

“Writing as Re/vision”: Imagery in Adrienne Rich’s Later Poetry

as Modeled in The School Among the Ruins

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Abstract

Adrienne Rich (b.1929-) is an American poet, prose writer, and a socio-political activist. Equally important, she usually identifies herself as a white American lesbian feminist as well as a non-Zionist Jewish with Marxist sympathies. All these affiliations motivated her life-orientations and art tremendously. No wonder then that her socio-political sympathies informed the themes and imagery of her poetry in degrees throughout the different stages of its development. The trajectory of Rich spans, in effect, two social movements whose far-reaching influences should not be overlooked: "Feminism" in its 1960s and 1970s high tide as well as its running into a post structural Feminism, and "The Men's Movement" of the 1990s. The feminist wave that dominated the 60s and the 70s inspired the major part of her poetry prior to *An Atlas of the Difficult World 1988-1991*. The masculinity that emerged in the 1990s as a reaction to the feminist excesses aimed at achieving a sort of balance. It is assumed that the poetry of *The School Among the Ruins: Poems 2000-2004* is a clear manifestation of the will to change following the various socio-political transformations of the 1990s. The objective of this study is to show how poetry, in Rich's case, functions as a communicative utterance rather than merely a self-expression. It aims, also, at pinpointing the technical changes undergoing Rich's imagery in this volume. The network of images employed by Rich in the volume is, hypothetically, revealing of a down-toning of feminism as a movement, a calming down of the ideological zeal of Rich herself as an advocate of that movement in addition to the marks of exhaustion characterizing an poet. However, the poet's feminism never dies out, but it is rather balanced by more universal concerns.

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الكتابة بوصفها رؤية تنقيحية: الصور الفنية
في شعر ادرين ريتش الأخير
كما يتجلي في ديوان " المدرسة بين الخراب"

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الملخص

ادرين ريتش (1929) شاعرة أمريكية معاصرة فضلا عن أن لها كتابات نثرية بالإضافة لكونها ناقده اجتماعية وناشطة سياسية. ومن الأهمية بمكان الأخذ في الاعتبار رؤية ريتش لهويتها على أنها أمريكية بيضاء ذات توجهات نسائية ومثلية فضلا عن كونها يهودية غير صهيونية ذات ميول ماركسيه. كل تلك الانتماءات أثرت في توجهاتها في الحياة وفي توجهاتها الفنية بشكل كبير. ولا غرو إذا أن ميولها الاجتماعية والسياسية قد أثرت في موضوعات وصور شعرها الفنية بدرجات متباينة على مدار مراحل تطوره المختلفة. فعلى مدار مسارها الشعري الطويل عاصرت ادرين ريتش حركتين اجتماعيتين لا يمكن إغفال تأثيراتهما بعيدة المدى بأي حال من الأحوال، ألا وهما الحركة "النسائية" – أو "النسوية" أو "الأنثوية" كما يطلق عليها أحيانا – وكذلك الحركة المقابلة لها وهي الحركة "الذكورية". فالحركة الأولى التي ازدهرت في ستينيات وسبعينيات القرن المنصرم قد أثرت في جزء كبير من شعرها السابق على ديوان "الثعلب". أما الأخرى والتي ظهرت في تسعينيات القرن نفسه فكانت بمثابة رد الفعل على تجاوزات الحركة النسائية فضلا عن كونها كانت ترمي أساسا إلى إحداث نوع ما من التوازن مع أفكارها. ومن هنا فمن المفترض أن قصائد ديوانها " المدرسة بين الخراب: قصائد من 2000-2004 " هي تعبير واضح عن الرغبة في التغيير؛ وهي رغبة ناشئة عن التحولات الاجتماعية والسياسية والثقافية التي حدثت في العقد الأخير من القرن الماضي.

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"I knew my life was changing, my work was changing, and I needed to indicate to readers my sense of being engaged in a long, continuing process..... it was a declaration that placed poetry in a historical continuity, not above or outside history" (Adrienne Rich, *Arts of the Possible*, 54).

"Every real poem is the breaking of an existing silence, and the first question we might ask any poem is, what kind of voice is breaking silence, and what kind of silence is being broken?" (Rich, *Arts of the Possible*, 150).

Adrienne Rich (b.1929) is rated as an eminent American feminist poet whose history is one of self and community. The evolution of her later poetry and poetics rests on the assumption that in "America, it is race and gender which are most prominent in the collective awareness of social divisions" and that "the importance of identity politics in the American academy and public life has meant that these divisions enter the aesthetic sphere as explicit lines of debate and contestation, rather than as metaphors," maintains Andrew Roberts" (6). Rich's reputation as a poet is founded, in this context, on her long-standing endeavor to widen her scope thematically and artistically as part of her conviction of "writing as revision" as projected in the title of her central essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision" that initiates her book *Arts of the Possible*. As a poet and thinker, accordingly, she has managed to straddle the fences of gender, class, and race towards reconciling self and world in addition to negotiating a wedding of art and life. So, Charles Altieri asserts that "Rich...entered the public sphere precisely because she was fed up with the expectation that women would take the sympathetic role. She wrote public poetry out of a lucid and intense

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anger at injustice in the domains of gender, race, and class." He adds also that " she writes a poetry engaged in the effort to change how we formulate desires and... where those desires lead us" (*The Art of Twentieth-Century Poetry*, 172). Jean Valentine stretches the point and states that Rich "went ahead and forged her knowledge and sympathy and joy beyond class, race, religion, nation—her community has no gates" (222).

Throughout her long poetic career, accordingly, the struggle has always been not to opt out for either gender or race, but, rather, to make connections between them as two facets of her conception of the "arts of the possible," just to quote one of her prose titles. According to Marilyn Hacker, her inquiries did not stop at questions of gender: "It was with the rage and insights of her feminism that she envisioned, re/vised...Movements." It is significant, then, that her work "locates each of these investigations in the poet's own physical body as it exists with her body of knowledge, in her own circumstances and surroundings" (231). Her utmost concern, in this respect, has always been an obsession with the premonition that: "What drives my poetry, always, is the need to see revealed what wasn't necessarily apparent or obvious— to uncover 'lies, secrets, and silences.' For me it is always a question of language as a probe into the unknown or unfamiliar" (*Arts of the Possible*, 140). The critics of Rich's poetry are, accordingly, greatly convinced that she is usually reconciliatory in her manipulation of both issues. Susan Sheridan suggests, for instance, that Rich's feminism should not only be considered "in relation to the literary establishment but also in relation to an expanding audience for women's poetry" due to the growingly inclusiveness of readership in her later poetry (19; Jeannette Riley poses a similar view, 102)). The tendency, in addition, to be more inclusive in terms of public themes renders her a critic of her own age and enhances the effect of her poetic message.

Rich, in other words, has gone beyond the limits of women poetry criticism to gain a wider critical recognition thematically and aesthetically. This orientation has evidently impressed the message of her later poetry as modeled in *The School Among the Ruins*. Brian Teare, therefore, views that "this shift has enabled her to dilate her

vision outward to confront the dehumanizing injustices that have attended capitalist globalization" (29). She does that by placing "her body in a public arena of history, class, race and anti-Semitism, the arena of 'we'," says Mary Eaglton (303). Most importantly, the body that concerns Rich in her later poetry departs from that of self-indulgence to experience the outside world and, hence, is embedded in historicism. She has founded her vision on the conviction that within the context of history and culture the feminist self changes and is itself changed in its endeavor to "break silence" and to "tell about lies," with the object to transform reality. Rich's change in *The School Among the Ruins*, accordingly, provokes thought since she goes beyond female readers' expectations to embrace those of the male readers considering that the world belongs to both types of consciousness. This later inclusiveness is labeled by Nita Schetchet a "moral imagination" that transcends the female/male dichotomy as far as issues and readership are concerned (127). For Rich, accordingly, "the frame is a boundary that contains, circumscribes, defines, and delimits historical reality, probing gaps in knowledge that can only be overcome by active imagination," comments Roger Gilbert (153).

Hence, approaching Rich's later poetry within a feminist context should not necessarily eclipse the overriding presence of domestic and worldly preoccupations artistically manipulated in her poetry that should be evaluated as such. However, tracing the development of her poetry maps out tendencies to deliberately converge on or diverge from her feminist affiliations in abreast with the requirements of the historical moment. This tendency has been reflected in constant aesthetic and stylistic transformations throughout her long poetic career (see for instance: Trudi Witonsky, 338-9,347; and Lee Sharkey, 42-3; and Alice Templeton, 3). Roberto Tejada asserts, in this concern, that Rich proved always capable of forging enduring work that "belongs...to a legacy that fuses surface effect with affect; whose cultural style, too, can join outrage and joy" (247). She writes, in the process, a poetry fueled by a strong desire to uncover lies about human affairs in general and a quest to unbridle the artist's imagination as part of a post-modernist new lyricism.

