

Abstract

The purpose of my thesis is to explore lesbianism in Adrienne Rich's essays and poetry. Rich has earned her reputation as a major American poet and essayist since the 1950s. Most attention has been paid to her extraordinary poems and revolutionary prose. However, the issue of lesbianism has seldom been focused on or fully discussed. Therefore, I would try to present a panoramic view on how lesbianism has been developed in Rich's works. In the first chapter, I have tried to delineate various definitions of "lesbian", and formulate my own definition. Besides that, I have also introduced some theoretical perspectives of lesbianism. In the second chapter, the discussion is mainly on Rich's concepts— "institutionalization of heterosexuality", "lesbian existence" and "lesbian continuum"—which were brought up in the essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." In the third chapter, my aim is to delineate the development of Rich's lesbian perspective in her poetry. The discussion consists of three parts: the first part covers the revelation of women's oppression; the second is stressed on the concept of androgyny; the last part will present Rich's idea that women's power should be based on close relations among women.

論文名稱：安筑恩 瑞奇詩與散文中的女同志主義

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論文摘要：

本論文旨在探討安筑恩 瑞奇的詩與散文中所展現的女同志主義。自 50 年代起，瑞奇即以美國主要的詩人與散文作家享有盛譽。最受到注意的莫過於她精采絕倫的詩作與富有革新精神的散文。然而，當中卻鮮少有人針對女同志主義提出全面性的討論。因此，筆者試圖在本論文中呈現瑞奇作品中的女同志主義。第一章，筆者首先引證多家對“女同志”之定義，再為“女同志”做出定義。此外，本章將簡介各個不同理論觀點對女同志主義所做過的研究與討論。第二章，討論著重於瑞奇在“強迫性異性戀與女同志存在”一文中所提出的主要觀念：「異性戀的制度化」，「女同志存在」，和「女同志連續體」。第三章，筆者將呈現女同志主義觀點在瑞奇詩中的發展。討論將分成三部份：一是關於女性受壓迫事實的揭露；二是強調「雌雄同體」觀念的討論；最後是展現瑞奇的概念—女性力量應奠基於女性親密關係。

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Introduction

The poetry and feminist essays of Adrienne Rich (b.1929) have won her literary fame. I perceive that lesbianism is an important issue presented both in her poetry and essays. Most critics put more emphasis on feminism than on lesbianism in Rich's works¹. For instance, Albert Gelpi in her essay "Adrienne Rich: The Poetics of Change" has paid more attention on Rich's development of feminism (ARPP 282-99); the feminist critic Judith McDaniel explores Rich's changing visions with a feminist point of view in "Reconstituting the World" (Reading Adrienne Rich 3-29). Only several critics like Judy Grahn in The Highest Apple: Sappho and The Lesbian Poetic Tradition discuss Rich's essays or poetry with a viewpoint of lesbianism.

If we want to fully understand Rich's lesbianism, it is necessary to read the poetry and essays that are composed before she raises her theory in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" which was published in 1980. My thesis consists of three chapters that I will give

¹ Feminist studies on Rich's works include: Jane Roberta Cooper, ed., Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Re-Visions, 1951-81 (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1984); Claire Keyes, The Aesthetics of Power: The Poetry of Adrienne Rich (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1986); Jean Perreault, Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995); Alice Templeton, The Dream and the Dialogue: Adrienne Rich's Feminist Poetics (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1994), and others.

brief summaries in the introduction. Before that, I will introduce some significant facts in the development of Rich's lesbian perspective.

According to Claire Keyes, it will be disappointing for those readers who look for "the feminist visionary of her later poems" in the early poems of Adrienne Rich, since those visions were still tiny "seeds" shaded by the dominant form of "mainstream patriarchal values" (15-16).

Those patriarchal values can be perceived in W. H. Auden's praise of Rich's "modesty" for her first volume A Change of World (1951).

Rich's poems are considered "modest" mainly because of the revelation of "their family tree" which specifically speaking, is the poetic tradition established by celebrated men poets. Her early poems have been extolled for their skillful imitation of the "neat" and "modest" forms of some male poets like Robert Frost and W. B. Yeats. In addition, the emotions motivating the poems are also considered praiseworthy because, in Auden's words, they "are not peculiar to Miss Rich but are among the typical experiences of our time" (ARPP278-9). Keyes suggests that Auden includes Rich in a circle of men poets without regards to her being a woman (16). In other words, there is no ostensible attempt to voice out the particular sound of a woman poet in Rich's early poems.

Even though Rich does not exhibit aggressive feminist perspectives at the beginning, we can still find in these early poems that women artists encounter struggles that rise from the conflicts between their inner desires and the outward restraint from the artistic society that is hosted by a majority of male writers.

In the fifties and early sixties described by Rich herself as “years of rapid revelations”, probably stimulated by the atmosphere of uncertainty, Rich began to think about “pacifism and dissent and violence, about poetry and society” and her relationship to all these things. In the late fifties when her third child was born and she was barely able to write, Rich was frightened by a “sense of drift” or so called “destiny” in which she felt losing contact with the girl “who had experienced her own will and energy almost ecstatically at times” (ARPP 173). At that time, her poems were “jotted in fragments during children’s naps, brief hours in a library, or at 3:00 A.M. after rising with a wakeful child” (175). Under such despairing conditions was produced the volume Snapshots of a Daughter-in Law (1963) which can be regarded as her first feminist work. Composing the poem “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law”, as Rich admits, is a great relief to her because she no longer follows the

conventional poetics of universalism but returns to use the pronoun “I” as well as to identify herself as a female poet (ARPP 175). Since then Rich begins to undergo an exploration of her identity as a woman and as a non-traditional female poet. The process culminates in the volume Diving into the Wreck (1973) where the idea of women’s power is gradually shaped. Then comes The Dream of a Common Language (1978) in which the concept of women’s power becomes mature as Rich identifies it as a communal power lying in women’s daily relationship. Simultaneously, Rich advocates to re-establish a women’s civilization and female poetics by unraveling the original bond between women, by envisioning women’s love for women. Rich seldom labels her own poetry as lesbian, but in many ways, her poetic writings reflect her theoretical concepts of “lesbian existence” and “lesbian continuum” (BBP 51) which mean any compulsory way of life should be rejected, the taboo of women’s mutual love should be broken, the history of women-identified experiences should be excavated, and the meaning of lesbianism should be created and expanded to involve any form of women’s intimacies.

In the first chapter “Definition of ‘lesbian’ and Theoretical

Perspectives on Lesbianism”, the aim is to establish my definition of “lesbian” and to offer a broad view on lesbian studies that have been taken with varieties of theoretical perspectives. At first, I look up the word “lesbian” or “lesbianism” in the dictionaries but find that in most entries, “lesbian” or “lesbianism” is defined exclusively in relation to women’s sexuality. Then I read Ann Ferguson’s discussion on defining “lesbian” which offers some explicit directions to set up my definition of “lesbian”. In her essay “Patriarchy, Sexual Identity, and the Sexual Revolution” published in 1981, Ann Ferguson discusses some acknowledged definitions like that given by Blanche Weisen Cook² in 1977, and points out two problems that are commonly detected in most definitions of “lesbian.” I think Ferguson’s ideas about giving a specific definition are practical and useful. So according to her suggestions, I try to develop my definition that will be applied to the word “lesbian” in the following discussion.

Before discussing lesbianism in Rich’s works, it is necessary to have some background knowledge about lesbianism by looking at how lesbianism has been studied in different theoretical dimensions, such as

² The definition of Blanche W. Cook is quoted in Chapter I.

biology, psychoanalysis, sociology, feminism and literature. Since my discussion will concentrate on Rich's writings before and around the 1980s, I intend to take a brief look at other theories that can present a historical view on the development of lesbianism from the beginning of the 20th century to the 1980s and that might bear impact on the development of Rich's ideology. This intention explains why some theories like the queer theory or the butch-femme aesthetic are not covered in the following discussions even though they are closely associated with lesbianism and prosper in the 1990s. In the biological and psychoanalysis fields, biological determinism of Havelock Ellis and the phallo-centric concept of Sigmund Freud on lesbianism will be discussed and the two points of view will be compared; Tamsin Wilton's discussion will present a full view of lesbianism in sociology; I will also take a close look at the complicated development of lesbianism in feminism, and viewpoints of feminists like Ann Koedt and of Radicalesbians will be discussed; as to lesbian literature, I will include Bonnie Zimmerman's propositions about identifying lesbian writings and her discussion on lesbian writing styles, and Judy Grahn's observation on the history of lesbian poetics.

In the second chapter “Lesbianism in Adrienne Rich’s Political Essays”, I will talk about the three main concepts— “institutionalization of heterosexuality”, “lesbian existence” and “lesbian continuum”— which have been explicated in Adrienne Rich’s essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” In reference to heterosexuality, Rich suggests that it be recognized as part of patriarchal institution rather than simply as a sexual choice because it has overwhelmingly manipulated women’s ideology about their sexual subjectivity and their relations with other women. In order to defy heterosexual oppression, women are advised by Rich to identify women’s love for women and to employ the lesbian-feminist view on women’s situation and relationship. Rich replaces the word “lesbianism” with two new terms—“lesbian existence” and “lesbian continuum”—to get rid of the derogative perceptions of lesbians that were considered abnormal, or psychologically immature or limited to sexuality, and to politicize lesbianism with feminism to develop a more extensive view on women’s history and power. Then I will adopt negative opinions of theories like Ann Ferguson and positive views of Jacquelyn N. Zita with my suppositions in the discussion.

In the third chapter “Lesbianism in Adrienne Rich’s Poetry”, my discussion on lesbianism in Rich’s poetry will be divided into three parts and the poetry that I want to talk about will include those written before 1980³. In the first part, I am going to explore how Rich unravels the oppression in housewives’ stifling lives, the acute anxiety of female artists to voice her own ideas, and the unspeakable love of lesbian women. I will also present how Rich offers some criticisms and expresses her anger. In the second part, I will observe how Rich takes up a retrospective way to explore the concept of androgyny and relate it to her integrity of being a poet and her poetic viewpoint. In the third part, my discussion will focus on Rich’s claim of women’s communal power which is mainly presented in her volume The Dream of a Common Language. I will try to inspect the notion of women’s power that Rich suggests to uncover in women’s daily relationship, such as lesbian lovers, siblings, and daughter and mother. Moreover, in the discussion of chapter III, opinions of some critics on Rich’s poetry, such as Judith McDaniel, Susan Stanford Friedman, Albert Gelpi, Jane Vanderbosch and so on, will be included.

3. The reason why I choose the poetry before 1980 will be discussed in Chapter III.

In this thesis, my aim is to try to present a sectional view on the development of lesbianism in Rich's poetry and essays by explicating her lesbian vision that is so innovative and distinguished as to renew the concept of lesbianism.

Chapter I

Definition of “Lesbian” and Theoretical Perspectives on Lesbianism

Before we proceed to discuss lesbianism in Rich’s works, the word “lesbianism” and the noun “lesbian” should be defined first.

According to The Oxford English Dictionary, lesbianism means “female homosexuality”; in Random House Webster’s College Dictionary, lesbianism is defined as “homosexual relation between females”. As we can see in these definitions, lesbianism is simply related to sexual relations between women. However, lesbianism should cover more than that. Concerning the definition of “lesbian,” Ann Ferguson in the essay “Patriarchy, Sexual Identity, and the Sexual Revolution” provides an insightful and critical overview on Adrienne Rich’s concept of lesbian identity and also, with discussions on two problems usually detected in the definitions of lesbian. Ferguson’s opinions about Adrienne Rich’s concept of lesbian identity will be studied in the next chapter which will focus on Rich’s lesbian-feminist politics. Ferguson’s discussions on the biases about lesbianism help me give the term “lesbian” a specific definition that will facilitate in the following chapters. To find out an appropriate definition of lesbian is the main goal in the first part of this

chapter. The second part will offer a broader view on the discussions about lesbianism in various domains.

Ferguson criticizes two problems that are frequently perceived in the definition of the term “lesbian”: one is the extreme attitude emphasizing only the aspect of sexuality and the other is the ignorance of historical conditions. Take the definitions in dictionaries of the words mentioned above for example. It is obvious that they simplify lesbianism as sexuality between females. According to Ferguson, sexual practices are not an indisputable criterion for identity definition, because the definition of homosexual identity varies in different cultures and historical periods. For instance, given that lesbianism is referred to a woman’s exclusive sexual relation with another woman, such strict definition severely dividing lesbians and bisexuals fails to cover “many commonly accepted historical situations involving homosexual practices, for example, those of Greece and Lesbos, . . . ” (162). In other words, under that historical circumstance, it is not conflicting for the aristocrat to have homosexual love relations as well as a heterosexual marriage. Another definitional example raised by Blanche W. Cook is also criticized for being ahistorical:

‘ . . . a woman who loves women, who chooses women to nurture and support and to create a living environment in which to work creatively and independently,’ whether or not her relations with these women are sexual. (Ferguson 163)

Ferguson points out two ahistorical problems in this definition: one is its elimination of all the women who are sexually attracted to women but working with men, like Virginia Woolf in the Bloomsbury group. In some historical periods, there are no ostensible groups or oppositional cultures of women, but as Ferguson suggests, women who can show their ability to challenge the sexual division of labor by performing as well as men “are just as important for questioning the patriarchal ideology of inevitable sex roles, . . .”(163). The other problem is its ignorance of “the important sense in which the sexual revolution of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a positive advance for women”(164). In contrast with other definitions overemphasizing the trait of lesbian sexuality, Cook’s definition tends to upheave women’s emotional commitment but to downplay the sexual component. However, as for Ferguson, the potentiality of sexual relationship between women cannot be neglected because it challenges the ideology of heterosexuality

in which women are thought dependent on men for sexual love and fulfillment (164).

