perspective of gender relations. The essays comprised in this book serve as a sample of the best feminist criticism of the first phase. They show the trajectory of Rich's process of awakening consciousness from the category of "other" towards the category of "subject", her analyses of others female writers as well as a revision of some issues linked directly with woman, such as education, work, family, feminism, motherhood, lesbianism.

In BBP Adrienne Rich connects literary production with politics in society and particularly in literature. Similarly to her early articles but with a broader understanding of feminism, Rich grounds her critical essays and lectures on gender, but she adds other categories which also characterize and influence women. At this time Rich shows the need of the feminist movement to revise and redefine its lines so as to be coherent with the fight for all women. Rich also declares that all the essays have been re-vised, re-evaluated, and re-written before the book was published, and that they are, therefore, "indicative of a continuing exploration, not of a destination" (xii). For her, gender, class, race, religion and sexual option converge as points of domination: "there is no 'primary oppression' or



'contradiction', and it is not patriarchy alone that must be comprehended and dismantled" (xi). Rich reinforces and enlarges the feminist principle that the public and the personal are political, and that, as dimensions of a totality, these elements are interdependent on one another. As a matter of fact Adrienne Rich asserts that the prose contained in this book focuses "less about poems themselves and more about the social and historical conditions of their making" (xiii), hence the title of her book: the blood that relates to the hard work, the suffering, of a woman writer making poetry in a country which aims at profit - a capitalist country, a male centered culture, a white supremacist country; the bread which means financial support for a female poet; the poetry that refers to the writing of poetry as a result of the cultural, historical, geographical, social and political conditions for such.

In order to achieve the objectives of this chapter, I will follow three main steps. First, I will present a brief historical introduction of Adrienne Rich's personal and public life, attempting to show how Rich has focused on some of the aspects that influenced the formation of her worldview. Then, I will be pointing out some of the problems and contradictions Rich has confronted in a male centered culture. Finally I will be showing that, as Rich becomes increasingly aware of her problems and contradictions, her situation becomes unbearable, and so she begins to question and embark in a process of 'awakening consciousness', with the consequent loss of effectiveness of the dominant ideology and myths upon herself.

The poet and critic Adrienne Rich was born in Maryland in North America, a white and male dominant culture, in 1929. As she herself says, she was "the daughter of a Jewish father and a Protestant mother", a "white woman who had never known hunger or homelessness, growing up in the suburbs of a deeply segregated city in which neighborhoods were also dictated along religious line: Christian and Jewish" (1987:168). Among the established cultural privileges of class, colour, and to a certain extent nationality, which place Rich at the center of the establishment, there were some underprivileged characteristics, such as those of being female and Jewish, which place her at the margins as a writer. Actually, these were some of the aspects that have influenced Adrienne Rich's worldview and how she has related with reality - her consciousness - which in turn have directly influenced in her poetics.<sup>1</sup>

Rich's worldview has been influenced by many forces - personal, social, historical, cultural, economical, and political conditions - which inevitably involve the many relations of power in society. Her worldview, in this way, is inevitably political, as she herself affirms: "my personal world view at sixteen, as at twenty-six, was itself being created by political conditions" (1987:171). Rich's worldview therefore reflects the politics of gender, of colour, of class, of sexual option, of nationality, of religion, of the contemporary woman, of traditional literature and its criticism, of the emergent feminist criticism, as she herself recognizes:

I was not a man; I was white in a white-supremacist society; I was being educated from the perspective of a

particular class; my father was an "assimilated" Jew in an anti-Semitic world, my mother a white southern Protestant; there were particular historical currents on which my consciousness would come together, piece by piece. My personal world view was shaped in part by the poetry I had read, a poetry written almost entirely by white Anglo-Saxon men, a few women, Celts and Frenchmen notwithstanding. Thus, no poetry in the Spanish language or from Africa or China or the Middle East. My personal world view, which like so many young people I carried as a conviction of my uniqueness, was not original with me, but was, rather, untutored and half-conscious rendering of the facts of blood and bread, the social and political forces of my time and place. (1987:171)

The ideology of the dominant group had therefore pervaded Rich's life, by influencing her consciousness and consequently her art. Although not perceived at first her worldview is later understood as related not only to her gender, but also to many other forces. And, though Rich affirms that these dimensions have constituted her as "a complex identity" (1987:xii), some of them will be approached in isolation for analytical purposes.

The fact of being born and raised in The United States of America, for instance, forms the basis of her thinking. Contradicting Virginia Woolf, who said, "As a woman my country is the whole world", Adrienne Rich's revisionism emphasizes: "as a woman I have a country; ...I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history" (1987:212). As an American woman Adrienne Rich shows to be aware of the influence of American culture, ideology, and myths upon herself:

As women, I think it is essential that we admit and explore our cultural identities, our national identities, even as we reject the patriotism, jingoism, nationalism offered to us as 'The American way of life'. (1987:183)

Indeed, Rich emphasizes how her national and cultural identity has affected her whole life. Socialized to perceive the world

according to the interests of American ideology and its myths, she saw herself, at eleven, as the center of the universe:

Adrienne Rich  
 14 Edgevale Road  
 Baltimore, Maryland  
 The United States of America  
 The Continent of North America  
 The Western Hemisphere  
 The Earth  
 The Solar System  
 The Universe (1987:211-212)

Only much later does she realize that the image America has attempted to spread all over the universe - as free, united, helpful, the best country of the universe - contradicts its reality. Rich takes away the mask that veiled her country and concludes that the USA is classist, misogynist, racist, imperialist and anti-semitic:

Our government keeps telling us that its thumbprint of violence all over the world is for our protection, our national interests and security. Yet in this free country, in this city of art and culture and "free" enterprise, men and women are picking their food from garbage cans on Broadway. In this advanced technological society, 40 percent of all adults can barely read and 20 percent are functionally illiterate. In this city, as across the country, Black and Hispanics women and men, and white women are living in the very basement of economy, a whole generation of youth is being wasted by neglect and violence, while a generation of elders -- 72 percent of them women -- is dying in poverty, forgotten. (1987:161)

By exposing some of its contradictions, Rich demythicizes the ideological American reality and frees herself from its hold.

Another of the "privileges" enjoyed by Rich is that of being white in a female body. The politics of colour therefore influenced her being and acting, as she recognizes in the following text written in 1984:

This body. White, female; or female, white... I was defined as white before I was defined as female....The politics of location...the implications of white identity were mystified by the presumption that white people are the center of the universe. (1987:215)

In the light of such declaration, Rich then demythicizes the American discourse which conveys that everybody, independently of colour, is to be considered equal.

A high level of education and her middle-class social condition were some other aspects which contributed to Rich's way of interpreting the world, as she points out in her outstanding article "When We Dead Awaken". Indeed the importance of this article lies in the fact that through revision Adrienne Rich theorizes the female author's process of awakening consciousness and that she uses her own process to exemplify it: "My own luck was being born white and middle-class into a house full of books, with a father who encouraged me to read and write" (1979:38).

When compared to many other women of her time and place, Adrienne Rich was really fortunate in terms of education, class and colour. She graduated from Radcliffe College in 1951, and did not suffer from starvation, or illiteracy, or prejudice against her colour, as many American women did. Regarding her gifted situation in comparison to other women, she says:

Like Virginia [Woolf] I am aware of the women who are not with us here because they are washing the dishes and looking after the children. ...And I am thinking also of women ...who are washing other people's dishes and caring for other people's children, not to mention women who went on the streets last night in order to feed their children. (1979:38)

Positively, Adrienne Rich shows that she was aware that she and the other women who were together with the same purposes, had some advantages over other women.

Developing this idea, Rich emphasizes that she and women in general have internalized and tried to fulfill the myth of the "special woman", "romanticized" by men:

...we have liked to think of ourselves as special, and we have known that men would tolerate, even romanticize us as special, as long as our words and actions didn't threaten their privilege of tolerating or rejecting us and our work according to their ideas of what a special woman ought to be. (1979:38)

Aware that by embodying this myth women did not threaten male hegemony, Rich exposes one of the aspects of the myth of the "other". Besides the "special woman...is also the token woman" (1979:38), that woman who is encouraged to see herself differently from others due to some talent. Maintaining a separatist position in relation to other women and sometimes even hating them, the special woman stays at the side of man (1987:1-10).

Adrienne Rich acknowledges that her father was the man who "encouraged [her] to read and write" (1979:38). Rich's father was indeed very influential on her choice of a career. He offered her, among other things, the opportunity to study the great classics and taking up the craft of writing poetry. In regard to this subject, Wendy Martin - a researcher of Adrienne Rich's life and work - cites Rich's own words saying that her father pushed her to "work, work/harder than anyone has worked before",

and to struggle for excellence (1984:167). Rich learned her lesson - her craft - very well.

As many women poets, Adrienne Rich states that she learned the craft of writing poetry from the men she most admired and who were conventionally considered as highly instrumentalized and intellectualized men. Rich is aware that she started writing within a traditional male dominant literary framework: "I know that my style was formed first by male poetry: by the men I was reading as an undergraduate - Frost, Dylan Thomas, Donne, Auden, MacNiece, Stevens, Yeats. What I chiefly learned from them was craft" (1979:41). Though a talented poet, Rich in fact learned her lesson by behaving and writing according to the myth of the "other", the traditional mythical image of the "angel", the special woman and to a certain extent the token woman in society and in literature. In her first poetry one can notice that she followed conventions with an uncritical consciousness as if these literary modes were the only ones suited to a woman poet.

Although Adrienne Rich herself declares that her style was shaped first by male poets (WWDA 1971) one cannot forget that - throughout the time - Rich's style also received influences from Emily Dickinson. In her article "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson" (1975), for instance, Adrienne Rich reveals that for "years [she had] been not so much envisioning Emily Dickinson as trying to visit, to enter her mind, through her poems and letters..." (159). In spite of Dickinson's influence, Adrienne Rich's first wrote as male centered culture determined: like an "angel".

Indeed, Wendy Martin comments that "as a young woman, Rich wrote elegantly crafted, tightly rhymed, prize-winning poetry" (168). As she followed feminine conventionalized ways of writing, Adrienne Rich was respected for writing in a "pure and lovely" way, as the special woman, delicate and frail, the obedient submissive angel poet who writes according to the roles assigned to her. She was thus acknowledged for fulfilling the expectations and interests of a male centered criticism, rather than fulfilling her own female desires and needs. Indeed, her first collection of poems *A Change of World* (1951) was praised by W. H. Auden for its female modesty and neatness, suggesting, thus, obedience and respect for male masters. As he notes "... the poems a reader will encounter in this book are neatly and modestly dressed, speak quietly but not mumble, respect their elders but are not cowed by them, and do not tell fibs: that, for a first volume, is a good deal" (quoted in Gelpi 126-127). And Randall Jarrell, in a review of *The Diamond Cutters* (1955) exalted the myth of the angel with its characteristics of femininity, of sweetness, in Adrienne Rich's poems:

It seems to me that she herself is, often, a good poet who is all too good -- one who can afford to be wild tomorrow; meanwhile, today, she is also an endearing and delightful poet, one who deserves Shakespeare's favorite adjective, *sweet*. (quoted in Gelpi 129)

In the light of such criticism upon Adrienne Rich's early work, we can perceive that until the beginning of the 1960's, Adrienne Rich lived according to the dominant ideology, as if it were her own ideology. Her literary production followed the cultural tradition of the literary establishment, in terms of both content



and form, as I will attempt to show in the next chapter. At no moment of Rich's early poetry are there hints that she was aware of her situation as "the other" (the marginal, the muted, the dominated, the secondary). Much to the contrary, Rich first believed that the literary principles presented to her were the only valid ones. As a token woman she believed that incorporating the myth of the special woman, she would be accepted by the traditional critical community. Though in 1971 Rich would affirm that literary production conveys unconscious knowledge - "poems are like dreams: in them you put what you don't know you know" (1979:40) - during the fifties and sixties, Rich still had a rather uncritical view of her role as a poet.

Although, on the one hand, Rich's education privileged her with a high standard of taste plus a wide knowledge of poetry, on the other, this male-centered education hindered her development as a woman and writer in many ways. Education, as an apparatus of ideology, was thus a means to make Rich believe that the images and roles attributed to women, in society and literature were natural and universal. Later on, as developed in this same chapter, Rich becomes aware that these feminine images and roles are unsuited to her new female aspirations. At this moment patriarchal ideology conveyed through education will enter in conflict with Adrienne Rich's femaleness in emergence. The basic conflict refers to what culture has said to be female and woman's desires, feelings and needs. So, Adrienne Rich denounces how ideological has been the education offered to woman:

As women have gradually and reluctantly been admitted into the mainstream of higher education, they have been made

participants in a system that prepares men to take up roles of power in a man-centered society, that asks questions and teaches "facts" generated by a male intellectual tradition, and that both subtly and openly confirms men as the leaders and shapers of human destiny both within and outside academia. (1987:127)

But in the beginning of her career she behaved as most educated or special women did, striving to please her father, her masters and the traditional dominant literary criticism, as she observes:

So for about twenty years I wrote for a particular man, who criticized and praised me and made me feel I was indeed "special". The obverse side of this, of course, was that I tried for a long time to please him, or rather, not to displease him. And then of course there were other men - writers, teachers - the Man, who was not a terror or a dream but a literary master and a master in other ways less easy to acknowledge. (1979:38-39).

Rich's words show her awareness of her uncritical consciousness of the past.

Another problem Rich faced due to this male centered culture, with its ideology and myths was the lack of female reference to counterbalance male distortions of female images and roles, in society and in literature (as characters or as writers). By 1971 she realizes how the mythical images of women have really hindered her development as a woman writer:

A lot is being said today about the influence that the myths and images of women have on all of us who are products of culture....[The woman writer] goes to poetry or fiction looking for her way of being in the world, since she too has been putting words and images together; she is looking eagerly for guides, maps, possibilities; and over and over in the "words' masculine persuasive force" of literature she comes up against something that negates everything she is about; she meets the image of woman in books written by men. She finds a terror and a dream, she finds a beautiful pale face, she finds La Belle Dame Sans Merci, she finds Juliet or Tess or Salome, but precisely what she does not find is that absorbed, drudging, puzzled, sometimes inspired

creature, herself, who sits at a desk trying to put words together. (1979:39)

Whenever looking for directions, for examples which would become compatible with her female being in emergence, Rich found almost nothing that could help her search. When she did find models, she encountered different, unsuitable images and values from what she was really feeling and experiencing at that moment of her life. Rich suffered a disjunction between what was said to be female and what she was experiencing and discovering about herself and about history and culture.

Progressively aware of this contradiction, Rich becomes critical of the historical position and the role of women:

... historically men and women have played very different parts in each other's lives. Where woman has been a luxury for man, and has served as the painter's model and the poet's muse, but also as comforter, nurse, cook, bearer of his seed, secretarial assistant, and copyst of manuscripts, man has played a quite different role for the female artist. (1979:36)

Furthermore, Rich shows to be aware that this culture has assigned to the female writer a conventional feminine tone, style or subject. Woman had to "be determined not to appear angry", but "be calm, detached, and even charming...". Female writers had, as Rich points out, to show to be without passion. These female writers, including Rich at the beginning of her career, had to keep sexuality far from their poems, by being cool and special (1979:36-37).

Looking back at her early career, Rich recognized that she too was convinced that poetry was an art which expressed higher spiritual values. In "Blood, Bread and Poetry" (1984) she

confirms her attitude during the fifties: "I still believed that poets were inspired by some transcendent authority and spoke from some extraordinary height" (1987:171). Believing in the old and the quite conventional concept that in order to be an artist, one has to be kind of blessed by some God, or inspired by some metaphysical force, she first saw the artist as completely disconnected from any social, political or cultural influence. Furthermore, the "beauty" and "pleasure" of art was above everything:

I had grown up hearing and reading poems from a very young age, first as sounds, repeated, musical, rhythmically satisfying in themselves, and the power of concrete, sensuously compelling images... I came into my twenties believing in poetry, in all art, as the expression of a higher world view... (1987:168,171)

During the fifties, Adrienne Rich also believed that the poet achieved "universality" and authority "speaking as a man to men', as Wordsworth had phrased it" (1987:171). But, as DeShazer affirms, later Rich would resent "the implication that the woman poet should seek creative power and sustenance from a 'superior' male force" (1986:135). Rich's revisionist position, therefore, made her acknowledge how harmful these kinds of influences had been to her, and also to seek for a specific tradition centered in self-definition.

The story of her "conversion experience" can be found in "When We Dead Awaken", and deserves a closer scrutiny. Acknowledging that "very problem which has no name", which Betty Friedan analyzes in *The Feminine Mystique*<sup>2</sup>, Rich describes her life in the silent 1950's:

I finished college, published my first book by a fluke... took a job, lived alone, went on writing, fell in love. I was young, full of energy, and the book seemed to mean that others agreed I was a poet.... as a "full" woman's life, I plunged in my early twenties into marriage and had three children before I was thirty. There was nothing overt in the environment to warn me: these were the fifties...the family was in its glory. Life was extremely private... I have the sense that women didn't talk to each other much in the fifties - not about their secret emptiness, their frustrations. (42)

But like many women of her generation, she begins to sense a growing dissatisfaction with her private and public life. And it is this sense of emptiness which leads her to a reexamination of herself and triggers a conscious striving to move from the condition of "other" towards that of the "subject" of her female existence. As she tell us:

I went on trying to write; my book and first child appeared in the same month. But by the time that book came out I was already dissatisfied with those poems, which seemed to me mere exercises for poems I hadn't written. The book was praised, however, for its 'gracefulness'. (42)

Thus, in spite of achieving a certain measure of respect from the critical establishment, Rich did not feel she was fulfilling herself as a poet, especially as a woman poet.

