



ISSN: 1994-4217 (Print) 2518-5586(online)

Journal of College of Education

Available online at: <https://eduj.uowasit.edu.iq>

Hiba Ali Hussein

Shireen Shihab Hamad  
(Ph.D.)

University of Wasit

Email:

[Hibaalihuh@gmail.com](mailto:Hibaalihuh@gmail.com)[shhamad@uowasit.edu.iq](mailto:shhamad@uowasit.edu.iq)**Keywords:**self-reflexivity,  
reflexivity, feminism,  
narcissistic text,  
Adrienne Rich**Article info****Article history:**

Received 17.jan.2023

Accepted 18.mar.2023

Published 29.May.2023

**Self-Reflexivity in Selected Poems by Adrienne Rich****A B S T R A C T**

This paper presents the use of the theory of self-reflexivity in selected poems. The term reflexivity covers the whole range from reflection, self-reference, and self-reflectiveness and sometimes it gets mixed with self-reflexivity. Similarly, each one of these terms is closely connected with consciousness and self-consciousness. This study aims to deal with self-reflexivity and how it is employed in Selected poems by Adrienne Rich “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law”, “Diving into the Wreck”, and “Sources”. The study provides a psychological, linguistic and literary analysis of these poems and points out the use of a narcissistic text to attract the attention of its readers into how it was produced and received. The study arrives at showing how the poet started to question the patriarchal traditions in her society. She reflected her own ideas and experience concerning the oppression of the patriarchal system and created ways to express herself using a new perspective that is women’s own perspective.

© 2022 EDUJ, College of Education for Human Science, Wasit University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31185/eduj.Vol51.Iss2.2167>

## الانعكاسية الذاتية في قصائد مختارة للشاعرة أديان ريتش

أ.م.د. شيرين شهاب حمد

الباحثة هبة علي حسين

جامعة واسط / كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية،

## الملخص

تعرض هذه الورقة البحثية استعمال نظرية الانعكاسية الذاتية في مختارات شعرية. يشمل مصطلح الانعكاسية، الانعكاس، الإشارة للذات والانعكاس الذاتي وأحياناً تتداخل مع الانعكاسية الذاتية. كل مصطلح من هذه المصطلحات مرتبط بالوعي والوعي الذاتي. تهدف هذه الدراسة للتعامل مع نظرية الانعكاسية الذاتية وكيفية توظيفها من قبل الشاعرة أديان ريتش في قصائدها "لمحات لزوجة ابن"، "الغوص في الحطام"، و "جذور". تزودنا الدراسة بتحليل نفسي، لغوي وادبي لهذه القصائد. تتوصل الدراسة الى ان تبين كيف بدأت الكاتبة بالتشكيك بالنظام الابوي في مجتمعها. عكست افكارها وخبراتها الخاصة فيما يخص الاضطهاد من قبل النظام الابوي وابتكرت طرق للتعبير عن نفسها باستعمال وجهة نظر جديدة وهي وجهة نظر خاصة بالنساء.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الانعكاسية الذاتية، الانعكاسية، النسوية، النص النرجسي، أديان ريتش.

## Introduction

American literature is a reflection of the land's socio-political growth. Once discovered, America became a land that attracts ethnically victimized groups and oppressed religious sects. It became the land where dreams can be fulfilled. Some literary texts depict a specific religious and philosophical concerns. It is defined according to the concepts that the area influenced by like realism, naturalism, humanitarianism, Puritanism, transcendentalism and many other concepts of gender, race and other political issues. Many American writers belong to specific ethnic or racial groups so their writing can be arranged according to their ethnic origin. According to this, American literature is classified into Native American, Asian American, African American, Jewish and Hispanic (McMicheal, 1974, pp. 135-138).

The European immigrants, especially the British were the first who start writing poetry in the American colonies. They used their English language. The skillful Early American woman poet Ann Bradstreet's wrote her first poetry volume "The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America" in 1650. Although written in in Massachusetts, Bradstreet's work is not considered as a reflexive attempt to create an American identity. Just like in other English colonies, the American identity appeared as an opposition to the colonizers. The American nationality emerged as a challenge to the European progenitor after the revolutionary wars. The British culture helped the Americans to find their own identity and to build their American politics, music, literature and so on. The American individual is a picture of the republican beliefs that were adopted by the founding fathers of America (Dolan, 1990, pp. 31-41).

There was a shift in American poetry which is represented by the disappearance of the optimist tone that accompanied the poetry of the Puritans and Whitman, to a modernist tradition that is described as being dystopian. For ages, American poets like Whitman, Eliot,

Williams, Frost tried hard to be free from anything that is described as “traditional” in their generation. Their narratives reveal ongoing process of self-reflection and also self-modification in the poetry of American poets. Since America itself constituted originally from foreigners, the American poetry produced various types of poetry that represented the marginalized people to reflect the multi-cultural spirit of America. Types like feminist literature, Black literature, Queer literature are few examples of subtypes of the American literature (Siddhant Kalra, 2015, p.11).