Rich’s method of developing imagery throughout her poetry gives insights into the changing roles of the poet over a long period of literary creativity which culminates, and is best exemplified, in *The School Among the Ruins*. She felt strongly motivated in all her artistic manipulations to transform experience and vision into imagery. As she expresses it: "It is one thing to understand something and express it logically, and quite another to assimilate organically, reconstructing the whole system of one's feelings, and to find a new kind of artistic expression for this new entity" (*What Is Found There*, 46). Imagery, hence, maps out the different changes underlying the development of her feminist thought throughout her long poetic career in the sense that the evolution of her imagery parallels the development of her vision itself. For instance, in her early feminist period, imagery is stamped by her attempts to demystify false images of the past and false representations of women's lives as well as her efforts to present self definition. In her lesbian period, she builds a world of imagery resonating her pro-lesbianism; imagery that connotes physical and communal “closure” (as a common lesbian feminist term; although for Rich “the lesbian continuum is a strategic mechanism for generating politically viable identities and alliances,” according to C.L. Cole and Shannon Cate, 281-2). The imagery of her later poetry, as exemplified in *The School Among the Ruins*, grows out of the poet's need to make broader “connections” with the outside world— as emphasized by one of her titles, and as referred to by Carole Bere (551). Rich has gathered her imagery, in this context, from every experience that filtered into her consciousness and every situation she found herself caught up into. In writing a poem, "an image snatched from riding a bus...,this scrap of private vision suddenly connected...with a life greater than my own, an existence not merely personal, words coming together to reveal what was unknown to me until I wrote them" (*What Is Found There*, 25).

Imagery is, therefore, Rich's means of “making connections” and of bridging the gaps between reality and the dream, the past and the future, art and life, the conscious and the unconscious, all impossibilities and what could be attained; it is her method of

transforming ideas into mental and visual patterns and designs. Helen Emmitt observes, in this respect, that "in the last ten years Rich has moved to a style using 'concrete images' in order to achieve both clarity of idea and fidelity to women's lives" (226). Rich, in a sense, celebrates the kinds of images that make the poet's experience surprisingly sensational; this saves poetry from the trap of propaganda for a new kind of recognition. She recommends, therefore, that images be effective, have connections with experience itself, and imagination persist its vital role. The successful re-visionary poem for Rich is one which manages to create tensions between the different life experiences that call up images from all the areas of consciousness. Hence, Rich greatly assesses the high value of turning experiences into images as progressively evolving rather than remaining iconic: "What is represented as intolerable—as crushing—becomes the figure of its own transformation, through the beauty of the medium and through the artist's uncompromised love for that medium, a love as deep as the love of freedom" (*What Is Found There*, 249).

An examination of Rich's imagery should, in fact, consider the importance of two main aspects of her art and thought. Firstly, the changing roles of the artist as closely related to an ever changing distance between "location, body, and the boundary between them" (just to make use of Kathleen Kirby's and Mary Eagleton's titles as informing the content of their two articles connected with Rich; both are to be evoked wherever this interconnection is to be mentioned throughout this study). Secondly, Rich's tendency towards "re-visionism," as one of her favorite terms, on the other. Throughout her poetry and prose writings the terms "change," "the will to change," "to re-vision," and "to correct" are recurrent and central to her thought and art. As Colby Langdell succinctly puts it, "the one constant in Adrienne Rich's poetry has been change and successive self-transformation" (1). Both aspects give insights into her tendency to explore and exploit the different capacities of language as performative and transformative at the same time, as Templeton alludes to (15). Thus, they represent the cultural and artistic contexts within which Rich's imagery grew and evolved so that a brief examination of them is of value to the current study.

The structuring of imagery throughout Rich's poetry is presumed to be understood within the context of the ever changing relationship between location, the body, and the boundaries between them over her long poetic career. This aspect is evocative of Simone de Beauvoir's conception of the body as a situation. In Toril Moi's words: "To claim that the body is a situation is to acknowledge that the meaning of a woman's body is bound up with the way she uses her freedom." Moi adds further that for Beauvoir, "our freedom is not absolute, but situated. Other situations as well as our particular lived experience will influence our projects, which in turn will shape our experience of the body in this way, each woman's experience of her body is bound up with her projects in the world" (65-6). This relationship has always been closely related to her will to change: "Recognizing her location, she recognizes it as a responsibility, something she cannot set aside," reveals Kirby (181). The responsibilities toward herself, her women community, her country, and the world in general rendered her and her poetry conspicuously fixed in time and place to the exclusion of all forms of thematic and aesthetic solipsism in consonance with her growing role as a socio-political activist. It is worth noting, in this respect, that "one might look particularly anywhere in Rich's poetry and not have far to go before encountering these central passions: will, change, and power—that is, the exercise of will in the quest for change that leads to empowerment," argues Hugh Seidman (227). This will to change is, undoubtedly, at the bottom of her thematic and artistic preoccupations collectively.

This pervasive peculiarity of Rich's feminist consciousness is insightfully highlighted by Kathleen Kirby and Mary Eagleton. Both perceptively trace her thematic and artistic evolution in terms of thinking through the body metaphor. The body is assessed as related in its changing roles to limiting spatial and ideological boundaries while alternating between subjectivity and objectivity. Rich's physical and psychological locations are not, understandably, fixedly mapable or restricted to a definite mood. They are, rather, in a process of varying connections that lead up to different territories of meaning and aesthetics (Kirby, 175; and Eagleton, 299-300; refer also to Coren,

60). It is, therefore, a metaphor fitting for Rich's approach to poetry as an activity whose aesthetics is determined by historicism and the attending moods over half a century that culminated in her later poetry as specified in *The School Among the Ruins*.

Parallel with the development of her feminist and political thought as resting on her constantly changing roles, "revisionism" represents the development of her poetics and ethics that abundantly inform her own imagery as a main texture of her early and later poetry. It is inseparable from her politics of the close affinity between the "body and location." Self-revision is valuable for Rich as a means of overcoming the aesthetic problems that faced her in her early poetic career. Rich emphatically maintains that: "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (*What Is Found There*, 11). This mode, in fact, is closely associated with her sense of responsibility that is permanently demanding ethically and aesthetically. Her unrelenting conviction that she is a poet with a mission supported her lifelong endeavor to "re-vise" with the object to gain modes of "self-correction" for her position as thinker and artist: "Like Yeats and Langston Hughes, Rich has reshaped her vision and voice several times in response to changes in the political and poetic environments," views Craig Werner (242). However, it cannot be claimed that Rich, in this endeavor, is a past-drawn writer/thinker; she is, rather, future oriented. Eagleton most insightfully points out that "Rich's work necessarily looks back—the rewriting, the 're-visioning', the self-citing, the self-critiquing—but, equally, the writing with its constant questioning and ardent, compelling rhythm drives the reader forward to a different future" (31). Revisionism remains, undoubtedly, both an existential and an artistic exigency for her. Existentially, it is her means of conquering and transforming an oppressor's imagery and discourse. Artistically, it is her tool of giving shape to the changes and transformations of an ever evolving feminist political activist consciousness. The shifts and displacements of Rich's art and poetics become, in this context, natural repercussions of her ever persistent tendency to engage with the historical moment in which she may be

anchored. Whereas the body/location close affinity presents the ideological context of her imagery, "revisionism" represents the bottom ground for the changing moods and forms within which her imagery is contextualized.

Imagery becomes, in this connection, more inclusive as evidently informed by the various contemporary worldly affairs. The poetic integrity Rich aspires to fulfill, in this context, is based on her inclination towards inclusiveness. All has been perfectly accomplished in *The School Among the Ruins* with the strategy of “[r]eaching toward” as the “leitmotif of the anguished and searching poetry and poetics,” states Schetchet (126). An insight into the volume's structure, in effect, may guide the reader into the nature and objectives of its imagery. Hacker presents a fitting method for approaching *The School Among the Ruins* as follows: "It occurs to me that one possible approach to Rich's work would be in the context of modern and contemporary poets who wrote/write long poems in sequences....The long sequential poem necessitates a wider lens, which opens out from the lyrical or anecdotal, even if it began there." She recommends, moreover, that "for this reader, the multifocused, kaleidoscopic poems from 'Snapshots' through 'Tendril' in...*The School Among the Ruins* are Rich's most characteristic and powerful work." Hacker sees further that "this large poetry made of small objects placed significantly together and swift concepts in motion; a poetry enacting the mimesis of thought" (235).

It is important, therefore, to consider Rich's efforts in her later poetry to examine and exercise feminist hermeneutics capable of transcending what Moi identifies as the ideological traps of the first and second feminist waves (206) towards the attainment of an ever inclusive form of art whose greater objective is to make connections rather than to cultivate ideological confinements. It cannot be claimed, however, that the inclusiveness contingent upon Rich's revisionism and her willingness to step out of the thematic and aesthetic closures in her later poetry necessarily connotes a break from—in a deconstructionist strategy—the feminist contexts. It is, rather, a way of presenting a post-structuralist feminist hermeneutics of worldly

experiences. Although the metaphysical turn in her recent poetry might seem threatening to the feminist zeal of Rich's work, yet a feminist hermeneutics still guides her vision. It is, in effect, a new turn in her feminist vision, or a quest for a "feminism without illusions," just to refer to Fox-Genovese's title; an attitude forming the bedrock of Rich's revisionism as founded upon her unceasing critiquing of one's ideas and biases to save oneself from existential impasses.

