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Fuel for Change: the Representation of Anger in the Works of Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde and Siri Hustvedt

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Abstract

Women writers have always been faced with the inculcated teaching that only men are capable of great writing, whereas women are too sensitive and their writing too emotional. All great women writers have had to face sexism and prejudice leading them to write for an audience composed mostly of men, barely reaching those who should have read the novels aside, in the isolation of their housework. Since Virginia Woolf, the profession of writing has been completely opened to women and they are now more than able to live off their creative work. However, prejudice and sexism still remain, and women still write under the male gaze of society. The male gaze is an act of depicting women and the world of art and literature from a masculine, heterosexual perspective that presents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer. If applied to how women writers are perceived by men writers, there is an underlying sexism in how women's books are perceived. If Virginia Woolf was almost in touch with her anger, modern women writers have become more and more vocal about their conditions and even more direct with their anger. Women use that anger to write, create art, make music, and try to change society. It's the fuel that initiates the creative machine with the purpose of empowering other women to examine their conditions, to find within themselves that spark to produce change. Starting from this realisation, the main objective of this research is to examine how anger is imagined and expressed through poetry and prose, analysing the metaphors used to define it within its context. The research will start with an analysis of the concept of metaphors and how it is defined by Gemma Corradi Fiumara in her book *The Metaphoric Process: Connections Between Language and Life*. From a general idea of what is a metaphor to which are the metaphors regarding anger, the thesis will then delve into the current literature on Virginia Woolf's anger. From this essay and the previous

definition of metaphors, I will analyse the poems by Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde, two contemporary women poets, and then two novels by Siri Hustvedt. The objective of my research is to highlight the hidden - or not so hidden - expressions of anger that women writers put into their works and how these metaphoric expressions relate to their experience as women and as women writers, and also how has this changed from Virginia Woolf to the 70s and 80s and up to the present times.

Introduction

In the TV series *Sex Education* there is a scene where the girls go to scrapyard and start destroying everything they find. This scene happens right after another important scene of the series, which is when all the girls talk about their common experiences as girls: abuse, bullying, sexual harassment, sexism, racism. These common experiences enhanced their inner rage and to let everything out, they went to the scrapyard to destroy things. This moment helped the bonding and sparked empathy between the girls, reminding also the viewer that it doesn't matter who you are, how you are made and where you come from, their experiences had a lot of things in common, the main one: being a girl.

In regard to this, I have read an article on *The Guardian* from 2023 on how women are showing their anger more and more and for a wide variety of reasons. In this article, the journalist talks with the manager of Rage Rooms in Norwich, where customers can smash things in a controlled space. "The concept first caught on in Japan as a way of working off stress, before spreading across the US and Europe, and is promoted as a fun, liberating means of venting everyday frustrations. And in Norwich around two-thirds of the customers are women". Many see this as a negative way to deal with anger, which is seen as an aggressive and violent emotion that leads to destruction, but the manager of Rage Rooms says that "lately she's noticed more people using their visit to process emotions" and each one of them process their emotions differently, some even shaking as it is a rush of adrenaline. On another point, "Jess, an occupational therapist from London who mainly treats women in their 20s and early 30s, says that after [Sarah] Everard's

death she noticed an increase in the number of clients raging at everyday misogyny, whatever their original reason for seeking help".

The article continues by narrating the stories of different women who deepened the conversation on anger, writing books, organizing marches, creating trending hashtags on social media. But the main common factor between them is that each one of them feels that women had to suppress their anger because of how society views women who are mad: "a witch, a nag, a crazy bitch". The release of anger through therapy sessions, Rage rooms or by protesting on the streets has led the new generations of women to start working on how to express their emotions, including anger. The journalist reports the story of Alex, who had problems with expressing anger in a healthy way and decided to start the Mind course. She says: "We would joke about it on the course – will we ever be Zen and completely at peace? No. But I definitely think anger is a real motivating force. I want to use it for passion projects, for drive and for being brave."

And it's from these testimonies of anger that I started thinking about my own anger and of the other ways women have expressed their feelings, which to me, an avid reader, means literature. Starting from Adrienne Rich's essay "When We Dead Awaken" – I have decided to trace my steps back into the words of three different writers, two poets and a novelist, starting from the available literature on Virginia Woolf and her relationship with anger. Adrienne Rich writes that Woolf is "almost in touch with her anger", Audre Lorde defines what she considers the uses of anger for social change, and Siri Hustvedt tells a story of revenge, anger and perception. To understand how women represent their anger through their words, I have began my thesis with a first chapter on the concept of metaphor presented by Gemma Corradi Fiumara and her book *The Metaphoric Process*, and I have moved on to analyzing how anger is seen by society, which are the metaphors

used to describe it and how it's description leaves out the more positive aspects of this emotion. After concluding that the most beneficial use of anger is through political activism, I have begun the second chapter with my reading of the current literature on Virginia Woolf's expression of anger in her two most political writings, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. The concept of metaphors described by Fiumara has been the lens through which I have read and analyzed Adrienne Rich's poetry in the third chapter, Audre Lorde's poetry in the fourth chapter, and, finally, Siri Hustvedt's novel *The Blazing World* in the fifth chapter.

The initial purpose of my thesis was to highlight the hidden - or not so hidden - expressions of anger that women writers put into their works and how these metaphoric expressions relate to their experience as women and as women writers. The results of this research have been that women have been expressing their emotions more and more not only through their writing but also in their writing as well, which has led to a more emotional writing on one side, and a more truthful and experiential writing on the other. As a reader and a woman myself, the reading of these writers have brought out not only their emotions, but mine emotions as well. If metaphors are embodied experience and our perception of things depend on both our mind and our body, what we read becomes a way to understand the writer and the reader at the same time. So what happens when we read the anger of women? We learn more about our anger as well.

1. The metaphors of anger

In this chapter, I will delve into the concept of metaphors, How are metaphors used in language? How do they influence the experience of language and life? After a brief introduction on the definition of metaphor from a linguistic and cognitive perspective, I will discuss the concept of metaphor explained by Gemma Corradi Fiumara in her book *The Metaphoric Process. Connections between Language and Life* (1995). Through the reading and analysis of this book, I will touch on how metaphors are not only a linguistic figure of speech and a comparison between two elements, but how they become the embodied experience of the person using those metaphors and how they change based on the speaker's whole cultural and social environment, and from this concept of metaphors I will then introduce metaphors of anger and how the feeling of anger can be interpreted also in a positive way.

1.1. The metaphoric process: between language and life

The linguistic definition of the word 'metaphor' that can be found on the Merriam-Webster dictionary is "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them". This means that in linguistics, a metaphor is defined as a figure of speech that involves words or phrases to describe something by comparison with something else. What is important here is the word "comparison", which is defined - again in the Merriam-Webster dictionary - as "the act of process of comparing: such as; the representing of one thing or person as similar as similar to or like another; an examination of two or more items to establish similarities and dissimilarities; identity of features". This means that metaphors consist of two items that should have something in common, which can be

possible in some cases, like, for example, when we describe someone saying, "he is a lion", we compare that person to a lion identifying him as an animal that is considered brave, strong, the king of the Savannah.

In cognitive linguistics, metaphors are described as "understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain", (Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor. A Practical Introduction*, 2002, 4), which is still based on the describing one element through a comparison with a second element, but in the case of cognitive linguistics, the two elements are described as conceptual domains, which is "any coherent organization of experience. Thus, for example, we have coherently organized knowledge about journeys that we rely on in understanding life" (Kövecses 4). In this statement Kövecses uses the metaphorical frame LIFE IS A JOURNEY, which is written in capitals letters to distinguish the universal frame from the actual metaphors used daily in communication. The two domains that participate in conceptual metaphor have special names. The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain. Thus, life, arguments, love, theory, ideas, social organizations, and others are target domains, while journeys, war, buildings, food, plants, and others are source domains. The target domain is the domain that we try to understand through the use of the source domain. (Kövecses 4)

Thus, the comparison between these two elements stem from a mental association between the target and the source, allowing the reader or listener to understand the target in terms of the qualities or characteristics associated with the source. So, in my example, the person is compared to a lion which is not considered as literally a lion, but the lion stands for the characteristics by which it is considered, such as brave and strong; so the

final metaphor indicates that the person is brave and strong, and not literally a wild animal. The terms "target" and "source" were introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), and, as William P. Brown points out:

> The terms target domain and source domain not only acknowledge a certain parity of import between the metaphor and its referent but they also illustrate more precisely the dynamic that occurs when something is referenced metaphorically—a superimposing or unilateral mapping of one domain on another. (*Psalms* 2010)

In this quote it is interesting to highlight the word "mapping", which differentiates itself from comparison and shows the interaction between the two domains from another point of view: if a comparison finds similarities between two items, mapping is "the act of process of making a map; the activity or process of creating a picture or diagram that represents something" and it is also used in relation to genes and neurology; in mathematics it is "a transformation taking the points of one space into the points of the same or another space", which agrees with the mental picture that mapping conveys, which is the tracing of the interactions that happen between the two domains.

The target and source domains and their relevant mappings are widely studied in the field of metaphor theory, more precisely conceptual metaphor theory, which explores their cognitive, cultural, and communicative aspects. Because metaphors work by creating a map, a link - another term that shows another point of view - between two different domains, this figure of speech is more of a mental process rather than a linguistic one. As stated by Antonina Kartashova in her essay "Cognitive Metaphor In Modern Linguistics" (2010),

> The process of metaphorization implies interrelation of two knowledge structures, namely cognitive source domain and target domain as a result of which metaphorical mapping occurs. Such mapping manifests itself at the level of sentence and text meaning and thus conveys our vision of the world. (5)

Thus, metaphors convey the meaning and vision that the speaker or writer has of the world in which he/she lives. As mentioned before, metaphors interact between two semantic domains through mapping and through this the listener or reader learns the language that stems from the speaker's experience of the world and his/her vision of it. For this reason, metaphor theory focuses on understanding the cognitive and conceptual basis of metaphors and their role in human thought and language. This theory seeks to explore how metaphors shape our understanding of the world and influence the way we think. Metaphor theory was explored by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their book *Metaphors We Live By*, published in 1980. According to Antonina Kartashova:

> Lakoff and Johnson's classification of conceptual metaphors is based on various aspects of metaphorization of a human's notional system, namely structuring one concept in terms of another, forming a system of concepts with respect to another system and classifying abstract substances by means of imparting them with clear outlines in space. (7)

In metaphor theory, metaphors are seen as cognitive mappings between a source domain, which can be concrete, and a target domain, which is abstract. These mappings enable us to understand and reason about abstract concepts by turning to more concrete and familiar domains so that we can understand the figurative meaning given to words. There is also an emphasis on the embodied nature of metaphorical thought. Lakoff and Johnson propose that our physical experiences and interactions with the world play a crucial role in shaping the metaphors that we create, arguing that metaphorical thinking is grounded in our sensorial experiences and contributes to the conceptualizing of abstract concepts.

Lexically based studies of conceptual metaphors stem from the assumption that if there are a number of similar expressions, then these showcase the existence of a conceptual metaphor. These metaphors are the result of a complex web of associated meanings mapped onto other webs, those of the target domain. So, metaphors are more

than just the figure of speech that express a comparison between two elements. Metaphorical expressions share similar non-figurative senses, but they do not all share the same source domain. It can be assumed that because of this, these expressions are only co-incidentally similar. However, conceptual metaphors, in general, can be identified through two procedures: firstly, we should identify a set of similar metaphoric expressions in the source domain; then, we should identify a set of similar expressions that demonstrate that the conceptual metaphor is not a coincidence in the language.

In the book by Gemma Corradi Fiumara[1], "*The Metaphoric Process. Connections between Language and Life*" (1995), her view is that life and language exist in reciprocal interaction and that metaphors play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the world and ourselves. Her analysis starts by quoting Aristotle: "The greatest thing, by far, is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt; and it is also a sign of genius" and highlights how the topic of metaphor has been ignored throughout the centuries and that modern Western philosophy focuses especially on rationality and meaning, rather than the role of imagination in everyday metaphors.

> A live language which shares in the organismic domain as well as in the conscious and willed levels of the mind, is as problematic for the philosophers as it is for the individual; thus, in order to regulate varied richness of language, the prevalent human tendency is to acquire (often idealized) standards of normative linguistic behaviour. (Fiumara 2)

This passage highlights how human beings search for concreteness as it becomes difficult to maintain boundaries between different domains of meaning, which can lead to ideas that are not only "out of place but out of control" (Fiumara 3). Fiumara states that as

[1] Gemma Corradi Fiumara is a training analyst and a member of the Italian Psychoanalytical Society. She is also Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Third University of Rome. She is the author of "Philosophy and Coexistence" (1966), The Symbolic Function: Psychoanalysis and the Philosophy of Language" (1992), The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening (1990) and most recently The Metaphoric Process: Connections between Language and Life (Routledge, 1995).

humans we are "subtly and profoundly linked by the language we create and live by" and that the interaction between "different epistemic languages, or between differently speaking aspects of the same mind, stands out as one of the main challenges that the human science must face" (Fiumara 3-4).

Metaphoric constructs shape intersubjective relations together with our experience of nature, the world, implying different levels of "linguisticity" as metaphors, or our "metaphoric potential" (Fiumara 5) as Fiumara calls it, do not stem from linguistic rationality but rather from the depths of one's "affectual life" and intellectual and formal achievements. Language appears as not only viewed as "constitutive of our cognitive efforts, but, indeed, of our whole being" (6). Thus, once we adopt an "ontogenetic, life-dependent" perspective, we disclose a more interactive communicative approach, in which our language appears as a holistic process, and which leads us to accept the complexity of the dynamics of language instead of searching for a system of cognitive communication. What does this mean is that once we realize that our language is not a structured cognitive system that is used to communicate between people, but understand that there is an interactive communication that relies not only on cognition but also on the ontogenetic – which means relating to the development of humans – and life-dependent – which means it depends on the experiences of the speaker/writer – aspects of the person using metaphors. To sum up, language is not only related to the mind, but it needs a more holistic approach that includes life experiences and development.

> In a representationalist perspective the meaning of our sentences would be given by the conditions that render them determinately true or false. Indeed, a view of language so restrictively circumscribed that it could distort the nature of our linguistic life. It is a view of language that does the best it can in striving to connect the complexity of life to its view of the world through what, after all, are the only kinds of connections it understands: reference, truth, instantiation, exemplification, satisfaction, and the like. Human language could also be (or instead) be viewed as

> a bodily, interactive, constitutive process emanating from communicative practices, a process to be somehow differentiated from the more circumscribed representationalist concerns, intent upon analysing which sorts of true statements, if any, stand in representational relations to non-linguistic items. (7)

Thus, the meaning of language cannot be reduced to true or false but it is through bodily, physical and interactive communicative processes that humans search for both literal and non-literal meaning in the ideas and theories that they create. This means that language depends on physical – even embodied – experiences of life and also the interaction between human beings. These theories could define the structure of the interactions present in the mind of those who create them and are referred to as implicit theories as "they exist in some sense in our world-view without being explicitly formalized", and it is from these implicit theories that the explicit ones can arise. It is through implicit theories that even empirically derived ones find the domain of meaning. When we pose a question or try to identify a problem, the main question we have to ask ourselves is the reason for that specific question.

> It is our metaphoricity rather than our semantic use of discourse which enables us to create novel perspectives of whatever reality we inhabit and to experience it largely as a unity, as a whole, even though all its parts are not always exactly in place. We do cope with our world by constantly attempting to relate parts to whole in order that integration and connection can be made functional criteria. And although implicit models and theories are not literally true of the world, they are somehow significant in indicating possible connections in the world. […] In Aristotle's words, 'It is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh.' But metaphors do not necessarily exhibit their metaphoricity on the surface, and what sounds like verbal imagery may turn out to be a structural hypothesis of how a question that we heretofore lacked words for is to be understood. And, indeed, one of the ways in which the metaphors of our cognitive and interactive pursuits can be distinguished from poetical metaphors is to recognize their function of inchoate explanatory devices – even though the boundary between the poetic use and the heuristic use must ultimately remain vague. Thus by becoming more aware of the metaphoric roots of our theories we may be clearer about some of the specific questions that our theories generate. The more contextualistic modes of thought seem now to introduce enough distance between the instruments of cognition and what cognize, and thus almost come to regard sets of categories as inchoative metaphors. (10)

The power of metaphors can be found in the linking of known contexts and theories and the search for new implicit knowledge through the exploration of a new and different context, but, at the same time, their function as connections between known and unknown may lead to a re-order of stored information, affecting cognition. What we don't know or fully understand, cannot be named; thus, humans need to name these new concepts metaphorically in order to understand the phenomenon and assimilate it in stored knowledge.

1.2. The life of language

The world we live in is divided into inanimate matter and living beings, which distinguish themselves from the former by a variety of functions, also called life, and human language is a part of this: "As we consider that life itself carries the flux of language we also notice that the study of metaphor may reinforce an awareness of the evolutionary nature of human linguisticity" (Fiumara 13). Language is, thus, an expression of life and is alive itself, meaning that it is subject to growth and development, deterioration and extinction, just as living beings are. It brings together diversities in a unity of meaning, just as metaphors connect together diversities through the juxtaposition of terms from different domains. Just as human beings, language is affected by time, despite being remarkably stable and changing very slowly. This movement of change, even if slow, is in action and is implicit in the same word "meta-phora". The motion implied by the word phora is symbolic, "a double imaginative act of outreaching and combining that essentially marks the metaphoric process" (14). The assumption of movement is plausible as otherwise our ancestors would have had the same cognitive and linguistic structures as now.

Even though language is relatively stable, it is still deeply connected to our condition as living beings, affected by the life cycle of life and death, which influences also the transformations in logic and language as well. These transformations also happen in metaphors: from being newborn and innovative, to worn out and extinct in literalness, namely the degree of familiarity and context of that metaphor.

> When Lakoff and Johnson point to *everyday* locutions such as 'defeat an argument' or 'attack a position', a crucial question emerges regarding the metaphorical age or 'biological' status of such expression. One may wonder whether they are sufficiently alive to count as metaphor or sufficiently extinct to appear as literal locutions. And a dead metaphor is such to the extent that it has been successfully absorbed into any of the standard epistemologies. The distinctive difference is probably due to the degree of familiarity of any such locution and thus it is a matter of use, attachment and hierarchization of values. In this sense, then, the metaphoricity of language is more dependent on our bio-cultural vicissitudes than upon analytical and formal adjudications. (16)

Metaphors that inspire innovative thought and those extinguished into literalness are the testimony of the metabolic nature of culture: metaphors can come as a surprise to the listener/reader but it's survival can only come through the absorption into literalness, where expressions such as "the branches of physics" no longer convey any figurative meaning and only imagination could help us return to it. Fiumara affirms that a new mode of thinking tends to be expressed in figurative language and that metaphors should be taken as an indicator of this cultural metabolism. Metaphors use one part of experience to illuminate another; they help humans approach novelties that can only exist if they can be symbolized, and, ultimately, be absorbed into literalness. Without metaphoricity, it would be difficult to explain and describe the unknown, so individuals tend to resort to metaphors linking them to known concepts and creating a juxtaposition between the familiar and unfamiliar. This moves away from the idea of mapping and comparison of the other definitions of metaphor that I have previously faced: in this case, people would give meaning to the unknown by creating a link to what is already known to the person.

As already mentioned, language is alive and a living being itself, an essential aspect of the life of the mind and of culture. It is complex and multidimensional, and even those aspects that can be explained in terms of logical deductions interact with "affectually generated metaphorical processes" (28). Because it is impossible to extract the mind from a living creature, it is misleading to consider linguistic interactions as immune from the living condition from which they emanate.

> Experience in this context is thus to be regarded in an open sense so as to include emotional, biological and historical dimensions. The nature of our embodiment helps us create the metaphors through which we organize multiple experiences. Our thinking cannot be viewed as 'pure reason' inasmuch as it is derivative of our ways of coping with contingent problems of self-formation. Inasmuch as we are living beings there cannot be too much pure reason. (28)

However, the essential way of thinking is described "in terms of stable principles and general ideas which transcend the dynamics of everyday events" (52), which translates into a way of thinking that places literality as more important than figurative meaning. Literal use is more manageable as it is less open to misunderstanding and equivocations. The primacy of literality, though, may lead to be detrimental to the life of language as it becomes more and more detached from the complexity of human interactions. Because literality depends on how much a context is circumscribed, the more a domain is defined, the more literality is found. The systematic adherence to literalness will then lead to the individual being increasingly more detached from the expression of their own self, whilst the use of metaphoric language is deeply interwoven with the development of inner life. And once this literal language is credited more than the metaphoric, personal, one, the instruments to deal with oneself become more endangered.

"In an evolutionary perspective, metaphors tend to represent the relatively more cultural features of our life in terms of its more natural aspects" (59), yet there is perhaps

the need for metaphors that exorcise unpleasant ones that tend to solidify into the so-called human nature. In fact, major transformations need to be expressed in non-literal, or "extraliteral", language to indicate their potential structures other than those metaphors that now appear logical, that have been assimilated into literal language.

> In whichever contexts literalness is at a premium there are positive reinforcements for adaptation to a standard vocabulary and the lack of interest in metaphoric construal may be so widespread that whatever cannot be heard ultimately becomes non-existent – unheard of. To the extent that we are unwittingly absorbed into the pathology of literalness we are inhibited in the symbolization of inner life; 'intimacy' is thus attained not through metaphor but through destructive relations which may never erupt into overt violence inasmuch as they are not implemented in the attack on psychic life but in the prevention of it. (59)

This supremacy of literality on metaphoric language leads to the inability of metaphoric construal and also to the fear of creative expression that threatens literality and normality. Another danger of this supremacy is that the hierarchization of languages seems to incline toward canonized structures as a way to achieve the atrophy of inner resources. And yet this atrophying process may be perceived as unbearable to the individual, bringing them into a state where it becomes almost impossible to articulate their inner condition as if they had been constantly indifferent to their own selves. This benumbing process is perfectly concealed to remain unnoticed. The use of literal language could easily colonise the metaphoric one and it could result in a form of literalistic control over the evolution of affects and cognition. In this perspective, psychological research cannot forget about what lies underneath the literalizing attitudes of the individual. "The effort to reconnect literalness and metaphoricity is not a question of generating revolutionary ideas but of recovering a culture's neglected but not quite forgotten stories" (61).

This benumbing process leads to detachment from the affectual and it presents itself as the 'right way' to look at the world and the individual's place in it. It claims a

position of accuracy of how things really are, imposed upon individuals from the impersonal detachment from the inner self. This detachment also translates as a distinction between the domain of meaning and cognition from the domain of experience and affects; however, the evolution of knowledge cannot be relegated only to the domain of cognition, but it is likely the result of the metaphoric linking of different cultures and domains.

Through the words of Arbib and Hesse, Fiumara affirms that human thought is not purely abstract as humans are essentially embodied, and coming to terms with the thinking subject is to come to terms with the actions its thoughts are implicated in. Thus, Fiumara chooses to approach language as a means of interaction in the first place, and secondarily as a synchronic representation of life and language.

> At the 'end' of the story metaphoric links can be found telling us whether words are instruments or weapons, precious or worthless, whether the individual or the group *really* exists, whether danger comes from the inside or from the outside. As such connection structures become less obscure, the person in the making may also try to reveal so far hidden guidelines of events in his development. (126)

Indeed, metaphoricity is crucial for language and its embodiment helps to create metaphors through which individuals organize their experiences, and this comes as a result of the aforementioned detachment perpetrated by the philosophical tradition that focuses on accuracy rather than on the synergies of interaction. Metaphors also connect different evolutionary levels of humans' inner world and they also depend on interlocutors, yet, at the same time, they are the core of individuals' inner life. And whenever there is an interaction between two individuals where one presumes that the interlocutor doesn't have the tools to express their inner world, the other tends to use their own metaphors to voice the interlocutor's experiences. This means that one is deprived

of the opportunity to exercise their own metaphoric resources. Only through the creative listening of others that the expressions of lived experiences can be linked to mature levels of articulation. In this way, the listener might come to know something from the speaker that they still cannot think in a logical way. The language at work in these interactions is the "constant weaving and reweaving of metaphorical contexts in which life and language join together in a metabolic process which extends from the extremes of impeding inner life to the enhancement of self-creation" (142).

Fiumara's approach to metaphors is a holistic one, including the mind as well as the body and human experience. Regarding this approach it is worth mentioning the work of neuroscience in the recent years that has been applied to aesthetics and which has demonstrated what Vittorio Gallese in the essay "Embodied Simulation Theory: Imagination and Narrative" (2011) calls "embodied simulation", a "pre-rational, nonintrospective process generating physical, and not simply 'mental', experience of the mind, motor intentions, emotions, sensations, and lived experiences of other people, even when narrated" (Gallese 197). This means that when someone is reading a book, a poem, anything narrated, the reader can perceive what is being narrated as if they were feeling those emotions themselves. "The embodied simulation is strictly linked to physiological vision, cultural gaze and their functioning" (Cammarata, "The Reason of Imagination", 2019, 2), which has been recovered by the phenomenological philosophy of, especially, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edith Stein. "Maurice Merleau-Ponty lowered the gaze into a terrain completely different from the Cartesian one: no longer as a mechanism of objectification that exists only at a perceptual level, but as an intersubjective relationship" (Cammarata 2). The main characteristic of this gaze is "the carnality of perception, which is translated into a chiasmus between visible and invisible" (2). Following this line of

thought, the human body is no longer an object, but it becomes the means through which human beings relate to the world and its objects, and at the same time the mind is present and is part of the body, which results in embodied minds or mental bodies. This embodied simulation, then, can be, using Fiumara's language, mapped onto to the concept of metaphors that Fiumara wrote in her book, which is the embodiment of experience as well as the inner life of human beings.

1.3. How we talk about anger

Stemming from Fiumara's concept of metaphors as the embodiment of human experience and inner life, which creates a juxtaposition between different domains, in order to understand and acquire new knowledge, and ff metaphors are influenced by the cultural, historical and biological experience of the individual, affecting cognition, then it is even truer for metaphors regarding emotions, especially strong emotions like anger, which is the focus of this thesis.

Before delving into the metaphorical domain of anger, it is necessary to define and describe what anger is. When looking for the meaning of anger, we can find an almost coherent definition of it: anger "is the strong emotion that you feel when you think that someone has behaved in an unfair, cruel, or unacceptable way"; "a feeling of great annoyance or antagonism as the result of some real or supposed grievance; rage; wrath". However, anger has different synonyms based on how intense this feeling is and how it manifests itself:

> Anger is broadly applicable to feelings of resentful or revengeful displeasure; indignation implies righteous anger aroused by what seems unjust, mean, or insulting; rage suggests a violent outburst of anger in which self-control is lost; fury implies a frenzied rage that borders on madness; ire, chiefly a literary word, suggests a show of great anger in acts, words, looks, etc.; wrath implies deep indignation expressing itself in a desire to punish or get revenge.

> 1. resentment, exasperation; choler, bile, spleen. anger, fury, indignation, rage imply deep and strong feelings aroused by injury, injustice, wrong, etc. anger is the general term for a sudden violent displeasure: a burst of anger. indignation implies deep and justified anger: indignation at cruelty or against corruption. rage is vehement anger: rage at being frustrated. fury is rage so great that it resembles insanity: the fury of an outraged lover. 4. displease, vex, irritate, exasperate, infuriate, enrage, incense, madden.[2]

In neuroscience, anger is "a complex neural system that orchestrates behaviour, physiology, facial and vocal expressions, perceptual changes, motivational priorities, memory, attention, and energy regulation in response to interpretations of social events" ("The grammar of anger" 2017, 110). Anger is triggered in some way, usually through provocation, a stimulus perceived as threatening or aversive; the recalibrational theory, however, considers anger as an emotion that has evolved to bargain for better treatment and has had a role in survival with its fundamental involvement in the fight-or-flight reaction to threat detection. This theory has showcased how anger is triggered when the target of anger does not respect the individual, which means that it is activated "by cues of what the target thinks of the angry person and the importance of their affairs" ("The grammar of anger" 111).

According to folk theory[3] and psychology, anger is an intense emotion you feel when somebody has wronged you. The main physiological reactions of anger are increased blood pressure and energy levels, a spike in the levels of adrenaline and noradrenaline hormones, increased body temperature and muscle tension. The more anger increases, the more its physiological reactions increase to the point where anger affects normal functioning. Therefore, if we follow the general metonymic principle, the

[2] https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/anger
[3] Folk psychology as a lay theory of mind is a descriptive theory derived inductively from the process(es) of describing the experience of human behaviour (including thoughts or cognition). (Craig L. Fry, Daniel Z. Buchman 2012)

physiological effects of an emotion stand for the emotion itself. From the definition, we can deduce the metaphors: “anger is heat”, “anger is the heat of a fluid in a container”, “the body is a container for emotion”, “anger is fire”, with heat and fire ideally belonging to the same semantic domain.

