

Following the Traces of Feminine Writing in Adrienne Rich's Poems

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ABSTRACT

The phallogocentric structure of language privileges the male in construction of meaning throughout the patriarchal history which allows no place for feminine writing. Opposing what Lacan calls as phallogocentric discourse, poststructuralist feminists exhort to what Cixous terms as "écriture féminine" as the inscription of female difference in language and text. Therefore, viewing women's difference as a *source* (of imagery) rather than a point of inferiority to men, Rich rediscovers female experiences in her poems through using "écriture féminine" and thus exhibits the productivity and plurality of women's language. Hence, the present study, looking from the perspective of Cixous's "écriture féminine," aims at analyzing female modes of writing in Rich's poems. The main finding of the research is that, through using genuine female forms of expression as opposed to phallogocentric structure of expression, Rich brings into being the symbolic weight of female consciousness, illustrating the oppressive forces that obstruct female expression.

Keywords: Rich, Lacan, Cixous, écriture féminine, phallogocentrism.

INTRODUCTION

There is a close interrelationship between the world of poetry and the real world outside, especially in the case of women's writings. Poetry for women represents the experience and the oppressions which they have undergone throughout history. Therefore, the prerequisite to understanding women's literature, its specialty and difference, is "to reconstruct its past, to rediscover the scores of women novelists, poets and dramatists whose work has been obscured by time and to establish the continuity of female tradition from decade to decade" (Showalter, 1979, p. 35). Through this method, one can trace the patterns and phases of the evolution of female tradition, which is parallel to the phases of the development of any "subcultural art", through which one can "challenge the periodicity of orthodox literary history, and its enshrined canons of achievement" (Showalter, 1979, p. 35). Such a systematic exploration of women's writing enlightens one's awareness of political, social and cultural experiences of women.

Having gone down to the depths of the wreck of the civilization, brought about by the non-inclusive male myth, and having tried to stand against the orthodox literary traditions which are mostly masculine and to create a new female myth and mode of writing, female writers like Rich turn to a better ways of knowing, that is, a totally female mode of expression.

Such manner of female writing exposes women's "courageous self-exploration." Moreover, such female writers try to "unify the fragments of female experience through artistic vision" and they focus on "the definition of autonomy for the woman writer" (Showalter, 1977, pp. 33-5).

From the 1960s onwards, women's writing starts a dynamic phase which combines the strengths of their previous conservative writings with such themes as the conflicts between women writers' love of their craft and its discrepancies with family obligations, the conflict between "self-fulfillment and duty." Moreover, in this period we confront with such concepts as "anger and sexuality," as sources of female power (Showalter, 1977, pp. 34-5). Such burst of radical themes, modes of expression and writing in women's writing, as opposed to the dominant male patterns of expression and masculine aesthetics and modes of writing, could be traced in Adrienne Rich's writing. In a society where language becomes an instrument in the hands of the males, Rich undergoes a risky project through which she evades the "discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system" and uses feminine writing or "écriture féminine" (Cixous 1975, p. 353).

METHODOLOGY

Rhetoricians have challenged the function of language as a neutral mirror of objective reality; rather

they assert that it plays a powerful undeniable role in shaping human experiences and perceptions of the world. Having such view of rhetoricians towards language in mind, feminists consider the structure of language as being gender-based functioning both as a means of expression and repression. Lacan, utilizing Derrida's term, illustrates the phallogocentric structure of language to refer to the privileging of masculine in construction of meaning throughout the patriarchal history. Lacan believes that Western thought is based on systematic oppression of women's experience brought about by the phallogocentric structure of language which allows no place for feminine writing. Due to the control of men over their territory, according to Cixous (1975), women have been confined to live in a narrow room where they have undergone an unconscious brainwash throughout the whole history. Once they learn their name, they are also taught that "their territory is black" because they are considered to be black. Women are taught that their "continent is dark" and dangerous. That is how women's horror of their "dark" places have been internalized and at some point, as it seemed to be, eternalized. Riveting women between two horrifying myths of the Medusa and the abyss, the patriarchal society has made women to believe that theirs is too dark a continent to be exploreable. (p. 349).