### **Self-reflexivity in Adrienne Rich’s Poetry**

One of the most influential poets in American Literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is Adrienne Rich (1929-2012). Within the various essays and poems she introduced, Rich presents her continuous journey of self-discovery and self-knowledge. Over years she has had a growing interest in womanhood which was an essential theme in her poetry collections specifically in “Diving into the Wreck” (1973) and “The Dream of a Common Language” (1978). Rich worked on discarding culturally imposed concepts like male supremacy and female inferiority by promoting balance between them in her poems, as in “Diving into the Wreck”. Rich realizes that this balance will not happen without rewriting women’s history. Her work depicts her political and philosophical interests that go back to the 1970s. As one of the most important activists for radical feminism and the Women’s Liberation Movement, Rich’s work can be regarded as a voice for voiceless women (Kate Souls, 2012, p. 16).

Rich studied at Radcliffe College where she acquired and expanded her literary knowledge. In 1953, in one of Rich’s efforts to leave her parents household and to get freedom and independence, she got married to Alfred Conrad. This attempt proved to be a failure since she simply found herself in another stifling atmosphere which is marriage (Amy Sickels, 2005, p. 9-26).

Rich’s poetry encouraged people to doubt their beliefs and the norms of their society. Rich analyses and reflects herself in many poems by addressing subjects related to religion, myths, the history of women. In 1960s, she got recognition for her work. She was awarded by the National Institute of Art and Letters award. In 1963, she published her third collection “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” in which she reflected a more personal experience related to her female identity and the hardships of being a wife and a mother in 1950s which was a shift in Rich’s subjects and style. Adrienne Rich is regarded as a literary theorist and a multitalented writer whose poetry reflects the voices of discontent of those who are oppressed and silenced by the patriarchy (Nina Baym, 1998, p. 2722).

In this collection, for the first time she presented her feminist views explicitly in her poem “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” which was a crucial point in Rich’s poetic development. This poem is a powerful and angry statement that reflects Rich’s feminism. This poem was written when Rich was married and a young mother of three children just as “the Daughter-in-Law” in the poem. She depicts her desire to rebel and resist as a woman in a patriarchal society and as a poet in photographs of a woman, a daughter-in-law. Rich writes about females whose dreams have been forgotten or buried and whose voices have been silenced. This poem portrays a woman at an important period of transition, particularly in

1960s and 1970s because women started to become more aware of the limitations imposed on them by the patriarchal culture, society, family and even literature.

Rich attempted to free herself from her parents' entrapment and authority by getting married to a Harvard Economist. Later on, she discovered that nothing has changed and that she just moved from one prison to another. After only five years of getting married, Rich's label changed from a "wife" to a "mother" of three children (Kathlene Moore, 2000, p. 294). She started to have feelings of anger and dissatisfaction of being restrained by the limitations of motherhood which made her hopeless (David Peck, 2009, p. 929). In a journal entry, she reflects this suffering "My children cause me the most exquisite suffering of which I have any experience. It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness" (Rich, 1976, p. 21).

Being incapable of coping with the cultural conceptions of motherhood, made her "haunted by the stereotype of the mother whose love is 'unconditional' and by the visual and literary images of motherhood as a single-minded identity" (p. 23) that makes women leave everything and focus on nothing but their families. Rich faced a difficulty in accepting the culturally imposed duties on the role of women as mothers that force them to completely dedicate themselves to their children and husbands. After realizing this, in 1970 Rich separated from Alfred Conrad. Then she focused only on Women's Liberation Movement (Sickels, 2005, p. 59).

The speaker in this poem considers herself as a mere daughter-in-law that has no identity. She sees her existence as related to others who are around her or to structures. For this reason, she reflects her frustration and anger using an aggressive language. A major theme in the poem is the feeling of suppressed anger, rage, and guilt. The poem also sheds light on the role of males in suppressing females by reducing their dreams or the possibility that females have their own identities or talents. Instead, they limit the roles of females by doing only housework. According to Lacan (1949, p. 76), people need to go through different stages of questioning and thinking using the symbolic power of language in order to get to a particular state of maturation. Women poets are aware of the poetic forms they utilize in their works to reflect self-consciousness and that these forms must be different from men poets' forms. Hutcheon (1980, p. 14) explains that "the thin paper is the reflecting pool [Narcissus pool]; the text is its own mirror".

