Chapter Five

An Uncommonly Queer Reading: Adrienne Rich

So what's a chapter about a (*the?*) white middle-class lesbian feminist doing in a book about reinserting working-class/lesbians of color into the history of lesbian theory? Although I argue that lesbian feminism is neither as white, middle class, nor antiqueer as it has been portrayed, neither do I assert that lesbian feminism is *not* white, middle class, nor, well, lesbian feminist. To discuss lesbian feminism, especially through its poetry, requires a look at the work of Adrienne Rich, the woman who, with her friend and colleague Audre Lorde, stands at the definitional core of lesbian feminism for so many commentators. Published the same year as Lorde's *The Black Unicorn* and contemporaneous pivotal essays, Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language* had a similarly far-reaching impact on lesbian feminism and lesbian theory more generally. While there are obvious differences between the two writers and the two volumes of poetry, there are numerous connections as well—links that usually go unexamined when Lorde is selectively cited as evidence of queer theory's political rectitude while Rich is vilified for the wrongdoings of a stereotyped (white, middle-class, separatist, radical-feminist) lesbian feminism. My point here, and throughout *Identity Poetics,* is that we falter when we discuss the segmented parts of "the lesbian community," of "lesbian feminism," and of the contemporary lesbian political/theoretical project as entirely distinct and opposing camps instead of acknowledging the fluidity, the overlap, and (to use a term especially significant to any analysis of Rich) the continuum of relevant ideas.

Most of the errors of lesbian feminism, imagined and actual, have been syncretized at various points to the figure of Adrienne Rich, as represented by a few key passages, even phrases, plucked like distinct feathers from a complex organic whole (by which I mean whole essays as well as a developing oeuvre): *lesbian continuum, compulsory heterosexuality, common language, radical feminism.* In the words of the deconstructionist critic Elizabeth

Meese, Rich's work has been "enlist[ed] in the service of critical disputes," in the work of at least one critic, "based only on a few convenient examples" and "uncomfortably independent of evidence and persuasive argument" (*(Ex)tensions*, 171).[1] Arlene Stein, in her postmortem on lesbian feminism, *Sex and Sensibility: Stories of a Lesbian Generation,* refers directly to Rich only three times, and each time it is to repeat her own take on Rich's "lesbian continuum": a "blur[ring] [of] the boundaries between lesbians and heterosexual feminists," which "exemplified" cultural feminism (112).[2]

Sometimes, Rich herself is not even mentioned by name when her ideas take a hit, as, for example, in the first subheading of Donna Haraway's influential "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," where Rich's "Dream of a Common Language" becomes "An Ironic Dream of a Common Language for Women in the Integrated Circuit" (190). Later in the essay Haraway blasts Rich's phrase, devoid of attribution and context, again: "The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of a perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one" (215). Once more, when she restates two of her main points, Haraway knocks Rich, a nameless stand-in for all the faults of prepostmodern feminism. "Cyborg imagery . . . is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. . . . Although both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess," she writes, ridiculing, among other things, the women's spirituality movement *of which Rich is not a part* (223).

Haraway's readers are supposed to understand the references and, for those who do, they are reinforced by Haraway's repudiation of Rich as a "radical feminist" who "like Susan Griffin [and] Audre Lorde" has "profoundly affected our political imaginations—and perhaps restricted too much what we allow as a friendly body and political language" ("Manifesto," 216). Lorde alone is resurrected in the next paragraph, in which Haraway extols the virtues of the concepts "women of color," "*Zami,*" and "sister outsider"—keeping what she finds useful and throwing out the identity politics context, including radical and lesbian feminisms, in which it grew. Haraway qualifies her dismissal in a notational coda, allowing that while Rich's radical feminism is too rigid, Rich, Lorde, and Griffin as "poets are very complex, not least in treatment of themes of lying and erotic, decentered collective and personal identities" ("Manifesto," 232*n*32).

Haraway quite persuasively argues for her postmodern position, but she meanwhile reduces Rich to a sort of synecdoche for radical feminism. Haraway herself calls her reading of radical feminism a "schematic caricature" ("Manifesto," 199, 202, 228*n*13) and a "reductive critique" ("Manifesto,"

228*n*15) in the service of her larger goal of pointing out the flaws in socialist and radical feminisms and positing a postmodern cyborg consciousness. She never allows the full complexity of Rich's vision, especially not attending to its development by the mid eighties, when the cyborg manifesto was published. By that time, Rich had published her essay "Notes Toward a Politics of Location" (delivered as a speech in 1984), which she dubbed "a struggle for accountability" (*Blood, Bread,* 211), that is, a struggle to account for her relative privilege and to problematize her earlier proclamations on "the common oppression of women" (*Blood, Bread,* 210). Although in this essay Rich takes herself to task for "the limits of my understanding a year ago, five years ago—how did I look without seeing, hear without listening?" (*Blood, Bread,* 223), in fact Rich had written on race and class, not just gender and sexual oppression, in essays as early as the 1970s: "Teaching Language in Open Admissions" (1972), "Toward a Woman-Centered University" (1973–74), "Motherhood: The Contemporary Emergency and the Quantum Leap" (1978), and, centrally, in "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia" (1978).[3] As early as 1975, in "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying," Rich was proposing a necessary "complexity" for feminism (*On Lies,* 193). She developed the idea further in "The Meaning of Our Love for Women Is What We Have Constantly to Expand," in which she repudiates the siren call of "dyke separatism" in favor of "radical complexity," even in the all-female context of a precursor Dyke March during Gay Pride in 1977 (*On Lies,* 227):

> Racism is not a "straight" issue, motherhood and childcare are not "straight" issues, while there is one black or Third World lesbian, or one lesbian mother, in the world. Violence against women takes no note of class, color, age, or sexual preference. Lesbians and straight-identified women alike are victims of enforced sterilization, indiscriminate mastectomy and hysterectomy, the use of drugs and electroshock therapy to tame and punish our anger. There is no way we can withdraw from these issues by calling them "man-connected problems." There is no way we can afford to narrow the range of our vision. (*On Lies,* 228)

While in the 1970s Rich sometimes tended to emphasize rather generally the need to include "all women" ("Toward a Woman-Centered University," 145; "Conditions," 213; "Meaning," 229), by the time of "Cyborg" Haraway is faulting Rich for a politics she has publicly moved beyond—and one that, nevertheless, played a part in creating the stance Haraway is advocating. At least in one sense, Haraway's postmodern cyborg depends upon Rich's

(and others') earlier identity politics; Haraway argues that Rich, Lorde, and Griffin's

