

ISSN 0976-8165

The Criterion



The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed & Indexed Open Access Journal

April 2013 Vol. 4 Issue- II

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

Saussurean Concerns in the Writings of Adrienne Rich

Hina Gupta

Assistant Professor ,Department of English
Patel Memorial National College, Rajpura (Punjab) India
&
Research Scholar (English) Punjabi University, Patiala

Adrienne Rich (1929-2012) took to writing as a key to social and political change. She surfaces through her remarkable poetry as a “pioneer” in poetry of empowerment (Gelpi xi). Her poetry consistently vouchsafes for a complete human being. Critics have consistently and overwhelmingly read her as a feminist. This is half the truth. She through language used by her in her writings try to give empowerment for the marginalized, the depowered and people existing on the fringes. This could be women in one case, isolated and ostracized communities and clans in another case. Rich herself underlines the political imperative in writing. She calls language a “double edged sword” and comments:

... no art, no writing, exists that is not ultimately political. ... Language and images have the capacity to bolster privilege and oppression, or to tear away at their foundations (Rich “Notes For a Magazine” 4).

It is this janiformity in the works of Rich, their language as exhibiting an array of political meaning that has not been attended to by critics. The present article strives to remain free from the uniperspectival nature of present criticism on the works of Adrienne Rich, and instead sensitively attend to the multiperspectival character of language in her writings. Rich’s poetry is not only disciplined but candid, and there is the Saussurean concern for meaning in her use of language. Also her writings reveal her relations with Saussurean concerns, concerning not only language, but also its meaning and problematics of expression and significance.

The need of the hour is:

I) neither to continue embracing poststructural theories and the theoreticians uncritically;
II) nor to throw them lock, stock and barrel in the proverbial dustbin of history.
It is to re-read those episto-philospho jargon-laden legerdemain critically and not to any longer put up with the paradox-producing high-handed style of theory in the humanities.

Poetics, structural and post-structural either read literature as a narrow alley alongside the highway of critical theory, or it used literature as a quarry to mine out precious insights from literature to put them at the service of the theoretics of theory, for purposes of instances, and to render literature subservient to philosophy.

The need is to critique the Barthesian and the Derridean, put them at the service of literature for hermeneutic purposes and read literature *per se*, for its efficacy and value. Thus, the technique has to be neither assimilationist nor an exercise in *reductio ad absurdum*. Of course, as always, the difficulties relating to language, meaning and significance remain to be (as far as possible) disseminated and elucidated. Theoretics ought to aid in garnering insights from literary texts, instead of turning parasitical, sucking humanities, in general, and literature, in particular to fatten theory, while theory, for the most part, remains ambiguous and aloof. Poststructuralist ideas like:

- a) eschewing consideration of authorial intention,
- b) meanings are undecidable, sliding and purely provisional,
- c) there is no justification for searching for unity in a text,
- d) all hierarchies of values are reversible,
- e) history is a contest among competing narrative constructions,
- f) the very nature of language renders recounting of experiences ambiguous, an exercise in verbiage, and so on, need to be reappraised, in order to gain an overview of their relevance and efficacy in the present.

It is obvious that such arbitrary dictums set severe limits on critical arguments, investigations and interpretations that are not only acceptable but welcome in literature reading and analysis. Such lopsided doctrines, partial and one-sided readings of at least one primary text, namely, Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Generale* (1916). Often readings from Saussure's texts are incompatible with the avowed aims of critics who set forth on such expeditions.

Take an example: now, the necessity of considering the historical context of a literary work is being recognized again. These discussions concerning context will land in the domain of befuddlement if relations among language, perceived reality and authorial intention are not appropriately thought through, as these are going to have a great bearing on reading literature, if the historical context is significant. In a similar way, it can be said that if the language of a literary text was as self-referential as poststructuralist theory asserts, then literature would hardly be a site where important issues of race, class and gender could be explored, as is being done in much of contemporary critical discussion. The view has gathered strength that literature has more important purposes than to merely serve as the subject of theorizing, and theorizing more so an object whose purpose mostly has been the production of a paradox and the overt demonstration of the intellectual legerdemain. It is also being increasingly felt that the focus ought to be on a pluralism that recognizes that there are many ways of talking about literature instead of the formulations of traditional syllabi. Literature broadens understanding, provides newer perspectives and enhances the range of available alternatives to inimical forces that threaten or are fallacious or unjust or focusing on much of the absurd in cultural and social structures.