The diversity of the synonyms for anger have made me think of questions such as: are emotions just feelings or are they linked to cognition? When we talk about anger, do we use a conventional way of speaking about it, or is it based on a cognitive model? Anger is not only expressed physiologically but also through language. If we look at the list of idioms used to express anger, there is such a diversity that it makes it impossible to define a cognitive model. So, the final question would be how these expressions of anger relate to each other and how they relate to anger. In his essay “Metaphors of Anger, Pride, and Love”, Kövecses lists different expressions on anger, such as:

> He was foaming at the mouth.
>
> You're beginning to get to me.
>
> You make my blood boil.
>
> He's wrestling with his anger.
>
> Watch out! He's on a short fuse.
>
> He's just letting off steam.
>
> Don't get a hernia!
>
> Try to keep a grip on yourself.
>
> Don't fly off the handle.
>
> When I told him, he blew up.
>
> He channeled his anger into something constructive.
>
> He was red with anger.
>
> He was blue in the face.

> He appeased his anger.
>
> He was doing a slow burn.
>
> He suppressed his anger.
>
> She kept bugging me.
>
> When I told him, he had a cow. (11-12)

In linguistics, there are two ways in which a conceptual metaphor is productive: the first is lexical, which means that words and fixed expressions can be used to express aspects of a metaphor, therefore these words and fixed expressions of a language code and can elaborate the conceptual metaphor. Thus, the number of linguistic expressions that can code a conceptual metaphor is a measure of how productive it is.

> For example, a stew is a special case in which there is a hot fluid in a container. It is something that continues at a given level of heat for a long time. This special case can be used to elaborate the central metaphor. 'Stewing' indicates the continuance of anger over a long period. Another special case is 'simmer', which indicates a low boil. This can be used to indicate a lowering of the intensity of anger. Although both of these are cooking terms, cooking plays no metaphorical role in these cases. It just happens to be a case where there is a hot fluid in a container. This is typical of lexical elaborations. (14-15)

Another way that a conceptual metaphor can be productive is when it carries details of the extensive knowledge of the source domain from the source domain to the target one. These carryovers are referred to as “metaphorical entailments” (15), which elaborate conceptual metaphors. In this case, the central metaphors of anger are “anger is heat” and “anger is heat of fluid in a container” and we know that when a liquid is heated, it starts to boil, which means it has a vertical upward movement, and it produces steam and pressure until it reaches its peak intensity causing the container to explode. In this case, we are referring to how a person deals with increasing anger, which leads to an increase in blood pressure causing redness and sweat, until the person metaphorically explodes

into the peak of their anger, and they can seemingly lose control over their emotions and reactions to these emotions. In the end, this loss of control can be dangerous.

BODY HEAT:

Don't get hot under the collar.

Billy's a hothead.

They were having a heated argument.

When the cop gave her a ticket, she got all hot and bothered and started cursing.

INTERNAL PRESSURE:

Don't get a hernial

When I found out, I almost burst a blood vessel.

He almost had a hemorrhage.

REDNESS IN FACE AND NECK AREA:

She was scarlet with rage. He got red with anger. He was flushed with anger.

AGITATION:

She was shaking with anger.

I was hopping mad.

He was quivering with rage.

He's all worked up.

There's no need to get so excited about it!

She's all wrought up.

You look upset.

INTERFERENCE WITH ACCURATE PERCEPTION:

She was blind with rage.

I was beginning to see red.

I was so mad I couldn't see straight.

WHEN THE INTENSITY OF ANGER INCREASES, THE FLUID RISES

His pent-up anger welled up inside him.

She could feel her gorge rising.

We got a rise out of him.

My anger kept building up inside me.

Pretty soon I was in a towering rage.

INTENSE ANGER PRODUCES STEAM

She got all steamed up. Billy's just blowing off steam. I was fuming.

INTENSE ANGER PRODUCES PRESSURE ON THE CONTAINER

He was bursting with anger. I could barely contain my rage.

I could barely keep it in anymore.

WHEN ANGER BECOMES TOO INTENSE, THE PERSON EXPLODES

When I told him, he just exploded.

She blew up at me.

We won't tolerate any more of your outbursts.

WHEN A PERSON EXPLODES, PARTS OF HIM GO UP IN THE AIR

I blew my stack.

I blew my top.

She flipped her lid.

I went through the roof.

WHEN A PERSON EXPLODES, WHAT WAS INSIDE HIM COMES OUT

His anger finally came out.

Smoke was pouring out of his ears. (12-13)

Another way of describing the explosion of anger is through the concept of birth. For example: “She was having kittens”; “My mother will have a cow when I tell her”.

Hence, these metaphors answer the initial question regarding the relationship between the linguistic expressions of anger and the emotion itself, highlighting how these

idioms convey not only a metaphorical meaning but are the consequence of the physiological effects of anger on people. These physiological effects can also be seen in the domain of insanity, which is represented in folk theory through expressions of agitation, such as going wild, starting raving, flailing their arms, foaming at the mouth. Thus, there is an overlap between the effects of anger and insanity which brings to life the metaphor of "anger is insanity".

> I just touched him, and he went crazy.
>
> You're driving me nuts!
>
> When the umpire called him out on strikes, he went bananas.
>
> One more complaint and I'll go berserk.
>
> He got so angry, he went out of his mind.
>
> When he gets angry, he goes bonkers.
>
> She went into an insane rage.
>
> If anything else goes wrong, I'll get hysterical
>
> When my mother finds out, she'll have a fit.
>
> When the ump threw him out of the game, Billy started foaming at the mouth.
>
> He's fit to be tied.
>
> He's about to throw a tantrum.

Perhaps the most common conventional expression for anger came into English historically as a result of this metaphor:

> I'm mad! (20-21)

Other metaphors on anger include: "anger is a dangerous animal", which refers to aggressive and angry behaviour similar to that of a dangerous animal; "anger is an opponent", where anger becomes an enemy to fight; "passions are a beast inside a person", where the loss of control is compared to an animal getting loose and where passions refer to anger in this case. Metaphors of anger can also be related to the domain

of boundaries and space, like for example “the cause of anger is a physical annoyance” and “causing anger is trespassing”. Some minor metaphors are related to the presence of the emotion as if it were a physical object and to the idea that emotions exist in a bounded space.

After going through Kövecses’s study on the different expressions on anger and its prototypical and non-prototypical scenarios concerning the manifestation of anger, we can conclude that the expressions that indicate anger do have a relation with each other and are structured in terms of an elaborate cognitive model, implicit in the semantics of language. Anger is not just an amorphous feeling, it has an elaborate structure that cannot, however, be applied to every single person and be considered universal. The conclusions to Kövecses’s study show that the methodology applied does not uncover if people comprehend the cognitive model of anger and if this model affects the way people feel. It is clear, however that most speakers use these expressions consistently.

Going back to neuroscience, anger is described as a complex neural system that orchestrates behaviour and controls facial expressions, tone of voice, verbal arguments and the deployment of aggression, and the prototypical trigger is that the offender places too little weight on the angry individual’s welfare when making decisions. In the aforementioned recalibrational theory, this emotion resolves conflicts in favour of the angry individual over the other person.

In neuroscience as well as in religious studies, the discourse around anger has always focused on the negative and destructive character of anger, especially when it comes to which gender is allowed to express their anger. However, anger cannot be dichotomized into bad or good when observing and considering the human experience.

"Both Buddhist and Christian thinkers like to compare anger to fire, an irrational force which burns out of control, destroying everything it touches" (Keefe, "Tending the Fire of Anger", 68). In modern times, this negative depiction of anger is at odds with a more positive one promoted by mental health professionals and social activists, which sees anger as a fire that is also potentially creative, pushing individuals to see the wrong in personal and social relationships; it is the fire that provides transformation and challenges injustice. The tension between these two dichotomies can be described with Aristotle's words, who argues that anger is a virtue if moderated, and Seneca, who considers anger always as a vice. This tension holds a truth as anger is potentially destructive and creative, making it a complex emotion and needs attention and awareness to work with it.

> But for the task of careful reflection on the ethical status of anger, lumping every experience of anger into the same category as "violent anger" is unhelpful and misleading, especially because it demonizes an emotion that is basic to the human condition. While anger unchecked by reason or love can run amok and lead to violence, what Oxford (*Oxford English Dictionary, ndr*) describes as an 'active feeling provokes against an agent' can also manifest as a desire for restoration of right relationship, for the problem provoking the anger to be fixed, or simply, for one's grievances to be heard and acknowledged. (70)

That anger can be variegated in intensity and intention is clear; nevertheless, anger is still perceived as destructive, synonymous of aggression and rage. The Dalai Lama argues that there are two types of anger: one that arises from hatred and rage, the other from compassion, which is usually compared to the anger of a parent towards a child that is endangering themselves. In this same category, anger that arises out of concern for social injustice is equally motivated by compassion for the oppressed and suffering. This type of anger persists until this injustice is eliminated, so until the main goal – justice – is achieved. On the other hand, Nussbaum sees anger still as a negative emotion, stemming from the idea that is includes revenge in some way, a "hope of payback" that has also

been stated by Aristotle, and if there is no desire for revenge, then it is not really anger. According to Nussbaum, there isn't only the need to take revenge on your own, but there is also the wish that the law would deal justice or there would be divine justice.

> Nussbaum, who is perhaps one of the most influential modern philosophers of the emotions, bases her discussion of anger upon acceptance of the premise that anger intrinsically includes a "payback wish" for vengeance of some kind in response to the perception of injury. But Nussbaum has to acknowledge exceptions to this rule such as the anger of a parent in response to a child's self-endangering behavior. In this case, all that the parent desires is that the child is safe from harm—no payback is desired. Nussbaum accounts for such instances of anger conditioned by love by defining such anger as being not anger at all, "because it lacks that wish for ill." She calls this kind of non-anger "Transition-Anger," because it is anger that has transited away from the payback impulse to a rational concern with the social welfare of all involved. She also points to Martin Luther King in his nonviolent crusade for civil rights as an example of this Transition-Anger in action. (Keefe 71)

What has been mentioned as Transition-Anger is what Nussbaum calls the change of focus of the angry person from a status point of view to "important human goods that have been damaged" (Nussbaum, "Beyond Anger").

> Sometimes a person may have an emotion that embodies the Transition already. Its entire content is: 'How outrageous! This should not happen again.' We may call this emotion Transition-Anger, and that emotion does not have the problems of garden-variety anger. But most people begin with everyday anger: they really do want the offender to suffer. So the Transition requires moral, and often political, effort. It requires forward-looking rationality, and a spirit of generosity and cooperation.

In her essay "Transitional Anger", Nussbaum uses Martin Luther King as an example of how Transition-Anger is used and she poses this distinction: "The payback mentality wants groveling. The Transition mentality wants justice and brotherhood. […] I shall call this emotion Transition-Anger, since it is anger, or quasi-anger" (53). This distinction described by Nussbaum, however, does take into account the fact that Transition-Anger "commits itself to a search for strategies" and "it focuses on future welfare from the start" (54). Anger is in itself a neutral emotion; it follows a trajectory once the individual adds

meaning and intention to this anger, whether it's violent or compassionate. So, if on one side anger is destructive and resolves conflict overpowering the target of anger, on the other side anger stems from compassion and want to challenge social injustice.

When talking about anger that stems from social injustice, it is easy to direct our attention to the women's cause as there are hundreds, if not thousands, of years of oppression and injustice that can transform itself into the fire and heat of anger, even rage. However, women's anger has been redeemed as irrational and not fit for a woman, as they should always be gentle, sweet and kind. "While anger in men can be appreciated as an expression of strength, anger in women is seen as evidence of female irrationality and inferiority" (Keefe 67). For this reason, women have always disguised their anger, hiding it under a façade of kindness in order to not be dismissed as unladylike or insane. There have been, however, a series of women that have expressed their anger for their socio-cultural conditions: whether it be through political activism, such as the suffragettes, or through writing.

2. Writing from and about anger

As mentioned in the previous chapter, anger has an intrinsic duality: the tension between destructive and creative, two aspects that have intrigued many psychologists and philosophers on these two completely opposite yet linked characteristics of this complex emotion. Kathleen Woodward, in her essay "Anger...and Anger: From Freud to Feminism" (1996) starts her analysis of anger by looking up what Freud has to say about anger but what she finds is the lack of an entry for Anger. What she does find is a correlation between Hysteria and Anger. Freud places much more emphasis on the drive – which in this case is aggressivity and the purpose of a drive is to satisfy basic instinctual needs – rather than the emotions themselves – which differentiate from drive as emotions are born in response to the perception of external input. We read in Cezary Żechowski's essay "Theory of drives and emotions – from Sigmund Freud to Jaak Panksepp" that:

> Most authors today concur with the basic premise that the notions of "drive" and "desire", found in Freud's works, may correspond with the notion of an emotional-motivational system which, on the one hand, would define a system of behaviors related to the experiencing of basic emotions, and on the other would have its neuronal representation at the level of the central nervous system and are evolutionarily common to humans and animals. (1184)

Aggressivity is also seen as a drive to action, to behavior. Furthermore, he places anger under hysteria, which is associated mainly with women and with the repression of sexual desire. There is, however, one case that involves a man and it is referred to as the hysterical employee, where an employee starts having a manic episode after being mistreated by his employer and after having his rights denied in front of a court of justice. According to Woodward, the anger manifested by this employee seems not to be the symptom of his illness but rather the root. In her essay, Woodward traces the trajectory of Freud's thought on anger which ends with the manifestation of guilt, "an emotion, as I

read Freud, that is highly individualizing and isolating" (Woodward 85). But if anger and consequently guilt are isolating emotions, "feminist anger is conceived in precisely the opposite terms" (Woodward 85). Anger then becomes not only the basis of the group but it "will also politicize the group, as an emotion furthermore that is created in a group, as an emotion that is enabling of action, not inhibiting of it" (Woodward, 86). The group Woodward talks about is the feminist movement, but it can also be applied to all political movements against oppression of race, class, sex and gender.

This chapter will start with a quick touch on psychology as anger is, before all, an emotion that, in relation to women's experience, has been used in psychology as a way to oppress and suppress women. I will, then, touch on the development of a self-consciousness in regard to the emotion of anger and on the search for an identity for women that goes beyond what society perceives it to be. I will then approach the currently available literature on Virginia Woolf's main feminist works, *A Room Of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, and her relationship with anger as a starting point to demonstrate how women's writing doesn't need to explicitly write about anger to be angry.

2.1. Killing the angel in the house: the angry pen of Virginia Woolf

Before acting upon the emotion of anger as a group for a collective social cause, women need to identify and name this emotion. The problem with this is that, traditionally, anger has been confined to the male domain, pressuring women to adhere to societal rules that want women controlled, detached and gentle. This has led to the emotion of anger being repressed and hidden from the public eye, almost cancelling it from the wide range of emotions. Naomi Scheman, a scholar of Philosophy and Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies, has been one of the first researchers to bring

Wittgenstein's thoughts into feminist philosophy. In the context of this thesis, her essay "Anger and the Politics of Naming" (1980) becomes fundamental in the analysis of the use and expression of anger: "to discover what we are feeling (our emotions) is not necessarily or usually to discover some new feelings (pang, *frisson,* wave, or whatever); rather, it is to discover what all of that means, how it fits in with who we are and what we are up to" (italics in the original; Scheman 22). The patterns necessary to identify these emotions are given by society and "societies categorize at least some of the emotions in at least slightly different ways. They find different conjunctions of feeling and behavior significant, and the significance can change over time" (Scheman 22). Both Descartes and Freud use the image of a flow with leaves floating on the surface, which are our sensations, thoughts and feelings (Scheman 23). The difference between the two is that the latter added a further layer to this traditional picture of mind: Freud states that not all leaves are on the surface, some are on the bottom, covered with silt. Despite being covered, they still disturb the leaves on the surface and the flow of water. The only way to uncover these leaves is through interpretation, which in Freud's case is psychoanalysis. The heart of this picture is that when talking about emotions, conscious or unconscious, we are talking about a state which we are in, whether it be mental or physical. According to Scheman, all our emotions are always there, they just need to be discovered and named. In her essay, she brings this concept forward with an example: Alice belongs to a consciousness-raising group. Before entering it, she had been satisfied with her life. She then became gradually more aware of the times she felt depressed, pressured, harried, angry, "as though her time were not her own. However, she didn't believe her time ought to be her own, so in addition, she felt guilty" (Scheman 24). Every time she would feel a negative emotion, she would find various causes for it. "She didn't think she had any

reason to feel this way; she never took the bad feelings as justified or reasonable; she didn't identify with them, they came over her and needed to be overcome" (Scheman 24-25, italics in the original).

Through this path of self-discovery and self-consciousness, Alice discovers that she has been angry and that she has covered her anger with other emotions. However, how can we be completely sure that she was truly angry in those past moments? As Scheman argues, "not only would no newly discovered leaf provide conclusive evidence of past anger, but it may be that there is no particular item in our mental life left to be discovered" (Scheman 25). There is however an inability for women to acknowledge their anger and to interpret them in "the proper political perspective" (Scheman 25). There are three different aspects of the sexist ideology that prevent women from naming their feelings. The first one is the idea that women's emotions are "irrational or nonrational storms" (Scheman 25). These emotions tend to be personal and possibly hormonal. They don't actually have any meaning and this leads women to feel guilty for having succumbed to such outbursts. The second aspect is insecurity: to be conscious of one's anger, one also has to trust oneself and their own judgement. Women are expected to be uncritical and unchallenging, and it becomes even more difficult to acknowledge their anger when in a position of dependency – or even not, as women are held accountable by society as well. This can also be seen in literature, especially through critical reviews of women's works, whether they are poetry or novels, and it will be uncovered through the analysis of the authors of this thesis. The third aspect is "the picture we are likely to have of what the good life for a woman consists in. Anger is "object-hungry": if there is no one and nothing to be angry at, it will be harder to see oneself as really angry" (Scheman 26). There are certainly irrational manifestations of anger, but the difference between irrational

and rational anger is that the latter must disclose what type of feelings and what circumstances they are ready to take as anger. When judging someone's anger, we are often judging whether the situation called for it or not. "If we take ourselves to be angry, whether justifiably or not, our anger changes. We begin to see things differently, as it were *through* the anger; it colors our world, both inner and outer. […] Our feeling, judgements, and behavior become organized around the fact of our anger" (Scheman 26-27).

Thus, to discover that one has been angry in the past is to correct their earlier interpretation, but one thing is quite clear and it is that there is a difference between how one sees their own emotions and how other sees them. "The patterns we pick out when we name the emotion have to do with the needs of social life: seeing people as angry is connected with a complex set of expectations of them, and their not seeing themselves in the same way affects the validity of those expectations" (Scheman 27). This statement shows that it is possible to view someone as angry in relation to our own set of emotions, because anger is a relational emotion; it sheds light on the social bond between people.

However, when analyzing past situations to uncover the hidden anger, it becomes necessary to change these patterns. It's easy to see unconscious anger as genuine when feelings and behavior are coherent, but we come to this by seeing the life of the person as a whole: Alice's past anger can be recognized as that not only because it is influenced by her present state but also influenced by past facts and her expectations for the future. This realization can be also applied to a group which has a past, a present and a probable future. This applies quite well to women and anger and the feminist movement.

> Part of what makes it true that a woman is angry today is that her vague and unfocused feelings are apt to crystallize in the future as she becomes clearer about the nature of sexism and its role in her life. We identify her feelings and behavior today as straightforwardly angry partly with reference to

> this possible future, their natural one. Calling this future course "natural" means here that the political beliefs she comes to have are *true,* and her not having them previously can be explained as part of the distorting effect of false ideology. […] But this future course has become at all likely only quite recently. […] I want to suggest that someone who felt like a woman who is unstraightforwardly angry today would not previously have been considered to be, *and would not have been*, angry. There was then neither the likelihood of future crystallization nor any way of thinking that would have made it appropriate to gather together some odd jumble of feeling and behavior and call it "anger". The meaning that the jumble has for us today is the product of social change; it has acquired a way to organize itself and grow. (Scheman, 32-33, italics in the original)

When re-reading past texts and analyzing them through the lens of hidden anger, we may uncover the emotion of anger where it might not have been considered as such because of the development and creation of the concept of anger for women and in the feminist movement.

This leads us to the analysis of two of what have been considered staple texts for the feminist movement: *A Room of One's Own* (1929) (from now on abbreviated as AROO) and *Three Guineas* (1938) (from now on as TG), written by Virginia Woolf almost ten years apart. The importance of this text lie in the fact that Virginia Woolf had been almost forgotten by literature scholars until the 1970s, when feminist scholars decided to re-read Virginia Woolf in a feminist perspective, especially her more political texts such as those I will be presenting. However, it is important to keep in mind that her commitment to the suffragette movement was ambivalent and she has expressed this through her writing, not only these two political texts, but also through female characters in her novels. As Sowon S. Park writes in the essay "Suffrage and Virginia Woolf: 'The Mass Behind The Single Voice'" (2005):

> In principle she was in favour, and famously worked in a suffrage office, probably the People's Suffrage Federation, for almost a year in 1910. But at the same time she continually expressed private reservations about both the individuals involved in the movement and the larger ethos behind it. Suffragists, with their 'queer accents' and 'drab shabby clothes', are derided in her letters and diaries, and her comments resonate with popular anti-suffrage propaganda. (120)

Moreover, not only was she ambivalent towards her commitment to the movement, but she would also disdain the masses, which has given her the label of "class feminist", which is also confirmed in *A Room Of One's Own*, where she writes "Of the two – the vote and the money, the money, I own, seemed infinitely the more important" (AROO 34). However, despite these differences, the importance of her two most political texts have been brought back to life by second-wave feminism and I will be delving further into their analysis of these writings.

The first text is based on two lectures that Woolf delivered in 1928 at Newnham College and Girton college, both the women's colleges at the University of Cambridge. These lectures, then rendered in a long essay, touch on the social injustices of women and cover the topics of women and fiction and women's access to education. The second text, TG, was written in 1938 and was thought as a continuation of AROO, covering the same topics such as women and education, but stemming from the rising of totalitarian governments, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. This text was thought as a response to a man's letter which asks for Virginia Woolf's contribution to prevent war. Being a pacifist, Woolf answers this fictitious letter on how she would best prevent war in an ideal situation as she also argues in the same speech that because society is not inclusive of women, war becomes a male game that cannot be prevented. Alongside the topic of war as a male game, she, again, touches on the topics of women and education and the social injustices of her time.

Both of these texts are considered the early manifesto of the feminist movement, particularly for women writers, as they are also the first texts to uncover the anger of women. As Alex Zwerdling argues in his essay "Anger and Conciliation in Woolf's Feminism" (1983), Woolf has written these two important texts as "the urge to vent her anger about the subjection of women, and the urge to conciliate the male audience she could never entirely ignore. […] One has a sense in reading these works that impulse is at war with strategy and that this conflict accounts for a certain uneasiness of tone present in both books, but especially in the later *Three Guineas*" (Zwerdling, 68, italics in the original). This uneasiness stems from the tension between her boiling anger and the social expectations posed on women that they should always be detached and gentle and that they should never show their anger. This is demonstrated by a diary entry where Virginia Woolf talks about an encounter with E. M. Forster at the London Library and he tells her that her name has been proposed for membership on the committee of the Library but it was met with resistance from the other men. Her reaction, as recorded in her diary and cited by Zwerdling in his essay, was:

> See how my hand trembles. I was so angry (also very tired) standing. And I saw the whole slate smeared. I though how perhaps M[organ] had mentioned my name, & they had said no no no: ladies are impossible. And so I quieted down & said nothing & this morning in my bath I made up a phrase in my book on Being Despised [the working title for what became *Three Guineas*] […]. Yes, these flares up are very good for my book: for they simmer & become transparent: & I see how I can transmute them into beautiful clear reasonable ironical prose. […] For 2,000 years we have done things without being paid for doing them. You can't bribe me now. […] In short one must tell lies, & apply every emollient in our power to swollen skin of our brothers so terribly inflamed vanity. (Zwerdling 68)

From this passage in her diary, it is quite apparent how Forster's remark on the impossibility of a woman writer entering a male-only committee has made Woolf extremely angry as the social injustice is obvious, but only to women's eyes. This passage

also highlights the contradictory impulses of Virginia Woolf: on the one hand, the inner turmoil; on the other, this anger has sparked inspiration for her book, transforming itself into "beautiful clear reasonable ironical prose" (Zwerdling 69). Woolf often uses her diary as a moderator for her emotions, which means that before working on her books, she empties the container of her emotions onto the more personal pages of her diary. "Anger is treated as embarrassing and childish; at best it only provides some interesting raw material for the artist to refine and contain" (Zwerdling 69). Many feminist critics have argued that the inhibition of anger has compromised Woolf's works, by turning it against herself. Adrienne Rich, in her essay "When We Dead Awaken" (1972), writes that she "was astonished at the sense of effort, of pains taken, of dogged tentativeness, in the tone of that essay. And I recognized that tone. I had heard it often enough, in myself and in other women. It is the tone of a woman almost in touch with her anger, who is determined not to appear angry, who is *willing* herself to be calm, detached, and even charming in a roomful of men where things have been said which are attacks on her very integrity" (Rich 20, italics in the text). On the other hand, Rich found that her anger has been beneficial for her because it helped realize what she was missing from her life and it urged her to find a way to let all of her beings coexist: the mother, the wife, the poet. She writes in her notebook:

> Paralyzed by the sense that there exists a mesh of relationships-e.g. between anger at the children, my sensual life, pacifism, sex, (I mean sex in its broadest significance, not merely sexual desire)-an interconnectedness which, if I could see it, make it valid, would give me back myself, make it possible to function lucidly and passionately. Yet I grope in and out among these dark webs. ("When We Dead Awaken" 24)

And thanks to her anger, Rich realized that what she considers political is not external but also "something 'in here and of the essence of my condition" (Rich 24), her condition as a woman and as a poet, one not excluding the other but two parts of the same person.

The idea that Virginia Woolf's works would have benefitted from a more direct expression of her anger was brought forward also by Jane Marcus in her essay "Art and Anger" (1978), where she writes that "anger is *not* the anathema in art; it is a primary source of creative energy. Rage and savage indignation sear the hearts of female poets and female critics. Why not spit it out as Woolf said, blow the blessed horn, as [Elizabeth] Robins said?" (Marcus 94, italics in the text). However, it would not have been possible for Virginia Woolf to spit her anger out as recommended by Marcus because of the changes in the literary practice of that time. When T. E. Hulme's essay was written, Woolf was writing her first novel. In his essay, Hulme attacks the Romantic sensibility and "defends the deliberate inhibition of emotion" (Zwerdling 70); he idealizes an art in which "there is always a holding back, a reservation", he continues saying that "a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about something or other". Also T. S. Eliot follows this idea with his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), where he states that poetry "is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality," that "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates." These essays concern poetry, but fiction follows the same idea with Ford Madox Ford, who insisted that "the object of the novelist is to keep the reader entirely oblivious of the fact that the author exists." Being this the literary climate in which Virginia Woolf wrote her books, it becomes clearer why she didn't disclose her anger as much as modern feminist critics would have wanted, and this can be seen in Zwerdling's essay:

> She *was* in touch with it [anger]; to have put those feelings on more prominent display would not, to her way of thinking, have produced better art; on the contrary. And it would have constituted a betrayal of the particular literary tradition stretching from Chaucer to Jane Austen that she admired and tried to carry on in her own fashion. But the decision to inhibit her anger in the feminist books

> was not only literary; it was also political, and rooted in a very different tradition which Woolf also knew well: that of nineteenth-century feminist writing. […] The whole history of the women's movement was highly instructive for someone thinking about the uses of anger in political protest. (Zwerdling, 71)

There was a division amongst the movement: on the one hand the more militant suffragists following the Pankhursts; while on the other hand, the constitutional group was led by Mrs. Fawcett and was almost the opposite of the militant one as they tried to avoid any type of confrontation with the men in power; they were more subtle and low-key. And from Virginia Woolf's letter, she was more akin to the latter. The tension between these two facades of the same movement highlights the same tension present in Woolf's writing as there are elements that show that she did not repress her unconscious anger, but she expressed it throughout her work. However, she was not direct with her attacks on masculinity[4] as she thought of them as "artless" and that "anger could be the root, but must not be the flower" (Zwerdling, 74). This last statement takes us back to the tension between composure and distance and her inner turmoil. Her diary shows the process through which Woolf went while writing her books: before working on whatever novel or essay she was working on, she would write down her thoughts impulsively, without editing her feelings.

> I think writing must be formal. The art must be respected. This struck me reading some of my notes here, for, if one lets the mind run loose, it becomes egotistic: personal, which I detest; like Robert Graves. At the same time the irregular fire must be there; & perhaps to loose it, one must begin by being chaotic, but not appear in public like that. (Quote from Diary, II, 321 in Zwerdling, 76)

[4] It is important to note that Virginia Woolf attacked masculinity and not biological maleness directly as she was aware that men were human beings educated by a patriarchal society.

This also applies to *Three Guineas* even though the structure of the book required a different approach to the topics she wanted to cover and to the tones she wanted to use, including that of anger. This change was not only an internal and psychological evolution from her earlier work, but it was also influenced by the political and aesthetic developments of the 1930s. With a world going through war, the neutrality of the "observer-artist" became part of another era, a luxury that the new world could not afford anymore. The new need for political participation influenced also Virginia Woolf's work, including *Three Guineas*.