> insist[ence] on the organic, opposing it to the technological . . . can only be understood in Sandoval's terms as oppositional ideologies fitting the late twentieth century. They would simply bewilder anyone not preoccupied with the machines and consciousness of late capitalism. In that sense they are part of the cyborg world. ("Manifesto," 216)

Just so, Haraway responds to identity politics and is involved in its discursive world. To paraphrase the work of Diana Fuss, identity and postmodernist politics are coimplicated systems. At the same time, in the 1985 essay Rich explores her own positionality and shelves "the whole primacy question" of radical feminism that is closely associated with the work of Mary Daly (Hedley, "Surviving," 41–42). While Haraway—and Linda Alcoff, in another watershed essay of the late 1980s, "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism"—reductively read Rich's earlier work,[4] Rich herself moved in directions that some critics a few years later would compare to the work of Spivak and Derrida (Herzog,"Adrienne Rich," 269; Meese, *(Ex)tensions*, 176–77). (By 1992, at least one critic, James McCorkle, views Rich as a "Postmodern American Poet," according to his inclusion of her work in his critical study *The Still Performance: Writing, Self, and Inteconnection in Five Postmodern American Poets.*) Even Phelan, critical as she is of the flaws of identity politics throughout her work, sees in Rich's mid-eighties essay a kindred spirit to her own politics of specificity, "an almost revolutionary statement of responsibility" in her "politics of location" (*Getting Specific*, 8–9)—that is, her identity poetics, forged through activist engagement with the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, lesbian feminism, and the writings of, among others, the several poet-theorists who make up this book.

Rich is targeted in Haraway's "caricature" of radical feminism and Alcoff's opposition to cultural feminism, but she is never named by them as lesbian feminist nor, indeed, as lesbian at all. The elision is significant because of lesbian feminism's positional, oppositional stance—correctly construed as gender essentialist in many cases, but clearly constructionist with respect to lesbianism. Following the Combahee River Collective, Alcoff succinctly explains identity politics in this vein—"to recognize one's identity as always a construction yet also a necessary point of departure" ("Cultural Feminism," 432)—but does not see it applying to Rich. And perhaps under-

standably not: Rich's work is clearly not poststructuralist, but neither is it simply essentialist nor static over time.

Haraway picks on the phrase *common language,* which, while both powerful and a fitting metaphor for Haraway's analysis of radical feminism, is nevertheless a term Rich used in print only three times: as the title of her 1978 collection of poems and in two of the poems it includes, "Origins and History of Consciousness" (*Dream,* 7–9) and "Cartographies of Silence" (*Dream,* 16–20). Despite critical readings to the contrary, both poems clearly seem to illustrate Rich's ambivalence about assuming the sameness of women as a basis for feminist politics. Both question "the true nature of poetry," defined in "Origins" as "The drive / to connect. The dream of a common language" (ll. 11–12). "Drive" and "dream" indicate a striving for community and communication, not an achievement of it. In "The Fact of a Doorframe," an earlier poem, Rich similarly called poetry "common":

> Now, again, poetry,
> violent, arcane, common,
> hewn of the commonest living substance
> into archway, portal, frame
> I grasp for you . . . (ll. 16–20)

In this 1974 poem, the edifice constructed by poetry, the doorframe in which the poet stands,

> means there is something to hold
> onto with both hands
> while slowly thrusting my forehead against the wood
> one of the oldest motions of suffering (ll. 1–4)

Hardly simple or crystal clear, poetry as described here can be an opaque language ("arcane," l. 7; "stubborn," l. 21) and is not an obvious tool of easy communication among women.

Rich opens "Origins and History of Consciousness" in a dismal writer's lodgings, where poems are "crucified on the wall, / dissected" (ll. 2–3); "No one lives in this room / without living through some kind of crisis" (ll. 5–6). This last sentence of stanza 1 is echoed syntactically in the beginning of stanza 2 and grammatically carried through the entire stanza:

> No one lives in this room
> without confronting the whiteness of the wall

> behind the poems, planks of books,
> photographs of dead heroines.
> Without contemplating last and late
> the true nature of poetry. The drive
> to connect. The dream of a common language. (ll. 6–12)

To the extent that "common language" should be taken to mean all women becoming or sounding alike—a typical but not necessarily accurate interpretation of Rich's poetic phrase—the *dream* of a common language is not the same thing as a waking reality.

"Origins" is primarily a somnambulant poem. In stanza 3 the narrator dreams "of going to bed / as walking into clear water ringed by a snowy wood" (ll. 16–17), washed clean by the dream experience, where "like a warm amphibious animal" (l. 21) she is "*clear now / of the hunter, the trapper / the wardens of the mind*—"(ll. 25–27). The sentence that ended stanza 1 is shifted slightly, so that at the end of the first section (of three) it reads, "No one sleeps in this room without / the dream of a common language" (ll. 32–33). Section 2 also turns on the difference between dreaming and waking. "It was simple" (l. 34), the section begins, to meet and fall in love with her woman lover. "What is not simple," on the other hand, is "to wake from drowning" (l. 40) in their lives' realities before they became lovers, into an awareness of the violence of the city around them. Section 3 presents two types of waking: the simple type, "to wake from sleep with a stranger, / dress, go out, drink coffee, / enter life again" (ll. 55–57), and the more complex type, to consciously choose a lesbian relationship that will be public and accounted for. The poem declares in the last stanza that "life" only begins when the lovers "start to move / beyond this secret circle of fire" (ll. 67–68); the dream, the unreality, belongs to the night, and the narrator refuses to "call it life" (l. 67).

Thus, in "Origins," there are at least two ways to read "the dream of a common language." Either it is a phrase that describes poetry and its relationship to the private, unreal dream world of the night, or, if by "common language" Rich is supposed to imply an unproblematic connection between or sameness of all women, then it is an elusive dream, not a waking fact. In "Cartographies of Silence," Rich's other use of the phrase in a poem, "each / speaker of the so-called common language feels / the ice-floe split, the drift apart / as if powerless, as if up against a force of nature" (ll. 2–6). This poem is not about easy, naturally transparent communication but about the contours of "lies, secrets, and silence," to quote the title of Rich's first prose col-

lection. Language here is not actually common, but allegedly ("so-called") common. So, while some critics disparage "the dream of a common language" as Rich's essentialist vision for a radical-feminist future, viewed in context the poet's intent might well be understood as quite the opposite.

