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A Stylistic Analysis of Adrienne Rich's "Planetarium" and "Power"

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Abstract

Adrienne Rich utilizes free verse to surprise her readers by covering the intertwined relationship between politics and society, which results in encapsulating everyday practices in most of her poems. She tries to articulate the depressed voice of women, thus making this group noticeable by people. The study discusses Rich's poems "Planetarium" and "Power", focusing on pronouns, spacing, enjambment, and diction. It explains how the change in pronouns, for instance, serves the theme of uniting women's experience of oppression and resistance and how the enjambment and the choice of diction are used to add emphasis on women's suffering and their consequent need to oppose patriarchy. Relying on this stylistic approach, the paper concludes that Adrienne Rich is resisting patriarchy through a feminine stylistic tone.

Keywords: Adrienne Rich, English Poetry, Feminism, Stylistics, Patriarchy, Modern, and Contemporary Poetry.

I. Introduction

Adrienne Rich is an iconic American female poet who is identified by many critics as a radical feminist, as she has dedicated her life and poetic talent to the cause of empowering women and bringing the ways of their oppression to the front. Rich does not only defend the rights of women but also writes about the rights of lesbians as well as other feminine categories. In fact, Rich is famous for her poems that criticize the ideals of patriarchy by centralizing the subjects and themes of feminism, sexuality, civil rights, and Jewish identity. Rich always tries to break the taboos (i.e. religion and sexuality); the most resounding point in her poems is her declaration that she is lesbian, a state that, as Rich believes, opposes the conventionally patriarchal constructions of gender roles.

Rich stresses her own identity as a woman in most of her poetry. Kohut (2018) states that "Identity [...] is the point of convergence between the

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developed self [...] and the socio-cultural position of the individual" (p.451). She uses poetry to express and record her own feminine experience, desires, and hopes regarding significant issues like feminism, patriarchy, and identity. For her, if women want freedom, then "[their] survival demands that [they] contribute all [their] strength to the destruction of the class of women within which men appropriate women" (Wittig, 1997, p. 226).

Articulating such a viewpoint, Rich deploys free verse to cover various universal issues and eventually surprise the reader. For instance, she emphasizes the entangled relationship between politics and society to create a communal atmosphere that can attract the attention of all people regardless of their origins and cultural backgrounds. Throughout most of her poems, as evident in "Planetarium" and "Power", Rich potentially tries to loudly and articulate women's voices, which "most people never notice" (Nguyen, 2018, stanza 3). To fully explain such a feminist attitude, this paper conducts a stylistic analysis that focuses on the structure and diction used in two of Rich's poems, namely "Planetarium" and "Power". We argue that the female poet is resisting patriarchy by writing about women and by using a purely feminine style of language.

II. Literature Review

There have been many studies conducted on Adrienne Rich's poetry, themes, and style. For example, in "Woman Define Identity: Analysis of Selected Poems of Adrienne Rich," Mahsa Maneshi (2014) analyzes some selected poems written by Adrienne Rich from a psychological perspective, focusing on the modern interpretations of women's identity. Maneshi claims that the fragmentary nature of Adriana's poetry and the ambiguity of style makes the poems difficult to understand, as they introduce some portraits about the confounded soul of women who have been detached from the essence of being and therefore are striving to regain their lost voice.

Similarly, Mary Hunsmann (1992) comments on Adrienne Rich's poetry, style, and topics in "An Atlas of the Difficult World." She explains how Rich prefers using contradictory dualities in her poems, myths of freedom, and the purity of natural beauty among others. Likewise, in "A Feminist Perspective of the Selected Poems of Adrienne Rich," Jayasudha (2016) explains and comments on the feminist perspective of some selected poems by Adrienne Rich. He explores the many common themes Rich uses in her poems, focusing on the themes of power, feminism, and marriage in patriarchal societies. In the same vein, Nodeh Soghra and Farida Pourgiv (2016) in "On the Development of Female Voice in Adrienne Rich" attempt to analyze the stages through which Adrienne Rich passes during her poetic career. They state that Rich has started

as a conservative formalist following masculine aesthetics and then has moved to be a radical feminist protester against the dominant patriarchal system.