In Ferguson's critique about other's definitions of "lesbian", it is crystal-clear that the notion about sexuality cannot be overlooked but it is not supposed to be exclusively focused on, either. Besides the problem of the role of sexuality, as Ferguson suggests, most definitions fail to be historical because "they all implicitly assume some universal way to define lesbianism across cultures, classes, and races " (165).

Furthermore, Ferguson offers a new definition:

Lesbian is a woman who has sexual and erotic-emotional ties primarily with women or who sees herself as centrally involved with a community of self-identified lesbians whose sexual and erotic emotional ties are primarily with women; and who is herself a self-identified lesbian. (166)

This sociopolitical definition expresses Ferguson's main concerns that lesbians should be identified not only by themselves but also by the lesbian community, and lesbian relation should be established both physically and emotionally. Ferguson acclaims that this definition is meant to be specifically contemporary, particularly correspondent to the second wave of the women's movement when self-identified lesbian

community came in existence and self-identified lesbian bisexuals were included in it. I agree with Ferguson that the background and the process where those definitions are formed should be taken into consideration, in order to set up a more comprehensive and precise definition. In the following discussion, I am going to adopt a definition that is to be applied to lesbians in American culture and literature since the beginning of 20th century to the second wave of the women's movement which starts in the 1970s. However, I would not regard the community identity as an important criterion since there must be some lesbians who would not like to get involved in any group or do not choose to participate in any social lesbian movement. My definition is that a lesbian is a woman who shows sexual and emotional preference to women or who identifies her potentiality of erotic love for and emotional bond with women, under the influence of lesbianism. In this definition, I put stress on both women's sexual and emotional commitment to women and "preference" here indicates being self-consciously more attracted to women than to men, whether having an exclusively sexual relation with women or not. On the other hand, I would also want to include those women who used to be heterosexual or bisexual but whose erotic desire and emotional

attachment toward women are gradually evoked and unraveled by the political and social issue of lesbianism.

That the lesbians become invisible socially, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, results from the intimidation of the heterosexual world. Adrienne Rich in her short prose “Invisibility in Academe” reminds lesbians as well as other suppressed groups of the danger of invisibility. That lesbians are expected to be invisible does not simply mean that in order to survive in the heterosexually constructed world, lesbians cannot help but conceal their private lives. In this case, what really matters is the patriarchal inference to stop lesbians “integrating love and work and feelings and ideas, with the empowerment that that can bring” (Rich 200). In other words, robbed of the chance to know what achievements can be made, lesbians are forbidden to become integrated individuals or to share with each other more fulfilled lives. Furthermore, Rich maintains that this deprivation is very likely to be undertaken by all the women. In the society that is manipulated by heterosexual ideology, women hardly have a fair opportunity to acquaint women who love women spiritually and sexually. Ignorant about lesbians, women cannot map out a panorama of human history, and are unable to see clearly how

social relations are formed (Rich, "Invisibility in Academe" 201). In this case, I agree with Rich that it is not singly the responsibility of the researchers on lesbian studies to make lesbians known to the public but the privilege of all the women to have an unconditioned knowledge of the existence of lesbians.

Following the steps of Women's liberation movement and gay's liberation movement, lesbian studies have gradually been developed in diverse fields. Paulina Palmer in Contemporary Lesbian Writing: Dreams, desire, difference examines the development of theoretical perspectives of lesbianism in the past two decades. The developing process is divided into two periods according to their different approaches: the first stage of lesbian studies is from the 1970s to the early 1980s, in which lesbian feminist identity and community, and the challenges to patriarchal power are emphasized; the second is mainly during the 1980s and 1990s, when different sexual identifications and practices are highlighted, with more and more attention paid to sexuality and psycho-analysis. I intend to acquire a broader view on how the theoretical perspectives of lesbianism have developed; therefore, I will examine the related arguments in scientific, academic fields such as, in

biological and psychoanalytic studies and sociological researches, then discuss the complicated relation between feminism and lesbianism, and at last review the lesbian influence on contemporary literature.

In What Is She Like?, Rosa Ainley points out that the definition of lesbianism today doesn't go much further than the one which, almost a century ago, emphasized lesbian sexual desire in terms of pathological deviation. For example, Havelock Ellis holds a stereotyped idea that lesbians are masculine and believes that homosexuality is congenital. Though he stresses the ordinariness of homosexuality, paradoxically homosexual behavior is still considered deviant. Modern biomedical accounts on homosexuality follow the logic of biological determinism that lesbian sexual desire is caused from some biochemical processes (Wilton 77). Though in this approach lesbian sexual desire seems scientifically justified; however, as Tamsin Wilton suggests, the biomedical account of lesbian sexuality is still "limited by unquestioned allegiance to a heterosexual norm and by an intellectually stifling androcentrism" (76). This bias in heterosexual culture is held by psychoanalysts, too. Contrary to Ellis' biological determinism and other biomedical essentialism, Freud's theories put more emphasis on "the

influences of environmental difference that could lead to changes in sexual roles and behavior” (Ainley 16). The proposition of Freudian psychoanalysis emphasizes that sexual identity is not completely inherent or innate but is mostly formed from the childhood experiences and fantasies in the family. As to homosexuality, Freud does not regard it as illness but thinks “all human beings” are “basically bisexual” (Wilton 70). The way Freud criticizes both homosexuality and heterosexuality on the equal basis is potentially to “disrupt the stubborn binaries of sexual categorization in western thought” (Wilton 71). Nevertheless, Freud still constructs the gender binaries on “the primacy of the penis, a heteropatriarchal phallacy which renders female sexual subjectivity and agency peculiarly inconceivable” (Wilton 72). Havelock Ellis stresses that lesbians are congenitally deviant while Freud affirms environmental effect on sexual identities.

According to Tamsin Wilton’s discussion on lesbianism and sociology, earliest sociological research simply traces back to some studies of sexologists like Kinsey in the 1950s. Earlier sociological research on lesbianism mostly associates homosexuality with crimes (Wilton 167). Critically speaking, lesbians have been oppressed as both

women and homosexuals in the field of sociology until the early challenges from the feminists in the 1970s. With the growing interest in the question of sexuality, sociologists begin to develop “the anti-essentialist model of sexual identity” and ‘Sexualities in Social Context’ is chosen as the theme of the British Sociological Association annual conference in 1994. However, the disadvantageous position of women within the academic world and the stigma of homosexuality continue to police and limit research activities on lesbians (Wilton 165).

Within the mainstream of sociology, lesbianism remains ignored in the restricted studies of heterosexual researchers. Nevertheless, lesbians attempt to explore more ways to include lesbianism into sociological discussion. For example, in 1959 the earliest social-scientific survey was conducted by the San Francisco branch of first lesbian social/political group, the Daughters of Bilitus (DOB); in the 1970s and 1980s lesbian sociological writings were nearly autobiographical and started the discussions about “heterosexism, the legal position of lesbians, the relationship between sex and gender, the development of theories of lesbianism in psychology/ sexology/ biology, etc.” (Wilton 171); later the focus shifts to the desire of lesbians “to

develop and disseminate accounts of lesbianism to further the social, political and psychological needs of a lesbian community” (Wilton 174).

Why should sociology include lesbian sociological praxis? If sociologists no longer assume the stance of exclusive heterosexuality or deny any surmise of lesbian existence in any social context, they may bring forth “a praxis which is more entire, more finely tuned and more alert to the specifics of power” (Wilton 176). Furthermore, Wilton suggests that the nature of lesbian identity should be understood as something constructed and contingent. By observing the development of lesbianism in sociology, we may find that lesbianism is proceeding in a constructive way from being diagnosed as sexually perverse, through being marked as a marginal group and now gradually to being reconstructed as another sexual category. However, Wilton reminds that in order to legitimize the consistency of a lesbian sociology, lesbians should be appropriated in a strategic rather than ontological way (177).

Wilton concludes the discussion about “The social-lesbianism” by stating that sociology, as neglecting the existence of social lives of lesbian, fails to develop a full-scale observation; lesbians are continually confined because they are deprived of knowledge about themselves, their

social lives and how to solve the problems of living in the heterosexual world. That's why lesbian sociology plays an indispensable role in not only enriching the lives of lesbians but also "filling in the gaps in our social knowledge" (180). According to Wilton's discussion on lesbian sociology, feminism sets up "the epistemological ground work" for a "more finely-tuned lesbian sociology", and it also brings overwhelming influence on lesbian scholars and made lesbian discussion more sophisticated (172, 175). However, it doesn't indicate that feminist approaches should unconditionally apply to all the issues of lesbianism. In the following paragraphs, I am going to take a look at how lesbianism was involved in the development of feminism from 1960s to 80s.

The liberal feminism proposes that an individual woman's problem should be politicized into women's, otherwise women can never coalesce into a force to oppose the male dominance. To make an even more overwhelming and aggressive strike, it is suggested that lesbianism should be embraced into feminism. According to the Radicalesbians⁴ in

⁴ Radicalesbians is a New York lesbian-feminist group that was founded in 1970 and mainly led by Rita Mae Brown and Cynthia Funk (Echols 213-7). They exploded the issue of lesbianism in the second annual Conference to Unite Women on May 1, 1970. Their manifesto "The Woman-Identified Woman" started up the questioning to heterosexuality among feminists and became a classic work of lesbian-feminism (Katz 140-5).

“The woman Identified Woman,” “A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion” (240), in which saying, a lesbians’ sufferings are compared to be the ultimateness of women’s distress. This comparison further indicates that lesbians experience more conflicts against patriarchal oppressions than heterosexual women, because lesbians are doublely oppressed for being both women and homosexual. Besides that, lesbianism is also silenced in feminist movements. Paula C. Rust indicates that in the early era of the second wave of feminist movement, “nonfeminists used the charge of lesbianism to intimidate feminists and would-be-feminists”, so lesbianism is kept hidden for fear of distaining feminism. Moreover, lesbianism is labeled as “lavender herring” in contrast to the real focus of feminism with which heterosexual women are concerned (124). Here one cannot help but ask why and how lesbians would bring a harmful effect on feminist movement. I think in this stage, lesbians are definitely oppressed by the feminist movement.

Redstockings⁵, the radical feminist group, recognize that women

⁵ Redstockings was founded in New York by Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis in February 1969 but only functioned till the fall of 1970. Influenced by the left, Redstockings appropriated the Marxist methodology to construct a theory of women’s oppression (Echols 139-58, 388).

are sexually oppressed, but they do not intend to overturn the heterosexual system that promotes this oppression. On the other hand, they claim “heterosexuality could be deployed on women’s behalf” (Echols 147). Founded by Roxanne Dunbar, another group Cell 16⁶ initially claims that the oppression of women results from their reliance on men so women should solve this problem “by taking off the accumulated emotional and physical flab that kept them enthralled to men” (160). After the departure of Dunbar in early 1970, Cell 16 turns from constructionism to essentialism by maintaining “that the origins of men’s hypersexuality and women’s hyposexuality were hormonal” (163). Though Cell 16 is the first to speak for women’s withdrawal from men, the group never advances lesbianism because in their eyes, homosexuality, like heterosexuality, attaches too much to sexuality and in addition, lesbianism is too personal to be available for all the women (164-65). Ti-Grace Atkinson, representing The Feminists⁷--a New York

⁶ Cell 16 was formed by Roxanne Dunbar in Boston in the summer of 1968 and dissolved in 1973. Characteristic of its guerrilla style, Cell 16 was probably the first group to propose that women should separate from men personally as well as politically (Echols 158-66, 387).

⁷ The Feminists was formed by Ti-Grace Atkinson in New York in October 1968. It is the first of many feminist groups to interpret “the personal is the political” prescriptively. The Feminists set up rules to regulate what a feminist should act like and how a woman can avoid oppression by shedding their sexual roles. However, restrictive rules only make the group more confining. It continues to function until late 1973

radical-feminist group, suggests that women's oppression is the result of their internalizing the patriarchal ideology which teaches women how to act like a male-defined woman. Therefore, she contends that women have to eradicate the socio-constructive definition upon women and go further to establish a new standard of what women should be like (171). Still The Feminists contend that the importance of sexual pleasure is propagandized as well as affected by male thinking. Hence they would not just ask women to get rid of heterosexual restrictions but encourage women to get away from sexuality (172). As to The Feminists, lesbianism is also considered primarily sexual, so it is considered unacceptable (173). Even though most of the radical feminists recognize the heterosexual oppression on women, they still would not support lesbianism because it is regarded as a mainly sexual choice that might be as dangerous as heterosexuality.