If the phrase was parodied by critics in the eighties and nineties, it was as easily misconstrued as it was incorporated by lesbian feminists in the seventies and early eighties. Like Judy Grahn (and sometimes with her), Rich often appeared under the banner of the term *common.*[5] Writing in the "Lesbian Writing and Publishing" special issue of the lesbian-feminist journal *Sinister Wisdom,* Melanie Kaye(/Kantrowitz) marked the motif as crucial to the idea of "classics" in twentieth-century lesbian literature: "judy grahn . . . reclaimed the word 'common' (a reclamation that continues to echo through our literature; rich's dream of a common language; myself, 'are we ready to name / with a common tongue?')" ("Culture," 29). Some critics oversimplified, or simply misread. Reviewing *The Dream of a Common Language* in *Gay Community News,* Lorraine Bethel praised Rich for naming "universal female truth[s]," missing the nuances with which Rich's poetry grapples with patriarchal language and the complexities of different women's lives. It is in the reviewer's terms, not Rich's, that "the dream of a common language of love between women is one all of us have had all our lives" ("Poetry," 9). Thus Rich's prophecy in the poem "North American Time" (written in 1983) that she is destined to be misunderstood is equally applicable to lesbian-feminist supporters and queer detractors:

> Everything we write
> will be used against us
> or against those we love.
> These are the terms,
> take them or leave them.
> Poetry never stood a chance
> of standing outside history. (ll. 11–17)

Other critics of the late seventies and early eighties did see the nuance in Rich's postulation of the form and promise of communication among diverse women through poetry. Mary Gentile's explication of Rich's antiseparatist politics of language illustrates the tension between radical-feminist reductivism (at once the postmodern accusation against Rich and the reason she was valorized by radical feminists) and Rich's antiessentialist appreciation

of differences among women. Gentile begins with Rich's "drive / to connect. The dream of a common language," as have so many others who fault Rich's formulation as essentialist. Gentile explains, instead,

> Rich sees the richest, the strongest, the most intelligent in lesbian/feminism as arising from attempts to understand and draw connections among all women's common experience while trying to learn from their differences. . . . She rejects always the reductive, the simplistic, the inflexible. ("Adrienne Rich," 142)

The tension is encapsulated in the contradictory readings of "the dream of a common language" and in the coexistence of Rich's attempts to craft a language that speaks to (and for?) "all women" (*On Lies,* 17, 145, 213, 229) with her clear attempts to listen to and account for diverse women, all of whose voices make up the "radical complexity" she calls for (*On Lies,* 193, 227). Ultimately, and increasingly over the course of her published work, Rich figures the "common language" as a multilayered conversation or chorus, not a homogenous white woman's voice. This is perhaps most obvious in her 1983 volume, *Sources,* and in the 1982 essay, "Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity," in which Rich explores anti-Semitism and her own Jewish heritage.

Haraway's critique of the cultural hegemony of the commonality theme in radical feminism is not wrong, but it is too facilely applied to Rich by many critics. At the same time, Rich is everywhere and nowhere in later feminist and lesbian theory, appropriated by the technique Margaret Homans has called the "disappearance into" a later theory of an earlier one. Such is the case with the many invocations of Rich's term *compulsory heterosexuality* devoid of citation and lesbian-feminist context. Among many others, the prominent queer theorist Judith Butler performs this sleight of hand—and in an essay devoted, no less, to the importance of what she calls "citationality" (*Bodies,* 18). The term *compulsory heterosexuality* has its uses to queer theory, no doubt, but its radical- and lesbian-feminist roots apparently do not. Joan Retallack notes that Butler's "mirror image" of subversive performativity is "after Freud-Lacan/Foucault/Rich, of culture as inescapably masculinist and 'compulsorily heterosexual,'" but Butler is similar to other queer theorists in being more likely to cite the first three than Rich (Retallack,": Rethinking:" 354).

Perhaps Butler's reluctance to claim Rich's contribution is understandable, if still inexcusable, in light of the controversy surrounding Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." Objections centered

not on Rich's formulation of the coerced nature of women's heterosexuality but on her proposition of "the term *lesbian continuum*"

> to include a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women . . . we begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of *lesbianism.* (*Blood, Bread,* 51–52)

Embraced by many, the concept of the lesbian continuum (similar to and contemporaneous with Lillian Faderman's expansive definition of lesbianism in *Surpassing the Love of Men*) also was attacked by feminist and lesbian critics of various persuasions for its lack of historical specificity, erasure of sexuality, prioritizing of gender over race, failure to recognize the costs of publicly claiming lesbian identity, and/or requirement that all women be (or be seen as) lesbians. In the early 1980s Bonnie Zimmerman was one of many critics opposed to what she called the " 'expanded meaning' school" of lesbian identity articulated by Rich's lesbian continuum, calling it

> reductive and of mixed value to those who are developing lesbian criticism and theory and who may need limited and precise definitions. . . . Too often, we identify lesbian and woman, or feminist; we equate lesbianism with any close bonds between women or with political commitment to women. These identifications can be fuzzy and historically questionable. . . . By so reducing the meaning of lesbian, we have in effect eliminated lesbianism as a meaningful category. (Zimmerman, "What," 205–6)[6]

Diana Collecott questions whether, "in the face of such facts as the history of African-American women, we are justified in affirming what Adrienne Rich called 'the lesbian continuum', or should we focus on discontinuity, the absence of a universal lesbian identity?" ("What Is Not Said," 240). Gloria Bowles elaborates most of the common complaints in her 1981 essay, "Adrienne Rich as Feminist Theorist," including the charge that Rich appropriates the distinct experiences of African American women by looking to their lives and literature for evidence of the lesbian continuum (322–25).

But Rich's contention is an echo of African American feminist Barbara Smith's reading of Toni Morrison's novel *Sula* in "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (1977). Smith highlights the strong emotional connection

between the novel's two main female characters and calls it "lesbian," reading *Sula* as a lesbian novel "not because [the] women are lovers, but because they are the central figures, are positively portrayed, and have pivotal relationships with one another" (164).

> *Sula* . . . works as a lesbian novel . . . because of Morrison's consistently critical stance toward the heterosexual institutions of male/female relationships, marriage, and the family. Consciously or not, Morrison's work poses both lesbian and feminist questions about Black women's autonomy and their impact upon each other's lives. (Smith, "Toward," 165)

Furthermore, criticisms of Smith sound a lot like the criticisms of Rich. Deborah E. McDowell's charge, reiterated by Hazel V. Carby in *Reconstructing Womanhood,* is that Smith's definition of lesbianism is "vacuous" ("New Directions," 190) and that she "undercuts her own credibility" ("New Directions," 189) by presenting a "definition of lesbianism [that] is vague and imprecise; it subsumes far more Black women writers, particularly contemporary ones, than not into the canon of Lesbian writers. . . . Smith has simultaneously oversimplified and obscured the issue of lesbianism" ("New Directions," 190).