As mentioned before, this book-long essay starts from the question "how women could prevent war?" and touches upon topics such as women's access to education and the social injustices they live daily. Differently that *A Room Of One's Own*, this book was meant to have a part of fiction and a part of essay, however Woolf decided to separate these parts into different books, with the fiction become her novel *The Years*. At the heart of this essay is Woolf's belief and statement that "the public and private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other" (TG 142). With this statement she brings forward the argument that the behavior of men in public – in this case she refers to war and tyranny – is the same behavior they have in the private sphere, in their homes and with their wives. Because of the oppression and the position of liminality of women, Woolf asks women to use their position to refuse – as Brenda Silver states in her essay "The Authority of Anger" (1991) – to "join blindly or uncritically the centuries-old procession of educated men whose desire for possessions, power, hierarchy, and honors she identifies with the desire for dominance and war" (Silver 344). Woolf calls upon women to maintain their status of outsiders of society and stating "let it be understood, soberly and rationally between us,

that [men] are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; but not to gratify my instincts, or to protect myself or my country. For…as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world." (TG 108-109). This book is a seven-year long research and observation of the world and as a committed pacifist, she reacted to the war with anger and frustration: "anger that everything she valued was threatened with extinction, and that men, including her own nephew Julian Bell, who died in Spain, seemed intent on completing this process";

> […] the extensive quotations that punctuate the text and the notes of *Three Guineas* paint a devastating portrait of the conscious and unconscious attitudes that govern both behavior and discourse. Allowing her witnesses to speak for themselves within skillfully orchestrated, ironic dialogues, Woolf balances her ventriloquism with the insistence that the male correspondent hear the speaker as a woman; for their ability to work together for peace hinges on his acknowledgement of the validity, the authority, of women's perceptions and voice. (Silver 345)

And it's exactly the validity and authority of this text that is denied by her contemporary critics and along with the authority of the text, also the authority of its anger. The reception of this text highlighted and continues to highlight how criticism is firmly rooted in the society and world they are produced, which means that Woolf's texts – during her time alive – produced different reactions compared to those that she would have produced if she were to write nowadays. If Woolf's anger was disguised and rendered with ironic and detached prose, the post-war feminist movement started including topics which were not only women's access to education but also reproductive rights, discrimination, sexuality and violence – domestic and sexual.

2.2. Anger as a transformative emotion.

With her essay "Art and Anger" (1978), Jane Marcus analyzes both Virginia Woolf's feminist texts – AROO and TG – touching on her suppressed anger, unleashed in AROO in the form of "an angry old woman" or a "guerilla fighter in a Victorian skirt" in TG. However, it's possible that Woolf might not have been as angry as perceived by Marcus. As mentioned before, Virginia Woolf used a detached tone to express her opinions on the situation women were living in but would have never used an angry tone, as can be read in diaries that she used as a way to control her anger. So, it is not completely correct to say that Woolf unleashed her anger in these political texts, but she has taken a stance against injustice. However, it hasn't been enough during Woolf's time, as the true change-makers were those who actually unleashed their anger, like the Pankhurts and the suffragette movement, so I agree with Marcus (94-95) when she writes:

> Why wait until old age as they did, waiting long to let out their full quota of anger. Out with it. No more burying our wrath, turning it against ourselves. No more ethical suicides, no more literary pacifism. We must make the literary profession safe for women as well as for ladies. It is our historical responsibility. When the fires of our rage have burnt out, think how clear the air will be for our daughters. They will write in joy and freedom only after we have written in anger. It is up to us to see that the academy gives its little silver cups to those who deserve them. We must ourselves forge a great big golden bowl in honor of Virginia Woolf, inscribing on it her words: "The future of fictions depends very much upon what extent men can be educated to stand free speech in women."

However, the women of the 1940s and 1950s remained silent and Virginia Woolf's text, *Three Guineas*, was left out of the conversation, until the feminist movement of the Sixties and Seventies brought her back and tried to rebuild her voice. Despite Marcus' hope for a situation for women writers "after anger", where they could right with joy and freedom, the reality has been completely different. Marcus herself states in the introduction to the

book *Art & Anger: reading like a woman* (1988), written ten years after the original essay, that what she wrote "grew out of [her] own anger and the anger of [her] generation of feminist critics, who were trying to change the subject without yet having developed a sophisticated methodology" (Marcus XXI). What this statement showcases is another debate regarding anger and it's that of the authority of emotions and how the personal becomes political when talking about women's social status.

In her essay "After Anger" (2018), Margot Kotler approaches this feminist debate on the authority of these emotions, in particular anger, and she begins by analyzing Jane Marcus' essay and Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*. As said before, expressing anger was not as easy as it could be for modern women writers, as the expression of such strong emotions was not well seen, especially for women, as the literary standard for men was detachment and objectivity, whilst emotions and autobiographical information were considered too subjective and too feminine. Kotler writes (36):

> The problem of women's personal anger—how and when, if ever, to express it and in what context—has been a major concern of Woolf scholars and of feminist critics more generally. The expression of the personal, whether it implies the exposure of autobiographical information, emotion, or personality, is a historically fraught issue for women writers who have felt and continue to feel pressure to adhere to masculine standards of intellectual objectivity in order to avoid accusations of writing from a subjective, gendered place.

The problem of anger and its authority is that the expression of emotion is seen as not objective and therefore does not conform to masculine standards in literature, with the difference that if a woman is impersonal, she is not emotional enough and is not avoiding autobiography. This issue has brought feminist critics to go deeper into the topic of anger as an emotion, splitting the debate between those who think that emotions are bodily

reactions, involving immediacy and, therefore, they lack thought, whilst the other side of the debate has a cognitivist approach, which argues that emotions involve judgments, attitudes, appraisals or a way of understanding the world. On the one hand, the bodily approach identifies anger as immediate and instinctual, producing automatic responses, for example, those of survival (flight or fight); on the other hand, the cognitivist approach identifies something or someone as the source of anger, an intentional object. This approach has, thus, allowed feminism to challenge the concept that emotions from the oppressed are irrational, but that they are the response to injustice, less immediate and rational. In her essay "Anger and the Politics of Naming" (1980), Naomi Scheman argues that the naming of emotions transforms them into political acts, as the recognition "that some state of affairs counts as oppression or exploitation" (Scheman, 29) involves attributing anger to external objects, rather than to personal dissatisfaction, calling attention to the need to address the collective forms of injustice faced by women. Elizabeth V. Spelman, in her essay "Anger and Insubordination" (1989), argues that this approach can be traced back to Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, and that "anger is an appropriate response to injustice, rather than an irrational emotion" but "explains that anger has only been associated with justice and reason when it is expressed by politically and culturally dominant groups" (Kotler 38). The fact that women, through the feminist movement, have claimed the power of anger as a political tool reevaluates the epistemological status of anger itself. This claim has led to the transformation of the earlier critics of TG from "'resentment', 'grievance', and 'complaint' into collective, public concepts associated with social and political change. Placed in the context of anger, Woolf's tone ceases to be heard as neurotic, morbid, or shrill and becomes the expression of an ethical or moral stance" (Silver 361).

It is interesting to see how Woolf considers women's anger rational and factual, "while men's anger is inseparable from their personal emotions. This allows for a differentiation between two forms of anger: anger that comes from personal injury, which can only respond with its own concerns, and anger about injustices affecting groups" (Kotler 42). To support this differentiation, Woolf demonstrates that women's anger is based on facts, using real women's lives as evidence in TG, allowing biography to stand for authoritative history. "Woolf suggests that the personal, at least for men, implies the translation of narrow and distorting emotional instincts into truths to support the oppression of women; while for women, the personal or autobiographical is fact and must be treated as such, rather than as a repressed, and therefore irrational emotion" (Kotler 44). Related to this. Contemporary feminist theorists are aware of the indispensability of anger to the feminist struggles, but theorist Sara Ahmed, for example, problematizes the idea that the personal validates their anger. Ahmed's work wants to reclaim the negative affects, refusing the teleology that the ultimate result of anger is happiness. With this she refers to works by Jane Marcus and Adrienne Rich, who encourage and believe that women should recognize their anger in order to be free. In contrast to this idea, Ahmed follows black feminists such as bell hooks and Audre Lorde, emphasizing that not all women have access to happiness in the same way. In TG, Virginia Woolf makes an argument about the future of the movement:

> What more fitting than to destroy an old word, a vicious and corrupt word that has done much harm in its day and is now obsolete? The word 'feminist' is the word indicated. That word, according to the dictionary, means 'one who champions the rights of women.' Since the only right, the right to earn a living, has been won, the word no longer has a meaning. (TG 120-21)

Here, Woolf suggests, ironically, the obsolescence of feminism now that the goal has been achieved – that of having the right to earn a living - and women are free, but she also emphasizes the continuity of the movement over generations, explaining that those "queer dead women in their poke bonnets and shawls" were working for "the very same cause for which we are working now" (TG 121). If in her letter to Katherine Cox in 1913 Woolf writes that the suffragists had "queer accents" as a negative way to describe them – queer meaning strange, odd, not conforming to established gender norms – Woolf is now using the term as especially non-conforming but not in a negative way but as a positive description of the women who have fought for the cause. The fact that these women never let go of their anger and unhappiness, is viewed as pathological and is described by Ahmed in her book *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) as the "feminist killjoy", who "spoils the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness" (Ahmed 65). She continues by stating that they can also be considered "the origin of bad feeling" (Ahmed 65). The description of this feminist killjoy is useful for conceptualizing alternatives to the personal anger of feminism. Ahmed argues that "reasonable thoughtful arguments are dismissed as anger (which of course empties anger of its own reason), which makes you angry, such that your response becomes read as the confirmation of evidence that you are not only angry but also unreasonable!" (Ahmed 68). Here, reasonable anger, derived from a "judgment that something is wrong," is read as "unattributed anger" that comes from a personal place (Ahmed 68), an effect that also Woolf tried to avoid when writing and expressing her anger in a detached and more "masculine" way of writing. The differentiation between reasonable and unattributed anger follows Spelman's one between understanding emotions as judgements or as irrational, and this reveals how prioritizing the personal

source can make it more susceptible to attack as it the personal can erase the reasoning behind that anger. “If the feminist killjoy is not an angry *person* but a person who is angry *about* injustice, she is better able to address those injustices beyond the scope of personal injury and through a project that does not end when she is “free” from anger but continues on as an essential aspect of a feminist genealogy (Kotler 45-46, italics from text).

Woolf’s use of the personal and the biographical, the use of evidence to demonstrate the facts behind women’s anger, demonstrates her support for a reasonable and attributed anger in the feminist movement. However, women’s anger is rational only when it’s not transformed into unattributed anger by those it threatens, which are men, creating that figure of the feminist killjoy that Ahmed talks about. In TG, Woolf’s descriptions of the Society of Outsiders in the final chapter takes on the earlier characterizations of women throughout her text as interested only in the personal in favor of the collective. The Society’s refusal to understand and share the personal and emotional reasoning for the political causes of others that don’t resonate with their values is described by Ahmed’s notion of “affect alien”. She describes the feeling of alienation when we do not “experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good” (Ahmed 41-41), which can lead to the creation of a gap and then to anger. On the same note, even Woolf would feel alienated by society, an outsider. Kotler, then, argues:

> Woolf’s Society of Outsiders is alienated from the dominant affects of British patriarchal society because war and nationalism do not make them feel happy or sympathetic; however, rather than fill this gap with anger, they respond with indifference. Indeed, when they do support a cause, they do so not out of sympathy, but out of the carefully formulated conclusion that their behavior is just and indifferent to personal influences, which is guaranteed by their vows of “poverty, chastity, derision, and freedom from unreal loyalties” (97). The last of these vows—which requires ridding oneself of

> "national, religious, collegiate, sex and familial pride"—is essential to Woolf's vision of an ideal form of politics as one that abandons personal identity, which leaves one susceptible to irrational, emotional appeal, in favor of an indifferent collective (97). Woolf demonstrates how women are already, by default of their sex, collectively excluded from these attachments, as they "have no country," "want no country," and therefore have the ability to oppose war, as a group, through their indifference (129). (Kotler 47)

By stating that women "have the ability to oppose war, as a group, through their indifference", Woolf establishes her position through the indifference of the Society of Outsiders and the relationship between emotion and feminist politics through the transformation of women's experiences into collective facts. Both of these aspects highlight how Woolf understood the role of anger in politics and it has allowed her to conceptualize a future for feminism that can embrace negative feelings. Another aspect that highlights the power of emotions to formulate a rational response is the inclusion and exclusion of photographs from her text. The original text presented photographs of patriarchal figures in place of the devastating photographs from the Spanish Civil War. The pictures of these only-male institutional authorities uncover the uncanny link between ego assertion, as their posture in these pictures was of dominance, and the violence of war, which is a demonstration of power of one country on another for reasons that seem valid and reasonable to those who execute the war declaration. These pictures were left out from the following editions of the book, until 1993 with Michèle Barrett's Penguin edition and Jane Marcus's 2006 Harcourt edition. The reason that they were omitted is unknown, but the reason that Woolf decided to add them is the connection these figures have with what is described in the text. Despite not being present, the photographs from the war are described in detail, never letting the reader forget that these pictures are the reason at the base of the discourse. As Kotler states in her essay:

> As Judith Butler points out, photographs of war elicit powerful affective responses, but they do not always produce consensus. Woolf might have been aware of the fact that although "we" (Woolf and her interlocutor) have the same emotional response, she can neither guarantee that other viewers and readers will respond the same way, nor that their emotions will be transformed into political action. (Kotler, 50-51)

For this reason, Woolf decided to leave out the pictures of war and death and added the pictures of those men who were the source of tyranny and fascism. Woolf not only dismisses the official regalia and titles of these men, considering them outdated, but these images push towards closer scrutiny of "their ability to conceal, through the emotional response that they coerce, the injustices they support" (Kotler, 52). And the regalia, the posturing, the parading and the link to violent power and problems that remain as urgent today as they were during the XX century. With these photographs, Woolf reverses the objectifying gaze from the victims of war to the perpetrators of the sentiments that lead to it. With this redirection of the gaze, Woolf suggests that to resist tyranny one must become unsympathetic by understanding the exploitation of emotions with those pictures. Kotler then continues by saying that:

> Woolf maintains that feminists would be better served by both transforming personal emotions into collective negative feelings, as shown in her use of impersonal anger as a feminist methodology, and harnessing this *attributed* anger and unhappiness to launch a collective critique, via unsympathetic and indifferent response, of the emotionally exploitative rhetoric and imagery of the fascist and patriarchal state. A project grounded in negative, but impersonal, affect does not conceptualize anger as a personally exhausting emotion to overcome, but as a critical methodology that supports a more sustainable feminist politics. That is to say, writing "in joy and freedom" need not remain a future that is only possible after feminism becomes obsolete; Woolf implies that the project will never be complete because there is no "after" to anger. (Kotler 53)

So what comes "after anger"? We have seen how the authority of anger has become the basis of the second-wave[5] feminist movement, creating that bridge from Virginia Woolf's angry writing to the new generations of angry feminists who were fighting for women's rights and liberation. As already mentioned, Scheman states that throughout time we add meaning to what previously had none because the context in which something happened was different. This is the reason why the feminist theorists and critics between the 1960s and 1990s are so vocal on the power of anger, through what Adrienne Rich describes in her essay "When We Dead Awaken" as a "re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering a text from a new critical direction-is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (Rich 18).

[5] I will be using this term only for convenience to describe the feminist movement that operated between the 1960s and 1990s, as I am aware of the criticism that is opposed to the use of this term.

3. Re-vision and Adrienne Rich:

How far have we come?

When Virginia Woolf wrote that “telling the truth about my [her] experiences as a body” she meant that the woman in general "has many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome", leading her to change not only how she perceives herself as a woman but also how she perceives the world around her. After killing the Angel of the House, what a woman writer had to consider starting writing as a woman are the myths surrounding her image and role in society and how she has imbibed these myths inwardly. From Woolf to Simone Beauvoir’s influential book *The Second Sex* (1949), women writers have written on the demystification of women’s identity and on finding their true selves outside of society’s idea of them. With the international feminist movement of the 1960s, women started to reassess the cultural importance and contribution of women, trying to rethink and recreate their identity.

In fact, in her essay “When We Dead Awaken”, Adrienne Rich states that “no male writer has written primarily or even largely for women, or with the sense of women’s criticism as a consideration when he chooses his materials, his theme, his language. But to a lesser or greater extent, every woman writer has written for men even when, like Virginia Woolf, she was supposed to be addressing women” (Rich 20). This statement underlines Rich’s commitment to creating a new language for women writers, who need to write for women as a woman, a language that speaks to women’s experience and is rid of the oppressor’s language. What Rich did was to look back to the women writers of the past to review, or better re-view:

> Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped us as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see – and therefore live – afresh. (Rich, 18)

It is through this act of re-vision that it is possible to re-read and analyze the works of women writers beyond a male-dominated language and literature where the myths and images connected to women have influenced women's writing and how they perceive themselves. So once women start re-visioning past writing through the feminist lens and perspective, beyond the patriarchal gaze, it, then, becomes a mission for them to discover their true identity. Rich's journey in writing has been of self-discovery of her identity and along this journey there had been a search for a universal female-dominated language that spoke firstly and foremost to women.

3.1. Looking at reality through poetry.

Born in 1929 in Maryland, Adrienne Rich is an American poet, essayist and activist. She studied at Radcliffe College where she received the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award from W.H. Auden for her first poetry collection *A Change of World* (1951). Her path in poetry started at a very young age, inspired by the writers and poets she studied and supported by her father, a pathologist and chairman at the John Hopkins Medical School.

Her first collections were written and published contemporary to the main events in her private life, such as her marriage in 1953 with a Harvard professor and the birth of her three children (1955, 1957, 1959). Her first poems were "elegant and graceful" (370),

as Willard Spiegelman writes in "Voice of the Survivor" (1975). They "flow with the prosodic assurance of Auden or Wilbur" but her early themes were suffocation and alienation described through scenes of everyday life. These poems were "in the conversational manner of Auden and Yeats, worldly and witty, polished and careful. But like the characters they present, these poems are crushed under the weight of the very tradition they parade" (Spiegelman 371). Even Auden has said of her first work *A Change of World* that it is "neatly and modestly dressed, speak quietly but do not mumble, respect their elders but are not cowed by them". The real change in her poetry began after a break in her writing between 1955 and 1963 when *Snapshots of a Daughter-In-Law* was published. During this period, she was occupied with her firstborn and married life but it soon became too restrictive and limiting for a poet and writer. Once she started to be more active in the women's liberation movement, she started not only to experiment more in her writing but also to develop a consciousness of her identity and role as a woman and as a woman writer.

But what does poetry mean for a poet? For example, W.H. Auden thought that "poetry makes nothing happen", a phrase found in his elegy to W.B. Yeats. On the other hand, in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent", T.S. Eliot contends that poetry makes a difference in people's lives:

> if you follow the influence of poetry, through those readers who are most affected by it, to those people who never read at all, you will find it present everywhere. At least you will find it if the national culture is living and healthy, for in a healthy society there is a continuous reciprocal influence and interaction of each part upon the others. And this is what I mean by the social function of poetry in its largest sense: that it does, in proportion to its excellence and vigour, affect the speech and sensibility of the whole nation. (24-25)

Besides the social implications of writing and reading poetry, the poetic language works through images and, especially, metaphors to draw readers into the process of meaning-

making. When entering the text, readers find themselves in a space between subjectivity and objectivity; a space where they find shared meanings constructed through the poem and their engagement with it. This engagement is exemplified in Adrienne Rich's work. According to Jeannette Riley in her essay "The Voice of Poetry is Calling" (2009), "for Rich, poetry is the space that enables us to know ourselves and to (re)experience the conditions under which we live, as well as undertake the creation of new ideas and ways of perceiving the world – all the necessary components to the continual maintenance and transformation of democracy" (Riley 350). Rich explains further that poetry teaches us that it "is neither an end in itself, nor a means to some external end. It's a human activity enmeshed with human existence" (Rich, "Poetry as Social Practice", IX). And because it is a human activity, poetry stems from images and metaphors that recreate the poet's relationship with their community and the whole world. For Rich, metaphors are that "which lies close to the core of poetry itself, the only hope for a humane civil life. The eye of likeness in the midst of contrast, the appeal to recognition, the association of thing to thing, spiritual fact with embodied form, begins here" (Rich, *What is Found There,* 1993, 6). Metaphors become powerful tools, even democratic as they are open to interpretations that are developed as a collaboration by the poet, readers and the poem, creating new ways of seeing and knowing. Moreover, through this collaboration, Rich believes that poetry "begins the suggestion of multiple, many-layered rather than singular meanings, wherever we look, in the ordinary world" (*What is Found There* 6).

Rich's work is noteworthy as she has analyzed the relationship between poet and poem from a feminist perspective, which has put her under the label of feminist literary critic, even though she is more than often dismissed as such. As Marilyn Farwell states in her essay "Organic Feminist Criticism" (1977), the key in Rich's literary criticism is

“a desire of wholeness which relates to ethics and language, text and artist, creation and relation, and ultimately art and life” (Farwell 193). In her work, Rich analyzes society in terms of the ethical relationship between male and female principles, the former representing relationship and subjectivity in Western ideology. However, she differs from this ideology: she believes that the patriarchal society has divorced these principles and that it has caused a “terrifying dissociation of sensibility”, as Rich wrote in “Caryatid, A Column” in the September-October issue of the 1973 *American Poetry Review*. With the dissociation of sensibility, Rich meant that women were relegated to the nuclear family and with that all that feminine means. Femininity could no longer be kept inside the post-industrial family or under the subjugation of men, and this has been translated in metaphoric terms to rape: “the paradigm for a series of relationships which keeps the male and principles separate, an attitude which points to society's fear and hatred that is female” (Farwell 194). The separation between the human being and the environment, the objectification of others from oneself and the separation of the conscious and unconscious, as well, are paradigms of rape. Rich also believes that rape is the metaphor that keeps men, and women too, untouched by the female principle of subjectivity and relationship and this separation is considered unethical, and without the communal relationship between male and female principles, the world is forced into manipulation. Whenever there is a connection between the two principles, there is an ethical situation and the paradigm for this situation are matriarchies.

> The female principle of relationship and subjectivity, "the mother in all women and the woman in many men," is not a static ontological category but a composite of behaviors and stances by which anv human being relates to others, nature, language, and the self. Theoretically, it is not the exclusive property of women. The two principles are to be seen as modes of action, as experiential categories rather than ontological entities. In other words, they are verbs instead of nouns. The static ontological categories, which are a part of patriarchal philosophy, divide and separate things, principles, and

> human beings while the experiential categories allow a sifting and meeting of that which has been heretofore separated. (Farwell 195)

The emphasis on experiential in ethics provides the basis for the work on the definition of the poem as an experience, a verb instead of a noun. This provides an interpretation of the relationship between poet and poem that doesn't depend on both distance and identity.

It often happens that this relationship is divided: some theories take a stance on separating the artist from their art, theories that Rich is aware of and turns against. She believes that this separation is the aforementioned dissociation between the male and female principles on an artistic level. Men are used to compartmentalizing their lives, while women are taught that it is essential to relate to others. And while men are praised for separating their lives from their work, women are often forced into a choice which, when deciding to pursue both career and love, leads to guilt. And whenever they choose writing, they often don't marry. In the end, for both men and women, "separating the man who suffers from the mind that creates is a hindrance rather than an advantage" (Farwell, 196-197). Thus, the separation between art and artist creates only sterile work as the poet is not in touch with their emotional and relational life: when this happens, the poet can be accused of manipulating the images on a conscious level and of changing them after the experience has manifested itself. Rich is opposed to this type of revision and manipulation of the images of a poem: impulse: "What does it mean to revise a poem? For every poet the process must be different; but it is surely closer to pruning a tree than retouching a photograph" ("Caryatid" 42). If the pruning becomes manipulation and the images are completely changed, the poet loses touch with the unconscious side of the self and this leads to: "The poet's need to dominate and objectify the characters in his poems leaves him in an appalling way invulnerable. And the poetry, for all its verbal talent and skill, remains emotionally shallow ("Caryatid" 42).

Language is an important part of Rich's work and criticism. She considers it the physical aspect of the poetic voice that reaches out in dialogue. It is metaphorically the body of the poem. In this way, Rich claims for it an ethical function. "The poetic language which is in touch with the female principle will allow the poem to be primarily experiential rather than ontological" (Farwell 200). Which means that poetry written by women becomes the means through which the poet writes about her experiences as a woman – the experiential – rather than concentrate on her being a woman – the ontological – even though the fact that she is a woman influences her experiences, the focus is not her gender but what she has to endure in her gender.

For this reason, Rich believes that language is central and important to the condition and status of women and when it is returned to the female principle, it will provide the basis for social change to the point that it can also be used to redefine and change reality. On the point of language, Virginia Woolf, too, gave great importance to language and one of her favorite themes was the lack of communication that amplifies the loneliness and isolation of the characters of her books, but more in general of human beings. As Gönül Bakay writes in her essay "Virginia Woolf's Gendered Language" (2015), "deeply concerned with this problem, Woolf tries to articulate a different gendered language that is more appropriate for the expression of women's emotions but that also widens the scope of communicative exchanges between both genders" (146). Also Mary Daly, an American radical feminist philosopher, focuses on language as the core of oppression and the center for change because men have the control of language, this reflects also on how people perceive the world, particularly women. An important statement from Mary Daly, written in her work *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (1973), is: "The liberation of language is rooted in the liberation of ourselves" (Daly 8).

Language for Rich is an important subject, especially in her later works, as she considers language rooted in experience and there is a deeply physical aspect in her poetic "I". When poetic language is returned to the female principle it embodies the person who is speaking and the poem becomes a person in conversation. This person has reached a significant universal level of self and the poem becomes a human being, it becomes a verb in action.

> Perhaps a simple way of putting it would be to say that instead of poems about experiences I am getting poems that are experiences, that contribute to my knowledge and my emotional life even while they reflect and assimilate it. In my earlier poems I told you, as precisely and eloquently as I knew how, about something; in the more recent poems something is happening, something has happened to me and, if I have been a good parent to the poem, something will happen to you who read it. (Farwell 202)

The essential to this image is the communal aspect of the poetic "I", the poem as dialogue. Restoring the breathing self to the persona of the poem, Rich does not reduce the voice to merely her personal voice, rather, if the experiencing self is in touch with its female principle, the voice becomes universal and communal. This means that language becomes a means of conversation, and redefinition, and the poem a focus for an entire community. This is why her feminist perspective is important when reading her works, as her poems, as well as her essays, are not only meant to be renderings of her daily life, rather they become a metaphor of women's experience in the world. Amidst the layers and meaning that her poetry can convey, and that the reader can explore, strong emotions such as anger have had an important role in her poetry. As already mentioned, anger is seen as a rational and powerful emotion whenever it's related to a man, but when it's expressed by women it becomes irrational and explosive, an emotion that is difficult to rationalize and can hardly be put into writing, even less into poetry, which is the polished end-product of the creative process. Anger as an emotion is even more problematic when associated with the

feminist movement. The wide range of reasons why women are angry, starting from the behavior of close relatives to the patriarchal society itself, makes it difficult for feminist poets "to arrive to clear definitions of complex issues" (142), as stated by Mary Slowik in her essay "The Friction of the Mind" (1984). However, Adrienne Rich has explored her own anger and has used it firstly as a creative source for her poetry, for her journey of self-discovery as a poet, a woman and as a woman poet, and secondly, she has used her anger to talk about issues and give voice to those who don't – and can't – have one.

3.2. The oppressor's language: between anger, identity and (mis)communication.

The first step she takes into this process of moulding her anger into a creative emotion rather than a destructive one is to find and provide ways that anger can be disciplined into the energy that informs her art. She does this by cultivating "a tough though sensitive irony and a hard look at the drastic changes anger requires her to make" (Slowik, 143). Her earliest poems, *A Change of World* (1951) and *The Diamond Cutters and Other Poems* (1955), portray a kind world where no negative emotions seem to exist. Even Rich strongly criticised her early work:

> Only gradually, within the last five or six years, did I begin to feel that these early poems, even the ones I liked best and in which I felt I'd said most, were queerly limited; that in many cases I had suppressed, omitted, falsified even, certain disturbing elements to gain that perfection of order. […] In my earlier poems I told you, as precisely and eloquently as I knew how, about something; in the more recent pomes something is happening, something has happened to me and, if I have been a good parent to the poem, something will happen to you who read it. (Rich, "Poetry and Experience", 1964, 165)

Despite criticizing her early works and stating that she had suppressed "disturbing elements to gain that perfection of order", the volumes are permeated of discontent,

alienation, stagnation, and one poem that I think creates a link between her early poems and her later feminist works is “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” from the collection *A Change of World* (1951), where Rich paints the image of a woman trapped in tradition and oppressed by the presence of the either/or of art/matrimony: the tigers vs matrimony embodied by her husband.

Aunt Jennifer’s tigers stride across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer’s fingers fluttering through her wool
Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.
The massive weight of Uncle’s wedding band
Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer’s hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.
The tigers in the panel that she made
Will go on striding, proud and unafraid.