What is quite remarkable, in fact, is that Rich in *The School Among the Ruins* is completing what she has initiated since *Time's Power*: the possibilities of making connections with community and the world. According to Susan Sheridan, Rich "creates herself as representative," and in this way "she also creates an expanding readership....She seemed to speak for others, even as she spoke of her own deepest desires and fears, so that the myths she makes are, significantly, not so much myths of the single female self...as myths of the women's movement" (41). Rich may not, nevertheless, be accused of defection. She is, rather, coping with the Feminist Poststructuralism. However, the partial divergence from the early lesbian feminism is interesting in the sense that it greatly impressed her artistry in general, and imagery in particular, as capable of mapping out the interfusion of private and public meanings in the single composition and over a large group of compositions. The process of involving the reader in the historical mainstream and the world consciousness can, therefore, be traced in terms of imagery generated by her "moral imagination" referred to earlier.

A valid way of reading *The School Among the Ruins*, accordingly, is to approach it, as Templeton has suggested earlier, as an effective expression "of the internal process of revising and reshaping political consciousness," as a poetic rendering of the tension between the "external scenes of social and political chaos," of the poet's "internal sweeping disruption" and sense of pain, and the resolve to find meaning behind all of that (15, 16, 66). She fulfills all that in the form of highly sophisticated patterns of imagery fitting for the new attitude and mood omnipresent throughout the whole volume. Images of this kind become symbolic of the poet's guilt feelings as an

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American woman writer present at the turn of a millennium, according to Mary Deshazer’s title. Peter Erickson assesses the general plan of the whole book by saying: "The patterns of desire traced by Rich's new poems produce a trajectory that turns private intimacy outward to face a wider public sphere" (101). Templeton's comment on the contours of theme and technique in *Diving into the Wreck* is also valid, in this context, for *The School Among the Ruins*:

Rich makes an identification between 'the carnage of her inner life and that of the outer world, a convergence made convincing by the marshalling of evidence of modern horrors that cannot be dismissed as projections, but must be seen rather, as she sees them—as social symptoms of the same inner division that makes her the victim of her own censorious 'male mind', which fears her power and had taught her to hate it, and which makes of love a carnage' (38-9).

In both books, accordingly, Rich is preoccupied with presenting her personal aspirations and testing the validity of feminist hermeneutics, as mainly aspired to and popularized by the Third Way feminists. In this case, the poet's internal destruction is to be interpreted in terms of the images of external ruins; images rendered main pillars of the volume's overall structure.

Closely related to the feminist hermeneutics practiced in *The School Among the Ruins*, Rich becomes more inclusive on the assumption that she seeks no ostensible distinction between male and female subjects on the grounds that both are identified as victimized by modern culture and modern warfare. Hacker determinedly voices that even while Rich insistently adhered to her "particularity as a woman" and similarly to "the historical over determination of women's experiences and supposed limitations, she was insisting as well...that a woman's intellectual/political/aesthetic development could provide the emblematic narrative for a generation" (231). Thus repeatedly throughout her later poetry, as demonstrated in *The School Among the Ruins*, Rich endeavours to present her vision, as based on the female experience, of modern civilization and attempts to achieve a more public setting for the drama of the self to the extent that the external

details complicate the experience and the experiencing consciousness modifies the images and objects. Rich, in a sense, "critiques North American society in a time of struggle and growing despair....However, Rich's...efforts cannot be as direct as she wished", comments Jeannette Riley (100-1). In contrast with her earlier feminist poetry with its tendency towards stereotyping in terms of themes and imagery, *The School Among the Ruin*, as a culmination of Rich's final development, departs from such common clichés to join a more thematic and technical openness and to gain a more inclusive readership: "In breaking boundaries, it breaks silences, speaking for, or at best, with the silenced. It is a poetry that talks back, that would act as part of the world, not simply as a mirror of it," states Teare (28). Equally significant, the poetry presented in the current book helps her to "see that part of herself as more and more integral to her multifaceted identity, and she embraced it," voices Jules Chametzky (418).

The *School Among the Ruins*, accordingly, seeks to present solutions to the problems that emerged in her lesbian period. The poet's main task, then, is no more than the quest for the reality and the truth of an end-of-millennium America. Tejada sees that "the poems of her most recent collection, *The School Among the Ruins*, are especially powerful reminders that it is still possible to address the catastrophe of the historic present and to resist its harrowing world effects with a sensual optimism of body and language" (249-50). Such an effort to live and be human is the motivating force behind this book as well as the source of its world of imagery. It is impractical, therefore, to deal with her later poetry in general distinctly from her growing concern with universal issues and gaining a common readership irrespective of gender/class/race biases: "We...go to poetry to receive the experience of the not me, enter a field of vision we could not otherwise apprehend." She adds that: "Self-reference is always possible: that my 'I' is a universal 'we,' that the reader is my clone...that my chip of mirror contains the world," announces Rich (*What Is Found There*, 85; see also Lee Sharkey, 42). Rich presents here a collective experience formed of the conflict between good and evil, man and environment, the private and the public, the typically American and the commonly universal. That is, she wanted, in a revisionist manner, a poetry encompassing "every wreck, all the

myths of American life,” in Chametzky’s words (418).

Gone, therefore, is the solipsism of her lesbian poetry. The contiguity and tension between the female writer and a whole world have called for a different world of imagery as a requirement of decorum: "I realize that the social fragmentation of poetry from life has itself been one of the materials that demanded evolution in my poetic methods, continually pushed at me to devise language and images that could refute the falsely framed choices," maintains Rich (*What Is Found There*, 53). Throughout *The School Among the Ruins*, images of the body and location are, understandably, representatives of Rich's development of thought and aesthetics. Images of both types are substantiations of the assumption that "Rich relies heavily on imagery that simultaneously indicates fragmentation and claustrophobia," states Artemis Michailidou (18). They are examples of her mastery to turn images into “verbal compositions,” according to Peter Erickson (99) in the sense that an image is not turned into a mere icon but rather transformed into an evocative verbal context whose poetic effect derives from its power of free association. As Diaz-Diocaretz conceives of it, the feminist discourse in Rich's case encompasses "verbal constructs created with textual strategies (imagery, arguments, perspective) that contribute to an expansion of messages in which the individual and the collective experience originate from critical stance against the social contexts of patriarchy and its language" (46). Despite that both types of imagery are not restricted to *The School Among the Ruins*, they are, most significantly, employed in various contexts as related to different perspectives. So, the issue becomes not the employment of new world of imagery but rather the ability to render it newly vested. As Rich herself argues: "Formal innovation always challenges us to 'keep the language flexible'....I go on searching for poetic means that may help us meet the present crisis of evacuation of meaning" (*Arts of the Possible*, 14). However, as Teare observes, "what has not changed is her simultaneous rhetorical precision and imagistic clarity, which serve here to ground her impassioned voice, whose intimate tone 'work[s] to keep it current / and meaningful'" (28). The significance of each of the two types of images mentioned above has to do with the assumption that they are no longer Rich's representation of her early

lesbian attitude, but rather her reflections of the full-fledged poet's meditations on life, mortality, and the urgent need to give them greater attention as common human issues calling for different sensibilities and artistry as well.

What is remarkable about Rich's recurrent allusions to the body in *The School Among the Ruins* is that the image transcends the portrait of the body in its totality and symmetry either to one of fragmentation and destructivity or to its being a presence in absentia. As Zofia Burr assesses this strategy: "In poems that are addressed to us, something might be being said to us, but to hear it we have to overhear it" (1). This, paradoxically, connotes the fragmentary, but full, experience of the speaker as restoring her full connection with the outside world in her post-lesbian period. It is worth minding that the references to persons' bodies are inclusive of Rich herself, for "Rich is present in all her persons, singular and plural, first, second, and third," observes Jeanne Perreault (45; consider, similarly, Sharkey, 41-2). Throughout the volume, the bodily image gains a new dimension and a new value as the poet's clearer expression of her novel all-inclusive concerns. Erickson views, in this concern, that "the difference is the striking change of mood" (99). The body, accordingly, is not that body as conceived of as a source of sexual desire and erotic pleasure. (Rich's lesbianism, however, is more ideological than physical, rather virtual than real, in contrast with other lesbians such as Audre Lorde, for instance. In *The Dream of A Common Language* poems Rich describes her lesbianism as: "Most of our love from the age of nine/took the form of jokes and mute/loyalty," *The Fact of a Door Frame*, 156). It is, rather, the broken, bruised body that reveals marks of the destruction and oppression outside the poet's bedroom and beyond the lesbian community. It is also the body of an aged woman poet preoccupied with ontological, metaphysical, and mundane issues. Here, Rich establishes family resemblances with the long line of the third way feminist thinkers from Beauvoir to Toril Moi who insist that "the sexed body is both a background and a situation, and as such not a phenomenon that can simply be disavowed," argues Moi (205). The development of its image from earlier to later poetry is, accordingly, in line with Beauvoir's conviction that "consciousness is not a unified, coherent, and stable entity," reveals Moi (59). Hence, the image evolves out of the writer's mood and angle of vision as motivated by

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the historical moment itself. This implies that feminist criticism of literary themes and techniques must be sensitive to the woman writer's differences of place and time so that a proper assessment of the value of the created image be possible. The bodily images are valuable, therefore, for Rich's thought and artistry from the perspective that Rich's achievement as an artist derives directly from the intense reconciliation of imagination to the experience that fosters it and motivates the creative process.