Interestingly, in her essay collection dating back to the 1970s, "Of Women Born," Adrienne Rich (1995) explains the main gender roles assigned for a woman, that is, bearing children and taking care of them. Adrienne tries to explain the difference between two meanings of motherhood: the ability of women to have babies and how a woman proves that ability or potential. The essay collection is somehow autobiographical in the sense that it covers some personal experiences of Rich herself. She comments on the fact that pregnancy and raising children is a sacred duty that is associated and assigned for women only; if a man ventures to help, then this would come out of generosity. Yet, after realizing the destructiveness of patriarchy against women, she attacks patriarchy and calls women for adopting radical feminism.

Part of Rich's radical feminism is her reliance on a purely feminist style of writing. Deirdre Burton (1996), in "Through Glass Darkly: Through Dark Glass," describes what can be called Rich's feminist stylistics. She argues against the linguists' claim that a stylistic analysis of works can be objective. She writes, "any writer that supposes that he or she is politically neutral in their writing is merely naively supporting and demonstrating the (largely unseen and unnoticed) political bias of the status quo" (p.225). This suggests that studying literary texts without considering their historical and political contexts is not only inaccurate but also supports dominant injustice. Elaborating on this notion, Burton (1996) explains Rich's feminist ideology by associating it with "Sexism", which she defines as,

the most deep-rooted (psychologically), the most pervasive, the most difficult to perceive, the most resistant to change – yet available as a locus for important and essential radical impetus to the reorganization of all the unequal and oppressive power-structures in our society. (p. 226).

Based on Burton's viewpoint of Feminist Stylistics, Adrienne Rich's poetry is a work of resistance against patriarchal rules, as the female poet uses language, which is conventionally associated with patriarchy, to glorify women. In "The Female Language Barrier: A Close Reading of the Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Adrienne Rich," Faiella Annmarie Faiella (1994) discusses the power of language and its significance for women. She explains that women are treated unjustly and suffer inequality in several institutions such as education, justice, and business. However, the hardest and most dominant area in which women are oppressed by patriarchy is language, which has always been dominated by men. Women "cannot, however, survive without the use of language" (Faiella, 1994, Intro. i). Although the language is dominated by men,

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women should always try to resist that dominance through expressing their feminist identity in creative pieces like poetry.

Women need to invent their styles and deviations, as suggested by Faiella (1994) who considers Emily Dickinson as a pioneer in resisting patriarchal rules, and Adrienne Rich as her descendent. In fact, Rich's poetry complies with Hélène Cixous's viewpoint regarding the creation of the feminine voice, where she (1997) states,

First, I sense femininity in writing by: a privilege of voice: voice and writing are entwined and interwoven and writings continuity/voice's rhythm take each other's breath away through interchanging, makes the text gasp or form it out of suspense and silences, make it lose its voice or rend it with cries. (qtd in Mahesha, 2014, p.402)

Accordingly, this essay focuses on how a female writer like Adrienne Rich resists patriarchal dominance by devoting most of her poems to define women's identity from a feminine lens. Rich, we argue, deploys all the stylistic devices and mechanisms to vent out her feminine experience in a world dominated by man, thus setting a model of how women around the globe can resist that patriarchal dominance and express themselves through writing in a way that reflects their rejection of man's dominance.

III. Discussion

Biologically speaking, women are less strong than men, which sometimes connotes that men are socially superior to women (Beauvoir, 1989, II, p.306). In Leighton's words,

[The] main thesis is that in spite of her biological predicament, woman needs not be doomed to immanence, for it is man who created artificial distinctions between masculine and feminine functions, and thus kept woman in false, passive role. (1975, p.34).