Actually, Rich's dissatisfaction shows that the dominant ideology starts to fail. As a woman writer in patriarchal culture Rich was expected to feel very satisfied with the life and poetry she was living and creating. Rich was first made to believe through the dominant ideology and myths that she was a free individual and that the life she was living was chosen by her - the life of a true woman: a recognized poetess, the wife of a professor at Harvard, and a mother. Though at this time Rich was

not yet conscious of this ideological stratagem which was behind her dissatisfaction, things were not going on according to what the establishment expected. Dominant ideology was not being so effective for it was not hiding the domination as it was supposed to (cf. Althusser, 1985:90).

In spite of her great dissatisfaction Rich could not show it in public, otherwise she would be labeled an unpleasing, probably an abnormal woman because, according to the dominant values and its myths, Adrienne Rich was living one of the best lives woman could live: "I had a marriage and a child. If there were doubts, if there were periods of null depression or active despairing, these could only mean that I was ungrateful, insatiable, perhaps a monster" (1979:42). After the birth of her third child (by her thirties) Rich felt as if she were "dead". She felt as if all her energies were being sucked and that instead of living a life, a life was living her:

What frightened me most was the sense of drift, of being pulled along on a current which called itself my destiny, but in which I seemed to be losing touch with whoever I had been, with the girl who had experienced her own will and energy almost ecstatically at times, walking around a city or riding a train at night or typing in a student room. (1979: 42-43).

Rich then realizes that she was not the free subject who had chosen her destiny, but that some other forces had imposed on her a life she had not chosen: "A life I didn't choose chose me: even my tools are the wrong ones for what I have to do" (1974:63).

Under such circumstances Rich had only two alternatives: she could either consider herself a "failed woman and a failed poet" (1979:42), or she had to attempt to understand and alter those

"mysterious forces" which affected American women after the second world war (the 1950's and the very beginning of the 1960's): the widespread belief in America that women's happiness was inside the home, in the domestic/private realm, in taking care of children, house and husband (cf. Friedan, 1964).

In feminist critical terms, Adrienne Rich's dissatisfaction arises from the division between two selves which plagues so many women writers. One of the selves fulfills her own needs, desires, wishes, which had been silenced and are now coming to the surface. This side is the muted, the wild, and marginal part, which is "unwomanly" and not socially accepted; this same side has been conventionally labeled as the mythical image of witch or wise woman. The other self is the one which fulfills the male-created myth of the "other" and therefore fits the mythical image of the angel in society and in literature. This woman follows the "feminine style", for she is submissive and fragile, and lives almost always in the private realm. The angel woman rarely goes beyond the limits assigned in patriarchal culture. In literature, according to Gilbert and Gubar, this side relates to the feminine heroine, the feminine persona, the feminine subjects and tone, the embodiment of the mythical image of the "angel in the house", the one which holds her anger and does show her femaleness, her inner self as a woman (1979a:xv-xxvi). Rich was divided between these two sides, as if they were distinct and completely separated from one another. But she is conscious of this division. She affirms that "patriarchy has always split [women] into virtuous women and whores, mothers and dykes, madonnas and medusas" (1979:226). Moreover, Rich declares in 1979

how much and how long this same division has made her uneasy: "Much of the first four decades of my life was spent in a continuous tension between the world the Fathers taught me to see, and had rewarded me for seeing, and the flashes of insight that came through the eye of the outsider" (1987:3). The consequences of this psychosocial dilemma are reflected in her poetic production as well:

I was writing very little, partly from fatigue of suppressed anger and loss of contact with my own being; partly from the discontinuity of female life with its attention to small cores, errands, work that others constantly undo, small children's constant needs. What I did write was unconvincing to me: my anger and frustration were hard to acknowledge in or out of poems because in fact I cared a great deal about my husband and my children. (1979:43)

Thus, Rich begins to analyze and question her career in connection with her private roles as wife, mother and housewife. As she affirms: "Trying to look back and understand that time I have tried to analyze the real nature of the conflict" (1979:43). Her conclusion is that though she was made to believe that these roles would make her naturally feel that she was living a full woman life, these roles instead restrained her "full life" as a woman and writer.

Rich truly felt that the personal and public female roles assigned to her did not suit her wishes and desires, and the needs of her latent femaleness now in emergence. She concludes that acceptance of the traditional mythical feminine roles (wife, mother, housewife, daughter-in-law, teacher, poetess) and attitudes (passivity, sweet, frailty, abnegated, unselfish) were



hindering her poetic development, by keeping her from transforming and growing:

...to write poetry or fiction, or even to think well is not to fantasize or to put fantasies on paper. For a poem to coalesce, for a character or an action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive and a certain freedom of the mind is needed - freedom to press on, to enter the currents of your thought like a glider pilot, knowing that your motion can be sustained, that the buoyancy of your attention will not be suddenly snatched away. Moreover, if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has the question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment. (1979:43)

In order to obey the demands of "the subversive function of the imagination" she had to question, expose and free herself from the condition of a woman in patriarchal society.

Freedom is the fundamental point. Freedom of thought and action is the first requirement for a revisionist attitude toward concepts, values and behaviours, especially where poetry is concerned:

You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name. For writing is re-naming. (1979:43)

Believing in the transformative power of words, she imparts a new urgency to her poetry. Imagination or, as she terms it, "the energy of creation" becomes an invaluable instrument in Rich's search for balance and for fulfillment. Her worldview and her poetry begin to change, but not without struggle and conflict:

...to be maternally with small children all day in the old way, to be with a man in the old way of marriage, requires a holding-back, a putting aside of that imaginative activity,

and demands instead a kind of conservatism. I want to make it clear that I am not saying that in order to write well, or think well, it is necessary to become unavailable to others, or to become a devouring ego. This has been the myth of the masculine artist and thinker; and I do not accept it. But to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way is in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination. There must be ways..., in which the energy of creation and the energy of relation can be united. But in those years I always felt the conflict as a failure of love in myself.(1979:43)

The division between the traditional and the emergent woman must be healed, for they exist in the same person. Rich also concludes that personal and public life are connected and that both spheres are political, considering that they have to do with the relation of power between genders in society and in literature. "I think I began at this point to feel that politics was not something 'out there' but something 'in here' and of the essence of my condition" (1979:44). Rich had been looking for "clues" to solve her problems for about ten years, and in the late fifties, as she declares, she began writing "directly about experiencing herself as a woman" (1979:47). Her first book exploring herself consciously as a woman with her conflicts, needs and wishes is called *Snapshots of a Daughter in Law*, published in 1963. The poetry of this book marks the beginning of a poetics that can be termed - at least from the perspective of the 1990's - feminist.

Her critical stance also acquires a "feminist" and therefore political turn. In 1966 she analyzes in her first critical article, "The Tensions of Anne Bradstreet", the connection of the private life and the poetry of Bradstreet - the first woman poet considered as being American. But it is in "When We Dead Awaken" that her critical views are more fully developed, as she

advocates the revisionist attitude which has made her central for the feminist literary criticism of the 1970's and 1980's. Her plea for revision "as an act of survival" has indeed launched "a radical critique of literature" which forms the base of gender criticism as we know it today. But only a full rendering of the conclusion of her essay can give us the full impact of her ideas:

Re-vision -- the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulses, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative [emphasis mine], and how we can begin to see and name - and therefore live - afresh. A change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if we are not going to see the old political order reassert itself in every new revolution. We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (1979:35)

It was this revisionist instance which in fact enabled Rich to learn about her female being and behaviour, the writers' cultural locus, the language which is full of dominant ideology and myths, the connection of social and cultural events with her self, the kind of education offered to oppressed groups, the life of other women and female writers, about the family as a patriarchal institution. Such a position has been Adrienne Rich's fundamental solution for a more woman-oriented poetry, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Throughout the 1970's Rich increasingly engaged in the feminist literary movement and social projects, searching for an instrument to articulate and communicate her personal and public revisionist position. Her essays of this period reveal a deep concern with social issues, demonstrating therefore that Rich was not only worried with her self, but also with the world surrounding her. Education, literature, motherhood, the feminist movement, female work and family are some of the topics of the essays comprised in her book *DLSS*, which range from 1966 to 1978.

In regard to education Rich describes her experience with other teachers in attempting to change the dominant way of teaching English language to marginal groups, such as Black, Hispanics, Irish and Italian, and affirms that the educational system and the English language are inadequate for marginal groups ("Teaching Language in Open Admissions" 1972). The education at the university level versus gender relations is a microcosm of society with its male centered culture. Rich proposes a radical transformation of the university as a whole so as to be more woman-centered, not only in curriculum, but also in physical space, in order to create a more balanced and humane university in terms of relations of gender, without repeating "the devouring ego" of male culture ("Toward a Woman-Centered University" 1973-1974). Adrienne Rich also emphasizes the need of fostering women to be more critical regarding their condition, and of encouraging them to take charge of their beings and lives as grown up and responsible human beings ("Taking Women Students Seriously" 1978).

Concerning literature versus relations of gender, Adrienne Rich investigates some writers' literary work and points out their conscious or unconscious strategies of writing their femaleness in forms and contents considered unwomanly (unfeminine) by traditional criticism. Whereas in Eleanor Ross Taylor's poetry she shows the parallel between the waste and the power of man in wars versus the waste and the power of woman in society and in wars ("Woman Observing, Preserving, Conspiring, Surviving: The Poems of Eleanor Ross Taylor" 1972), in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, Rich shows that the main female character represses her sexuality in the figure of another female character: the madwoman imprisoned in the attic. Rich shows that poetry can become a powerful instrument for powerless women because through the forms and contents a female poet can transform the old language of poetry into a more suitable way of communicating her femaleness. Many female poets alluded to themes and tones that were coherent with their private lives, such as daughterhood, abortion, love of a powerless mother, menopause, self-violence, self-contempt, self-trivialization, victimization ("Anne Sexton: 1928-1974", 1974), the re-definition of love, rape, the fetishization of the female body, violence against women ("Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman" 1977). Rich states that in the case of Emily Dickinson she created unorthodox codes of metaphors, images, strategies, points of stress, so as to write her discoveries and her option for "spinsterhood and seclusion at home, as a strategy to freely explore in deep the states of the mind, and also to control the world ("Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson", 1975).

Adrienne Rich shows how patriarchy has made use of myths referring to motherhood and fatherhood as a strategy of domination. The sacredness of motherhood as a heterosexual institution, the myth of the nuclear family ("Motherhood in Bondage" 1976 and "Motherhood: The Emergency and the Quantum Leap" 1978), plus the myth that man through the figure of father and husband is entitled the head of the family, are some of the myths which should be radically revised and demythicized ("Husband-Right and Father Right" 1977).

Concerning female work Adrienne Rich points out that the kinds of work offered to woman reflect her subservient condition in society through the myth of female unselfishness in roles such as secretary, waitress, and nurse ("Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women" 1976). As a solution Rich proposes a radical re-shaping of female worldview so as to demythicize gender work, and help in the re-assessment of women into professional positions and institutions considered unwomanly.

The issues of love among women and lesbianism are also in need of a radical revision. Adrienne Rich believes that lesbianism has been strongly attacked because this is a way of maintaining women separated from one another and also of diverting people's attention from racism, poverty, unemployment ("The Meaning of Our Love for Women Is That We Have Constantly to Expand" 1977). Moreover Adrienne Rich settles two meanings for the term lesbianism: one which refers to female's bonding (friendship), and other which concerns female sexual option ("It is the Lesbian in Us..." 1976 and "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying" 1975). Thus, Rich proposes that women tell the truth and

reveal their secrets in what concerns their lesbianism, and also to respect all women as equals and as suffering very similar oppressions.

Still in OLSS Rich focuses on some variety of topics. Regarding the images of woman Rich affirms that the antifeminist woman is a creation of patriarchy, such as the case of the token woman ("The Antifeminist Woman" 1972). In what concerns sexual violence, such as rape, Adrienne Rich links with the violence and horror of Vietnam war, and affirms that both have been male actions ("Caryatid: Two Columns" 1973).

By the end of the book Adrienne Rich starts to enlarge her focus of analysis of feminism. Rich claims that the differences of women - race, colour, class, sexual option - must be considered and respected, so as to unite all kinds of women ("Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia" 1978).

Proposing a radical reshaping of attitudes, behaviours, ideology and myths, Rich defines in OLSS her feminist project as linked to the transformation of personal, political and public aspects of the self:

Feminism begins but cannot end with the discovery by an individual of her self-consciousness as a woman. It is not, finally, even the recognition of her reasons for anger, or the decision to change her life, go back to school, leave a marriage (though in any individual life such decisions can be momentous and require great courage). Feminism means finally that we renounce our obedience to the fathers and recognize that the world they have described is not the whole world. Masculine ideologies are the creation of feminine subjectivity; they are neither objective, nor inclusive "human". Feminism implies that we recognize fully the inadequacy for us, the distortion, of male-created ideologies, and that we proceed to think, and act, out of that recognition. (207)

Adrienne Rich's project is extended to her other book of essays, *BBP* however within a larger vision of feminism.

The articles collected in *BBP*, and which span the years between 1979 and 1985, similarly to the previous book, focus on education, feminism, feminist criticism, lesbianism, female education, but from a more extended point of view of feminism, society and literary creation. Here Adrienne Rich's inquiries are based upon the premise that all women, independently of colour, race, sexual option, religion and nationality, are to be considered and respected as women. The differences exist for uniting instead of separating one woman from the other.

In what affects education Adrienne Rich believes in a female education which stimulates women towards the subjectivity of their own being, so as to create a more just society. For such, Rich points out some of the obstacles to achieve this female educational objective, as well as the ways to overcome them. First, Rich warns female students to take care and to avoid the embodiment of the mythical image of the "token" woman, as it has been offered by patriarchy as a privilege of few women ("What Does a Woman Need to Know?" 1979). Rich states that the purpose of woman's education is formal knowledge plus the development of a critical and transformative consciousness about her and other female's condition, as well as of society's relations of power in general ("The Soul of a Woman's College" 1984). Furthermore, there is the need to teach students the history of women's domination plus the atrocities committed against all kinds of women, so as to make students realize that their condition is



historical and mutable, and not natural as conventionally preached ("Resisting Amnesia: History and Personal Life" 1983).

In what relates to lesbianism versus feminism Adrienne Rich believes that feminism should help in eradicating all kinds of segregation from the movement and from society, otherwise feminists would be incoherent, because all women independently of colour, sexual option, etc. have been exploited by patriarch capitalist America ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 1980 plus "Invisibility in Academe" 1984). Here echoing Muriel Rukeyser's cry, "No More masks, no more mythologies", Rich claims once more for "no more prejudices, no more domination" (1973:1).

The divisions that women have confronted have been innumerable; thus it is time to eliminate any reason of human being's conflict and fragmentation. Adrienne Rich's division referring to her Jewishness in an anti-semitic country had led her - when young - to hide her Jewish identity, so as to be accepted in some central part of society, instead of being considered marginal ("Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity" 1982). Later on, Rich noticed that her Jewishness could not be neglected, because it was part of herself. In an attempt to solve such division Adrienne Rich analyzes the stigma of being Jewish, the actions and the otherness of the Jews, and finally recommends the elimination of all hierarchies, prejudices, archetypes, stereotypes from feminism and society ("If Not with Others, How?" 1985).

Concerning feminism and nationality Adrienne Rich emphasizes the importance of identifying herself as an American, and also of

having consciousness that her country has committed many atrocities, segregations and oppressions inside America and throughout the world. Wars, racism, exploitation of third world people have been some of the USA actions ("North American Tunnel Vision" 1983). Furthermore, Rich states that the fact of being a feminist from a developed country does not give any American feminist the prerogative of interfering in women's movements from underdeveloped countries. For Adrienne Rich, the best feminist to deal with the particular patriarchy of her country is the feminist of her own country, because each country has its own reality and necessities ("Going There and Being Here" 1983).

In regard to literature and education Adrienne Rich proposes to introduce in the canons and in traditional disciplines female writers never taught before ("The Problem of Lorraine Hansberry" 1979). Rich also states that going towards a more feminist criticism implies the enlargement of its field with other categories of analysis that refer to woman's characteristics, such as race, nationality, religion, added to gender ("Toward a More Feminist Criticism" 1981). Being coherent with her new position of feminism linked with literature, Adrienne Rich points out that in Elizabeth Bishop's poetry there are some themes which reveal her marginal location directly linked with her lesbianism; indeed Bishop's marginal condition pushed her to identify with other marginal groups such as the poor and the black, as some of her poetry shows ("The Eye of the Outsider: Elizabeth Bishop's Complete Poems 1927-1979" 1983).

At the end of the book, Rich shows that she is aware that poetry, rather than reflecting the artist's unique transcendental

illumination, reflects the artist's consciousness which is formed by social, historical, geographical, cultural, political aspects of a particular time and space ("Blood, Bread and Poetry: The Location of the Poet" 1984).

Finally, in the utopic year of 1984, in Europe, Adrienne Rich writes "Notes Toward a Politics of Location" (1984). In this article she urges that the basis of the new feminism research and practices are gender plus the other categories related to women: colour, race, sexual option, religion and class. Thus, Rich affirms that not only gender influences in the production and reception of literature, but geographical location, culture, history, sexual option and colour influence women's consciousness and therefore their being and acting in society and in literature. Furthermore, all relations of power of a specific time and space must be revised and eliminated inside feminism and in society. Indeed Adrienne Rich declares that her idea regarding feminism has changed a lot since she entered the feminist movement. Rich's definition of feminism has been transformed, as seen above, and enlarged its scope. So, Rich reinforces the need for the union of women with the respect of every one's difference, and she also re-affirms that all pre-conceived images and prejudices concerning female differences should be revised and eradicated from feminism and society. In this way, by respecting the differences and stressing the similarities women will acquire a more coherent position in feminism and in society. This shows that Adrienne Rich's search continues, the changes continue. And as I conclude this chapter there is only one

certainty - Rich and her poetry will continue to change and to be changed by revisions and rereadings.