The comparison between Aunt Jennifer and the tigers on the tapestry showcases the contrast between their freedom as they “will go on striding, proud and unafraid” and Aunt Jennifer’s obligation towards a patriarchal society that wants her bound to her husband, exemplified through the image of “her terrified hands will lie/ Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by”, with the ordeals referring to “the massive weight of Uncle’s wedding band”. Even though there is no direct reference to anger or any blatant metaphor, the whole poem depicts the image of a woman oppressed and constricted by tradition and her husband’s dominance and power, exemplified especially through the contrast between the tigers, which “do not fear the men under the tree” and Aunt Jennifer’s “terrified hands”. In her essay “When We Dead Awaken”, Rich writes that as an undergraduate she

was reading Frost, Dylan, Thomas, Donne, Auden, MacNiece, Stevens and Yeats, and what these great poets taught her was craft, but Rich states that "poems are like dreams: in them you put what you don't know you know". When looking back at the poetry she created before she was 21, she realized that "beneath the conscious craft are glimpses of the split I even then experienced between the girl who wrote poems, who defined herself in writing poems, and the girl who was to define herself by her relationships with men" (21-22). "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" was written while she was a student and shows the detachment from this split. The woman in this poem may seem like the portrait of an imaginary woman, who suffers because of the contrast between her lifestyle and the life she would want represented by the tigers. The split that Rich talks about – between the poet and the woman defined by men – can be read through the image of Aunt Jennifer longing to be free as the fierce tigers; even though Rich wasn't in that situation, she would be after college when she delved into married life and domestic life, finding herself longing for the freedom to write without leaving behind the life she had built.

As Rich stated, her first poems were precise and eloquent, but have an underlying plethora of suppressed emotions that have not been uncovered and that will start to be from her 1963 work, *Snapshots of a Daughter-In-Law.* This volume is considered as a transitional book, after years of great change such as her marriage and the birth of her children. The title of the collection is also the title of one poem part of it, "Snapshots", where Rich presents an album full of women as "daughters-in-law", bound to the set of rules that men have established and that women have re-enforced. It is her experience from student to poet to wife/mother/daughter-in-law that pushed Rich to write these poems. *Snapshots* brings forward her awareness of her role within the form of marriage, and how it has affected the subject and form of her poems. The main themes of this work

are the burden of history on women's experience of the world, the separateness of individuals – the division between genders, between masculine and feminine – and the need for a relationship where there is no other transcendence. It is the separateness and division of genders that allows her to investigate language and her writing style. She often doesn't explicitly state the gender of the person talking, with an increasingly awkward use of the language throughout the collection of poems. Not only does she investigate language, but through language, she goes on a journey of self-discovery of her identity as a woman and as a woman poet. When Rich wrote *Snapshots* she was in her mid-thirties, an age that Jung states to be a moment when a person has accomplished a set of goals and might be called by an inner necessity to find the self, to a process of individuation. In "When We Dead Awaken", she wrote:

> In the late '50's I was able to write, for the first time, directly about experiencing myself as a woman. The poem was jotted in fragments during children's naps, brief hours in a library, or at 3 a.m. after rising with a wakeful child. I despaired of doing any continuous work at this time. Yet I began to feel that my fragments and scraps had a common consciousness and a common theme, one which I would have been very unwilling to put on paper at an earlier time because I had been taught that poetry should be "universal," which meant, of course, non-female. Until then I had tried very much not to identify myself as a female poet. Over two years I wrote a 10-part poem called "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," in longer, looser mode than I'd ever trusted myself with before. It was an extraordinary relief to write that poem. It strikes me now as too literary, too dependent on allusion; I hadn't found the courage yet to do without authorities, or even to use the pronoun "I"-the woman in the poem is always "she." One section of it, No. 2, concerns a woman who thinks she is going mad; she is haunted voices telling her to resist and rebel, voices which she can hear but not obey. (Rich, 24)

Leaflets is, again, a transitional book that closely resembles the previous work, *Necessities of Life* (1966) in subject and form, but in this case, the poems of this volume are "permeated with anger, diffused nervous tension and unfocused hostility" (Judith McDaniel, "Reconstituting the World" 1978, 315). In these poems, the images strike out against traditions and cultural entombment. Her tone is defensive, ready to fight to prove

her presence in the world as a woman and as a poet. *Leaflets* opens with the poem "Orion", where the "you" addressed in it is the poet herself, "the active principle, the energetic imagination" (Rich, "When We Dead Awaken", 24).

Far back when I went zig-zagging
through tamarack pastures
you were my genius, you
my cast-iron Viking, my helmed
lion-heart king in prison.
Years later now you're young

my fierce half-brother, staring
down from that simplified west
your breast open, your belt dragged down
by an oldfashioned thing, a sword
the last bravado you won't give over
though it weighs you down as you stride

and the stars in it are dim
and maybe have stopped burning.
But you burn, and I know it;
as I throw back my head to take you in
and old transfusion happens again:
divine astronomy is nothing to it.

Indoors I bruise and blunder
break faith, leave ill enough
alone, a dead child born in the dark.
Night cracks up over the chimney,
pieces of time, frozen geodes
come showering down in the grate.

A man reaches behind my eyes
and finds them empty
a woman's head turns away
from my head in the mirror
children are dying my death
and eating crumbs of my life.

Pity is not your forte.
Calmly you ache up there
pinned aloft in your crow's nest,
my speechless pirate!
You take it all for granted
and when I look you back
it's with a starlike eye
shooting its cold and egotistical spear
where it can do least damage.
Breath deep! No hurt, no pardon
out here in the cold with you
you with your back to the wall.

1965

In this poem, the "you", Orion, is described as fierce and striving – just as Aunt Jennifer's tigers in her self-discovery poem - despite being held down by a heavy sword that drags down the belt. The stars are dim and maybe have stopped burning, an image that represents Rich's inner fire and passion as being dim and almost turned off, but she knows that it is still there, burning. In this poem, Rich argues with her own poetical fervor that is still present inside of her, even though she "bruise(s) and blunder(s)" indoors, comparing her poetry to a "dead child born in the dark". At the end of the poem, Rich describes herself as "cold and egotistical", shooting a spear into Orion trying to do the least damage. According to Rich's notes, the last verses were suggested by Gottfried Benn's essay "Artists and Old Age". Benn writes this advice for artists: "Don't lose sight of the cold and egotistical element in your mission… With your back to the wall, care-worn and weary […]" (Benn 206-207). The image of the back to the wall is repeated in another poem of the last part of the collection, "Ghazals": "Did you think I was talking about my life?/ I was trying to drive a tradition up against the wall" ("7/14/68: II"). This tradition that is forcing her to the wall, to live and write on the outskirts, is patriarchy.

And this is confirmed by Rich's parody of Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts", where he insists that "about suffering they were never wrong,/The Old Masters: how well they understood/Its human position." Rich changes it in the poem "The Evening": "The old masters, the old sources,/haven't a clue what we're about,/shivering here in the half-dark sixties." This is an example of Rich's familiarity with literary tradition, which has been her first source of inspiration for her poetry – the great poets of the canon – and by quoting the literary tradition in her poem, she is inserting herself in a patriarchal literary tradition but at the same time she is also highlighting how the literary tradition of the past has shut out the female experience – "haven't a clue what we're about". Just as Virginia Woolf had tried to enter the patriarchal literary tradition by writing for women but with men and their criticism at the back of her mind, here Rich puts herself in the patriarchal tradition but with her words she remarks how little does the patriarchal culture had understood the women experience and how little it had represented the needs and desires of women. It becomes clearer and clearer that the themes of this collection of poems is not only cultural entombment, but a search for her own identity.

Throughout *Leaflets*, Rich's anger manifests itself not directly but as the limiting walls of tradition that confine women's existence and experience in the rules set by the patriarchal society and the lack of communication between men and women, between white and black people as well, that translates into the statement: "When they read this poem of mine, they are/translators./Every existence speaks a language of its own."

A relevant poem in the collection *The Will to Change* (1971) is "Planetarium", dedicated to the astronomer Caroline Herschel. The reason why Rich decided to dedicate a poem to Caroline Herschel was because of Herschel's importance and role in science for women: she was the first woman scientist to receive a salary and had discovered eight

comets between 1786 and 1797. This poem is dedicated to Herschel and is a celebration of her work but also a criticism of how women were often put aside or behind the men who worked in the same field as they did. In fact, the event that has probably inspired this poem was the exclusion from the Nobel Prize of Jocelyn Bell, an astrophysicist who discovered the first radio pulsars. Herschel, too, made important discoveries but the only reason why she could achieve those results were because her brother William Herschel was himself an astronomer and had "employed" his sister Caroline as an assistant to study together astronomy. The poem opens with the words "woman" and "monster", the latter already seen in the previous collection in the poem "On Edges", where Rich writes: "that types 'useless' as 'monster'/and 'history' as 'lampshade'", with a clear reference to Sylvia Plath and her poem "Lady Lazarus". So the poem "Planetarium" begins with the image of "a woman in the shape of a monster/a monster in the shape of a woman". The poem continues by presenting Caroline's life spent "among the Clocks and instruments/or measuring the ground with poles'/in her 98 years to discover/8 comets". Rich also mentions Tycho Brahe, the inventor of the telescope and the first to see a Nova. She compares the exploding and bright light of the Nova with the life that flies out of "us", as in us women. The reference to Jocelyn Bell's episode can be found in the verses "heartbeat of the pulsar/heart sweating through my body". The structure of the poem is initially fragmented, with plenty of spaces and very few punctuation marks to set the rhythm. However, what can be considered the second part of the poem – separated with the verse "I am bombarded yet I stand" that represents the persistence and strength of the poetic "I" which could be Caroline as well as Rich as well as every woman – follows a more regular structure but still with no punctuation marks and some extra spaces in between words. This second part takes on a more general discourse, still using astronomy

as a metaphor to talk about the "untranslateable language in the universe" as the language of patriarchy, far from the language of women that Rich is searching for. The poem represents change through the action of seeing – with the verses "what we see,we see/and seeing is changing" – which is not only about changing the world but also being changed by it as well. In the end, the poetic "I" is "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", which can be read as women trying to understand the world and what surrounds them, trying to understand a language that does not resonate with them unless it is translated into images that will help bring relief to the body and the reconstruction of the mind, meaning that these new images will lead to a path of self-discovery outside of the images that have been created to describe women. "The emphasis on translation emphasizes the process-driven, interactive nature of the medium she envisions" (Pavlić, 14).

One of Rich's most important poems is "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children" (1968), which "marks the goals of the new translations complexly, but clearly enough" (Pavlić, 14). The poem is divided into five sections, with the first-time use of complete prose in a poem. The poem talks about the time when her son and his friend decided to burn a maths textbook after the end of school. This autobiographical episode in Rich's present sends her back to her past when she used to spend time in the library – her father's library – and she discovered the story of Joan of Arc, an image that creates a juxtaposition with the burning of the maths book and the burning on the stake of Joan of Arc. This memory serves her to explore her relationship with her father – made of "love and fear in a house/knowledge of the oppressor/I know it hurts to burn" – a relationship that is now perceived as oppressive. The second section moves from language to physical

touch, as a relief from language itself. She refers to Native Americans' way of communicating through smoke signals until they had to learn the oppressor's language, the only language that she has available and needs it to speak to the poetic "you", the reader, the Other, women. The third section is a quotation from a protest that Rich went to rather than translating it and it ends with a lyrical parenthesis: "(the fracture of order/the repair of speech/to overcome this suffering)". Only after repairing language to speak to everyone will it be possible to overcome suffering. The fourth section of the poem takes a love relationship into question: Rich imagines the role of books in the lives of people, in a relationship, but these books are "useless", so even if people go to books to understand their experience of life, books are not useful as they speak the oppressor's language. For this reason, it almost becomes reasonable to "*burn the texts* said Artaud". The fifth and final section is in prose and Rich here puts together all of the previous sections with the awareness that the languages used by Frederick Douglas and Joan of Arc were "pure" as their language coincided with their actions and "language is a map of our failures" but also of the successes of people. The tone of voice is ignited throughout the poem, but it becomes even more pressing in this section despite the use of prose. The sentences are short and straight to the point, almost as if they were more verses united in one long one. "In America we have only the present tense", there is no past, no future, no hope as the poetic "I" and the poetic "you" are both in danger. She mentions napalm as a reference to the anti-war protests against the Vietnam war and it becomes also a reference to the burning of books and of oneself. "The typewriter is overheated, my mouth is burning, I cannot touch you and this is the oppressor's language". Rich often takes phrases and repeats them throughout the volume of poems or in the poem itself; in this case, the repetition conveys an urgency that is incremented by the use of the word burning. Often

anger is associated with increasing pressure and temperature and in this poem the metaphor of burning books instead of children, the burning of the typewriter as a metaphor of the passion that ignites the poet and her writing and the fact that the oppressor's language burns her tongue making it impossible to communicate clearly, are all images that convey the urgency and anger to find a language that speaks to everyone, that can ignite people towards a change and consequently to end suffering.

The theme of translation and of the difficulty of communication is brought forward also by the poem "Our Whole Life" in *Leaflets*. The poem starts with "Our whole life a translation/the permissible fibs/and now a knot of lies/eating at itself to get undone", referring to the fact that the "oppressor's language" is filled with lies that do not resonate with women's experience of life. The poet finds herself in the position of "Trying to tell the doctor where it hurts", and here she identifies with the post-colonial subject, "like the Algerian/who has walked from his village, burning/his whole body a cloud of pain/and there are no words for this/except himself." There are no words for his condition because these words are spelt with all "those dead letters" that are "rendered into the oppressor's language."

The missing translation is brought up again in the poem "Ghazal V", adapted from Mirza Ghalib. Ghazals, are an originally Arabic form of amatory poem or an ode, which is a conversation with a woman in an amatory and enticing manner. It deals with worldly and spiritual love and loss, which presents couplets – of which the second part in rhyme – and was embraced by medieval Persian poets.

Each couplet ends on the same word or phrase (the radif), and is preceded by the couplet's rhyming word (the qafia, which appears twice in the first couplet). The last couplet includes a proper name, often of the poet's. In the Persian tradition, each couplet was of the same meter and length, and the subject matter included both erotic longing and religious belief or mysticism. (Poetry Foundation)

In this poem, the poet conveys the frustration of talking without being heard as in the first verse "Even when I thought I prayed, I was talking to myself;/when I found the door shut, I simply walked away". The poem ends with the poet talking to a poetic "you" that could be society, which has "never cared to learn the structure of my language". Again, Rich underlines the problem of communication in "Part II: 3-7/70" in the eighth poem, where, in this case, she talks about poetry as a way of conveying her experience as a woman and as part of a group of people – women – who are dismissed: "Entering the poem as a method of leaving the room". This poetry is considered "of false problems, the shotgun wedding of the mind, the subversion of choice by language". The poem ends with a metaphor of unveiling the truth through the images of light purging the room, and the sun breaking in on the courtyard. This leads to the feeling of existence through the "force of the lumps of snow gritted and melting in the unloved corners of the courtyard".

The first poem of the first part and of the whole volume of *Diving Into Wreck (1971-1972)* (1973) is "Trying To Talk With a Man" (1971). The landscape is that of the desert, a place of deprivation and sterility. In this desert bombs are being tested, but these bombs are not external bombs, but internal, between the you and I of the poem. The whole poem is set in the past, a past that is beyond salvation, but not beyond understanding, as Margaret Atwood states in her review of the collection, and specifically this poem. The man and woman of the poem are trying to communicate, the woman feels like "an underground river/forcing its way between deformed cliffs/an acute angle of understanding/moving itself like a locus of the sun/into this condemned scenery". This desert, a metaphor of the sterility of the communication between man and woman, which they are trying to change but it is filled with silence, a silence that came with them into

the desert. In this poem the man talks about danger, a danger that the poet identifies in themselves and their relationship and lack of communication.

From the same volume, the poem "The Stranger" (1972) takes clarity and transforms it into "visionary anger" that is "cleansing my sight". This anger flowers from the perception of mercy. The last stanza of the poem talks about this stranger, the woman, who enters a room where the people in it speak a dead language. Again Rich takes forward the theme of language as a part of the change she foresees and hopes for. In this stanza the theme is women's identity through language:

> if I come into a room out of the sharp misty light
> and hear them talking a dead language
> if they ask me my identity
> what can I say but
> I am the androgyne
> I am the living mind you fail to describe
> in your dead language
> the lost noun, the verb surviving
> only in the infinitive
> the letters of my name are written under the lids
> of the newborn child

The last poem of the first part is the one that gives the title to the volume: "Diving Into The Wreck" (1972). Just as in other poems, Rich tries to understand herself in relation to the history of women written by men, so in this poem the act of diving becomes a way to destroy the old meaning in order to propose new ways of thinking. Rich looks at the past in this poem but without nostalgia, as she refuses to consider it desirable. However, it becomes the basis for her revisionist attitude, with the aim of destroying the old and the conventional with a new, emerging present. Revision is "an act of survival" (Rich "When We Dead Awaken" 18), especially for women. So, this dive becomes an exploration of the myths that have been used to describe and narrate women through the male gaze. This

dive takes the poet underwater, in unexplored depths that are both cultural and psychic, despite all of the obstacles of this journey, the suffering and the dangers of this dive. The preparation to this journey is made of conscious actions, such as "read", "loaded", "checked", and all the traditional types of equipment, "knife-blade", "body-armor", "flippers", "mask", that will help her during the descent. These details showcase the fact that this journey is a metaphor for an analytical plunge into her own inner self and the patriarchal culture. This descent into the ocean, in fact, can be interpreted as the poet's exploration of the unconscious. The objects used for the dive are both made to facilitate the descent as well as described as “awkward”, “absurd”, “useless”. Even the ladder that could be good for her descent, is described as useless and inessential for the plunge. Despite this, she uses it to understand and revise to ultimately reverse its traditional usefulness for getting into the water. This is a metaphor of the usefulness of tools that society and patriarchal culture has made available and their uselessness for women’s understanding of themselves.

Even though the journey looks like a scientific expedition, the purpose of it is to be se1f-exp1oratory and cultural exploratory:

> I am having to do this
> not like Cousteau with his
> assiduous team
> aboard the sun-flooded schooner
> but here alone.

In diving alone into the depths of the ocean-dominant cultural, with all of its myths, as well as in her psyche, she wants to redefine her consciousness by exploring and consequently confronting the cultural wreck, by herself:

and there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin.

This dive can be interpreted as a metaphor an ultimate equality between men and women, where “I am she: I am he”, which have finally freed themselves from the prescribed gender roles and myths, and it also is a metaphor for the unmasking of the patriarchal interpretation of reality. For this reason, Rich wants to also explore the collective consciousness, as well as history and gender relations.

I came to explore the wreck
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.

She needs a new language that is free from the myths and that can help her to explore the wreck, as “maps” and “purposes”. The “book of myths” that she mentions is the myth-making and stories that have been told and that have pushed society to consider women as less. The dive to the bottom is a metaphor for Rich exploring the obscured stories of women in history, the book of myths where “our names do not appear”. The wreck represents the past, the history, where the two mermaids represent men and women of the past, protecting the dominant culture of the wreck.

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.

The androgynous that continues to explore old meaning is substituted by the woman who is writing herself into history, as well as the collective of women.

The second part of *Diving Into Wreck* is made of only one poem, "The Phenomenology of Anger" (1972), divided into ten parts. With the word "phenomenology"" the title suggests that the poem is based on the philosophy of experience, so it represents the experience of anger in Adrienne Rich's life, but it can also be a poem on the experience of anger by women as a whole group of people. Rich shows in an angry tone of voice what are the circumstances and the experience of anger and the consequences of its repression or expression. When repressed, anger can lead to depression or madness, becoming a negative element in women's creative life. The poem opens with the contraposition of freedom and madness, of freedom and isolation:

> The freedom of the wholly mad
> to smear & play with her madness
> write with her fingers dipped in it
> the length of a room
>
> which is not, of course, the freedom
> you have, walking on Broadway
> to stop & turn back or go on
> 10 blocks; 20 blocks
>
> but feels enviable maybe
> to the compromised
>
> curled in the placenta of the real
> which was to feed & which is strangling her.

Just at the beginning of the volume there is quote from André Breton's novel *Nadja* (1928), which traces the story and obsession with the woman Nadja, a semi-autobiographical description of Breton's relationship with a patient of Pierre Janet, a

French psychologist, physician, philosopher and psychotherapist. The madness of this woman is then used as the incipit of this poem. A poem on anger that starts with madness clearly wants to criticize the myth of the madwoman in the attic, of the female hysteria that is a direct consequence of female anger, which stems from a woman's social and economical position in society. The poem then continues by describing the emotions that have been repressed for so long that it has become difficult to light them up, just like "a log that's lain in the damp/as long as this house has stood". To respond to this, she decides to "twist […] into a knot of old headlines/- this rose won't bloom", closing herself into a rose bud and not blooming into a full rose, emotions included. As the poet tries to light her emotions and encourage them to come, she is filled with self-hatred: "a monotone in the mind./The shallowness of a life in exile/even in the hot countries./Cleaver, staring into a window full of knives." In stanzas 4 to 6, the poet identifies the way that her anger tries to express itself. In the first stanza, the setting is domestic but she refers to the menstrual blood, to blood in general, which can be interpreted as physical violence. The fifth stanza starts with the consequences of repressing anger: "Madness. Suicide. Murder." Destructive consequences that seem to almost be the only solution as the poet asks herself "Is there no way out but these?". Here there is also a reference to the Vietnam war and how the fact that men seem so elusive is in contrast with the fact that they are "gunning down the babies at My Lai". The poet continues with the topic of murder in the sixth stanza where Rich releases her anger by giving herself the permission to fantasize about destroying her enemy with its own weapons. Killing is "to cut off from pain"; however, "the killer goes on hurting". Murder is "not enough" for the poet so she dreams of destroying the enemy:

> Not enough. When I dream of meeting
> the enemy, this is my dream:

white acetylene
ripples from my body
effortlessly released
perfectly trained
on the true enemy.

raking his body down to the thread
of existence
burning away his lie
leaving him in a new
world; a changed
man

The fire of this stanza burns away the lies, the outer layers of tradition that will leave the world a new place to live in, where man is changed as the male and female reunite and become whole. The use of acetylene is a metaphor for creative energy that blazes up, that cleanses the consciousness, and which also gives way to madness, to a destruction that becomes creation, hope in the case of the poem.

In the seventh stanza the poet gives voice to her anger with a clear and direct tone: “I hate you”. The poem begins with the “I” seeing the world as not a place to live in anymore, a place that needs to change as it has become “no longer viable”. And while men go out in the world “to spread impotence”, women stay in bed, but this only lightens her rage up. The hate that the poet feels is for the lies, the masks, the language that doesn’t resonate with her experience. She tries to understand what the feelings of the other person are, of men, and finds her answer only “as you defoliate the fields we lived from”.

I hate you.
I hate the mask you wear, your eyes
assuming a depth
they do not possess, drawing me

into the grotto of your skull
the landscape of bone
I hate your words
they make me think of fake
revolutionary bills
crisp imitation parchment
they sell at battlefields.

Last night, in this room, weeping
I asked you: *what are you feeling?*
do you feel anything?

Now in the torsion of your body
as you defoliate the fields we lived from
I have your answer.

In the eighth stanza, Rich imagines a new world, where women and men live together happily and connected to nature and the universe. A utopian image that is followed by "a woman's confession": "*The only real love I have ever felt/was for children and other women./Everything else was lust, pity,/self-hatred, pity, lust."* She then writes the names of famous women like Botticelli's Venus, the epitome of beauty and grace; Kali, the Mother Goddess of Time, Change, Creation, Power, Destruction and Death in Hinduism; Judith of Chartres, the infamous Judith and Holofernes, the most used image to depict women's rage and vendetta, as for example, Artemisia Gentileschi's painting of this story that has been for her a metaphor to depict her rape and the treatment of her as a woman as a consequence of this event. The last stanza uses a fragmented style to narrate testimonies of women "burning up [their] lives" with anger, trying to be careful of the dangers of the world. Women are now planning rebellion, an act perceived so against their being that it is compared to "Thoreau setting fire to the woods". The poem ends with an important statement that sums Rich's journey of self-awareness and of how this is perceived by society:

Every act of becoming conscious
(it says here in this book)
is an unnatural act

This poem is then followed by the third part of the collection, introduced with a quote by Leonard Cohen's song "Bird on the Wire", sung by Judy Collins:

I saw a beggar leaning on his crutch,
He said to me: Why do you ask for so much?
I saw a woman leaning on a door,
She said, Why not, why not, why not
ask for more?

An apparently decontextualized quote but fundamental as it embodies the fact that women need to start asking for more, they don't need to be content with their situation anymore. The first poem of this section is "Merced", divided into three stanzas, each one related to a moment in time. However, it does not follow a chronological order, in fact, it begins with the future, a fantasy "of old age". She starts listing reasons why this world is unfit: "prefab/buildings, smelling of shame/and hopeless incontinence/identical clothes of disposable paper, identical rations/of chemically flavored foods", images of hopelessness. In this stanza the most important word is "neutralize" as the poet, trying to alleviate the world's despair, feels that she is creating a sort of purgatory-on-earth in order to have absence of pain. Rich then jumps to the past and describes an apparently idyllic scene with her children, three boys, a landscape where pain has become central: from the burned feet, her body aching from the cold river to the "spasm of pain" of the final verse. This pain continues describing in the third stanza, where we find ourselves in the present. This pain becomes rage that "has passed my body, driving/ now out upon men and women/now inward upon myself". She mentions the fate of the anti-war protests, such as Norman Morrison, the Buddhists of Saigon, as well as "the black teacher/who put himself to

death/to waken guilt in hearts/too numb to get the message". She describes the world that she sees from above and she sees change happening, "a process they do not feel/ is spreading in our midst/and taking over our minds", a process that takes place "in a world of masculinity made/unfit for women and men". Rich fears that this process is a powerful thing at work, something that only she can see while the rest of the world seems oblivious of this process that is increasingly removing humanity's ability to feel, that is taking away what it is to be human.

The following poem of the volume is "A Primary Ground", introduced by a quote from Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* (1927), and a depiction of domesticity and women in the domestic realm. Here Rich describes the relation between women and the house, as a wife and as a mother, describing scenes of everyday life, such as the Thanksgiving dinner or "passing the salt/down a cloth ironed by a woman", the flattening of "the linen cloth again", "chestnuts puréed with care are dutifully eaten". Even the furniture reflects the woman as she becomes both "larger than life, or dwindling". All of these, however, are filled with emptiness, a feeling that she "thrust like a batch of letters to the furthest/dark of a drawer", a metaphor for the repression of her feelings. The last stanza is a metaphor and reference to the madwoman in the attic: the twin sister of the wife, who is dying, as "you and your wife take turns/carrying up the trays,/understanding her case, trying to make her/understand". This twin sister can be interpreted as both the other side of a woman, the repressed woman who is trying to free herself from patriarchy but who is also dying in the house, in her role as a wife and mother and hostess; on the other hand, this twin sister can be another woman in another house, as women shall try to come together to free themselves by the limiting walls of domestic life.

Finally, the poem "Translations" takes back the theme of language but in different way than usual: here language is needed to identify the commonalities between women, "*enemy, oven, sorrow*", as only these words can help the poet identify a woman of her time, a woman who could be interpreted as Sylvia Plath with the reference to the oven. In this poem, Rich writes about the topic of love, a topic that has been central in women's writing as the only way they could express themselves – as mothers, as wives, as lovers – but when she calls the man, he doesn't answer and the woman that is with him, the poet's sister – as in another woman and not biological sister – becomes the poet's enemy. However, this woman will soon "light her own way to sorrow" because she does not know that her grief is shared with all women, and it is "unnecessary/and political".

3.3. Power and politics through the body.

Between the publication of *Leaflets* and her following collection, *The Will to Change*, she wrote other poems. One in particular is noteworthy: "Tear Gas", which was written October 12, 1969, and based on the reports of the tear-gassing of demonstrators protesting for the treatment of G.I. prisoners in the stockade at Fort Dix, in New Jersey. This poem has a different structure compared to the previous ones: it almost follows the rules of prose rather than those of poetry and is fragmented. It conveys a sense of immediacy and anguish, and it can be considered a metaphor for the women's body as a political body. As the title mentions the word "tear", Rich uses it throughout the poem as "tears" that are born from her emotions, especially her anger and anguish at the incapability of communication: she states that she is "afraid/ of the language in (my) head", that she is "alone with language/and without meaning" and finally that she "need(s) a language to hear myself with/to see myself in". She also states that "our words misunderstand us/wanting a word that will shed itself like a tear/onto the page/leaving its

stain". The tears in this poem are "tears of rage, tears for yourself,/tears for the tortured men in the stockade and for/their torturers/tears of fear, of the child stepping into the adult/field of force, the woman stepping into the male/field/of violence, tears of relief, that your body was/here,/you had done it, every last refusal was over". These tears of anger, anguish, the immediacy and pressing tone in her voice lead up to the central theme and statement of the poem:

> The will to change begins in the body not in the mind
> My politics is in my body, accruing and expanding
> with every
> act of resistance and each of my failures
> Locked in the closet at 4 years old I beat the wall with
> my body
> that act is in me still

Women's bodies have always been a part of men's discourse and society has always tried to control them with rules. In this poem, however, Rich is liberating women's bodies and transforming them in a political body, she is gaining back the power to control it and use her body for her own purposes. The poem is a call for the others to listen, to read these lines as "these repetitions are beating their way/ toward a place where we can no longer be together/ where my body no longer will demonstrate outside/ your stockade/ and wheeling through its blind tears will make for the/ open air/ of another kind of action". The "we" in this statement refers to men and women and a situation where language will be different for men and women and where a woman's body will no longer need to be a political body. Although this path is still ongoing, Rich knows that everything is moving in the direction of another kind of action.