Like "Compulsory Heterosexuality," Rich's 1976 MLA address, "It Is the Lesbian in Us" (*On Lies,* 199–202), faced accusations of overgeneralization and oversimplification. The controversial essays are the only two to which Rich appends afterwords in her volumes of collected essays, in order to respond to the intense debate and criticism they provoked. In the case of "Compulsory Heterosexuality," Rich asks readers to view the essay "as one contribution to a long exploration in progress, not as my 'last word' on sexual politics" (*Blood, Bread,* 68). Rich acknowledges the various "resonances" of the word *lesbian* for the audience of "It Is the Lesbian in Us," conceding that in the interest of time (MLA presentations typically last twenty minutes) she may have "oversimplified the issue" of the connection between lesbianism and creativity. Nevertheless, she maintains in her afterword that she meant "to say something more complex" than to either a) issue a "lesbian imperative" (Alkaly-Gut, "Lesbian Imperative"; Ostriker, *Writing,* 121; Peters, "'Whatever Happens,'") or b) erase the specificity of lesbian oppression, with her thundering statement, "It is the lesbian in us who is creative, for the dutiful daughter of the fathers in us is only a hack" (*On Lies,* 201).

Both famous formulations seek to place lesbians in a gendered female context rather than an ostracized sexual location. As Rich writes in "Com-

pulsory Heterosexuality," "I perceive the lesbian experience as being, like motherhood, a profoundly female experience, with particular oppressions, meanings, and potentialities we cannot comprehend as long as we simply bracket it with other sexually stigmatized existences" (*Blood, Bread,* 53). Or, in another way of looking at it, Rich pulls all women into a lesbian universe—defined in terms of woman identification, not only sexual intimacy—centering lesbians and woman-to-woman energy, as some might have described it in the seventies. Both the lesbian continuum and the lesbian in us are consciously expansive but do not exclude *lesbian existence,* Rich's specific term in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" for what is commonly called lesbianism. (It is Rich, after all, who insists on the lesbian specificity of her *Twenty-One Love Poems* when two heterosexual friends praise their universality [Bulkin, "An Interview," 58].) Somehow, the second term in the title gets lost in the controversy, and so the queer emphasis on sexuality over gender leads in a more or less straight line to the repudiation of Rich's landmark early essays, either by ignoring them or through reductive criticisms. Such responses (or nonresponses) are by now so automatic that an undergraduate told me in 1998 that my lesbian-feminist poetry class was the first time she was reading "Compulsory Heterosexuality" with the permission to think about it on her own without a queer critique already a part of the text. (One almost wonders why the professors at her previous institution were assigning the essay. Was it to demonstrate the implied stupidity of lesbian feminism, emblematized by a particular reading of Rich?)

Rich as Rhetorical Proto-Queer

Ironically, the lesbian continuum and the lesbian in us were faulted on nearly the same grounds as the term *queer* would be criticized by detractors two decades later. Although the bases for inclusion in queer nation or the lesbian continuum differ, the rhetorical move and motivations are similar: to gain political allies, to draw attention to sexual identities that are suppressed by heterosexism, and crucially to construct disruptive, insurgent categories of identity that fly in the face of the terms' typical usages. From this perspective, Smith's lesbian-feminist reading of *Sula* is perfectly queer, naming "lesbian" a text that disrupts the narrative of woman as heterosexual. At the same time, it is queerly lesbian feminist, in that it does not require "genital sexual experience" as a criterion for the construction of lesbianism.

Queer at once reclaims a derogatory term for same-sex love and challenges lesbians and gay men to loosen the boundaries that have defined communities and their politics. *LGSN,* the newsletter of the Gay and Lesbian Caucus for the Modern Languages, became one of many sites of contention over the term *queer* in 1993, when editors proposed changing the name of the publication to *QSN* and asked for caucus members' input.[7] The next few issues included letters from both sides of the debate, including one from Colleen Ramos, whose praise for the possibilities inherent in the word *queer* is representative of a variety of pro-queer arguments:

> "Queer" has the advantage of signifying a broad, indeterminate range of so-called perversions, thus permitting those who identify as lesbian or gay to form alliances with bisexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, and others on the margins of straight society. . . . Moreover, "queer" makes me rethink who "we" are. It forces us to face the fact that "we," as a historical construction, are in the process of changing from a protective insular community, based upon essentialist convictions of lesbian or gay identity, to a larger movement based upon the riskier but powerful concept of queer as the disavowed alterity within our normatively heterosexual society. "Queer" thus marks a radical shift from identity politics to deconstructive politics. ("Letter," 3)

Other letter writers responded negatively to the proposed name change on various grounds: that *queer* remains a painfully derogatory term, that its false gender neutrality silences women, that its use is faddish and will pass. Responding generally to the widespread replacement of *lesbian and gay* with *queer,* Zimmerman asks rhetorically, "What comes after queer? Human?"[8]

If "It Is the Lesbian in Us . . ." and the lesbian continuum bear parallels to queer in its take on sexuality as a construction in opposition to patriarchy/heteronormativity, this raises the heretical question (in both directions), was Rich in the 1970s and eighties in some respects a queer theorist before her time? I have asserted that the work of Judy Grahn and Pat Parker, largely out of circulation in the nineties, needs to be read. I have maintained that Audre Lorde must be read in her proper context. I am veering close to arguing that Adrienne Rich must be taken *out* of context to be appreciated for her contribution to queer theory. This is true in that it was the debates of the eighties that led to some of Rich's key theoretical contributions being taken out of context, considered suspect, and then flogged like a dead horse. Read now, the nascent queerness in some of those ideas as well as the

antiracist themes are evident. Critiques of Rich's "cultural feminism," which tend to focus on an interpretation of part of a sentence from "Compulsory Heterosexuality," make sense, for example, in the early eighties context of the "sex-radical" perspective, perhaps—and yet Rich never said that women in the past weren't having sex; far from it. (See, for example, Bulkin, "An Interview," 62). From the post-sex wars queer perspective, we can read Rich's lesbian resistance to "heteronormativity" (read "patriarchy") differently than it was read by its detractors in the early eighties—and perhaps more in the sense that it was intended. That is to say, from a queer perspective, or from the "queer" era, we should be able to read Rich from a standpoint less embroiled in the arguments of their day—but only if we refuse to accept the ossification of old answers to still pertinent questions. In this vein, Elizabeth Meese sees in Rich a deconstructive resistance to "the oppositions the phallogocentric analytical method uses to produce heterosexism, racial dominance, and class oppression masquerading as knowledge" (*(Ex)tensions*, 173), even traces of a characteristically postmodern "intellectual drift" (*(Ex)tensions*, 172). Marilyn Farwell makes specific claims for the "lesbian" on the continuum as "determined . . . by her positioning toward other women. . . . The lesbian image focuses attention on a revised female positionality" (*Heterosexual Plots*, 93). Farwell argues that the notion is "more complex than is usually acknowledged" (*Heterosexual Plots*, 90) and likens it in certain ways to the work of the poststructuralist film theorist Teresa de Lauretis (*Heterosexual Plots*, 121).

