

# Are We There, Yet?:

## A Bisexual Tribute to Rich's Continuum

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This presentation focuses on the importance of "bisexuality" from the perspective of literary scholarship and its possible representations within the writings of Adrienne Rich, whose work on sexuality and feminism shaped much of the current discourse. Rich has drawn inspiration from her own experiences with heteronormative and female-oriented relationships. Thus, in order to establish an active conversation between lesbian feminism and bisexual feminism and create an origin point for a bisexual continuum, it is necessary to discuss the bisexual connotations and the coexistence of bisexuality alongside lesbian existence within Rich's scholarship, using four sample essays: "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," "Reflections on 'Compulsory Heterosexuality,'" "If Not With Others, How?," and "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." The argument is presented in three major parts; firstly, a brief historical background of the radical, separatist, lesbian movement and the feminist discourse within the timespan of early 1970s to mid-1980s and the major terms surrounding the sexuality discourse and their limitations. Secondly, Gilles Deleuze's theory of bisexuality and the relationship between language, manifestation, and events, are presented, followed by a critical reading of Rich's essays and their potential for bisexual dialectics created through the Deleuzian framework.

The amount of scholarship on bisexuality as a standalone topic has been scarce, to say the least. Because of the inherent difficulties of being a bisexual woman, they are often overlooked or underrepresented within the feminist discourse and queer theory and usually treated merely as a sub-group or part of the LGBTQ+ but rarely as a standalone faction. The main reason for this lack of attention is bi-invisibility. In the early 1970s, the term defined a broad range of concepts, from androgyny to sexual orientation to an obscure/uncategorized anomaly within the binary gender/sexuality theory. Only a fraction of these definitions truly captures the essence of bisexuality in the contemporary sense. Bisexuality always operates outside the binaries of the gender theory and the dichotomies of the sexual discourse: but it is often theorized within a binary system. From a Foucaultian perspective, sex is as much of a social construct as anything else. Michel Foucault argues that the notion of 'sex' groups together, in an artificial unity, anatomy, biology, and senses, to use this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere: thus, sex becomes "a unique signifier and as a universal signified" (154). Clear-cut definitions are bound to become outdated when social and cultural variables change; thus, an enforced binary system becomes even more oppressive and repressive to make up for the loss of legitimacy. Since the 1970s, as a result of the feminist movements, gender-related terms have multiplied exponentially: what started with masculine and feminine branched off to androgyny, then into transgender, agender, genderfluid, genderqueer.

Deleuze stands on the intersection of language, repetition, and bisexuality. Rich and Deleuze have certain ideas in common regarding female sexuality. Conceptualizing bisexuality within a Deleuzian framework relies on the development of language through the interaction of the whole and part: repetition is the part which makes the whole multiple times. Through repetition, it is possible to reconnect the body, pleasure, and sexuality, divided by Foucault's categorical definition. Additionally, Deleuze's comments on language itself are also useful in putting Rich's essays and her rhetorical decisions in conversation with his theory and bisexuality. Rich acknowledges bisexuality even if it is in a satirical utopic tone: "This assumption of female heterosexuality seems to me in itself remarkable: it is an enormous assumption to have glided so silently into the foundations of our thought. The extension of this assumption is the frequently heard assertion that in a world of genuine equality, where men are nonoppressive and nurturing, everyone would be bisexual" ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" 17). In "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," she draws attention to intersectionality within the feminist discourse. Furthermore, even when Rich opposes the male oppression, she does not condemn her heterosexual past completely. In the "Re-vision," she discusses the future of the radical feminist movement and her fight against patriarchal oppression, which affected her writing. When she acknowledges her heterosexual relations in both of the sample essays, 1972 and 1985, within the Deleuzian framework, she "manifests" the bisexual discourse on her own, by giving equal attention to both heterosexual (past) self and her homosexual self within the (same) body of her scholarship.

Drawing clear-cut conclusions at this point can be arduous because bisexuality within the feminist scholarship is a relatively unthreaded ground; hence any judgment would either become the groundwork for the future of the scholarship or become baseless through the same future scholarship. Furthermore, it can be dangerous, as creating definitions could lead to creating limitations that would halt the advancement of such a progressive discourse. Yet, by acknowledging the existence of bisexuality, Rich challenges us to set up a bisexual continuum. Her rhetorical choices and wording allow us to delve deeper into her arguments and emerge with the first seedlings of the coexistence of bisexual and lesbian continuums. The gradual change within her ideas from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s strengthens the bisexual discourse because she moves from acknowledging heterosexual relations to female-only experiences and then acknowledging the validity of both. Through Deleuze, approaching bisexuality as the synthesis of restricting dichotomies, which operates outside the accepted binaries, becomes viable. Thus, combining the bisexual reading of Rich and the Deleuzian framework grants us the hope of establishing feminist solidarity through the acceptance of bisexual women as a crucial part of intersectionality.

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