Those “re/vised” and revised bodily images are demonstrated as early as "Equinox." The title of the poem is connotative of the nature of the images in the poem itself and throughout the whole volume. As the equinox suggests equality and equilibrium, hence the images are consistent with the poet's tendency to redress the balance in her life and to make her experience a round one: "Can say I was mistaken?" ("Equinox," 16). The body is viewed, from this perspective, not as a source, or symbol, of pleasure and closure, but as a new understanding of reality with all its cruelty and intricacy:

To be so bruised: in the soft organs skeins of consciousness
Over and over have let it be
damage to others crushing of the animate core
that tone-deaf cutloose ego swarming the world
so bruised: heart spleen long inflamed ribbons of the guts
the spine's vertical necklace swaying
Have let it swarm
through us let it happen
as it must, inmost
but before this: long before this those other eyes
frontally exposed themselves and spoke. ("Equinox", 16-17)

The fact that the body, as presented in terms of disjointed organs, establishes an evidence that it is not that soft skinned organism

designed for lying with other soft skinned homo-organisms—"skin could lie on skin," (16)— but an organism with new meanings for the poet and the world: to receive and be a registry of new and more impersonal experience; to give a different shape to the speaker's consciousness. This new bodily image shaped by the stresses of the new millennium is to be valued in contrast with a counterpart bodily image presented by Rich in the 1968 poem "Planetarium" in which the poet's images are for the "relief of the body" and the "reconstruction" of the female consciousness:

... I am an instrument in the shape
of a woman trying to translate pulsations
into images for the relief of the body
and the reconstruction of the mind. (*The Fact of A Doorframe*, 74)

Obviously, the woman poet's optimized ambition is not only physical relief but, equally important, the reshaping of her own feminist vision. It is a forging of a woman-centered consciousness in which individual perception is informed by a common lesbian desire. What is connotative about the body image presented in "Equinox," in contrast, is its violation of the outer configuration of the human, ex-lesbian, body to include all the vital parts of this body to reveal the amount of suffering and destructiveness characterizing it. Peter Erickson remarks, in this connection, that: "The terms 'bruised' and 'swaying' echo the related prose passage ... of What Is Found There...where Rich calls for a poetry 'that reveals how we are— inwardly as well as outwardly—under conditions of great imbalance and abuse of material power'." (100). The fact that the ego—"the animate core"— is crushed, and that it used to be "tone-deaf cutloose" connotes punishment for its past divorce from the outside world. Or, it may also suggest that the speaker expects the body to be bruised for loss of contact with the outer world as a result of the speaker's past solipsism; therefore, the determination to reconcile it to the world anew may bring about its tragic end of enlightenment, reversal, and catharsis: "But before this: long before this those other eyes/frontally exposed themselves and spoke" ("Equinox," 17).

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In "Tell Me" the speaker presents a similar change of tone as far as the significance of the body is concerned. The body's earlier vitality and sexism is questioned and implicitly rejected—not as shying away from the idea of lesbianism that connotes for Rich living in women's autonomous community irrespective of any physical contacts:

Tell me, why toward dawn the body
close to a body familiar as itself
chills—tell me, is this the hour
remembered if outlived
as freezing—no, don't tell me. (18)

Later in the poem, the body's new message is implicitly determined as one of transcending its narrow boundaries and regaining contact with the outer world rather than remaining permanently as just a fractured mirror:

Dreams spiral birdwinged overhead
a peculiar hour the silver mirror-frame's
quick laugh the caught light-lattice on the wall
as a truck drives off before dawn
headlights on. (18)

The speaker attributes to the body different functions that resonate the change of attitude and of mood following a new change of role and a novel revisionist attitude. It is a metamorphosed machine equipped with up-to-date network of tools for receiving and analyzing the world in its all-inclusive state. The body's flashes are no longer self-centered ones— not engendered through its contact with other female bodies— but, most importantly gaining power and vitality from its association with the outside world. Its new objective, therefore, is to transcend its past closure that, paradoxically, rendered it cold though erotically thrilled:

Not wanting
to *write this up* for the public not wanting
to *write it down* in secret

just to lie here in this cold story
feeling it trying to feel it through. (18)

This is an image of a body deprived of all forms of the past sensual energy; a weak, still mature, one involved in meditations about the past, the present, and the future. In a manner of speaking, the body featured in the new millennium poetry is defeated by and exposing the personal failure of the speaker and the public failure of a nation at war—a nation whose "unauthorized shock troops are abroad," ("Tell Me," 18). Amidst all these frustrations, the body is a ghost-like figure (may be akin to Yeats's scarecrow) leaning

over the banister

declaring the old stories all
froze like beards or frozen margaritas
all the new stories taste of lukewarm
margaritas, lukewarm kisses. (19)

The body at present is valid rather for suffering from than craving for pleasure:

always mis-taken, draft, roughed-in
only to be struck out
is blurt is brought-up
hot keeps body
in leaden hour

simmer. ("Tell Me", 19)

So, the empathy that the speaker shows in the volume's title poem is a matter of a fresh understanding of the place of the body amid the recent massacres taking place in "Beirut, Baghdad, Bethlehem, Kabul. Not of course here," ("The School Among the Ruins," 22). In these cities, it is destruction that occupies the whole scene and the bodies are mutilated or dismembered. There, the human debris there intermix with those of buildings and other forms of life to the extent that the living bodies themselves become bruised ones like those of "Equinox" and life freezes in them as it happens in "Tell Me":

When the offensive rocks the sky when nightglare
misconstrues day and night when lived-in
rooms from the upper city
tumble creating lower streets

cornices of olden ornament human debris
when fear vacuums out the streets

When the whole town flinches
blood on the undersole thickening to glass

Whoever crosses hunched knees bent a contested zone

knows why she does this suicidal thing. ("The School", 22- 3)

Here, the speaker, though a professed lesbian, experiences promptly how the human body is permitted only to queerly masquerade—"hunched knees bent"— as new life strategies divorced from those experienced by the lesbian writer in the past when the

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body's main message was to make connections with other straight lesbian ones. As a political activist, Rich, accordingly, widens the scope of her themes and imagery in consonance with her changing role and mood.

In the closing part of the poem, the human body is rendered powerless, maimed, or fully destroyed by war. There is no place for any sense of security or peace; fear is the focus of the scene. The speaker's body is, therefore, stepping beyond the closure of the lesbian years to be close by the miserably worried bodies of school children who are subject to a different form of closure: the siege of hostile troops threatening to dismember, or have already dismembered, their soft innocent bodies:

I've told you, let's try to sleep in this funny camp
All night pitiless pilotless things go shrieking
above us to somewhere

Don't let your faces turn to stone
Don't stop asking me why

Let's pay attention to our cat she needs us. ("The School," 25)

In these lines, the speaker's body, a presence in absentia, is not located in its habitual setting of the early poetry: the bedroom. Hence, whereas the early closure was associated with the solipsist ego, the present confinement is physical and threatens to destroy this ego altogether. The sole solution available under the circumstances is to try to escape consciousness and ego together for the continuity of the human existence to be possible:

We sang them to naps told stories made
shadow-animals with our hands
wiped human debris off boots and coats
sat learning by heart the names
some were too young to write

some had forgotten how. ("The School," 25)

The body in the "The Eye," unlike the early lesbian closure, is located in a horribly deadening setting. Cynthia Hogue is quite apposite, in this context, in remarking that Rich's "poetry exceeds its textual boundaries, the testimonial frame of a singular, seeming eye/I, turning (political) outside into (poetic) inside and so back, once a reader has been transformed by reading the poem. As such, Rich forges a revisionary 'public voice of our time'" (423). The central image of the poem is that of bodies divorced from their beds and leaving for the unknown where danger and death wait them. The image gains its effect from Rich's willingness to explicitly allude the present state of the body; she is, on the contrary, turning the image into a "verbal composition." Albert Gelpi, hence, illuminates that "Rich prophesies...the 'reclaiming of the suffering body through the imaginative and creative power of language" (438-9). The poet's business, in this context, is a tragi-comic one. The effect is both ironic and fear rousing together, for the body is no longer a delicate pleasure-giving one as habitually centered in cozy beds but an ominous doomed entity:

Our bed quilted wine poured future uncertain you'd think
people like us would have it scanned and planned tickets to
somewhere
would be in the drawer with all our education you'd think we'd
have taken measures
soon as ash started turning up on the edges of everything ash in
the leaves of books ash on the leaves of trees and in the veins of
the passive
innocent life we were leading calling it hope
you'd think that and we thought this it's the war not us that's
moving
like shade on a balcony. (32)

The body, as imaged in these lines, is a presence in absentia as part of the poet's artistry of turning images into verbal patterns. Hence,

the "bed," the "wine poured," the "scanned and planned tickets to somewhere," "the passive/innocent life we were leading calling it hope," and the "war...that's moving" are incantatory of the pervasive presence of the body as the main agent in the speaker's present and future plans. The lines are also revealing of the speaker's meditations on the past job of the body: one of giving pleasure, and then modified by her present notion of the impact of worldly events as well as of old age itself on the present and future bodily position. It is, in effect, a clear manifestation of a change of mood and orientation together.