As alluded to a little while ago, Saussure's thinking was indeed intricate. It was of a specialist who was and remains original in certain respects. Of course there is the problem with his text, since it was reproduced from the lecture notes of his students, it is written in a terse and dry style. The text seeks a kind of exactitude where discussing through technical terms and complex language concepts is required. Even today, interest attaches itself to one important area of Saussure's study: it is related to the semantic aspect. Saussure attempts to provide an account of how words have meaning. Explaining *le signe linguistique* as an inseparable association of a sound image and a concept, Saussure elucidates upon the manner in which meaning accrues. He says: "it is quite clear that initially the concept is nothing, that is only a value determined by its relation to other similar values, and that without them the signification would not exist" (Saussure 117). Saussure is attempting to say that words in a language drive their meaning from each other and not through any relation to the objects in the world. Roland Barthes tried to help us by explaining: "this 'something' which is meant by the person who uses the sign ... being neither an act of consciousness nor a real thing... can be defined only within the signifying process, in a quasi-tautological way" (Barthes. *Elements* 43).

A little later, Fredric Jameson offers help with the Barthesian thought. He says: “the traditional concept of truth itself becomes outmoded, because the process of thought bears rather on the adjustment of the *signified* to the *signifier*” (Jameson 133). Jameson ought to be thanked for pointing out that the concept has to adjust itself vis-à-vis the sound image, and not the other way round. It may also be added that Barthes replaced ‘truth’ by ‘internal coherence’. A little while later, Terence Hawkes attempted to present a gloss on the issue. He said: “We thus invent the world we inhabit” (Hawkes 107). But Hawkes also qualified his statement by adding that “we modify and reconstruct what is given.” This was further amended, a little later, by Catherine Belsey who explained that language provides “not given entities but socially constructed signifieds” (Belsey 144). This meant that what language reflects is the “invented” world that is constituted in language.

There are important borrowings from Saussure concerning the study of literature. Roland Barthes articulated it in the following manner: “The structure of the sentence, the object of linguistics, is found again, homologically, in the structure of works” (Barthes. “To Write” 136). This may be befittingly compared with the views of Tzvetan Todorov on language. He said: The concept we have of language today ... if this perspective is followed, it is obvious that all knowledge of literature will follow a path parallel to that of the knowledge of language: moreover these two paths will tend to merge (Todorov 126).

Jameson concluded that structuralist criticism was “a kind of transformation of form into content ... literary works are about language” (Jameson 199). Jameson in his book (*The Prison-House of Language*) alludes to the views of Todorov to opine that every work expresses the story of its genesis. This led him to formulate that “the meaning of a work lies in its speaking of its own existence” (Jameson 199). Thus, the structure of a literary work is constituted by its language features, instead of the conventional idea that they are ‘about’ something. These are the consequences that have followed Saussure’s study of language. Another extension is Jameson’s conclusion that “literature, in our time is essentially an impossible enterprise” (158). Jameson demarcates a particular kind of writing which is “charged with the absolution of the guilt inherent in the practice of literature.” This reminds us of Belsey’s skepticism “whether we should continue to speak of *literature* at all ... because of ... the case for primacy of the signifier.” She finds value judgments objectionable and they are “frequently implicit in the term literature” (Belsey 144). Following Saussure we read in Barthes that the main indicator of language in realistic narrative is the past indefinite tense with “the expression of an order, and consequently of ... euphoria” (Barthes *Writing Degree Zero* 37). Reading Saussure intensely Barthes opines: “To tell the truth ... action that constitutes the narrative ... can be reduced to mere signs.” By way of a gloss, Barthes adds that in “all the great story-tellers of the nineteenth century, ... reality ... is subjected to the ingenious pressure of ... freedom” (Barthes *Writing Degree Zero* 37). Concentrating on language he further explains that:

the narrative past tense is ... part of a security system for *Belles-Lettres* ... one of those numerous formal pacts between the writer and the society for the justification of the former and the serenity of the latter ... it has a reassuring effect. ... Narrative past ... allows ... triumphant bourgeoisie of the last century to assert its values, and to assert them ... in a form ... it didn’t have to defend (Barthes *Writing Degree Zero* 39).