Rich reflects the hardships she faced as a daughter in law of traditional Jewish family. Rich chooses to focus on the daughter-in-law as the center of the poem instead of choosing any other female role like mother or sister. The purpose is the contrast between the daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law creates an effective means of comparing two different statuses of women each one from a different generation. Another important point is that this female relationship is the result of being related to a man. Rich sheds light on how females' lives and even relations are highly influenced by men. Mary Ellen (2012) explains that "Through Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law Rich gained national prominence, in part because of the accomplishment of her lyric voice, mostly in free verse, and in part because of her treatment of feminist-related themes". In the first part of the poem, the daughter-in-law expresses a rapid change in her character. She criticizes the mother-in-law because she is living a

meaningless and miserable life. She finds the mother-in-law as an obstacle that limits her life. Marriage has changed the daughter-in-law from having an active character to a miserable one because of her husband and children. Her mind is fertile but it is being limited by the people around her and hence she is incapable of using it:

You, once a belle in Shreveport,  
 with henna-colored hair, skin like a peachbud, (1-2)  
 ...  
 Your mind now, moldering like wedding-cake,  
 heavy with useless experience, rich  
 with suspicion, rumor, fantasy,  
 crumbling to pieces under the knife-edge  
 of mere fact. In the prime of your life. (8-12)

Although the daughter-in-law is an educated woman, but all she does is making coffee or “dusting everything on the whatnot everyday of life” (49). She remembers her earlier years when she used to suit the feminine standards of beauty which now moldering away just like the remains of her wedding cake. The poet uses simile in “a moldering like a wedding cake” (7) to say that this woman who once had beauty discovers that her mind is rotting as if it was a wedding cake. Rich points to how woman’s mind and the cake are similar in being fragile and vulnerable to decay. She carries on in “heavy with useless experience, rich/ with suspension, rumour, fantasy” (8-9) to express the how her mind became “heavy” with suspicions and rumours. The daughter-in-law is conscious of herself and how marriage has changed her to a different person. The mother in law portrays the traditional image of woman in Western society as a wife and a mother, and a mother-in-law.

In the second stanza, Rich employs metaphors related to domesticity to focus on her suffering in this slave-like state of what she describes in her essay “all enforced conditions under which women live subject to men” (Adrienne Rich, 1993). The daughter-in-law imagines hearing angels telling her “Have no patience” (17) and to save herself. This sound might be her true self that is entrapped and buried by the responsibilities of being a daughter-in-law, wife and mother. The sound is telling her to rebel:

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 (16-18)

Rich expresses how marginalized she feels. She deliberately uses references in this poem to form the poet’s rejection of the influential texts written by males. So, the allusions and references she mentions in the poem represent a protest against the patriarchal texts by Horace, Baudelaire, Diderot ... etc. and to highlight the poetic argument in referring to Emily

Dickinson and Mary Wollstonecraft. In order to create an effect of irony, Rich puts phrases from canonical texts beside contemporary texts as in part five which begins with Horace's Ode XXII "Integer Vitae", "Dulce ridens, dulce loquens" which means "sweetly laughing, sweetly speaking". She uses the same effect in the following part of the poem:

When to her lute Corinna sings  
 neither words nor music are her own;  
 only the long hair dipping  
 over her cheek, only the song  
 of silk against her knees  
 and these  
 adjusted in reflections of an eye. (58-63)

In her essay "When We Dead Awaken", Rich describes her journey in searching for her own voice. Rich confesses that in the early years of her career, when she used to read other women's poetry, she looked for similarities between women's poetry and men's poetry because "I wanted women poets to be the equals of men, and to equal was still confused with sounding the same" (Rich, p. 21). The first line in this part is taken from Thomas Campion's poem "When to her Lute Corinna Sings" to add an effect of contrast with Rich's opinion that women do not have a language that expresses their experiences and emotions.

Rich explains that Corinna is capable of playing the lute which is similar to how women writers are able to understand language. But when this woman writer imitates the men's techniques in writing, she loses her literary voice and cannot declare it as its own, just like Corinna. The only thing that Corinna possesses is her femininity which is also "adjusted in reflections of an eye" which refers the influence of patriarchy in controlling everything women have even their femininity by shaping it according to certain values of beauty. Rich is conscious of herself as a woman poet who was once affected by the style of male writers. Also, she is aware of herself as a woman who subjected to the traditions of patriarchy and sacrificed her dreams and goals, and as a result she lost her voice. This awareness is the first step in expressing her rejection to the masculine system and rediscovering herself.

In "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law", Rich reflects her emotions concerning themes like language, womanhood, resistance, and boundaries. She uses language that shows contrast between two sides by using texts that are regularly taken by male audience and presenting them from a different perspective. At the same time, she mentions independent and strong women characters whose voices were silenced just because they dared to "smash the mold straight off" (103). Rich links herself to those great women in the past who tried to break free from the typical roles that were imposed on them by the patriarchy.

The poem shows Rich's disappointment seeing her dream of becoming a prominent poet shattering in front of her sight because of marriage and motherhood and the traditions of the society. The responsibilities of her roles as a housewife, a mother with three children with constant needs, and the continuous interfering of the values of the patriarchy in her personal

matters were reasons for her rage and irritation. She reflects emotions of suppressed anger in this poem. She illustrates how women writers and artists are being limited and exploited by their societies. Rich once asked about what the reason behind not writing poems about her children, she replied “for me poetry was where I lived as no one’s mother, where I existed as myself” (Bernays, 1977, p. 89).