In "There Is No One Story And One Story Only," Rich meditates on the truth, value, and longevity of physical life and bodily pleasure-seeking at a time that both imply transience of pleasure and memories. The stories of death in the poem represent variations on the same tune: the destructive impact of time on the human body the matter that implies the valuelessness and too shortness of physical beauty, power, and pleasure. It is a mark of the poet's involvement in metaphysical meditations contrary to the early lesbian ones. Among the stories of the poem is that:

Of the friend watching him leave remembering
the story of her body
with his once and the stories of their children
made with other people and how his mind went on
pressing hers like a body
There is the story of the mind's
temperature neither cold nor celibate
Ardent The story of
not one thing only. (33)

Throughout the first part of the volume, therefore, Rich's bodily images are clear manifestations of her change of role and attitude; they are transformations of her early lesbian images. Hence, the assertions that Rich makes in relation to such images "are not to be appreciated solely by their relation to the past. Part of Rich's greatness is her refusal to be satisfied by such assertions. She makes them points

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of departure, or the creation of new sites for imaginative inquiry," maintains Charles Altieri (*Self and Sensibility*, 170). In the second part of the volume, *USONIAN JOURNALS 2000*, she proceeds with the same attitude. In "Mirrors," for instance, it is the female body that is represented as losing its past delicacy and vitality as victimized, not by a male oppressor but, by a metaphysical agent:

Possible tones of the human voice, their own possible physical beauty— no recognition. The fish-eye lens bobbles faces back. Bodies heavy with sad or enraged feminine or macho brooding mimic stand-up comics, celebrities; grimace, gesticulate. The nakedest generation of young USonian with little intuition of the human history of nakedness, luminous inventions of skin and musculature. Their surfaces needlepointed with conventionally outrageous emblems, what mirror to render justly their original beauty back to them? (39-40)

The lines, undoubtedly, are lamentations on lost physical beauty that finds in old age "no recognition." It is the story of bodies whose glamour was featured earlier in the nude by the "nakedest generation of young Usonian with little intuition of/ the human history of nakedness." (The effect of the image is, actually, enhanced by its intetextuality with the images of Rich’s lesbian period in which: “Whatever happens with us, your body/will haunt mine—*tender, delicate*” (italics added; *The Fact of a Door Frame*, 150). The present generation's little intuition of the history of nakedness is a mark of their unprecedented knowledge its meaning. However, all is gone forever with old age: "what mirror to render justly their/original beauty back to them?" The speaker's present state of physical

deformity is strongly sensed as the source of her lamentation and change of mood in a highly productive lesbian period.

In " Artworks II," the speaker strongly strikes a note of deep sadness as the body fails to inspire her poetry with images of vitality and beauty. The oral communicative incompetence is a mark of the general communal malady coloring contemporary urban life. Ailing bodies, as also signs of old age, are exhibited in a low-key tone:

This fade-out/suspension of conversation: a syndrome of the past decades? Our companionate immune systems under siege, viral spread of social impotence producing social silence?

Imagine written literature that walks away from human conversation. A written literature, back turned to oral traditions, estranged from music and body. So what might reanimate, rearticulate, becomes less and less available. (41)

What is clearly presented in this passage is an image of a body defeated and defeating at the same time. In as much as it is subject to decay, it is a silenced kind of body inspiring literature different themes and imagery. Similarly, since it fails to communicate, the past connections it used to make turn out to be false and ineffective. The speaker grows blue as her aged body fails to function: "So what might reanimate,/rearticulate, becomes less and less available."

In the third part of the book, the bodily image takes a new and positive turn. It undergoes a radical change compatible with the poet's different attractions. As the title of the part connotes, history becomes a territory shared, and the poet develops an extreme sense of responsibility towards the world. Unlike the erotic bodily images of the lesbian period, and differently from those of the first two parts of *The School Among the Ruins* incarnating destructivity and suffering, the body image in the third part emerges from an understanding of the body as a language. In "Transparencies," for instance, the body is

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imaged in terms of a weapon as expressive as words themselves. The poem's significance, in a sense, has to do with the fact that it is inspired by the Palestinian "Intifada" as Rich herself experienced when residing for a short time in Beit Jala. Rich maintains that the Palestinian bodies turned into defensive weapons against the apartheid wall erected by the Israelis and in as much as the Palestinians and other peace activists used to scrawl on the wall words of protest, their bodies represented symbols for the ability to negotiate that wall to raise doubts about its uselessness. Rich's recreation of the whole situation with the body at its centre (while evocative of W.B. Yeats's stone as in the midst of all in "Easter 1916") is connotative of the intertextuality of Rich's imagery in general. Hence, the body's value is enhanced by its being in the presence of:

Word that would cancel deed
That human equals innocent and guilty
That we grasp for innocence whether or no
is elementary that words can translate into broken bones
That the power to hurl words is a weapon
That the body can be a weapon. ("Transparency," 49)

the change undergoing the body image in this poem is, undoubtedly, so radical, keeping in mind the extent to which a lesbian poet used to celebrate and glorify the eroticism and thrill one might obtain from bodily relations. Now, it is the body's turn to recreate history in terms of the Freudian sublimation of instincts (though Freud himself may not be a favorable citation or model for a feminist writer). The relationship between words and the body in the passage quoted above is a complex one, for not only does the body inspire the images, but it is, concurrently, provoked by it. The privilege endowed upon the body derives from its transformation into the only alternative and solution possible for resistance and survival:

Any child on play ground knows that asked your favourite word
In a game

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You always named a thing, a quality, a *freedom* or *river*
(never a pronoun never *God* or *War*)
is taken for granted that word and body
are all we have to lay on the line
that words are windowpanes in a ransacked hut, smeared
by time's dirty rains, we might argue

likewise that words are clear as glass till the sun strikes it
blinding. ("Transparency," 49)

In the same way as the word turns into protective "windowpanes in a ransacked hut, smeared/ by time's dirty rains" that are subject to different changes, the body itself is subject to various contexts. So, since the words can be cleaned, the bodies themselves can be purified by being turned into shields defending the human survival. Hence, the word and body, to be of value for the human survival, must be quashed and destroyed to be reborn. Thus, "transparencies" is a good model for Rich's modification of the bodily image in consonance with her changing roles.

In "Ritual Acts," the body is projected in a highly paradoxical context. It evolves into a symbol of gaining freedom and immortality through death. The poem, therefore, presents a heroic woman who, instead of seeking joy through physical pleasure, attains greatness and power by means of transcending the body boundaries. The body itself turns into the vehicle of reaching her goal: to protest at oppression and defend the dignity of her country, and of humanity in general:

She wrapped herself in a flag
soaked it in gasoline and lit a match
This is for the murdered babies
they say she said
Others heard
for the honor of my country

Others remember

the smell and how she screamed. (59)

Rich deliberately relies on implication to achieve a maximum of suspense. What is wrapped is apparently her body, which has always been herself. Hence, she sacrifices this symbol that gains in a new significance in Rich's later poetry. The fact that the body is wrapped in a flag enhances also the image's significance in the sense that it is rendered into a national banner, and hence, the impossibility of divorcing both elements as far as dignity and sanctity are concerned. In addition, the woman recognizes in her new situation that the body is valid more for nobler causes than for egotistic pleasure. Paradoxically, the body is remembered only through its purifying fire and the woman for her pains; this is in contrast with the state of oblivion from which both suffer concerning their past existence. In this case, the body, in this as well as other poems related to the same volume, is a clear utterance of the amount of change undergoing the thought and art of the later Rich.

The way Rich conceives of the body in terms of a "box," or treasury, in "Slashes" is, likewise, compatible with her all-pervasive image of the body as a registry of history. The poem is, in fact, at the center of the volume's fifth division. It gains its power from its contextuality with the body images of the same part. This central image, therefore, is reinforced by the way the other bodily images are forming a closure for it; all are informed, in this regard, by the poet's lesbian memories of imaginary or real bodily connections. However, the reference to the body as such is neither self contradiction nor interrupts the line of thought, for the images represent merely flashes of thought that do not last long in the poem. They function, rather, as parapraxes. For instance, the body is alluded to in passing in the poem "For J.J." in terms of "our solidarity" (71); in "Memorize This," a remembering of the devotion of the two lovers as a kind of : "One says I'd rather make love/ Than go to the Greek Festival/ The other, I agree" (75); or the fragmentation of the body in the speaker's recollection of how the body represented a source of momentary pleasure that cannot be re-experienced—in the Wordsworthian conception of poetry as an overflow of powerful feelings recollected

in tranquility. So, what is recollected in the case of Rich's speaker is more the memory than its attendant effect:

Take a strand of your hair
on my fingers let it fall
across the pillow lift to my nostrils
inhale your body entire. ("Memorize This,"76)

The experience presented in this image is, apparently, one of gaining a partial pleasure and trying, whether successfully or not, to overstretch it. Even the memories involved in the experience are temporarily limited ones that do not step beyond the speaker's case, considering that the other side is already dead. Similarly, the "bedded bodies" in "Trace Elements" are merely presented within the context of an escape from evil conditions, no more: "Memory: echo in time / All's widescreen now lucid inchoate century/Vast disappearing acts" (80).