The first poem of *The Will to Change* and the first to be analyzed is an ode to change itself: "November 1968" is set in autumn and the theme of change and

transformation is rendered by this season, an in-between season that sees the trees change color and appearance, just as Rich was changing parts of her life at that moment. The journey of self-discovery is represented by the verses: “How you broke open, what sheathed you/until this moment/I know nothing about it/my ignorance of you amazes me/now that I watch you/starting to give yourself away/to the wind”. Rich is just then starting to understand herself, to discover the parts of herself that she kept hidden – the divorce from her husband was also caused by the realization of Rich’s lesbianism. Through this self-realization, she starts a new journey letting herself flow in the wind.

The following poem of the collection, “I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus”, is a metaphor of power. The myth tells us that Orpheus, a poet and bard, travelled with the Argonauts and Jason looking for the Golden Fleece and he also travelled to the underworld of Hades to recover his wife Eurydice. He was able to charm every living being, even stones, with his music and in one version of the myth he was killed by the hands of the maenads because they got tired of his mourning for his wife. The maenads were female followers of the god Dionysus and the word means “raving ones”, from the verb “to rave” because “because they were frenzied in the worship of Dionysus”. In Rich’s poem she identifies with the maenads as she dreams she will be the death of Orpheus. The whole poem revolves around the concept of power: she describes herself as a “woman in the prime of life, with certain powers/and those powers severely limited/by authorities whose faces I rarely see”. Right at the beginning of the poem she clearly states how her power as a woman is limited by authorities – society, government, and patriarchy in general – and who she rarely sees. She continues by saying that she is a “woman with a certain mission/which if obeyed to the letter will leave her intact”, meaning that as a woman she has a role and a mission in society and obeying to these

unwritten rules will leave her intact. But she is a woman who has the nerves of a panther, that has contacts among Hell's Angels – referring to the outlaw motorcycle club – and she is a woman "feeling the fullness of her powers/at the precise moment when she must not use them", so a woman aware of her own power only when this power is limited by the outside. She is a woman "who sees through the mayhem", the violence, and learns to walk against the wind, against the flow, "on the wrong side of the mirror". Rich uses the object mirror has a metaphor of how the world is perceived, so the reflection of the world as it is, and the other side of the mirror, where there is a different reflection, a different truth.

I am walking rapidly through striations of light and dark thrown under
an arcade.

I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain powers
and those powers severely limited
by authorities whose faces I rarely see.
I am a woman in the prime of life
driving her dead poet in a black Rolls-Royce
through a landscape of twilight and thorns.
A woman with a certain mission
which if obeyed to the letter will leave her intact.
A woman with the nerves of a panther
a woman with contacts among Hell's Angels
a woman feeling the fullness of her powers
at the precise moment when she must not use them
a woman sworn to lucidity
who sees through the mayhem, the smoky fires
of these underground streets
her dead poet learning to walk backward against the wind
on the wrong side of the mirror.

1968

Just as in the previous *Leaflets*, *The Will to Change* features a sequence of ghazals, "The Blue Ghazals", where Rich takes forward the discourse of lack of communication and the problem of translation. She dedicates ghazals to Wallace Stevens and Leroi Jones, but the most relevant to the thesis is the last one. The poem is introduced with pain, as in "pain made her conservative", in this case, the term "conservative" could be both a political reference and a scientific reference as in self-conservative. The poem then continues with the scars that this woman has that were caused by matches, which could refer to the witches burnt at the stake. The central theme of this poem is touch, which becomes political: "*The moment when a feeling enters the body*/ is political. This touch is political". The fact that women's feelings are not held as relevant and they are often dismissed or put into the category of "crazy" and "hysteric" makes the act of feeling entering the body as political, just as touch becomes political. Touch as in a love relationship – Rich was more and more self-aware of her lesbianism and how homosexuality was considered in the 1960s – and also touch as in sexual assault: the poem refers to the police and to accidents in the city, "your true map/is the tangling of all our lifelines". The poem then ends with the poetic "I" dreaming of floating on water, hand-in-hand with someone and she dreams of "sinking without terror", as a metaphor of letting go, of liberation from the heaviness of the gaze of others. Or without the feeling of terror that a man's touch could arise.

Before starting to talk about *Diving Into The Wreck (1971-1972)* (1973), it is important to approach Rich's essay that takes the same title of one of the volume's poems, "When We Dead Awaken", written in 1971 as a poem and in 1972 as an essay. The essay's complete title is "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", a fundamental and central theme of Rich's whole work as a poet. The essay tackles the problem of

women writers' writing as not being for women but always trying to be compliant with men's criticism and idea of literature. Rich thinks that "Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (Rich, 18) is an important act for women, it is considered an "act of survival" (Rich, 18). She also states that women, writers especially, "need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (Rich, 19). Rich often talks about the power that men hold over women, not only in the daily life, but also through writing as women have often written about love as the source of their suffering and as an inevitable fate, and modern poets like Sylvia Plath or Diane Wakoski, where "in the work of both Man appears as, if not a dream, a fascination and a terror, and that the source of the fascination and the terror, is simply, Man's power – to dominate, tyrannize, choose, or reject the woman". And it is in the works of these two poems that Rich notices that when women have a sense of themselves, their poetry is charged with "need, will, and female energy" (Rich, 19). This analysis stems from Rich's re-reading of Virginia Woolf, especially *A Room Of One's Own*, where she found the "sense of effort, of pains taken, of dogged tentativeness, in the tone of that essay" (Rich 20), a tone that denotes that suppressed anger that has been analyzed in the beginning of the chapter. The efforts that Virginia Woolf has taken to tone down her anger can be perceived by another writer like Rich who has embraced her anger and has used it as a source for the poems of her whole career. The reason why Virginia Woolf had to be so cool and detached was that:

> No male writer has written primarily or even largely for women, or with the sense of women's criticism as a consideration when he chooses his materials, his theme, his language. But to a lesser or greater extent, every woman writer has written for men even when […] she was supposed to be addressing women. If we have come to the point when this balance might begin to change, when

> women can stop being haunted, not only by "convention and propriety" but by internalized fears of being and saying themselves, then it is an extraordinary moment for the woman writer – and reader. (Rich 20).

Rich then continues by noticing that the women described in men's poetry were always beautiful women who were terrified of losing their beauty or their youth, a fate that was considered worse than death; or they could be "cruel and disastrously mistaken, and the poem reproached her because she had refused to become a luxury for the poet" (Rich 21). These images have strongly influenced women's writing as these myths and images are the products of culture, the culture of the time, but which is not too distant from the present idea of women in literature and society. Women have often tried to find their way to express their emotions and feeling but they find themselves dealing with the image of Woman that has been written by men, which is not the way that women describe themselves or consider themselves. In fact, the theme of a new language that resonates with women's experience of life has been Rich's central theme from the beginning and especially her works after the 1971 volume *Diving Into the Wreck*.

Rich started writing during college but interrupted this after her marriage and the birth of her children. This brought her a great deal of frustration and insecurity regarding her role as a woman as mother and wife, and a woman as writer. She describes her thought process in this passage:

> I was writing very little, partly from fatigue, that female fatigue of suppressed anger and the loss of contact with her own being; partly from the discontinuity of female life with its attention to small chores, errands, work that others constantly undo, small children's constant needs. What I did write was unconvincing to me; my anger and frustration were hard to acknowledge in or out of poems because in fact I cared a great deal about my husband and my children. Trying to look back and understand that time I have tried to analyze the real nature of the conflict. [..] But to write poetry or fiction, or even to think well, is not to fantasize, or to put fantasies on paper. For a poem to coalesce, for a character or an action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality

> which is in no way passive. And a certain freedom of the mind is needed – freedom to press on, to enter the currents of your thought like a glider pilot, knowing that your motion can be sustained, that the buoyancy of your attention will not be suddenly snatched away. Moreover, if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment. You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its oppo- site or to call experimentally by another name. For writing is re-naming. Now, to be maternally with small children all day in the old way, to be with a man in the old way of marriage, requires a holding-back, a putting-aside of that imaginative activity, and seems to demand instead a kind of conservatism. I want to make it clear that I am not saying that in order to write well, or think well, it is necessary to become unavailable to others, or to become a devouring ego. This has been the myth of the masculine artist and thinker; and I repeat, I do not accept it. But to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way is in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination. (Rich, "When We Dead Awaken", 23)

Rich continues to analyze her response to the Sixties and Seventies events, the protests, the feminist movement, and how she couldn't find the right way to approach these events when reading the male world of academy's answers. As a woman, she needed to think for herself and her own relationship with these things. It was at that time that she started to feel that politics what not "something: 'out there' but something 'in here' and of the essence of my condition" (Rich 24). This has led to a search for her own identity as a woman poet detached from the myths that men have created and written until then. As Rich describes it, "the awakening of consciousness is not like the crossing of a frontier – one step, and you are in another country. Much of women's poetry has been of the nature of the blues song: a cry of pain, of victimization, or a lyric of seduction. And today, much poetry by women – and prose, for that matter – is charged with anger" (Rich 25). It is this anger that Rich thinks that women writers need to tap into and to be explored as this anger is experienced by all women and it is real, with real sources in the environment and in society.

The poem “When We Dead Awaken” (1971), from the collection *Diving Into the Wreck*, is divided into three parts and traces the rewiring of the creative and relational life in a world that has a structure made to keep them apart, a world where “everything outside our skins is an image/of this affliction”. In this poem she talks to another woman about their experience as women looking for their own self, their identity as women in contrast with the identity of men that the world holds on to: “even you, fellow-creature, sister,/sitting across from me, dark with love,/working like me to pick apart/working like me to remake/this trailing knitted thing, this cloth of darkness,/this woman’s garment, trying to save the skein.” This part takes what Rich writes in her essay and renders it in poetry: the re-vision of women’s writing, the remaking of the myths around women, the picking apart all of the literature, the history of the world where women barely are acknowledged. The second part of the poem compares the brain, the mind of a woman to “a huge lock shaped like a woman’s head/but the key has not been found.” She continues by saying that in there are other keys that open other doors, lost doors as the women has lost touch with these parts of her womanhood: “In the compartments are other keys/to lost doors, an eye of glass.” The third part of the poem is the awareness of the lies that they have been told about their existence as women, “in the matrix of need and anger”. The doubts and the things that they have been told, have been repeated so many times that “the words get thick with unmeaning”. Rich compares the new awareness of these lies and the discovery of the truth as “a weed flowering in tar, a blue energy piercing the massed atoms of a bedrock disbelief.”

From the same volume, “Waking in the Dark” (1971) follows divided into five parts where Rich adopts different lyrical styles. The first part is fragmented, without any punctuation marks except for the parenthesis. The first part is a metaphor of women not

being able to be in control of their image (and body as well), describing it as "composed of molecules" that are "arranged without our knowledge and consent", just like the picture of a man from Bangladesh who doesn't know that his picture is being used on the front page. The second part of the poem continues with a reference to the power game between men and women as Rich describes the scene of animal blood dumped in the ocean to attract the sharks. Blood here becomes not only a metaphor for violence but also of the menstrual blood, of the most physical display of femininity that has often been associated with negative myths. Here the woman and the animals are the same thing, and the blood that has been used to attract the sharks is the blood, metaphorical blood, of women who have attracted the men-sharks.

> You worship the blood
> you call it hysterical bleeding
> you want to drink it like milk
> you dip your finger into it and write
> you faint at the smell of it
> you dream of dumping me into the sea.

The third part sees the poetic "I", the poet in an isolated place and alone, "the hermit's cabin, the hunters' shack –/scenes of masturbation/and dirty jokes", all elements that allude to loneliness and isolation. She continues by defining this "a man's world. But finished./They themselves have sold it to the machines." In this man's world, the poet walks in the forest, "dressed in old army fatigues", as a veteran comes back from war, in this case a war of sexes. She thinks that "nothing will save this", she is walking alone and "kicking the last rotting logs", which, surprisingly, do not smell like death but of life, a slight hint to hope and to a positive outcome of this journey, "wondering what on earth it all might have become". The last two parts are an exploration of the body, of the control and loss of control on one's body and on someone else's body. In the end of the poem the

poet and the Other will be standing and handing to each other the "power-glasses", looking down at earth to find "where the split began".

In the poem "From the Prison House" (1971), the poet acquires a third eye: especially Eastern philosophies consider the third eye as a gate that leads to a higher consciousness, possible through meditation, and it symbolizes a state of enlightenment. In Rich's case, the third eye helps her see the world for what it really is, so the truth about the world she lives in as a woman. She writes "this eye/is not for weeping/its vision/must be unblurred/though tears are on my face/its intent is clarity/it must forget/nothing".

The *Diving Into The Wreck* volume ends with the poem "Meditations for a Savage Child", a poem in five acts and it mixes prose and poetry through passages of the translation of J.M. Itard's account of *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*, the most famous story of a feral child, set in 1800 in France. The poem is structured with a small prose passage and then Rich's poetry as an extension of what the prose has conveyed. In the first part, the passage talks about the escape of Victor of Aveyron from civility into the forest. On the other hand, Rich uses this escape tentative from society as a metaphor for the incompatibility between men and women: men have taught women what to like, names of things that women don't need; they were taught the "language/the thread of their lives/were strung on". The second part is about survival and nature's tendency "to repair and conserve what she tends secretly to impair and destroy": in this part, Rich thinks about "the lesson of the human ear/which stands for music, which stands for balance", like that of a cat. She is able to analyze the ear as it is outside of the skull, however she is not able to see "that part of the brain/which is pure survival". She then proceeds to move in "the most primitive part", here "every wound is registered/as scar tissue": here Rich means that she goes deep into the consciousness – or unconsciousness – where the scars

that life gave her are registered as scar tissue. This place is “a cave of scars!/ancient, archaic wallpaper”, here the scars create layers on layers, from the first to the most recent one. The process of delving deep into the remotest part of her consciousness means to go so deep and so back in the past that “language is no longer personal”, another language opposed to the present one. The third part takes forward the theme of language as it becomes sound, prehuman and radical, because her throat is cut, just as Victor’s throat was cut, and the telephone that the poet uses is ripped out, so she cannot communicate in any way. The scar becomes a sign of mistrust, of a scream, and this makes the poet acknowledge how little did Victor trust his keepers. The scar was a consequence of probably an attempt to take his life, so Rich mentions the rates of infanticide in the 18th century as she then goes back to her past, when she used to play with other kids in the vineyards until they were “warned to stay away from there”. There was an abortionist’s house, something that was still not considered a woman’s right and against Christianity, and this made them all shiver as they were scared. “*Men can do things to you*/was all they said” are the last verses of this part, almost as a warning for women and not for children. The last part of the poem is about power and control over the body, Victor’s body in prose and women’s body in Rich’s words. The poem ends with one question without question mark but nonetheless the final “why” sums up Rich’s research for a new language, a new self-awareness, and a re-vision of the history of women.

In the analyzed poems, Rich has always been aware of the repressed anger and the self-destructive violence of women’s situation; however, she does not promote outbursts of anger. On the contrary, she tries to demonstrate through words that there is a need to stay human and to “gain a humanizing reality in the eyes of each other and in the eyes of men” (Farwell, “The Friction Of The Mind”, 160). Through her poems she focuses on the

problem of the oppressor's language and how it has become fragmented and false. Rich's poetry is imbued with "the power of anger, continually examined, continually controlled" (Farwell 160). Rich has once remarked in an interview that for her "anger can be a kind of genius if it's acted on" and she has acted on it by transforming her repressed anger into poetry that analyze, redefine and re-visions the surrounding world and language.

4. Reclaiming difference: Audre Lorde's poetics

If Adrienne Rich's poetry is considered the representation of women's experience, especially white, Audre Lorde's poetics traces the experience of women of color. Born in 1934 as Audrey Geraldine Lorde from immigrant parents, her father was from the Barbados and her mother was Grenadian and born on the island of Carriacou. Because of this origin, her mother's skin tone could be passed as Spanish and this would lead her to look down to anyone with a darker skin tone, even her own daughter Audre. Growing up, Audre heard the stories of the West Indies from her mother and these stories have influenced some of the topics of her writing. However, the relationship with her family, especially her mother, was difficult and what can be considered "tough love".

While Rich is on a journey of self-discovery of who she really is as a woman in a society that oppresses women and considers them as inferior human beings, Audre Lorde has a clear idea of her identity, which is made of not one but a multitude that speak to different facets of herself: she was a Black, feminist, lesbian poet. This chapter will delve into the poetry of Audre Lorde and through her poetry identify those topics that can be considered political, which are supported by the essays and speeches she wrote. The focus will be to highlight the different facets of Audre Lorde and how they communicate between each other, uncovering the metaphors and poetic style she chooses to use.

4.1. From silence to action: poetry as a tool for communication

The American feminist movement of the 1960s fought for women's rights, for equality and against the Vietnam war. They were also concerned with the rights of minorities such as black people and the LGBTQ+ community. However, the need for a black feminism that could work alongside the mainstream American feminist movement

was strong. Despite the fighting and protesting for women, black women were left on the side of the discourse as their experience of inequality was different from white women. Barbara Smith – an American, lesbian feminist and socialist who has played an important role in the Black feminist movement in the US – asserts "all segments of the literary world – whether establishment, progressive, Black, female or lesbian – do not know, or at least act as if they do not know, that Black women writers and Black lesbian writers exist" (Smith 20). The need for a Black feminist movement stems from the invisible existence of Black writers, especially Black women and even more in particular Black lesbian women. The fact that many magazines, books and articles that have been devoted to the subject of women writers include only a few names of Black and other Third-World women writers is what sparks the rage into Black women such as Barbara Smith. In her article she tries to connect the politics of Black women's lives to what they write and their situation as artists. She underlines how important the role that criticism plays in the creation of a body of literature and how this criticism does not take into consideration a part of what is being written and published. For a book to be real and be remembered, it needs to be talked about. And books written by Black authors have always been viewed as a subcategory of American literature and the criticism on Black literature has been kept alive by Black critics before it became interesting for white people.

> Before the advent of specifically feminist criticism in this decade, books by white women, on the other hand, were not clearly perceived as the cultural manifestation of an oppressed people. It took the surfacing of the second wave of the North American feminist movement to expose the fact that these works contain a stunningly accurate record of the impact of patriarchal values and practice upon the lives of women and more significantly that literature by women provides essential insights into female experience. (Smith 21)

The existence of the feminist movement led to the growth of a feminist literature, whilst the parallel Black feminist movement evolved much slower, which had an impact on

Black literature that has been mainly ignored during the same period of the white feminist movement. If on the one hand there was a political movement that supported the revision and criticism of feminist literature, on the other hand it cannot be said the same for Black literature, as "there is no political presence that demands a minimal level of consciousness and respect from those who write or talk about our lives" and, in addition, "there is not a developed body of Black feminist political theory whose assumptions could be used in the study of Black women's art" (Smith 21). Furthermore, whenever there is someone dealing with Black women's books, these are inserted into the context of Black literature, which does not take into consideration sexual politics, so it becomes even more necessary to create a "Black feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers" (Smith 21).

The rise of a Black feminist approach to Black women's writing is necessary and has been due for some time, but, even though the development of Black studies and post-colonial studies has led to new and diversified approaches nowadays, the consideration and visibility given to books written by minorities is still not as wide as that given to white women's books. For this reason it becomes important to shed a light on writers and poets who not only had an active part in the rise of a Black feminist movement through speeches and an active participation in the movement, but also writers and poets who narrate their story from their point of view, inserted in the context of a white America. It is from this point of view that Audre Lorde becomes an important standpoint from which to take into consideration her poetic and political voice. By reclaiming the multitudes of her identity, Audre Lorde speaks up and gives voice to different types of oppression: racism, patriarchy and homophobia.

And it's exactly the act of speaking up that is at the base of Lorde's literary work, the fact that there is much to be talked about and that needs to be talked about. As Lester C. Olson states in his essay "On the Margins of Rhetoric: Audre Lorde Transforming Silence into Language and Action" (1997), "her speeches […] often examine human differences communicated within a sociocultural system of power, ranging as it does across symbolic oppositions […] which Lorde criticizes as simplistic and as useful to dominant groups for exploiting subordinated communities" (Olson 49-50). Here Olson focuses almost exclusively on her speeches and essays, which are a part of Audre Lorde, her political voice, while I will be focusing on her poetic voice, with the support of also her political voice, because "the personal is political".

As already mentioned, Lorde made herself more powerful by self-defining herself, as she also affirms in her essay "Age, Race, Class, & Sex", which can be found in *Sister Outsider* (1984):

> My fullest concentration of energy is available to be only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without restrictions of an externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living. (120-121)

Audre Lorde cannot be limited by one box with one identity, but she is a mosaic of different parts of herself that are not limited by external and imposed definitions, and she needs all of these parts that become a whole to fight against the oppression, "those struggles" that she has embraced, accepted, but does not ignore. The reclaiming of her selves is at the heart of her literary works and is used as a mirror of how society treats each of her definitions: the fact that she was black meant that she was oppressed for her race, being woman meant being oppressed for her gender and being lesbian meant that

she was silenced and rendered invisible by the whole heterosexual community of people, including black women. In her essay "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action", originally delivered at the Lesbian and Literature panel of the Modern Language Association's 28th December 1977 meeting, she talks about the importance of speaking up against the oppression of silence. She considers the act of speaking up a way to reclaim the power through language, made to be used against women and minorities. Language becomes important and a way that women in general can redefine their existence and their needs, and by doing this they bridge the differences between them. In this essay, Lorde uses the metaphor of death to describe silence: "Death, on the other hand, is the final silence." She starts by saying how she considers speaking important, despite the risk of "having it bruised or misunderstood" ("The Transformation of Silence" 40), and she then continues by talking about how she discovered she has cancer and how this discovery has helped her put into a new and different perspective her whole life. This is where she reflects on how the thing that she regretted the most were her silences:

> Of what had I *ever* been afraid? To question or to speak as I believed could have meant pain, or death. But we all hurt in so many different ways, all the time, and pain will either change or end. Death, on the other hand, is the final silence. And that might be coming quickly, now, without regard for whether I have ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else's words. And I began to recognize a source of power within myself that comes from the knowledge that while it is most desirable not to be afraid, learning to put fear into a perspective gave me a great strength. I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. ("The Transformation of Silence"41)

In this passage, Audre Lorde confirms the metaphor that silence equals death, and how remaining silent is a betrayal to oneself as much as cancer is a betrayal to the health of the body. Comparing silence to cancer, she tries to speak to a wider audience, because cancer does not discriminate, and by doing this she bridges the differences between race,

class and sex, and is able to have her voice heard by everyone in the room on the central topic of this speech: that language, that one's voice is important and that whenever one speaks up, it can lead to action and, thus, to change.

> And, of course, I am afraid– you can hear it in my voice– because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation and that always seems fraught with danger. But my daughter, when I told her of our topic and my difficulty with it, said, "tell them about how you're never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there's always that one little piece inside of you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don't speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth." […] ("The Transformation of Silence" 42)

For Lorde there is no positive outcome from silence. For subordinated communities, such as the black community, silence means invisibility, which leads to oppression and violence. As bell hooks states, "speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being an object to being a subject" (bell hooks, *Talking Back*, 1989, 12).

> We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us. The fact that we are here and that I speak not these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken. ("The Transformation of Silence" 44)

The breaking of silence is a fundamental cause that increases the importance of communication between heterogeneous communities; however, the act of breaking silence implies the act of listening, which is the most difficult activity, "especially when the perception of differences is great, especially when differences underlying cultural experiences may shape our very abilities to listen (Olson 64). Breaking the silence can take many forms: by self-naming herself, Lorde promotes identifications and

differentiations. In his essay, Olson endeavors the use of language "to affirm and promote underlying values, such as active and respectful listening across many differences […], while drawing upon some similarities" (Olson 66). The bridging of differences stated in Lorde's essay is a call to action to create a more complex understanding of society using these differences as a resource and not as a division.

What is important about the essay "The Transformation of Silence" is that it gives us a perspective on what has been Lorde's objective with her literary work: through essays, speeches, poetry and prose, she wanted to tell her story and urge people to listen to a different and diverse voice. All of her work comes from a call to action for anyone who listens carefully, whether it be through her essays and speeches, or through the more personal writings, such as her poetry and prose. The breadth and diversity of this production highlights even more how much Lorde needed to speak up against oppression, how much she needed to express her inner turmoil, her inner emotions in her poetry and her more political ideas and views in her essays. Even though there is much written on her biomythopgraphy, poetry has always been her first and primary medium of expression, whether it be political events or personal feelings related to her experiences.

In her interview with Adrienne Rich, published in *Signs* in the Summer issue of 1981, Rich and Lorde talk about Lorde's work in poetry and racism. In this interview, Lorde talks about how she arrived to poetry and what it means for her. After a question from Rich regarding Lorde's essays "Poems Are Not Luxuries" and "Uses of the Erotic", Lorde speaks about how she dealt with emotions and how she had to find a way to get and give information, as she found that the way people talked around her wasn't effective or didn't make sense to her at the time when she was an infant. She then adds:

> When you asked me how I began writing, I told you how poetry functioned specifically for me from the time I was very young, from nursery rhymes. When someone said to me, “How do you feel?” or “What do you think?” or asked another direct question, I would recite a poem, and somewhere in that poem would be the feeling, somewhere in it would be the piece of information. It might be a line. It might be an image. The poem was my response. (Lorde, “Interview", 714)

From this experience, she realized that poetry was not only a way for her to learn how to name her feelings and sensations, but it became for her a way to also express and convey her thoughts and feelings. In the terms of my thesis, the fact that she used poetry as a way to understand herself, means that reading other people’s writing can help the reader understand more about themselves, and even the writer themselves could understand more about themselves while writing for others. In this two-way communicative process, reader and writer learn and communicate with each other about each other. And in relation to this, Lorde realized that the only way she could express the complexity of the emotions she was feeling was to write poems herself. At the beginning she wouldn’t write them down, keeping them in her head and learning them by heart. She affirms that she remembers trying to use poetry to think and found the way other people think amazing and curious. Despite using nursery rhymes and other poems as a way to express her feelings, Lorde states that the way she uses word and silence comes from her mother.

> The important value of nonverbal communication, beneath language. My life depended on it. At the same time living in the world and using language. And I didn't want to have anything to do with the way she was using language. My mother had a strange way with words; if one didn't serve her or wasn't strong enough, she'd just make up another word, and then that word would enter our family language forever, and woe betide any of us who forgot it. But I think I got another message from her ... that there was a whole powerful world of nonverbal communication and contact between people that was absolutely essential and that was what you had to learn to decipher and use. One of the reasons I had so much trouble growing up was that my parents, my mother in particular, always expected me to know what she was feeling and what she expected me to do without telling me. And I thought this was natural. But my mother would expect me to know things, whether or not she spoke them. (“Interview” 715)

Growing up with her mother made it difficult for Lorde to communicate with others, as she got used to intuiting what other people wanted from her, thus she applied this also in school. She stated that for her, everything that she read, "was like a poem, with different curves, different levels. So I always felt that the ways I took things in were different from the ways other people took them in" ("Interview" 716). In this interview, Lorde goes on talking about how her experience in Mexico has been an epiphany on poetry for her and when she went back to New York she wrote a prose piece, called "La Llorona", based on the legend of that part of Mexico, Cuernavaca. The legend tells the story of a woman on the basis of the Medea story, so Lorde took this legend and wrote her story based on how she was feeling and on her relationship with her mother. This story was published under a pseudonym because, as Lorde states, she doesn't "write stories. I write poetry. So I had to put it under another name" (Lorde 718). This statement in the interview goes hand in hand with the renaming of her self as a Black, feminist, lesbian poet.

Her first collection of poems, *The First Cities*, was published in 1968 by The Poets Press with an introduction by Diane de Prima. This collection was published during Lorde's workshop on poetry at Tougaloo, a black college in Mississippi. This experience, her first publication and the first teaching opportunity, changed her relationship with poetry and has shown her a new way through which she can work to make a change in people's lives, in society. Especially her teaching experience has been helpful in understanding more about herself and in learning "about courage" and "to talk" (Lorde 721). Tougaloo had shown her that poetry was not the only thing that she wanted to do: "From the time I went to Tougaloo and did that workshop, I knew: not only, yes, I am a poet, but also, this is the kind of work I'm going to do" (Lorde 723).