In the next chapter I will present some of the changes which can be perceived in Adrienne Rich's poetry in the twenty years which marked the development of her feminist consciousness.

## Notes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> Michael Lowy, *As Aventuras de Karl Marx contra o Barão de Munchausen: Marxismo e Positivismo na Sociologia do Conhecimento*, trad. Juarez Guimarães e Suzanne Felice Lewy, (Ed. Busca Vida Ltda., 2nd ed., São Paulo, 1988). *Worldview* and *consciousness* are here used as conveying similar meanings, in a simplified approach. I have based these definitions upon Michael Lowy's. Whereas *Worldview* is how the person perceives the world which is conditioned to a certain culture, context, historical and political moment, *consciousness* is how the person relates with the world as ideologically presented to her/him. The person changes according to the changes of her/his worldview. Different worldviews cause different being and behaviour. In the case of literature, different worldviews cause different consciousness and therefore different poetics.

<sup>2</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1963) pp 11-27.

### CHAPTER III

#### ADRIENNE RICH'S POETRY: 1951-1973

In this chapter I will analyze some of the transformations of Adrienne Rich's poetry. For such I have selected ten of Adrienne Rich's poems, starting from her first poetical writings in the 1950's and continuing for a period of approximately twenty years, so as to illustrate the evolution of her critical feminist consciousness of self, culture and poetry. Far from aiming at an exhaustive examination of the transformations of Adrienne Rich's poetry, this study proposes a partial analysis of Rich's poetry and its characteristics, concentrating on the beginning of her process of "awakening consciousness".

For the purpose of examination, the following phases may be recognized: (1) confinement and constraint; (2) division between what has been assigned to her as feminine and what is emerging from her inner, latent self; (3) the exploration of her identity and the reality surrounding her, which may result in the unconventional expression of her body; (4) The release of anger which is proper to her indignation concerning her muted condition. (5) exploration of her love towards every kind of woman, independently of colour, religion, and sexual option; (6) revisionist-mythmaking which involves the practices of redefining woman's consciousness and culture with the demythification of conventional myths regarding genders and the subsequent creation of more female oriented myths. The underlying objective is to show the attempt to create a new language and new images which

can express in a more authentic female way a new vision of the self, world and poetry, according to the principles discussed in Chapter One.

Even though every choice is ultimately a matter of personal preference, in reflecting the ten poems to be analysed, and which are transcribed in full in the Appendix to this dissertation, I have kept in mind certain guidelines. Besides the obvious preoccupation with chronology, I have tried to contemplate every volume of poetry published by Rich from 1951 to 1973, the year her most highly acclaimed work - *Diving into the Wreck* - was published. Except for *The Diamond Cutters* (1955), all of her volumes are indeed represented by either one or two poems. Another criterion which cannot be overlooked is that of critical evaluation. Almost all of the ten poems selected have been hailed by critics and by Adrienne Rich herself as landmarks in her poetical production, as their inclusion in *Poems: Selected and New, 1950-1970*, in the Gelpi's Norton Critical Edition of her poems, and in most anthologies of contemporary American poetry can attest. In the analysis which follows, the reader will be able to take a full measure of their importance.

Adrienne Rich's first poems, comprised in *A Change of World* (1951) and in *Diamond Cutters* (1955), are marked by the formalism and conservatism of a poet who followed established literary patterns. Her writing conveys the confinement and constraint proper of her powerlessness in a male centered culture. The woman in her poems is a victim of dominance and subordination, but she

cannot yet perceive this predicament. She is uncritical of her subservient position, and as a result there is a detachment from her self, her emotions and the world presented to her. Sometimes, however, the speaker unconsciously demonstrates that there are other - less masculine - alternatives for this muted and passive woman. The wild side of this woman is still very blurred and unknown. Thus, most of the time she does not consciously explore or articulate this side for fear or unawareness.

"Storm Warnings" (1951) shows a female persona entrapped in a house, protecting herself from the threats of a storm. She is instinctively aware of the impending storm. There is an air of anticipation for the "winds are walking overhead" (1.3) and the sky is becoming darker "by moving accross the land" (1.34). Aware of the imminent peril, the persona prepares for the coming of the storm. She "leaves the book upon a pillowed chair" (1.3) and shuts all the windows. Her only movement is to "walk from window to closed window, watching/ Boughs strain against the sky" (1.7). The persona recognizes the coming of the storm as a warning that she is in trouble, but as she is unconscious of her position, she does not realize that her problem is a conflict between her assigned category as "the other" and her latent feelings and desires. She unconsciously protects herself in this closed place. The persona's condition as "the other" imprisions her into a state of immanence, that is within the limits of her inferior condition. Instead of being open and attempting to understand this dilemma, she confines herself even more by "[closing] the shutters" and "[drawing] the curtains as the sky goes black" (11. 21-22). In spite of all her efforts to protect herself from



the dangers outside, another force, stronger than herself - - the imminent wind - - insists on entering what critic B.Gelpi in "Adrienne Rich: The Poetics of Change" terms her "weather-proof sanctuary" (131) through the only "unsealed aperture" (l.24): the key hole of the door.

Furthermore, the noise of the wind - - "the insistent whine" - - demonstrates the breaking down of the persona's sole instruments of defense. The drawing of curtains and the lighting of candles are not sufficient for combating this storm:

This is our sole defense against the season;  
 These are the things that we have learned to do  
 Who live in troubled regions. (ll. 25-27)

In fact, although realizing she is "in troubled regions", in "Storm Warnings" the persona is unaware of the future struggles she will confront. She is ignorant of the nearest approximation of the conflict between her assigned passive role, which implies her present life of confinement and restraint, and the opposite role which may grant her more freedom of thought and movement, thus enabling her to opt for what can emerge from herself (the subject of her own being). The life she is living is metaphorically imaged by the house she encloses herself in: the subservient feminine poet following traditional patterns of being and writing. The other life, which the persona is completely ignorant of, is latent, although beginning to stir. The storm refers to the writer's female consciousness still in the state of half-sleep, and which, if awakened could lead her to start behaving and writing unconventionally. And, in transforming her consciousness and culture, she could risk being unaccepted. For a

while Adrienne Rich describes, with a detachment proper of her uncritical stance, a woman who encloses herself against the threats of an unknown world. She prefers to remain actionless and be the disconnected and emotionless spectator of this other life in which she may one day be a subject, and which may shake and destroy her apparent safety.

Another poem of this phase which refers to Adrienne Rich's unconscious duality between her assigned feminine private life and her latent female poet is "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" (1951). In this poem, also from *A Change of World*, Rich shows on the one hand Aunt Jennifer's feminine domestic art of tapestry which portrays unconsciously unfeminine characteristics through the image of the tigers. The tigers, on the other hand, are strong, "proud" and "unafraid" (l.12), and represent creative power, plus freedom of daring. In Adrienne Rich's unconscious the artist - Aunt Jennifer - transfers to her art the latent wishes of a female artist to be like the tigers (strong, courageous, creative, unafraid):

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,  
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.  
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;  
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty. (ll. 1-4)

Nevertheless, Rich shows through the image of uncle's wedding ring how the conventionalities of a marriage have hindered Aunt's full development as an artist. As described in the second stanza, the heaviness of the ring - - marriage duties - - obstructs and delays the artist's development:

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through the wool

Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.  
 The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band  
 Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand. (ll. 5-8)

The conclusion is that the "ordeals" of her marital 'status' make her a victim of the gender roles, such as in marriage. Her husband, imaged by the heavy wedding band, is oppressive. Conventional marriage has constrained her life as a whole. By the time Aunt dies she is "still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by" (l.10). So even in death she continues to be repressed and oppressed by the confinements of the wedding. But on the other hand, her art lives on, conveying her unfulfilled desires: "The tigers in the panel that she made/ Will go on prancing proud and unafraid" (ll. 11-12). As critic Claire Keyes comments in her book *The Aesthetics of Power* (1986), Aunt "never integrates the 'tigers' into her psyche", because "to accept the implication of being a tiger is to unwoman herself" (p.22), that is, to become unfeminine.

At the time the poem was written, Rich was writing in a feminine way, proper of her condition as the other, the muted. Moreover, the speaker in the poem is detached from her description, as if she were outside the action and just commenting upon it, as if she were the spectator of another's life. One sign of this is that Rich chooses a character far from her generation, as if Aunt Jennifer was completely outside Rich's life. This was a kind of disguise or mask applied unconsciously (Keyes 18). But, according to Rich herself, "poems are like dreams: in them you put what you don't know" (WWDA 40).

Thus, almost twenty years later, the poet makes the following observation:

Looking back at poems I wrote before I was twenty-one, I'm startled because beneath the conscious craft are glimpses of the split I even then experienced between the girl who wrote poems, who defined herself in writing poems, and the girl who was to define herself by her relationship with men. "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" (1951), written while I was a student, looks with deliberate detachment at this split....

In writing this poem, composed and apparently cool as it is, I thought I was creating a portrait of an imaginary woman. But this woman suffers from the opposition of her imagination, worked out in tapestry, and her life-style,....(1971:40)

Aunt Jennifer may be perceived, then, as representing the Adrienne Rich of that time, who was unconsciously divided between the "girl" poet and the "girl" who had to define her self through her relationship with men, such as through the roles of marriage: wife, housewife, mother.

In her second phase Adrienne Rich begins to challenge tradition by gradually freeing herself from male influences and attempting to build a more female tradition, as her third book *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963) illustrates. Some of the characteristics of this phase may be also detected in *Necessities of Life* (1966), *Leaflets* (1969) and *The Will to Change* (1971). This is the time when Rich starts to be conscious of the many consequences involving the fact that she - as a woman - is powerless and muted (the other), whereas man is powerful and dominant (the subject). The process is gradual, as she remarks in "When We Dead Awaken": "The awakening consciousness is not like

the crossing of a frontier - - one step and you are in another country" (48).

In the first section of the title poem of the collection, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law", Rich deplures the waste of energy and time that women dedicate to the fulfillment of the male-created mythical image of women as sweet, compliant, and ornamentally beautiful. In the title she derides the "feminine sources of authority: her marital status and family relationship" (DuPlessis 125) and shows her frustration at the figure of her mother-in-law (DeShazer 149) or her mother's attitudes in relation to herself, marriage and man.

In the first two lines the speaker criticizes her mother-in-law's wasted youth dedicated to the improvement of her physical beauty:

You, once a belle in Sheveport.  
with henna-colored hair, skin like a peachbud.(11.1-2)

The poet criticizes and mocks her mother-in-law, almost accusing her of doing something repugnant and worthless. From the poet's perspective the woman's mistake is to be entrapped by male created "feminine" values. This woman, who once was "a belle", lives nowadays in her past, for this is what remains for her. She copies her dresses and plays music at the piano which refers to the memories of a past in which she was glorified by the beauty of her her youth. Though dedicated to art, instead of creating her own art - music and/or lyrics - she is dependent on male defined models. Even the very act of playing piano was typically

feminine, and most of the time learned in order to entertain that kind of society.

still have your dresses copied from that time,  
 ...and play a Chopin prelude  
 called by Cortot: "Delicious recollections  
 float like perfume through the memory." (ll. 3-6)

Rich's choice of quoting the French pianist Alfred Cortot, (1877-1962) - "'Delicious recollections float like perfume through the memory'" - when referring to Chopin's Prelude No 7, Andantino (Gilbert and Gubar, 1985 2026) suggests that this woman lives on memories. The poet applies a critique of traditional woman consciousness and behaviour by ridiculing not only the mother-in-law's over care to her beauty, but also the over attachment to her past. Quoting from a man's lyric, the poet censors this woman who lives in the past.

Today, this same woman has a deteriorated and decayed mind which drives her to fruitless attitudes of an empty life full of unimportant experiences:

Your mind now, moldering like a wedding-cake  
 heavy with useless experience, ...  
 .....  
 crumbling to pieces under the knife-edge  
 of mere fact. In the prime of your life. (ll. 7-11)

When comparing "mind" to a "moldering wedding-cake" the speaker is ridiculing conventional marriage whose feminine duties have deteriorated the woman's mind. As a wedding cake becomes old and moldy, so does her mind in these circumstances. Furthermore, this woman's mind has become mistrustful, full of doubts and gossips: "... rich /with suspicion, rumor, fantasy," (ll. 8-9). Since she

has chosen this assigned life, instead of another emerging from her inner female will, her deteriorated mind is doomed to be filled "with useless experience", full of "suspicion", "rumor", and "fantasies". But her life means nothing, it collapses - - "crumbling to pieces" - - by the knife edge of mere fact" (ll. 1-5). This kind of vain feminine life decays because in face of reality it makes no sense. The daughter-in-law unmasks traditional feminine life and gives place to facts instead of fantasies: the mother-in-law has submitted herself to the myth of the other. The daughter-in-law is so annoyed and dissatisfied with such thinking regarding the feminine images that she becomes "Nervy, glowering" (1.12) and thus attempts to become another kind of woman: "[growing another] way" (1.13). She attempts to replace the old plot with a new one, in which she could include herself. This denotes that the daughter-in-law is beginning to awaken.

In section two of the poem the daughter-in-law rebels by "banging the coffee pot into the sink" (1.14). Though she searches for other ways - - such as other plots - - she is divided between her rebellion and her house tasks: her wild female side and society's feminine demands. She does the domestic duties against her will; she does them because she was assigned these obligations. She is angry. Nevertheless, as the daughter-in-law's rebellion is traditionally an inappropriate feminine behaviour, she feels anxiety and guilt. These feelings are expressed in the poem through voices: the "angels chiding her" (1.15). The angels represent the patriarchy seductively persuading her not to change. These angels are depicted as

representing "the good", whose duty is to protect people. In fact, these angels represent the feminine myth of the "good girl". Patriarchal ideology and its myths have been so much internalized by the persona that these angels become part of herself, forming thus part of her worldview. So, after rebelling and reproaching herself through the "angels' voices" the persona looks out of the window, but she looks "past the raked gardens to the sloppy sky" (1.16). Although she tries to empty the old vessel and fill it with a new content, she gets trapped by patriarchal ideology and its myths. In this way the persona feels and writes her lost, dissatisfied, puzzled, anxious and completely divided woman self, demonstrating that the myth of "the other" and its consequences hold her into her immanent condition.

This image above represents again a conflict between tradition and her latent femaleness which is beginning to emerge. This may mean that everything on earth - - material things and cultural values - - such as the persona's own self and her house, are superficially arranged and organized so as to fulfill society's demands. But the sky, which symbolizes a direct manifestation of transcendence, of power, the regulator of the order (Chevalier, and Gheerbrant 227) is not well defined. Besides, it is presented as being vulnerable to any disorder. At any moment a storm or snow or wind coming from the sky can dismantle this apparent order. Now she is not safely enclosed within walls as in "Storm Warnings". At this moment the persona is completely confused and divided.



This section, according to Rich in WWDA, "concerns a woman who thinks she is going mad; she is haunted by voices telling her to resist and rebel, voices which she can hear but not obey" (45): "Have no patience.../Be insatiable," that means to be selfish by forgetting other women; "Save Yourself; others you cannot save" (1.19). Ambivalence and torment make the persona anxious and nervous. The persona's conflict between moral values, customs and behaviour internalized by her and her latent femaleness which is now beginning to awaken has been so turbulent and ardent that she even burns herself during traditional domestic duties:

Sometimes she's let the tapstream scald her arm  
 a match burn her thumbnail,  
 .....  
 or held her hand above the kettle's snout  
 right in the woolly steam. They are probably angels,  
 (11. 20-23)

Once again domestic tasks are present in the persona's life as making part of her basic conflict. Her functions have been culturally designated as something natural and immutable. Although she hates these duties and thus becomes angry and careless in doing them, her desire to rebel against such crystalized feminine duties torments her even further. She is torn. Thus, hurting herself is a kind of self-punishment.

In spite of these torments, the persona affirms that these are minor sufferings if compared to her lack of sleep, lack of wholeness, lack of time, lack of peace, lack of energy and lack of hope. Every day she wakes up with this feeling of "lack" and

her suffering is doubled. She is thus unable to foresee any solution:

.....They are probably angels,  
since nothing hurts her anymore, except  
each morning's grit blowing into her eyes.(ll. 23-25)

The "grit blowing into her eyes" means the lack of sleep, and obviously the reasons and consequences for this lack of sleep. Anxiety, confusion, torment, conflicts, guilt and division are some of the symptoms of her situation. It is as if she were in a labyrinth with no exit. But what makes her go on is the increasing dissatisfaction with this situation. Instead of hearing the angels voices and stopping her search for a solution, she continues questioning and revising feminine consciousness and established culture. Indeed, later in article "When We Dead Awaken" (1972) Rich comments about the connection of this poem to her fragmented real life: "I despaired of doing any continuous work at this time" (44).

In the third section of the poem the speaker says that any woman who reasons is entrapped in the mythical image of a monster. Furthermore, this kind of woman runs the risk of becoming a monster in the literal meaning, because instead of being furious at patriarchy -- the real enemy -- she may turn her anger towards other women. The sisterhood Adrienne Rich later talks about in *On Lies, Secrets and Silences*, as discussed in the previous chapter, is completely ignored by this kind of thinking woman. Such absence of female bonding among ambitious thinking women who aspire for recognition within the prevailing culture is one of the results of patriarchy. And the immediate and specific

product of this fact is the token woman (see previous chapter). In this way, the poet deals with some of the consequences of patriarchal ideology and its myths regarding women.