The bodily image presented in "Slashes," likewise, gains its significance not from being part of a personal interconnection, but from being related to a woman's presentation of her varied experiences of American and worldly political events: The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the 1968 Vietnam War Opposition Movements linked with the movement for Black civil rights and with anticolonial struggles abroad, in addition to the Military Subversion in Chile in 1973 (*The School*, 113). What is remarkable about the poem's bodily image, compared with the previous ones related to the same division of the volume, is its transformation into a mine of experiences that can be conjured up not only by the poem's persona but, equally significant, by others: "Years pass she pressing the time into a box/ Not to be opened a box/ Quelling pleasure and pain" ("Slashes," 79). As the lines connote, the body/box substitution is evocative of the image of the body: "To be bruised" as exhibited in "Equinox" of the first part of the volume. It suggests the unity of experience and mood throughout the whole volume. Thus, the lesbian images erupting suddenly at distant intervals throughout the whole volume reinforce this unity rather than interrupt it.

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In the sixth and seventh parts of the volume, the body, whether referred to explicitly or in implication, gains a highly symbolic significance. It is no longer a lesbian body suffering from the pains and decay of old age, but rather the body of contemporary America inflicted with moral and spiritual pains contingent on the American foreign policies. The fact that the location of the two parts is a war setting helps assess the meaning of their bodily images. Part six, in this concern, is entitled "Dislocations: Seven Scenarios," which connotes the lack of harmony and unity in contemporary American culture and ethics. In the first scenario the speaker is angry about the value of a home that has grown sickening and frustrating: "Still learning the word/'home' or what it could mean/ say, to relinquish (85). Artemis Michaildou's remark is illuminating in this respect: "What underlines Rich's debt to Millay...is her emphasis on 'impotence' as the primary feeling experienced by all the anonymous people trapped in war." Similarly, both "voice their frustration at the impotence of the way to influence the decisions taken by the few, the military elite that holds the power" (19). The second scenario is an implicit representation of the nation's body as subject to pain and decay; what is presented is merely antibiotics and pain killers, but no effective treatment:

In a vast dystopic space the small things multiply
when all the pills run out the pain
grows more general

flies find the many eyes
quarrels thicken then weaken
tiny mandibles of rumor open and close
blame has a name that will not be spoken. (86)

The lines are clear evocations of the body as poisoned and threatened with complete death or at least amputation of its parts. The image is, therefore, a tragic one that provokes thought about the present situation of that body and the urgent need for solutions to save

it from being utterly doomed to extinction. In the fifth scenario, the poet moves in a camera-like manner to diagnose the state of a member of modern urban American culture:

maybe so, maybe not

look at her now

pale lips paperly flesh

at your creased belly wrinkled sac

look at the scars

reality's autographs. (89)

Here, it is impractical to try to divorce the nation's decaying body from the citizen's body rendered into a mirror of the nation's malady. Thus, the scenario closes with a strong comment: "how in a body can defiance/ still embrace its likeness" (89).

In the seventh part of the volume, the bodily images are significant on the assumption that they are connected with the bodies sent abroad for killing and being killed for no good reason, according to the speaker. In "Five O'clock, January 2003," for instance, the news that soldiers are being sent abroad evoke in the speaker feelings of sadness for the lover who was wounded, and at most maimed, at war:

Tonight as cargoes of my young

fellow countrymen and women are being hauled

into positions aimed at death, positions

they who did not will it suddenly

have to assume

I am thinking of Ed Azevedo

half-awake in recovery

if he has his arm whole

and how much pain he must bear
under the drugs. (95)

The speaker's "fellow young countrymen and women" hauled into death positions and wedded to Ed Azevedo's wounded body, undoubtedly, evoke the physical pain of a whole nation at war that Rich repeatedly portrays in her prose writings. The wound is, apparently, physical, yet threatening, the unity and moral integrity of the whole nation. Hence, Ed Azevedo's semi-conscious state, and the assumption that he may suffer bodily pains, considering that he had passed without maiming, is a reflection of the speaker's anger and loath at her country's foreign policy:

we passed, greeting, I saw his arm
bandaged to the elbow
asked and he told me: It was just
a small cut, nothing, on the hand he'd
washed in peroxide thinking
that was it until the pain began
traveling up his arm
and then the antibiotics the splint the
numbing drugs the sick sensation
and this evening at five o'clock the emergency
surgery. (95)

The images in these lines are concrete ones after the imagist model in its tendency to evoke intellectual and emotional complexes simultaneously. Later in the same poem, the connections between the individual's bodily wounds and those of the whole nation are unmistakable:

I'll be thinking of you at five

this evening I said
afterward you'll feel better, your body
will be clean of this poison
I didn't say Your war is here
but could you have believed
that from a small thing infection
would crawl through the blood
and the enormous ruffled shine
of an ocean wouldn't tell you. (96)

This group of bodily images in "Five O'clock, January 2003" are, accordingly, instrumental for a political activist poet like Rich, who skillfully and successfully widens the image's perspective consistently with her changing roles. The body, in this context, evolves from being a source of erotic pleasure to one of pain and suffering, as characteristic of the whole book in general.

Images of location in *The School Among the Ruins*, stand, similarly, for Rich's tendency toward revisionism and changing roles. They are clear manifestations of the widening of scope as well as the change of mood throughout the whole volume. They are manifestations of Rich's strategy in which instead "of a person's being absorbed within scenes, scenes become challenges to the poet to produce a discursive poetic framework adapting them to the concerns of a society," in Altieri's words (*Self and Sensibility*, 179). Parallel with the bodily images as revealing of the inclusiveness of her later poetry as far as the subjects, techniques, and readership are concerned, the images of location are variations on the same tune. Diaz-Diocaretz's note to Rich's first text in "Twenty-One Love Poems" is validly applicable to her overall scheme of location imagery in *The School Among the Ruins* that "introduces images of the external world that converge in the city as a kind of contemporary wasteland....In Rich's sequence the opposition is not 'I/you'... but 'we

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versus the city'....The speaker declares the desire not to be part of that decaying, debased landscape" (49-50). So, distinctly from the images of location of her early feminist and lesbian periods that focused on locations connoting physical closure and limited modes of life, the images in the present volume are part of her wider concern with the world and worldly issues. Hogue observes, in this respect, that Rich's poetry "is charged by...a poetics of witness. By transporting the reader from outside to inside the poem, the poem's import is potentially translated from inside to outside the textual frame—becoming...ecstatically political" (414). Hence, any image of this type gains its significance from the evocativeness of the poet's change of outlook towards the outside world and her tendency to sidestep the closures of her early and middle poetry. It turns into an incarnation of a strong desire to make connections between poetry and other art forms: "I want a poetry that is filmic as a film can be poetic, a poetry that is theatre, performance, voice as body and body as voice. I want everything possible for poetry," states Rich (*Arts of the Possible*, 118). An examination of this category of images as featuring throughout *The School Among the Ruins* may give insights into the amount of change coloring her new worldly sympathies.

"Equinox," is, interestingly, connotative of the kind of image of location woven into a closely-linked encompassing structure; that is, the bed image. The image, in this context, is wedded to the body image for heralding the new change of attitude presented in the present book. Hence, the manipulation of the bed image departs, expectedly, from its representation in the lesbian poetry in which the bed connotes restricting the value of the human body to lesbian connections and contacts. In her new concerns, the bed, like all other locations, is not intended to suggest lesbian confinement and exclusiveness, but, rather, to signify the poet's tendency to make broader connections with the outside world. In "Equinox," accordingly, the speaker is deeply involved in reconsidering the past closures of her life and the potentialities of the future:

So can I say it was not I listed as Innocence

betrayed you serving (and protesting always)
the motives of my government
thinking we'd scratch out a place
where poetry old subversive shape
grew out of Nowhere here?
Where skin could lie on skin
A place "outside the limits"
Can say I was mistaken? (16)

The bedroom as location, in this new context, gains its effect from its close affinity with the bodily image evoked in the same poem in which the body is "so bruised" that it is no longer valid for erotic pleasure but, rather, for registering the poet's new connections with the outside world. The speaker is, under the circumstances, torn between her past lesbian loyalties and her present sympathies. The bedroom turns from a symbol of solipsist forms of closure into a peepshow for the "bruised body" upon the outside world. The rhetorical question tailing the passage is highly connotative accordingly. This new perception stands in sharp contrast with the "bed" and "bedroom" images of Rich's earlier poetry where female companions were supposed to "lie under the sheet/after making love, speaking/of loneliness," "sexual jealousy/outflung hand/beating bed," and "dryness of mouth after panting" (*The Fact of a Doorframe*, 76,77). Hence, the change in the bed's and bedroom's nature and function resonates the same change undergoing the body's role in the poet's new context. Hacker demonstrates Rich's tendency to make connections between feminist and historical interests by means of the bed/bedroom images. She says that it is the connection "she made youthfully and romantically between 'Vietnam and the lover's bed,' which is equally between the Sudan and an Oakland jazz club, Falluja and the Brooklyn public library, an old man on the roof of a flooded house in New Orleans and the army recruiter outside Wal-Mart." Hence, these "juxtapositions, this sense of being, as a poet, necessarily

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here and elsewhere, elsewhere of being here, are at the heart of Rich's poetic project" (232).