Besides, patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons but now, as Rich (1986) asserts, it should come to view "women's physicality as a resource rather than a destiny" (p. 188). Therefore, while phallus is a masculine metaphor in phallogocentric language introduced by Freud and Lacan, female body is the source of meaning in "écriture féminine." Going with such attitude towards language and femininity, Adrienne Rich rediscovers female experiences in her poems through using what Cixous calls "écriture féminine" or feminine writing. Through viewing women's sexual difference as a *source* (of imagery) rather than a point of inferiority to men, Rich exhibits the productivity and plurality of women's language and experience that allows another birth to the woman-within of the poet. Through using genuine female art forms which serve to subvert the phallogocentric structure of discourse, Rich brings into being the symbolic weight of female consciousness, illustrating the oppressive forces that obstruct female voice, and create a female space of expression in her texts.

Looking from the perspective of Cixous's "écriture féminine" as opposed to Lacan's phallogocentrism, the present study aims at analyzing the female modes of writing and expression in the poems of Adrienne

Rich through Cixous's idea of "écriture féminine" or feminine writing and thus subverting Lacan's phallogocentric structure of language.

DISCUSSION

Throughout the whole patriarchy, a woman is pushed to internalize the standards of the dominant culture and to imitate its established modes of writing and behavior. Internalizing the male assumptions about female nature, women under such government try to write "equal to the intellectual achievements of the male culture" without daring to display an original, innovative and independent art (Showalter, 1979, pp. 35-6). This is what feminists like Cixous and Showalter have always tried to put under question; they believe that women "have always read *men's* writings" and their writings have always been affected and shaped by dominant masculine literary canons (Showalter, 1991, p. 21). In such a society, language becomes an instrument in the hands of the males through which they govern the forms of expression and thus silence the female for whom masculine forms of expression do not function to convey their real life experiences (Cixous, 1975, p. 353).

Although women have internalized their feminine conflicts and never directly mentioned them in their writings, they deeply feel the need for a movement beyond self-sacrifice and self-repression; they deeply feel the need for rebellion against the masculine tradition and for confrontation with patriarchal society and culture. Hence, discarding the conventional ideas of dependence that were held up for their admiration, women turn their back on the tradition in which they were nurtured. Thus, feminist writers indiscriminately abandon the old bonds—denouncing their (literary) fathers—and servitudes, demanding "self-realization", freedom of individuality and personal will. Casting away "the old probes and veils", feminist writers are determined to know and say everything, no matter how ugly and outrageous (Showalter, 1977, p. 227-8). Feeling the need to write of their own female experiences, the feminist writers like Rich aspire for a feminine mode of writing and language that stands against the "oppressor's language" and allows women to give word to their private experiences through *écriture féminine* as opposed to the established phallogocentric structure of language. This is what can be traced in Rich's revolutionary volume of poetry, that is, *Diving into the Wreck*.

The Radical Revolutionary Rich in *Diving into the Wreck*

Rich in *Diving into the Wreck* dares to stand against what Lacan calls as "phallogocentrism" and tries to