Barthes appraises the style of expository prose “and clarity of classical writing,” including the realist novel of the last two centuries and entitles it as “class writing,” with the gradual “definitive ruin of liberal illusions” (Barthes *Writing Degree Zero* 66). Realist fiction, and its characteristic style gradually appeared invalidated to writers, leading to multiplicities and

pluralisms of the previous century. Resembling Barthes' appraisal, Belsey entitled such writing as belonging to the domain of "expressive realism." According to her such writings belong to "the last century and a half, the period of industrial capitalism ... based on ... genuinely familiar senses ... and a predominantly conservative form ... to largely confirm the patterns of the world we seem to know" (Belsey 50-51). Characterization conformed to individualism, since it is a perspective essential to capitalism, and the writing appearing as a message from the writer to the reader. She explains that "Classical realism constitutes an ideological practice in addressing itself to readers as subjects, ... the readers's existence as an autonomous and knowing subject," with the denouement that "they freely accept their subjectivity and their subjection" (Belsey 69).

However, there could be another manner of reading a literary work, which may be branded as a non capitalist way of reading. Here "coherence and plenitude of the text is ... masquerading," where to appraise the "process of its production" the focus could be on the nature of the text, partaking of "inconsistent, limited and contradictory ... in the ideology" that gave rise to such a text. Here the reader (with overtones of capitalism) is not so much a "consumer of the text" (Belsey 104). In this manner of a reading of a text, "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (Barthes *S/Z* 4). Belsey explains that conventional criticism makes "departments of literature ... function like consumers' associations ... advising readers on the best (spiritual) buys." On the other hand, contemporary manner of reading a text will be "to foreground the contradictions ... in the text ... and to read it radically" (Belsey 129).

Thus, contemporary manner of reading a text replaces author-reader, capitalist-consumer mythology of classic realism with a model of reading in which critics and readers together are like the capitalist producers in an enterprise. We can also leave out the coinage of the term capitalism both in relation to critics and authors, thus leaving the reader alone to enjoy and savour the text. Suffice it to say that this vast edifice of thought has been erected upon the discussions in Saussure's study. Thus it is Saussure's line of thought which must be reconsidered as the notable genesis of these and related ideas. It is Saussure's work which is key to all the rest. Saussure argues and elucidates his position as clearly and completely as the difficulty of his subject will allow. Also it must be remembered that Saussure had scarcely anything to say in his book about literary works, ideology, capitalism and realism that later writers made so much of, as mentioned earlier. An important area of Saussure's thought was his expostulations on the phenomenon of words yielding meaning. It goes without saying that this has been found to be an area of difficulty right from the times of the first notable western philosopher, namely Plato. Moreover, Saussure scarcely considered the Nominalist tradition of thought, except while talking of "thing" and "idea," alternately in the first chapter. But soon he commences his long preamble on the nature of the linguistic sign as uniting a sound image and concept. Here Saussure may not be very explicit, but generally speaking, his position is quite clear. He goes on to say that the sign "carries the concept." He adds: "I mean by sign the whole [*le total*] that results from the association of the signifier with the signified." He further adds that "an idea is not linked by any inner relationship (*repport interieur*) to the succession of sounds ... which serves as its signifier ... and no one disputes the principle of the arbitrary nature of the sign" (Saussure 67). Saussure implies that no word for something in English or in any other language will be better than the word for it in any other language. Saussure explains difference between diachronic and synchronic language studies and compares a state of a language at a particular time in its history to a state of a chess game at a particular point. This analogy ushers in value as analogous to meaning. He explains that "The respective value of the pieces depends on their positions on the