In "The Eye," the bedroom image of "Equinox" is developed into one of a home image arousing feelings of chaos and discomfort relevant to those of the outside world itself rather than to the speaker's inner disruption, according to Erickson (99). The image's power and effectiveness have to do with the fact that the bed room itself opens into the outside world rather than lesbian limited spaces. Hence, the bedroom and its surrounding domestic locations are not comforting or pleasure-giving houses but rather an overall portrait of a horrible and ugly sight:

Behind the balcony an apartment, papers, pillows, green vines still
watered

there are waterless places but not here yet, there's a bureau topped
with marble

and combs and brushes on it, little tubes for lips and eyebrows, a
dish of coins and keys

there's a bed a desk a stove a cane rocker a bookcase
civilization

cage with a skittery bird, there are birdless places but not
here yet, this bird must creak and flutter in the name of all
uprooted orchards, limbless groves

this bird standing for wings and song that here can't fly. ("The Eye," 32)

This disorderly and uncomfortable scene with the bedroom as its focus gains more strength when compared with her earlier bed room images that highlighted a perfect, tidy place: "To imagine a time of silence.../a time of chemistry and music" (*The Fact of a Doorframe*, 76). It is also to be contrasted with other traditional images that connote harmony, luxury, and comfort, notably Alexander Pope's toilet scene in *The Rape of The Lock*, for instance. Rich's recent

portrait contextualizes, rather, T. S. Eliot's scene in "A Game of Chess," of *The Waste Land*. As Erickson interprets it, "'The Eye' in the present volume shows that the domestic space of 'Our bed quilted' has lost its protective capacity" (99). The bed image in the same poem is also evocative of the speaker's sense of closure and despair. It is no longer the bed of the lesbian period which represented a meeting place for companions' bodies, or as a location where erotic pleasure could be obtained, but as a deserted place overlooking the outside world:

Our bed quilted wine poured future uncertain you'd think

people like us would have it scanned and planned tickets to
somewhere would be in the drawer with all our education you'd
think we'd have taken measures

soon as ash started turning up on the edges of everything
ash in the leaves of books ash on the leaves of trees and in the veins
of the passive innocent life we were leading calling it hope

you'd think that and we thought this it's the war not us that's
moving like shade on a balcony. ("The Eye," 32)

Obviously, the authority of the past over the present is very strong in the bed image presented in this passage. The image connotes the failure of the bed to resist the present conditions of the war that the speaker and the addressee look defeated by and suffering from; they are lonely as the bed failed to bring about pregnancies—which is implicitly alluded to in the last three lines of the passage at hand. The image is quite reminiscent of the closing part of "A Game of Chess" as portrayed by Eliot as a main motif of modern civilization that is doomed to a state of corruption, impotence, and imminent downfall.

The bed image is, similarly, highlighted in "Tendril," of the volume's closing section, as an incarnation of feelings of fear and worry rather than pleasure and satisfaction. The bed functions as the closure, or unsafe place, for a soldier who is supposed to leave for war, but unwillingly:

Why does the outstretched finger of home
probe the dark hotel room like a flashlight beam

on the traveler, half-packed, sitting on the bed
face in hands, wishing her bag emptied again at home
Why does the young security guard
pray to keep standing watch forever, never to fly. (103)

The bed, as the main setting of the two persons portrayed in the poem, symbolizes the runway that will send them to the eye of danger away from home. Ironically, its earlier function has expired owing to changes in all wakes of life including the historical conditions, the poet's changing mood, and the widening scope of readership. What is significant in the study of images under similar conditions is to consider Nelly Furman's earlier statement that "the 'picturing of experience is gender-neutral or free of ideological value" (67). The bed's role, for instance, is different since the poet's vitality itself is vanishing, her role as an anti-war thinker becomes more intense, and her lesbian feminist interests are balanced by her inclusively public concerns. Thus, the changing essence of the bed image is aptly valid for the threatened life and hopes of the two persons associated with the image: "What are they carrying in their bundles / what vanities, superstitions, little talismans / what have the authorities intercepted / who will get to keep it" (103). In part four of "Tendril," Rich illuminates the reasons why the person in the poem is frightened at the idea of being sent abroad:

She can't go on dreaming of mass death
this was not to have been her métier
she says to the mirror in the toilet
a bad light any way you judge yourself

and she's judge, prosecutor, witness, perpetrator
of her time

's conspiracies of the ignorant

with the ruthless she's the one she's looking at. (106)

The bedroom is, apparently, significant for the person presented in all contexts. The mirror, as a symbol of man's reflection of the inner psyche, is central accordingly in this part since the person imaged is subject to a deep process of projecting her inner thoughts that are coloured with her being "judge, prosecutor, witness, perpetrator of her time." This signifies the great value of the bedroom with all its different details; a central image that gives insights into the revisionist nature of Rich's artistry throughout her long poetic career.

Rich's images of location take, moreover, non-domestic forms, which is symbolic of the poet's growing interest in public and international issues and revealing of new humanitarian sympathies. The images of the book's title poem evoke a different type of closure from that of the lesbian years is a case in point. The closure is suggested to be a universal one in terms of the names of cities under that function as subtitles: "Beirut. Baghdad. Bethlehem. Kabul:" all have been oppressed by military siege over the last decades. After a number of secondary descriptive location images related to the school's daily routine—the school standing for all places in all besieged cities—the central location image is tragically fear evocative and pity rousing as the school turns into "glass cages" (23); with this kind of confinement is associated the open closure outside there:

When the offensive rocks the sky when nightglare
misconstrues day and night when lived-in
rooms from the upper city
tumble catering lower streets
cornices of olden ornament human debris
when fear vacuums out the streets
When the whole town flinches
blood on the undersole thickening to glass

School's now in session day and night children sleep
in the classrooms teachers rolled close. ("The School," 22-3)

Interestingly enough, the sense of closure in these lines is enhanced by the presence of the human body/bodies at its focus to make the body a central element of the new change characterizing Rich's new poetic orientation. The location, in addition, undergoes a drastic chaotic change suggesting the tendency to take challenge under the circumstances, as differently from the state of death-in-life running through the orderly forms of locations imaged in Rich's early poetry. In the former case, the challenge is an existential one related to the desire to change circumstances and to defeat death; in the latter, it is the desire just to commit acts of endurance and resist. Within this fear-ridden location signifying a cultural closure, the speaker grows hysterical and ironic as well: "you can't go home yet/ but you aren't lost/ this is our school" (24). It is as if the attackers were intending out of humanity to keep the school safe and the little children alive. Irony remains, however, the speaker's only available resort amid the tragic inner disruption sensed within this suffocating location:

I've told you, let's try to sleep in this funny camp
All night pitiless pilotless things go shrieking
above us to somewhere
Don't let your faces turn to stone
Don't stop asking me why
Let's pay attention to our cat she need us

Maybe tomorrow the bakers can fix their ovens. (25)

The speaker tries, in effect, to remain self-composed under the circumstances—being convinced that the life force is greater than destruction and oppression. In this manner, the sense of closure raised by the images of in this poem is positively thought-provoking and

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emotion-purifying in contrast with the closure of the early poetry that connotes emotional and intellectual confinement. The change characterizing the imagery of the title poem suggests, therefore, that the poet's changes of position and role restore the poet to the center once more after a long time of playing at the peripheries. So, the sense of closure created by the images of location evoke entirely different feelings, in this context.

A similar sense of closure and discomfort occurs in "The Eye" where the war setting provides consistent images of location. As a peace activist visiting besieged and attacked zones, the speaker, a mouth organ of her creator, announces that:

in the eye of the war There are places where fruit is
implausible, even
rest is implausible, places where wine if any should be poured
into wounds
but we're not yet there or it's not here yet it's the war
not us, that moves, pauses and hurtles forward into the neck
and groin of the city, the soft indefensible places but not here
yet. (32)

The open field form of the poem is, in a sense, compatible with the loosened emotions contingent on the scenes of destruction the speaker is experiencing. It entails also observing that the images are not of the speaker's internal destruction as it is the case in Rich's earlier poetry, but images of the outer chaotic reality.

The scope of Rich's location imagery is not limited, however, to her bedroom or home, but, most significantly, extends to describe her alienation from her home country. The speaker in "USONIAN JOURNALS 2000" visions her relationship with her own country to be one between "Citizen/Alien/Night/ Mare" (37). She attributes this

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change relationship and of distance almost to the failure of the American Dream of spreading freedom worldwide:

A country I was born and lived in undergoes rapid and flagrant change. I return here as a stranger. In fact I've lived here all along. At a certain point I realized I was no longer connected along any continuous strand to the nature of the change. I can't find my passport. Nobody asks me to show it. (37)

The lines are revealing of Rich's general tendency to turn imagery into verbal patterns. So, the utterances in this passage are threaded together to create an image of frustrating place; an American person fed up with his American reality, suffering from an identity crisis, and subject to guilt feelings consequent on the loss of faith in the American Dream.