give voice to the female experiences of different generations through *écriture féminine*. After following the tradition of her old masters and never directly identifying herself as a feminist in such conservative volumes of her poetry as *A Change of World*, Rich in *Diving* bids farewell to an old way of love and “an old grammar of loving”. Talking about her early poetry, Rich notes “I was trying, to write about the craft of poetry. But I was drawing on the long tradition of domination, according to which the precious resource is yielded up into the hands of the dominator” (qtd. in Wasley, 2000, p. 162). But Rich’s voice in *Diving* transforms to a robust voice of protest in American poetry and thus challenges the words of W. H. Auden who discovered Rich’s early poetry as portrayal of his belief in the “poetry [that] makes nothing happen” (Genoways, 2006, p. 207). Therefore, Rich in *Diving* turns her back to the former woman, in her former volumes of poetry, who was “haunted by her responsibilities as mother and wife” and was writing in phallogocentric structures accepted by her male literary supervisors. She finally finds the courage to reveal the previously hidden aspect of her writing and to free herself from the confinements of the patriarchal tradition. The “time allowed a new vision in Rich’s work as she composed subject matter previously avoided” which led to the creation of a collection of poetry filled with experiences of “real” life moving beyond the traditional forms of writing traced in her earlier collections (Riley, 2004, p. 210). Starting strong political identification with feminism, Rich in *Diving* challenges the “unfit world” which handles the male the power to control and determine what roles shall the female play and what shall not. Diving down into the depths of the wreck of her psychic and cultural past, the mission of the persona in the title poem, Rich plunges to her primal origins in order to return to the root to find the origins of such an oppressive state for women (Keyes, 1986, p. 138):

I came to explore the wreck. [...]

I came to see the damage that was done

and the treasures that prevail. [...]

the thing I came for:

the wreck and not the story of the wreck

the thing itself and not the myth (Rich, 1973, p. 23).

Here Rich pronounces the origins of the present oppressive status of women in the culture brought about by patriarchy which gives destructive powers to the male. Therefore, Rich (1979) believes, if women are to survive the detrimental effects of the culture in which they live, they must not only overcome the “drives” that impel them to play the roles which have been prescribed for women throughout history but also express their anger towards such a system for

imposing subservience on women throughout patriarchal history (p. 123).

Thus, the strength of *Diving* comes from Rich’s rejection of her early subservient poetry and enactment of her deep-rooted wish to explore the depths of the scars on the female body. Beginning such a mission, Rich knows that one must “reactivate the old wounds, inflame all the scar tissue, [and] awaken all the suppressed anger” (Vendler, 1993, p. 310). Rich in *Diving* explores the old wounds which infect the whole human civilization and makes them squeeze out. That is why her work “resonates with anger” especially towards the limitations brought about for women by imposing such roles as “daughter, daughter-in-law, lover, and mother” on them all throughout patriarchal history (Jasper, 2007, p. 205).

Hence, the predominant feelings exposed in this volume of Rich’s poetry are anger and hatred which are tangible even in the title of the poems included in *Diving* like “Burning Oneself In”, “Burning Oneself Out”, “The Phenomenology of Anger” which act out women’s thirst for violence that Rich could not render in her first volume of poetry. Female anger and frustration are expressed more directly in feminine writings than had been done before; women’s hostility towards their male counterparts is illustrated through “violent action” in feminine writings (Showalter, 1977, p. 160). This change of tendencies in feminine writing or what Cixous (1975) calls as “*écriture féminine*” could be evidently traced in Rich’s *Diving* (p. 353). In this volume of her poetry Rich finds the courage to abandon masculine strategies of writing in favor of direct and public confrontation with masculinity. Using strong personas with a direct voice of anger, Rich (1973) gives voice to women’s rage as a source of energy releasing women from the social norms that are imposed on them by patriarchy throughout history: “My visionary anger cleansing my sight” (p. 19). Rich believes that “anger is a creative force” that throughout history women have not been allowed to experience. Patriarchy has led women to live a life in which “their survival and self-respect have been so terribly dependent on male approval”. Thus, starting a strong political confrontation with masculine dominance, Rich calls for “the Erinyes”, the goddess of vengeance, to compensate for “the damage done to women in Western civilization in the name of reason, logic, and intellect” (Martin, 1984, pp. 197-8).

Therefore, in *Diving* Rich shows a tendency to denaturalize patriarchal hierarchy of values through transforming her poetic form and voice from “an apolitical formalist poet to that of an intensely

politicized feminist poet writing in open forms” and reflecting the suppressed conflicts within women’s lives. Thus, Rich’s rejection of the carefully crafted impersonality of her early poetry which can be traced in her first volume of poetry, as “institutionalized forms of representation [which] certify corresponding institutions of power”, is followed by an expansion of her poetic voice to include feminist issues and women’s experiences along with untraditional poetic forms for accommodating such issues which formalism cannot fully render (Strine, 1989, p. 28).