Her volume “Necessities of Life: Poems 1962-1965” showed a new side of Rich’s character. She became more involved with neglected people in her attempts of making their voices heard. Also, she participated in movements that were antiwar and called for the rights of marginalized people. She tried to portray her poetic career in her volume “Diving in the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972”. In this volume, she shed light on her journey of fighting for women’s rights and her rejection and anger of women’s subjugation in patriarchal societies (Abraham, 2016, p. 255). Sickels (2005) says:

Rich became an outspoken member of the Women’s Liberation Movement [...] in which small groups of women met to explore the political aspects of personal life [...] Much of Rich’s work [...] reflected this major philosophy of the Women’s Movement- that the political could be discovered within the personal, and that the community was more powerful than the individual (65).

In her poems, Rich explores females experience through language by using what can be called as “female writing”. She brought attention to women’s sexual difference to be a source of imagery in her poems instead of being a sign of inferiority. Nodeh Soghra and Farideh Pourgiv (2016, p. 72) state that “Rich exhibits the productivity and plurality of women’s language and experience that allows another birth to the woman-within the poet”. She offers a space for females to express themselves in her texts. She uses forms of art related to females that undermine the phallogocentric structures within language. She depicts the symbolic significance of female consciousness by pointing to the forces that oppress women in patriarchal societies. In these societies, language is turned to be a tool controlled by the males by which they govern the different forms of expression and at the same time make sure that females cannot use it to express themselves and their real life experiences (Helen Cixous, 1975, p. 353).

Nodeh Soghra and Farideh Pourgiv (2016, p. 73) suggest that there is a transformation in Rich’s writing which can be perceived by comparing her early work “A Change of World” with her later work as in her poetry collections “Diving into the Wreck” (1973) and “The Dream of a Common Language” (1978). Her “A Change of World” conveys the influence of males’ literary writing on Rich’s, especially of Auden’s, which can be described as a conservative manner of writing.

Cixous (1975) and Shoutler (1979) direct criticism to the conservative manners of writing followed by women writers. Cixous explains that the patriarchal history has internalized fear within women concerning the way they express themselves. Therefore, women were directed to employ a phallogocentric language that is repressing and incapable of reflecting women’s experiences. The ways in which this phallogocentric discourse used by females display inferiority. So, it is necessary for women to create a more powerful language that expresses females’ issues and real feelings to replace the phallogocentric discourse.

Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva as the representatives of the poststructuralist feminist theory see that women are imprisoned by a language that declines their attempts to express themselves. Consequently, they urge women to have what Cixous (1975) calls a “female writing” which is the “inscription of female body and female difference in language and text” (347). Showalter (1979, p. 37) asserts that female writers must work on freeing their literature from the imposed male tradition and make women’s literature guide itself according to its own preferences.

Rich experiences the same process of transformation to have a goal of expressing women’s issues. She presented her first volume “A Change of the World” in which she did not refer to herself as a feminist and followed the tradition of her old masters. Whereas in “Diving into the Wreck”, she leaves “an old way of love” and moves to a new one (Soghra and Pourgiv, 2016, p. 75). Rich gives an explanation of her writing in her early poetry: “I was trying, to write about the craft of poetry. But I was drawing on the long tradition of domination, according to which the precious resource is yielded up into hands of the dominator” (as quoted in Wasley, 2000, p. 162). In “Diving into the Wreck”, Rich’s voice changes to a strong voice of rejection in American poetry. She starts her collection by addressing problems of how inadequate this world is which gives males the authority and power to decide what females should and can do, and what should not. This case is similar to Rich’s early writings and the effect of male writers on her style and content.

In “Diving into the Wreck”, the persona in this poem has a mission which is diving into the wreck of Rich’s cultural and psychological past. Rich goes back to her origins to explore the roots of this oppressive tradition towards women (Keyes, 1986, p. 138). She rejects to be defined by the masculine tradition as a lesbian. This poem sheds light on Rich’s rediscovery of her “mirror-image” and her relationship with other women. She regards this rediscovery as a journey to recreate herself and to get connected to women readers:

I came to explore the wreck ...  
 I came to see the damage that was done  
 and the treasures that prevail ...  
 the thing I came for:  
 the wreck and not the story of the wreck  
 the thing itself and not the myth (Rich, 1973, p. 23)

In the previous lines, Rich declares that the reason behind oppressing females in patriarchal societies is due to handing males destructive powers. Thus, Rich thinks if women want to survive in this destructive culture that prescribes specific roles for them, they must rise above these obstacles and convey their rejection for such a system making them inferior to males throughout history. So, the influential status of “Diving into the Wreck” emerges from Rich’s elimination of the ideas she conveyed in her early poetry and a presentation of her desire to survey the origins of her scars. She refers to her beginnings as a daughter, a wife of a traditional Jewish man, and then a mother of three children. Also, the changes that took place in her life including her divorce and the suicide of her ex-husband shortly after that and

then announcing that she is a lesbian to the world. In each phase of her life, she found herself alienated as a female and as a poet. Rich is aware of the necessity to “reactivate the old wounds, inflame all the scar tissue, [and] awaken all the suppressed anger” (Vendler, 1993, p. 310). Within this feminist phase, Rich expresses female frustration and anger more directly and loudly.