The images informed by the American background, as the speaker's mise-en-scene, gains its significance from being part of Rich's unending revisionism and changing roles in terms of thought and artistry as well. In "Document Window" the sense of failure conveyed through images of location is heightened by what the speaker identifies few lines later in the same poem to be: "What hangs a moment in the air is already dead: That's history" (38). The images of people moving into a different location connote the meaning of dislocation and its attendant feelings of estrangement. Similarly, in "Artworks (I)," of "USONIAN JOURNALS 2000," the speaker who is in the presence of a family painting fails to identify the people before her. She is shocked that the location changed, the people in the painting seem alien to her. What is felt is that the speaker is estranged from all history, all is done through images of location embodying the idea of displacement:

.... We were at the time in the time of our

displacement, being torn from false integrity. We stared at the pictures in the gallery knowing they were not us, we were being driven further for something else and who knew how far and for how long and what we were to do. (40)

As the speaker, who suffers amnesia, grows more alienated from life in general:

Isolation begins to form, moves in like fog on a clear afternoon. Arrives with the mail, leaves its messages on the phone machine. If you hadn't undergone this so often it could take you by surprise, but its rime-white structure is the simple blueprint of your displacement. You: who pride yourself on not giving in, keep discovering in dreams new rooms in an old house, drawing new plans: living with strangers, enough for all, wild tomato plants along the road, redness for hunger and thirst. (Unrest, too, in the house of dreams: the underworld lashing back.)

But this fog blanks echoes, blots reciprocal sounds. The padded cell of a moribund democracy, or just your individual case? (40-1)

The sense of imprisonment evoked by the images of location throughout the passage is implicitly linking the speaker's inner sense of loss with the external chaos resulting from her government foreign policies. The various histrionic locations imaged in this poem are, undoubtedly, intended to expose the evil corrupting the speaker's psyche as well as her whole community and culture. The different locations evoked—personal and communal—bear witness to the failure of the speaker and her fellow artists and thinkers to stop it, the

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matter that renders them complicit in the creation of evil itself and, consequently, the guilt feelings governing all.

In "Collaborators," of the volume's second division, the images of location are employed in a manner relevant to Rich's role as a peace activist visiting the Palestinian occupied lands. The sense of closure is enhanced by a cluster of images inspired by the war setting environing the region. In the opening part of the poem, the speaker establishes connections between the Israeli and American policies and orientations in terms of creating images of two closely linked closures:

Thought of this "our" nation:: thought of war
ghosts of war fugitive
in labyrinths of amnesia
veterans out-of-date textbooks in a library basement
evidence trundled off plutonium under tarps after dark
didn't realize it until I wrote it

America
from which I write
the war ghosts treading in their shredded
disguises above the clouds
and the price we pay here still opaque as the fog
these mornings
we always say will break open? (52)

In the first part of the verbal image, the allusion is to the Palestinian closure in which the Palestinians themselves are "ghosts of war fugitive/ in labyrinths of amnesia." The speaker seems hopeful that her images might call more attention to those people's existential

dilemma. In the second part of the image, America is described as a place of psychological confinement contingent on the war atmosphere prevailing it since the involvement in the Iraq: "and the price we pay here still opaque as the fog." However, the speaker remains hopeful that both closures can be ended: "These mornings/ we always say will break open?" Interestingly enough, the turning of images of location into verbal compositions remains a highly effective tool in the poet's hand in her endeavour to incarnate her sense of boredom and closure as a peace activist. The poet's images in the third part of the same poem brings the confrontation between the poet's Jewishness and her anti-Zionism to a climax. They are employed to strike a note of protest against the Israeli Zionist practices and policies that make for a genocide in the occupied lands: "There was a beautiful life here once/ our enemies poisoned it?" (54) The poet's reference to the kind of life experienced in the occupied lands is, understandably, part of the poet's unprejudiced reading of the history of the region, its culture, and its people as well. Similarly, her reference to the Jewish Zionists as "our enemies" is inspired by the fact that the American Jews used to severely attack Adrienne Rich for her views concerning the Palestinian Israeli conflict; they considered Rich to be the people's enemy. Hence, Rich is signifying, in an Afro-American manner, on the American Jews' use of the word "enemies" as directed against other Jews. The image of location at the end of the poem turns the poem into a testimony of the life force derived from the memory of history that makes possible an end to the genocide taking place up there:

Make a list of what you love well
twist it insert it
into a bottle of old Roman glass
go to the edge of the sea

at Haifa where the refugee ships lurched in
and the ships of deportation wrenched away. (54)

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The images of the ships representing a whole dream and a home taken from their roots are awfully tragic and terrible at the same time. Yet, it is peace lovers' turn to transform this incident into a song to be thrown into the memory of history like an "old Roman glass," which is to be thrown into the sea.

The war setting as a detailed image of location informs the mood of the volume's seventh division. The setting and its attending imagery are inspired by the American involvement in Iraq since the Operations of the Desert Storm. The images represent a horrible incarnation of the amount of destruction and the sense of suffocation created in soldiers related to both camps together. In "Wait," for instance, the speaker calls the attention to death hovering there as a consequence of the operations, which requires the Americans' revolt against their government. (It is worth observing that Rich's rejection of war as raised by her government implies also a revolt against a male-made war the matter that implies Rich's change of position rather than a full break with her feminist affiliations). The poem succeeds in weaving together a number of images of location preceding the call for revolt:

In paradise every
the desert wind is rising
third thought
in hell there are no thoughts
is of earth
sand screams against your government
issued tent hell's noise
in your nostrils crawl
into your ear-shell
wrap yourself in no-thought
wait no place for the little lyric

wedding-ring glint the reason why
on earth
they never told you. (97)

The images of sand storms are capable of creating in the reader feelings of suffocation and fear of imminent death. The conjuring of visual, auditory, and gustatory sense perceptions into the war context connotes imprisonment, lack of communication, and loss of direction hinted at either explicitly or in implication. In "To Have Written the Truth," the poet employs similar images of location inspired by the war setting to express self-hatred and guilt feelings. Ironically, the poet, who sought to provide self-definitions in her early feminist poetry, is now obsessed with feelings of self-hatred because of the failure to incarnate the truth of her government's oppressive foreign policies:

To have played in the ship's orchestra crossing
the triangle route
dissonant arpeggios under cocktail clatter
to have written the truth in a lightning flash
then crushed those words in your hand
balled-up and smoking

when self-absolution
easygoing pal of youth
leans in a doorframe
Kid, you always
took yourself so hard! (99)

The location portrayed in this poem inspired the poet kinesthetic images that connote rashness as well as approaching danger. Hence,

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the image of ships crossing the triangle route is to be wedded to those of arpeggios to reveal the difficulty of expressing truth under the circumstances, the matter that suggests intellectual closure and spiritual death together. It is the "easygoing pal of youth/ leans in a doorway" that makes the kids suffer so much.

To conclude, much has been written about the poetry of Adrienne Rich; yet the major part of criticism about the poet and her poetry rests on her socio-political activism—as a lesbian feminist and Marxist—and critics have addressed her poetry mainly as paralleling the ebb and flow of feminism. Similarly, critics interested in the woman writer and her writings have elaborated heavily on her discourses throughout her long literary career. It is strongly felt, however, that restricting an assessment of Rich to this ideological concern may do injustice to the poet, notably as far as her later poetry is concerned. An attempt at properly addressing the imaginative aspect of her later poetry is made, accordingly. What has been mainly focused in the current study is the value of Rich's imagery in *The School Among the Ruins* as informed by the poet's new tendency to establish new connections with and take responsibilities for the outside world as paralleling a partial change of tone as far as her lesbian feminism is concerned. It has been shown that the images employed in *The School Among the Ruins*, which the bed and the location images concretize, evolve out of the poet's constant changing roles as well as her tendency towards re/visionism. The two main types of imagery examined, in this context, are outproducts of Rich's deep conviction that poetry is a revolution rather than a way of knowing. So, the image as exemplified in both types gains its significance from its ability to address a wider, more inclusive, readership. Rich, in this case, no longer presents herself as a woman image to the world, but she is rather concerned mainly with representing the world through the "female" imagination. The images, most importantly, are clear manifestations of Rich's changes of attitude and mood as well. Gone, therefore, is the inclination towards internalization and meditation of the self that is clearly omnipresent in her 1960s and 1970s poetry. They are, instead, inklings of the poet's

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new tendency to establish dialogues between different parts of the self, between the female writer and the common readership— an attitude, sometimes, considered by radical feminists as a voice of treason. In Rich's later poetry in general, and *The School Among the Ruins* specifically, however, the imagery employed to represent and transform is the creation of a thinker having the courage of conviction, an activist yearning for an art that exposes, revises and changes on the social political, domestic, and foreign levels together. The important thing that the study has endeavored to highlight, accordingly, is that Rich's bodily and location images as employed in this volume represent a deviation from their contextual uses in her high feminist poetry. This may give insights into the poet's changes of mood and attitude attending her new metaphysical concerns in addition to the emergence of new cultural contexts since the 1990s on both sides of the feminine/masculine dichotomy.

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