In the first stanza of this third section the speaker shows not only that society condemns the woman who reasons but also that woman internalizes and thus accepts as natural this mythical image of woman as monster. Alluding to Yeats' question in "Leda and the Swan" - "Did she put on his knowledge with his power?/ Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?", Rich answers:

A thinking woman sleeps with monsters  
the beak that grips her she becomes..." (ll.26-27)

According to DuPlessis in "The Critique of Consciousness and Myth", this kind of woman may acquire knowledge and power from a male centered cultural system, but as conventionally any thinking woman bears "unfeminine" characteristics, she is inevitably stigmatized as a monster. She who "sleeps" with monsters naturally becomes one. A monster woman - the extreme opposite of the an angel-woman - may come in many guises: strong, evil, dangerous, ugly, extremely sensual, intelligent, smart or dumb, stupid, or may even possess supernatural-powers (witch-craft), such as: Medea, Circe, Grendel's mother in Beowulf, Lilith, Maga Patalogica by Walt Disney, the step-mother in Snow-White, (125).

This myth, which Rich criticizes, has been socially created so as to preserve the status-quo. Whenever a woman dares "to think" beyond the limits prescribed to her, the myth of the monster-woman captures, stigmatizes and marginalizes her. Her wings are thus ideologically cut before she can fly further.

Because any thinking woman is a menace to the establishment, she is depreciated by being called a monster, so as to nullify any of her intentions of transformations. The principle of naturalness - - as pointed out by Barthes and applied to myths (discussed in the first chapter) - - makes society believe that the myth of the woman-monster is natural and not culturally created throughout history. The significance of the myth conveyed by the image of the monster-woman is here presented as reflecting society's internalization of this myth which is therefore crystalized, dense and immutable.

In answering Yeats's question "Leda and the Swan" (as commented above), Adrienne Rich tries to show how patriarchy has been aggressive, deceitful and authoritarian through the creation of divisive and oversimplified feminine mythical images and scripts, such as the monster-woman. Yeats questions if the woman took any advantage before Zeus' beak oppressed, weakened and degraded her so violently. The Greek mythical tale of the beginning of Greek civilization serves to Yeats as a way to rescue the disintegrated and deteriorated modern society through literature. Indeed, Yeats tries to call the attention of the readers to the imperative of a violent action, so as to announce the need of the beginning of a new social and political order, considering the chaos of that period. The Greek mythical tale of the beginning of Greek civilization, which involves Zeus and Leda, tells that Leda was visited by Zeus, who disguised as a swan ravished her. Leda was completely unaware and unconscious of Zeus' aggressive intentions and actions in using her to become pregnant in order to give birth to the beginning of Greek

civilization: Helen and Clytemnestra (cf. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 2313-2314). So, whereas Yeats' intention was to borrow this misogynous tale for showing the necessity of a violent and tricky action for rescuing the old values and conventions, Rich applies the myth to show that this male centered culture is autocratic, violent, manipulative and tricky in creating and naturalizing the mythical tales, as well as the mythical images and scripts referring to gender relations and images. One consequence of the myth of the woman-monster, for instance, is that it divides and frightens women not to dare unconventional routes:

The beak that grips her, she becomes. And Nature,  
 that sprung-lidded, still commodious  
 steamer-trunk of tempora and mores  
 gets stuffed with it all: the mildewed orange-flowers,  
 the female pills, the terrible breasts  
 of Boadicea beneath that foxes' heads and orchids.  
 (11.27-32)

This myth of woman-monster is convenient - "commodious" - for patriarchal society. With these words the poet shows how society has made "Nature" convey through the image of a "steamer-trunk of tempora and mores" the history and culture of the myths regarding femininity.

The speaker is using irony when she alludes to Boadicea: a woman, leader of a tribe in Norfolk, who was famous for her political deeds in the history of England. Physically Boadicea was described as a very tall, big woman with long red hair down to her knees; she had a threatening aspect and a harsh voice (Mc Donald 51). When after the death of her husband, Boadicea was not recognized as the queen of her people, she attacked and invaded

many Roman cities until she was finally defeated by a Roman official in a battle. As a result Boadicea committed suicide. Thus, Rich ridicules patriarchal mythical images of either the angel or the monster. On the one hand, Boadicea's monster image is perceived by the descriptions of her physical appearance and unfeminine acts. On the other hand, there is irony concerning the angel image referring mainly to Boadicea's feminine beauty and behaviour. The poet alludes to Boadicea as wearing traditional feminine adornment: "flat foxes heads and orchids" (1.32). These feminine adornments would not have suited Boadicea's way of being, although society would have wished it thus. Rich is also ironic in her criticism of the myth that nature has created woman to be weak, vain, superficial and that any thinking-woman is doomed to failure.

Rich criticizes the thinking women who survive in patriarchal society by becoming token women. In the second stanza of this third part the poet shows how patriarchal myths lead woman to internalize and "express the monstrous dimensions of their self-hatred through hostility toward each other" (DuPlessis 125). Two women manifest their anger and hatred towards each other, instead of towards the real source of wrath: patriarchy. They behave just like men do: "Two handsome women, gripped in argument" (1.33). The adjective "handsome" for women confirms that the behaviour of these women is male characterized. Their reference of courage and power is male although they scream over domestic households:

Each proud, acute, subtle, I hear scream  
across the cut glass and majolica

like Furies cornered from their prey:  
 The argument ad feminam, all the old knives  
 that have rusted in my back, I drive in yours,  
 'ma semblable ma soeur!' (ll. 34-39)

These "handsome" women are in an "argument ad feminam". Rich borrows the historical phrase "ad hominem", and adapts to the feminine case. Instead of carrying out an intelligent argument, however, they are full of personal "feminine" prejudices and emotions. Both masculine and feminine characteristics are mixed and disordered within the token woman. This confusing blend leads her to a blurred identity. They argue according to the male created myth of the Furies: the mythological female figures who were goddesses of vengeance. (Gilbert and Gubar 1985: 2027) So, Rich uses myths and conventional sayings to characterize these women who keep on playing the role of the other by imitating man's attitudes. These women drove "old knives" into one another with the vengeance with which the patriarchy has been lacerating them: "the old knives/ that have rusted in my back, I drive in Yours"(ll.37-38). Then, Rich finishes this section implying that one of the very first acts woman has to take is to be sincere and faithful not only to her sister but also to her reader, instead of cultivating and spreading the hypocrisy implied in the transformation of Baudelaire's line -- "'Hypocrite reader! like me, my brother'" -- into "ma semblable, ma soeur!" (Gilbert and Gubar 1985: 2027).

Frustrated with the women types available until now, Adrienne Rich decides to depict and analyze the two distinct choices for "a thinking woman", whenever she attempts to be heard and accepted within patriarchal culture. The choices are to be either

a token woman (as developed above), or a woman poet who public undertakes a feminine style. Furthermore Rich also shows that these choices do not eradicate woman's division between her intellectual and professional spheres and her domestic feminine duties.

These choices are consequences of a marginal and oppressed woman who, searching for a way to express her rational capacity, resigns herself to androcentric prescriptions. So, Rich radically criticizes and condemns the token woman, considering that her characteristics are fruitless, worthless, useless, and damaging for the emergence of a more female centered culture. Such woman spends too much energy in being aggressive and offending other women who are in reality just like her. Their relations result in no positive achievement -- "no pure fruition" (1.41). In opposition, there is a constant negative source of annoyance -- "thorn" (1.41) -- and contempt, "scorn" (1.42) among them. Rich also stresses that a confused and divided mind, plus the sense of being repressed, has led the woman poet to a conflicting "being and acting". When Rich writes "Reading while waiting/for the iron to heat" (11.43-44), she evinces once more the split between woman's domestic and intellectual sides. This is also the condition of the woman poet who writes according to femininity, but speaks her own self through metaphors. Rich borrows a line of one of Emily Dickinson's poem -- "*My Life had stood -- a Loaded Gun --*" (1.45) -- where the poet uses a superb metaphorical language to communicate her inner feelings. As Rich observes in "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson", Dickinson had her kind of dialect which was her "native language" (161).



According to Rich, Dickinson overcame her feminine prescribed poetic language through elaborated metaphors, considering her limitations of gender.

So, in attempting some explanation for the disappointing women types Adrienne Rich demonstrates her empathy for Dickinson's private and public life; at the same time Rich reinforces - once more - the division of the thinking woman between intellectual and domestic work. Comparing both the lives and the poetry of both Dickinson and Rich we can say that Rich does not make use of metaphors with the same purposes of Dickinson. This occurs because Rich is able to deal with her conflicts, confusions, anxieties more clearly and openly. Like Dickinson, Rich's latent female consciousness is still similar to a "loaded gun"; this means that Rich's powerful female energy has been repressed though ready to explode at any time. Anyway the release of her powerful female energy - such as deception or anger - is not a negative act, but a positive one, considering that she speaks out her dissatisfaction with her inferior condition in patriarchy. Rich empathizes with Dickinson's intellectual and private life, because she not only feels that a more female and explosive part of her is ready to explode, such as Dickinson's case, but she also stresses the communal duality and conflict between intellectual and domestic feminine spheres.

Immediately after quoting Dickinson's words, Rich comments about the poet's domestic life: "in that Amherst pantry while the jellies boil and scum" (1.46). Then she refers to her own domestic duties, such as "iron" (1.44) and "dusting" (1.49). At the end, the persona appears as "iron-eyed" (1.48), suggesting

her emotionless staring, insinuating imposed ways of being and acting. So, male centered ideologies and myths have constantly ruled her life, considering that the persona keeps on being torn, conflicted and disordered. This is illustrated with the last line - "dusting everything on the whatnot every day of life" (l.49), which suggests that the woman remains mechanically doing vain and useless domestic feminine chores. This obsessive act of "dusting everything" means wasting her energy in doing nothing meaningful for her own self and life. It is a sign of anxiety, which in turn is a result of her conflict and of her blurred identity. She does not see any solution. She feels unable to join her divided selves and achieve her wholeness.

In section five the poet once more refers to the "doll woman", whose only aim is to please man. She illustrates this through her use of a line from Ode XXII, "Dulce ridens, dulce loquens", by Horace - "sweetly laughing, sweetly speaking" (Gilbert and Gubar 1985: 2027). She implies that, for man, a woman has to speak and smile sweetly. The poet also mentions woman's custom of "[shaving] her legs until they gleam/like petrified mammoth-tusk" (ll. 51-52), meaning the dead artificiality of an object which was only extracted and polished to serve as adornment.

In the first stanza of section six the speaker criticizes woman's use of art as an instrument of seduction, another cultural custom which entraps woman.

When to her lute Corinna sings  
 neither words nor music are her own;  
 only the long hair dipping  
 over her cheek, only the song

of silk against her knees  
and these  
adjusted in reflections of an eye.(11.53-59)

The speaker's first line is taken from a poem by Thomas Campion (1567-1620), representative of the Renaissance love poetry in which woman is usually presented as object of love and inspiration of the creative process. Rich's speaker also implies that this woman believes that only through man's "love" she will achieve happiness and fulfillment. So, woman sings to seduce man. And this feminine ritual of singing involves other aspects which can help her in the "art": the long hair and the sensual silk fabric touching "against her knees". Art here is only a feminine instrument of seduction. And what impells this woman's use of "art" is the illusion of "love".

Love entraps woman. In the second stanza of the sixth part the poet revises and criticizes the meaning and consequences of "love" for woman. The woman is "Pinned down/ by love, for [her] the only natural action" (1.60-61). Such love, described by Rich in WWDA as "womanly, maternal love, altruistic love -- a love defined and ruled by the weight of an entire culture (46)"-- hinders woman's development. As Rich continues, "the word "love" is itself in need of re-vision" (47). So, the persona is "poised", "trembling", and "unsatisfied" (1.60) before the "unlocked door", but "love" pins her down. As the woman is so ideologically gripped by the meaning and promises of this feminine love, she does not do anything to free herself.

Adrienne Rich forewords section seven with a quotation from Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1787):

*To have in this uncertain world some stay  
which cannot be undermined, is  
of the utmost consequence. (ll.69-71)*

In Wollstonecraft's words women have to resist in order to have their own perception of the world. Women should not follow the demands of a feminine education produced by and for man's interests. The persona though, "brave and partly good/ who fought with what she partly understood" (ll. 72-73), and in a way "few men about her would or could do more" (l.74) is labeled "harpy, shrew and whore". So any thinking woman is considered an anomaly of nature. She may be a harpy, which in Greek mythology is a cruel creature with a woman's face and birds wings and claws ( cf Webster's Unabridged Dictionary); she may be a bad tempered, scolding woman, sharp-tongued - a shrew; or she may be that creature which can demolish the sacredness of family and drive the weak man crazy with her sensual powers. Such are the myths that man, threatened and vulnerable, has created in order to preserve his hegemony.

In section eight Adrienne Rich analyzes and criticizes the tragic doom of women who are not in the prime of their lives anymore, and whose beauty has deteriorated with age. By quoting Denis Diderot's (1713-1784) thought about woman in his *Letters a Sophie Volland*: "'You all die at fifteen', said Diderot" (l.76), the speaker in the poem is critically ironic. She ridicules patriarchal belief that women no longer youthful - in "a theirç

middle years" (1.84) - are useless. They are then considered kind of dead for society, for they "turn part legend, part convention" (1.77). And, though they could have done something different - "all that we might have been, /all that we were" (11.80-81) - their dreams and hopes were sacrificed in the name of a society which says that they are dead because their youth has passed.

In the first stanza of section nine the persona questions Samuel Johnson's remarks about a woman's preaching: "*Not that it is done well, but/ that it is done at all?*" (11. 85-86). According to the interpretation of Keyes the persona refers to women in the public realm (59), when she claims women to take the chances or to put them aside: "Yes, think of the odds! or shrug them off forever" (11.86-87). The persona believes that "time's precious" (1.89) and that there is not even a second to waste. Woman's obscure origin - "blight" - has been responsible for women's lack of courage in transposing barriers. Their obscure origin has made them accommodated - "sinecure" (1.91). The persona reproaches herself and women for these failings (Keyes 59): "mere talent was enough for us --" (1.92), instead of looking for new horizons beyond just talent.

In the second stanza of the ninth section, the persona explores the ways in which patriarchy has made women dependent. The speaker reminds women of the kind of society they live in and consequently of their limitations: "Sigh no more, ladies./ Time is male" (11.94-95). The persona is being ironic when she advises women to pay attention not only to the kind of women they have been (the socially accepted), but also be aware that the daring woman is socially punished:

and in his cups drinks to the fair  
 Bemused by gallantry, we hear  
 Our mediocrities over-praised,  
 indolence read as abnegation,  
 slattern thought styled intuition,  
 every lapse forgiven, our crime  
 only to cast too bold a shadow  
 or smash the mold straight off. (ll. 96-104)

Women have been stimulated and encouraged to be mediocre, reinforcing their category of "the other". Whenever attempting at obtaining any space in the public realm, which contradicts the establishment, they were seen as criminal ("crime", as above), "monsters", "whores", "shrew" or "harpy". And not many have wanted to risk the isolation which comes with breaking the rules:

For that, solitary confinement,  
 tear gas, attrition shelling.  
 Few applicants for that honor. (ll. 105-107)

But at the end of the poem Adrienne Rich envisions a new idealized woman whose traditional characteristics have been destroyed.

The advent of this new woman is an apotheosis. She comes from heaven, thus soaring above or transcending her objectified being, the bearer of concrete possibilities:

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. (ll. 111-122)

But she must be "more merciless to herself than history" (ll. 109-110). Through this new idealized woman the poet makes a painful critique of old consciousness and myths. Disengaged from patriarchal myths and nearer to a more female consciousness, this ideal woman is free and courageous. New joy in her freedom illuminates her own being: "taking the light upon her" (l.113). Furthermore this "idealized" woman is no longer alone. Her cargo is communal: "ours".

Thus we can see how the poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" reflects Rich's initial and basic conflict. The persona is torn between society's demands of feminine roles as wife, mother, housewife and poet and the demands of her femaleness which is beginning to emerge (1971 44). As a consequence, she begins to feel the necessity of searching for an autonomous self definition. But, in her exploration, she encounters a blurred and fragmented identity. She confronts a duality: a strong dominant male heritage on one side, and a wild and muted femaleness in emergence on the other side. She also encounters oversimplified and dualistic male images of woman as angels or as whores. Now, she is confronted with "problems of contact with herself, problems of language and style, problems of energy and survival" (1971 37).

The persona's turmoil highlights the feminist thesis that the private and the public are interconnected and political. In the poem, nevertheless, the persona is not conscious of this, and so she depicts such turmoil as a private and an individual conflict. In many ways the fragmented identity of the persona may be taken to reflect the poet's real life. In a retrospective

analysis of "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law", Rich acknowledges having written this ten-part poem over a two year period: 1958-1960. She declares that the poem "was jotted in fragments during children's naps, brief hours in a library, or at 3 A.M. after rising with a wakeful child" (1971 44). In "Snapshots" the persona sometimes shows her disgust regarding women who have dedicated their lives only to the vain improvement of their physical appearance and to their marriages' success; sometimes she portrays woman's identity as deformed or even blurred; sometimes she shows women without sisterhood - one attacking the other instead of directing their indignation to/ anger at the real enemy: patriarchy; at other times she is aggressive and on occasion seems to complain about gender polarities and its consequences; sometimes she shows glimpses of a female writer puzzled, torn and tormented between feminine duties and her dissatisfaction to these. Most of the time she portrays an empty female identity with signs of crisis as the result of the internalization of her identity as the other. At the end Rich shows her inner desires to transcend this situation for she delineates a new but idealized woman who encounters her wholeness.