At last Anne Koedt's article "Lesbianism and Feminism" elaborates on the relation between radical feminism and lesbianism. Koedt opposes patriarchal society for its manipulation that adapts women to "female roles" created mostly by men. Lesbianism is

considered an act of rebellion by feminists against this role-playing system, and these rebellious acts are looked upon as “only personal accommodations to living in a sexist society until they are understood politically and fought for collectively”; in this way, the importance of lesbianism is diminished into “a small part of the whole fight to bring down the sex role system” (Koedt 257). In another essay “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm,” Koedt accuses men of attempting to oppress women sexually by concealing the truth of clitoral orgasm or even depriving it by means of clitoridectomy. She forcefully protests against phallocentrism which does not view a woman as a whole human being. This ideology not only disregards the fact that women as well have desires to be satisfied, but also suppresses women in order to pursue men’s interest. Even so, Koedt only leaves a little space for lesbianism and bisexuality and views them as other minor alternatives to heterosexuality. Koedt thinks that lesbianism is not acceptable to heterosexual feminists because, she holds two prejudices. First, in her opinion, lesbianism is considered to be connected with sexuality that has been one of the characteristics of male-dominated heterosexuality, so lesbianism seems as untrustworthy as heterosexuality. Second, Koedt

defines lesbianism in a simplified way: “women having sexual relations with women” (254). In this definition, lesbianism is taken as nothing but private and personal sexual relationship without any political implication; this assumption also explains why lesbianism remains unreliable to heterosexual feminists. However, is lesbianism only related to sexuality and really threatening to feminism like heterosexuality? When lesbianism is intentionally ignored and discarded by feminists, aren't they oppressing lesbian women? Later on, the development of lesbian feminism can prove the possibility that lesbianism can work with feminism to foster a much more revolutionary viewpoint for women's liberation.

Lesbian feminists gradually purge themselves of being secondary to radical heterosexual feminists, becoming the vanguard of the feminist movement since the day Radicalesbians interrupted the second annual Conference to Unite Women⁸ to protest against Betty Friedan's complaint about lesbian-feminists' “giving mainstream feminists a bad name” (Katz 139-41). In that protest, Radicalesbians hand out their essay “The Woman-Identified Woman” which represents a turning point of the

⁸ The second annual Congress to Unite Women was organized by NY-NOW (New York—National organization for Women) in New York on May 1, 1970 (Echols 213-5, Katz 140).

relation between lesbianism and feminism and becomes a quintessential manifesto of lesbian feminism (Katz 141). At that time, the name “lesbian” becomes not so derogative and lewd as before but is endowed some political meanings by lesbian-feminists. Lesbianism would turn out to be an appropriate way to choose as long as a woman agrees that heterosexuality has conspired with patriarchy. Hence, lesbian-feminists hold the ground firmly to stake out lesbian feminism for uniting women-identified women in their confrontation with the long existing hegemony of patriarchy. During the development of lesbian feminism, the brief circular “The Woman-identified Woman” not only plays a pioneer role in arguing for the stance of lesbians in women’s movement, but also provides two main directions for the following progression of lesbian feminism.

In “The Woman-identified Woman”, a lesbian is described as a woman who leads a life “in a state of continual war with everything around her, and usually with her self” (240), because her real intention to be a free person is in conflict with what the society requires her to act--“the female role.” Any woman that ever desires to get free from the social modeling and to regain her complete individuality must have

shared this struggling process. In order to suppress potential reformers, the name, “lesbian”, has been exercised by the patriarchal and heterosexual society as a label on women who dare to prioritize their own needs, to be independent of men, and to be men’s equals. In this way, those daring women are not regarded as “real women” but recognized as transgressors outside of this male-centered society. The Radicalesbians demonstrate that lesbianism as a category only exists in “a sexist world characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy” (241). It means that if we do not classify people into any specific sexual role, categories of sexuality will not exist and differentiation between homosexuality and heterosexuality will disappear. It also indicates that this heterosexual world is backed up by masculine power; specifically speaking, the promotion of heterosexuality and detest toward lesbianism are directed by some dominant men who are desperate to confine women to supporting roles.

Moreover, “lesbian” has been “one of the sexual categories by which men have divided up humanity” (Radicalesbians 242). Women have been dehumanized as sexual objects in their relationship with men. However, women would never discern what they have really been

deprived of until they are involved in lesbian relation. Heterosexual relation would compensate women for their loss of freedom and integrity by offering social acceptance. In contrast to heterosexual relation, lesbian relation is not ensured by the social system but it can provide women with chances to see clearly and to realize what they have lost. After all, these sexual relations are defined in the patriarchal system of classification and women keep being dehumanized in this system. Therefore, lesbianism is suggested to be part of the discussion in feminism because only through lesbianism can women uncover their real situation in sexual relation to men. And only when women are wholly committed to women, spiritually and sexually can women “find, reinforce and validate [our] authentic selves” (Radicalesbians 245). Accordingly, Radicalesbians in the essay “The Woman-Identified Woman” have obviously presented a new vision of lesbian-feminism for women’s liberation. Furthermore, in the arguments above, there are two approaches worth noticing: one is that feminists should strengthen the standing point of lesbian feminists by rejecting to be a “woman”—a categorized gender which remains beneath a man; the other is that it is necessary to develop an even more specific view on heterosexuality as

an institute and to encourage women to unite on the basis of their identification with the long existence of women's intimacy. The second approach has been proposed by Adrienne Rich and it will be discussed in the next chapter. After exploring the influence of lesbianism on social science and social movement, I am going to probe into the literary world to see what traces lesbianism ever left there and also what contemporary lesbian writers have established.

In her discussion on contemporary lesbian literature, Bonnie Zimmerman, quoting Bertha Harris' saying, suggests that if we want to have a specific lesbian literature, lesbian identity should be established first (13). As we know, the dynamically developed feminism in 1970s brings lesbianism up to the surface and meanwhile, the issue of lesbian identity has been ardently discussed. Zimmerman observes that under the influence of feminist "political radicalism and literary experimentation," many lesbian writers, such as Natalie Barney and June Arnold between 1969 and 1978, follow former lesbian writers⁹, such as Gertrude Stein

⁹ Many lesbian writers "consciously hearkened back to lesbian writers of earlier decades: Bertha Harris to Djuna Barnes, Monique to Renee Vivien and Natalie Barney, Jill Johnston to Gertrude Stein, and June Arnold to Virginia Woolf." Besides, "Elana Nachmann (who later named herself Elana dykewomon) and Sharon Isabell wrestled with the legacy of Radclyffe Hall, while Jane Rule and Isabel Miller emerged from the lesbian romance genre of the 1950s" (Zimmerman 13).

and Virginia Woolf, some employ their life materials in fictional stories and others produce unique languages to their contemporary lesbian literature, so as to create a new genre idiosyncratic to lesbians (13). In Zimmerman's words,

Like the category 'women's literature,' 'lesbian literature' is not defined by inherent, static characteristics that can be easily and uniformly identified and agreed upon, but by the perspective of a community of writers and readers. (14)

Therefore, Zimmerman stresses that her discussion in The Safe Sea of Women focuses on lesbian fiction from 1969 to 1989, and according to the literary works in this period, she provides three factors to identify a piece of lesbian writing.

According to Zimmerman's definition of lesbian fiction, the first factor is that the writer should identify a lesbian with the lesbian community in the process of writing or in choosing the publishers. The second is that in the literary text, there is a central lesbian character and the story should be mainly concerned with lesbian relationships, lives or histories. More strictly, a lesbian text, different from heterosexual feminist writing, is required to marginalize men. The third is involved with the "audience reception" in Zimmerman's words. It means that

lesbian fictions offer a basis on which lesbian readers can identify the common experiences among lesbians and then affirm their participation in lesbian culture or any lesbian community. Besides these three propositions, Zimmerman also issues her dissent from another possible factor—lesbian style, which is identified by many critics. Owing to “disruptive” and “experimental” characteristics of lesbianism, lesbian writing is supposed to be “radically transformative”. Theoretically, lesbian writers ought to demonstrate a unique way that is distinct from the traditional and patriarchal narration and structure. However, as Zimmerman observes, the fact is that only a few lesbian writers ever adopted experimental methods and lesbian writing has remained conservative in style (14-6). On the whole, in Zimmerman’s definition, lesbian fictions are supposed to be written by a lesbian-identifying writer, to be lesbian-centered and to provide the lesbian readers with approaches to set up a community identity. Then what about lesbian poetry? What kind of viewpoint will lesbian poets provide? And how will they affect the contemporary lesbian writing?

In Sappho¹⁰’s work, there is a description about a mature apple

¹⁰ Sappho (6th century B.C.) is known as a Greek poet whose existing works are few: “It can be fairly stated

hanging on such high top of the branch that the picker could not reach it so that it was left behind (Grahm 3). Judy Grahm employs this image—“the highest apple”, as a metaphor for unattainable “female powers” which “remained, intact, safe from colonization and suppression, . . . in the fragmented history of a Lesbian poet and her underground descendants” (11). Insistent on this belief of ever-lasting female power, Grahm presents an overview of lesbian poetic history from Sappho’s Greek millennia to Grahm’s contemporary time. Grahm points out that Sappho’s world is not patriarchal because Sappho does not present lesbian love with heterosexual love as a contrast, nor are any social-political restrictions and accompanying fears mentioned in her lyrics. However, a male-centered world replaces the female-centered world for the patriarchal intervention recorded in Homer’s account of Trojan War can evidence this shift. As a result, Sappho’s highly liberal island like the highest apple is left out of the history. Since then western women have been bereft of public and independent institutions of female power (9-10). For this reason, the bond between women withdraws from

that she was a poet of high reputation and that young girls of birth and education came to be the island of Lesbos where they studied under her tutelage and perhaps took part in a form of service dedicated to the goddess Aphrodite” (Cosman 41).

the world center to cloistered conditions like Emily Dickinson's isolated life where her love for women (Susan Gilbert Dickinson and Kate Scott) ends up with split from them, also from herself (Grahm 20).

Discontinuity in line composing and the favorite subject of death in Dickinson's poetry may explain what Grahm says, "Dickinson articulated the most extreme fragmentation Lesbian poets have undergone" (22).

Out of the strict cloister of the nineteenth century, lesbian poetry seems to enjoy more freedom while entering a new age. In the 1920s, Amy Lowell exhibits lesbianism in her dyke manners and poetry. Her setting is not Dickinson's isolated room but often an outside though protected garden or the countryside. However, prejudice toward lesbians prevails so the lesbian content in her poetry also suffers criticism.

Almost in the same period, Gertrude Stein, in a subtle way, takes lesbianism for granted in her works without labeling it; in such an encoded way, lesbianism is further spread out by avoiding any head-on conflict with the external hostility (Grahm 22-7). In referring to encoding, the twentieth-century poet H.D. also "used classical mythology and Hermetic philosophy as a code of her own in which to lay down a philosophical exploration of female power in a masculine world"

(Grahn28). Lesbian poetry, whether outspoken or intricate, remains restricted and vague in the early era.

Not until the beginning of 1970s, as Grahn suggests, did lesbian poets begin to set forth an idea of “Lesbian Nation”. From 1973 to 1977, lesbian poetry initiated a “crossing” into public life where “a pair of lesbians make a perilous modern urban journey in which they have an insight about their situation with respect to the rest of the world” (Grahn 32-3). Although the role of a lesbian here is positioned as an outcast, on this position lesbian poets would build up a new world in their everyday life, in their interactions with all other people. This world means a home, a place pertaining to women and as Grahn mentions, the way to this female place is to grasp the highest apple on Sappho’s island, the foundation of lesbian poetry and the world shared by all women (34-45).

