

Abstract

This BA thesis examines the development of feminism in the poetry of Adrienne Rich between the 1950s and the 1990s. Feminism in Rich's poetry took years to develop from strict formalism in the 1950s that only alluded to the unequal status of women in patriarchal society, to bold free verse and feminist attitudes in the 1970s, and finally to an engagement with marginalization of certain groups of people due to their race, nationality, class or religion. Rich examined the marginalization of women in society already in her first collection, *A Change of World* (1951), through poems such as "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" or "An Unsaid Word," which are characterized by the perfection of form. Formalism was still a prominent hallmark of the poems in Rich's second collection, *The Diamond Cutters, and Other Poems* (1955), but a certain loosening of Rich's style, deviations from the tight stanzaic structure and a bolder approach to criticizing male authority over women can be seen in these poems. This concerns for example poems "Living in Sin" and "Perennial Answer," which address traditionally assigned gender roles. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, there was a major change in Rich's poetry, because it became significantly radical both in terms of feminism and free-verse. This significant shift is most prominent in Rich's eighth book of poems *Diving into the Wreck* (1973), in which Rich openly criticizes men's oppressive authority over women, calls for recognition of women's equal status and expresses her unity with women. This approach is typical for example of the poems "Diving into the Wreck" or "Insipience." This radical feminism, however, did not remain the only hallmark of Rich's poetry. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was another shift in her poetry, because she realized that if she wanted to be politically influential, it was not sufficient to be a feminist poet only. An example of this change is the collection

An Atlas of the Difficult World (1991), in which Rich points to a wider range of social issues in the contemporary United States, such as unemployment, racism, class, illiteracy and poverty. In the title poem “An Atlas of the Difficult World,” Rich criticizes the marginalization of all those who do not fit into the dominant white, patriarchal and heterosexual North American culture. In her later works, knowing that poetry has the power to transform readers’ awareness and lead to action, Rich consciously called on her readers to take responsibility for political and social change.