Besides illustrating many characteristics of the second phase, as stated in the beginning of this chapter and in the first chapter, this poem is also an example of the strategy of "revisionist mythmaking". The poet's indignation regarding the basis of gender relations is demonstrated through a radical critique of old female consciousness, male ideology and myths regarding gender roles (Ostriker 57). She revises some myths,



such as historical figures and thoughts, by criticizing and ridiculing their meaning regarding relation of gender, with its assigned roles. This poem involves "reevaluations of social, political, and philosophical values" (Ostriker 235). The persona tries to kill the angel in the house, but she is still too disturbed and frustrated to transcend her position as the other merely idealizing a transformed woman nearer to femaleness. The speaker excludes the subject "I" from the poem. The persona is the "she", and this shows that the poet is still unable to expose her "female" self.

In "Prospective Immigrants Please Note" (1962) - the last poem of the collection *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* - Adrienne Rich strengthens her decision to define herself. Though aware of the risks and dangers of such an undertaking, the poet decides to go on by leaving her past life behind and starting a new phase. She emphasizes that the reward of abandoning the past is the discovery of a more authentic 'I'. In her constant "you" referral to the persona, the poet is advising not only herself but also the ones - "immigrants" - who intend to explore unknown and wild paths of self and culture. According to critic Gelpi in "Adrienne Rich: The Poetics of Change" there are either a "safe security or a dangerous passage" (1975, 135). So, before undertaking this exploration, the persona warns the "prospective immigrants" of the two options.

Either you will  
go through this door  
or you will not go through. (ll. 1-3)

Each of these two choices has its own implications and consequences for the woman immigrant.

The poet declares that although the "immigrant" may decide on going through, she may be tempted to return to her previous immanence:

If you go through  
there is always the risk  
of remembering your name.(11.4-6)

Going back could be the easiest way to avoid more conflicts, apprehensions and anxieties. This "going back", in DeBeauvoir's terms, only reinforces the maintainance of the myth of the other, by hindering woman from achieving her critical consciousness, and finally her subjectivity. As Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*, "It is an easy road; on it one avoids the strain involved in undertaking an authentic existence" (21).

But if the "immigrant" decides for going through, she will certainly encounter conflicts and divisions. The best attitude, as the speaker warns, is to revise these dualities maybe experience them - live them in full - so as to understand what is happening to her:

Things look at you doubly  
and you must look back  
and let them happen.(11. 7-9)

If the "immigrant" denies entering in contact with such conflicts, she might return to the same place of "the other", remaining with problems masked and unresolved. This woman will thus live her alienated life in the feminine region prescribed for her.

In the next part there is irony when we are told that if the woman "immigrant" does not go through she may "live worthily" (11.12). This living "worthily" means keeping the rôle of the other. The irony lies in the fact that the speaker condemns this attitude. Mockingly, the woman is praised for acting according to what is expected of her, for remaining in her immanence. By applying irony Rich is making a critique of old consciousness and attitude. The poet implies that the maintenance of such mediocre behaviour will prevent the prospective "immigrant" from seeing, knowing and experiencing what she has never experienced before, and from probably freeing herself from her immanence. The price for not attempting to cross the other side of the door is unawareness - "much will blind you, / much will evade you" (11.16-17).

In spite of the risks and dangers implicated in this symbolic act of opening a door towards an unmapped wild route and region, Rich commits herself to change by taking this journey, which according to critic Wendy Martin implies an uncertain future as well. As Martin commented in "From Patriarchy to the Female Principle", the persona is not only unpreconceived concerning the future and place she is going, but also completely aware of such an undertaking (1975, 179):

The door itself  
 makes no promises.  
 It is only a door. (11.20-21)

There are no hints of what is behind the door. There is only Rich's courageous option plus her action of opening the door, which for Martin "is extremely important because it marks a

fundamental change" in Rich's way of dealing with reality. Furthermore, the poet shows her determination in experiencing, confronting and perceiving conflicts, anxieties and dualities. Her attitude demonstrates her openness to any different feeling and experience, and also her fearlessness to face unconventionalities.(1975, 179).

Still based on Gelpi and Martin's interpretation, between the two routes of the beginning of the poem, Adrienne Rich, through the persona, commits "herself to live in the present - to process" (Martin 1975, 179). The past does not provide her with the kind of consciousness, customs and values appropriate to her emergent modern woman who is anxious to understand and search for her self, her life, culture, and the connection of these with her poetry-making.

According to the above reading of "Prospective Immigrants Please Note", we can conclude that as Adrienne Rich feels the need to discover more about herself and also about her relation with the world, she sees herself as a daring immigrant going towards unknown regions.

In the poem "Necessities of Life" (1962), from *Necessities of Life*, Adrienne Rich, tired of the turmoils she has been confronting, decides for exploring, understanding and looking for her identity (personal) and for an explanation to her existence; but differently from previous poems she is now connecting her search to historical, social and cultural contexts. According to Wendy Martin, the poems around 1962 reveal the poet's impatience

with her inner conflicts, splits and confusions. ("From Patriarchy to the Female Principle" 178). In order to fulfill her needs, the poet revises the past by being ironical at cultural and historical figures and sayings, as well as "[paring] away the layers of social conditioning, ritualized roles and programmed responses" (Martin 179). Tradition is no longer viable for this woman and poet. As Keyes remarks in *The Aesthetics of Power*, the poet abandons the modernist prescription against "the personal" and "autobiography" in poetry, and adopts the "I" persona. "Although she never identifies herself as a woman, the image patterns betray a female mind at work" (69).

In the first stanza of "Necessities of Life", the persona starts to look for her identity and feels as if she were giving birth to her self (Ostriker 1987, 59): "Piece by piece I seem/ to re-enter the world:"(ll. 1-2). This re-entrance into the world means the persona's first glimpses of awakening from that kind of sleep - from that kind of death-like state - as if she were isolated from the world for a period of time. The prefix re- in the verbs referring to her entrance into the world means that at this moment she is giving birth to herself with fresh eyes and in different ways.

This kind of re-birth, as Keyes observes, is artistically portrayed in painterly images (69). The speaker compares the persona's rebirth with the pointillists's process of painting in tiny dots (cf author qtd. in Gelpi 1975, 22), an art that requires patience and time as is the case of Adrienne Rich working upon her own subject-self. Indeed, these painterly

metaphors - painting with tiny dots - implies a gradual and cautious 're-entrance' into the scene of life:

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

pushed into the scene,  
a hard little head protruding

from the pointillist's buzz and bloom. (ll. 3-7)

Furthremore, according to critic Wendy Martin "to determine the essentials of her ... reality, Rich turns to nature to learn what she can about the fundamental characteristics of life" (1975:179). And so the poet interprets and compares the persona's sounds during her birth with the pointillists's (post-impressionists) painting her paintings. She makes the noise of a bee and flourishes - "buzz and bloom" (l.7).

Nevertheless, after beginning her process of re-entering the world, there is an abrupt shift of process. Now, the persona starts another process of feeling and being blurred, as well as undefined. Once more the illustration is in painterly images:

After a time the dot

begins to ooze. Certain heats  
melt it.

blurring into ranges  
of burnt red, burning green, (ll.8-12)

As the dot starts to leak out slowly through small openings, because the heat liquifies and fuses it, so does the persona start to realize her malleable and formless identity. Some other images also elucidate her confused, obscure and stained identity. The colours "blurring into ranges" are like her inner self, life

and poetic language blurring, as well. Indeed some forces have guided her to be and accept as natural her blurring identity, which is a result of her category of the other: her immanent and inessential state of being passive.

These multiple forces are the various influences that have formed the persona's identity. She has, in fact, come under the influence of historical figures, as if she were devoured and then thrown up conveying rests of each of her devouring self:

whole biographies swam up and  
swallowed me like Jonah

Jonah! I was Wittgenstein,  
Mary Wollstonecraft, the soul

of Louis Jouvet, dead  
in a blown-up photograph. (ll. 13-18)

In this way many thinkers, writers, artists and biblical figures have influenced her and her poetry. She was eaten by these personalities just like Jonah was swallowed by a great fish, and released after three days. The personalities are: Wittgenstein (1889-1957), a philosopher especially important for his work in linguistic analysis and semantics; Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), Louis Jouvet (1887-1957), a French director, actor, designer and technician.

Many persons and issues influenced the poet/persona's life and poetry, and almost ate and torn her quickly - "wolfed" - into pieces. That is, the persona was almost fragmented into pieces of nothing. But she overcomes the influences by revising and cutting with traditions. She radically alters the meaning of the

myth that a woman writer does not create by herself, that she cannot be a creatrix.

When the persona decides on the rebirth of self through the re-shaping of herself, the poem turns to the second part. The speaker dismantles the myth that woman is to "nature" as well as man is to "culture". Considering that the plan of culture is to submit and transcend nature, women who are seen as part of nature will be culturally subordinated and oppressed. This is a "natural act". (Ortner, 101-102). This means that while woman procreates, man creates. In this way, Adrienne Rich revises, denies, empties this myth from its original meaning by including herself. She gives birth to herself and poetry:

I learned to make myself

unappetizing. Scally as a dry bulb  
thrown into a cellar

I used myself, let nothing use me. (ll. 20-23)

As Ostriker says "the idea of giving birth unaided, to the self governs the dry bulb metaphor" (219). The poet's created image of the "dry bulb" for the persona is an act of rebellion against the myth that a woman should be attractive, beautiful and charming so as to conquer the love of man. Rich presents the opposite extreme of patriarchal myth. The persona has learned to give birth to others or even to herself in a feminine way; but here she confronts the myth, by aggressively presenting herself as "unappetizing". She despises all attractive masks to seduce men. She is disgusting. Anyway this scally dry bulb is "trown into a cellar", probably to be re-planted and later germinated in



another less aggressive form. That is the reason the persona says that nobody has used her, but only herself. She also confronts the belief that women are used by men, through the reversal of roles: she uses her own self for self-fertilizing intentions.

The persona's unconventional act brings about "a moment of intense awareness of the little pleasures of life", according to Keyes (71). For her the days are now different:

now and again to lay  
 one hand on a warm brick  
 and touch the sun's ghost  
 with economical joy, (ll. 27-30)

The persona's relation to nature is positive for her development. "The sun, for instance, is a source of energy" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 836-841) and joy. And, touching the sun is like acquiring the necessary energy for "life". The speaker is also aware of knowing, speaking and searching her basic - "bare" - necessities for a decent "life" coming from her inner self.

The persona is not only in constant revision but she is also conscious that the past has to be analyzed and destroyed as well. The present is here and now waiting for future worthwhile results for her self, life, poetry and culture. One of her necessities is to "live" in constant movement, changing established meanings, such as that of the private not being public.

At the end a new unconventional woman seems to be really emerging. She then refers to old women, who complete the whole cycle of birth: birth, youth, rebirth and maturity. The persona may wish to be "like old women knitting, breathless/ to tell their tales" (ll.41-42). As these old women are anxious to tell

their stories, so is the persona in need to tell not only what has been happening to her and what she has been searching, but also what she has been encountering. The persona needs to write both her private and public self in poetry; she is in need of a more adequate language for speaking this woman in transformation.

In *Leaflets* (1965-1969) Rich brings together personal and public realities by demonstrating that both are political. As critic Wendy Martin points out in "Adrienne Rich: A Evolucao de um Poeta", this was a time of political turmoil, such as the Vietnam War - which affected and shook the emotions of American people - the student movements in France and the USA, the revolt in Argelia (379). This was also the period when Adrienne Rich became politically active through her involvement in the protests against the Vietnam War. And, as seen in "Teaching Language in Open Admissions" discussed in the previous chapter, at about 1969 Adrienne Rich engaged in the educational writing program for disadvantaged students, perceiving that language (with its ideology and myths) is a fundamental political device in relations of power; and as such language can be used as a means for changing reality (51-68). Acknowledging the need of self transformation and of speaking of her self (psyche, domestic roles and emotions) in poetry, Rich realizes that as a poet her main instrument, language, is a language resulting from a male centered culture, and which does not adequately transmit her emergent political side.

In "Implosions" (Leaflets) Adrienne Rich evinces her desire to use language as an instrument of transformation. Increasingly conscious of patriarchy as a barrier for social and personal development, she focuses on issues such as the following: herself as a woman and poet (consciousness/worldview), society in general (people's consciousness and culture), the established divisions between personal and public (political); mind and body; poetry and politics. In her search for a more adequate language Rich uses her body to transmit herself.

By stating "I wanted to choose words that even you/ would have to be changed by" (ll. 3-4), the persona declares her inner intention to use "words" as instruments of change. The word "even" may imply her wish to modify not only herself, the world and poetry, but also You-reader, You-woman, You-man, You-poet.

Society, nevertheless, far from being careless and with no useful purposes - "wanton" - is indeed savage, violent, tempestuous and dark - "wild" - besides being vulnerable and trembling - "wavering". The following words, which introduce the poem, are Rich's quotation from Abbot Small, one of her student's, probably from her writing classes to disadvantaged people:

*The world's  
not wanton  
only wild and wavering.(ll.1-3)*

This thought shows the hopelessness and disbelief toward a society that is manipulative, deceitful and most of the time contradictory by preaching peace, enjoyment, harmony and certainty. In fact, there is no space for fun and useful

purposes, but only for uncertain, violent and barbarous actions, such as wars.

The poet stresses that the dominant group's language is able to deceive people through the ideological speech that 'wars' bring about freedom, peace, protection and help for the 'good' people and nation. Disguised as the defense of the weak and poor people, wars tend to hide economic, political and ideological intentions of domination. Bringing dreadful consequences to people and nature any kind of war conveys the meaning of the statement: "All wars are useless to the dead" (1.9). As critic Keyes declares, war is "the senseless destruction, the incalculable human waste, the degradation of being part of a superpower so morally turgid" (108) - the United States of America. Although society preaches that the ones who die in wars are heroes, the persona dismantles this widely accepted thought. War, as an imposition of the dominant group, leaves people in a position of powerlessness.

Even though the persona wishes to use language as a political device of transformation, male centered culture and its stratagems, such as ideology, its myths, and wars hinder her aim:

"My hands are knotted in the rope  
and I cannot sound the bell (ll. 10-11)

She shows patriarchy's power of paralysing her. She may be too disappointed and unable to find an appropriate language to express her thoughts. She also feels incapable of freeing herself from the dominant ideologies and myths which pervade language.

In spite of her intention of using language with political purposes, the persona is entrapped by reality. Dominant groups use of all instruments to maintain their position of "the subject". One of these devices is "the ideological apparatuses" - as illustrated by language - and the other is "the repressive apparatuses" - as illustrated by wars (Althusser, 1985). Though the persona believes that she is unable to do anything, as she feels tied down by the powerful instruments and actions of society - "The foot is in the wheel" (l.16), she still seems to hold the attitude that she must fight with the internal and external enemies in order to effect change.

Having, so to speak, set the "scene" for the poem in a world in which uncertainty and violence dominate, the poet starts by giving the persona a first person position and focusing on the issue of language: the choice of words that can bring about change. The persona then invites the reader to feel the meaning of her message concretely, by touching part of her body and thus comprehending the meaning of her poetic language:

Take the word  
of my pulse, loving and ordinary  
Send out signals, hoist  
your dark scribbled flags  
but take  
my hand (ll. 6-10)

She persuades the reader to perceive her "word" by sensing the beating of her heart through her pulse. But the poet also wants to know the reader's reaction to her words, and thus she asks the reader to answer her with any kind of signals, such as by putting the flag up: "hoist". It does not matter whether the reader's

answer is confused, dim, badly written or not. The most important is communication - exchange of intentions and feelings - which fulfills the aim of the poet: comprehension of meanings between poet and reader. So, as the speaker asks the reader to sense and try to understand her "words" transmitted through the language of her body. The stratagem is to use her body to attempt a more effective communication. The words themselves are lifeless. But her message is political. And the "even you" (l.4), as already mentioned, hints at the possibility that this reader may be an enemy.

In the context of the time when the poem was written, a period marked by the American people's disbelief in the government, DuPlessis' comments are illuminating: The "Vietnam War becomes a focal issue, since, in a historical sense, it is the concrete political reality in which [women poets] feel implicated, and in a symbolic sense it epitomizes the destructive values and acts that the old-consciousness can produce" (128).

At this moment, the persona - among many people - is a victim of the war. She is a prey of patriarchal culture, which for her is the creator of many atrocities, such as people's physical and psychological death. The speaker declares:

When it's finished and we're lying  
 in a stubble of blistered flowers  
 eyes gaping, mouths staring  
 dusted with crushed arterial blues (ll. 17-20)

Empathizing with the dead - "we" - she has suffered the consequences of war in spite of her conscious intention; she is entrapped by reality. She must fight with the internal and

external enemies in order to effectively transform consciousness and culture.

At the end of the poem the persona shows her disappointment at not having the certainty that her words have been effective:

I'll have done nothing  
even for you? (ll. 21-22)

Thus the persona reinforces her political stance as a poet. With Rich, she seems to question and criticize herself as a poet who has been - until now - unable to demythicize traditional concepts with her poetic language. But she implies that her poems are taking an increasingly political turn.