Comparing Zimmerman’s definition of lesbian fiction (1969-1989) with Grahn’s ideas about lesbian poetry, we may clarify some features of contemporary lesbian poetry. In order to reach the ideal world of women, contemporary lesbian poets have tried to reminisce the poetic home on Lesbos, and stress “the necessity of wholeness and integration”; it means that each woman is supposed to be a whole individual as well as “her

own Muse” and besides, only through this recognition can women integrate the female power as soon as they find in each other the “sense of place” which is inherited from Greek Lesbians (Grahm 43). With an aim to weld women’s power, quite a few radical feminists adopt the method of contrasting women’s debased situation with the dominant patriarchal society. Different from their way, according to Grahm, lesbian poets have paid more attention to what is common with women, not what is in opposition to men (41, 72). Compared with Zimmerman’s first factor of identifying with lesbians, what lesbian poets concern about seems more encompassing because in addition to their lesbian identity, they also have shown the intention to sketch out a female poetic tradition and to encircle all the women en masse. When it comes to the literary text, lesbian poetry is women-centered. Akin to Zimmerman’s second requirement to modern lesbian fictions, lesbian poetry allows no place for men. As to the “audience reception” Zimmerman suggested as the third factor to identify lesbian writing, lesbian poetry has held such great influence over the lesbian readers, especially those who involved themselves in lesbian feminist movement during the 1970s. The impact even spreads out far, as Grahm describes her own experience in the 80s:

“I can hardly walk into a women’s center anywhere in the country without seeing lines from any of a dozen of my own poem posted on the wall as mottoes of strength and inspiration to all who pass through” (71). Ostensibly, contemporary lesbian poets mostly have contributed to constructing a lesbian renaissance not only in their poetic works but also in the social-political movement. In the poetry, they presents a vision to revive the splendor of the Lesbos that belongs to all women. Most of them get involved in the lesbian feminist activities so as to apply their ideas to practice, making efforts to bring out in every woman the closeted love.

Before reading Ann Ferguson’s discussion, most of us may still get stuck in the narrow definition of lesbianism that only refers to sexual relation. Fortunately, Ferguson presents a quite full-scale overview to define lesbianism and emphasizes the importance of taking historical and cultural background into consideration. Most important of all, lesbianism is not restricted to sexuality any more in Ferguson’s definition. Thus in this chapter, I have also tried to illuminate what lesbianism is by offering different portraits of it from diverse points of view. As we have seen, from the early biological studies to the later psychological research,

lesbian relation is discussed mostly as the issue of sexuality; under these conditions, it is understandable that lesbianism is attached a sexual tag. Tamsin Wilton points out that the image of lesbians also appears blurred in the research of heterosexual sociologists. Even though many lesbians make efforts to incorporate lesbianism in the study of sociology, Wilton criticizes that sociology never takes the social lives of lesbians seriously, let alone propagates an overview on it. Finally it is feminism that gives lesbianism its deserved attention, but in the beginning stage of feminism, lesbianism is still hushed. It is not until the proclamation of the group, the Radicalesbians, and the rise of lesbian feminism that lesbianism burgeons in feminist movement. The thriving development of lesbianism as a social movement also influences contemporary lesbian poets.

According to Bonnie Zimmerman's discussion about the lesbian fiction from 1969 to 1989, we may find that lesbian identity of the writer within the content has been her main concern, and lesbian fiction is laid magnificent responsibility of educating readers to affirm their lesbian identity. If we look at contemporary poetry, we find a variant scene.

Judy Grahn also presents a lesbian poetic tradition from Sappho to lesbian poets in our times. We find many shifts in the process of this

lesbian poetic history. At last, Grahn sends an encouraging and prospective message that lesbian poets nowadays have been on the way to reach “the highest apple”—the fruit of female creativity, by means of integrating all women’s power and evoking women’s love for women. Lesbian poets have contributed their endeavors not merely in poetry writing but also in social movement. It is for certain that what they have done has overwhelmingly affected the lesbian readers, feminists, and the public. Adrienne Rich is one of these influential lesbian poets and her achievements in social-political theories and poetic writing are compelling. Hence, in the next two chapters, my discussion will focus on Rich’s ideas in her essays and poetry.

Chapter II

Lesbianism in Adrienne Rich's Political Essays

According to Jonathan Ned Katz, the analyses of heterosexuality that lesbian feminists made in the early 1970s not only brings the hidden history of homosexuality to the surface but also have “led, gradually, to a new look at heterosexuality history” (166). Incontrovertibly Adrienne Rich contributes a lot to this inspiring process by proposing new perspectives on heterosexuality and lesbianism. The psychiatrist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing indicates the term “hetero-sexual” as a normal eroticism between different sexes since 1893, which is associated with “homosexuality” as the “perversion”(Katz 21-23). However, Rich sheds a new light on this most widely accepted pattern of sexual relation. In her most renowned essay “Compulsory heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”, Rich politicizes both heterosexuality and lesbianism. Heterosexuality, as Rich suggests, should be regarded as a prevailing institution that plays a leading role in oppressing heterosexual women as well as lesbians. In face of such a dominant system, how shall lesbians and other women resist its manipulation? As the terms—“lesbian existence” and “lesbian continuum”—are introduced by Rich, she

encourages all women, whether heterosexual or lesbian, to identify those intentionally neglected intimacies between women, not just in their present lives but also in the long-encased history. In this chapter, I will first discuss Rich's ideas about institutionalization of heterosexuality and about coordinating lesbianism with feminism. In addition to my own opinions, I will also include the stimulating and contrast views of Ann Ferguson and Jacquelyn N. Zita.

Since the early book Of Women Born, Rich has confirmed the connection between patriarchy and heterosexuality by stating that "patriarchy would not survive without motherhood and heterosexuality in their institutional forms" (43). In this saying, not only heterosexuality but also motherhood is regarded as dominant instrument of patriarchy. Then Rich makes the full exposition of this idea in her most quoted essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" where the idea of heterosexual institute is further viewed as a primary oppressive power over women. Rich suggests, "heterosexuality, like motherhood, needs to be recognized and studied as a political institution" (35). In Rich's opinion, heterosexuality should be recognized as a socially constructed system rather than a natural sexual drive. Rich proves this

argument by presenting how heterosexual power has enforced limits, persecutions, and false consciousness upon women in diverse ways.

As Rich exhibits, Kathleen Gough in her essay “The Origin of the Family” lists eight characteristics of male power over women in the heterosexual society; moreover, Rich added some more elaboration in brackets. These characters are

1. to deny women [their own] sexuality. . .2. or to force it [male sexuality] upon them. . .3. to command or exploit their labor to control their produce. . .4. to control or rob them of their children. . .5. to confine them physically and prevent their movement. . .6. to use them as objects in male transactions. . .7. to cramp their creativeness. . .8. to withhold from large areas of the society’s knowledge and cultural attainments (BBP 36-8).

Gough regarded none of these characteristics to be of a heterosexual force; they are just believed as sources of sexual inequality. Rich, by adding more factual instances to these eight characteristics, maintains that these characteristics also represent different approaches to empowering heterosexuality. For example, the second character that male sexuality is forced on women, as Rich explains, resides in “pornographic depictions of women responding pleasurably to sexual violence and humiliation” and “idealization of heterosexual romance in

art, literature, the media, advertising, etc.” (BBP 37). Rich denounces pornography for extending the sphere of heterosexual behaviors and at the same time, stripping women of the sexual potential “of loving and being loved by women in mutuality and integrity”(BBP 40). In addition to the prevailing pornography business, the overwhelming heterosexual romance in mass media also impels women to fantasize heterosexual intercourse and even to submit themselves to sexual abuses by men. In this way, the hetero- sexual ideology is strengthened and other sexual alternatives like lesbianism are relatively obfuscated. Therefore, women’s potentials and subjectivity in sexuality are also denied as implied in the first feature. As the third trait suggests, women’s labor is commanded and exploited by the male power because women are paid less and seldom promoted to higher positions. Besides these officially unfair treatments, women in the workplace also suffer sexual harassment from time to time. Under such oppressive conditions, women are conditioned and educated to be real women only to fulfill the requirements regulated by men. It means that women should express femininity to satiate heterosexual men’s perception. Hence, the gender dichotomy of heterosexuality is further intensified. Obviously,

heterosexual viewpoints function in various phases of the society and heterosexuality has been established as ubiquitous monarchy. That is why Rich would like to take an aggressive stance and insist that we should inspect heterosexuality as an institution, not just as a matter of sexual drive.

Rebutting Rich's view of heterosexuality as a manipulative mechanism of male dominance, Ann Ferguson holds opposing opinions. First, although the patriarchal suppression over homosexuality is undeniable, such heterosexual suppression is not "sufficient by itself to perpetuate male dominance" (170). Ferguson argues that heterosexuality can be central to women's oppression only when "women's emotional dependence on men as lovers in conjunction with other mechanisms of male dominance . . ."; these mechanisms indicate, for instance, "the control of female biological reproduction" and "economic systems involving discriminations based on class and race" (171). Therefore, "single mothers," and "economically independent women" are taken for example by Ferguson as successful escapees away from the oppression because they are out of marriage, motherhood, economic dependence on men, that is, not just out of sexual relation. Concerning

this argument, I do not agree with Ferguson's saying that "single mothers" or single women or "economic independent women" are successful escapees. These women might avoid marital bondages or economic dependence on men but, as Rich has suggested in discussing Gough's list of eight characteristics of male power, the female sexual or love potentials or mental creativeness probably will still be cramped by conventional ideology of heterosexuality (BBP 36-8). It means that some women, despite their ability to sustain their lives without relying on men, are still in a state of being oppressed as long as heterosexual ideology is not rejected. In Ferguson's criticism, she indicates the systems¹¹ that oppress women are far more complex. As for Rich, she also does not simplify the oppressive systems. Rich has taken a close look at those oppressive systems when she specifies that heterosexuality represents the dominant force to oppress women in numerous ways. For example, Rich refers to Catharine A. MacKinnon's study Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination which is focused on how capitalism cooperate with compulsory heterosexuality in the workplace to reduce women to low-paying positions and to sexualize

¹¹ Ferguson points out that these multiple systems include "capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexism, racism, imperialism" (171).

them with heterosexist prejudice. Moreover, Rich introduces Kathleen Barry's research Female Sexual Slavery which offers evidence "for the existence . . . of international female slavery, the institution once known as 'white slavery' but which in fact has involved . . . women of every race and class" (BBP 43-4). As we can see, Rich has tried to take different social institutions into consideration before she asserts that heterosexuality is supposed to be the manipulative force behind the systematical oppression on women. Ferguson suggests that because the oppressive system is multiple, it is necessary to possess "autonomous groups of resisters opposing each of these forms of dominance" and women are in need of mutual alliance. Since Rich's discussion covers various systems of male oppression, she cannot be ignorant of their resisters as Ferguson criticizes. What Rich has strived for actually matches Ferguson's proposition for women's coalition because Rich's effort is intended to make women's diverse resistance converge by distinguishing the commanding position of heterosexuality. In Rich's word, heterosexuality "needs to be recognized and studied as a political institution" (BBP 35) on account of its overwhelming effects. Hence, heterosexuality does not simply indicate sexual or marital relation

between a woman and a man but has been a formidable system that Rich would like all the women to comprehend.

Another feminist, Martha E. Thompson also finds it “theoretically unsatisfactory and politically untenable” that Rich emphasizes the enforcement of heterosexuality as the basis of male power over women. Rich utilizes Susan Cavin’s argument and suggests that heterosexuality maintains “a mother-son relation between women and men” and demands that “women provide maternal solace, nonjudgmental nurturing, and compassion for their harassers, rapists, and batterers” (BBP 49). As to this suggestion, Thompson criticizes that “maternalism often protects men from women’s wrath, but it does not necessarily reinforce heterosexuality” (791) because according to Jessie Bernard’s proposition, “the roles of wife and mother are actually paradoxical, not complementary” since wives are expected to be docile and weak while mothers are thought to be capable and strong. In view of this conflict in the heterosexual system, Thompson proposes that “the contradictions and inconsistencies among social institutions” should be recognized as main targets to attack since they are “the weak links in the social and cultural chains that bind women” (791-2). Rich does not lay an assault on the

structural flaw of the heterosexual system, but she presents another contrast even more relevant to women's situations: that is, women's conflicts in heterosexual society. Rich names these conflicts as women's "double life" in which women appear obedient to the heterosexual institution but their inner feelings and sensuality "have not been tamed or contained within it" (BBP 59). Rich further suggests that "this double life . . . has been characteristic of female experience"; it not only indicates some women's struggle between their marriage to men and their tendency toward lesbian love, but also lies in many kinds of heterosexual behavior such as "the pretense of asexuality by the nineteenth-century wife" and "the simulation of orgasm by the prostitute, the courtesan, the twentieth-century 'sexually liberated' woman" (BBP 60). As to Rich's criticism on heterosexual behaviors, Ferguson raises her second question: why not "just stop sleeping with men, withdraw from heterosexual practices"? (171)

Jacquelyn N. Zita disagrees Ferguson's implication that refusing the institution of heterosexuality simply means "not sleeping with men" because heterosexuality is definitely not merely a sexual matter.

Ferguson pronounces that Rich's view of heterosexuality as the matrix

of male dominance “ignores the existence of some heterosexual couples in which women who are feminists maintain an equal relationship with men” (170). Zita does not deny the possibility of such situations but she points out that “Ferguson’s analysis does not sufficiently emphasize its ponderous force and its sturdy intractability in the face of all but a few liberated heterosexuals” (185). In other words, it is possible for some women to share an equal relation with men but this condition does not apply to every woman. I would elaborate further that there are many heterosexual women who are involved in derogatory relationship with men. Some of them are even not as informed as some feminists have been to realize they deserve more respect and fair treatment, not to speak of the way to liberate themselves from the heterosexual oppression.