In her volume “Diving into the Wreck”, Rich expresses her courage to be free from the masculine heritage and strategies that used to govern her writing which put her in a direct clash with masculinity. By employing a direct language and strong personas loaded with anger and dissatisfaction, Rich makes her rage heard by others to liberate women from cultural norms that patriarchy impose on them. Rich (1973) explains that saying: “My visionary anger cleansing my sight” (p. 19). She regards anger as a creative power that for ages women were prohibited from experiencing it. Martin (1984) mentions that throughout history patriarchy affected women in a negative way by linking their lives and even their self-respect to male approval. By getting to this confrontation with masculinity, what Rich wants is vengeance to make up for “the damage done to women in Western civilization in the name of reason, logic, and intellect” (p. 197-198).

She changes her poetic forms from “an apolitical formalist poet to that of an intensely politicized feminist poet writing in open forms” (Strine, 1989, p. 28). In her volume “Diving”, Rich (1973, p. 12) depicts women as “hand in hand, stumbling and guiding each other/ over the scarred volcanic rock” (41-42) as if they are break out of this cultural entrapment to the imaginary world of “Amazon Utopia” where there is only female community that is far away from male’s oppression.

In her poem “Diving into the Wreck”, Rich tells the story of a diver who expresses her suffering for having an unreal identity that is different from her reality. Rich wants to tell how patriarchy damaged and marginalized her in the past as a woman and a poet. She was highly influenced by the language used by male writers which directed her to write about subjects that do not represent her real self. She dives deep in the ocean in order to see the wreck and return with a rewritten story about her history.

This rewritten history is supposed to support her new identity that is conscious of herself. According to Rich, to portray a “self-image” in poetry means to focus on the distinction between two stages, the oppression of the patriarchy on her in the past and the changes that lead to self-consciousness in the present and future. The “wreck” here might represent the culture of the patriarchal system that suffocated her, or it might represent how Rich’s life and dreams were ignored by the society. The diver has the intention of discarding the false thought of gender roles by using a discourse that makes women’s voices heard and does not downgrade them. After years of attempting to adapt with the feminine roles imposed on her, Rich expresses her rejection and demands to have a voice of her own that must be heard.

Pamela Annas (1982, p. 18) explains that the persona in this poem dives deep in the ocean that is dark. The poem itself is written depending on the image of diving deep into the unconsciousness to revive the lost identity and voice of Rich as a female poet. The image of the ocean in the poem is a female image. The diver is not convinced with the present history

of Rich, so she dives deep to find the hidden treasures in water. She is looking for more liberating forces that enable female explorers to rewrite her history without being affected by male writers:

Beyond the difficulties of structuring truth lie the issue of power and sustainability, and how they function in determining gender identities. The diver begins by asserting her independence from the imposed model of gender. Then, by crossing the threshold between air and water—man and woman—she discovers a forgotten history and finds a new integrated-self waiting for her. Rich seems to replace contorted gender roles with a freer paradigm of androgyny (Hay, p. 2).

The diver shows rejection to the symbolic modes “book of myths” since they are biased and do not represent males and females in the same way. In patriarchal societies, women are linked to nature whereas men are linked to culture. The entailment of such a link is to say that women represent emotions while men represent thought. This entails that women are incapable of logical thinking or guide others while men are. Rich took this step of diving into the unconsciousness in order to find the forgotten treasures. The image of diving is employed to explore Rich’s own world that is deep and dark. Melissa Keith (2012, p. 103) says that this journey to unexplored side of the self brings to light particular types of power that reflect both personal transformation and women’s ability to impose social and political change on their world.

The first line, “First having read the book of myths” (1) describes the patriarchy’s role in constructing a deformed history of what women should be and do. Rich wants to change this historic perspective and create a new one from her point of view. One of the significant symbols in the poem is “The book of myths”. It symbolizes the source of males’ superiority and females’ inferiority. Because of this book, males exploited the untrue narratives about women that were imposed by the patriarchal system to shape women’s identities. The content of this book is biased and it included only myths since it focused only on masculine discourse and disregards feminine discourse (Keith, 2012, p. 103).

According to Lacan’s (1949) “Mirror Stage”, people acquire the ability to identify themselves in language, only after losing themselves in it by becoming objects, in what he calls the “Mirror Stage”. He states that the “Mirror Stage” starts when an infant becomes able to recognize itself in the mirror, after that an assimilation process takes a place to match between the consciousness and the reflected body in the mirror. The reflected identity obtained from the mirror gives the person a feeling of an illusionary wholeness within the perception of fragmentary reality.