In this poem and in others from Leaflets Rich strives for a definition of her political identity and position in society and the reality surrounding her. Following the phases outlined in the beginning of this chapter and in the first chapter, we can say Rich has reached the third phase, considering that she defines herself as a political poet who uses even the sensual language of her body to speak her political awareness as a woman. She is willing to use the power of poetic language for transforming old consciousness and culture, though so far she has hardly succeeded. As a matter of fact, the poet demonstrates efforts to overcome the establishment, but she is still hindered by dominant ideologies and its myths, and her dead body on the battlefield is one evidence of her subjection. At the end, however, the poet implies that she has not given up looking for more effective ways to help her to understand and change herself, others and culture, though it can be "even for you" (l. 22).

In "Nightbreak" written in the same year as "Implosions" and also included in *Leaflets*, Adrienne Rich makes a critique of old consciousness and culture by approaching the fundamental feminist interconnection of the personal with the public spheres and also by demonstrating that the private is political. For such, Rich explores and connects the meaning of the imagery of her body and of war in patriarchal society, from a political stance,

In the struggle to define herself, Rich, through the persona, starts by showing fissures and anger towards her historical and cultural situation. As Martin comments in "From Patriarchy to the Female Principle", the persona is angry for being a victim of a history and of a culture that has created and assigned her a life unsuited to her; thus she discovers that the personal (psyche) is political and that they cannot be separated (181). What the persona of an earlier poem "The Roofwalker" (1961) says may be applied to the poet herself: "A life I didn't choose / chose me" (Rich 1975: 63).

As night comes the persona feels that something is wrong. Something is fractured. She is angry, but it seems a fictitious and illusory anger. In fact, she is unable to define what is lacerated, and what anger is this. She has not entered in conscious contact with her anger yet. She really feels and knows that she is disappointed with her cultural locus in society, which has fractured her. Nevertheless, she hopes that a new day - imaged by "morning" - may bring either illumination, solution, brightness or even destruction of this unclear fragmentation and anger:



Something broken      Something  
 I need      By someone  
 I love      Next year  
 will I remember what  
 This anger      unreal  
    yet  
 has to be gone through  
 The sun to set  
 on this anger      (11. 1-9)

The persona complains, declares and tries to understand that what is desintegrated into pieces are her inner self, body and life. Her desintegration added to anger "[have] to be gone through". Although unaware, the persona is really angry at the situation that is tearing her up. In line five she begs to have her anger sustained to the end. She may also realize that this anger and desintegration are results of the patriarchal culture she lives in. So, the poet implies that the "sun to set" may either symbolize the sources of heat, light, truth, knowledge, energy and life, or even death of the old and birth of the new (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 836). And thus lines eight and nine may help the persona to cope, comprehend and resolve this mixture of fragmentation and anger within herself.

In fact the persona suggests that she wishes to revise, understand and destroy not only traditional concepts regarding women - such as the fragmentation and anger approached above - but also society's atrocities. Although she knows that the world is presented as serene and peaceful, she feels that in reality something which is the opposite of the appearance is being hidden. So, tired of what comes into sight, the persona decides for a more unconventional position.

The persona searches for transformations rather than the crystallization of states, concepts, values and ideas regarding woman and society. She denies what is useless to her. She wants to clear up her path of destructive conventional concepts and values, and acquire transformative tools:

I don't  
I need

collect what I can't use  
what can be broken. (ll. 24-26)

So, the old and useless - which may mean tradition, myths, archetypes and stereotypes - seem to have become too heavy. She then tries to shift the desintegration of her self (as seen in the first stanza) towards the destruction of established images, values and concepts. For such acts of breaking, destruction and hurting are essential, considering that after revising the old this is the second stage for a less fragmented self towards a more suitable life.

Though it seems contradictory for a fragmented woman to revise and break established values and concepts internalized by her and society, this is the way towards a more unifying self and society. The persona has been living the basic feminist axiom of 'division' which she has to break down with, as Rich herself declares in an interview given to Barbara and Albert Gelpi in 1974: "Once you stop splitting inner and outer, you have to stop splitting all those other dichotomies, which I think proceed from that. Yourself-other, head-body, psyche-politics, them-us" (119). Then, by breaking down with the splits that have fragmented her, the persona would be able to re-build a more unified and female self and culture.

The persona empathizes with the destructions of the victims, nature and cities during the Vietnam war. Aggressively she compares her body to a battlefield, as critic Wendy Martin comments in "Adrienne Rich: A Evolucao de Um Poeta". The persona's "body is transformed into a graphic metaphor to the horrors of the war" (379):

In the bed the pieces fly together  
 and the rifts fill or else  
 my body is a list of wounds  
 symmetrically placed  
 a village  
 blown open by planes  
 that did not finish the job (ll. 27-33)

By comparing the lacerated appearance of a woman's body with that of a village after a war attack, Adrienne Rich criticizes patriarchy's control and oppression not only of women but also of the powerless in general. Indeed, as Ostriker points out, self-annihilation is the ultimately artistic, ultimately ironic answer to domination, oppression and violence (1987:102). The poet destroys the traditional belief that a woman's body serves the sacredness of procreation. By criticizing and destroying these myths the poet removes the patriarchal mask which has distorted the cultural meaning of a woman's body. The fact is that the female body has indeed been used, misused and abused. It has been used for controversial propagandas in outdoors, magazines, for naked pictures in calendars in garages, for being raped even by the husband, father, or brother. Thus, the female body has been so morally and physically repressed, oppressed, wounded and disrespected that the poet dares delineating in words

its horrible appearance. Her words describe vigorously and aggressively her disgusting, unattractive and unfeminine body.

Moreover, similarly to the previous poem, the persona also makes a radical critique of wars, as being a creation of the dominant group. By associating the "horrors of wars" with a woman's body, Rich exposes a repulsive society whose ultimate target is domination.

At the end Adrienne Rich demonstrates that most of the time the enemy is "invisible" (1.35), and that it is time for carefully revising and reconnecting the blown up pieces of herself. As she says "the enemy has withdrawn/...become invisible" (11.34-35). Indeed the worst enemy is dominant ideology and its myths, because they act through the subjection of the person, they are not clearly and honestly presented but distorted instead. And thus night breaks (1.42) giving the persona a time to rest, think, re-energize herself, revise and finally re-connect the pieces of herself scattered on the ground of her mind and life. Then, it will be time to wake up with the certainty that the personal and public are interconnected and that both are political, and finally that the persona has to encounter the most appropriate tools for confronting patriarchy.

Thus, acknowledging in this book the politics of language as being either an instrument of transformation or an instrument of alienation (subjection), Rich theorizes later on that "poetry is above all a concentration of the 'power' of language" (1977:248). In this volume, according to critic Martin in "From Patriarchy to the Female Principle", Rich "transcends the dichotomy between art and life, aesthetics and politics", by writing in poetry her

constant revisions and transformations of self, context, culture and society (181). In the two poems analyzed here, which illustrate the third stage of development, the persona unconventionally makes use of her body to speak herself. As Rich affirms to Barbara and Charles Gelpi in "Three Conversations", "you have to be constantly critiquing even the tools that you use to explore and define what it is to be female" (119).

In her sixth book *The Will to Change* (1971), Adrienne Rich continues exploring her identity by intensifying and extending her will to change herself, her poetry, and her culture. She deepens her earlier convictions realizing that the achievement of changes implies a more integrated woman than that fragmented one in "Snapshots" (Keyes 111-113). Furthermore, the poet also confronts racism, capitalism, sexism and the violences of patriarchy. And Rich keeps on investigating "the failures of a culture based on the greed and repression which denies the basic needs of most of its population - women, children, the aged, Blacks, Mexicans, Indians - and all other people who are not part of the patriarchal elite" (Martin, 1975:183).

It is in this volume that Adrienne Rich fully shows her awareness of how language can hinder self-fulfillment and self-knowledge. Her famous lines, "this is the oppressors's language/ yet I need it to talk to You" (1975:149), show how confined Rich feels in a language which prevents her from understanding, defining and articulating her own reality (Martin, 1975:183). So, in her need and willingness to change, Adrienne

Rich begins to experiment with unconventional language. Her images, metaphors, and strategies become increasingly "open rather than closed forms, characterized by spontaneity instead of planned, rational discourse" (Keyes 113).

For Adrienne Rich language is not the standardized speech of an elite, but the most important political instrument in achieving authenticity and fulfillment. Through language Rich keeps to her objective of revising, denying, reversing and or destroying male created myths. Furthermore, as she states in a later article - "Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman" - "poetry is above all a concentration of the power of language" (1977:248). Through language Adrienne Rich re-invents images, words, rhymes and rhythms so as to create alternative and new ways of seeing and interpreting reality. Indeed, Rich declares that "Poetry, is among other things, a criticism of language" (1977:248).

One of her main strategies in her movement towards a more female point of reference is revisionist mythmaking, as it characterizes the sixth step in the development of woman's poetry. Sometimes Rich breaks with conventional values preserved by mythological stories, transcending the destructive ideologies of the myths that she herself has internalized throughout her process of socialization. On other occasions Rich appropriates traditional myths regarding genders and transforms them into positive interpretations of the female image (cf. Funck, 1990:14-16).

In *The Will to Change* Rich chooses the woman figure - most of the time courageous women - as a point of reference for her

life, poetry and the changes that she herself is undergoing. She is no longer complaining, lost, alone and without any female models or directions, as she was in her first phases, e.g. the courageous male "roofwalker" ("The Roofwalker", 1961), or the ideal woman coming as a helicopter or a bird, as portrayed in "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law". Rich discovers a real, rather than an ideal, role model; she replaces the ideal with the historical (Keyes 115).

In the epigraph to "Planetarium" (1968) Adrienne Rich's reference to Caroline Herschel - the astronomer who was not recognized accordingly because she was a woman - indicates that the poet was inspired by the woman astronomer when writing the poem:

*"Thinking of Caroline Herschel  
(1750-1848) astronomer, sister of  
William; and others."*

Indeed, by revealing her deference to Caroline Herschel, the poet demonstrates her shift - from a male to a female reference. As Keyes remarks, "Rich's meditations upon Herschel lead her to deeper insights about women and about her own role as a woman poet" (144).

Rich starts the poem with the negative male created image of woman. Her female model, far from being ideal, is initially portrayed as a "thinking woman", who is labeled a monster by patriarchal society:

A woman in the shape of a monster  
a monster in the shape of a woman  
The skies are full of them (ll. 1-3)

The poet shows Herschel as marginalized and somehow divided between being a woman and a scientist ("monster"). In fact the images of "woman" and "monster" initially blur the persona's identity, but she also refers to the fact that there are lots of monster-women in our society.

These monster-women (my emphasis) are doomed to suffer, however. They do not have enough courage to confront and overcome the establishment:

Galaxies of women, there  
doing penance for impetuosity  
ribs chilled  
in those spaces                      of the mind (ll. 13-16)

As Keyes notes, the impetuosity of these women is frozen not externally but in their very minds. They are unable to use their power, for they are trapped by patriarchal ideology and myths. They are paralyzed, and this illustrates the effectiveness of patriarchal ideology with its myths regarding gender roles (117). These women, differently from Herschel, still accept their images as natural.

Nevertheless, through Herschel, Rich transforms the traditionally derisive concept by emptying it of the negative patriarchal meaning, and filling it with creative, energetic and positive female meaning (Keyes 116). Caroline Herschel has researched and discovered many absorbing things in the universe, such as comets and stars; and "like us" - the persona includes herself in this category - she is just like a witch conveying the positive and female power: "levitating into the night sky/ riding the polished lenses" (ll.11-12). She seeks and travels to achieve



her objectives. This witch scientist is as light as a feather, free to move wherever and whenever she wishes. Differently from the women-monster who are "chilled" in their inner and outer selves, Herschel is in command of her body and mind. Her polished lenses symbolize the conventional witch's broom: the witches' vehicle. This is the unconventional instrument with which she takes her journeys inward and outward - through the spaces of herself and of the universe. In this way, Rich modernizes and re-writes positively the myth of the witch from a female perspective.

The witch scientist has a harmonious relationship with nature. Indeed this witch scientist travels and discovers new things in the universe through her polished lenses, a device which enables her to be and to act energetically freely. The poet presents Herschel as an astronomer who discovers "8 commets" and progresses to the NOVA (1.20): a new and brilliant star.

This NOVA signifies a whole new female glowing existence: both inner and outer. According to critic Keyes, NOVA means life: vitality connected to woman (117). For Rich it means a renewed and lively sensation make "every impulse of light [explodes] / from the core" (11.21-23) of her body into space. The journey from now on is from inside to outside and from outside to inside. There is an energetic wave surrounding Caroline Herschel's life.

The scientist-witch becomes neither paralyzed, nor a token woman as others women have. Her eye is fully professional - "virile, precise and absolutely certain", in the astronomer Tycho's words. Herschel is not afraid of acquiring virile characteristics and being called monster. "This is a risk she is

willing to take" (DeShazer 147). In this way Rich's use of images and her choice of diction demonstrate how the poet has overcome the conventional division between masculine and feminine characteristics (Keyes 117). So, language becomes a political instrument for eradicating conventional values and for transcending destructive ideologies and myths. As Keyes properly remarks, "Rich's theme is powerlessness versus power" (117), with Herschel representing female-power, and the other women representing feminine powerlessness.

The persona wants to experience a "life", for she does not want to have lived "in vain" (l.25). She wants to have new and energetic experiences, as illustrated by Tycho's words: "'Let me not seem to have lived in vain'" (l.25). The persona is neither afraid of applying masculine terms to express herself nor does she mind being called a monster for exhibiting masculine traits. She shakes and awakens her consciousness and goes on towards discovering, revising and transforming not only herself, but also others and culture, when she writes:

What we see, we see  
and seeing is changing (ll. 26-27)

The speaker's use of "seeing" in this poem means her crucial act of re-vision, which is her process of awakening consciousness. This is an act of transformation: from the poet's previous image of herself and the world. This "seeing" makes the persona change her previous worldview. Furthermore, her reference to the "heartbeat of the pulsar/ heart sweating through my body" (ll. 30-31) demonstrates the internal emotions speaking through the

poet's body, which characterizes one of the revisionist ways of breaking with the status quo. This is the reason for this "seeing" being a political act. Rich overcomes the division between body and mind and breaks with conventions as she writes her emotions through her body. And once more the power of language is evinced.

Though she has been bombarded, the persona remains strong. "Her route, however, is not through the stars but through the power of poetry" (Keyes 118). This power is in the remainder of the poem, which is divided into her previous negative (muted) existence and then the emergence of a positive (speaking) existence marked by her process of "awakening consciousness":

I am bombarded yet                    I stand  
 I have been standing all my life in the  
 direct path of a battery of signals  
 the most accurately transmitted most  
 untranslatable language in the universe  
 I am a galactic cloud so deep                    so invo-  
 luted that a light wave could take 15  
 years to travel through me                    And has  
 taken                    I am an instrument in the shape  
 of a woman trying to translate pulsations  
 into images                    for the relief of the body  
 and the reconstruction of the mind. (ll. 26-27)

During her whole life this woman persona has been subjected to male culture. She has not been able to communicate her self and her worldview because she has been bombarded by a male dominant culture, with its myths and language. This language has been for her untranslatable. It took her fifteen years to start her process of awakening consciousness. But, then she positively becomes a "galactic cloud" - "an instrument in the shape of woman" (ll.42-43) trying to speak her inner feelings - "trying to

translate pulsations" (11.43-44) into images: words. Critic Keyes has observed that, when the persona declares "I'm an instrument in the shape/ of a woman" (11.42-43), she illustrates that there is a positive shift from the beginning of the poem, when she declared that she was "a woman in the shape of a monster" (11.1-2). Now Adrienne Rich, through her persona, is proclaiming her "awakening consciousness" - her freeing herself from patriarchal dominance. With such evolution the division between private and public is exterminated. As Keyes says, "[Rich] shows [through language] - her sense of being woman while she takes on the function of the poet" (119). And, as Rich herself states about "Planetarium", "at last the woman in the poem and the woman writing the poem become the same person" (1971:47).

In "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus" (1968), Adrienne Rich approaches many subjects proper of her historical moment. Moved by dissatisfaction with herself, her poetry, culture and society, and now stirred by "rage as a form of female creative power" (De Shazer 153), "the sense of her own power as a poet" (Keyes 12)), the poet demythicizes the myth of Orpheus. By appropriating the tale of Orpheus, Rich transforms not only the plot but also the the gender of the heroic figure. Through the tactics of "revisionist mythmaking" - which characterizes the sixth mode - the poet once more uses the politics of language to revise and transform established gender images and scripts. In this way Adrienne Rich strengthens the feminist hypothesis that the personal and public are interconnected and political.

According to Keyes this poem is "a modern reshaping of the myth of Orpheus in the underworld" (120). Rich bases her poem not only upon the traditional mythical story of Orpheus but also upon Jean Cocteau's modernized version in the film *Orphee* (1950), in which Death, personified as a woman in a Rolls Royce and followed by motorcyclists dressed in black leather, comes from the underworld in the pursuit of Orpheus (cf. Gilbert and Gubar 1985: 2032)

In the original mythical story Orpheus - the poet-musician - implores the superior beings - Pluto and Proserpine - to allow him to stay with his beloved wife, Eurydice, who has just died (Brandao 141-191). Orpheus is permitted to go to the underworld - Hades - to bring his wife back to the world of the living beings. In the granting of this wish certain stipulations are imposed. One of the stipulations is that, on the journey from Hades to the upperworld, Eurydice has to walk behind Orpheus, and Orpheus is forbidden to look back. But, during the journey Orpheus is tortured mentally by the doubt that Eurydice is not actually behind him. Unable to resist he does look back and then his beloved Eurydice is swept back to the underworld. As Orpheus loses his other half, he also loses himself as an individual, a poet and a musician. He does not sing or compose anymore. There is no longer harmony within himself (Brandao 147). According to the myth, Eurydice represents the feminine, the inessential, the object, the immanent being (the inferior, the muted, the passive principle, the obscure/wild side), in short "the other", whereas Orpheus represents the masculine, the essential, the active principle, the transcendent being, "the subject". In Simone

deBeauvoir's sense, as previously seen, Orpheus as a man needs the woman in order to be completed (108). Yet, in "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus" Adrienne Rich captures and transforms the significance of this mythical story.