Missed Connections: Silence and Naming

Part and parcel of renouncing lesbian feminism in the person of Adrienne Rich is ignoring the connections between the political visions and identifications of middle-class/white lesbian feminists and working-class/lesbian feminists of color. Working-class/lesbian feminists of color tend to be rendered invisible unless it is time for enfranchised white academics to prove we are not racist, and middle-class/white lesbian feminists typically are ignored except to recite their sins. Thus, while Rich is castigated for her lesbian feminism, Lorde is—I am tempted to say—exonerated.

Both Lorde and Rich gained prominence as poets and as activists before coming out as lesbians, and before publishing openly lesbian volumes of poetry—*The Black Unicorn* and *The Dream of a Common Language,* respectively—in 1978. Rich describes meeting Lorde in the early 1970s in New

York, and their ensuing friendship, in an essay about the women's poetry movement of the era tellingly titled "A Communal Poetry":

> I knew that I had found a remarkable new poet and that she was also a colleague, someone I might actually talk with. Meeting one day on the South campus of CCNY [City College of New York], we began a conversation that was to go on for over twenty years, a conversation between two people of vastly different temperaments and cultural premises, a conversation often balked and jolted by those differences yet sustained by our common love for poetry and respect for each others' work. For most of those twenty-odd years . . . we exchanged drafts of poems, criticizing and encouraging back and forth, not always taking each others' advice but listening to it closely. (*What Is Found,* 169)

Lorde echoes Rich's narrative of their friendship, revealing in a lengthy 1979 interview with Rich that "in my journals I have a lot of pieces of conversations that I'm having with you in my head" (*Sister,* 103).

The two poets centrally pursue several of the same themes in their works—violence, power (which both use as the title of a poem), motherhood, community, heroic (and ordinary heroic) women, anger—and employ some of the same key images, such as New York City, nature, the solstice. The dialogue between their poetry is sometimes explicit. Rich literally dedicates the poem "Hunger" in *The Dream of a Common Language* to Lorde (12–14). The poem takes up the problem of world hunger, expanding the reach of Rich's feminist politics to problems "in Chad, in Niger, in the Upper Volta" (l. 29), that is, to the continent that is central to Lorde's poetic cosmology in *The Black Unicorn.* The poem meditates upon the centrality of women, particularly mothers, to feeding the world and upon the responsibility and privilege of North American feminists. In the third stanza Rich touches on many themes she and Lorde both explored in the late seventies:

> I stand convicted by all my convictions—
> you, too. We shrink from touching
> our power, we shrink away, we starve ourselves
> and each other, we're scared shitless
> of what it could be to take and use our love,
> hose it on a city, on a world,
> to wield and guide its spray, destroying
> poisons, parasites, rats, viruses—
> like the terrible mothers we long and dread to be. (ll. 44–52)

Rich ends the poem with a call to activist coalition that exemplifies their activist poetics and their relationship, "Until we find each other, we are alone" (l. 76).

Lorde seems at times to have Rich in mind when responding generally to white feminists' reactions to learning about the realities of racism in the lives of women of color. Lorde explained to Rich in their 1979 interview, "I'll be having a conversation with you and I'll put it in my journal because stereotypically or symbolically these conversations occur in a space of Black woman/white woman where it's beyond Adrienne and Audre, almost as if we're two voices" (*Sister,* 103). Lorde's explanation is echoed in poems such as "The Same Death Over and Over," in which the speaker explains that the real problem is not just "the small deaths in the supermarket" that white middle-class women since Betty Friedan had been describing, but rather "the smoking ruins in a black neighborhood of Los Angeles / and the bloody morning streets of child-killing New York" (ll. 1, 7–8). Lorde's speaker is not denying her interlocutor's statement; she writes, " 'I'm trying to hear you' I said" (10), " 'I'm not fighting you' I said" (14). To the extent that this poetic exchange may be viewed as taking place in Lorde's symbolic "space of Black woman/white woman," it echoes Rich's description of their relationship: "We also debated, sometimes painfully, the politics we shared and the experiences we didn't share. The women's liberation movement was a different movement for each of us, but our common passion for its possibilities also held us in dialogue" (*What Is Found,* 169).

Lorde's and Rich's poems were published in many of the same feminist journals in the 1970s, including *Aphra, Ms., Chrysalis,* and *Amazon Quarterly,* for which Lorde served as the poetry editor. By 1973, they had performed at poetry readings together, and they began to know each other better when both were nominated for the National Book Award for that year (Wood, "Interview," 14). (Rich won the award but accepted in the name of co-nominees Lorde and Alice Walker; together, the three coauthored an acceptance speech refusing the notion of competition among other women writers.) As both their friendship and their importance to feminism developed, their names and works were increasingly associated with each other. Rich's *Poems: Selected and New* was advertised on the jacket of Lorde's 1976 collection *Coal,* and Rich's words of praise appear on the jackets of Lorde's *The Black Unicorn* and *Chosen Poems.* By 1976, Lorde was being published by the large New York publishing house W. W. Norton, Rich's publisher since 1966.[9] In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars and other commentators often discussed Lorde's and Rich's work together as vital to the lesbian and gay movement (e.g., Col-

lecott,"What Is Not Said," 244–45; Kushner, "Last Word") or when analyzing similar themes in their poetry and prose (e.g., Annas, "Poetry"; Bowen, "Completing," 227; Braxton, "Introduction"; Carruthers, "Re-Vision"; Yorke, "Constructing").