“The Primary Ground,” which is a poem in *Diving*, elucidates the argument in a perfect way. The poem deals with the stifling effects of women’s subservience to male-defined roles, which is what Rich herself did through her submissive poetic craft in her first period of writing. The poem, as an elaboration of Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, overtly reveals the effects of overpowering male egoism on submissive women in particular, Mrs. Ramsay being an enlightening example of, and “its far-ranging destructive consequences for society in general”. Besides, the looseness of the structure of verse form intrudes on the tranquility of the family dinner scene in Mrs. Ramsay’s house which is also further undercut by the persona’s rendering of the situation as “this sin of wedlock” that forces the woman to deny an essential part of her Self in conforming to her husband’s expectations (Strine, 1989, pp. 29-30). “The Primary Ground”, thus, expands Rich’s feminist criticisms which she left unsaid in the poems included in her early volumes of poetry such as the poem “An Unsaid Word.” The following lines portray an image of Mrs. Ramsay’s “twin sister”, as her wild unsubmissive side that is doomed to live in exile and that, like Brontë’s “madwoman in the attic”, is speechless (Keyes, 1986, p.146):

your wife’s twin sister, speechless
is dying in the house
You and your wife take turns
carrying up the trays,
understanding her case, trying to make her
understand (Rich, 1973, p. 39).

Rich’s emphasis on the speechlessness of the twin sister refers to one of the central themes in her new poetry. After her first volume of poetry, Rich has unlearned the speechlessness of her early poetry; therefore, in contrast to the subservient and speechless persona of her first volume, Rich not only articulates her own already suppressed and unsaid words but also, criticizing women’s complicity with patriarchy through their speechlessness, does everything in her power to transform other women’s silence into speech (Keyes, 1986, p. 147).

“The Primary Ground”, thus, condemns “repression of risks” on the side of women which is brought about by the force of patriarchy on women, in this case women like Mrs. Ramsay and her twin sister, and men’s deceptive care for women, in this case Mr. Ramsay who cares for the dying sister who functions as the representative of women’s repressed self (Templeton, 1994, p. 46). Accordingly, giving the example of Woolf’s Mr. Ramsay, Showalter (1979) notes that what women have found hard to take in such male characters is their self-deceptive care and their pretense to objectivity. The male has always dominated the female in every aspect of her life and that is the reason for which in women’s writings “the complacently precise and sympathizing male has often been the target of satire, especially when his subject is woman” (p. 24). “The Primary ground,” at the same time that questions women’s submissiveness to the male, also questions such men’s as Mr. Ramsay’s surface pretense to objectivity and innocence.

Similarly, men’s egoism and superficial pretense to objectivity is the target of Rich’s criticism in “Meditations for a Savage Child” as well. As representative of all male supporters’ self-deceptive care and pretense to objectivity, Dr. Itard’s care for the child (symbolizing women) through his male thread is severely criticized in the poem. Hence, the poem is “about the use that the male artist and thinker— in the process of creating culture as we know it— has made of women in his life and work and about a woman’s slow struggling awakening to the use to which her life has been put” (Keyes, 1986, pp. 144-5). “Meditations” draws a parallel between Dr. Itard’s efforts to civilize the savage child and those of men to control women. Therefore, the child, for his vulnerability to his scientific supporters and for his resistance to their dominating social roles, becomes a symbol representative of all kinds of victims under patriarchy: “*You have the power/in your hands and you control our lives*” (Rich, 1973, p. 62). Thus, through the image of a savage child, the poem discloses Rich’s disgust of the patriarchal system of education and childrearing. It is as if Rich, having been brought up under such an educational system by her male masters including her father who taught her to “write letters copying out [such male writers’ works as] Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*” (Valentine, 2006, p. 222) in her first period of writing, is now in her feminist period of writing portraying the use to which her life has been put in her first period of literary creation. Rich in *Diving* is trying to articulate those unsaid words, which she conservatively left unarticulated in her early volumes of poetry, through female writing.