Another important essay is “Poetry Is Not a Luxury”, published in 1977, where Lorde affirms that poetry is the only medium women have to get in touch with old feelings and ways of knowing that have been long forgotten. As she states in the first paragraph, “this is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless – about to be birthed, but already felt” (Lorde, “Poetry”, 36). Again the topic of silence, which, together with fear, can lose control over women’s lives only when women “learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny, and flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living” (“Poetry” 36). She affirms that inside each woman there is a dark place where one can find “an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling” (“Poetry” 37). She continues by saying that poetry is essential for women’s existence as it is the only way women can name the nameless, can get in touch with long forgotten emotions and to finally explore and achieve knowledge on oneself.

> For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. As they become known and accepted to ourselves, our feelings, and the honest exploration of them, become sanctuaries and fortresses and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas, the house of difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action. (“Poetry” 37)

Lorde, then, makes a reference to the most well-known quote of Western philosophy, which is “cogito ergo sum”, or in English “I think therefore I am”. Lorde quotes Descartes in her essay by saying: “The white father told us, I think therefore I am; and the black mothers in each of us – the poet – whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free” (Lorde 38). With this statement, Lorde highlights a dichotomy between mind/intellect (the white oppressor) vs body/feeling (the oppressed) and how each of us have a “black mother

– the poet" inside of us that can help us tap into emotions and the inner self to really be free from society, from limitations, from oppression by other people, regardless of gender, race and class. As she states in her interview with Adrienne Rich, when talking about the black mother in each of us, she refers to "the black mother who is the poet in every one of us. Now when males, or patriarchal thinking whether it's male or female, reject that combination then we're truncated" (Lorde, "Interview", 729). What Lorde means here is that rationality needs to go hand in hand with the black mother, the poet, the emotions, because whenever we discard one for the other, we become incomplete. By referring to the "white fathers", she refers to the old way of thinking, the standardized way of thinking that has been set by ancient Western thinkers that have not spoken for women, nor for black women. Poetry thus becomes the way through which people, women especially and black women in particular, can free themselves from judgement and oppression, and can finally express and see the truth of their emotions. Women, especially, have an array of emotions that should not be felt – such as anger – that has been hidden away in the depths of one's inner self, and these can only be released through poetry, through language, a language that speaks for women, for black women. Poetry is not a luxury because, for women, it is an essential and necessary way to finally find one's true voice from within.

> For within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were meant to kneel to thought as we were meant to kneel to men. But women have survived. As poets. And there are no new pains. We have felt them all already. We have hidden that fact in the same place where we have hidden our power. They lie in our dreams, and it is our dreams that point the way to freedom. They are made realizable through our poems that give us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare. If what we need to dream, to move our spirits most deeply and directly toward and through promise, is a luxury, then we have given up the core-the fountain-of our power, our womanness; we have give up the future of our worlds. For there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt, of examining what our ideas really mean (feel like) on Sunday morning at 7 AM, after brunch, during wild love, making war, giving birth; while we suffer

> the old longings, battle the old warnings and fears of being silent and impotent and alone, while tasting our new possibilities and strengths. (Lorde, "Poetry", 39)

And it is exactly through poetry that women can finally start speaking up, giving voice to the hidden emotions that are now being uncovered through writing.

4.2. The black woman, the black poet: reclaiming black womanhood

When women started writing, the majority of their public of readers were men, particularly white men in positions of power or that have had an education. This meant that they had to adapt their language and topics to the preferences of their readers. The same can be said for Afro-American writers, whom, until the 1960s, presented aspects of their black life while addressing a white, middle-class public of readers. Like every other mainstream institution, even literary institutions had to serve to ideology of that public, which means promoting works that reproduced the racial and sexual stereotypes, and myths as well, and on the other hand the excluded every text that went against those stereotypes. By doing this, they replicated white dominance and black subordination. The 1960s were animated by a movement of Afro-American political and cultural nationalism and this led to the creation of a black aesthetic in literature. As Lawrence Hogue affirms in his text *Discourse and the Other: The Production of the Afro-American Text* (1986), this aesthetic promoted and valued literary works that reproduced "the cultural nationalist's ideologically defined Afro-American historical experience" (Lawrence 11), while excluding those which used the mainstream stereotypes. However, this does not apply to black womanhood, as it was common in both white and black communities and persisted also in works by black nationalists. There was a myth that spread between black men and women, which was that black women were liberated in order to support their men due to unemployment, and this caused conflict between men and women. In her

essay “Audre Lorde: Revising Stereotypes of Afro-American Womanhood” (1991), Ekaterini Georgoudaki states:

> Michele Wallace points out the misogyny existing in the 1960s Harlem community, and she criticizes the contemporary black man for maintaining both Anglo-American middle-class ideals of beauty and womanhood, which excluded the black woman, and certain negative stereotypes of the black woman, such as: a domineering, invincible, masculine, Amazon-like matriarch castrating the black man, a fallen Eve, a monster, a beast of burden, and a sex toy; these stereotypes were originally created by the white slave society in order to devalue her and thus to justify her economic and sexual exploitation. Wallace further criticizes the black nationalist movement for supporting the black woman's self-effacement, her subservience to the black man, and her exclusion from public life, despite the common goal of all black people towards their liberation. (48)

Audre Lorde, as well as Wallace, talked about the devaluation of black womanhood in the black community through her own experience of oppression by white male privilege and the white ideals of womanhood. Despite these negative stereotypes, there were also black writers trying to construct new myths and images that could be inserted in the black nationalistic aesthetic of the 1960s. “For example, they presented black women as ‘queens’, ‘mothers of the Universe’, and symbolic holders of the black race’s moral condition” (Georgoudaki 49). However, as Barbara Christian states in her text "Introduction," *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation* (1984), these new stereotypes, which were created as a reaction to the old ones, were transformed into “Sapphire, Aunt Jemima, the black mammy, the sex kitten, and the evil woman-images germinated the white southern mythology and enriched by film, television, and social programs even up to the present” (Christian 16). So, black women realized it was their responsibility to change these stereotypes and define themselves through the revision of their “experience from their own perspective in order to prevent the distorting and dehumanizing effects of stereotypes” (Georgoudaki 49). For this reason, the reclaiming and self-defining of Auder Lorde’s existence becomes central in her literary work. She

had frequently stressed the importance of her self-naming as a Black woman, a black woman-loving feminist poet, and she considers this self-definition fundamental for the survival of black women in a hostile environment. This is what Audre Lorde means in her essay "The Transformation of Silence" with breaking the silences: with her own self-definition she said out loud who she is, going beyond the dehumanization and invisibility by the racist and sexist society. As Lorde affirms in her interview with Karla Hammond (1980):

> AL: If we don't name ourselves, we are nothing. As a Black woman I have to deal with identity or I don't exist at all. I can't depend on the world to name me kindly, because it never will. If the world defines you, it will define you to your disadvantage. So either I'm going to be defined by myself or not at all. In that sense becomes a survival situation . . .
>
> KH: Is self-definition the greatest issue women face?
>
> AL: I think self-definition is the first large question every human being faces - particularly women because we have been supplied a definition that has been alien to us, just as Blacks in America have been. Without that self definition there is no contact with personal power; without that contact of power there is no movement; and without movement, there's surely death. (19)

The act of self-definition and the reclaiming of her existence are fundamental in the fight against racism for Lorde. The fact of self-naming herself as Black takes back the power of her own being and marks a stance against the white oppressors, who want Black women to be submitted to Black men's oppression. This stance is what gives courage to Lorde to stand up and speak up against the blatant racism that pervades not only the white American society but also the Black communities and in particular the Black women communities. The fact that there is little to no connection between Black women to stand against oppression, regardless of the color of the skin of the oppressor, fills Lorde with rage and anger. Some of her essays in *Sister Outsider* talk about this anger and this rage that fills each and every Black woman, and these two aggressive and violent feelings are usually unleashed on those closest to them, on those who are not the real source of those

emotions and especially on those who could actually benefit from a unified effort against the true source of this anger and hatred. The essays I am talking about are "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger" and "Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving". In these essays Lorde talks widely and deeply about the issues of hate amongst Black women and how this hate stems from the inner racism that pushes a Black woman to hate her reflection in the mirror. The consequences of hating oneself are hating those that look like that reflection and are the embodiment of all the suffering and the pain that each Black woman has to endure during her lifetime. So, the act of self-definition becomes an act of survival, an act of empowerment that needs to be passed on to every Black woman in order to unify the effort against oppression, sexist and racist. An important essay on the topic of anger is "The Uses of Anger", published in 1981 and present also in the book *Sister Outsider*. In this essay Lorde is speaking to an academic public of mostly white women at the NWSA Convention (National Women's Studies Association) where she speaks about "Women responding to racism". In this speech and essay, Audre Lorde talks about how her life is imbued of anger because of her experience as a Black woman.

> My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, on that anger, beneath that anger, on top of that anger, ignoring that anger, feeding upon that anger, learning to use that anger before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight of that anger. My fear of that anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also. Women responding to racism means women responding to anger, the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and coopting. My anger is a response to racist attitudes, to the actions and presumptions that arise out of those attitudes. If in your dealings with other women your actions have reflected those attitudes, then my anger and your attendant fears, perhaps, are spotlights that can be used for your growth in the same way I have had to use learning to express anger for my growth. ("The Uses of Anger" 278)

Audre Lorde speaks about her anger, she is vocal about this emotion and has identified the source of this anger, which is also the anger of other Black women, even if they still keep it under harness, as a way to explain how to use it and how it can have a positive effect rather than a negative one. As already mentioned in previous chapters, anger has always been considered a negative emotion and one that shall not be disclosed by women, as it goes against the ideal image of femininity, which is delicacy, posed, graceful. Virginia Woolf's anger was suppressed and expressed with a detached tone of voice because expressing emotions was considered not objective and "masculine", in compliance with the literary standards of the time. On the other hand, Adrienne Rich re-reads Virginia Woold noticing her suppressed anger through her written words and decided to use anger as a creative force to write about her experience as a woman and to also be politically vocal against oppression of every kind. Whilst Virginia Woolf would use language to express the ambivalence of human emotions in her writing, Adrienne Rich uses her poetry as a way to discover herself as a woman or a feminist outside of society's established norms and to search for a language that would speak to women for women, against the oppressor's language. Audre Lorde, ultimately, embraces completely her anger and uses it as a fuel to speak up, to break the silence and to show herself for who she truly is.

Anger is a masculine emotion, on the same level as strength and power, which can only be associated with men. If anger is expressed by women, it becomes hysteria, which comes from the Greek *hysterikos*, from *hystera* womb; from the Greek notion that hysteria was peculiar to women and caused by disturbances of the uterus (Merriam-Webster dictionary). The term now means:

1. a psychoneurosis marked by emotional excitability and disturbances of the psychogenic, sensory, vasomotor, and visceral functions;
2. behavior exhibiting overwhelming or unmanageable fear or emotional excess; (Merriam-Webster dictionary)

This unmanageable emotion which is anger is used as a powerful tool in feminist theory and, especially, in the fight against racism.

> Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration in all those assumptions underlining our lives. I have seen situations where white women hear a racist remark, resent what has been said, become filled with fury, and remain silent, because they are afraid. That unexpressed anger lies within them like an undetonated device, usually to be hurled at the first woman of Color who talks about racism. But anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies. Anger is loaded with information and energy. [...] The angers between women will not kill us if we can articulate them with precision, if we listen to the content of what is said with at least as much intensity as we defend ourselves from the manner of saying. Anger is a source of empowerment we must not fear to tap for energy rather than guilt. [...] The angers of women can transform differences through insight into power. For anger between peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth. ("The Uses of Anger" 280-283)

These passages of the essay highlight the positive use and effects of anger when used for change, when used to fight oppression, racism and sexism, as it is only through anger and action that there can be change, because as a woman "I am not free while any woman is unfree" and "I am not free as long as one person of Color remains chained. Nor is any one of you" ("The Uses of Anger" Lorde 285).

Before delving into Lorde's poetry, it is important to mention a particular figure of speech that recurs often in Lorde's poetry, which is *apo koinou*. "*Apo koinou* [italics in text], Greek for "in common," is a figure of speech, a variety of zeugma, which a single word or phrase is shared between two distinct, independent syntactic units. A noun-phrase that serves as both the object of one verb and the subject of the next" (Amitai F. Avi-Ram, "Apo Koinou in Audre Lorde and the Moderns: Defining the Differences", 1986, 193). It has appeared occasionally in English Renaissance poetry and then it disappeared until a revival in Modern Poetry, "Modern poetry, where it supports heightened formal self-consciousness of Modernism and advances its freedom the constraints of traditional correctness" (Avi-ram 193). Audre Lorde takes this figure of speech from the tradition and has made it hers with a different way of using it.

> Rather than an occasional device, Audre Lorde's *apo koinou* is a systematic method for dividing lines. Almost every line seems to have a sense of its own which is then somehow altered – sometimes drastically – by the following line. Each line is thus held in common between itself and the sentence of which the next line unexpectedly makes it a part. This technique at its most surprising forces us to become estranged from, and to reinterpret, an overfamiliar term. (Avi-ram 199)

With this technique, Lorde forces us to challenge our expectations of rationality in the sentence structure: each part of the poem has a life of its own but it shares a bond between the preceding and the following line. "*Apo koinou* in Lorde's poetry is a way of subordinating the sentence association of ideas as they are explored further and more deeply through the sequence of the poem. […] *apo koinou* suspends the temporality or causality normally implied in discrete sentences" (Avi-ram 202) and this allows us readers to navigate Lorde's feelings without them being subordinated to the rigid structure of grammar and poetry.

A relevant example of *apo koinou* can be found in the poem "Good Mirrors Are Not Cheap", which can be interpreted as the racism that can be found also in the black community. The poem has been published in the book *From a Land Where Other People Live* (1973), published by Broadside Lotus Press, Detroit, and was nominated for the National Book Award for poetry in 1974, the same year that Adrienne Rich won with her *Diving Into The Wreck*. As mentioned before, the fact that Lorde has openly stated that she is a feminist and a lesbian has brought with it negative consequences, first and foremost homophobia within the same black community she belongs to.

It is a waste of time hating a mirror
or its reflection
instead of stopping the hand
that makes glass with distortions
slight enough to pass
unnoticed
until one day you peer
into your face
under a merciless white light
and the fault in a mirror slaps back
becoming
what you think
is the shape of your error
and if I am beside that self
you destroy me
or if you can see
the mirror is lying
you shatter the glass
choosing another blindness
and slashed helpless hands.

Because at the same time

down the street
a glassmaker is grinning
turning out new mirrors that lie
selling us
new clowns
at cut rate.

Leaving the title at the end of the analysis, the first stanza is long, followed by a very short second stanza. The layout reminds the reader of an exclamation mark, which suggests that Lorde is making a statement, an important one. The beginning of the poem is peculiar, it starts with a generic statement: “It is a waste of time hating a mirror”. It also suggests that Lorde is following a thought, she pouring her thoughts on paper, starting from a generic sentence and pausing, then moving on to the second line, where she writes “or its reflection”. Lorde pauses again, thinking, which is evoked also by the word “reflection”, which is not only the reflection in a mirror but the act of reflecting, thinking. Lorde continues and returns to the mirror, which is made by a hand “with distortions”, and these distortions are “slight enough to pass/unnoticed”. Here the word “unnoticed” is not only the explanation of the previous line “slight enough to pass”, but also part of the following line, where this “you” is unnoticed until, “until one day you peer”. Here, we finally have a subject, a “you”, which automatically implies an “I” in the conversation. We then reach the *apo koinou* of the poem: “and the fault in a mirror slaps back/ becoming/ what you think/ is the shape of your error”. The *apo koinou* is the line “what you think”, which can be read as “becoming what you think” and “what you think is the shape of your error”. So here we see that this mirror in the poem has the ability to show us what we think we are becoming but also it shows us how what we think is shaped by error, in this case the error is “the fault in a mirror”, indicating the reflection that is distorted because of how we see what we see and how much we believe in what we see

in the mirror. Finally, the "I" manifests itself in the line "and if I am beside that self", where this I is beside the self, which could indicate the reflection in the mirror as well as another person, with the following line "you destroy me". There is a confrontation between the you and the I, between two elements, which could be two people or the person and their reflection. The following lines seem almost disconnected from one another, as if they were on their own, but they are connected by this dualism of the you-I, where Lorde asks "or if you can see", what? "The mirror is lying". Here comes the realization of the "you" that there is a fault, an error in perception, that the mirror is lying and that what the "you" sees is not true. After this realization, "you shatter the glass/ choosing another blindness": the "you" of the poem breaks the mirror, choosing to not see the reflection and to not see the truth that the mirror reflects. The last line of the first stanza, "and slashed helpless hands", is referring to self-destruction, a destruction that started by shattering the glass and that continues with slashed hands that are helpless in front of this self-destructive force.

The last stanza closes this poem opens with a temporal space: "Because at the same time", so at the same time that the "you" of the first stanza is destroying the mirror as an act of self-destruction and in light of the new self-awareness, something else is happening. What is happening is that "down the street/ a glassmaker is grinning/ turning out new mirrors that lie": from a "hand/ that makes glass with distortions" we finally have a person, the glassmaker, who is creating these lying mirrors. But he is also "selling us", the line where finally the dualism becomes a whole entity, an "us". This us is also "new clowns", a reference to the image that the clown evokes: the mask, the face distorted by makeup in order to be funnier, absurd, to hide oneself from the truth of the reflection. New clowns means that these clowns are not the usual clowns seen in circuses but they are new, they

are the “us”, what is seen in the distorted, lying mirrors. And ultimately, these mirrors and these clowns are being sold “at cut rate”, where the word cut brings us back to the slashed hands and the shattered glass, a reminder of broken pieces. Moreover, at cute rate means at a cheap price, which is in contrast with the title “Good Mirrors Are Not Cheap”. With this title, Lorde means that self-awareness and self-definition have a price to pay: by reclaiming her identities, Lorde paid the price of exclusion, of being an outsider, but without self-awareness she could not recognize herself in the mirror. This is the central theme of the poem: being aware of your reflection, of your being, of your blackness.

Lorde’s poetry is always about all of her different facades, so the boundaries between one subject and the other can be very thin. However, some poems are more relevant than others in narrating these topics, so I will be focusing on those. Another detail to add is that Lorde revises and republished some poems in more than one book, so if one relevant poem has been published more than once, I will be choosing the book with the majority of poems I would like to analyze.

The first poem I will analyze is “Coal”, published for the first time in *The First Cities* (1968), as already mentioned Lorde’s first book of poems, published by Poet’s Press with an introduction by Diane Di Prima. Lorde will then publish in 1976 a book with the title of this poem, *Coal*, her first collection published by a major publisher such as W. W. Norton and Company.

“Coal” is perhaps Lorde’s most anthologized poem and has been frequently read as the affirmation of Black essence. It has been included also in the anthology *Understanding the New Black Poetry* by Stephen Henderson, which reflects the tenets of the Black Aesthetic movement. The inclusion in this anthology has made this poem a

manifesto for the Black Power movement, the same movement that was deeply homophobic and largely male, thus making the fact that it has been read as a manifesto almost a contradiction as Lorde's poetry was almost invisible in the eyes of the movement.

I
Is the total black, being spoken
From the earth's inside.
There are many kinds of open.
How a diamond comes into a knot of flame
How a sound comes into a word, coloured
By who pays what for speaking.

The poem opens with the celebration of the identity of the poetic "I", with coal, with being "the total black, being spoken/ From the earth's inside". As an *apo koinuo,* this "I" stands alone as the subject of the first verse, but it is also associated with the second line, which is, however, introduced by "is" instead of "are", leading the reader to find another subject to this poem, which is the "I" of the first verse. The "I" can be the poet, Lorde, but it can also be the black community as one entity. The first stanza brings out the contrast between coal and diamond, which have been associated with being the same thing, with the adage that goes "A diamond is a chunk of coal that did well under pressure" said by Henry Kissinger; however, it is not actually true. Diamonds and coal do not come from the same material, but they do come from the earth's inside. Diamonds are seen a luxury and privilege, but coal is fuel, it's a need and a material comfort. With the line "diamond comes into a knot of flame", Lorde highlights how only the diamond is allowed apotheosis. This confirms coal's exclusion from the apotheosis also by the following lines "sound comes into a word, coloured/ By who pays what for speaking", showing how both words and diamonds can become a business transaction. The openness mentioned in the

fourth line links the first lines of blackness with the following lines on diamonds and sound. This link underlines the idea that there is an ambivalence in coal and diamond, considered different forms of the same mineral. However, this openness can also be related to the need to break silence, to speak up, for black people, which leads to being open to criticism, judgement and violence as well. This openness of words uncovers the metaphors used in the first stanza: the total black of the earth's inside can also be seen as a associated with the forcible extraction of coal; or even it can be a feminized trope for the womb, receptive but also violated as well, at the center of the act of extracting meaning, which as been usually coded as a male act, in this case it highlights the male violence on the woman figure in the poetic tradition. So this "total black" is a blackness that speaks the different languages of the social and political histories it comes with.

> Some words are open
> Like a diamond on glass windows
> Singing out within the crash of passing sun
> Then there are words like stapled wagers
> In a perforated book—buy and sign and tear apart—
> And come whatever wills all chances
> The stub remains
> An ill-pulled tooth with a ragged edge.
> Some words live in my throat
> Breeding like adders. Others know sun
> Seeking like gypsies over my tongue
> To explode through my lips
> Like young sparrows bursting from shell.
> Some words
> Bedevil me.

The second stanza presents the reader with the conditions for negotiating Black identity:

directly in the first line we learn that some words are open like a diamond, so they are bright and privileged, strong enough to break the glass, to break the silence; however, the more these words are heard, the more they are violently crashed by the sun. The fourth line presents us words that are the "stub remains" of "stapled wagers" that have been bought, signed and torn apart, a metaphor for the cost of survival. The "ill-pulled tooth" is a metaphor for the price paid for speech, as the removal of a tooth does not deprive one of the ability to speak, but it becomes a remainder of the payment. This tooth is linked to the words that "live in my throat/ breeding like adders", words that are stuck inside, not able to come out but are becoming more and more venomous. Other words are trying to make their way out, they are trying to travel just like the "gypsies over my tongue", but instead of exiting, they "explode through my lips", there is an urge to speak, to break this silence, like "young sparrows bursting from shell". Then there are words that "bedevil" the poet, that torment her.

> Love is a word another kind of open—
> As a diamond comes into a knot of flame
> I am black because I come from the earth's inside
> Take my word for jewel in your open light.

The last stanza of the poem asserts that love is a word and is itself another way to be open. The last lines repeat the beginning lines of the first stanza but from a first-person perspective: "I am black because I come from the earth's inside". Just as the diamond is forged through the "knot of flames", the poet is urging the reader to take her words for jewel, for something bright and beautiful in the open light, so the words are now visible and open. The last lines can be interpreted as a call from the poet to read her openness but

with an open light, so with an open mind. The poet asks us to meet her halfway in this openness, as she can speak open words, but it is our responsibility to listen openly as well.

Moving to Lorde's most analyzed and praised collection of poems, *The Black Unicorn* was published in 1978 by W. W. Norton & Company. This book puts together poems that go beyond Western politics, beyond Black America, reaching Abomey, Dahomey and the Amazons. The poems are filled with African goddesses and myths, tracing back to the origins of humanity and the African celebration of womanhood. In these poems she borrows the images of Seboulisa, Yemanja, Oshun, Oya, of the queen warriors such as the Amazons, of witches, creating a woman-centered world through the lines of her poems. By identifying in these women, Lorde "re-enacts the role of the black woman conjurer appearing in the Anglo- and Afro-American literary texts" (Sagri Dhairyam "Artifacts for Survival", 62). She rejects the religious values of Western society and finds empowerment in her ancestral African roots. By identifying with the Amazons, she also reclaims the image of these warrior queens that has been imposed on Black women by the Western society as a stereotyped image of black women, trying to encourage women to be submissive and creating a conflict with the black man. The Amazons also represent another part of Lorde, who depicts herself as a warrior and not a victim, of either racism, homophobia or cancer, which led to an involuntary mastectomy. Lorde uses these African mythical women as a representation of the contemporary black women as a symbol of the creative force of the earth, which bring together in harmony both the female and male qualities, destructive and creative power, including the procreative power, and also sensuality and beauty.

The first poem of the collection is the title poem "The Black Unicorn", which takes the black essence of the poem "Coal" and transforms it in the mythical creature

present in Western folklore. The unicorn is usually written as the embodiment of purity that is seduced by a virgin and then killed by the hunters, creating a parallel with Christianity and the death of Christ on the cross. Lorde takes the imagery of the unicorn, with its masculine coding of its single horn, and transforms it into a female and black mythical beast. Despite reclaiming an alternative myth, the poem also presents the problems with mythmaking, even when it stems from empowerment.

> The black unicorn is greedy.
> The black unicorn is impatient.
> The black unicorn was mistaken
> for a shadow
> or symbol
> and taken
> through a cold country
> where mist painted mockeries
> of my fury.
> It is not on her lap where the horn rests
> but deep in her moonpit
> growing.
>
> The black unicorn is restless
> the black unicorn is unrelenting
> the black unicorn is not
> free.

In this first long stanza and in the first lines of the poem, the black unicorn is described as greedy and impatient, two masculinized traits, but the tension that the poet is expressing starts mounting as the unicorn is mistaken "for a shadow/ or symbol/ and taken/ through a cold country", the same cold country that has made it the symbol of a dead Christ, and where the fury of the poet/speaker conflates in the unicorn and is mocked and painted with mist. The poem continues with the unicorn not resting its horn on her

lap but in her moonpit, so the unicorn is deprived of the phallic significance and conflates in the image of the virgin woman, "enabling the poet to regain the phallic mother and to renew her access to creativity" (Dhairyam 238). In the last stanza, despite the poet's effort to regain neutrality, the break in the last line, "the black unicorn is not/ free", can be read as the poet cannot separate its fate from that of the unicorn as they both become a symbol in a cold country, underlining the problems with symbolization. Just as the unicorn has been made a symbol and a myth, so has black women been made a symbol and described through myths on blackness and of the warrior woman.

The poem "A Litany for Survival" makes use of the call-and-response pattern, giving shape to the relationship between fear, silence and invisibility. These are in contrast with courage, coming to voice and visibility. The call-and-response pattern, used in the African tradition, resonates with the Western liturgical form, which is stressed by the repetition of the lines "for those of us" at the beginning of the stanzas one and two, with a variation "for all of us" at the end of the second stanza.

> For those of us who live at the shoreline
> standing upon the constant edges of decision
> crucial and alone
> for those of us who cannot indulge
> the passing dreams of choice
> who love in doorways coming and going
> in the hours between dawns
> looking inward and outward
> at once before and after
> seeking a now that can breed
> futures
> like bread in our children's mouths
> so their dreams will not reflect
> the death of ours;

For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.

The poet uses phrasal repetition to signal her inclusion in a community using "us" and "we", even though it is not distinctively specified what community Lorde is talking about and for this reason, the poem seems to be referring to a more universal community. However, it is easy to associate this community to an oppressed one through different indicators: when Lorde equates future with bread for her children, it indicates an economically underprivileged community; "the heavy-footed hoped to silence us" can be associated with gender oppression, as "heavy-footed" suggests a masculine and military image. Lorde also invokes images of in-between and peripheral spaces with the phrases "at the shoreline", "looking inward and outward", "in doorways" – a line that also evokes the heteronormative oppression of lesbians as they "cannot indulge/ the passing dreams of choice/ who love in doorways coming and going". The third stanza is a litany of fears of black women that are used as a call-to-action for black women to speak up despite the silencing fears:

And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning

when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.

The final stanza closes the poem with the urgency of speaking up against oppression that comes in different forms and for different reasons, race and gender and sexuality.

The poem that better conjugates the problems of liberatory reclamation of blackness and womanhood linguistic agency is "Power". Published initially in the book *Between Ourselves* (1976) and then in *The Black Unicorn*, the poem is reflection on the responsibilities of speaking up. The poem was written after hearing the news on the radio that the white policeman who shot a black child was acquitted. In an interview with Adrienne Rich she says:

> AL: […] There was one black woman on the jury. It could have been me. Now I am here teaching John Jay College. Do I kill him? What is my effective role? Would I kill her in the same way - the black woman on the jury. What kind of strength did she, would I, have at the point of deciding to take a position-
>
> AR: Against eleven white men ...

> AL: ... That archaic fear of the total reality of a power that is not on your terms. There is the jury, white male power, white male structures, how do you take a position against them? How do you reach down into threatening difference without being killed or killing? How do you deal with things you believe, live them not as theory, not even as emotion, but right on the line of action and effect and change? All of those things were riding in on that poem. But I had no sense, no understanding at the time, of the connections, just that I was that woman. And that to put myself on the line to do what had to be done at any place and time was so difficult, yet absolutely crucial, and not to do so was the most awful death. And putting yourself on the line is like killing a piece of yourself, in the sense that you have to kill, end, destroy something familiar and dependable, so that something new can come, in ourselves, in our world. And that sense of writing at the edge, out of urgency, not because you choose it but because you have to, that sense of survival - that's what the poem is out of, as well as the pain of my son's death over and over. Once you live any piece of your vision it opens you to a constant onslaught. Of necessities, of horrors, but of wonders too, of possibilities. (734)

In this piece of interview, Lorde uses expressions such as "on the line", "writing at the edge" that suggest her poetic line, her process of composing: she is putting herself on the line, asserting her own vision through poetry. As Lorde explains in "The Transformation of Silence into Language", the act of choosing poetry over rhetoric is "the decision to define ourselves, name ourselves, and speak for ourselves" (43). This is the reason why "Power" begins with these lines:

> The difference between poetry and rhetoric
> is being
> ready to kill
> yourself
> instead of your children.

