Adrienne Rich's Radical Feminist Poetics with Special Reference to "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law"

Neerja Nagpal
1Associate Professor Department of English Aditi Mahavidyalaya

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Abstract
One of the most exciting new voices in American poetry and essays is Adrienne Cecile Rich (1929-2012). She is an accomplished writer in many genres and styles, from polemics to literary theory to dissent poetry. Poets like Rich speak for the voiceless by articulating their anguish. While her views on American history influence her poetry, so does her ideology. She thinks the feminism-inspired community of women would mark a turning point in U.S. history. She wants everyone, regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic status, to be welcomed into the world. This paper analyses "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," a vital poem by Rich, which is a testimony of her radical feminist poetics.

Introduction
Adrienne Cecile Rich is best recognized as a radical feminist, but she also writes extensively about sexual and gender identity and politics, social justice, as well as the anti-war movement, and more. Many people consider her to be one of the most well-known and significant poets to have written in the second half of the twentieth century (Cary, 2000). They did more than shape the gender-aware American psyche; they also impacted discussions about gender worldwide. She is frequently credited with making the subjugation of women and lesbians the primary topic of discussion in lyrical discourse (Alison, 2012). In addition to being a poet of exceptional skill, she is a formidable opponent of the patriarchy because her works challenge and criticize the pervasiveness of male chauvinism in society. She has stepped forward to continue the fight against historical and contemporary forms of sexism. Her poetry is highly significant, but her political discourse makes her more than just a poet of note. A prime example of such an intervention is her poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," This paper analyzes the poem critically to gauze Rich’s radical feminist poetics.

Interconnections between Power and Politics
Adrienne Rich is an influential figure in contemporary culture, a poet of our time, and an unafraid voice. She thinks women's writers might benefit from adopting a strategy that calls for rethinking the past, rereading classic texts with a modern lens, and giving new names to familiar ideas. Female authors often saw more
clearly than their male counterparts when male authors were too enmeshed in their frameworks and patterns to examine political difficulties, social disruptions, or acts of violence from a gendered humanitarian vantage point. She endeavored to present women in a positive light in the public eye in an effort to combat the distortions caused by male writers, scholars, and male-chauvinist culture (Wendy, 1984).

Because she felt the same anxieties and shared the same sentiments as the modernists, Rich’s early works were modernist in their outlook, not dissimilar to those of W. H. Auden. In the 1960s, however, Rich displayed much greater maturity in dealing with politics, reflecting her belief that a writer without a commitment to the cause of bettering society does not have much coinage. So, Rich made a radical shift from her earlier poems’ introspective musings and formalistic style to an intense political consciousness, which is particularly apparent in poems like “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law” (1963). A Change of World (1951) and The Diamond Cutters and Other Poems (1955) maintained a similar introspective tone and shared common themes with other major 20th-century poets like W.H. Auden. However, starting in the 1960s, Adrienne Rich’s poetry shifted from the formalist style she had previously employed to one that reflected more introspective musings (hence, the title of her most recent collection, published in 2006). Her radical free-verse style and the feminism and politics she discussed in her writings about women increased in tandem with the development of her political consciousness.

Her poetry and social activism developed and matured during this time, as evidenced by such works as Necessities of Life (1966), Leaflets (1969), and Will to Change (1971). She was honored with the National Book Award for her collection diving Into the Wreck in 1974.

Rich herself turned down the award, but poets Alice Walker and Audre Lorde accepted it on their behalf. Rich’s controversial yet ground-breaking feminism came to a head with the publication of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution in 1976. She came out as a lesbian shortly after that.

Rich’s work was published under the pen name Adrienne Rich. (Dinah 2009). She has strong beliefs in feminism, anti-war activism, and equal rights. Such worries are often reflected in her poetry. Poet, literary critic, and activist Adrienne Cecile Rich is a pioneer of "poetry of witness and dissent," which empowers the voiceless by telling their stories, as described by Nina (1998). Those who heard her speak now view her with suspicion. Many of Rich’s poems focus on exploring her sense of self, delving into themes like her Jewish heritage, mythology, the history of women’s rights, homosexuality, and the politics of oppression.

“Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law”

“Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law” is an overtly feminist poem that is a testament to Rich’s Feminism. Allusions to the poet’s real-life daughter-in-law abound throughout the poems, she expressed her dissatisfaction with a culture that stifled her freedom of choice. From a young age, society teaches girls that to make their husbands happy, they must focus on improving their social skills, caregiving abilities, and physical appearance. They are also taught to become objects rather than subjects of desire. Moreover, when a woman becomes aware of this, she must face her disappointment, rage, and worry.