chess board” (Saussure 88). Saussure explains that “values depend above all else [*surtout*] on an unchangeable convention [*une convention immuable*] the set of rules that exist before a game begins and persists after each move.” This needs explaining that linguistic values can and do change steadily over the history of a language. Also, unlike the game of chess they cannot be formulated before the history of language begins, because before that they do not exist. It is in the next chapter that Saussure asserts that “psychologically our thought – apart from its expression in words – is only a shapeless and indistinct mass.” But in our actual use of language there are many factors to be pondered over, like reactions, intentions and constant revising and amending our uttered expressions and descriptions. Perhaps, here Saussure should have been more explicit or at least more detailed. The comparison of a state of language with the game of chess is not very adequate, after all. Saussure should have remembered the vital difference between language and a game of chess, since the former is amenable to gradual change, but this cannot be said of the latter. Of course, Saussure is right when he implies that it is language which makes it possible for us to think in a “distinct” way. The question is how do units of language contain that distinctness. A little while earlier (in the previous chapter) Saussure had rightly pointed out that words as units of significance comprise of individual sounds, but these individual sounds are not vehicles of meanings by virtue of their exactness. They are adequate vehicles of meanings because speakers or users of language consistently maintain recognizable differences within the entire system of sounds that they use in speech. Sounds gather their meaning-values from the entire system of sounds that meaning depends upon, in a given language, and not merely from the intrinsic phonetic features. Just as Saussure insisted on the point that “no one disputes the principle of the arbitrary nature of the sign,” in the same way he could have also insisted that individual sounds gather their meaning-values in language from the entire larger system of differences in which they occur. This will of course lead to other Saussurean concepts like the quality of words in paradigmatic or syntagmatic usage, that is to say occurring in a combinatorial form or being used in a contrastive manner. Thus, Saussure’s ideas are key ideas, but they need more analysis and study.

Saussure takes an important step in his discussion of language. He examines relation between signs as wholes and their distinctive kind of meaning. Here Saussure extends the idea that he earlier used for the description of individual sounds. He says:
to consider a term as simply the union of a certain sound with a certain concept is grossly misleading [*une grande illusion*]. ... [I]t would mean assuming that one can start from the terms and construct the system by adding them together when, on the contrary, it is from the interdependent whole that one must start and through analysis obtain its elements (Saussure 113).

Significance, according to Saussure is the counterpart of a sound image. On the other hand, “value” is that which a term gains “solely from the simultaneous presence of the other terms.” This is an interesting distinction and Saussure goes on to say that this is also true of “grammatical entities,” like tenses. Perhaps Saussurean idea needs a little explanation. He began by distinguishing between “signification” of a word and “value” that attaches to that word (Saussure 115). This takes in to explain several different features of language. He persistently observes that in a particular language groups of words with relative meanings “limit each other reciprocally.” When we learn to use one word, we also learn not to use other words with related meaning. Then Saussure presents the idea that words in two languages that are called synonyms are not completely so, for the simple reason that “There is obviously no exact correspondence of values.” According to Saussure this also reveals the fact that words do not stand for “pre-existing concepts.” This is a formulation that rests on the premise that the relation between word and

concept should in all cases be of one to one correspondence. Next idea that Saussure presents is that “grammatical entities” are not constant between languages. He presents an instance: “The value of a French plural does not coincide with that of a Sanskrit plural, even though their signification is usually identical.” The meaning here is that a “French plural means the same” as the corresponding plural in Sanskrit, but that Sanskrit plural cannot be used to translate French plural in a particular phase where the French plural is for two items only. In this case in Sanskrit the dual has to be used. Then he provides more instances of the same and concludes by saying: “We find in the foregoing examples values emanating from the system,” and the concepts to which these values correspond are defined “by their relation with other terms in the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what others are not.” Saussure has reached an important stage in this argument. Now he produces a diagram when illustrating the constituents of a sign, namely signified-signifier or concept-auditory image, and goes on to say “that is only a value determined by its relations with other similar values, and that without them the signification would not exist” (Saussure 117). It may be granted that there are instances where value of a term in Saussure’s sense is determined by its relation with other terms in a group of terms. Saussure even specified some such instances, mentioning “all words used to express related ideas, ... words enriched through contact with others,” and words that do not have exact equivalents in meaning “from one language to another.” It may not be said that all words in every language belong to these classes; otherwise the entire task of further discussion to distinguish these classes would have been confusing, and even misleading. Such difficulties remain in Saussure’s text and followers of Saussure have not paid adequate attention. Take the instance from Barthes’s *Elements of Semiology*, where we find mundane statement that value and signification are different and Saussure “increasingly concentrated” on value. But this is stating the obvious, and Barthes has largely left the point unattended. We may take a queue from the sundry observations by Emile Benveniste, who talked of various categories of language like declarative, imperative, interrogative and takes up the matter of subjectivity in language. Benveniste argues that human subjectivity is constituted “in and through language,” as against the view that language is constituted by human subjectivity. Benveniste does not depreciate subjectivity. It is in another paper that Benveniste explains “the psychic unity that transcends the totality of actual experiences ... and that makes the permanence of the consciousness.” (Benveniste “The Idea of Subjectivity of Language” 260). It was in another paper, entitled “The Nature of the Pronoun” that Benveniste thought of something other than a grammatical subject by the fundamental contrast he made between the functioning of “I” or “You” as against this he explains: “it is by identifying himself as a unique person pronouncing ‘I’ that each speaker sets himself up in turn as the ‘subject’ (Benveniste “The Nature of the Pronoun” 252). Somewhat similar idea is echoed by Terence Hawkes, who explained that:

in short, a culture comes to terms with nature by means of encoding through language. And it requires only a slight extension of this view to produce the implication that perhaps the entire field of social behaviour ... might in fact also represent an act of ‘encoding.’ ... In fact, it might itself be a language (Hawkes 107).

This echoes Roland Barthes, who had expressed himself on these lines a decade earlier. He said: “We see culture more and more as a general system of symbols. ... Culture, in all its aspects, is a language” (Barthes “To Write” 136).

The problem with meaning in language is taken to the next stage of inquiry – how texts provide cognitions – how meaning is yielded? – whether by perspectivising texts as means of cognition or as objects of cognition. This emphasis is to be on specific dynamics by which

wording the world appears inseparable from willing the world. Texts are processes of wording and willing. These processes, in turn are performances. It is this process, wording and willing that the cultural and social come into play. Modes of thinking and feeling become representative. Thus, texts embody complex identifications that they facilitate. Discursive practices are concerned with connecting how we word the world. The question of being representative depends upon the possibility of proleptic identifications whereby agents use certain figures of speech through the modes of the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic to configure possible states of mind or an attributing of qualities to such states of mind, intuited or experienced or imagined.

Interconnectivity commences with the specific leading to the general, fulfilling the condition of being representative. Extending this analysis into the domain of literature, we may opine that lyric poetry provides adequate instances of the ways of wording the world. Lyric is like a public rhetorical performance, stressing eloquence as its ground for engaging its audience. A rhetorical performance would cultivate ethos to turn representative, a lyric tends to make ethos an end in itself by stressing an individual mood of consciousness to emblemize collective mode of consciousness. In a lyric memory serves as the mode of identification. It facilitates internalization of charm of language, combined in a particular combination. If we look at its constituents closely it is a commingling of simplicity, profundity and intimacy, where its intensity is borne out through its reading aloud, especially the speaker's identification. In Saussurean terms it is a particular syntagm, where the reciprocal relations among lexical items yield both signification and value. Semantic occurs through a verisimilitude of specific constituents, through a subtler use of paradigmatic and syntagmatic. Modernist poets, notably Thomas Stearns Eliot, or his acclaimed predecessor Matthew Arnold, often alluded to Dante Alighieri's *La Divina Commedia*, usually quoting "*La sua voluntade e nostra pace*" (in His will is our peace). Linguistically speaking it is a particular combination of lexical items. Semantically, certain words have been foregrounded. Philosophically, its significance lies in just the possibility of the statement, containing both the declarative and the imperative impacts. This is what led Matthew Arnold to overvalue poetry, when he vaunted that poetry will, one day, take the place of religion. He was right to the extent that poetry through such linguistic expressions tends to combine the epistemological, spiritual and the generally philosophical. It is this specific combination of lexical items that presents an impression of a performance when read out by a reader. This spectacle of a performance is, perhaps, more generously present in the genre of poetry than in other genres, at least readers and critics have found this in larger measure in poetry than in other genres of literature. One reason could be that of tropes, like metonymy and metaphor. Performative aspect is enhanced through the figurative use of language, rather than the literal. It is poetry that presents complex instances of wording. New Criticism was tempted to treat this mode as the exclusive model for literary value, and turned myopic. Of course, there are other central features, like culture and history, and the politics of literary texts to be reckoned with. Such features are present in large measure in all literature. Poetry appears less susceptible to the temporal aspect, whereas the other genres are more sensitive to changes through time, and their wording is compelled to submit to the yardsticks of duration and gradual dissipation. Thus, different genres engage different aspects of willing. Account of wordings in all genres brings the writer into view. So aesthetic organization of a work can be seen as the writer's manner of revealing his investment in the wordings. This, in turn, shapes the reader's ways of willing. The writer is the fabricator of reciprocity of relations through imagined spectacles by means of different and still different combinations and combinatorial possibilities of lexical items. The other vital half of a work of art is the writer's real or imagined response to specific cultural