Therefore, the real anger of the poem is targeted towards parents, as the original educators and governors, for creating scars on women's bodies. Rich in the following lines, taken from "Meditations", reflects the "self-serving foundations of patriarchal language and social values" imposed on women through patriarchal education. (Strine, 1989, p. 37) Just like the persona of "Diving into the Wreck," that is the title poem, who diving into the wreck of civilization carries such tools as language saying "[t]he words are purposes/the words are maps" (Rich, 1973, p. 23), the speaker in "Meditation" reveals the capacity of language to "inscribe, to preserve and to (mis)guide" (Smith, 2009, p. 75). Here in the case of "Meditations," the phallogocentric language, which is imposed on the speaker, misled her into speaking with an alien language and caring for alien "objects of *their* caring": (emphasis added)

In their own way, by their own lights
they tried to care for you
tried to teach you to care
for objects of their caring: [...]
to teach you names for things you did not need
[...]
to teach you language:
the thread their lives
were strung on (Rich, 1973, pp. 55-6).

It seems as if Rich here is talking to her father who, supervising her education, led her to care for the things he cared for through assigning her the books of the writers whom he "cared for" and imposing their manner of writing on her writing which suppressed the voice of the real Rich. Through using *écriture féminine*, Rich gives voice to female existence; the child's scars, which bear witness to the child's "buried pain", are symbolic of Rich's pains as a child and as an early female writer who could not openly articulate her criticisms against such governing educational system which rendered her and other female poets speechless: "when I try to speak/ my throat is cut" (Rich, 1973, p. 56). These scars, as Rich describes them a "hieroglyph for a scream" (Rich, 1973, p. 56), become a metaphor for the violence done to the wild woman poet for embedding silence in her and also for making her to use imposed forms of learning and expression which fail to adequately render her meanings and finally result in an "obliteration of her voice" and identity as a woman. (Yorke, 1997, p. 52) Besides, in the bold rebelliousness of the savage child, who does not care for the objects of the civilized people's caring, Rich finds the unruliness which she and all other women must have shown under patriarchal education. Rich, "scarred by that process of socialization and nurture" under patriarchy, now in *Diving* calls for "re-education" which is one of the

characteristic features of radical feminism (Vendle, 1993, pp. 305-10).

Rejecting her early subservient poetry which defines female in terms of the masculine norms and values communicated through patriarchal educational system, Rich in *Diving* turns to define the human in terms of the female. This is what Cixous's *écriture féminine* demands from the female writers who abandon the conservatism imposed on them by patriarchy. Women have traditionally been considered as "sociological chameleons" who have historically been allowed only to adopt lifestyle, class and culture of their male counterparts. Hence, refuting masculine culture, women in their feminine writing form a subculture, within the larger framework of a whole society, unified by common values and experiences making their way for direct self-expression. Emblematic of women's writing during this period is, therefore, the presence of fantasies of Amazon Utopias, that is, perfect female societies. Such fantasies of female utopias function as visions of a flight from male dominated world to a culture defined in opposition to male tradition (Showalter, 1977, p.159).

Such images of strong bonds within female subculture appear abundantly in Rich's poetry in her feminist period of writing. Rich not only criticizes the burden of masculine forms and tendencies on female writers but also breaks out of the patriarchal boundaries, creating a bond with other women (writers). Illustrating such tendency of Rich's, the poems of *Diving* are filled with the lives of both the oppressed and rebellious women such as Marie Curie, Elvira Shatayev, Willa Cather, Emily Dickinson, Audre Lorde, Rich's mother, her mother-in-law and her grandmothers. Such a tendency of Rich's displays her "deeply held belief in the necessity for bonding or community among women" and the necessity for building an Amazon Utopia, a no-man's land free from all oppressions (Bennett, 1990, p. 226). Through such images Rich calls "for a female bonding that will recognize the strength and diversity of women's powers" (Michailidou, 2006, p. 42).