In it, she poetically proclaims her desire to resist and rebel as a woman and a writer. She talks about how women felt when their abilities and opinions were disregarded. More precisely, it depicts a woman in the 1960s or 1970s, when women became increasingly aware of the negative responses and expectations placed on them by a traditionally male-dominated culture and society. The poem’s narrator calls herself a daughter-in-law who has no sense of who she is or what she deserves and cares only about other people and institutions. Unsurprisingly, her aggressive behavior is rooted in her frustration and anxiety. The poem’s central theme centers on the speaker’s frustration, guilt, and suppressed anger. In addition, it helps remedy the age-old issue of male chauvinism, in which men suppress women by denying them the opportunity to develop interests and abilities outside the home.

From the title, you can get a feel for the poem’s structure, which is divided into ten sections. Snapshots suggest hurriedly taken pictures of loved ones in natural settings. They do not have the expert sheen of a studio shoot or a professional photographer. A daughter-in-law piques our interest because of the intriguing sound of the name. The generational divide is represented by the links between the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law, established through the interactions between Rich’s male characters, the son and the husband. Rich demonstrates the extent to which men exerted their influence on the lives of women-female slaves and even on their relationships with one another.

In the poem’s first lines, we see the daughter-in-law undergoing a dramatic change. Her in-laws’ mother has made her life so difficult and meaningless that she has rejected her. Her mother-in-law is a hindrance to her success and happiness in her eyes. The daughter-in-law
Rich uses a metaphor, drawing parallels between the mold and a wedding cake. The lovely lady is losing her wits faster than a stale wedding cake. The analogy emphasizes how quickly a woman’s thoughts can decay, just like a piece of cake. The heavy and rich adjectives carry on the metaphor. Just like a piece of wedding cake can fill you up, the rumors and suspicions plaguing this woman’s mind are thick and substantial. Since she “still has her dresses copied from that time” and is “crumbling to pieces under the knife-edge of mere fact,” it is clear that Rich’s fictitious mother-in-law has neither the means nor the will to leave her mundane existence. The ties that keep her tied to mundane housework are not lost on her daughter-in-law (such as “wiping the teaspoons”). The angels have warned her to “save herself” by growing up and separating herself from her mother-in-law.

Rich draws parallels between the situations that men and women are expected to live under and compares the two to slavery in the second stanza by using metaphors from home. Written by Adrienne Rich and first released in 1993. In her mind, “probably angels” are telling the woman to save herself because she cannot save anyone else and to be impatient and insatiable in her pursuit of happiness. She is only vaguely aware that she has burned herself with hot water from the tap, a lit match, or a boiling kettle, as the angels of the home have told her. On the other hand, the angels tell her that nothing else will hurt her anymore because she has endured so much sorrow and suffering in her life.

In the third section, Rich brings back a heated discussion about the attributes of females. In her opinion, females are the weaker gender. A “thinking woman,” as Rich puts it, “sleeps with monsters” when she does not feel safe. In different interpretations, the poem raises questions about life after death. “the beak that grips her” alludes to the fact that women often entrap themselves out of fear. Therefore, men have set up the social constraints that define women’s roles. In order to emphasize his conformity, the author repeatedly refers to Nature’s “streamer-trunk of temporal and mores” (times and customs). Female symbols like flowers and “female pills” obscure the “terrible breasts of Boadicea,” which represent women’s absolute power and strength (menstruation pills). Men and women are more likely to fight each other than the real enemy.

Rich, an Emily Dickinson admirer, uses the fourth stanza to speculate about the poet’s background. The American poetess lived in isolation in Amherst, Massachusetts, for the duration of her nineteenth-century career. Rich asserts that despite her intelligence, Dickinson was destined to do housework like every other woman. Even though she was brilliant (the first line of one of her poems is “My Life has stood a loaded gun”), she spent most of her time in the company of dusters, irons, and boiling jellies.

In the fifth chapter, the woman shaves her legs in an effort to conform to the patriarchal image of the meek, cheerful, and tranquil woman. She does this so as not to harm the feelings of the men. While shaving her legs, she noticed that they had a lustrous sheen, much like the tusks of a mammoth that had since become extinct. In other words, she sees that trying to fit into male stereotypes of women is a futile exercise in conformity that belittles her uniqueness.

In the sixth section, Rich makes the case that women are always second to men, the “superior” creations of nature, whom they are meant to love and serve (and perhaps keep the family finances in order). Nature is portrayed as a mother with grown sons; all women are their wives instead of daughters. Corinna lies and says she does not have any male-oriented songs because she is embarrassed by her singing abilities. Rich, however, expresses regret that Corinna gives in to patriarchal psyche beauty standards. Rich uses this symbol to suggest that women have always been seen as subordinate to men in a patriarchal society and that this subordination has been seen as natural rather than learned. Rich, ever the cynic, rejects these patriarchal myths and casts doubt on the supposed superiority of men in the modern world.