Religiously speaking, the story of Adam and Eve and their fall from Heaven validates the grudge against women, which, to some extent, justifies oppressing women as they, in this sense, deserve this treatment for they accepted the consultation of the Devil once. This perspective results in "the reduction of women to the lowest common denominator" (Irigary, 1997, p.312).

Associating women with the original sin and fall designates the stereotypical belief that women are inferior to men. As a result, women are oppressed by patriarchy, which Rich defines as,

the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men--by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which

the female is everywhere subsumed under the male. (qtd in Eisenstein, 1938, p.5).

Obviously, Rich views patriarchy as a deeply rooted system in people's personalities, cultures, and everyday life activities that shape the social, political, religious, economic, linguistic, and communicational systems of the entire society. This suggests that men are the ones who decide how women should live, work, behave, talk, dress, etc., an oppressive situation that places men as superior to women at the different phases of the society. Such oppression has caused women to lose their identity and sometimes accept being oppressed by the society. Thus, a woman who may think of rejecting or opposing such perspective may get attacked harshly by women themselves before anybody else.

It is still rare that a deed of rejecting men's oppression against women is applauded. Nevertheless, some brave women including Rich have already succeeded in expressing resounding, feminist voices, thus giving the rest of women the chance of being heard and treated rightly and justly. Adrienne Rich is one of those brave female poets who have ventured to discuss sensitive topics such as lesbianism among others and express her unique feminine identity. Rich (1995) claims that power has been a "primal word and relationship" in patriarchal societies; the constitution of "identity...of man depends on power...in a certain specific sense: that of power over others, beginning with a woman and her children" (p.64). Rich explains,

To hold power over others means that the powerful is permitted a kind of short-cut through the complexity of human personality. He does not have to enter intuitively into the souls of the powerless, or to hear what they are saying in their many languages, including the language of silence ...Powerlessness can lead to lassitude, self-negation, guilt and depression; it can also generate a kind of psychological keenness, a shrewdness, an alert and practiced observation of the oppressor-'psyching out' developed into a survival tool. (Rich, 1995, p.65)

Rich also assumes that "the idea of power has, for most women, been inextricably linked with maleness, or the use of force; most often with both" (qtd in Maneshi, 2014, p.405). Thus, she suggests that there is no such a thing as a separate, individual identity of woman, as when she ventures to write, she needs:

First of all [to] belong to nobody but [herself].... Women belong to the family or the group, and not to themselves. And in such conditions, writing becomes, if not impossibility, then at least a very difficult task indeed. (Eisenstein, 1938, p.17-8).

When a group of successful women is asked by Simone de Beauvoir (1989) about the reason why one may limit her creativity, they have answered,

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Well, we have to avoid getting really bad marks, or people will think we are stupid; but if our marks are too good, people will think that we are pedantic or intellectual...nobody will want to marry us. We want to do as well in our studies as possible without making marriage impossible. (Moi, 1986, p.20-1)

Women suffer social and cultural pressure; therefore, their approach of resisting patriarchy and rebelling against it should be conducted carefully.

Setting an example of how to rebel against patriarchy and liberate women, Rich composes "Planetarium" and "Power" to acknowledge the achievements of certain female figures who have excelled men. "Planetarium", for example, is a poem dedicated to a female astronomer, Caroline Herschel, who has accomplished a lot in astronomy. The poem depicts Herschel while collecting samples from the snowy outer space, calling her a monster in the sky. The speaker says that Herschel has died at the age of 98 and has discovered eight comets. Then the narrator talks about other female astronomers and women in general who work as hard as men. Ironically, the poem shows how Herschel has often been undervalued and has not received the respect she deserves. She is always referred to as "William's sister," as William is also an astronomer, which seems to be a result of patriarchy's inclination of ignoring the achievements of women and giving credit to men instead. In Eisenstein's words,

man's sense of awe before women, his dread of her position one step closer to eternity [...] which made men detest women, revile them, humiliate them, defecate symbolically upon them, do everything to reduce them [...] So do men to destroy every quality in a woman which will give her the powers of a male, for she is in their eyes already armed with the power that she brought them forth.... (1938, p.13).