The poet utilizes an important metaphor in “loaded the camera” (2) which reflects the diver’s feeling of the necessity of capturing the truth to have a proof of it. The verb “load” is used here to refer to loading a gun, so she is like loading a gun that she will use later. This gun is loaded to shoot the reason behind oppression against Rich in the past that will be discovered in the depth of the ocean- i.e., her unconsciousness. After that, she “checked the edge of the knife-blade” which is an image of danger and threat. The persona in the poem is

expecting to face difficulties in her journey from the masculine tradition to the undiscovered feminine tradition, but she is not affected by these threats and determined to reach her goal of self- discovery:

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

The journey in the poem stands for a journey from consciousness to the deeper levels of unconsciousness that are repressed by the old self and others. The “wreck” that she found at the bottom of the ocean represents the psyche’s levels that have not been explored consciously yet. It stands for her ambitions, ideas that were repressed because of the society. The poet searches for the truth about this wreck. So, the knife can be used to cut up the different things she may find in her search and the camera to record the truth when it is discovered (Ira Milne, 2009, p. 62).

The poet uses simile to convey the persona’s refusal to dive into the sea in a manner similar to Cousteau’s – a French scientist and explorer- and his team. They employed symbolic elements like the book of myths in order to tell the story of females. Their story was biased because it represents the masculine perspective of what women’s characters are and how they should be. They side-lined women and considered them inferior in comparison to men. Therefore, the persona dived into the deep water to see “the wreck and not the story of the wreck”.

I am having to do this  
not like Cousteau with his  
assiduous team  
aboard the sun-flooded schooner  
but here alone. (8-12)

Moreover, the persona employs different colours as an imagery to reflect her feelings in the journey. Colour signification is an influential device for it is related to the persona’s mood. Colours change from blue and green that represent the patriarchal society of the poet to black and dark when she gets deeper to indicate the invisibility of this new world because it represents the forgotten part of the self:

First the air is blue and then  
 it is bluer and then green and then  
 black I am blacking out and yet  
 my mask is powerful (34-38)

How the dark colours are used in the poem show the nature of the world under the water. The persona experiences a change in her mood which becomes darker but she is not affected because her mask “pumps her blood with power” (38). The diver’s aim is to discard the imposed restrictions that were imposed by the patriarchal system, by running away to the deep water to get her freedom. When she gets there, she feels comfortable that she “breathe [s] differently down here” (51). The poet uses metaphor to convey the persona’s feeling of peace under the water which later she discovers the richness of this hidden part of herself. In this volume, Rich was able to reflect herself as a woman in her poetry after years of following the traditions of male writers.

One of the important symbols in the poem is the symbol of the ladder “There is a ladder/ The ladder is always there hanging innocently” (13-15). It represents a connection between two worlds and enables the diver to remain on the surface or to go deep to the bottom. It helps her to have a holistic perspective of both males and females’ needs in life. Alicia Ostriker (1982, p. 72) sees that Rich points to the importance of distinguishing between reality and myths for women.

My flippers cripple me,  
 I crawl like an insect down the ladder  
 and there is no one  
 to tell me when the ocean  
 will begin. (29-33)

The persona’s flippers are bothering her and make her crawl as if she is “an insect” (30) when she goes down using the ladder. The poet utilizes simile here to convey the difficulties the diver is facing since there is no one to guide her.

Repetition is employed heavily in this poem in “I go down” (22), “I go down” (28) which aims to strengthen the sound effect of the poem and convey that the diver is ready to dive deep in the water. By this, she refers to her willingness to move from consciousness to explore unconsciousness leaving out the fear that was internalized in her by the patriarchal system.

Because of the biased system that considered masculine thought as superior to the feminine in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the patriarchy rejected the poet’s attempts to reach the androgynous being. So, the feminine traits are dominated by masculine traits which makes it quite difficult to reach a state of balance between the feminine and masculine traits. Patriarchy forces women to have whole feminine traits. Rich attempts to empower and rediscover herself to be able to reach the state of androgynous being. For this, she sees that it is a must to rewrite the history of females. She continues her search for the real story:

I came to see the damage that was done  
 and the treasures that prevail.  
 I stroke the beam of my lamp  
 slowly along the flank  
 of something more permanent  
 than fish or weed  
 the thing I came for:  
 the wreck and not the story of the wreck  
 the thing itself and not the myth (55-63)

The diver started the journey to see the damage that was done to herself throughout history and have a look on “the treasures that prevail” (87). After finding the treasures, she achieves the androgynous ideal by putting an end to the boundaries between feminine and masculine traits and traditions. She succeeded in transforming the masculine into feminine:

We circle silently  
 about the wreck  
 we dive into the hold.  
 I am she: I am he (74-77)

Rich ends the poem after discovering that she can become everyone “We are, I am, you are” which refers to her attempts to resurrect herself using language. In her quest for a better and deeper understanding of herself, Rich writes this poem to outline her perspective of her journey to become a radical feminist poet. Lacan (1949) asserts that a human infant develops a better realization of itself when looking in the mirror. The same thing happened to Rich, using her texts as the mirror, she develops and monitors herself development as a woman with a mission to rediscover herself and communicate with other women in her poems and create mirrors in which women can see their true selves. Language is an influential means that enabled Rich to rewrite her history and express her own ideas in a society that trivialized and limited her roles as a daughter, wife and mother.