In Ferguson’s words, Rich’s statement “implies that the quality of straight women’s resistance must be questioned” (171). Additionally, three Marxist-feminist activists and scholars, Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson also question Rich’s using “false consciousness” to represent “women’s heterosexuality”(BBP 69). Rich explains that the term “false consciousness” can be representative of “dismissal for any thinking we don’t like or adhere to” but what she

wants to illustrate here is to reveal that “there is a real, identifiable system of heterosexual propaganda,” and that system has always been in control of everyone’s consciousness, especially women’s (BBP 71).

Furthermore, she explains that she never inclines to warn heterosexual feminists against “sleeping with the enemy,” or to neglect any women’s resistant movement. Her intention is to ask heterosexual feminists to criticize their heterosexual experiences and the institute that they are a part of, and “to become more open to the considerable resources offered by the lesbian-feminist perspective” (BBP 72).

In “Women and honor: Some notes on lying”, Rich asserts that “heterosexuality as an institution has also drowned in silence the erotic feelings between women” and “that silence make us [women] all, to some degree, into liars” (190). Rich indicates that heterosexuality not only obstructs women’s movement fiercely but also gives numerous lies to women’s lives, especially to the intimate relation between women. Rich in “The Meaning of Our Love For Women” analyzes that the silence about lesbians is “part of the totality of silence about women’s life” (225), and the situations of lesbians are even worse than those of heterosexual women since they are forced to live between two

male-dominated cultures-- the heterosexist, and the patriarchal. The combination of lesbianism and feminism is supposed to be the most influential expedient to evolve women's ideology and to transform women's relation completely, because according to Rich, lesbian feminism represents "the more radical concept of woman-centered vision, a view of society whose goal is not equality but utter transformation" (OLSS 229). Moreover, Rich considers the consolidation of women's love for women to be the primary concern, and interprets the meaning of women's love for women as "what we have constantly to expand"(OLSS 230). It means that striving simply for economical or political equality with men is not enough. In order to acquire an unconditional social status, first of all, women have to recognize women's love for women that has been purposefully obscured, most severely forbidden and still awaiting more exploration.

After inspecting the overpowering influence of heterosexuality, Rich announces that lesbianism and feminism should be coordinated to unravel what has been hidden beneath women's lives. Rich introduces two terms "lesbian existence" and "lesbian continuum"—on the one hand, to replace the word "lesbianism" which is thought to wear "a

clinical and limiting ring” and on the other hand, to provide a vision for the development of lesbian feminism. “Lesbian existence” is suggested to include “both the fact of historical pressure of lesbians and our continuing creation of the meaning of that existence,”(BBP 51) and “comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life” (BBP 52). As Rich explains, lesbian existence not only stands for a rejection or resistance against the oppression of patriarchy and heterosexuality but also encompasses experiences between women. It involves what has been recorded and what has been erased, including the act of diminishing lesbians to a female version of male homosexuality. In Rich’s word, “To equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatized is to erase female reality once again” (BBP 52). This assumption is based on two reasons. First, lesbians, unlike gays, but like other women, lack economic and cultural privilege mostly pertaining to men. Second, the erotic relation between lesbians is qualitatively different from that between gays because for example, in lesbian relations seldom exist such patterns of anonymous sex and ageism as among male homosexuals. As a result, Rich claims that lesbian experience shall not be bracketed with other

sexually stigmatized existence since such “a profoundly female experience, with particular oppressions, meanings, and potentialities” (BBP 53), as mentioned above, has remained imperceptible or has been masked with its twisted images. Apparently, Rich has expanded the meaning of lesbian existence by taking all the female experiences into account. Such an inclusive way will lead to controversy among heterosexual women who feel safe and contented because they are deluded by the heterosexual system. This very turbulence, however, may advance the realization of Rich’s expectation that all women should recognize the possibility of lesbian existence in their lives.

“Lesbian continuum” is meant to involve “a range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience” (BBP 51). This continuum consists of not simply the fact of a woman’s sexual desire or experience with another woman but also more intimate commitments between or among women. Since according to the patriarchal definition of lesbians, “female friendship and comradeship have been set apart from the erotic, thus limiting the erotic itself,” Rich suggests to discover the female defined erotic which shall be “unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body

itself,” and “as Audre Lorde has described it, omnipresent in ‘the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic,’ and in the sharing of work” (BBP 53). In addition to exploring the female erotic in a purely female way, Rich also recalls a central element in women’s history “that women have always resisted male tyranny” (BBP 56). This resistance has ranged from personal refusal of arranged marriage to collective rebellions against deprivation or discrimination in the workplaces around the world. Rich expresses that “we can connect these rebellions and the necessity for them with the physical passion of woman for woman which is central to lesbian existence” (BBP 57). It means that besides these visible rebellions, we still have to unravel more reasons why the revolts are needed and they require women’s love for women. Rich stresses the importance of women’s love and regarded it as a basis where female revolution against male dominance shall be established. In this way, Rich heads for an ideal that women’s power can be united by identifying the love between or among women. This ideal is supposed to be the motive behind the construction of “lesbian continuum”.

Rich’s innovative ideas of “lesbian existence” and “lesbian continuum” politicize lesbianism into lesbian feminism as the most

forceful approach against patriarchal and heterosexual dominance. However, Ann Ferguson points out some problems in Rich's lesbian identity which is "the sense of a woman bonded primarily to women who is sexually and emotionally independent of men" (159). First, Ferguson considers it an oversimplified and romanticized idea to measure the resistance against patriarchy by the degree of women's sexual and emotional independence of men, "without really defining the conditions that make for successful resistance rather than mere victimization" (160). In other words, such passive resistance by separating from men is incompatible with the dominant power that is still capable of reducing lesbians to even more disadvantageous status in the patriarchal society. Women who are docile in the patriarchal and heterosexual system are bonded but guaranteed some priorities for being a pregnant woman or a mother. Women who give up playing certain roles in that dominant system, however, are not informed of definite essentials to win their own ways. Without specific guidelines but a simple idea to flee from men, lesbians hardly can find the route to success and possibly will fall victim to patriarchal manipulation.

Regarding this problem, Jacquelyn N. Zita defends Rich by stating

that omitting the discussion on what is counted as successful or failed resistance will not invalidate Rich's concept of lesbian identity. In historical development, the male-dominated power that women have to revolt against comes in various forms; therefore, whether women's rebellion can succeed or not, in some way, depends on what kind of historical circumstances they reside in. What matters here, as Zita suggests, is to recognize the continuity of lesbian existence that has been erased and muffled in the male-centered history. I agree with Zita that before making a successful resistance, lesbians should realize that the history of lesbian existence is traceable. In my opinion, when talking about the point of Rich's lesbian identity, Ferguson digresses it to simply disengagement from men. When bringing forth the terms— lesbian existence and lesbian continuum, Rich offers a broad and political view on women's life experiences that encompass both the resistance against male-centered dominance and women's communal attachment.

Ferguson also thinks that Rich's view is ahistorical for it "undervalues the important historical development of an explicit lesbian identity connected to genital sexuality" (160). On the contrary, Zita maintains that it is Ferguson's view that is ahistorical, neglecting the

continuity of history. Ferguson refers the development of lesbian identity to a group of lesbian-identified women, belonging to a subculture of modern capitalist societies. In that way, Ferguson ignores many lesbian precursors and some women who would not like to make their lesbian lives a social issue (176). According to Ferguson's criticism, Rich might fail to signify certain developments of lesbian identity in particular periods. However, I agree with Zita in that Ferguson's concept lacks a consistent perspective of history; moreover, Ferguson's partial- historical notion is too inadequate to discuss Rich's delineating lesbian identity as a "trahistorical phenomenon", not a "historical phenomenon" belonging to any specific period or any single area. Moreover, Claudette Kulkarni specifies the contrast by analyzing that Rich's idea of continuum is suitable for "historical purposes" while Ferguson's definition is adaptable for "contemporary purposes" (83). Therefore, Rich's proposition is not ahistorical but indeed concerned about the collective power of lesbian community throughout the history; in her perception, the community of lesbians shall be composed of every woman who has affections for women and tends to resist against male dominance, from the past foremothers to the future followers.

When stating that Rich cannot distinguish “lesbian identity” from “lesbian sexual practice”, Ferguson implies that according to Rich’s concepts, the genital sexual relation between women is not estimated as a requirement for a lesbian. As a matter of fact, Rich does not overlook the importance of sexuality in the issue of lesbian identification but as mentioned above, when proposing the idea of lesbian continuum, Rich makes her intention clear to redefine the erotic in a female way. Besides, Rich suggests that “the erotic choice must deepen and expand into conscious woman identification—into lesbian feminism.” (BBP 66). In the western tradition has existed a many-layered lie that women are naturally drawn to men. For example, women are supposed to have affections for men and on the other hand, women who only adore women would be despised as outcasts and their love for women would be considered out of resentment against men. In order to modify such a detractive concept that lesbian existence is nothing but a refuge from male abuses, Rich suggests one should “choose a woman lover or life partner in the face of heterosexuality” so as to initiate a political demonstration of feminism. In Rich’s eyes, erotic love between women should not be claimed as simply an orientation or just taken as a

demonstrative tool against heterosexuality. It has to be a conscious choice and should be further developed into women's communal identification which lesbian feminism can depend on. In the heterosexual institution, women count their lives upon chance, without "collective power to determine the meaning and place of sexuality in their lives" (BBP 67). Lack of choices and collective power is characteristic of female experiences in the heterosexual institution that has erased, misnamed, and fragmented the history of female struggle against male domination. Since women's erotic protest against heterosexuality suffer most oppression, Rich encourages the connection between women's radical rebellions and "the physical passion of women for women which is central to lesbian existence" (BBP 57). Accordingly, genital sexuality of lesbians is not neglected when lesbian erotic is politicized.

That Rich keeps stressing heterosexuality as a center of patriarchal manipulation over women is not only due to those long-existed oppression but also because it is noticeable that many feminists have neglected the overpowering influence of heterosexuality in women's lives and even, have aided to spread its force into every woman's

consciousness. Rich takes some feminist books¹² for instance, pointing out that they “contribute to this invalidation and erasure” of “lesbian possibility” by ignoring the lesbian existence, providing an incomplete view for women, and disabling women from realizing their real conditions. As a result, Rich restates her primary intention to awaken every feminist of their consciousness about lesbian existence and what lesbianism can contribute, by means of presenting a critical view on heterosexuality as an institution. Rich would like to consolidate women’s communal power by encouraging women to identify with “lesbian continuum”. Rich supports this continuum as originating in “a desire to allow for the greatest possible variation of female-identified experience” BBP 73). What Rich has proposed for is the desire to validate any possible diversity of women’s experience. Lesbian continuum is utilized by Rich to prompt women’s identification with women and to encourage all women to explore a broader and more

¹² Those mainly criticized books are as follows, “Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978), Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and the Human Malaise (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Anchor, 1978) and Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women (Boston: Beacon, 1976)” (BBP 27).

profound vision on women's past experiences, present relations and possible development in the future. The proposition of lesbian continuum, instead of taking revenge on heterosexuality, is meant to provide women a chance to behold what has been existent before, what kind of situation women remains in now, and what is possible for the coming days. It is suggested in this proposition that as soon as heterosexual system is recognized as a manipulating position, women should be aware of the significance of lesbian existence and the lesbian continuum which every woman has been involved in. Rich further clarifies that her notion is not to deny heterosexual women or to ask for acceptance of lesbianism as another choice of life style, but to promulgate that lesbian existence has been silenced and marginalized for it poses challenge and threat to heterosexual and male empowerment (BBP 73). Therefore, on the one hand, lesbian existence should be recognized so as to elucidate the impacts heterosexuality has made on women; on the other hand, recognition of lesbian existence and lesbian continuum helps explore more possibilities of women's autonomy in both sexuality and other respects of life.

Chapter III

Lesbianism in Adrienne Rich's Poetry

In this chapter I am going to explore the development of lesbianism in Rich's poetry before 1980, the year when her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" was published in Blood, Bread, and Poetry. In my opinion, the appearance of the essay signifies a turning point where Rich advances her lesbian-feminist conviction and discourse to apex since in the essay, she demonstrates a groundbreaking discussion on the institutionalization of heterosexuality and recognition of lesbian issues in feminism. Moreover, I believe that the poems before 1980 show that Rich has undergone a series of revolutionary progression in her concept about herself as a woman and female poet and about women's circumstances including those of lesbians. The purpose of focusing on the period preceding 1980 is that I want to fathom the process in which Rich developed from a laudable poet whose poetic style used to be influenced by male poets to a lesbian-feminist poet who becomes concerned about her being a woman and women's experiences in the patriarchal- heterosexual society. Thus the following discussions on her poetry will be divided into three parts: the first part will present

Rich's investigation of and her anger at the oppression of patriarchal-heterosexual system over women; the second part will be focused on how Rich explores the power of women's art and relates it to her own integration of being a woman poet; the last part will emphasize on the way Rich suggests to develop women's power by identifying women's forbidden closeness in daily relationship, such as lesbian lovers, sisters, daughters and mothers.