Just as both appeared on the now famous 1978 MLA panel, "The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action," Rich like Lorde explores the significance of silences in her poems and essays. Speaking to an interviewer in 1980 about the importance of breaking insidious silences, Lorde refers to Rich, "As Adrienne has said, what remains nameless eventually becomes unspeakable, what remains unspoken becomes unspeakable" (Hammond, "An Interview," 18). Rich's first prose collection, significantly titled *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence,* includes three essays that take silence as a central theme: "Disloyal to Civilization," from the 1978 panel, "It Is the Lesbian in Us . . . ," the essay to which Lorde was referring, and "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying" (1975), in which she equates silence with dishonesty and dishonor, observing that "Lying is done with words, and also with silence" (186). Rich describes the lie of silence that is the closet in the afterword to "It Is the Lesbian in Us . . .": "The word *lesbian* must be affirmed because to discard it is to collaborate with silence and lying about our very existence; with the closet-game, the creation of the *unspeakable*" (*On Lies,* 202). In "Women and Honor" Rich combines the themes of silence, the closet, and compulsory heterosexuality: "Heterosexuality as an institution has also drowned in silence the erotic feelings between women. I myself lived half a lifetime in the lie of that denial. That silence makes us all, to some degree, into liars" (190).[10]

The Dream of a Common Language takes silence and its antidote, voice, as a central theme, from the focus on denial in the first poem, "Power" (3), to the lamentation of the things "No one ever told us" (l. 43) in "Transcendental Etude," the last one (72–77). Like Lorde, Rich aims to transform silence into language and action through poetry, recognizing that the journey can be arduous. "No one who survives to speak / new language" avoids this, she writes in "Transcendental Etude" (ll. 105–6), but the rewards are great: self-knowledge, mutuality in love and desire—in short, "a whole new poetry" (l. 148). Though this phrase has been criticized as a naive statement of language reflecting something called reality, it can be understood as part of a positional identity poetics, as I have been arguing throughout. (See, for example, sections 7 and 8 of Rich's poem "Cartographies of Silence" [*Dream,* 16–20] for one of many places where Rich acknowledges the limitations of language.) Other poems explore multiple forms that silence takes ("Cartographies of

Silence"), unspoken elements of actual women's relationships ("Paula Becker to Clara Westhoff," *Dream,* 42–44, "A Woman Dead in Her Forties," (*Dream,* 53–58), secrets ("Sibling Mysteries," *Dream,* 47–52), censorship (*Twenty-One Love Poems,*5, *Dream,* 27), and lies ("Cartographies of Silence").

Rich is equally occupied in *The Dream of a Common Language* with giving name to the unspoken, the taboo, "the unnameable," and it is in this sense that the book as a whole dreams of a common language, giving voice to variously silenced and unnamed experiences of and among women. Of course, this is also problematic. Rich cannot do it alone—nor does she mean to, but as the emblematic lesbian-feminist (or often, in the mainstream, token lesbian) poet, she is assumed to be trying to. As Catherine Stimpson points out, Rich

> resists being laid down as the star track in what ought to be a multiple-trek [*sic*] tape of the language of such women as Judy Grahn, Susan Griffin, Marilyn Hacker, Audre Lorde, Susan Sherman. "To isolate what I write," she has warned, "from a context of other women writing and speaking feels like an old, painfully familiar critical strategy." (141)

The Dream of a Common Language literally puts words in the mouths of some women, such as the mountaineer Elvira Shateyev in "Phantasia for Elvira Shateyev" (*Dream,* 4–6) and the painter Paula Becker, close friend to the wife of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, in "Paula Becker to Clara Westhoff." Other poems, such as "Sibling Mysteries," "To a Woman Dead in Her Forties," and a number of the *Twenty-One Love Poems,* speak the poet-narrator's perspective on what has gone unsaid in relationships of her own. Several speak to women's lives and relationships more generally (and, some might argue, in a problematically essentialist way): "the raging stoic grandmothers" in section 13 of "Natural Resources" (*Dream,* 60–67), the mother who is "the woman . . . / . . . making for the open" of "Mother-Right" (ll. 15–16, *Dream,* 59), the "woman" and the "we" running throughout "Transcendental Etude," "the daughters and the mothers / in the kingdom of the sons" in section 3 of "Sibling Mysteries."

Rich's preoccupation with "lies, secrets, and silence" makes her, with Lorde, a forerunner of the queer theorist Eve Sedgwick, whose *Epistemology of the Closet* is an extended meditation on the construction of Western culture through the silences of dominant discourses, especially with respect to the canon of Great Literature. Both Rich and Sedgwick concentrate on silences as presences, weapons, secrets, and lies, not neutral absences. Both

discuss the politics of silence, or, in Sedgwick's term, "ignorance," which intimately relates to specific knowledges. Sedgwick argues that the knowledge/ignorance dyad in Western culture is always about sexuality, traceable to Eve's eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge in Eden. By the late nineteenth century homosexuality, "the Love that dare not speak its name," became the "one particular sexuality that was distinctively constituted *as* secrecy" (*Epistemology*, 74, 73). The enforced silence of the closet is, in Sedgwick's terms, "itself a performance," like coming out, a series of "speech acts" (*Epistemology*, 3). In "Transcendental Etude," a poem about shedding the lies and breaking the silences of conventionality, Rich writes, "The longer I live the more I mistrust / theatricality, the false glamour cast by performance" (ll. 82–84). Ignorance, for Sedgwick as for Rich, is presence, not absence: "unknowing *as* unknowing, not as a vacuum or as the blank it can pretend to be but as a weighty and occupied and consequential epistemological space" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 77), "silence and lying about our very existence; with the closet-game, the creation of the *unspeakable*" (Rich, *On Lies,* 202).

Sedgwick's and Rich's remedies for this state of affairs differ significantly, however. In her activist passion for justice, Rich makes clear that at times she is seeking to name truths, a goal antithetical to the insights of poststructuralist, Sedgwickian queer theory. Rich's "Transcendental Etude," certainly, seeks to strip away the silences enshrouding the primacy of women to each other ("nothing that was said / is true for us" [ll. 68–69]), to uncover "the truths we are salvaging from / the splitting-open of our lives" (ll. 85–86). The words *true* or *truth* appear in five of the major poems in *The Dream of a Common Language:* "Origins and History of Consciousness," "Cartographies of Silence," "Sibling Mysteries," "A Woman Dead in Her Forties," and "Transcendental Etude." Many others seek to reveal "the truth" of a situation, such as "Power," "Hunger," "The Lioness," several of the *Twenty-One Love Poems,* and "Natural Resources."[11] Rich succeeds, if not at finding absolute truth, in naming women's oppression and lesbian existence so that they may not be erased by silence.