As a feminist who helped and supported feminists for years, Rich’s political opinions and writings promoted the idea of radical feminism. During this time, Rich published some of her best writings as she immersed herself with ideas related to women’s history and traditions. She is known as an honored poet in America because she dared to defy the traditions and norms of her society just to live in her own terms (Moore, 2000, p. 295).

Mary Hussmann (1992, p. 221) describes Adrienne Rich as “one tough poet. In a voice which is powerful, resolute, critical, and honest, she has tried to integrate the personal and the political in order to create a woman identified aesthetic”. Rich worked hard in conveying the true image of what women are and in challenging the restrictions of the patriarchal society. In her poetry, she attempts to reflect and reshape her society’s culture. By following her own feminist tradition, Rich has clearly depicted her ability to change her poetic voice which was similar to the tradition of Auden and Yeats, to a new voice that

represents her as a woman which was a part of her self-transformation or recreation. In 1951, after publishing her volume "A Change of World", Rich was praised by W. H. Auden for the modesty in her poems.

Linda Kinnahan (1996, p. 620) mentioned that there were many women poets who had a goal of making women's experiences heard using women's voices. In order to reach this goal, they employed a language that is easy and improves self-expressivity. For years, negative gender associations have accompanied the productions of female writers. In poetry if a woman poet is described as "too lyrical" then it will be linked to concepts like being too emotional, too solipsistic or too feminine.

In 1982, Adrienne Rich published her twenty-three parts prose poem hybrid "Sources" in which she tried to reconcile the present with the past. She uses writing as a revision to view her past and her identity from a different perspective. Adrienne Rich published her poem "Sources" in 1982 as a reassessment of her life and herself as a woman, poet, ex-wife, daughter and widow. As if the poem is a reflection of Rich's past experience and the development of her thought.

In "Sources", Rich presents a more expressive language and content. It is a detailed exploration of Rich's efforts to overcome her past experience and find a new perspective. Rich is in an imaginative investigation of the self in this poem. In sequence XX (20) in the poem, the speaker refers to the "faithful, drudging child" (1) who became a woman that has a determination to change history using her writing, and whose poems won awards for being perfectly crafted:

The faithful grudging child  
 the child at the oak desk whose penmanship,  
 hard work, style will win her prizes  
 becomes the woman with a mission, not to win prizes  
 but to change the laws of history. (1-5)

The poet continues expressing her personal struggle as a writer who was first raised and guided by males whether within her family or by other male writers, then she decided to abandon these guidelines that were set by males to experience new choices as a female poet who can express herself without having concerns of being described a narcissistic or self-centered poet. She is puzzled about having this sense of mission. She does not know how she got this mission nor how the "boundaries of perfection" (7) exploded and disappeared.

In "the boundaries of perfection" (7), she uses metaphor to refer to how her family and the society drew her particular boundaries and she was not allowed to cross them. After igniting these boundaries, she can see that there is a kind of transformation within herself. The speaker in the poem transcends to her past experience using imagery of boundaries that are exploding and injuring the speaker. She refers to leaving the traditions of her family to leaving a war zone that causes her injuries and "her cheekbone grey with smoke" (8) which was not an easy path to take:

How she gets this mission  
 is not clear, how the boundaries of perfection  
 explode, leaving her cheekbone grey with smoke (6-8)

Rich goes back to her early childhood. She was born in a privileged family that introduced her to reading and writing poetry. Her father taught her the basics of writing poetry like meter and form and encouraged her to write. At home, Rich's literary environment was limited by reading books that were written by only male authors from her father's library (Sickels, 2005, p. 10).

Later in her life, a different force, "desert absolute" grabs her and empowers her sense of mission. She becomes more dedicated to that mission. Now, she is a well-known female writer and activist who sacrificed a lot to change her own world and to break free from the rules of the patriarchy. In this poem, Rich explores the role of herself as a woman in shaping her own world.

Say that she grew up in a house  
 with talk of books, ideal societies —  
 she is gripped by a blue, a foreign air,  
 a desert absolute: dragged by the roots of her own will  
 into another scene of choices (10-14).

