

The New Criterion

Features

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The multicultural Muse

by [John Simon](#)

On The Best American Poetry 1996 edited by Adrienne Rich

The camera only photographs the photographer, runs a line by John Ciardi, perhaps his only good one. Or so my faulty memory recalls it. Similarly, an anthology photographs the anthologist. *The Best American Poetry* was edited this year by Adrienne Rich; to help convey its contents, I must advert to the poet who chose them.

Back in 1951, I was one of three assistants in Archibald MacLeish's poetry course at Harvard, and a student named Adrienne Rich came to me with an acrimonious complaint. W. H. Auden had just chosen her Yale Younger Poet of the year, yet MacLeish was not paying special attention to her. She had hoped for advanced, personalized treatment, and here she was being denied privileged status. I tried to remonstrate gently, but the Yale Younger Poet-elect indignantly dropped the course.

Later that year, Miss Rich gave a poetry reading in Harvard Hall. Knowing my skepticism about th
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John Simon's collections of film, theater, and music criticism are available from Applause.

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