Sedgwick states an equally activist, if more narrowly academic, goal of pursuing "anti-homophobic inquiry" (*Epistemology*, 14), though her method is more deconstructive than expositional. She refuses deconstruction as an end in itself, however, observing that "a deconstructive understanding of these binarisms makes it possible to identify them as sites that are *peculiarly* densely charged with lasting potentials for powerful manipulation—through precisely the mechanisms of self-contradictory definition or, more succinctly, the double bind" (*Epistemology*, 10). A deconstruction does not of itself disable a

binarism, it merely exposes the interdependence of the two terms. Sedgwick states her fervent desire that all types of antihomophobic activism and inquiry proceed. She, if not the majority of her readers, acknowledges that, despite her own queer position, "the space of permission for this work and the depth of the intellectual landscape in which it might have a contribution to make owe everything to the wealth of essentialist, minoritizing, and separatist gay thought and struggle also in progress" (*Epistemology*, 13). These are hardly glowing terms for other types of "antihomophobic" inquiry and activism in the current queer-theoretical-friendly climate, but it is a nod in the direction of attribution (and coalition?) nonetheless. Nothing, alas, is said directly of the activism of the recent past in the passage, but the homage seems clearly implied. Indeed it should be, in light, for example, of Meese's deconstructive reading of "the lesbian continuum" as a

> move "beyond" the conventional binary oppositions, rather than simply negating them. Rich (re)figures lesbianism and heterosexuality along the continuum's subversive relational structure which connects women in their difference, asks each woman to identify the differences within herself, and relates one to another. (*(Ex)tensions*, 171)

Not unlike Meese, Sedgwick reads the lesbian continuum as "tend[ing] toward *universalizing* (i.e., more or less constructivist [*Epistemology*, 40]) understandings of homo/heterosexual potential," though based on a gender separatism that forecloses "an alliance or identity between lesbians and gay men" based on "gay-*separatism,* minoritizing models of specifically gay identity and politics" (*Epistemology*, 89).

The difference between Sedgwick's and Rich's approaches is fraught with one of the central issues of the putative lesbian feminism/queer theory divide, the centering of study and theory on gender *or* on sexuality. Sedgwick calls *Epistemology of the Closet* feminist "in the sense that its analyses were produced by someone whose thought has been macro- and microscopically infused with feminism over a long period," but she chooses to place "the book's first focus . . . on sexuality rather than (sometimes, even, as opposed to) gender" (*Epistemology*, 15). Sedgwick's impulse to preserve "understandings of sexuality that will respect a certain irreducibility in it to the terms and relations of gender" (*Epistemology*, 16) is a vital goal for LGBT studies (and certainly for queer theory), clearly. But Sedgwick would seem to commit the error elucidated by Elizabeth Spelman in *Inessential Woman* when she insists that an antihomophobic study is somehow more so by being untainted by the complications, as it were, introduced by questions of lesbians and sexism

and/or people of color and racism. (The authors under study in *Epistemology of the Closet*—Melville, Wilde, Nietzsche, James, Proust—bear out this reading, a problem also of Sedgwick's earlier book *Between Men* and her edited volume *Novel Gazing*.) How, then, to make sense of Sedgwick's introductory "*Axiom* 3: There can't be an a priori decision about how far it will make sense to conceptualize lesbian and gay male identities together. Or separately" (36)? Sedgwick's choice of texts indicates the "decision" she *has* made, as a passage from "Compulsory Heterosexuality" makes clear Rich's: "The term gay may serve the purpose of blurring the very outlines we need to discern, which are of crucial value for feminism and for the freedom of women as a group" (*Blood, Bread,* 53). It is not that Sedgwick studies sexuality qua sexuality while Rich focuses on gender; they part ways along gendered lines. Sedgwick trains her lens, specifically, on gay men.

Oddly, under the rubric of "*Axiom* 2: The study of sexuality is not coextensive with the study of gender . . ." (27), Sedgwick makes a practically lesbian-feminist argument when she asserts that sexuality, fluid over one's lifetime, is an "apter deconstructive object" than gender (34). In the sense that lesbian feminism is a self-consciously constructivist politics, its proponents make the same argument in different terms. Sedgwick's statement, too, is worse the wear of the years that have passed since it was published, during which the growth of the transgender movement—ironically, part of the queer movement itself—has called into question Sedgwick's supporting idea that "virtually all people are publicly and unalterably assigned to one or the other gender, and from birth" (34).

Dissimilarities between Sedgwick and lesbian feminists such as Rich and Lorde are clear, but points of connection are obvious enough to suggest the productiveness of an ongoing conversation. Sedgwick expresses a desire that *all* types of antihomophobic activism proceed "without any high premium placed on ideological rationalization between them" (*Epistemology*, 13), implying, at least, that the contradictions are insurmountable on an intellectual basis. What would come of an actual coalitional movement, if we can imagine it, in which Lorde and Rich and Sedgwick shared the podium as keynote speakers at a convention? A platform at a rally on the Washington Mall? A holding cell as detainees after a massive civil disobedience action? What if, in the sort of provocative, brilliant essays and speeches they are wont to produce, Sedgwick quoted Judy Grahn and Audre Lorde, Rich quoted Pat Parker and Judith Butler, and both Sedgwick and Rich cited each other?

For more on Lorde's relationship to the "sex wars" of the 1980s, see Phelan, *Identity Politics,* 113–15; Lorde and Star, "Interview with Audre Lorde"; Stein, *Sisters, Sexperts*, 17–18.

28. Lorde was a founding member of Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, which published *Home Girls* as one of its early titles.

29. "Sister Outsider" is the title of a poem in *The Black Unicorn,* but is better known as the title of Lorde's collected essays. As such, it is a title that became a signifier of Lorde's identity. For a brief discussion, see Hull, "Living," 154.

30. For news coverage and commentary about the conference, see Felman, "I Am Your Sister"; Folayan, "I Am Your Sister"; Stato, "I Am Your Sister." I draw on personal notes and the conference program for information.

5. An Uncommonly Queer Reading: Adrienne Rich

1. Quotations are from Meese's response to Jan Montefiore's *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing*; Meese, *(Ex)tensions*, 171–72.

2. The three nearly identical references to Rich's lesbian continuum idea appear in Stein, *Sex and Sensibility*, 38, 108, 112. Two of the three employ the blurring metaphor.