pressures, which he is both privy and susceptible to. He has to account for the political and the ideological.

Critical theory also grapples with the concept of performance. Gender and postcolonial theories gather their concept through its force as a focus for aesthetic interests. Theorists like Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble*) and Homi K. Bhabha (“Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt”) invoke the performative values, when they combine the insights of Austin and Derrida to explain how agency becomes articulate and there is defining of value without relying on pre-established criteria or submitting to the obvious or popular regime of an episteme. A singular performance itself can define features of a character or a nation by virtue of the actions being exemplary in the specific instance, even without evoking foundational principles to which the agent may overtly appeal. Such bypassing of the foundational, the act, the performance or the text tends to avoid fixed denotations of gender or subalternity. For instance, a subaltern act or performance succeeds in inter-weaving assertions of identity and counter subalternity, inextricably bound with colonial authority as its reverse, or the logical corollary, without which the picture remains incomplete and hence unsatisfactory, which again is the reason for our dissatisfaction with much of modernist literature. A completer picture in a feminist or a postcolonial text precludes both the romantic exotic and the archaic hegemonic, along with an obsolete notion of native authenticity. Thus the concept of performance is vital for contemporary texts, because in such works it can play an important part in liberating the straightjacketed and oppressed groups of subalterns, since oppressions and identarian politics have come to be increasingly seen as the part and parcel of culture and literature. Performances of texts ought to engage judgments of people and through such engagements and involvements they open possible lines of communication. They are not very compelling psychologically and ethically. They only buttress significant identities by figuring in the society through a sensitivity and thus engage the audience in the conformative aspect. An instance of a lyric performance can help stress the insight more effectively. A lyric performance can mobilize the audience’s expectations by developing a close rapport between wording and willing and resisting obvious sociological generalizations. Examples of such poems celebrating performative identity that come to mind are like William Butler Yeats’s “A Prayer for My Daughter” or even earlier Shakespearean sonnets full of puns and equivocations. We can have a detailed instance from a contemporary American political poet Adrienne Cecil Rich, who is, on the one hand, more restraint than Shakespeare or Yeats and on the other hand, striving to establish an identity on the basis of her power over words and acknowledgment of social bonds. Perhaps, a detailed instance will suit my purpose better.

You who think I find words for everything
and you for whom I write this,
how can I show you what I’m barely
coming into possession of, invisible luggage
of more than fifty years, looking at first
glance like everyone else’s turning up
at the airport carousel
and the waiting for it, knowing what nobody
would steal must eventually come round –
feeling obsessed, peculiar, longing ? (Rich “Contradictions” 97).