Adrienne Rich portrays Herschel rebelling against patriarchy by creating her own identity and giving her own life a resounding value in an exclusive male sphere. It seems that Rich as well as Herschel is rebelling against the conventionally gender-based dichotomy created by men at the cost of women, which makes their struggle a feminist concern. As evident in "Planetarium", Rich suggests that women should rebel against patriarchy's classification of the universe, which views the relationship between men and women in terms of binary oppositions:

Activity/Passivity
Sun/Moon
Culture/Nature
Day/Night
Father/Mother

Head/Emotions

Intelligible/Sensitive

Logos/Pathos (Cixous, 1997, p.231).

The attributes on the left are assigned to men, while the ones on the right are associated with women. This indicates that women are negatively viewed as passive, emotional, and sensitive creatures, while men are positively viewed as active, rational, and intelligent. While this dichotomy seems unproblematic for some readers, many feminist activists, such as Rich, believe that women should stand against it.

"Planetarium" opposes the patriarchal classification of the society by using a completely feminist style that relies on pronouns, lines' spacing, and poetic diction. Regarding pronouns, the poem can be divided into two sections based on the use of pronouns. The first part includes the lines (1-29), where Rich uses third person pronouns. She uses "her", "she", and "them". These pronouns are used to create a sense of commonality and unity between women. It seems that the poet is trying to indirectly say that the great achievements reported in the poem are not exclusive to Herschel but can be made by all women. Rich lists the achievements of Herschel to emphasize the gigantic work a female astronomer can do. The "she", "her", and "them" pronouns are not to ignore anyone's name, but to make the argument more holistic.

Rich then starts to view herself and other women as a reflection of Herschel. She tries to introduce Herschel's life experience, especially gender inequality, as something that can be experienced by all women across the globe. Thus, the second part of the poem heavily uses the first-person pronouns: "I", "we", and "us". The use of these pronouns makes the female character(s) more active, visible, and valuable. Clarie Keyes (2011) says that Rich "enlarges the scope of her subject and then moves her poem back to herself as a woman and a poet" (p.464). In the last stanza of the poem, Rich does not speak of herself but views all women as part of the same pronoun "I", which gives women their voice in the poem.

Besides pronouns, Rich places the lines of her poem in a way that expresses her feminist approach and theme. The poem flows thus,

Galaxies of women, there
doing penance for impetuosity
ribs chilled
in those spaces of the mind
An eye,
'virile, precise and absolutely certain'
from the mad webs of Uranusborg

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encountering the NOVA. (13-20).

Taking into consideration that the poem talks about space, the irregular arrangement of the poem's stanzas may function as an imitation of the randomness of space. The spaces between the lines' words reflect the scene of the outer space, which may symbolize the emptiness of the patriarchal or sexist ideology. The lack of words in the spaces can be related to the lack of action against inequality between men and women.

Such themes are further displayed through the poem's diction. The first remark about the poem's diction is the use of the word "monster" in the very first line of the poem. Rich is potentially saying that women could not enjoy their freedom of choosing their destiny without being referred to as monsters, mad, and abnormal. Such attributes suggest that women do not abide by the gender roles of the patriarchal society. Rich deploys irony and mockery when referring to Herschel as a monster: "a woman in the shape of a monster/ a monster in the shape of a woman" (1-2). The poet is trying to say that the society should observe what women can do when they break the assigned gender role and turn into – what is referred to as - monsters. Rich emphasizes this idea again in lines (9-12):

she whom the moon ruled
 like us
 levitating into the night sky
 riding the polished lenses

There is a reference to a madwoman who is ruled by the moon. Another reference is made to the woman who rides the night sky, a witch. Both types of women are as rebellious as that monster woman. Rich echoes Burton's viewpoint of women's resistance of patriarchy by using men's imagery and symbolism in favor of women. In "Planetarium," Rich idealizes women who are mad, monsters, and witches in the system of a sexist language. Instead of presenting them to readers as characters to be condemned, she views them as an inspiration for other women. In Faiella's words, "no longer can Rich just discuss the domestic side of women's lives; she has begun to break out of a socially constructed role. To Rich the domestic becomes political. Rich's theme grew as she did" (1994, p.13).