We have observed in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" that Rich criticizes patriarchal as well as heterosexual oppression upon women. Preceding this essay, Rich's observation about oppression is implied in her poetry where oppression of women is presented in the suffocated lives of married women, in the inner conflict of a women artist, and in the unspeakable love between women. The marital oppression is indicated in Rich's early poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" where we perceive a housewife who silently indulges herself in art craft as a protest.

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. (5-8)

The powerless image of Aunt Jennifer, symbolized by her frightened strained fingers in the second stanza, is in great contrast to the powerful image of those fearless tigers which symbolizes women's free will in the first stanza.

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. (1-4)

By way of this sharp contrast, Rich vividly presents the severe situation of married women under the power of patriarchal system. Here marriage is implied as a heavy burden of women, for "Uncle's wedding band" is symbolic of the patriarchal bondage, an instrument of the patriarchal-heterosexual institution to control women, and the tigers embroidered in the tapestry become a projection of women's aspiration for freedom. In the third stanza Rich reemphasizes that patriarchal mastery over women is like a life-long cuffs, and the torments of women will not cease until death: "When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie/ Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by."

In the ten-section poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" Rich further presents a variety of facets in housewives' oppressed lives.

Poised, trembling and unsatisfied, before
 an unlocked door, that cage of cages,
 tell us, you bird, you tragical machine—
 is this fertillisante douleur? Pinned down
 by love, for you the only nature action, . . . (60-64)

In these lines of section 6, the married woman is compared to an encaged bird. Unlike other cages, the cage is not locked but has imposed such a threatening power on the bird that she like Aunt Jennifer fails to follow her free nature but stay “poised, trembling, unsatisfied.” Many women, similar to this submissive bird “pinned down by love”, have consciously or unconsciously confined themselves in the intangible prison of marriage. Confronted with such confinement, some women choose silent ways of protest like Aunt Jennifer’s embroidering in which we see only a passive sense of discontent. However, some others in her poems begin to voice their anger in response to the oppression; the anger was materialized as an outrageous monster inside women’s minds.

In Rich’s poetry, angel is the counterpart of monster. In the second section of “Snapshots”, some angelic voices inside women’s minds come up to the surface.

Banging the coffee-pot into the sink
 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.

Sometimes she's let the 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

each morning's grit blowing into her eyes. (14-25)

I would assume that these voices are projections of the woman's anger at her life of no selfhood and her lost sensation that is being numbed by family chores. Virginia Woolf in her essay "Professions for Women" calls the docile housewife "the angel in the house"; the image of a sympathetic and unselfish angel symbolizes the conventional role of a housewife (2007). However, what the angels voice out in Rich's poem is not comforting or tender words but untamed speech and wild command.

The voices in Rich's poem, I suppose, do not come from the angels that Woolf indicated but from women's dissatisfaction that was materialized into monsters. Also, Judith McDaniel suggests that the

voices are “of monsters, the inevitable accompaniment of growing self-awareness and self-involvement for women” and the monsters “are from within” (6). In contrary to the angel, the monstrous voices keep urging the housewife to be selfish and unsympathetic with others. As Bertha Harris states, “Monsters are . . . emblems of feeling in patriarchy. The enemy of the monster is phallic materialism. . .”; besides, Harris explains that patriarchy or its phallic materialism tends to degrade women by means of the ritual of marriage (6). In other words, the image of monster can represent women’s emotional revolt against the oppression of patriarchy. According to Harris’ interpretation, the monster in Rich’s poem is likely to imply the housewife’s turbulent mind to strive for freedom.

Later, this monstrous image is even taken affirmatively in the poem “Planetarium” which is considered an extension on the theme of “Snapshot of a Daughter-in- Law” (Keyes 115). The image of a woman as a monster appears in “Planetarium”— “A woman in the shape of a monster/ a monster in the shape of a woman”—presenting a female role model, Caroline Herschel (1750-1848) who is a superb astronomer. According to Keyes, by regarding Herschel as a witch, Rich gives a

positive view on women's "monstrous" energies to break the traditional modes of thoughts and behaviors (116). As soon as the image of monster is employed as a positive inspiration for women's breaking through the conventional barriers, in my opinion, Rich constructs a counterforce against the patriarchal oppression which gives the label of "the angel in the house" to housewives.

As early as in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," a female artist's dilemma is presented in the contrast between the world of art— her tapestry—and her daily life. Claire Keyes also suggests, "The complex interaction between the womanly role and the role of woman as artist (thus aberrant) forms a thematic nucleus in Rich's early poetry" and thus the tigers in Aunt Jennifer's art work also represent a creative power of art (21-2). Accordingly, the contrast between Aunt Jennifer and the imaginary tiger mentioned above not only exemplifies married women's conflict between their outside subservience and inside aspiration but also implies the frustration of a woman artist. In the poem "Storm Warnings", such discord is signified by the outside storm and the inside turbulence in the persona's mind. Take a close look at the fourth stanza:

I draw the curtain as the sky goes black
And set a match to candles sheathed in glass

Against the keyhole draught, the insistent whine
 Of weather through the unsealed aperture.
 This is the sole defense against the season;
 These are the things that we have learned to do
 Who live in troubled regions. (22-28)

The persona, like “the candle sheathed in the glass”, has no alternatives but passively hid in the room against the threatening storm. Deborah Pope interprets that the “troubled regions” mean “the poet’s struggles to live in the world as a woman” and “making oneself small, passive, and sheltered” is not only a way to handle the outward and inward commotions, but also “the way to pass successfully as a feminine woman in Rich’s time” (123). Therefore, the confrontation between the outside and the inside may as well imply the predicament of being a docile woman and longing to become an unrestrained woman artist.

According to Judith McDaniel, “to win the approval of those whom she imitated”, Rich has to follow the established poetics like formalism¹³ and therefore, her “early poems seem nearly suffocated by self-control” (4). Hence the struggle of those women depicted in Rich’s poetry also

¹³ Later in the essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision”, Rich explained that in early years “formalism was part of the strategy—like asbestos gloves, it allowed me to handle materials I couldn’t pick up barehanded”(167).

projects the conflict in Rich's identity as a woman poet and as a housewife. Maybe as Deborah Pope mentions, at that time Rich might not be conscious of the situation that her passivity is in conflict with her "development and voice as a poet" (123). However, in my view, her poems of this period reveal the fact that if a female poet like herself wants to protect and maintain her passions and her own visions as implied in the images of "the tigers" and "the candlelight," she has to take a submissive or defensive stance in face of imminent power of the male-centered convention as implied in the term "marriage" and the image of "the storm." Rich is divided between expressing her own view and observing patriarchal regulations; this division is further evidenced in Rich's essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" published in 1971. Rich acknowledges that what she learned from male poets was craft and beneath the craft of her early poems are glances of splits she experienced "between the girl who wrote poems, who defined herself in writing poems, and the girl who was to define herself by her relationships with men" (171).

Rich suggests that in addition to its oppression over married women and female artists, patriarchy also has forbidden women's

mutual love in order to subjugate all the women to its heterosexual institution. “Twenty-One Love Poems” (DCL 25-35) is a set of lesbian love poetry but the poems are less romantic than political as Rich puts more emphasis on criticizing the patriarchal-heterosexual society for its purposeful silence and ignorance about lesbian existence and for its suppression of women’s communal affections. In the fourteenth section of “Twenty-One Love Poems” a lesbian couple suffer seasickness in their ferry ride where their vomiting is not simply regarded as a physical pain.

It was your vision of the pilot
confirmed my vision of you: you said, He keeps
on steering headlong into the waves, on purpose
while we crouched in the open hatchway
vomiting into plastic bags
for three hours between St. Pierre and Miquelon.
I never felt closer to you.
In the close cabin where the honeymoon couples
huddles in each other’s laps and arms
I put my hand on your thigh
to comfort both of us, your hand came over mine,
we stayed that way, suffering together
in our bodies, as if all suffering
were physical, we touched so in the presence

of strangers who knew nothing and cared less
vomiting their private pain
as if all suffering were physical. (1-17)

The persona mentions that those strangers would not take any notice of or cares about the intimacy between these two women; however, it is still observable that the lesbian lovers were intimidated so as not to show their love for each other as openly as those honeymoon couples. The lesbian lovers put their hands together to comfort each other against the pain which was caused not only by their physical illness but by their mental anguish. The mental agony is related to the social ignorance of lesbian relationship which is not legalized as that of heterosexual couples is. As to the physical suffering, it is indicated as a result of the pilot's intention which implies the patriarchal intent to torment the lesbians, for the poem reads “. . . , He keeps/ on steering headlong into the waves, on purpose.” Besides that, Rich also suggests that apart from lesbians, people who have only sensed their suffering as physical one should be aware that the pain might also result from the patriarchal manipulation which will agonize everyone's mind as well.

In the fifth section of “Twenty-One Love Poems,” Rich tries to expose all kinds of patriarchal oppression upon women and issues a

severe criticism on the patriarchal civilization for having obstructed the development of women's civilization.

This apartment full of books could crack open

to the thick jaws, the bulging eyes

of monsters, easily: Once open the books, you have to face

the underside of everything you've loved—

the rack and pincers held in readiness, the gag

even the best voices have had to mumble through,

the silence burying unwanted children—

women, deviants, witnesses—in desert sand. (1-8)

The image of monster with a furious look here, in my view, echoing the anguish monster in the poem “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law,” also represents a woman in rage like the poet herself who is anxious to unravel the truth about women by shattering the patriarchal lies in most volumes. As to “the underside of everything you've loved,” it indicates the covered facts about the violent suppression of talented women whose “best voices” could barely be heard and about “the silence” of Father—the patriarchy—who buries his “unwanted children”—women, whoever could not comply with patriarchal rules, and whoever witnessed patriarchal oppression. Rich points out that these hidden facts are “centuries of books unwritten piled behind these shelves” so she reminds

that the buried history should be unearthed:

and we still have to stare into the absence
of men who would not, women who could not, speak
to our life—this still unexcavated hole
called civilization, this act of translation, this half-world. (17-20)

The “unexcavated hole” means the unrecorded history of the patriarchal silence about women’s oppression. Rich suggests that the hole is another half of world’s civilization—that should be unearthed and interpreted in the original language.

Prior to “Twenty-One Love Poems,” Rich has made efforts in a retrospective way to orient herself as a female poet, to raise her female consciousness. Rich names this access as “revision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” and asserts its importance by taking it as “an act of survival,” and part of women’s “refusal of the self-destructiveness of male- dominated society” (ARPP 167). In the following passages, I will divide the process of revision into three stages. In the first phase, I will take the poem “Orion” (ARPP 29-30) as an example to discuss Rich’s initial step to awaken her female consciousness. Second, the discussion will focus on the idea of “androgyny” proposed by Rich in the poems

like “I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus” (ARPP 43), “Diving into the Wreck” (DW 22-4) and “The Stranger” (DW 19) The last part will present an observation on her poems about Rich’s another transitional and revolutionary view of women’s sexual identity and of the rising consciousness.

In the poem “Orion” we can observe two worlds that are respectively represented by the spaces inside and outside the house: “In doors I bruise and blunder, / break faith, leave ill enough/ alone, . . .” and the starry night: “and the stars in it are dim/ and maybe have stopped burning” (ARPP 29). It seems that the domestic world is not beneficial and suitable for the persona and the other world of constellations becomes gloomy. In the essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” Rich interprets what the poem “Orion” meant to her:

The poem ‘Orion,’ written five years later, is a poem of reconnection with a part of myself I had felt I was losing—the active principle, the energetic imagination, the “half-brother” whom I projected, as I had for many years, into the constellation Orion. (ARPP 175)

As we are informed in this saying, during the early years Rich identified her “active principle” and “energetic imagination” with the constellation Orion. Accordingly we can infer that the part Rich was losing is the

darkening night sky that symbolizes her poetic world or the world of imagination. On the other hand, the world inside the house should represent Rich's daily life where she appears unfit and unwilling to make things better. Her unfitness to the domestic life might result from the incessant passion for poetry.

But you burn, and I know it;
 as I throw back my head to take you in
 an old transfusion happens again: (15-17)

As long as that flaring starlight is brought to her mind again, her heart will be refilled with inspiration. In spite of her affection for poetry, Rich still has to face the reality that leads to disillusionment:

N ight cracks up over the chimney,
 pieces of time, frozen geodes
 come showering down in the grate. (22-24)

Once she stays under the roof, her poetic world of starry night crumbles into pieces like the scratches of time that she can barely collect for poetry in her daily life.