3. "Teaching Language in Open Admissions" is a discussion of Rich's involvement in the SEEK Program at the City College of New York, a program in which now prominent poet-teachers such as Rich, Toni Cade Bambara, and June Jordan taught writing "to black and Puerto Rican freshmen entering [the college] from substandard ghetto high schools, where the prevailing assumption had been that they were of inferior intelligence" (*On Lies,* 55); the essay is also a meditation on the meaning of the college experience for poor students versus wealthier, elite-university students. In "Toward a Woman-Centered University" Rich draws parallels between the projects of and resistance to Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies. "Motherhood" includes sustained analysis of the oppression of women of color through attacks on funding for birth control and abortion, and through forced sterilization and restriction of access to health care, drawing connections between racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia. "Disloyal to Civilization" is Rich's first essay to take as its main subject the racism and antiracist activism within the women's movement, past and present. The published version of the essay is an expansion of her speech for the MLA panel, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," for which Lorde delivered her essay of the same name. Other essays in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* make at least passing reference to race and class; the earliest to do so is "When We Dead Awaken," first published in 1971, the second essay in the volume (*On Lies,* 38).

4. Alcoff, in fact, inaccurately conflates the radical feminisms of Daly and Rich. For an explication of the differences between the two, see Hedley, "Surviving."

For more on Lorde's relationship to the "sex wars" of the 1980s, see Phelan, *Identity Politics,* 113–15; Lorde and Star, "Interview with Audre Lorde"; Stein, *Sisters, Sexperts*, 17–18.

28. Lorde was a founding member of Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, which published *Home Girls* as one of its early titles.

29. "Sister Outsider" is the title of a poem in *The Black Unicorn,* but is better known as the title of Lorde's collected essays. As such, it is a title that became a signifier of Lorde's identity. For a brief discussion, see Hull, "Living," 154.

30. For news coverage and commentary about the conference, see Felman, "I Am Your Sister"; Folayan, "I Am Your Sister"; Stato, "I Am Your Sister." I draw on personal notes and the conference program for information.

5. An Uncommonly Queer Reading: Adrienne Rich

1. Quotations are from Meese's response to Jan Montefiore's *Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing*; Meese, *(Ex)tensions*, 171–72.

2. The three nearly identical references to Rich's lesbian continuum idea appear in Stein, *Sex and Sensibility*, 38, 108, 112. Two of the three employ the blurring metaphor.

3. "Teaching Language in Open Admissions" is a discussion of Rich's involvement in the SEEK Program at the City College of New York, a program in which now prominent poet-teachers such as Rich, Toni Cade Bambara, and June Jordan taught writing "to black and Puerto Rican freshmen entering [the college] from substandard ghetto high schools, where the prevailing assumption had been that they were of inferior intelligence" (*On Lies,* 55); the essay is also a meditation on the meaning of the college experience for poor students versus wealthier, elite-university students. In "Toward a Woman-Centered University" Rich draws parallels between the projects of and resistance to Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies. "Motherhood" includes sustained analysis of the oppression of women of color through attacks on funding for birth control and abortion, and through forced sterilization and restriction of access to health care, drawing connections between racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia. "Disloyal to Civilization" is Rich's first essay to take as its main subject the racism and antiracist activism within the women's movement, past and present. The published version of the essay is an expansion of her speech for the MLA panel, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," for which Lorde delivered her essay of the same name. Other essays in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* make at least passing reference to race and class; the earliest to do so is "When We Dead Awaken," first published in 1971, the second essay in the volume (*On Lies,* 38).

4. Alcoff, in fact, inaccurately conflates the radical feminisms of Daly and Rich. For an explication of the differences between the two, see Hedley, "Surviving."

5. For example, the two poets appeared together in 1980 as part of The Poetry Series at the Manhattan Theatre Club; the advertisement highlights *The Work of a Common Woman* (noting Rich's introduction to it) and *The Dream of a Common Language.* A 1984 appearance by Rich at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was titled "To Dream a Common Language." Advertisements can be found in the subject files of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn, New York.

6. Leila Rupp explores the implications of the debate for historians in her essay "Finding the Lesbians in Lesbian History"; for reference to Rich, see 154.

7. I was reminded of the exchange of letters in *LGSN* by Terry Castle, who commented on it when she lectured as part of the Jing Lyman Lecture Series on "Gay/Lesbian/Queer Studies: An Emerging Discipline," sponsored by Stanford's Institute for Research on Women and Gender (IRWG), winter 1994.

8. Personal communication, 1994.

9. *Necessities of Life* was Rich's first book published by Norton; *Coal* was Lorde's. Both poets continued to publish broadsides and special limited editions with small literary and feminist presses after they began publishing with Norton.

10. Rich's statement on the "erotic feelings between women" resonates in Lorde's essay "Uses of the Erotic." My point here is not to suggest that Rich's and Lorde's work is redundant, but that they are part of the same political project, a multifaceted movement called lesbian feminism whose tenets and contributions resound in contemporary theory.

11. Catherine Stimpson even notes that "rhetorically, she is more like—well, Robert Lowell—than Gertrude Stein," 250, an observation that others have made as well. For other comparisons to Robert Lowell, see McDaniel, *Reconstituting,* 8; Ostriker, *Writing,* 105. Among the wide array of influences on Rich that critics have noted are several both more and less "avant-garde," to use Stimpson's term: W. H. Auden (Ostriker, *Writing,* 104, 115–16 and *Stealing,* 4), John Berryman (McDaniel, *Reconstituting,* 8), Elizabeth Bishop (Brogan, "Planets," 266, 269), William Blake (McCorkle, *Still Performance,* 92; Ostriker, *Writing,* 124), Hart Crane (Martin, "Another View," 259), Emily Dickinson (Erkkila, "Dickinson and Rich"; Ostriker, *Writing,* 112; Runzo, "Intimacy," 75), T. S. Eliot (Erkkila, "Dickinson and Rich," 547; Martin, "Another View," 259), Robert Frost (Erkkila, "Dickinson and Rich," 547; Martin, "Another View," 259; McPherson, "Adrienne Rich," 438; Ostriker, *Writing,* 104, 124), H.D. (Friedman "I Go" and "Reply," 238; Martin, "Another View," 259; Rich, "Comment"), June Jordan (Brogan, "Planets," 270), Edna St. Vincent Millay (Erkkila, "Dickinson and Rich," 545–56), John Milton (Bundtzen, "Power," 51, 55–57), Sylvia Plath (McDaniel, *Reconstituting,* 8–9), Anne Sexton (McDaniel, *Reconstituting,* 8), Wallace Stevens (Brogan, "Planets"; Erkkila, "Dickinson and Rich," 547; Estrin, "Space-Off"; Karp,"Adrienne Cecile," 463), Walt Whitman (Bundtzen, "Power," 51), William Wordsworth (Bundtzen, "Power," 45, 48, 55), and William Butler Yeats (Erkkila, "Dickinson and Rich," 547; McPherson, "Adrienne Rich," 438).