Rich in *Diving* shows her belief in the fact that there is something to be born in women and she loves this incipience. In a poem with the same title, "Incipience," after exploring the primal and prehistoric origins of patriarchy and the ways through which this system of government imposes its power on women, Rich points to the urgency of constructing a female community in order for women to be able to express their true power, which has been suppressed under the power of patriarchy, "like Dickinson's

dormant volcano” (Templeton, 1994, p. 53). “Incipience” ends with an image of women, in companionship, as exiled survivors escaping men’s violence. In this image women appear

Up the hill
Hand in hand,
Stumbling and guiding each other
Over the scared volcanic rock (Rich, 1973, p. 12).

escaping to the imaginary, the imaginary world of Amazon Utopia of female community free from all male oppressions and open to ecriture feminine which challenges women’s inferiority imposed on women’s minds throughout history by patriarchal system of thought. She aspires for a time when women and mothers can have their own lives and can fully live their lives as their own selves. She believes that “the cathexis between mother and daughter [here represented in the images of women hand in hand seeking their freedom from the bonds of patriarchy]—essential, distorted, misused—is the great unwritten story.” Such comment on the status and relationship of women in patriarchy challenges women writers to fill the “clearing” which she has made (Randall, 2004, p. 202).

A Genuinely Female World of Ecriture Feminine in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*

Throughout the whole patriarchy, the male has been privileged in construction of meaning and modes of expression through the phallogocentric structure of language which was imposed upon female writers like Rich. According to Cixous, a fear has been internalized in women throughout patriarchal history with regard to writing of themselves since theirs is a “dark continent.” Thus, women have been drawn to use a phallogocentric discourse which is inadequate and even repressing for women to express their female experiences. The imposed phallogocentric speech pattern used by women exhibits their powerlessness and inferiority. Thus, women need to make their own language through changing the present phallogocentric language and adopting a more powerful speech pattern that allows them to express their real feeling. A woman, Cixous (1975) insists, “must write of herself and her body to break from the phallogocentric system.” Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, as mothers of poststructuralist feminist theory, consider women as trapped in their own bodies by a language that does not allow them to express themselves. Hence, they exhort to a feminine mode of writing or what Cixous terms as “écriture feminine” as the “inscription of female body and female difference in language and text” (p. 347). On the other hand, feminists like Showalter (1981)

also emphasize that a “literature which is always pulling down blinds is not literature. All that we have ought to be expressed— mind and body— a process of incredible difficulty and danger”. Women should not stop on working within the limits of male discourse and their accepted manners of writing (pp. 191-3). Female writing, Showalter (1979) asserts, cannot and should not go “forever in men’s ill-fitting hand-me-downs”. Women’s literature must free itself from the accepted male models of criticism and guide itself by its own impulses (p. 37).

Through feminine writing, female writers begin to develop a new manner of writing, insistently female, which “celebrates a new consciousness”. Through ecriture feminine women let go of the male and rather stick totally to their own female experiences and values trying to “unify the fragments of female experience through artistic vision” (Cixous, 1975, pp. 240-3). Showalter (1977), quoting Woolf who points to feminine writing, elaborates more on this attitude of female writing saying that “it is courageous; it is sincere; it keeps closely to what women feel. It is not bitter. It does not insist upon its femininity. But at the same time, a woman’s book is not written as a man would write it”. When writing about female experiences through feminine writing, women look at men as outsiders. They consider men’s writings as “sterile, egocentric, and self-deluding” and believe that the entire literary tradition, which men had a monopoly over, has misinterpreted feminine reality. Therefore, female writers try to present female reality as it really is not as it has already been presented by male literary writers and critics (pp. 240-3).