In the last stanza, Rich refers to Gottfried Benn's essay "Artists and Old Age" in which Benn suggested that the modern artist should keep in mind "the cold and egotistical element" in creating opuses:

i t 's with a starlike eye

shooting its cold and egotistical spear
where it can do least damage.

Breathe deep! No hurt, no pardon
out here in the cold with you
you with your back to the wall. (37-42)

Nonetheless, it is almost impossible for a housewife who is always occupied with family chores to procure “the cold and egotistical element” which should originate from a calm and egotistical mind. In the poem, we perceive the dilemma Rich experiences as a housewife and a poet. Rich points out the choice that women had been facing “between ‘love’--womanly, maternal love, altruistic love—a love defined and ruled by the weight of an entire culture; and egotism—a force directed by men into creation, achievement, ambition, often at the expense of others, but justifiably so” (ARPP 175). In other words, women are always supposed to make a decision between fully contributing herself to her family and being concentrated on art creation without regards to other people. Rich criticizes that these alternatives are false ones because “the word ‘love’ is itself in need of re-vision” (ARPP 175). In this saying, Rich interrogates the traditional ideas that a housewife or a mother should give up the zeal for her ideals but love her family

wholeheartedly, but I think Rich's criticism would have been more complete if she also had expressed that "egotism" is in need of revision as well. Also in the poem "Orion" Rich only discloses the struggle in opting for her family or her career without further questioning whether a female poet should adopt "the cold and egotistical element" propagated by male artists. In "Orion" Rich has still not fully developed her female consciousness and she forms this new identity of "androgyny" by identifying part of herself with a male image—"Orion", the "half-brother." Nevertheless, the androgynous identity can release her from the rigid and conventional concepts of gender.

According to the archetypal theory of C. G. Jung, "every human psyche is bisexual," and in the female psyche, the male archetype is called the animus. The animus, like the anima representing female characteristics in a man's psyche, is the "soul-image," standing for a woman's life force or vital energy (Guerin 170). Referring to this Jungian theory, Albert Gelpi reads "Orion" as an projection of Rich's animus and suggests that Rich was advancing to "a fuller comprehension and integration of the self" by trying to assimilate the powers of mind and will symbolized by the animus into her identity as a woman (295).

Three years after “Orion” comes the poem “I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus” which is adapted from Jean Cocteau’s movie about Orpheus. Albert Gelpi also considers it an animus poem in which Rich depicts herself “as a woman whose animus is the archetypal poet” (296). Supposing Rich’s animus refers to the archetypal poet—Orpheus, she might imply that her poetic power diminishes again as the dim star in “Orion” when naming herself as “the death of Orpheus.” However, the image of the woman, “the death of Orpheus,” is not powerless, but full of power.

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

.....

a woman feeling the fullness of her powers
at the precise moment when she must not use them. . . (3-5, 12-13)

Similar to the secretly burning star in the poem “Orion,” the woman here should possess great powers that are strictly confined by the “authorities” that are very likely to imply the mighty institute of patriarchy. Thus both in “Orion” and “I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus,” we perceive that a woman poet’s mind suffers oppression but there is a difference worth noticing. I think, in the latter poem, Rich

incorporates the archetype of male poet, as Albert Gelpi calls “animus,” into her identity of woman instead of splitting herself into two conflicting roles—a woman and a poet. Keyes also comments that “Rich’s sense of her own power as a poet is reinforced in ‘I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus’” and writing this poem or the dream makes Rich attain “psychic integration” (120-1). However, strictly speaking, it is not until the appearance of the poem “Diving into the Wreck” that we can observe the poet’s achievement of integrating the female and male psyche.

According to Jane Vanderbosch, two poems “The Stranger” and “Diving into the Wreck” “constitute a ‘revision’ of Rich’s sense of herself” because in these poems Rich identifies herself “as a being who combines male and female characteristics” (112). These two poems have often been taken together in discussion because they both present the image of androgyny. However, their respective image of androgyny in some way does not symbolize the same thing in these two poems. In “The Stranger,” the tone full of firmness expresses Rich’s “visionary anger.”

Looking as I’ve looked before, . . .

.....

walking as I've walked before
I like a man, like a woman, in the city
my visionary anger cleansing my sight
and the detailed perceptions of mercy
if lowering from that anger (1, 6-10)

In these lines, Rich refers to her insistence on being what she has been and claims that her “visionary anger” is not revengeful but can offer a clear vision with “perceptions of mercy.” The image of “androgyny” is utilized to imply the poet’s integrity that cannot be divided by the gender division of patriarchal world.

if I come into a room out of the sharp misty light
and hear them talking a dead language
if they ask me my identity
what can I say but
I am the androgyny (11-15)

At the same time, Rich also accuses the conventional male language because it is incapable of expressing the multifaceted and vivacious mind of a poet like her.

I am the living mind you fail to describe
in your dead language
the lost noun, the verb surviving
only in the infinitive (16-19)

Here Rich integrates the male and female characteristics into her own

poetic identity in order to distinguish herself from traditional poets. Such integration can be regarded as great advance in a woman's process of raising her self-consciousness.

Cheryl Walker reminds the readers that there are two things Rich has said: one is that "she would like to write poetry which could be useful to women" and the other is that "the only real maturity is one in which the self is so small it disappears and so large it encompasses a great many more than one"; therefore, Walker suggests the "I" in "The Stranger" "both is and is not Adrienne Rich" (229). Nevertheless, I would prefer to apply Walker's opinion about the diver in "Diving into the Wreck" which in my opinion, is less personal than "The Stranger" because the diver's probing experience and what could be found could mean much to other people. After the diver reaches where the wreck is, the "I" is developed into "he" as well as "she."

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 (71-77)

In this stanza, we perceive the poet's androgynous integration around "the Wreck" which symbolizes the hidden truth about the gender. On the one hand, this explorative trip of the diver indicates Rich's attempt to fathom her "black" unconscious world. On the other hand, she also intends to reveal what has been covered under the sea—the subconscious world of human beings. In the final stanza, the persona is more like evoking communal consciousness than announcing an individual identity.

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
 a book of myths
 in which
 our names do not appear. (87-94)

"The myths" should mean the gender myths that have been constructed by the patriarchy to dichotomize humans into men and women and thus have left the name of androgyny out. According to the line "the sea is not a question of power" in the fourth stanza, we may assume the poet's implication that there is no problem of power in the subconscious world.

However, in the other world, where human consciousness has been manipulated by the patriarchal ideology, the gender dichotomy is intended to establish the hierarchy of power, in which men are on the top to command. Hence Rich would like to offer to all humans a revision about the gender and the power relation.

Even though the androgynous identification in “The Stranger” and “Diving into the Wreck” subverts the gender dichotomy, this new identity is still inadequate, so it cannot raise a whole female consciousness. Albert Gelpi mentions that Rich expresses her regret for the line ‘I am the androgyne’ in the 1972 poem ‘The Stranger’, “since androgyny in practice merely masks male appropriation of the feminine” (298). Jane Vanderbosch also refers to Rich’s saying about androgyny in a 1977 interview:

. . . The ‘androgyny people’ have not faced what it would mean in and for society for women to feel themselves and be seen as full human being. [Thus] I don’t think of androgyny as progress anymore, I think it’s a useless term. . . (113).

Rich further explains that the concept of androgyny cannot help women raise a self-awareness according to the strict feminist standard (Vanderbosch 113). In the poem “Natural Resources” (DCL 60-67)

published in 1977, Rich writes the lines “There are words I cannot choose again/ humanism androgyny” (66). Rich herself negates the term “androgyny.” Claire Keyes also maintains that when writing such poems as “Diving into the Wreck” and “The Stranger,” Rich emphasizes on the ideal of androgyny but at the same time, she “abandons her quest for a female aesthetic” (152). Even so, Keyes still holds up a different but positive view:

The androgynous ideal is a transitional stage in the formulation Adrienne Rich’s developing aesthetic of female power . . . It makes sense to think of balancing the masculine power-to-control with the coming into consciousness of the female power-to-transform. “Diving into the Wreck” is such a poem. In it, the two kinds of power merge (152).

In a word, the search for the androgynous ideal, as Keyes suggests, may be disadvantageous to the pursuit of female aesthetics but it does illuminate the direction to reveal what has been hidden under the patriarchal world.

In exposing and interrogating the oppression of compulsory heterosexuality in women’s lives, Rich writes poems with themes that correspond to her political essays. Besides the issue of heterosexual manipulation, Rich also presents the notions of “lesbian existence” and

“lesbian continuum” in her poems. Poetry in the volume The Dream of Common Language is considered most representative of Rich’s lesbian theory. Prior to that volume, the poem “From an Old House in America” begins to notify how necessary it is for women to recognize female communal experiences in their lives and history. In this poem, the ninth section beginning with “I am an American woman” portrays the history of American women.

Foot-slogging through the Bering Strait
jumping from the Arbella to my death

chained to the corpse beside me
I feel my pains begin

I was washed up on this continent
shipped here to be fruitful (86-91)

Rich’s identification with the experiences of those female forerunners (American Indians, Puritans and Africans) indicates her intention to delineate “lesbian continuum” which involves woman-identified experiences throughout the history.

Nevertheless, the frontier women suffer from long-lasting isolation from each other as expressed in the last five lines:

I have lived in isolation
from other women, so much

in the mining camps, the first cities

the Great Plains winters

Most of the time, in my sex, I was alone (112-116)

No matter where and when a woman exists, she always feels a sense of isolation which is symbolized as “a suicidal leaf” in the sixteenth section.

Isolation, the dream
of the frontier woman

leveling her rifle along
the homestead fence
still snares our pride
--a suicidal leaf

laid under the burning-glass
in the sun's eye

Any woman's death diminishes me (250-258)

Here the sun symbolizes the patriarchy that consumes women's power of life by dividing them into individual and less powerful resisters.

Isolation in lesbian lives and suicide of some lesbians are regarded by Rich as acts of resistance to patriarchy in lesbian existence. However, what Rich really wants to point out is that every woman is an influential part in women's community and the close connection among women should be revived to develop women's communal power which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Poetry in the volume The Dream of a Common Language has

presented women's power in many forms of women's relations. In Susan Stanford Friedman's words, the structure of the volume "embodies Rich's theory that authentic women's relationships in a patriarchy are essentially lesbian" (189). I think in this volume, Rich adopts lesbian-feminist approach of combining lesbianism with feminism by envisioning lesbian love, women's intimacy and mutual support as a starting point to explore women's power and female poetics. Therefore, in the following discussion, I will try to explore how Rich has manifested women's power in women's daily relationship, including lesbian lovers, siblings, and mother and daughter.

Rich frequently expresses anger toward the patriarchal oppression upon women but in the first section of "Twenty-One Love Poems" she presents a various attitude that is more than mere resentment. In the first section, symbolized by the malicious environment of a city, the patriarchal civilization is presented as a polluted and perverted world:

Wherever in this city screens flicker
 with pornography, with science-fiction vampires,
 victimized hirelings bending to the lash;
 we also have to walk . . . if simply as we walk
 through the rainsoaked garbage, the tabloid cruelties
 of our own neighborhoods. (1-6)

The city is full of pornographic and threatening fantasies and practices and people here are psychologically used to victimization. However, these lesbian lovers do not want to give up this unfavorable urban space but shows their determination to stay with rotten dreams and foul words: “We need to grasp our lives inseparable/ from those rancid dreams, that blurt of metal, those disgraces” (7-8). It is intricate why they still insist on living in such an offensive world where even their existence is rarely recognized:

No one has imagined us. We want to live like trees,
 sycamores blazing through the sulfuric air,
 dappled with scars, still exuberantly budding,
 our animal passion rooted in the city. (13-16)

According to Susan Stanford Friedman, Rich rooted in the city finds “evidence of a regenerating life force associated with a desecrated ‘female principle’” and the love between women here is “an Eros whose intangible power is the only force strong enough to confront the tangible power of society” (179-80). In this way, women are not asked to escape from the realities of oppression or to regard themselves as isolated exiles but encouraged to keep on walking and living like the vigorous nature “blazing through the sulfuric air,” and “still exuberantly budding.” Judy

Grahn also observes that “Rich is calling for a love based in reality” and the lesbian life she wants is “not in exile, not hidden and not located on a fantasy island, but rather is right there in the contemporary urban island of Manhattan, as a full and public life” (36). Rich also exhibits this intention to publicize her lesbian love in the second love poem.

. . . and I want to show her one poem
 which is the poem of my life. But I hesitate,
 and wake. You’ve kissed my hair
 to wake me. I dreamed you were a poem,
 I say, a poem I wanted to show someone . . .
 and I laugh and fall dreaming again
 o f the desire to show you to everyone I love,
 to move openly together
 in the pull of gravity, which is not simple,
 which carries the feathered grass a long way down the upbreathing
 air. (7-16)

Here the persona reveals in the dream her inner desire to show everyone her female lover and to make her lesbian love and life visible. The force of “gravity” indicates the power of a poet to make the invisible matters into readable poems and it is this poetic power that Rich would like to utilize to disclose the unspeakable and ignored love of women.