With a more critical consciousness the persona describes a journey towards her female wild part, which is beyond the limits set down by society. This is a journey "through a landscape of twilight and thorns" (1.8), but she takes it anyway in order to explore and rescue her wild and muted female side, which under patriarchal control is in a death-like state:

I am a woman in the prime of life  
driving her dead poet in a black Rolls-Royce  
through a landscape of twilight and thorns. (ll. 6-8)

As DeShazer says, "driving through the streets of Hades is an act of defiance, inspired not only by the song of the legendary singer but by herself" (153). Also, as critic Keyes infers, the title of the poem indicates that the persona kills Orpheus for usurping his power so as to have enough courage and strength to walk through paths never allowed to woman before (121). The poet then absorbs the conventional male power as a strategy to awaken her own power. By reversing the genders roles of the tale - the heroic protagonist is now a woman - Adrienne Rich is applying what DuPlessis calls the revisionist tactics of displacement (see Chapter I), so as to criticize and change self and culture.

The woman hero starts her journey of self-discovery "rapidly" through the wild, muted and unknown route, with determination:

I am walking rapidly through striations of light and  
 [dark]  
 thrown under an arcade. (11.1-2)

She is aware not only of her position in society but also of the need of a radical act.

As a hero-woman in a male-centered society, she has latent but non-recognized powers just as in the myth Orpheus is restricted by the superior beings of his time (Keyes 121):

I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain powers  
 and those powers severely limited  
 by authorities whose faces I rarely see. (11. 3-5)  
 .....  
 a woman with a certain mission  
 which if obeyed to the letter will leave her intact.  
 (11.9-10)

If she succumbs to the rules set down, she will be doomed to remain deprived of her femaleness forever. But this persona is energetic and resolute. She is as powerful and as heroic as Orpheus, and her anger at her male-prescribed limitations imparts her with more creative and powerful actions regarding new meanings for her woman being. The same woman who drove her dead poet in a black Rolls-Royce through hard and obscure paths is not afraid of the dangers of the path. She has the "nerves of a panther" and "contacts among Hell's Angels" (11.11-12). Thus the poet shows that the naturalness of the myth (as developed by Barthes and discussed in the first chapter) is merely another myth; that is, this is a distortion of the reality, because after demythicizing Rich shows the possibility of transforming by emptying the myth from its male meaning and filling it with a more female significance (cf. Ostriker 212-213).

Although the woman is conscious of her limitations, she defies the laws of society by using unfeminine power and courage:

A woman feeling the fullness of her powers  
 at the precise moment when she must not use them  
 .....  
 a woman sworn to lucidity  
 who sees through the maynhem, the smoky fires  
 of these underground streets (ll.13-17)

This woman breaks up with traditional values perpetuated through mythological stories and tradition, and transcends the destructive ideology which she has internalized. Unlike Orpheus she succeeds in her objectives, in spite of the many restrictions. Aware of the chaos and confusion of the streets - her route - she is able and resolute to defy traditions.

At the end of the poem the persona who is representing "the other" - the muted and wild side - looks and walks backward "on the wrong side of the mirror", without any fear. Though she looks backward she shows the mutability of the myth as she does not have the same negative fate of Orpheus. On the contrary, this woman who is awakening her dead-poet from a death like state is now reconstructing herself courageously. By "learning to walk backward against the [wind]" and "on the wrong side of the mirror" (ll. 18-19), the awakening woman poet is demonstrating her unconventional act which reverts positively. She looks backward confronting and overcoming the difficulties of walking against the wind. The wind here symbolizes the "natural" limitations created by established patriarchal values. Moreover, when she looks "on the wrong side of the mirror", she is



inverting the traditional images of femaleness "reflected" in literature.

Through this poem Adrienne Rich shows that she, among many contemporary poets, is a political poet in search of her identity as both woman and poet in a patriarchal society. By using revisionist mythmaking, Rich shows once more the power of poetic language in creating other ways of interpreting the world. "By challenging us to a more honest realization, she has recovered something of the function of the poet among his people: not by transmitting their legends and tales but by offering herself -- without pretensions, with honest hesitations -- as the mirror of their consciousness and the medium of their transformation" (Gelpi 148). Later, in 1977, Adrienne Rich would declare that "poetry is above all a concentration of the power of language, which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe" (248).

In the book *Diving Into the Wreck* (1971-1973) Rich is consciously furthering and emphasizing her previous searches of self, culture and poetry. According to Adrienne Rich's own commentaries, on the jacket of her book, some of the issues approached are the following:

A coming-home to the darkest and richest sources of my poetry:  
 sex, sexuality, sexual wounds, sexual identity, sexual politics:  
 many names for pieces of one whole. I feel this book continues the work I've been trying to do - breaking down the artificial  
 barriers between private and public, between Vietnam and the

lover's bed, between the deepest images we carry out of our dreams and the most daylight events "out of the world." This is the intention and longing behind everything I write.  
(cited in Keyes 133)

Rich has thus become conscious of her cultural locus in the relations of gender, of her radical feminist position and its outcomes in her poetry.

One of the results of her growing awareness is "an angry voice" (Keyes 133) that breaks with the male myth that it is unfeminine for a woman to externalize anger (see Ostriker, 1987). An outstanding poem illustrating anger is "Phenomenology of Anger" written in 1972. In this poem Rich shows in an aggressive tone the fact, the circumstances and the experience of the phenomenon of anger, its characteristics, the consequences of repressing or releasing anger. If repressed, anger may lead woman to madness or depression that results in lack of energy and purpose. This is negative for women's creative power of writing, because repressing anger can lead women either to write inauthentically or even to stop writing. Another consequence of the repressed anger is suicide or murder, as Adrienne Rich points out in her poem. Both consequences are completely destructive. But in "The Phenomenology of Anger" Adrienne Rich releases her anger permitting herself the fantasy of destroying her enemy with his own weapons (Martin, 1975:185):

White acetyline  
ripples from my body  
.....  
on the true enemy.(ll. 59-60, 63)

Furthermore the persona battles with the oppressor that creates and commits horrors in wars. And thus externalizing anger, as one of the subjects of this volume, is a necessary and vital achievement for the poet. She finally has the opportunity to declare to the oppressor: "I hate you". And at the end Rich describes her visionary dream of a community of people in harmony with themselves and with nature:

I would have loved to live in a world  
of woman and men gaily  
in collusion with green leaves, stalks,  
building mineral cities, transparent domes,  
little huts of woven grass  
each with its own pattern-- (11.99-104)

But this is a utopian vision of the world because it is far from being similar to the modern contemporary world of Post Industrial Revolution and two World Wars. In our world, in reality, "machines hurtle us through space, poison our air and water, anesthetizing us to our bodies, to nature" (Martin, 1975:186). Anyway anger is a vigorous creative force as a step for providing further transformations towards a more female vision of the world.

Although anger is one of the subjects approached in *Diving into the Wreck*, there are still other topics. The review of the history of American women ("From an Old House of America") is one of them. Others are the deeper re-exploration of self and culture and also of the power to transform both: consciousness. But the single most important subject is the revision and destruction of the myth of femininity and masculinity as well as the eradication

of the polarization of both through the creation of a more female oriented myth.

The poem "Diving into the Wreck" (1973) - which was written during the most politicized phase of the feminist movement - characterizes an advanced stage in Adrienne Rich's process of self-redefining. As "Diving" was written during the same period of Rich's celebrated article - "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" (1971) - the poem reflects Rich's questionings and feminist proposals of such time. In her use of revisionist language Rich, similarly to the previous poem, "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus", tries to understand her self in relation to male concepts and values regarding gender roles and images. It is an attempt to reverse scripts and values, "Diving" destroys old meanings in order to propose new modes of thinking.

In this poem Adrienne Rich is fully characterized as a contemporary revisionist mythmaker. Differently from the modernist mythmakers - Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and Auden - she never bemoans the decline of the past or the death of Arcady. On the contrary, Rich refuses to be nostalgic, and to see the past as desirable. She utilizes the concept of "palimpsest", as a decayed past serving as a basis for a revisionist, critical attitude which ends in the destruction of old and conventional meanings and their simultaneous replacement by the new emergent present (Ostriker, "Stealing", 235-236).

For Rich, as we have seen, revision is for women not only one more chapter in the history of culture and literature, but an

act of surviving, as well: "there is another story to be told" (1971:34-49). Guided by her emergent worldview, Adrienne Rich searches for explanation of her own history in relation to the history of civilization. Searching for the origins of existing relations of gender. Rich looks for history in the wild and muted regions of self and culture. By going beyond the mythical images prescribed to her, towards a more authentic female significance. "It is exactly 'this other story' that her poem "Diving into the Wreck" tries to tell" (Funck 17).

Stirred by her dissatisfaction regarding the causes and consequences of her cultural locus, the polarization of woman and man, the relations of power between genders, and the culture she lives in, Adrienne Rich - in "Diving into the Wreck" - consciously resolves to strive for a solution. By analyzing the cultural "assumptions" that have prevented her from having access to her fundamental energies (Martin, 1984:191). With courageous determination instead of hiding herself into her wounds, the persona resolves to investigate "the caverns, the scars, the depths or the wreckage" (Vendler 170).

The persona's exploration is represented by her dive into the ocean in an underwater journey towards a mysterious wreck. According to Martin, "the poet decides to return to her primal origins, to plunge into the depths of her psychic and cultural past" (1984:189), regardless of any painful consequences, such as the difficulties, dangers and sufferings that such kind of journey may imply and cause. As the persona's journey is disturbed by "the book of myths", which symbolizes the cultural entrapments, Rich consciously describes the persona-diver as

being cautious and "even methodic" in her preparations for the dive (Keyes 152). Her journey aims at deciphering each part of the sea-voyage, as well as the wreck:

First having read the books of myths  
 and loaded the camera  
 and checked the edge of the knife-blade,  
 I put on  
 the body-armor of black rubber  
 the absurd flippers  
 the grave and awkward mask (ll. 1-7)

The conscious actions - "read", "loaded", "checked" - plus her loneliness (Keyes 152), and all the traditional equipments - "knife-blade", "body-armor", "flippers", "mask" - for helping and protecting her "descent" are evidences that this journey symbolizes the persona's analytical plunge into her self and culture. Such revisionist critical position, the descent into the ocean, in fact replicates the poet's process of exploring the unconscious.

Like any common diver the persona uses the established equipments and devices of our culture for achieving her aim. They are all part of "the book of myths", as the only existing instruments and attitudes that can guide her in her search, on this symbolic underwater sea journey. But such traditional and contradictory artifacts and rituals are ambiguous. At the same time that they were created for making the diver's trip easier, they also hinder her descent towards the deep and mysterious origins of life. The flippers are "absurd" (l.6), the mask "awkward" (l.7), and the "ladder" is useless (l.13).

In the critique of patriarchal myths through the revision and destruction of its previous significance, the use of the

ladder for diving is a good example. As the only safe tool that can aid her "descent", it nevertheless is given a negative meaning, as it becomes really inessential for her plunge.

There is a ladder.  
 The ladder is always there  
 .....  
 hanging *innocently*  
*we know what it is for,*  
 .....  
 Otherwise  
 it's a piece of maritime floss  
 some sundry equipment. (ll 13-21, emphasis added)

Though completely aware that the ladder is useless for her objective, as it obstructs and delays her way down, the persona uses it anyway, probably to experience, understand, revise and reverse its traditional usefulness for diving into water.

Another artifact whose significance the poet reverses are the flippers. Instead of helping her descent, the flippers "cripple her" (l.29). In this way Rich goes on revising and demolishing patriarchal myth that some artifacts and attitudes are necessary for divers who venture in the exploration of the sea.

Throughout the poem, the poet also destroys the traditional meaning of diving into the sea, by demythicizing the image of both the diver and the sea. One of the first hints of this is the irony attached to the figure of the persona as she enters the water. Compared to an "insect" or to a baby, the persona is seen "crawling" down into the water (l.30).

The act of diving symbolizes a return to the origins of consciousness and civilization, through a symbolic death and a subsequent re-birth. In the mythical descent pattern, after going

deeply into water or ocean the persona is conditioned to a progressive phase of re-integration and regeneration (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 15-22, 592, 650). The diver turns into any mortal human being; the mythical image of the sea as dangerous and mysterious becomes the difficulties and dangers that one has to confront in life itself, the very concept of power.

The wreck, which is the aim of the persona's journey, means the devastation of the original meaning of personhood, split by the genders scripts enforced through literature. The wreck "is the personal and cultural foundering of the relations between the sexes" (DuPlessis, 131-132), which seems to have ruined all original thoughts, meanings, concepts and values. In a parody of the paradigm of the hero - "the subject", Rich reverses the hero's gender and destroys its archetypal meaning. The significance of the hero with supernatural forces who dives into the water to save a lady or kill an evil monster that is threatening the establishment -- such as the case of Beowulf who dives into the water to kill the mother of the monster and returns mature and transformed into a hero (Keyes 153) -- is destroyed. Besides being a common person, she is also the object of search. She is "the treasure" and "the quest". Whereas "the quest is a critique of old myths, the treasure is the whole buried knowledge of the relations between the sexes..." (DuPlessis 132). As the persona goes down the water, she progressively frees herself from any conventions (Martin, 1984:190) and, arriving at the wreck, is ready for the discovery of a new revisionist meaning.



Although the journey resembles a scientific expedition, the purpose is clearly self-exploratory, introspective cultural exploratory:

I am having to do this  
not like Cousteau with his  
assiduous team  
aboard the sun-flooded schooner  
but here alone. (11.8-12)

In entering alone the depths of the dominant cultural context, with its ideology and myths, as well as in her psyche, she seeks to redefine her consciousness by confronting the great cultural wreck, by herself:

and there is no one  
to tell me when the ocean  
will begin. (11 31-33)

As the persona undertakes the descent, she progressively develops her own way of dealing with the new element -- the water. All the tools she has culturally acquired have to be put aside and a new behavior must be established. As the persona realizes,

the sea is another story  
the sea is not a question of power  
I have to learn alone  
to turn my body without force  
in the deep element. (11. 39-43)

Learning to be alone and to do things in a new way is a must for the poet's process of development. This epitomizes the behavior of all women who search for an antimythological position. To dive into the sea may be metaphorically compared to freeing herself

from prescribed gender's scripts and images, and also by unmasking patriarchal mythical interpretation of reality.

Adrienne Rich is no longer interested in accepting the distortions of reality presented to her under the form of traditional patriarchal myths - as natural and immutable. She wishes to explore carefully not only the devastation of her old consciousness, but also the collective human consciousness, as well as history, gender relations and culture. She declares:

I came to explore the wreck  
*The words are purposes.*  
*The words are maps.*  
 I came to see the damage that was done  
 and the treasures that prevail. ( ll 52-56)

During her search the poet - through the persona - highlights the importance of another tool for interpretation: "words" (ll. 53-54). She needs a language less pervaded with patriarchal myths, though these same "words" have served as basis - "purposes" and "maps" - for exploring the wreck. Delegitimizing traditional language with its ideology and myths is a move towards a more authentic form of expression. But she can only unmask the distortions of patriarchal myths from within the system itself.

In her search for a new self and life - as represented by the diving into the wreck - the persona is not attracted by values sanctioned by society; she is interested in those values which prove pertinent to her experiences and intentions from the other side of the story. She needs to unmask the power of "the oppressor's language":

the thing I came for:  
*the wreck and not the story of the wreck*  
*the thing itself and not the myth*  
 .....  
*the evidence of damage.* (ll. 61-66, emphasis added)

With her purposes radically clear, she cannot accept patriarchal myths anymore. She is nearer her aim for a more appropriate consciousness, life and culture, which requires the destruction of the official stories through an understanding of what went wrong, i.e., "the wreck".

Upon reaching the site of the accident, the persona begins to build a new mythical image for herself. This myth is more fluid, less crystallized and more open to transformations. Based on the "treasure" found in the depths of the sea, this new prototype reflects the extermination of the polarities between the genders. With the synthesis of female and male characteristics into only one human being. The previous fragmented individual is now a wholeness combining characteristics of the two genders. Although still an idealized type, this basic wholeness substitutes the dualities, divisions and distinctions of the Western consciousness and culture:

This is the place.  
 And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair  
 streams black, the merman in his armored body  
 We circle silently  
 about the wreck  
 we dive into the hold.  
 I am she: I am he (ll. 61-66)

This new human being envisioned by the poet is the result of the encounter and synthesis of woman and man: the androgynous. As Martin points out, this human being abolishes any conflict or

division between subject and object, "merman" and "mermaid", mind and matter, male and female, body and spirit, private and public (1984:190).

After revising and overcoming this "wreck", the persona perceives that the androgynous characterizes only a moment in the continuous process of awakening consciousness of the persona - her transformations towards a more female cultural context:

the one who find our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera  
a book of myths  
in which  
our names do not appear. (ll. 89-94)

As the androgynous who keeps on revising and exploring old meanings, she realizes the need to write herself into history, by inscribing women in culture. This can only be achieved by going beyond the limits of culture, into the muted and wild zone, in order to search for a more female centered consciousness and culture. But, as Rich herself declared in WWDA, the awakening of consciousness is not like crossing a frontier and you are there. The awakening consciousness is a long and continuous journey.