The same stylistic approach is implemented in Rich's "Power", which is dedicated to a female scientist, Marie Curie, a chemist and physicist who has studied and specialized in radiotherapy. Curie is famous for being the first woman to win Nobel Prize and the first and only person to win two Nobel Prizes in two different fields. She and Albert Einstein have lived approximately at the same time. Having accomplished more than Einstein, Curie has never received the credit a male scientist would have when achieving the same

accomplishments. For this reason, Rich points out the uniqueness of Marie Curie and celebrates her scientifically powerful state.

Rich refers to some of Curie's inventions that are benefitting all humans, emphasizing how Curie has refused to stop working in radiotherapy for purely humane reasons. Rich mentions that Curie's experience of success as a scientist coexists with an experience of suppression as a woman, which makes the tone of the poem full of admiration and melancholy. Thus, Rich's language in this poem potentially resists and reshapes certain ideas associated with women's experiences of success and suffering. Interestingly, "Power" deploys third person and first-person pronouns.

Regarding the single "I" pronoun in line (6), the poet is trying probably to express the uniqueness of Curie declaring that she is a model to imitate. Nevertheless, the use of the third person pronouns indicates the physical absence of the figure portrayed in the poem, which suggests that the poet is trying to stress the state of Curie after death. While this implies that Rich uses the third person pronoun to describe Curie's death, such a usage refers to the poet's stylistic tactic of making that dead woman a powerful memorial of the fallen woman.

To develop this image, the poet relies on another stylistic device, namely enjambment, in the final stanza of "Power". Rich writes,

She died a famous woman denying
her wounds
denying
her wounds came from the same source as her power. (14-17).

Commenting on this stanza, Faiella (1994) argues that "Rich cannot see anything but the sick irony here and the break in her lines connotes a break in her train as though. Rich sees a chasm in the justice of a world that kills someone for hard work and ingenuity" (p.69). While this is insightful, breaking the lines in this way reflects the woman's continuous efforts and state of wholeness. It also emphasizes Curie's strength as a woman and her dedication to serving humanity. Whether this technique is used for emphasis or to represent the break in the stream of thinking, it certainly causes readers to stop and ponder the closing lines of such a poem.

Noteworthy here is that there is no period throughout the lines of the poem, except at the very end. There is a colon in line 6 after which Rich starts talking about Curie. The poet is trying here to let the reader get exhausted and feel hardly breathing when finishing the poem, a state that directly imitates Curie's sickness and poor health. This is necessary to attract readers' attention to Curie's hard experience working for people's benefit in an extremely hard social as well as personal environment. For the same purpose, Rich uses alliteration in eight lines of the poem in a way that stresses the fact that Curie has been a very brave

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passionate, dedicative woman. Her sickness has not stopped her from continuing her experiments. It seems that Rich wants to show all women a great example of dedication and devotion regardless of their difficult conditions.