The first version of the poem saw the last lines structured as follows: "is being ready to kill/ yourself/ instead of your children", while in *The Black Unicorn* it follows the version above. The break after "being" suggests that the difference between poetry and rhetoric is an existential one. The breaking of the lines follows the structure of *apo koinou* as

explained before and suggests that this difference is not only existential but also a denial of existence through the act of "killing yourself".

In the second stanza Lorde builds a surrealistic allegory, where the grammatical structure of the lines makes the reader wonder if the poet is in control of her dreams, who are the subjects of the images, who is the subject of agency:

> I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds
> and a dead child dragging his shattered black
> face off the edge of my sleep
> blood from his punctured cheeks and shoulders
> is the only liquid for miles
> and my stomach
> churns at the imagined taste while
> my mouth splits into dry lips
> without loyalty or reason
> thirsting for the wetness of his blood
> as it sinks into the whiteness
> of the desert where I am lost
> without imagery or magic
> trying to make power out of hatred and destruction
> trying to heal my dying son with kisses
> only the sun will bleach his bones quicker.

The act of "dragging" can be modified by the "I am" or by the "dead child", which raises the question of agency on if Lorde has control or not over her dreams, making it again a question of poetry and rhetoric. If the "I" is dragging the dead child, then is she performing the same action as the white jurymen, as a reference to the killing of children in the first stanza? The poet/speaker is physically torn in this stanza, as her "stomach churns", her "mouth splits into dry lips". All of this happens into the "whiteness of the desert where I am lost", where she is negated magic, which is poetry – as she states in "Poetry Is Not a Luxury" – and where she tries to "make power out of hatred and

destruction", a useless gesture identified in the rhetoric of racism and violence. From the allegorical space of the desert, the poem moves into a courtroom. The two following stanzas are about the event, the shooting of the black child by the hand of the white policeman. The two stanzas are quite clearly structured, except for the one line that says: "and a voice said 'Die you little motherfucker' and", where the subject is a voice that is not clearly identified and that could be elevated to universality as the policeman's hatred of the black child moves beyond this event and can be elevated to universality as the embodiment of racist hatred.

> A policeman who shot down a ten-year-old in Queens
> stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood
> and a voice said "Die you little motherfucker" and
> there are tapes to prove it. At his trial
> this policeman said in his own defense
> "I didn't notice the size nor nothing else
> only the color". and
> there are tapes to prove that, too.
>
> Today that 37-year-old white man with 13 years of police forcing
> was set free
> by 11 white men who said they were satisfied
> justice had been done
> and one Black Woman who said
> "They convinced me" meaning
> they had dragged her 4'10" black Woman's frame
> over the hot coals of four centuries of white male approval
> until she let go the first real power she ever had
> and lined her own womb with cement
> to make a graveyard for our children.

Again, in the third stanza, the verb "dragged" is used in association with the "Black Woman", the only black jurywoman, who has been forced to agree because of the "four

centuries of white male approval", and to do this she "lined her own womb with cement/ to make a graveyard for our children", meaning that she denied her own womanhood and maternity as the embodiment of the future of the black community in the name of white male approval.

> I have not been able to touch the destruction within me.
> But unless I learn to use
> the difference between poetry and rhetoric
> my power too will run corrupt as poisonous mold
> or lie limp and useless as an unconnected wire
> and one day I will take my teenaged plug
> and connect it to the nearest socket
> raping an 85-year-old white woman
> who is somebody's mother
> and as I beat her senseless and set a torch to her bed
> a greek chorus will be singing in 3/4 time
> "Poor thing. She never hurt a soul. What beasts they are."

The poet is still destabilized in the final stanza, where she is aware that if she does not learn to use poetry and rhetoric, she could either abuse power like the policeman, "will run corrupt as poisonous mold", or she would be powerless like the black woman of the jury, "or lie limp and useless as an unconnected wire". This last failure leads to the speaker identifying in a black teenage boy who rapes an elderly white woman, "somebody's mother". This action could confirm the rhetoric that black people are "beasts" and "motherfuckers", which is being pronounced by a "greek chorus", which is singing to the beat of "The Blue Danube". The last stanza is dialogue of Lorde's identities: as a black woman she objects to the rape of a woman; as a black person she objects the designation "motherfucker". So this brings the reader back to the first stanza, where the existential question is being set out: if the poet uses rhetoric instead of writing poetry, she must "be

ready to kill" herself, which means removing herself from the position of being black and female at the same time. For this reason, Lorde enjoins her readers to identify those positions of overlapping subjectivity: she calls for collective agency for "bridging our differences", accounting for "the powers of our differences".

4.3. Loving women: lesbianism and beyond

One of Lorde's identity is being lesbian, which has led her to be oppressed not only by the patriarchal and white society but also by her own community, whether it is black or women. However, lesbianism for Lorde, as well as for other women writers such as Adrienne Rich, is not only loving another woman sexually, but it also means loving other women platonically, it stems from the woman-bonding tradition that is present in African culture, that can be seen in the matriarchies such as those of the Amazons. As Barbara Smith writes in her essay "Toward a Black Feminism", "Bertha Harris suggested that if in a woman writer's work a sentence refuses to do what it is supposed to do, if there are strong images of women and if there is a refusal to be linear, the result is innately lesbian literature", which has led Smith to realize that many works by women are lesbian in this sense (Smith 23). "Not because women are 'lovers', but because they are central figures, positively portrayed and have pivotal relationships with one another" (Smith 23). Another explanation of what a lesbian is has been written in the ten-paragraph manifesto written by the Radicalesbians in 1970 in New York:

> What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society - perhaps then, but certainly later - cares to allow her. These needs and actions, over a period of years, bring her into painful conflict with people, situations, the accepted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, until she is in a state of continual war with everything around her, and usually with her self. She may not be fully conscious of the political implications of what for her began as personal necessity, but on

> some level she has not been able to accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society - the female role.

So, being lesbian goes beyond the simple definition of a woman loving another woman, but it represents the deep bond that runs between women, or it should, as a group of people oppressed by the patriarchal society. What happens when a Black woman is a lesbian? She has to face not only oppression from the white society as a black person and the patriarchal society as a woman, but also the homophobia, which was almost stronger in the black community than in the white society. As Wilmette Brown said in her speech "The Autonomy of Black Lesbian Women", delivered in 1976 in Toronto:

> Because the isolation of Black lesbian women, given that we are superfreaks, given that our lesbianism defies both the sexual identity that capital gives us and the racial identity that capital gives us, the isolation of Black lesbian women from heterosexual Black women is very profound. Very profound. I have searched throughout Black history, Black literature, whatever, looking for some women that I could see were somehow lesbian. Now I know that in a certain sense they were all lesbian. But that was a very painful search. (7)

In the case of Lorde, in her essay "Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving" (1978), she writes that being lesbian in the black community leads to isolation as the epithet "lesbian" is used as an insult to create the fear of rejection and to silence both lesbians and black women in general. This fear causes women to turn away from the empowerment that can be found inside oneself, through the erotic, and through solidarity with other women. Not being in touch with oneself means losing the power and creativity necessary to navigate the world. As she writes in her essay, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" (1978), "the erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (53). Lorde urges women to find that power within and to use it as

a creative force that can provide the energy for change. For this reason, love and lesbianism go beyond the sexual level and reach the spiritual one as well: being lesbian does not only mean a woman loving a woman, but it centers the woman in the narrative, leaving men outside, and creating a written world where women bond with women.

The first poem, inserted in this context, that I would like to analyze is "Scar", which was initially published in the book *Between Ourselves*, just as the poem "Power". In this poem Lorde concentrates the pain of the absence of the topic of lesbianism in the feminist discourse. Here, she intersects gender and race with the absence of lesbianism. This exclusion produces a cultural wound for the poet, which is later on in the poem revealed: her self-definition as lesbian is a threat for the heteronormative community and the codes that overlap with female gender positioning. The title of the poem is both a historical reference to the enslavement history, associating it with lacerations, woundings, tears, as well as a reference to the inner violation of body and mind. Thus, the scar becomes the metaphor for external and internal violation and wounding that has happened as a result of Lorde's self-definition and self-determination as Black, as lesbian, as woman.

This is a simple poem.
for the mothers sisters daughters
girls I have never been
for the women who clean the Staten Island ferry
for the sleek witches who burn
me at midnight
in effigy
because I eat at their tables
and sleep with their ghosts.

Those stones in my heart are you
of my own flesh

whittling me with your sharp false eyes
laughing me out of your skin
because you do not value your own
life
nor me.

In these two stanzas, Lorde addresses the poem to the women "who burn/ me at midnight/ in effigy", because she has decided to eat at the same table and "sleep with their ghosts". This can be interpreted as Lorde trying to be accepted by the feminist movement, the "sleek witches" with whom she was actively a part of the movement – but the women, especially white women, have decided to "burn me in effigy": the word effigy here is used as a metaphor of "using" Lorde as a model of the movement but destroying it during at midnight, just as protestors burn effigies as a form of protest, she is burned by the feminist movement who does consider her an actual part of the movement. For the same reason, she writes that she "eats at their table" and "sleep with their ghosts", so she sits with these feminists and sleeps with the ghosts of the dead feminists. These same women are using violence against the poet as they are making her into little pieces – "whittling me with your sharp false eyes" – by looking at her in a sharp and false way, and they are excluding her from their skin as women, which is not valued as well as the poet's life as a Black and lesbian woman is valued. The poem continues by repeating again "This is a simple poem", creating a pattern that resembles that of "A Litany for Survival":

This is a simple poem
I will have no mother no sister no daughter
when I am through
and only the bones are left
see how the bones are showing
the shape of us at war
clawing our own flesh out
to feed the backside of our masklike faces
that we have given the names of men.

In this stanza, the poet problematizes the assumption of a monolithic African-American identity by negating the presence of women close to her – "I will have no mother no sister no daughter/ when I am through" – and by doing this she interrogates the intersecting constructions of gender and sexuality. This stanza also presents the image of self-mutilation under the male identity, which happens in a heterosexual couple: "to feed the backside of our masklike faces/ that we have given the names of men." There is also the image of self-negation and cannibalism through the "shape of us at war/ clawing our own flesh out", where women cancel themselves and at the same time are at war with other women in the name of a heterocentric coding.

Donald DeFreeze I never knew you so well
as in the eyes of my own mirror
did you hope
for blessing or pardon
lying
in bed after bed
or was your eye sharp and merciless enough
to endure
beyond the deaths of wanting?

With your voice in my ears
with my voice in your ears
try to deny me
I will hunt you down
through the night veins of my own addiction
through all my unsatisfied childhoods
as this poem unfolds
like the leaves of a poppy
I have no sister no mother no children
left
only a tideless ocean of moonlit women
in all shades of loving
learning the dance of open and closing

learning a dance of electrical tenderness
no father no mother would teach them.

In the first of these two stanzas, Lorde mentions Donald DeFreeze, a Black American radical, spokesman of the Symbionese Liberation Army, a far-left group formed in Oakland. The group was considered a terrorist group by the FBI and has been persecuted for numerous violent crimes. Their belief lies in the word "Symbionese", which stems from the word "symbiosis" as they hoped in a united front against oppression. In the following stanza, again, Lorde uses the negation of presence of kinswomen while affirming a new community of women: "only a tideless ocean of moonlit women/ in all shades of loving". Here the women are united by all shades of love, who are learning to dance together, to be together beyond the teaching of their parents. The "electrical tenderness" can be traced by to Lorde' essay "Uses of the Erotic", where she writes that "women-identified women brave enough to risk sharing the erotic's electrical charge" (59), meaning that both in the poem and in the essay, women coming together are brave enough to share the electricity of the power of the erotic, which is not only physical love. This image of the erotic is in contrast with the image of pornography, that is represented in the sixth stanza, where Lorde mimics the voice of a prostitute:

Come Sambo dance with me
pay the piper dangling dancing
his knee-high darling
over your wanting under your bloody
white faces come Bimbo come Ding Dong
watch the city falling down down
down lie down bitch slow down nigger
so you want a cozy womb to hide you
to pucker up and suck you back
safely
well I tell you what I'm gonna do
next time you head for the hatchet

really need some nook to hole up in
look me up
I'm the ticket taker on a queen
of roller coasters
I can get you off
cheap.

In this stanza the poem creates an intersection between gender – "bitch" – and race – "Sambo" and "nigger" – with the addition of sexuality in the form a prostitute that sells her body for a man, who wants "a cozy womb to hide you". The subject addressed in this stanza seems to be "Sambo", which the racist stereotyped character of an African-American male in a children's book, alongside the figures of Bimbo and Ding Dong. The poem shifts from the "you" to the multitude of the "white faces", changing subjects as she writes the lines. The use of racist terms inserts sex and gender in the context of racial oppression. Here, male sex consumption is used as a way to escape from the "city falling down", in a downward spiral of dehumanization with the line "down lie down bitch slow down nigger", where down is alternated by racist and sexist terms.

This is a simple poem
sharing my head with dreams
of a big black woman with jewels in her eyes
she dances
her head in a golden helmet
arrogant
plumed
her name is Colossa
her thighs are like stanchions
or flayed hickory trees
embraced in armour
she dances
slow earth-shaking motions
that suddenly alter
and lighten
as she whirls laughing

the tooled metal over her hips
comes to an end
and at the shiny edge
an astonishment
of soft black curly hair.

The poem goes back to the concept of erotic of the fifth stanza, where the electrical tenderness depicted an image of women loving each other not only on a sexual level. The last and closing stanza, however, moves on to the sexual level of the erotic, in contrast with the image of the prostitute in the previous stanza. In this stanza Lorde depicts a "big black woman", which can be read as a cultural sign talking back to the patriarchal Western emblem: the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the world's seven wonders, a statue of Helios erected in Rhodes, which was approximately 33 meters high, similar to the Statue of Liberty, and with one foot on each side of the harbor entrance, forcing ships to pass under the statue. In Lorde's poem, this big black woman is named, for this reason, Colossa, wearing a golden helmet, defined as arrogant and decorated with feather. The following lines are a call to the Song of Solomon, where the poet uses nature as a way to describe a heterosexual love, and which Lorde uses to describe a homoerotic one. The final lines surprises the reader with the nakedness of Colossa, as the metal finishes over her hips and the "soft black curly hair" is a reference to Black lesbian eroticism and self-determined agency.

Following the thread of lesbian love and eros, the last poem I will be analyzing is "Love Poem", a poem dedicated to sexual love between women – physical opposed to the previous more spiritual love – published in *New York Head Shop and Museum – To The Chocolate People Of America* (1974), but initially meant to be in the book *From a Land Where Other People Live* (1973), but her editor did not want to publish it; the first official apparition of "Love Poem" was in *Ms. Magazine* in 1971. Whenever Lorde

describes sexual love, she interweaves images of nature with images of the woman's body and their physical contact. By doing this, she frees these images from the pornographic associations, which the patriarchal society has placed on lesbian love and sets them in a new context, a more primordial and ancestral place, in the natural cycle of growth and fertility, referring to the African goddesses and myths.

Speak earth and bless me with what is richest
make sky flow honey out of my hips
rigid as mountains
spread over a valley
carved out by the mouth of rain.

And I knew when I entered her I was
high wind in her forests hollow
fingers whispering sound
honey flowed from the split cup
impaled on a lance of tongues
on the tips of her breasts on her navel
and my breath
howling into her entrances
through lungs of pain.

Greedy as herring-gulls
or a child
I swing out over the earth
over and over
again.

By describing lesbian sex through images of nature, Lorde subverts the male gaze from the disembodied body parts to the primordial essence of the body connected to nature and vice versa. In this poem , Lorde puts lesbian sex at the center and by doing this she exposes herself completely to the eyes of society and at the same time, she holds the space for validating homosexual identities and giving visibility. Men are excluded from this place, where only two women are at the center, both of these women exist outside of the heteronormative sexual norms in their own temporality. As with the other poems she has written, whether it be on racism or sexism, even with this poem Lorde invites her readers to get in touch with their feelings and through their feelings take action, and in this case she is showing her lesbian readers that she understands the complexity of emotions that are involved in love between two women, who do not project their desire onto one or the other but they are both engaged and active in the process.

Lorde's identity reflects itself in all of her poems, leaving traces of every part of herself in every line that she has written. She is not just one unique identity, she is a mosaic of different parts of herself that become poetry, each part self-defining itself through words. By self-defining herself against society's racist and sexist norms, Lorde has made herself an "outsider" from more than one community and group, but by doing this she has freed herself from the pressure and the weight of following rules forced upon people by others. Lorde has embraced herself entirely and has poured the complexity of human emotions in her poetry, as well as her prose and even in her essays and speeches. Despite the division I followed in this chapter, Lorde is not only one thing or the other, but she is a mix of a multitude, and it is almost impossible to separate these different aspects of her self. One thing that is quite sure, and Lorde has demonstrated it and affirmed it more than once, is that her writing stems from the urgency and the need to

move her readers into action, through reflection, through the representation of oppression, through the power of anger and eros that explode into creative energy, helping the poet into writing. Lorde's poetry is not activism, it's a reading of moments of her life that are rendered into writing through the power of her emotions. The need to break the silence and to start bridging those differences can only happen when one is in touch with their emotions, when women are in touch with the anger that is born from a situation of oppression and are moved towards change.

5. A world of multitudes: Siri Hustvedt and The Blazing World

The previous two chapters present two different but not too distant poets that represented their anger through poetry and also through essays and speeches. If Adrienne Rich used her poetry as a way to discover more about herself and how her experiences relate to the more common experience as a woman; on the other hand, Audre Lorde used her poetry to understand more about her emotions and through her poems she would express her emotions that stemmed from the experiences she lived as a Black and lesbian woman. If Rich used poetry as a more experiential and truthful means from which to create a common language that would narrate women' experience in a patriarchal society, Lorde used poetry as a more emotional vessel that women could resonate with, while through her essays she took on a more activist and political voice. Their voice was just one but it branched out in different ways in order to reach all the people they could, not only women, but especially allies to the cause. How does a novelist compete with the formal experiments of poetry? Poetry experiments with forms to create what Hustvedt calls "zones of focused ambiguity", where the meaning hides behind line breaks and metaphors. Hustvedt, on the other hand, uses a different points of view to look at one object, one character of the story, creating ambiguity and challenging the readers perspective. In regard of the topic of anger, it has always lurked behind the creative impulse of Rich and Lorde, a type of anger that Nussbaum defines "Transition-Anger", which is moved by social injustice, rather than personal revenge. On the other hand, Hustvedt's protagonist of the book I will be reading for this chapter, *The Blazing World*,

is very ambitious and feels the need for a personal revenge, that can be used for the community, but it is still completely personal.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will focus on Hustvedt's novel *The Blazing World* and I will analyze this polyphonic story from different points of view as well: Hustvedt's use of anger and how it manifests through body representations; then I will move on to Hustvedt's description of the art produced by the artist in the story, which will also allow me to touch on the concept of perception. Finally, connected to both anger and perception, I will delve into the topic of authorship and identity.

5.1. A Brief Introduction to *The Blazing World* by Siri Hustvedt

The Blazing World was published in 2014 and is inspired by the 1666 novel by Margaret Cavendish with the original title of *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing-World*, better known as *The Blazing World.* Margaret Cavendish was the Duchess of Newcastle and was a prolific English writer, poet, scientist and philosopher. Considering the time she lived in, the fact that she produced more than 12 original literary works was seen as an incredible event, not without negative comments regarding this. Her novel was published as an appendix to *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666), which is a philosophical work on natural philosophy. Cavendish's *The Blazing World* is considered the forerunner of science fiction and is the depiction of a satirical and utopian kingdom in another world, where a woman is in command.

On the other hand, Siri Hustvedt's *The Blazing World* is set in the early 2000s, before 9/11, and is the story of the artist Harriet Burde, a.k.a. Harry, who wants to disclose the blatant sexism that permeates the art scene in New York City. The interesting aspect of this novel is that the story is not narrated from a one-person perspective, but it is a

polyphony of points of view and a variegated collection of materials that compose the novel: there are reviews, interviews, diary entries and testimonies. The reason for this diversified collection of materials can be found in the "Editor's Introduction", where the editor I. V. Hess writes about his or her purpose for this book: the editor wanted to tell Harriet Burden's story and has collected all the testimonies and material necessary to do it, including the most enigmatic and cryptic notebooks of the same Harriet. As Hustvedt states in an interview with Susanne Becker, this introduction was written after having written the whole book, so it contains references to parts of the book that will be largely developed afterwards. The whole intention of this book can be found in the first lines of this introduction: "All intellectual and artistic endeavors, even jokes, ironies, and parodies, fare better in the mind of the crowd when the crowd knows that somewhere behind the great work or the great spoof it can locate a cock and a pair of balls" (Hustvedt, *The Blazing World*, 1). In these few lines, we can read the leitmotiv of Harriet's story: the biased perception of art or literary works made by women and how this perception tends to favor and to give more authority to men instead of women. In this case, it does figure as the leitmotiv of Harriet's story, but there is more to this novel than just a gender issue. In fact, the editor also states that the *Maskings* project was not only meant to expose the anti-female bias of art world, "but to uncover the complex workings of human perception and how unconscious ideas about gender, race, and celebrity influence a viewer's understanding of a given work of art" (*The Blazing World,* 1).

The *Maskings* project is ideated by Harriet Burden as a way to avenge the mistreatment she received from New York City's art world, to uncover sexism. She does this by collaborating with three male artists, different from one another and with three different artworks that she has imagined. The first artist is Anton Tish (his real surname

is Tisch, which means chair in German), a white, young, male artist. The artwork is called *The History of Western Art*. The second mask is Phineas Q. Eldridge, a black and gay man, who is too light-skinned to be considered black but still not white enough to be considered completely white. He is as an actor performing on stage a piece where he plays the part of both a man and a woman, diving himself into gender, ambiguity and perception, concepts that Burden is trying to convey with her project. The collaboration between Phineas and Harriet is more positive than that with Tish and the artwork is called *The Suffocation Rooms*. The last mask is Rune, an already very famous and well-known artist in the art world, very young and with a very ambiguous background. This last collaboration, unfortunately, ends badly, with Rune's suicide and Harriet's deep rage and repressed violence that is transformed into ovarian cancer. And it's from this rage and anger that I will start a deeper analysis of this novel.

5.2. A Sweet Fury: the representation of rage and anger in Harriet's notebooks

With the leitmotiv of the story being the revenge of a woman artist on the sexism of the art world, it becomes normal to consider emotions, such as anger, rage, envy, and frustration, as central in the story. When talking about injustice, I have repeated more than once that anger is a fundamental emotion that can have a positive impact on the person, pushing the subject towards a desire and a will to change the unjust environment that surrounds him/her. In this case, Harriet's anger stems from not only the sexism of the art world, but also from her relationship with her father and her husband, an important art dealer in New York City, a job which has a direct impact on Harriet's life as well. Right from the beginning, from the editor's introduction, Hess quotes the incipit from a letter that Harriet has sent to Richard Brickman and then published on *The Open Eye*, where we learn about the reason behind her maskings project. Brickman poses as an assistant

professor at St. Olaf College in Minnesota and has earned a PhD in philosophy from Emory University (3), he is also another mask, another pseudonym that provides a male mask to give more authority to Harriet's voice. Brickman writes a letter to the editor of *The Open Eye* and quotes parts from the sixty-five-page letter, titled "Missive from the Realm of Fictional Being", that Harriet Burden has sent him through the post (266).

Going back to the incipit of the editor's introduction, a quote that can be found also in the Richard Brickman chapter (269), Harriet writes that the crowd responds better to any artwork or literary work when "the crowd knows that somewhere behind the great work or the great spoof it can locate a cock and a pair of balls". The fact that she used foul language to describe a man, who is only defined by his genitalia, is an indicator of the underlying irony with a little anger and frustration in her tone. Throughout the novel, Harriet uses foul words, only when her male mask Richard Brickman, in her last art project, becomes violent towards Ruina, a.k.a. Rune. However, Harriet's anger becomes more and more blatant and evident page after page, through the whole *Maskings* project, until it explodes with Rune.

In the first notebook we read, *Notebook C* (memoir extract), Harriet writes about the death of Felix Lord, her husband, and here we start learning more about the protagonist of the story and of everyone around her. The first manifestation of anger is when she speaks about the year after Felix's death: it was "furious, vengeful, an implosion of misery about all I had done wrong and all I had wasted, a conundrum of hatred and love for us both" (17). She continues by writing that she hid many things from her children, especially a "terrible hunger for something I couldn't name" (18). Amongst these feelings, she would vomit a lot, a physical reaction to the repressed anger and rage that she had kept inside throughout her marriage and that had been unleashed after her

husband's passing. After starting therapy with a psychiatrist and after Dr. Fertig - an important figure in Harriet's life – told her that "there's still time to change things" (18), she stopped vomiting.

In *Notebook A*, Harriet is talking about her encounter with Phineas Q. Eldridge and about how this encounter has led her to think about how people hide their feelings, just as Phineas tries to hide his. When Harriet asks him if he is okay, he actually answers no, and this answer makes Harriet glad, as people are always answering "yes, I'm fine" when in reality they aren't. From this thought, Harriet starts thinking about her own emotions hidden from the outer world:

> I wish I hadn't been so fine, so goddamned fine for so many years… […] I let go because there is fear in me, a sickening reticence. For as long as I can remember it has been there, lying in wait – a fat, leaden, hideous thing. I don't want to wake it. If I wake it, the earth will rumble and the walls will crack and fall. Put your finger to your lips, Harry, put your finger to your lips and tiptoe around the thing. Make nice and fine, Harry, as nice and fine as you know how. It was there with Felix, too, the thing, but it wasn't his fault. I understand that now. It was there long before Felix. Let him sleep. Walk softly. Defer. Don't upset him. He is fragile, fragile and somehow dangerous. Felix always deserves what you don't. Why? Mysterious feelings: ingrown, automatic, thoughtless. Before words. Under words. (63)

In this passage, Harriet talks about how she has always suppressed inside of her something, that she calls "fear" and a "sickening reticence", something she is afraid to set free, otherwise it will make the "earth rumble". As if she is remembering past conversations, we can see that the thing that she has inside has always been there, even before her husband Felix. She behaves around the thing just as she has behaved around her father and her husband as well, tiptoeing, keeping quiet. Harry had to be nice, quiet, soft, while inside her there are strong feelings that could make the walls crack and fall.

She then starts reflecting on an early memory and quotes a passage from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the opening scene of chapter 11 when the monster tells Victor

about the first moments after being created and his confusion; a passage from John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* where Satan is speaking, and he states that the mind on its own can create hell in heaven and heaven in hell. The last quote is from Emily Dickinson, "My Life has stood – a Loaded Gun", referring to the fact that her life was always ready to be fired, just like a loaded gun. These quotes are all related to how Harriet is feeling, like a person who has been dead and brought back to life and she finds herself confused about her past life; how her mind can create worlds, heaven and hell, and how she feels on the verge of firing a shot. She writes:

> I am wild on paper. I am bestial. And then I must hide and, with the thick black crayon, I rub out every line. I blacken the page so they will never see what I have drawn, what I have done.
>
> Why do I feel there is a secret I carry in my body like an embryo, speechless and unformed, beyond knowing? And why do I feel it might erupt in a great blast if not checked? (64)

The connection between the quotes and these last lines can be found in how Harriet describes herself, as "wild on paper", and "bestial", and how she feels, "it might erupt in a great blast". It is not clear what Harriet is talking about, but "the secret" can be interpreted as the intense emotions she has repressed and hidden that are now trying to resurface and have become almost a physical object, "like an embryo". This feeling inside her that is difficult to define can be also found in a written statement by Rachel Briefman, Harriet's long-time friend and also a psychologist. Rachel is the rational and scientific voice of the novel, the only person who has an idea of how the brain works and how people behave the way they behave. Amongst the many testimonies, Rachel is lucid and clear, adding psychological and scientific insight to Harriet's life. In one of her statements, she talks about Harriet's fight with Anton Tish, where Anton had accused her of ruining him and that he would be leaving and going far away to look for authenticity and purity. Here, Rachel reports the conversation she had with Harriet: she says that "Harry returned

to her fury. She had been so angry at Anton, she said, she could have punched him silly or burned him to a crisp with a single breath" (116). The burning Anton with a breath is a reference to Harriet's imaginary friend, who could breathe fire. One time, Harry talks to Bruno Kleinfeld about how that there was a boy living under her bed who could breathe fire. She states "I wanted to fly, you see, and breathe fire. Those were my dearest wishes, but it was forbidden, or I felt it was forbidden. It has taken me a very long time, a very long time to give myself permission to fly and breathe fire" (82).