The analysis above illustrates that from the 1950's to the 1970's Adrienne Rich's poems have suffered many transformations. These changes are the results of Rich's more critical and female centered consciousness, which has emerged from a revisionist attitude in her personal and public life. There is a movement in her poetry from a concern with confinement and lack of self-awareness toward a more liberating sense of self in which

gender plays an important role. Working with freer forms and more politically involved themes, she manages to establish by the early 1970's a poetics which considerably departs from her early modernist models to constitute a new and more female-oriented pattern. Such "poetics" is based on a recognition of the female voice and experience, on the need for revision of social and cultural norms, on the eradication of polarities and, especially, on language as an instrument of change.

## CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I proposed to examine Adrienne Rich's contribution to the development of important principles, methods and theories of feminist criticism. With this purpose in mind, I reviewed some of the major issues raised by the encounter of feminism and literature (Chapter One), critical articles (Chapter Two) and the development of her poetry between 1951 and 1973 (Chapter Three). I was thus able to conclude that the process of feminist criticism - as a new area of literary investigation - in defining principles and establishing criteria for reading, writing and interpreting literary texts, in many ways parallels Rich's process of awakening consciousness. Through her revisionist position in private and public life, Rich can thus be considered a representative poet and critic in the development of a feminist poetics, a new way of writing consciously as woman. and thus for feminist criticism development.

Since relations of gender are characterized by an imbalance in power, a feminist stance, as illustrated by Rich, must necessarily acknowledge the political dimension of the literary work. Also because of the secondary roles attributed to woman in society and in literature, it must emphasize what Rich has termed "the location of the poet," that is, the position from where each individual woman perceives herself and her constraints as a writer. Not generally socialized to become a writer who follows her inner needs, aspirations and experiences, the woman poet (as

illustrated by Rich) has had to struggle against the assigned scripts which repress her "imagination" and which often silence her authentic voice. Encouraged to remain within the boundaries of the patriarchal myth of femininity, women writers have had to face an acute fear of being unfeminine and therefore marginalized.

Rich's basic trajectory, as we have seen, consists in transcending the category of "the other" to become "the subject", a female subject. To accomplish this, she has had to effect a radical revision of the terms of her socialization, of the roles assigned to her, and consequently of her consciousness and culture. Furthermore, she has had to confront one of the main issues for feminist writers, which is the issue of language. Established in and by dominant culture, the artistic instrument of the woman poet is not value free. As Rich realizes "this is the oppressors language/yet I need it to talk to you". One of her major achievements has been the transformation of this language which hinders the full communication and development of women towards which their genuine selves into a more female-centered language, one which is purged of the dominant ideology and its myths. Following Ostriker's and DuPlessis' studies on revisionist mythopoesis as a liberating strategy for women, we could see through Rich's poetry how, during this process of transforming male-created myths, the woman is at the same time transforming her own condition, moving from the category of "other" towards becoming the subject of her own story or history.

The need to reassess the femaleness of woman writer implies a feminist/political, stance, one which seeks to solve the

inherent conflict of being a woman and a writer through unveiling the contradictions of the dominant ideology and also through the deconstruction of myths concerning genders. In this way, the writer may be able to notice that the principle of naturalness gives place to history and that the myth conveys a changing rather than an immutable significance. In the same way, the dualisms, such as those of angel/monster, mind/body, private/public, personal/political, male/female, are likely to be destroyed. The consequent wholeness helps heal that sense of anxiety, conflict, blurred identity and divided feminine self.

As one of the first feminist critics who defined and argued for a revisionist practice in life and literature (formally presented in WWDA) Adrienne Rich illustrates her revisionist position throughout her critical prose. Indeed, in revising and transforming her own consciousness and culture, Rich approaches and develops many of the fundamental issues of feminism as a movement seeking social change. At the end of BBP Adrienne Rich shows how her feminist stance acquires an enlarged scope, as she goes beyond "woman" to argue for a less biased and a less hierarchical society in all aspects.

Through her revisionist position in poetry we can notice that Rich moves not only towards a more female and critical consciousness but also towards a more general interest in cultural change. The ten poems analyzed marked the development of her feminist awareness, from her "killing of the angel in the house" (to paraphrase Woolf), through her increasingly politicized attitude, to her revisionist stance in relation to language and myth. Though the poems span a crucial period of her development



as a poet and illustrate the first burst of consciousness of the contemporary feminist movement, we must not forget that twenty years have elapsed between the last poem analyzed and today. Rich is alive and well, but she is no longer the same woman, as some of the issues she fought for are no longer in the feminist critical agenda for the 1990's. And though this does not invalidate any of the things which have been said here, we must account in this conclusion for the possibility, or better, for the certainty of further change.

As Rich herself states in the book *Your Native Land, Your Life*, published in 1986:

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

August 1981 -  
August 1982

(27 emphasis added)

Adrienne Rich's continuing transformations of self towards the fullness and the power of womanliness remains as a suggestion for further investigation. But whoever undertakes to follow the waters of her poetry should be aware that such waters flow in more directions than one and heed the poet's warning:

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

If you think you can grasp me, think again:  
my story flows in more than one direction  
a delta springing from the riverbed  
with its five fingers spread  
(in *Time's Power*, 1987)

The unawakened woman of "Storm Warnings" and/or "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers", the divided woman of "Snapshots", the woman who is looking eagerly for her origins and the origins of her culture, and who turns to be an androgynous in "Diving into the Wreck," this same Adrienne Rich remains elusive and changing and growing. The process of poetry, such as that of living, is an endless process.

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## APPENDIX

### STORM WARNINGS

The glass has been falling all the afternoon,  
And knowing better than the instrument  
What winds are walking overhead, what zone  
Of gray unrest is moving across the land,  
5 I leave the book upon a pillowed chair  
And walk from window to closed window, watching  
Boughs strain against the sky

And think again, as often when the air  
Moves inward toward a silent core of waiting  
10 How with a single purpose time has traveled  
By secret currents of the undiscerned  
Into this polar realm. Weather abroad  
And weather in the heart alike come on  
Regardless of prediction.

15 Between foreseeing and averting change  
Lies all the mastery of elements  
Which clocks and weatherglasses cannot alter.  
Time in the hand is not control of time,  
Nor shattered fragments of an instrument  
20 A proof against the wind; the wind will rise,  
We can only close the shutters.

I draw the curtains as the sky goes black

And set a match to candles sheathed in glass  
Against the keyhole draught, the insistent whine  
25 Of weather through the unsealed aperture,  
This is our sole defense against the season;  
These are the things that we have learned to do  
Who live in troubled regions.

1951

#### AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGERS

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

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

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie  
10 Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.  
The tigers in the panel that she made  
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

1951

## SNAPSHOTS OF A DAUGHTER IN LAW

1.

You, once a belle in Shreveport,  
with henna-colored hair, skin like a peachbud,  
still have your dresses copied from that time,  
and plays a Chopin prelude

5 called by Cortot: "*Delicious recollections*  
*float like perfume through the memory.*"

Your mind now, moldering the wedding-cake,  
heavy with useless experience, rich  
with suspicion, rumor, fantasy,  
10 crumbling to pieces under the knife-edge  
of mere fact. In the prime of your life.

Nervy, glowering, your daughter  
wipes the teaspoons, grows another way.

2.

Banging the coffee pot into the sink  
15 she hears the angels chiding, and looks out  
past the raked gardens to the sloppy sky.  
Only a week since They said: *Have no patience.*

The next time it was: *Be insatiable.*

Then: *Save yourself: others you cannot save.*

20 Sometimes she's let tapstream scald her arm,  
a match burn to her thumbnail,



or held her hand above the kettle's snout  
 right in the woolly steam. They are probably angels,  
 since nothing hurts her anymore, except  
 25 each morning's grit blowing into her eyes.

3.

A thinking woman sleeps with monsters.  
 The beak that grips her, she becomes. And Nature,  
 that sprung-lidded, still commodious  
 steamer-trunk of *tempora* and *mores*  
 30 gets stuffed with it all: the mildewed orange-flowers,  
 the female pills, the terrible breasts  
 of Boadicea beneath flat foxes' heads and orchids.

Two handsome women, gripped in argument,  
 each proud, acute, subtle, I hear scream  
 35 across the cut glass and majolica  
 like Furies cornered from their prey:  
 The argument *ad feminam*, all the old knives  
 that have rusted in my back, I drive in yours,  
*ma semblable, ma soeur!*

4.

40 Knowing themselves too well in one another:  
 their gifts no pure fruition, but a thorn,  
 the prick filed sharp against a hint of scorn  
 Reading while waiting  
 for the iron to heat,

45 writing, *My life has stood--a Loaded Gun--*  
 in that Amherst pantry while the jellies boil and scum,  
 or, more often  
 iron-eyed and beaked and purposed as a bird,  
 dusting everything on the whatnot every day of life.

5.

50 *Dulce ridens, dulce loquens,*  
 she shaves her legs until they gleam  
 like petrified mammoth-tusk.

6.

When to her lute corinna sings  
 neither words nor music are her own;  
 55 only the long hair dipping  
 over her cheek, only the song  
 of silk against her knees  
 and these  
 adjusted in reflections of an eye.

60 Poised, trembling and unsatisfied, before  
 an unlocked door, that cage of cages,  
 tell us, your bird, your tragical machine--  
 in this *fertilisante douler*? Pinned down  
 by love, for you the only natural action,  
 65 are You edged more keen  
 to prise the secrets of the vault? has Nature shown  
 her household books to you, daughter-in-law,

that her sons never saw?

7.

*"To have in this uncertain world some stay  
70 which cannot be undermined, is  
of the utmost consequence."*

Thus wrote

a woman, partly brave and partly good,  
who fought with what she partly understood.  
75 Few men about her would or could do more,  
hence she was labeled harpy, shrew and whore.

8.

"You all die at fifteen," said Diderot,  
and turn part legend, part convention.  
Still, eyes inaccurately dream  
80 behind close window blankening with steam.  
Deliciously, all that we might have been,  
all that we were - fire, tears,  
wit, taste, martyred ambition -  
stirs like the memory of refused adultery  
85 the drained and flagging bosom of our middle years.

9.

*Not that it is done well, but  
that it is done at all? Yes, think  
of the odds! or shrug them off forever.*

*This luxury of the precocious child,*

90 *Time's precious chronic invalid, -  
would we, darling, resign it if we could?  
Our bilght has been our sinecure?  
mere talent was enough for us -  
glitter in fragments and rough drafts.*

95 *Sigh no more, ladies.*

*Time is male*

*and in his cups drinks to the fair.*

*Bemused by gallantry, we hear  
our mediocrities over praised,*

100 *indolence read as abnegation,  
slattern through styled intuition,  
every lapse forgiven, our crime  
only to cast too bold a shadow  
or smash the mold straight off.*

105 *For that, solitary confinement,  
tear gas, attrition shelling.*

*Few applicants for that honor.*

10.

Well,

she's long about her coming, who must be  
 110 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  
 115 or helicopter,

poised, still coming,

her fine blades making the air wince

but her cargo

no promise then:

120 delivered

palpable

ours.

1958-1960

#### PROSPECTIVE IMMIGRANTS

#### PLEASE NOTE

Either you will  
 go through this door  
 or you will not go through.

If you go through  
 5 there is always the risk

of remembering your name.

Things look at you doubly

And you must look back

and let them happen.

10 If you do not go through

it is possible

to live worthily

to maintain your attitudes

to hold your position

15 to die bravely

but much will blind you,

much will evade you,

at what cost who knows?

The door itself

20 makes no promises.

It is only a door.

1962

#### NECESSITIES OF LIFE

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

5 pushed into the scene,

a hard little head protruding  
from the pointilist's buzz and bloom.  
After a time the dot  
begins to ooze. Certain heats  
10 melt it.  
Now I was hurriedly  
blurring into ranges  
of burnt red, burning green,  
Jonah! I was Wittgenstein,  
15 Mary Wollstonecraft, the soul  
of Louis Jouvett, dead  
in a blown-up photograph.  
Till, wolfed almost to shreds,  
I learned to make myself  
20 unappetizing. Scaly as a dry bulb  
thrown into a cellar  
I used myself, let nothing use me.  
Like being on a private dole,  
sometimes more like kneading bricks in Egypt.  
25 What life was there, was mine,  
now and again to lay  
one hand on a warm brick

and touch the sun's ghost  
with economical joy,

30 now and again to name  
over the bare necessities.

So much for those days. Soon  
practice may make me middling-perfect, I'll

dare inhabit the world  
35 trenchant in motion as an eel, solid  
as a cabbage-head. I have invitations:  
a curl of mist steams upward

from a field, visible as my breath,  
houses along a road stand waiting  
40 like old women knitting breathless  
to tell their tales.

1962

### IMPLOSIONS

*The world's  
not wanton  
only wild and wavering*

I wanted to choose words that even you  
5 would have to be changed by

Take the word



of my pulse, loving and ordinary  
Send out your signals, hoist  
your dark scribbled flags

10 but take  
my hand

All wars are useless to the dead

My hands are knotted in the rope  
and I cannot sound the bell

15 My hands are frozen to the switch  
and I cannot throw it

The foot is in the wheel

When it's finished and we're lying  
in a stubble of blistered flowers  
20 eyes gaping, mouths staring  
dusted with crushed arterial blues  
I'll have done nothing  
even for you?

1968

## NIGHTBREAK

Something broken      Something  
 I need      By someone  
 I love      Next year  
 will remember what  
 5    This anger      unreal  
                                  yet  
 has to be gone through  
 The sun to set  
 on this anger  
 10                                   I go on  
 head down      into it  
 The mountain pulsing  
 Into the oil drum      drops  
 the ball of fire.  
 15    Time is quiet      doesn't break things  
 or even wound      Things are in danger  
 from people      The frail clay lamps  
 of Mesopotamia  
 row and row under glass  
 20    in the ethnological section  
 little hollows for dried-  
 up oil      The refugees  
 with their identical  
 tales of escape      I don't  
 25    collect what I can't use      need  
 what can be broken.

In the bed the pieces fly together  
and the rifts fill or else  
my body is a list of wounds  
30 symmetrically placed  
a village  
blown open by planes  
that did not finish the job  
The enemy has withdrawn  
35 between raids become invisible  
there are  
no agencies  
of relief  
the darkness becomes utter  
40 Sleep cracked and flaking  
sifts over the shaken target  
What breaks is night  
not day The white  
scar splitting  
45 over the east  
The crack weeping  
Time for the pieces  
to move  
dumbly back

50                   toward each other.

1968

**PLANETARIUM**

*Thinking of Caroline Herschel (1750-1848)*

*astronomer, sister of William; and others.*

A woman in the shape of a monster  
 a monster in the shape of a woman  
 5 the skies are full of them

a woman        'in the snow  
 among the Clocks and instruments  
 or measuring the ground with poles'

in her 98 years to discover  
 10 8 comets

she whom the moon ruled  
 like us  
 levitating into the night sky  
 riding the polished lenses

15 Galaxies of women, there  
 doing penance for impetuosity  
 ribs chilled  
 in those spaces       of the mind

An eye,

20 'virile, precise and absolutely certain'  
from the mad webs of Uranosborg

encountering the NOVA

every impulse of light exploding  
from the core  
25 as life flies out of us

Tycho whispering at last

'Let me not seem to have lived in vain'

What we see, we see  
and seeing is changing  
30 the light that shrivels a mountain  
and leaves a man alive

Heartbeat of the pulsar  
heart sweating through my body

The radio impulse  
35 pouring in from Taurus

I am bombarded yet I stand

I have been standing all my life in the  
direct path of a battery of signals  
the most accurately transmitted most  
40 untranslatable language in the universe

I am a galactic cloud so deep so invo-  
luted that a light wave could take 15



her dead poet learning to walk backward against the wind  
on the wrong side of mirror

1968

#### DIVING INTO THE WRECK

First having read the book of myths,  
and loaded the camera,  
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,  
I put on  
5 the body-armor of black rubber  
the absurd flippers  
the grave and awkward mask.  
I am having to do this  
not like Cousteau with his  
10 assiduous team  
board the sun-flooded schooner  
but here alone.  
There is a ladder.  
The ladder is always there  
15 hanging innocently  
close to the side of the schooner.  
We know what it is for,  
we who have used it.  
Otherwise  
20 it's a piece of maritime floss  
some sundry equipment.

I go down.

Rung after rung and still

the oxygen immerses me

25 the blue light

the clear atoms

of our human air.

I go down.

My flippers cripple me,

30 I crawl like an insect down the ladder

and there is no one

to tell when the ocean

will begin.

First the air is blue and then

35 it is bluer and then green and then

black I am blacking out and yet

my mask is powerful

it pumps my blood with power

I have to learn alone

40 to turn my body without force

in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget

what I came for

among so many who have always

45 lived here

swaying their crenellated fans

between the reefs

and besides



you breathe differently down here.

50 I came to explore the wreck.

The words are purposes.

The words are maps.

I came to see the damage that was done  
and the treasures that prevail.

55 I stroke the beam of my lamp

slowly along the flank

of something more permanent

than fish or weed

the thing I came for:

60 the wreck and not the story of the wreck

the thing itself and do not the myth

the drowned face always staring

toward the sun

the evidence of damage

65 worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty

the ribs of the disaster

curving their assertion

among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.

70 And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair

streams black, the merman in his armored body

We circle silently

about the wreck

we dive into the hold.

75 I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes  
whose breasts still bear the stress  
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies  
obscurely inside barrels

80 half-wedged and left to rot

we are the half-destroyed instruments  
that once held to a course  
the water-eaten log  
the fouled compass

85 We are, I am, you are

By cowardice or courage  
the one who find our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera

90 a book of myths

in which  
our names do not appear.

1972