## Conclusions

In this study Adrienne Rich's poetry encourages people to doubt all the authorities imposed on them by the society. Rich's self-reflexivity is covert since she used thermalized techniques to reflect herself in her poems. In her poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law", Rich reaches a crucial point in her poetic development. She reflects her own experience as a daughter-in-law who could not fit in the role that was imposed on her by the society. In this poem, the poet is addressing herself using the pronoun "you". As if the text became a mirror that reflected her deformed image that was unseen or hidden. Rich uses simile in "a moldering like a wedding cake" to refer her mind state under the pressure of the society. For Lacan people need to go through different stages of questioning and thinking to get to a particular state of maturation. This is what Rich does, she is aware of the poetic forms she uses in her work in order to reflect self-consciousness.

Hutcheon's opinion is that "the thin paper is the reflecting pool, the text is its own mirror". Rich's poetry went through a transformation that can be noticed in her poem "Diving into the Wreck". In this poem, Rich became a recognized voice of rejection of the patriarchy in the American poetry. Rich dives in cultural and psychological past experience. This poem can be seen as a journey in which Rich rediscovers herself as a woman and as a poet who can have her own way of writing. The text here serves as a mirror to reflect the poet's journey and also affecting the reader's perception of it since it is a narcissistic text. She uses metaphor in "loaded the camera" (1) to capture her true self that is buried in the wreck.

## References

- Annas, P. (1982). A Poetry of Survival: Unnaming and Renaming in the Poetry of Audre Lorde, Pat Parker, Sylvia Plath, and Adrienne Rich. *Colby Quarterly*, 18(1), 3.
- Abraham, A. (2016). Accept & Advocate Womanhood: Adrienne Rich's Selected Poetry & Prose. *IJELLH*, 4 (9), 251-259.
- Baym, N. (1998). The Norton anthology of American literature. Volume 2. W.W. Norton & Co.
- Bernays, A. (1977) "Motherhood: A 'Primal Agony' ?" *Harvard Magazine*. January –February. p. 89.
- Cixous, H. (1975). The Laugh of the Medusa. *Chicago Journals*, 23(4), 347-362.
- Dolan, P. (1990). American Poetry: The Divided Tradition. *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, núm. State University of New York at Stony Brook. 3, pp. 31-41.
- Ellen, M. (2012). Cliffs Notes on American Poets of the 20th Century. Retrieved from [http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study\\_guide/literature/american\\_poets/poets/adrienne-rich-1929-2012.html](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/literature/american_poets/poets/adrienne-rich-1929-2012.html).
- Hussmann, M. (1992). On Adrienne Rich. *The Iowa Review*, 22 (1), 221-225.
- Hutcheon, L. (1980). *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Keith, M. (2012). *Cantatas of the Wild: Memoir, Mysticism, and Modern Feminist Poetry*. University of California.
- Kinnahan, L. (1996). Experimental Poetics and the Lyric in British Women's Poetry. Geraldine Monk, Wendy Mulford and Denise Riley. *Contemporary Literature*. 37(4),620-670.
- Lacan, J. (1949). *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function*. London: W. W. Norton & Company.
- McMichael, G. (1974). *Anthology Of American Literature Volume I*. Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
- Milne, I. (2009). *Poetry for students. Volume 29: presenting analysis, context, and criticism on commonly studied poetry*. Thomson/Gale Group.
- Moore, K. (2002). Adrienne Rich. In C. Cucinella (Ed.), *Contemporary American Women Poets: A-2* (pp. 294-301). Greenwood Press.
- Kalra, S. (2015). *American Poetry: An overview*. Researchgate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292615571\\_American\\_Poetry\\_An\\_Overview](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292615571_American_Poetry_An_Overview)
- Keyes, C. (1986). *The Aesthetics of Power, The Poetry of Adrienne Rich*. Athens: Georgia: U
- Ostriker, A. (1982). The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking. *Chicago Journals*. 8(1), 68-90.
- Showalter, E. (1979). Towards a Feminist Poetics. In M. Jacobus (Ed.), *Women's Writing and Writing about Women* (pp. 22-41). Goom Helm.
- Sickels, A. (2005). *Adrienne Rich*. Chelsea House Publishers.
- Soghra, N. and Pourgiv, F. (2016). *On the Development of female Voice in Adrienne Rich*. University Petru Maior.
- Soules, K. (2012). Revitalization of Female History: An Analysis of Adrienne Rich's Diving into the Wreck and The Dream of a Common Language. *Augsburg Honors Review*, 5, (3).
- Peck, D. (2009). *American Ethnic Writers. Vol. 3*. Salem Press, Inc.
- Rich, A. (1973). *Diving into the Wreck*. New York W.W. Norton & Company.
- Rich, A. (1976). *Of Woman Born*. New York W.W. Norton & Company.
- Rich, A. (1993). "When we dead awaken: writing as re-vision". In Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose. Norton.
- Vendler, H. (1993). Ghostlier Demarcations, Keener Sounds. In B. Gelpi & A. Gelpi (Eds.). *Adrienne Rich Poetry and Prose* (pp. 299-310). Norton.
- Wasely, A. (2000). *Postmodern American Poetry and the Legacy of Auden*. Ph.D. Thesis, Yale University.