Adrienne Rich’s poetic expression confirms her felicity of expression, although it is a dirge, a requiem, a lament for lack of expression, trying to “find words for everything.” She “barely

com[es] into possession of” what she terms as “invisible luggage.” This is poet’s groping for expression that Yeats eloquently described in his celebrated poem “The Fascination of What’s Difficult.” Rich has accepted the challenge of trying to affirm a sense of the limitation imposed by language. The struggle with language and meaning that we saw in the study of Saussure and his successors continues. The struggle intensifies, in the sense that older ways and the earlier expressions do not suffice. Similarly, earlier relationships and old confidences do not hold anymore. The poem in itself is a brilliant specimen of an excellent use of language. It carries a sense of being deeply responsive to the interrelational. In theoretical terms the attempt is being made to narrow the gap between the self and the other, which is the overriding aim of the humanities. Rich has been usually studied as a run of the mill feminist. The critics indulge in a formulaic study, trying to fit literary writings into neat, watertight compartmentalizations, which leads to an overwhelming sense of *déjà vu* in the mind of the reader, so the interest flags and the charm falls off. But, according to me such studies are stereotypical in nature and fail to do justice to the perspicacity of the poet and the versimilude of her writings. Rich’s use of language is evocative as much of it deals with contemporary cultural concerns. Rich’s poetry is not only disciplined but candid, and there is the Saussurean struggle for meaning in language. David St. John put it a little differently, when he appraised the writings of Rich. He commented:

There is no one whose poetry has spoken more eloquently for the oppressed and marginalized in America, no one who has more compassionately charted the course of individual suffering across the horrifying and impersonal growth of recent history (St. John, "Brightening the Landscape" 5).

Rich’s work has evoked strong critical acclaim. Her critical heritage includes thirteen reviews and diverse interpretations. Some of the notable reviewers and commentators are W.H. Auden, John Ashbery, Margret Atwood, Judith McDaniel, Adrian Oktenberg, Liz Yorke and Claire Keyes. Another promising work, a commended study of Rich’s work is by Albert Gelpi that traces chronologically the academically and culturally significant in the biography of the poet and how her study and analysis of the macrocosm devolved into significant writings.

Following are some of the acclaimed anthologies of Rich’s poetry, recorded chronologically:

Rich, Adrienne. *A Change of World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951.

---*The Diamond Cutters, and Other Poems*. New York: Harper, 1955.

---*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems, 1954-1962*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

---*Necessities of life: Poems, 1962-1965*. New York: Norton, 1966.

---*Selected Poems*. London: Chatto & Hogarth P Windus, 1967.

---*Leaflets*. New York: Norton, 1969.

---*The Will to Change: Poems 1968-1970*. New York: Norton, 1971.

---*Diving into the Wreck*. New York: Norton, 1973.

---*Poems: Selected and New, 1950-1974*. New York: Norton, 1975.

--- *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. NY: Norton, 1976.

---*Twenty-one Love Poems*. California: Effie's Press, 1976.

---*The Dream of a Common Language*. New York: Norton, 1978.

--- *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*. NY: Norton, 1979.

- A Wild Patience Has Taken Me this Far: Poems 1978-1981*. New York: Norton, 1981.
 ---*The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems Selected and New, 1950-1984*. New York: Norton, 1984.
 ---*Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985*. NY: Norton, 1986.
 ---*Your Native Land, Your Life: Poems*. NY: Norton, 1986.
 ---*Time's Power: Poems, 1985-1988*. NY: Norton, 1989.
 ---*An Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems 1988-1991*. NY: Norton, 1991.
 ---*Collected Early Poems, 1950-1970*. NY: Norton, 1993.
 ---*What Is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*. NY: Norton, 1993.
 ---*Dark Fields of the Republic: Poems, 1991-1995*. NY: Norton, 1995.
 ---*Selected poems, 1950-1995*. Knock even, Ireland: Salmon Pub., 1996.
 ---*Midnight Salvage: Poems, 1995-1998*. NY: Norton, 1999.
 ---*Arts of the Possible: Essays and Conversations*. NY: Norton, 2001.
 ---*Fox: Poems 1998-2000*. NY: Norton, 2001. (reprint 2003).
 ---*The School Among the Ruins: Poems, 2000-2004*. NY: Norton, 2004.
 ---*Poetry and Commitment: An Essay*. NY: Norton, 2007.
 ---*A Human Eye: Essays on Art in Society, 1997-2008*. NY: Norton, 2009.

---*Telephone Ringing in the Labyrinth: Poems 2004–2006*. NY: Norton, 2009.