Hence, Rich in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, moving towards female aesthetics through feminine writing or ecriture feminine, turns to redefine the female. In this volume she tries to speak of women, either women of consequence or anonymous ones, as they themselves would like to be heard. The fact that she aspires to redefine Dickinson and claim for her, as a female writer’s, already trampled rights is emblematic of such a direction in Rich’s writing. Rich in her *A Wild Patience*, trying to protect Dickinson from interpretive comments by all scholars who claim to know her, sets to represent Dickinson with her own words as a female writer not as she is defined and interpreted by the male critics. Thus, in “The Spirit of Place” Rich addresses Dickinson to rescue her from all intrusions and her memory from the oversimplified and trivialized picture that the male experts have created:

with the hands of a daughter I would cover you
from all intrusion even my own
saying rest to your ghost with the hands of a
sister I would leave your hands

open or closed as they prefer to lie
 and ask no more of who or why or wherefore
 with the hands of a mother I would close the door
 on the rooms you've left behind
 and silently pick up my fallen work (Rich, 1981,
 p. 43).

Not letting the truths of women's lives, including that of Dickinson, to be obliterated again by the patriarchy, Rich calls for pure female aestheticism as it existed in the past and as it still dwells in the hearts of women not as it is presented by patriarchy.

Rich's poems in *A Wild Patience* display a call back for women's self-representation and self-creation, characteristic of *écriture féminine*. Rich notes that we must return to what has been lost in women's history, "the lost collection" (Rich, 1973, p. 14), therefore, having read the "book of myths/ in which our names do not appear" (p. 14) in *Diving* in which she finds women excluded in patriarchal myth, Rich in *A Wild Patience* turns towards nurturing a female myth in her new poetry. For this purpose she first starts with retelling historical misrepresentation of women through patriarchal media. Rich believes that the images of women delivered through history by medium of "textbooks, museum labels and cultural myths" (p. 14) are false images. That is why she asserts that women must be interpreters, participants and practitioners of their history and myth rather than being merely detached observers who fail to claim their rights. Thus, in *A Wild Patience* Rich claims authority for women, a process which involves acceptance of "incompleteness of our historical circumstance". Such a process is evidently traceable in "Turning the Wheel"; in section three of "Turning the Wheel", entitled as "Hohokam", which is named after a prehistoric tribe that mysteriously disappeared from the desert, Rich criticizes the label of the museum of Hohokam—"those who have ceased to be"—since it indirectly dismisses the existence of such a tribe, as female myth and aesthetic is totally dismissed, rather than "imagin[ing] its reality" (Rich, 1981, p. 57) Templeton (1994) notes that Rich is referring to the fact that history has "banished the Indian woman's ghost and irrevocably erased the traces of her historical reality". Therefore, subversive to the elimination of women's myth and tradition from the face of history, Rich in *A Wild Patience* recollects women's real history and myth. In this volume she tries to "demystify false images of the past and false representations of women's lives", which was brought about by male agents, and to posit female ideals as more valid than the patriarchal ideologies by displacing female myths which are prototypical rather than archetypal, that is, a

repetitious form of meaning recurring across cultures and throughout history. Thus, Rich in *A Wild Patience* brings to the fore the lost facts of women's history and myth, making a "self-made, provisional framework" (p. 93).

Hence, Rich's focus on the female is now inspired by "mythmaking". Such an attitude of Rich's in *A Wild Patience* could be traced in the sixth section of "Turning the Wheel" where Rich, having discovered the effects of colonization on the land she journeys to in this poem, turns to a goddess, a shamaness, who functions as a female artist (Keyes, 1986, p. 198):

If she appears hands ringed with rings
 you have dreamed about, if on her large fingers
 jasper and sardonyx and agate smolder
 if she is wearing shawls woven in fire and blood
 [...]
 if she sits offering her treasures by the road
 look at her closely if you dare (Rich, 1981, p. 57).