As for diction, the word "bombarde" in "her body bombarded for years by the element/ she had purified" (8-9) is borrowed from the context of war to connote the intense suffering that Curie's body has endured. Rich portrays Curie's body as a war zone that is being constantly "bombarde" with powerful bombs, leaving the land dead. Simultaneously, the word "bombarde" also reflects how Curie has been violently attacked by the patriarchal society. This does not annihilate Curie; rather, it makes her a stronger woman. She does not submit to such patriarchal acts but behaves as a rebellious figure who has always been "denying" man's dominance. Again, using the word "denying" throughout the poem twice to describe the hard conditions of Curie supports the idea that the woman is a savior who struggles hard to deliver a message before leaving. Living on earth, she has sacrificed her own life for the sake of benefiting humanity, science, and academic research. Her body is bombarded due to dealing with radiation ignoring the fact that this would kill her, which has ironically made her name live forever. The same idea is manipulated in the closing line of the poem in which the poet explains how the source of Marie Curie's power is the same as her wounds. Rich's powerful closing statement describes Curie's lifestyle and sets that style as a model for what women can do when they break gender roles. Rich explains how Curie and other women can break the dominant stereotype, which views women as domestic, weak, and emotional.

IV. Conclusion

Adrienne Rich uses feminist stylistics in her poetry to resist patriarchal rules and empower women. She calls for women to march against patriarchy and work hard to maintain their own feminine identity, which echoes the same viewpoint Rich expresses in her collection "The Will to Change" (1971) as well as essay "When We Dead Awaken: as Re-Vision" (2012). Thus, "Planetarium" and "Power" display women's experience of patriarchal oppression and their way to resist it. "Planetarium" uses pronouns, spacing, and diction to display such ideas. Pronouns in this poem serve the theme of uniting women's experience of oppression and their resistance; the spacing indicates the theme of space and the lack of action against sexism, and the choice of diction constitutes a form of resistance, as it mocks the traditional way of depicting revolutionary women as mad humans. Similarly, "Power" uses pronouns, enjambment, and diction to celebrate the powerful image of Curie and set it as a model for all women. In this poem, pronouns are centered around the woman and used to praise, rather than criticize, women. The enjambment and the choice of diction are used to add emphasis on women's suffering and the strength needed to oppose patriarchy.

تحليل الأسلوب في قصيدتي "متحف الكواكب" و"السلطة" لأدريانا ريتش

مالك جمال زريقات، وعقاب يوسف الشواشرة، وشروق العواملة

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ملخص

تستخدم أدريانا ريتش أسلوب الشعر الحر لإدهاش القارئ من خلال التركيز على العلاقة المتبادلة بين السياسة والمجتمع، والتي تقود إلى تجسيد موضوعات الحياة اليومية في معظم قصائدها. تحاول الشاعرة التعبير عن صوت المرأة المكبوت، مما يجعل من النساء مجموعة معتبرة اجتماعياً. ولهذا الغرض، تناقش هذه الدراسة قصيدتين للشاعرة ريتش، وهما: "متحف الكواكب" (البلانيتيريوم) وقصيدة "السلطة" (باور). في القصيدة الأولى، يركز الباحثون على كيفية استخدام الشاعرة للضمائر والحيز الفضائي والمفردات اللغوية، ويحاولون تفسير كيف أن استخدام الضمائر الأنثوية يخدم المغزى الأنثوي المأمول في القصيدة، وهو توحيد النساء من خلال تسليط الضوء على خبراتهن المشتركة في معاناة الكبت ومقاومته. أما في القصيدة الثانية، فيحلل الباحثون أسلوب الشاعرة في استخدام الضمائر والجمل المتتابعة والمفردات اللغوية، ويركزون على كيفية تركيز الضمائر في القصيدة على محورية المرأة، وكيف أن أسلوب الجمل المتتابعة والمفردات اللغوية مكن الشاعرة من إبراز معاناة المرأة، وحاجتها إلى الحصول على العزيمة الضرورية لمواجهة السطوة الذكرية. ومن خلال التحليل الأسلوبي لهاتين القصيدتين، تخلص الدراسة إلى أن أسلوب الشاعرة أدريانا ريتش في قصائدها ما هو إلا مناهضة صريحة للسطوة الذكرية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أدريانا ريتش، الشعر الإنجليزي، النسوية، الأسلوبية، السطوة الذكرية، الشعر الحديث والمعاصر.

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