A quality that sets Rich's writings apart from others of her ilk is a negotiating of the performative in poetry in particular and in literature in general. Her disciplined expression seems to eschew the performative, while the linguistic felicity, her apt use of tropes, the illuminational and illustrational nature of her poems makes her writings an instance par excellence of the performative in nature. Hence, there is an alternating between restraint and spontaneity, carrying contraries along, while the focus all along is on negotiations. This provides metaphoric resonance to the relation between wording and willing. Rich's writings reveal her relations with Saussurean concerns, concerning language, meaning and problematics of expression and significance.

Works Cited:

- Alighieri, Dante. *La Divina Commedia. The Divine Comedy*. Trans. C.H. Sisson. Ed. David H. Higgins. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
 Arnold, Matthew. *Essays in Criticism*. Ed. S. R. Littlewood. London: Macmillan, 1958.
 Ashbery, John. "Tradition and Talent." *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Revisions, 1951-81*. Ed. Jane Roberta Cooper. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984.
 Atwood, Margaret. "Review of Diving into the Wreck." *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Revisions, 1951-81*. Ed. Jane Roberta Cooper. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984.
 Auden, W.H. "Foreword to A Change of World." *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*. By Adrienne Rich and B.C. Gelpi. Ed. Albert Gelpi. New York: Norton, 1993.
 Barthes, Roland. *Elements of Semiology*. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. London: Jonathan Cape, 1967.
 Barthes, Roland. *Writing Degree Zero (1953)*. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill and Wang, 1968.
 Barthes, Roland. "To Write: Intransitive Verb?" *The Structuralist Controversy*. Ed. R. Macksey and Eugenio Donato. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970.
 Barthes, Roland. *S/Z (1970)*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
 Belsey, Catherine. *Critical Practice*. London: Methuen, 1980.

- Benveniste, Emile. *Problems of General Linguistics* (1966). Trans. M.E. Meek. Coral Gables, Fla: University of Miami Press, 1971.
- Benveniste, Emile. "Subjectivity in Language" (1958). *Problems of General Linguistics* (1966). Trans. M.E. Meek. Coral Gables, Fla: University of Miami Press, 1971.
- Benveniste, Emile. "The Nature of the Pronoun" (1956). *Problems of General Linguistics* (1966). Trans. M.E. Meek. Coral Gables, Fla: University of Miami Press, 1971.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt." *Cultural Studies*. Eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Davis, Colin. *After Poststructuralism: Reading, Stories, Theory*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Eliot, T.S. *The Complete Poems and Plays*. London: Faber and Faber, 1942.
- Gelpi, Albert. "Adrienne Rich: The Poetics of Change." *American Poetry Since 1960*. Ed. Robert B. Shaw. England: Carcanet Press, 1973.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Prison-House of Language*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- Hawkes, Terence. *Structuralism and Semiotics*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976.
- Keyes, Claire. *The Aesthetics of Power: The Poetry of Adrienne Rich*. U.S.A.: University of Georgia Press, 2008.
- McDaniel, Judith. "'Reconstituting the World': The Poetry and Vision of Adrienne Rich." *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Revisions, 1951-81*. Ed. Jane Roberta Cooper. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984.
- Oktenberg, Adrian. "'Disloyal to Civilization': The Twenty-One Love Poems of Adrienne Rich." *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Revisions, 1951-81*. Ed. Jane Roberta Cooper. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984.
- Rich, Adrienne C. "Notes for a Magazine." *Sinister Wisdom* 17, 1981.
- Rich, Adrienne Cecil. "Contradictions: Tracking Poems." *Your Native Land, Your Life*. New York: Norton, 1986.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Cours de Linguistique Generale* (1916). *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Wade Baskin. Ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. London: Fontana, 1974.
- St. John, David. "Brightening the Landscape." *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, February 25, 1996: 4-11.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. "Language and Literature." *The Structuralist Controversy*. Ed. R. Macksey and Eugenio Donato. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970.
- Yeats, W. B. "The Fascination of What's Difficult." *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. Ed. Richard J. Finneran. 2nd ed. New York: Scribner, 1996.
- Yeats, W. B. "A Prayer for My Daughter." *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. Ed. Richard J. Finneran. 2nd ed. New York: Scribner, 1996.
- Yorke, Liz. *Adrienne Rich: Passion, Politics and the Body*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 1998.