In the seventh section, Rich discusses women’s difficulties when attempting to contribute positively to society despite negative stereotypes. Women’s contributions to society are discounted because they do not conform to patriarchal expectations that they should remain home to care for their husbands and children. Mary Wollstonecraft is one of the earliest feminists who has been the target of men’s sexism because of her intelligence and ambition. Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley’s mother, refused to let people distort and minimize her achievements because she was a woman, breaking serial conventions that undervalued women’s intelligence. Despite “fight with what she partly understood,” such as social norms that discouraged women from pursuing higher education, she wrote *Frankenstein* and accomplished much. Unfortunately, her accomplishments brought on the jealousy and scorn of male peers. In Greek and Roman mythology, a “harpy” is a vicious creature that has a woman’s head and body but the wings and feet of a bird. One common greedy
metaphor is the harpy, a symbol of a woman's cruel nature. If a woman is argumentative, picky, or has a short fuse, she may be called a shrew, which is a pejorative term.

According to Rich, who quotes Diderot (1759) as saying, "You all die at 15", women's dreams and sense of identity "die" at the age of fifteen. As a result, they start to believe the urban legends that have grown up around them and lose touch with reality. They can do nothing to change their current situation. Moreover, all they want is for the status quo to change. There is regret for "all that we might have been" if given a chance. Their "fire, tears, wit, taste, martyred ambition" remains alive even as their middle-aged chest sags.

Rich suggests in the ninth stanza that some female readers have come to terms with the limited opportunities and stereotypical roles that patriarchy has assigned them. They have never set ambitious goals for themselves, instead settling for "mere talent." She explains in her talk how women have been influenced by flattery to accept low achievement standards. They were flattered, so they did not use the opportunity to make significant progress. Only a few brave women opted to work alongside men in potentially dangerous occupations. She says that because of misogyny in the workplace, there are "few aspirants" for the "honor" of becoming a martyr or enabling her work to be martyred.

The last lines in the poem take a more upbeat tone, with Rich predicting that modern women will be "more merciless to herself than history" or highly critical of their actions. The new woman, she says, will be more desirable than any boy or helicopter. This indicates that the female will exhibit some of the more masculine and mechanical traits. That is to say, she will have to change both her sex and her humanity. In addition, it suggests that women should reject the notion that "time is male" and instead portrays a robust and self-assured individual who no longer "sleeps with monsters." Rich's confident prediction of a future that is "delivered, palpable, ours." leaves the listener with a crystal clear understanding of his anticipation of a society where women are no longer oppressed.

Accordingly, Rich's "Snapshots" is broken into ten sections, each of which varies considerably in the number of lines and stanzas typically found in poetry. Each paragraph contains a literary reference or quotation. Rich can engage his mother-in-law and sister-in-law in the profound philosophical discussion by bringing up the references as a springboard. Her tone toward the woman who shares responsibility for her denial of life is more direct, hurtful, and bitter, with a dash of sympathy and outrage.

Rich's Contribution to the Consolidation of Feminism

In every section of the poem, Rich's words ring true: more and more women are working outside the home, some dress like men, and many reject the traditional gender roles that society has assigned them. They function similarly to a helicopter because they are airborne, can rapidly expand their territory, and make do with relatively few machines. Rich argues that women should not limit themselves to the role of caretaker (domestic instincts) but should instead explore other avenues of potential contribution to society. Equality between the sexes and the advancement of women's rights cannot be achieved without a break of this kind. For women everywhere, her shipment will symbolize progress toward full equality. The air "wince(ing)" from the impact of the new woman's pen is a vivid metaphor for recognizing the new woman's skill through the natural world, the ocean, and the wind. In order to convey her outrage and her desire to convince her listeners of the importance of starting a movement for equality on behalf of women whose lives have been marginalized by male-dominated norms, she pauses the reading frequently and for extended periods.

In Rich's "Snapshots," the listener is given a glimpse into the lives of several different women, with a common thread focusing on men's ability to suppress women on many levels (physically, intellectually, and emotionally). The speaker is seen in a series of photographs smashing the coffee pot against the sink and discreetly reading a few pages of a book while waiting for the iron to heat up or while the jellies boil and scum. Because it was the first time Rich had ever written openly about feminism, the act of creating this poem proved to be very therapeutic for her. In conclusion, the poem should be given considerable attention as a candidate for the role of an essential literary work in both the international and domestic feminist movements. In the words of Michael Klein (1999), Rich's poetry had developed into the fiercely political force for moral good that it is today as a result of its emphasis on women's and lesbians' rights.

**Works Cited**

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