“ Twenty-One Love Poems” is supposed to be a romantic poem

about two lesbian lovers but actually it is more intended for exploring women's power by adopting a political view on women's close relationship. In this poem, the lesbian love and their intimacy have been expanded into women's communal experiences so Adrian Oktenberg also suggests that the pronoun "we" in this poem can mean two women lovers as well as all the women as a community (74). In poem VI, the persona reveals her faith in her lover for she could believe the world in her lover's hands. The "hands" not only represent a lover's support and warmth but also are extended to stand for the communal power of diverse careers such as divers, midwives, pilots and so on. The images of women are even traced back to ancient witches through their images on the sides of a krater-cup.

Your small hands, precisely equal to my own—
 only the thumb is larger, longer—in these hands
 I could trust the world, or in many hands like these,
 handling power-tools or steering-wheel
 or touching a human face . . . Such hands could turn
 the unborn child rightways in the birth canal
 or pilot the exploratory rescue-ship
 through iceberg, or piece together
 the fine, needle-like sherds of a great krater-cup
 bearing on its sides

f igures of ecstatic women striding
to the sibyl's den or the Eleusinian cave— (1-12)

Rich tries to integrate women's communal power in varied occupations,
from the past to the present but this power might “carry out an
unavoidable violence” in order to fight against any violent oppression:

such hands might carry out an unavoidable violence
w i th such restraint, with such a grasp
of the range and limits of violence
that violence ever after would be obsolete. (13-16)

However, this violence is grasped and restrained within the ranges and
limits that as long as there is no outrageous and oppressive force existing
in this world, the “unavoidable violence” in women's power would be
abandoned.

As mentioned above, Rich has intended to broaden lesbian love to
include all the women. This purpose is even more obvious in poem XII:

. . . and the past echoing through our bloodstreams
is freighted with different language, different meanings—
though in any chronicle of the world we share
it could be written with new meaning
we were two lovers of one gender
we were two women of one generation. (12-17)

The last two lines suggest to extend the “we” from the private relation

between two lesbian lovers to the public sphere of contemporary women.

In the lines—“and the past echoing through our bloodstreams/ is freighted with different language, different meanings—, ” Rich points out that women’s history lies in every woman’s body even though this history has been translated in “different language” into various meanings.

The idea about the history “freighted with different language” corresponds to the concept of translated civilization in poem V: “. . . civilization, this act of translation, this half-world” (20). As discussed above, women’s history has been translated into patriarchal language. Therefore, the different language in poem XII is also likely to be “the patriarchal language” which neither could describe the androgynous diver in “Diving into the Wreck”, nor could fully present the historical facts of women. That is why Rich continues calling for women’s new language that can be inscribed with new meanings for women’s history. The lines—“though in any chronicle of the world we share / it could be written with new meaning”—indicate the definition of “lesbian existence” that Rich proposed later in 1980. This concept of “lesbian existence” suggests “both the fact of the historical presence of lesbians and our continuing creation of the meaning of that existence” (BBP 51).

Therefore, in “Twenty-One Love Poems” lesbian existence implies not merely the existence of lesbian lovers but also a new vision for all the women to recognize women’s mutual love by employing a new language to recover the history of women.

In addition to lesbian lovers, Rich thinks that sisterly relationship and the bond of mother and daughter also can bring forth a communal power of women. Rich has confessed, “I feel acutely that we are strangers, my sister and I; we don’t get through to each other, or say what we really feel” (DCL 50). In the poem “Sibling Mysteries” which is dedicated to her sister, Rich attempts to reconstruct a connection with her sister. Hence Rich tries to evoke the memory about the common experiences between her and her sister, including their infant love and desire for Mother’s nurturing, comforting and protective power:

Remind me how we loved our mother’s body
 our mouths drawing the first
 thin sweetness from her nipples

our faces dreaming hour on hour
 in the salt smell of her lap Remind me
 how her touch melted childgrief (31-36)

Vaderbosch suggests that in the process of recollection Rich also wants

to be mindful of being “as part of a women’s tradition that stretches back to the primordial” (123). However, Mother’s love seems to be regulated for “the strange male body”—Father: “and how we thought she loved / the strange male body first / that took, that took, whose taking seemed a law” (40-42). As to what the law is, we may understand it by reading section three.

. . . And how beneath
the strange male bodies
we sank in terror or in resignation
and how we taught them tenderness— (54-57)

The “strange male bodies” are of husbands and male lovers who still need to be taught how to be tender in love making even if women themselves are “in terror or in resignation.” Women have to teach men and serve them: “And how we ate and drank/ their leavings, how we served them/ in silence, . . .” (61-63). Men are like sons who are dependent on their mothers and women become motherly wives. As a result, Rich names this male-centered world as “the kingdom of the sons”: “how we dwelt in two worlds/ the daughters and the mothers/ in the kingdom of the sons” (70-72). In that kingdom, it becomes a rule that women have to take care of men like sons and men deserve the

complete love and support from women. As to women's world, it is split into one of daughters and the other of mothers. In other words, a daughter cannot obtain Mother's full attention and love because of the presence of Father and when a daughter becomes a mother, her motherly love has to go to men, not to other women. Therefore, women live in two separate worlds where women can scarcely communicate their love for each other.

In the last two stanzas of section two, we see daughters crave for intimacies with Mother who is elevated to too high a position for them to approach.

erect, enthroned, above
 a spiral stair
 and crawled and panted toward her

I know, I remember, but
 hold me, remind me
 of how her woman's flesh was made taboo to us (46-51)

Nonetheless the law of "the kingdom of the sons" forbids daughters to develop intimate connections with mothers because those son-like men want to monopolize mother's love and power. Since the relation between mothers and daughters is the primary one between women, its split could

lead to disconnection among women and to discontinuity of women's power. Therefore, confronted with the long-existing separation among women's interrelationship, Rich suggests a way to reconnect women by reconstructing the fundamental interconnection among women.

Tell me again because I need to hear

how we bore our mother-secrets

s traight to the end

.....

how sister gazed at sister

reaching through mirrored pupils

back to the mother (73-75, 88-90)

From the first and the last stanzas in section four, we perceive how these sisters who bear in mind their secret desire for motherly love are prepared to trace back to their original bond with Mother through their gazes when they try to connect each other. To make this idea into practice, first Rich elicits the memory of the night they begin to break the patriarchal law:

then one whole night

our father dying upstairs

we burned our childhood, reams of paper,

talking till the birds sang. (93-96)

Second, Rich asks her sister to be mindful of their original bond that they were born of the same mother—“our lives were driven down the same dark canal” (114). In the final section, Rich reemphasizes the close relation between daughters and mothers.

The daughters never were
true brides of the father

the daughters were to begin with
brides of the mother

then brides of each other
under a different law

Let me hold and tell you (123-29)

Stressing the matriarchal bond between daughters and Mother, Rich signifies that it is of great importance for women to recognize the original bond of women. Here the mother-daughter relation is identical with lesbians who love each other physically and spiritually. I think Rich might suggest that only by identifying women’s connections like that between siblings or between mother and daughter together with that between lesbians can women’s intimacies be regained and then women’s power can be joined under “a different law” of women’s community.

As we have discussed in the second chapter, Rich's lesbianism suggests both "lesbian existence" and "lesbian continuum" which mean to create new meanings of lesbian history and to encompass all the women-identified experiences. As a poet, Rich has initiated her explorative journey in poetry writing to delineate her own life experience and her relations with the world and expand her observation to the whole history of women before raising up her theory about lesbianism. Rich has been revealing her concern about the oppression over women in their daily lives since her first poetry book A Change of World where the poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" showed a married woman's conflict between her role as a wife and her aspiring self. Rich's personal experience as a housewife gave her an inspiration to depict those housewives' agony and struggles in "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law." In composing the poetry about women's oppression, Rich's self-consciousness which has been ignored by the patriarchal world has gradually appeared especially when she identifies herself as an androgyny in "Diving into the Wreck." As soon as she recognizes her own androgynous characteristics, Rich also has developed a revision on her own identity as well as on the poetic language she has been taught to

utilize. Partly influenced by the feminist movement in 1970s, Rich further discovers that women suffer from oppression mainly because the connection among women has been cut off by the patriarchal power. Therefore she insists that women should reconnect each other by recognizing women's love that has been outlawed as a taboo and buried in the unwritten history. Lesbian love has been the most forbidden intimacy between women so Rich employs the lesbian love as a model of women's love in "Twenty-One Love Poems" to remind readers that various kinds of women's close relations have been oppressed and severed as mentioned in "Sibling Mysteries." Since women are separated into lonely individuals, it is impossible to integrate women's communal power. For this reason, Rich wants every woman to review what has been lost in her daily relationship with other women and to reconstruct the erased or unnoted history of women in a new language with new meanings.

Conclusion

When I try to work out my own definition of “lesbians” for the thesis, I have encountered some difficulties, since most definitions that can be found about lesbians or lesbianism are, as discussed in chapter one, almost limited to female sexuality without referring to its other aspects. Fortunately I have found Ann Ferguson’s essay and obtained many useful ideas from her analysis. Owing to Ferguson’s prudent discussion and suggestion, I try to avoid the problems in setting up my own definition of “lesbian.” As to those theoretical perspectives of lesbianism, I think, presenting lesbian studies in various fields, in one way, can prepare the researcher and readers with a basic understanding about how lesbianism has been perceived; in another way, it can form a contrast with Rich’s lesbianism, and will foreground the distinction of Rich’s lesbian concepts.

It is indisputable that “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” is one of Rich’s most magnificent essays. In that essay, the critique of heterosexuality as an institute has been stunningly innovative because it criticizes traditional perception about heterosexuality to be nothing but sexuality-oriented. Rich’s lesbian viewpoint is distinguished from others’ because she creates the terms of “lesbian existence” and

“lesbian continuum.” These two terms also represent Rich’s attempt to bring a lesbian perspective to the feminist movement. Rich has stated in the afterword of “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”:

In this paper I was trying to ask heterosexual feminists to examine their experience of heterosexuality critically and antagonistically, to critique the institution of which they are a part, . . . to become more open to the considerable resources offered by the lesbian-feminist perspective, . . .

(72)

As Rich has suggested, heterosexual feminists could further detect the oppression in their lives in this heterosexual society and the perspective of lesbian feminism should be accepted. Even if Rich’s new vision has caused interrogation from critics like Ann Ferguson, Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, however, all these questions and discussions can lead to further realization about Rich’s ideal to achieve women’s communal understanding and mutual support.

Rich’s definition of lesbian identity also has provided me an renovating view on defining “lesbian”. In the first chapter, my definition of lesbian is focused on women’s physical and emotional attraction to women, emphasizing the private intimacies between or among women. It is not until Rich’s lesbian identity is discussed in the second chapter that

I come to realize lesbian relationship should be politicized into a common experience of women but not limited in the individual or private field. The concepts of “lesbian existence” and “lesbian continuum” that are distinct from other definitions of “lesbian” broaden the perspective on lesbian connection and even more radically unravel the potentiality of lesbian relationship. Frankly speaking, these two enlightening concepts shape my approach to study Rich’s poetry in the third chapter.

Lesbian poetry is supposed to stress on the lesbian relationship but my discussion on lesbianism in Rich’s poetry has not been restricted to lesbian lovers. According to Rich’s essays, we are informed that her lesbian views are intended to cover every aspect of women’s lives and to unravel the hidden history of all the women. Therefore, my discussion encompasses three parts where Rich exhibits her lesbian perspectives in different ways. In the first part, since Rich has maintained that women should be aware of the oppression from the hetero-patriarchal society, I strived to present the implication about heterosexual and patriarchal oppression in Rich’s poetry. With the growing consciousness of the oppression, Rich starts exploring her own androgynous traits that are

focused on in the second part of my discussion. Later on, the word “androgyny” representing female power or poetics is denied by Rich, but women’s awareness of her own androgynous characteristics stands for a means to challenge and overthrow the gender binaries in heterosexuality. In addition, an exploration for androgyny symbolizes Rich’s revision on her selfhood, which can represent an important stage of reviving her female consciousness. Hence this phase of androgynous revision cannot be skipped. In the last part, we have perceived that Rich has indicated women’s power lying in their daily relations and Rich has also suggested that to explore the power, women have to identify the forbidden closeness with other women. The notion of disclosing women’s intimacy here in her poems obviously has corresponded to the idea of “lesbian continuum” in her essay. Therefore, Rich’s poetry accords with the important concepts constructed in her essays.

Rich has protested against hetero-patriarchal oppression and proposed the lesbian viewpoint, but never considered that it is meaningful or useful to tell heterosexual feminists that they were “sleeping with the enemy” (BBP 72). In other words, Rich has not asked every woman to deny heterosexual relation and turn to a woman lover.

What she really concerns about is that women should hold a view so sensitive as to perceive what has been veiled and so broad as to embrace what was banned to possess.

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