Giving a vision of a goddess, Rich tries to focus on how "Unborn sisters" will see her, and female writers like her, while developing the new female tradition. Conjecturing the appearance of the goddess in these lines, Rich asks us to acknowledge her and be brave enough to look at her in the eye and tell the unborn girls how she looks like in order to make her recognizable for them as well since she is the ancient goddess, the Great Earth Mother, the essence of the female which dwells in every woman. In other words, truthfully conceiving the shamaness, Rich "revises and revitalizes" historical and mythological concepts (Langdell, 2004, pp. 153-4).

"Turning the Wheel" displays Rich's passionate belief in the value of women's lives and art and the everlasting mystery of female principle. In this poem Rich, focusing on the "feminine mythic energy" especially in sections with even numbers, turns to "emblems of mythic feminine power" as it existed in American Southwest: the burden baskets of the "young woman's puberty dances"; the Colcha embroidery representing "our ancient art of making out of nothing"; an "apparition" of the female power; and the Grand Canyon as "the female core/ of a continent" in sections two, four, six and eight respectively. These emblems of feminine power, all put together, develop a woman-centered vision in Rich's poetry in this volume brought about by her feminine writing (Werner, 1988, p. 156).

Such images of female spaces formerly appeared in her *Diving* but at that time, though she showed her desire for such utopian societies, she doubted the

possibility of getting there. Rich (1975) herself affirms this idea when she said "I absolutely cannot imagine what it would be like to be a woman in a non patriarchal society. At moment I have this little glimmer of it. ... But it is very rare that I can imagine even that" (p. 151). But Rich's doubt and uncertainty about the possibility of creating a no-man's land turns to certainty in her feminine writing with her concentration on a woman-centered alternative to patriarchy and her public advocacy of a separatist vision in *A Wild Patience*. "Culture and Anarchy", for instance, actualizing the long-run dream of a no-man's land, ends with a celebration of a woman-centered vision taken from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's letter to Susan B. Anthony: "we are one in aim and sympathy/and we should be together" (Rich, 1981, p. 15).

Thus, Adrienne Rich's poetry "is an astonishing chronicle of how it has been for her to be alive right now, moment to moment" (Seidman, 2006, p. 229). Through her poetry, she proves that there exists the possibility of bringing about change by creating poetry that "evolves" with each new volume of her poetry "from strict formalism to angry free verse to a less confrontational, but no less urgent, optimism about the possibility of change" in women's state in patriarchy (Nichols, 2012, p. 110). Having undergone the conservative manner of writing which could be traced in her first volume of poetry and the rebellious feminist period of writing in her *Diving*, Rich now in *A Wild Patience* uses feminine writing and "turn[s] within" (Showalter, 1977, p. 240). Turning to pure female aestheticism, Rich does not merely rise against the masculine (literary) dominance as she did in her radical feminist period of writing in *Diving* rather she looks at women's texts and uses them as sources of power, as it is evident in the extract given above. Through these texts Rich creates a female utopia or a woman-identified text in *A Wild Patience* which allows women to speak as they themselves would like be heard. Such texts, which Rich symbolically refers to, are the only places where women are allowed to turn within themselves for sources of power as opposed to the oppressive male powers that has already dominated their whole lives.

CONCLUSION

Having been educated under the supervision of a male-oriented system of education, Rich starts her literary mission as a conservative formalist following masculine aesthetics in *A Change of World*. In this phase of her writing, Rich does not dare to disobey the masculine aesthetic preferences. But gradually she finds the courage to break the bonds of traditional modes of expression and to question male dominated structures in the content of some of her poems in

Diving into the Wreck. In this radical feminist volume of her poetry, Rich mounts an overt radical protest against the dominating masculine structures which suppressed female power throughout the whole history. Rich in this volume of her poetry changes to a disenchanting questioner who draws on the necessity of reinventing cultural standards in feminist terms. Finally, having been frightened by the perspective of a feminist art which, challenging the masculine forms, walks on deadly borders, Rich in her last phase of literary career in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* lets go of the male and rather turns to genuinely female aesthetics and feminine writing, calling for a purely woman-centered vision and a genuinely female art form in her poetry.

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