The fact that Harriet gave herself permission is also thanks to her therapy with Dr. Fertig, who is helping her disclose all of her repressed emotions and desires. Emotions and desires that can also provoke fear in Harriet as she feels she does not have complete control over them. "'There's something in me, Rachel, something I don't understand. […] It's old, Rachel. It's like a memory in me, but it's not. I feel it, and it's been coming up. With Dr. F., I mean. […]' I thought of Harry's vomiting. The body can have ideas, too, can use metaphors" (117). This thing that Harry feels but does not understand and is afraid of it can be read into the description of how Harriet imitated Anton while describing their discussion: she "played Anton as a girl, which was in itself a form of revenge" (118).

Revenge and rage go hand in hand in Harriet's story, as she wants to avenge her own self against the art world and against the people who have always told her to not be her true self, like her father and Felix. Rage accompanies this quest for vengeance as all the repressed emotions come out of her free to exist. However, as Rachel puts it, "all thoughts of revenge are born of the pain of helplessness. I *suffer* becomes *You will suffer*. […] In revenge we come together as a single pointed weapon aimed at a target" (italics in text, 118). However, revenge is destructive on the long run and we find this destruction after Rune's betrayal and with Harriet's cancer.

Another exemplar scene of rage is described by Phineas Q. Eldridge, when he enters the house in Red Hook and notices something different. He hears strange noises and looks for the source. He finally finds Harriet destroying one of her metamorphs, one of her artworks, with a kitchen cleaver. He exited as quietly and quickly as he entered with a strange feeling inside:

> I'm sure there are scads of artists over the centuries who have kicked, beaten, and mangled their own works in despair and frustration – it was no crime. Looking at her through the door frightened me, though. I told myself I was a queasy oaf – oh-so-sensitive Phinny. The figure wasn't a person. It was no more than a stuffed doll. It felt no pain. That was all true. The police were not going to come around and make an arrest for metamorph murder. Later, I realized that, despite all that, what scared me had been real. Harry's rage had been real. (143)

In this scene, Phineas finds Harry in a fury, a mad murderous rage that has led her to destroy one of the boxes, her artworks that are a representation of all the emotions that she has repressed and for this reason she transforms them into boxes and little metamorphs of people whom she probably knows and whom can be identified as Felix or her father, the two main figures that represent the repression of all will and desires.

For this reason, Harry dedicates a part of her notebook noticing how their behavior has influenced her own. In *Notebook B*, Harry starts by talking about how memories can resemble dreams, so when people start recalling and talking about a memory, our mind is almost narrating a story that has a first-person perspective and, at the same time, a third-person perspective as the narrator is the person who has lived that experience and is also retelling the experience as a memory. When recalling her memories with her father, there are sentences that have stuck into her memory, like her mother affirming "you must be quiet. Your father is reading", which has led Harriet to think "I am so quiet and so good. I hardly breathe" (148). Or the memory where Harriet gives Felix the note that confirms one of his affairs with two people in Berlin and she remembers him saying "it has nothing

to do with my love for you" and she feels "I am erased" (149). These memories are all permeated with anger that Dr. F. highlights for Harriet, whom realizes "I did not understand how angry I was" (150), as she was erased in front of her father, because she had to be so quiet she almost didn't breathe, and in front of Felix, who had multiple affairs and she, again, remained silent, erasing herself from the relationship.

This recollection of memories moves on to other memories that intertwine with one another, always regarding her father and her husband. There is a series of memories that come up like stream, probably due to her therapy sessions with Dr. F., which become one chain of thought that connects her memories as a child with her father and those as an adult with her husband. Both men put her into a state of immobility, of quietness. Her father's statement "you should not be here" (152) is related to a time when she entered his study, but it is also connected to the conversation Harriet had with her mother, who said that he did not want her, "it took some time, my mother says, before he got used to you. *Your father loved you, of course*" (153). There is another reference to Bodley, her fire-breathing imaginary friend, who she wishes would breathe fire, probably to burn her environment as the only way she could be surrounded by the fire of love, of passion, of care from her father, as she affirms "your order is my wilderness, Father" (155). The same elusive behavior of Harriet's father is mirrored by Felix's behavior towards her and their children, with his work and travelling, and his secret lives. All of these memories conflate in the last paragraph of the chapter:

> It's coming up Harry, the blind and boiling, the insane rage that has been building and building since you walked with your head down and didn't even know it. You are not sorry any longer, old girl, or ashamed for knocking at the door. It is not shameful to knock, Harry. You are rising up against the patriarchs and their minions, and you, Harry, you are the image of their fear. Medea, mad with vengeance. That little monster has climbed out of the box, hasn't it? It is nearly grown yet, not nearly grown. After Phinny, there will be one more. There will be three, just as in the fairytales. Three

> masks of different hues and countenances, so that the story will have its perfect form. Three masks, three wishes, always three. And the story will have bloody teeth. (164-165)

In this passage, Harriet mentions Medea, the woman who killed her own children and Jason's new bride, the former in cold blood and the latter with poison. Medea incarnates both the masculine and the feminine with her power and the cold-blooded violence, but she is also the embodiment of the oppressed revolting against the oppressor: she is a woman and has been betrayed by the same man she helped and to whom she was married for years and with whom she had children. He betrayed her, disregarding their marriage because she was a foreigner, and decided to take her children away to a new city and into a new marriage. The blind rage and fury pushed her to violence. This can also be seen in Harriet, her rage against the men in her life and the patriarchal society has nurtured her anger and it is now exploding into rage and violence: against her art, against Rune, against the society. But it is thanks to this rage that she is finally free to feel and to express her feelings.

Harriet mentions another important female mythological figure Clytemnestra, through the words she pronounces as a ghost in *The Eumenides*: "Let go upon this man the stormblasts of your bloodshot breath, wither him in your wind, after him, hunt him down once more and shrivel him with your vitals' heat and flame" (304). These words are reported by Maise Lord, Harriet's daughter, which were written in her *Notebook O*. This notebook has also a subtitle: The Fifth Circle, which in Dante's *Inferno* it belongs to the wrathful and sullen and where "Virgil and Dante meet the Furies, who call on the Medusa to come and turn Dante into stone" (304). The connection between the wrathful, Clytemnestra and the Medusa stems from Harriet's notes on what happened between Rune and herself in Rune's studio: he shows Harriet a DVD with a video of Felix and Rune sitting together. This video confirmed even more the underlying reason behind the

motivation that pushed Rune to accept Harriet's masking game. He knew Felix and indirectly knew about Harriet. In this episode Rune, through Harriet's words, shows a violent and cruel mask that turned Harriet into stone, just like Medusa would do. In this chapter, the first-person turns into a second-person dialogue between Harriet and herself, as if this experience has created a detachment between her selves, where she could see herself from the outside. As mentioned before, memories are a retelling of an experience, usually narrated in the first-person but relived as if the person was looking at herself living that experience again.

Until her last days, Harriet's rage was still there, in her *Notebook T*, April 13, 2004, she writes that she returns with her mind back to the Riverside Drive apartment, where she lived as a child with her parents, and she remembers her mother's face expression when Harriet is found in her father's study and her mother is worried about how her husband could react.

> She was afraid of him.
> I was afraid of him.
> He never hit her. He never hit me.
> He didn't have to. We were in thrall.
>
> You did not know how angry you were.
> I did not know how angry I was.
> How I have raged. I think I cannot rage anymore. I think I am too feeble and then the spite comes up again, a bit weaker, a bit thinner, but there. If only I could feel that I had done my work, that is was finished, that it would not vanish entirely.
>
> Father you did not know how much I wanted your face to shine when you looked at me. But you were crippled. It helps me to know you were crippled. (359)

In this paragraph, Harriet remembers the fear her father provoked in her, but also how much she wanted to be seen by her father. The fact that he did not see her has had an

impact on Harriet, leading her to the *Maskings* project, and to the expression of the anger that was the result of this invisibility. And it is through this topic of seeing and perception that I will delve into the next chapter.

5.3. Looking at art: biased perception

As already said, the incipit line has set the leitmotiv of Harriet's story, which is that art, even literature, fares "better in the mind of the crowd" when it knows that behind it there is "a cock and a pair of balls" (1). The fact that even Harriet's nickname is Harry, a male name given to her by her father, the same man who didn't want her at the beginning, probably because he desired a boy and not a girl, leads us to understand how this story is lined with gender ambiguity, blurring the lines between male and female, and at the same time confirming the incipit through Harriet's vengeance art project. As we have seen, the purpose of the *Maskings* project is to uncover the sexism in the art world and to do that Harriet Burden decides to create three artworks using three male artists as a cover for her own presence. The plan is letting them pose as the artists of the artwork and after all three are presented to the public, reveal herself as the artist behind the art and expose the whole art world to their own biased judgement. As the editor writes, "it meant not only to expose the antifemale bias of the art world, but to uncover the complex working of human perception and how unconscious ideas about gender, race, and celebrity influence a viewer's understanding" (1).

On this point, it's important to shift to Siri Hustvedt's articles and essays regarding perception. In her essay "Borderlands: First, Second, and Third Person Adventures in Crossing Disciplines" (2013), published on *Salmagundi*, Hustvedt writes about the relationship between mind and body, with scientists considering "scientific truth as hard,

tough, verifiable, and rigorous", while artistic truth is "squishy" ("Borderlands" 84). A division that is applied to academic writing, where the "I" or "we" is erased, in order to "cleanse the text of subjective taint" ("Borderlands" 85). She, then, goes on about the problem of the subject/object, which has been debated by different philosophers, such as Descartes, Hume, Kant, Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who Hustvedt also mentions in *The Blazing World*. With the arrival of quantum physics, Hustvedt writes that "third-person fixity becomes first-person ambiguity. The view from nowhere becomes the view from somewhere" ("Borderlands" 88-89). However, whenever a person uses the first-person "I", there is always a "you" implied in the conversation. On this point Hustvedt writes:

> We are inexorably led to the fundamental question. What does saying "I" and "you" have to do with who and what we are? For Benveniste, "Ego is he who says ego" and language is responsible for subjectivity "in all its parts." This situates the linguist in a twentieth-century Continental tradition in which the subject is constituted by signs. Michel Foucault is a brilliant elucidatory of this position, a mode of thought that posits a world in which the body is an entity created by the discourses of history, a body made of words. As Lydia Burke points out, "The body, for all its apparent centrality in Foucault's work, disappears as a material entity." In her book *Giving Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler articulates a post-modern position: "Indeed when the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist." I agree with Butler that the "I" is profoundly shaped by our moment in history and its social conventions, that our relations to our own bodies, crucially to what has been called gender, are bound up in intersubjective cultural creations that for better and for worse become us. ("Borderlands" 90)

What Hustvedt writes here is the idea that the "I" cannot be divided from its material body, as people are not only objective but also subjective beings that are shaped by the historical and cultural context they are immersed in. When this is connected to perception, it becomes clear that the "I" is not only an objective mind but it can also be both a subjective mind and body, which is connected to the mind through feelings, and the relationship between the two also depend on the context they inhabit. "We all bodily

inhabit the first person, and it is a phenomenological truth that what you see depends upon where you are. Personal perspective is crucial to experience" ("Borderlands" 91). This means that the "I" is both a subjective body and an objective body for the "you", there cannot exist an "I" without a "you", which means that there is not "no self without an other, no subjectivity without intersubjectivity" ("Borderlands" 97). What is intersubjectivity? Merleau-Ponty's idea is that "an internal relation is established that causes the other to appear as the completion of the system", which also means that "meaning begins in the sub or pre-personal reality of a living body in the world that interacts with other living bodies and an environment; these interactions create loops of between action" ("Borderlands" 97). Thus, this intersubjectivity influences also people's perception of the world around them as they create a shared space between them and because the body is "at once the 'I' and an object in the world that can be seen by others; it has interiority and otherness simultaneously, and it has an implicit relational tendency toward a you, which is there from the beginning" (105). Because this applies to perception, it indirectly applies to how people perceive art, which is the central topic of *The Blazing World*. In her essay "Embodied Visions" (2010), Hustvedt states:

> Every encounter with a work of art is an embodied, subjective one. Our phenomenal experiences of Duchamp, Kosuth, Richter, and Darger are not objective, third-person experiences. I don't fly out of my body and my personal story when I stand in front of Duccio's *Madonna and Child* at the Metropolitan Museum. What happens, happens between me and the image, and, as Thomas Kuhn argued in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* even in science there is no such thing as perceptual neutrality. […] We cannot help but be part of the language and culture that shape our beliefs about how things are. And we all engage to one degree or another in consensus making, and intersubjective consensus precedes us. Nevertheless, we all have a genetic makeup – some scientists call it temperament – that will be expressed through our environments. […] Our temperaments in tandem with our personal stories as we grow as human beings will affect our responses to a painting and

> become part of the dialogue. We are born into meanings and ideas that will shape how our embodied minds encounter the world. (29)

So, when people look at a painting, they look with their embodied minds that are shaped, influenced, affected by the surrounding environment, their upbringing, the culture and society they are immersed in. This means that our perception depends on our life experiences and, consequently, on how we react to art, which also includes literature. It also shows us how perception can be biased when talking about gender, race, sexuality and class. An example of how our embodied mind influences our perception and is biased can be found in Siri Hustvedt's novel, *The Blazing World*, through Harriet's experience as a woman artist, who sets up a project to find the longed-for recognition.

In *Notebook C*, when Felix has died, Harriet is describing her current situation and she calls herself "Gargantua's artist wife. Wife outweighed artist, however" (14), who, after Felix Lord's death, left the art world, which did not ask of her after she retired from the public art life. This reality is also confirmed by Maise Lord's words, who writes "I knew my mother was an artist who made intricate houses filled with dolls and ghosts and animals she sometimes let me touch, but I never thought of her work as a job. She was my mother" (23). This statement discloses not only the biased perception between the role of the mother and that of the father: Harriet was an artist as well as a mother, but her artist-self was muted due to her role as a mother and wife. Furthermore, Maise explains how her mother would "close her eyes from time to time and liked to say that there was no art for her without the body and the rhythms of the body" (24), a declaration that is accompanied by Harriet telling Maise that she was lucky she didn't have her big breasts. This made Maise realize how much Harriet "felt her womanliness, her body, her size had somehow interfered with her life" (24). In this chapter, the reader first learns about Harriet's passion for Pessoa, the Portuguese writer famous for his heteronyms, and for

Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher who used different pseudonyms to publish different writings and who described these different personalities as “poetized personalities”, a definition that Harriet will use in her letter to Brickman to describe her masks. In the same manner, Harriet’s therapeutic path has led her to unleash different personas of the same Harriet Burden, which Maise calls "protean artist selves, selves that popped out and needed bodies” (25).

These different selves are narrated also by Harriet in *Notebook C*, where she writes that she had become “Harriet Unbound”, completely inhibited, and she starts wondering about “other paths, the alternative existences, the other Harry Burden who might have, could have, should have unleashed herself earlier, […] a real Harry, not a Harriet. […] The thought of another body, another style of being haunted me” (32). This is further expanded in the same chapter:

> I suspected that if I had come in another package my work might have been embraced or, at least, approached with greater seriousness. I didn’t believe that there had been a plot against me. Much of prejudice is unconscious. What appears on the surface is unidentified aversion, which is then justified in some rational way. Perhaps being ignored is worse […]. Despite the Guerrilla Girls, it was still better to have a penis. (33)

The Guerilla Girls was an organization born in 1985 as a reaction to the only seventeen women artists against the 169 total artists of the “International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture” exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Just as Harriet, they wanted to call attention to sexism and racism in the art world. Harriet also mentions different women that have posed as men to pursue their true self and their true life, such as Dr. James Barry from Edinburgh; Billie Tipton, jazz musician; Catherine Vizzani, an Italian woman who posed as a man and had a relationship with a woman in 1751. However, Harriet wasn’t interested in posing as a man, but she was interested in “perceptions and their mutability,

the fact that we mostly see what we expect to see. […] How could one account for the change except with the thought that self-image is unreliable at best" (35).

Despite this purpose, her hate for her body is mentioned repeatedly throughout the text. An example is when Rachel Briefman talks about the early years of their friendship and realizes, when she reads Harriet's favorite book *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, why Harriet loved it: "I hate the way I look. Why did I turn out this way?" (53), can be read as the words of the monster in chapter 15 of *Frankestein,* "my person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?" (54).

This tension between the hate for her body and the desire to be acknowledged and seen as a woman is translated into the first artwork: a giant Venus that resembled Giorgione's painting of the sleeping Venus, finished by Titian. The body was then covered with minuscule reproductions, photographs, texts, quotes, references to classic Greek art, to Pop-Art, and more. Together with this Venus, there was a male mannequin with a suit, who was looking at the statue of Venus, and all around them were scattered different boxes with windows and eerie lights in them so that viewers had to kneel to see inside. Boxes that the same Siri Hustvedt creates as she is "drawn to narrative works as a series of boxes or rooms, as a journey through time going somewhere" (Hustvedt, *An interview with Siri Hustvedt*, 2016, 5). The man looking at a huge Venus sleeping, naked except for all of the other things placed on her, represents the idea of men looking at women, how women are perceived by men and its impact on women themselves. The idea of men looking at women is exemplified in Oswald Case's testimony, a journalist who wrote Rune's memoir as well. At the end of his written testament, he writes that he doesn't remember Harriet, or as he calls her, "Mrs. Felix Lord", confining Harriet to the role of

Felix Lord's wife and ridding her of her name. The level of invisibility has reached complete erasure. On the other hand, the written testament of Rosemary Lerner adds to this conversation another point of view on Harriet Burden's work and confirms what she is trying to unveil: "it has often taken women longer to gain a hold in the art world than men" (71). She, then, adds: "Mostly, the art business has been about men. And when it has been about women, it has often been about correcting past oversights. It is interesting that not all, but many women were celebrated only when their days as desirable sexual objects had passed" (72).

Regarding the first mask, Rachel Briefman adds her perspective through her written testament by writing how Harriet had always talked about a "they", an enemy with a masculine face against whom she would have her revenge. And with the first mask, Rachel starts asking herself:

> She had fantasized about revenge for years, and now it had come – sort of. What did it mean that an amorphous *they* had celebrated her work when it arrived in a *twenty-four-year-old body with a cock*, to borrow Harry's words? What were the enthusiasts actually seeing, I asked, her work, or just Anton, the portrait of the artist as a young hunk? How many people really looked at art? And if they did, could they see anything in it? How did people actually judge it? […] Without the aura of greatness, without the imprimatur of high culture, hipness, or celebrity, what remained? What was taste? Had there ever been a work of art that wasn't laden with the expectations and prejudices of the viewer or reader or listener, however learned and refined? Harry and I agreed there had never been such a thing. She said that her idea was not just to expose those who fell into her trap but to investigate the complex dynamics of perception itself, how we all create what we see, in order to force people to examine their own modes of looking, and to dismantle their smug assumptions. (110)

The questions that Rachel asks herself in this passage are central in the development of the masquerade project. The first mask ends on a negative note with Harriet and Anton fighting about how Anton felt he lost his purity and authenticity and decided to opt out of the project to travel and find himself again. Harriet decides to move to the next mask, despite being warned by her friend Rachel of the psychological toll (115) this could have.

The next mask is Phineas Q. Eldridge, who Harriet meets through his son Ethan Lord, moves into the Red Hook house. Over the months, they create a bond, becoming friends, and then decided to collaborate on the second piece of art that would be presented with Phineas posing for Harriet. Despite Phineas enthusiastic approach to the artistic performance, he warns Harriet that the effect would be different compared to Anton Tish as he is a "swishy black man" (129). Being Phineas a black, gay man, the reviews would define this artwork as him "exploring his identity. White boys, the Anton Tishes of the world, have no need to explore their identities, of course. What is there to explore? They are the neutral universal entity, the unhyphenated human. I was pretty much all hyphen" (137).

The artwork is called *The Suffocation Rooms*, where the viewer would shrink every time they would open a door of these rooms.

> The rooms were nearly identical, the same grim-looking table and two chairs with vinyl seats, the same breakfast dishes laid out on the table, the same wallpaper made of Harry's and my own handwriting and some doodles (I had free rein here to put in all my secret messages), and the same two metamorphs in each room. At the beginning of the journey, the furniture fit your median-size adult – we decided on five-seven – but with each consecutive room, the table and the chairs, the cups and plates and bowls and spoons, the writing on the wallpaper grew that much larger, so that by the time you hit the seventh room, the scale of furniture had turned you into a toddler. The soft, stuffed metamorphs grew, too, and they got progressively hotter. The seventh room felt like a Finnish sauna. […] And then there was "the box". Unlike all the other objects in the rooms, the box did not grow; it stayed the same size. (131)

Not only, but the rooms are progressively more ruined and aged, and even the metamorphs progressively become older, with wrinkles and saggy skin. The box in the room is the same size but it opens slowly with each room, and inside there is a body trying to come out. If the metamorphs are "big, goofy-looking, lumpy things", the small body coming out of the box comes from "another plane of existence" (133). Inspired by the anatomical

wax figures that can be found in the La Specola Museum in Florence, from the XVII century, Harriet designs a human body, which became more and more realistic, but also "skinny, eerily transparent […], hermaphroditic" (133). Once this body is out of the box, even the metamorphs change position to look at it. This artwork can be read as the story of the true Harriet, coming out of the box where the Felix Lord's wife put her, freeing herself from the limitations of the box, and finally showing herself for who she is and letting people see herself. This is also confirmed by the words of Phineas, who writes "to be really seen, Harry had to be invisible. It's Harry crawling out of that box […]. It's a self-portrait" (138). Harriet's story, as well as Phineas', was written all over the wallpapers, but the viewer did not notice it. Harriet will call this phenomenon "inattentional blindness", which is described by Phineas as "people don't see thing that are right in front of their eyes unless they pay attention to them." (137-138).

Daniel J. Simon explains it as follows:

> Studies of change blindness assume that, with attention, features can be encoded (abstractly or otherwise) and retained in memory. That is, all of the information in the visual environment is potentially available for attentive processing. Yet, without attention, not much of this information is retained across views. Studies of inattentional blindness have made an even stronger claim: that, without attention, visual features of our environment are not perceived at all (or at least not consciously perceived) – observers may fail not just at change detection, but at perception as well. ("Gorillas in our midst" 1999, 1060)

Experiments have shown that when people are concentrated on something, they are blind to other details, for example people in a cinema not noticing a man in a gorilla suit waking by (Simons, *The Invisible Gorilla*, 2010). When applied to art, viewers could fixate their attention on determined things and be blind to others. In the case of *The Suffocation Rooms*, the viewers didn't notice the little details that let them know the authors of that

artwork and decided to see what they wanted to see: a black man on a journey to self-determination, of identity exploration. However, Harriet still realizes that it's better to be a black and gay man than an old woman, but, even though *Suffocation Rooms*, had a discrete success, *The History of Western Art* had more success, proving "that what is most desirable is a triple act: heterosexuality, masculinity and whiteness" (Kon-Yu & Van Loon, "Gendered Authorship", in *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 2018, 54). Harriet describes the Runes and Anton Tishes of the world: "they have no identity. […] Their freedom lies in precisely this: They cannot be defined by what they are not – not men, not straight, not white. And in this absence of circumscribed being, they are allowed to flourish in all their specificity" (*The Blazing World* 270).

The third and final artwork is *Beneath* by Rune and Harriet. In *Notebook O*, Harriet writes about their time at her Nantucket's house, where she asked Rune to collaborate with her and experiment with the masks. In this case, the work is truly collaborative as she says "with your name on my work it will *be* different. Art lives in its perception only. You are the last of three, and you are the pinnacle" (234). Rune is, however, blind to the gendered bias of the art world – "there are lots of women in art now. Where's the battle?" (234) – but he is lured by the idea of perpetrating this hoax. Harriet, then, presents the masks, very minimal, with little differences between them, but one is a female mask and one is a male mask. They will change sex and interpret a man and a woman of their choice. This is where the game becomes violent: Rune decides to film their interaction with the masks on and in that moment "the mask changes everything. It changes far more than I had imagined when we began the game. Rune began to vanish" (236). Rune is interpreting Ruina, a name that holds in itself the root of ruin, a hint to the fate of this masking project; while Harriet interprets Richard Brickman, a reference to

Richard Lionheart and to bricks as a solid and sturdy material, the only house of the three piglets that doesn't fall down with the wolf's blowing. In this interaction, Ruina starts crying and "whining", while Richard becomes more and more angry and violent, "I feel invigorated by my anger" says Harriet (238). "I lift my hand to smack her hard. The masked head is thrown back, and Rune is laughing. The laugh enrages me. The laugh storms inside me" and with this "the game is over" (238-239). This game has triggered in Harriet a strange feeling, of shame for the creation of Richard and of Ruina. She asks herself "Who is that man?" (240).

When rewatching the video she sees how the masks change the perception of their bodies completely. Harriet mentions on this account the word "performativity", a term coined by Judith Butler, who writes in her work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1990: "Gender proves to be performance, that is, constituting an identity it is purported to be. In this sense gender is always a doing, though not a doing by the subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (Butler, 25). With the masks, Harriet's body looks even taller and more masculine than without the mask, while Rune's body becomes more feminine with the Ruina mask on. This game of perception is what Harriet had been looking for with her artworks, showing how perception can be controlled and influenced by what people see but also what people want to see, blinded in front of other details. Richard Brickman is Harriet, Harriet is Richard Brickman.

There is the masculine and the feminine inside each person, and Richard was created on the basis of the concept of man that Harriet was used to that is amplified by her inner repressed emotions. Richard is another of Harriet's personalities, of her multitudes: he is the masculine in her, what she could have been if she was born male. On the other hand, Rune interprets a woman, probably a mirror of his mother, who is

described by Oswald Case as “a beauty, a homecoming queen”, “the woman had nurtured her own Bovary pipe dreams” (192). He reports a conversation he had with Rune, where he said that is mother “used to dress up for nobody and sashay around the house. Now I think she was crazy, nuts, certifiable” (192). The image that Rune gives of her mother is of a fragile, crazy woman, who was stuck in her beauty dream. An image that could possibly have affected the resulting performance of Ruina: the amplification of how women are perceived by men, whimpering and muted in front of men. These two personas created a change in Harriet, especially, and her relationship with Rune himself. In that same *Notebook O*, as already mentioned, Harriet finds out the truth about Rune and Felix and is shocked, almost traumatized as she switches from first to second-person narration. Harriet has always had a tendency to switch person when writing, but the switching is more frequent when talking about Rune and *Beneath*. When Harriet talks about her Richard Brickman mask with Rachel, she talks about how her husband Felix had hurt her a lot, “and she had pushed her rage down at him, but a part of her couldn’t help feeling sorry for him anyway. *That’s why I need the cold mask, you see*” (258). This cold mask is Richard Brickman, which only comes out with Rune:

> *Yes*, she answered me, *a cold, hard, indifferent mask, an imperious persona that will rise up and smash the stupids. He comes out when I’m with Rune.* That’s why she was interested in multiple personalities, because she thought plurality was human, she explained. She didn’t get dizzy, black out, or lose people inside her. She knew perfectly well that she was Harry, but she had discovered new forms of her self, forms she said that most men take for granted, forms of resistance to others. *Why do you suppose,* she said, *that over ninety percent of all reported cases of multiple personality have been women? Bend and sway,* Harry said triumphantly. *Bend and sway. The pull of the other. Girls learn to read power, to make their way, to play the game, to be nice.* (258)

Harriet’s interest for multiple personality disorder stems from the experience of being a woman in a patriarchal society: as a woman, she had to change her behavior, she had to “bend and sway” in order to follow the wishes of her husband, of her father, of male art

critics and reviewers. If Harriet had to bend and sway, other women have decided to stay true to themselves and their self-determination has become an act of resistance against the oppressor (for example, Audre Lorde).

This last artwork is described by Phineas Q. Eldridge: the gallery was the setting for a huge maze with “thick white walls I guess were Plexiglas or Lucite” (261), which were eight feet tall, not too tall to feel they were towering over the viewer but high enough to not see the outside of the maze. The walls were translucent, letting the viewers see the shadows of the other visitors. “The maze was claustrophobic and disorienting” and a few moments Phineas felt “that dreamy, hallucinatory, life-really-is-awfully-strange atmosphere”, which was caused by the fact that the walls of the maze were not the same size: the widths grew narrower and wider, lengthened and shrank, but always gradually, creating a feeling of disorientation without the viewer realizing why they are feeling that way. In the walls of the maze there were windows with different objects designed to change very slightly but they forced the visitors to really look into these windows to manage to find their way out of the maze. In the windows there were the masks, a roll of cotton gauze, a white piece of paper and a dark grey crayon. In some windows there were videos and in the peep-holes at the dead ends of the maze there were other videos. The walls of the maze were increasingly marked by cracks, like veins branching out. After exiting the maze, both Phineas and his boyfriend Marcelo felt “a little dazed” (264), feeling the open and crowded space of the gallery as a relief.

This last artwork, *Beneath,* between the three of these artworks, pushes the visitor to actually pay attention to the small details put in the windows and displayed in the videos, otherwise they couldn’t find the exit. And by paying attention, they could notice the details that Harriet had put into the artwork. The title *Beneath* recalls to an underlying

meaning behind everything, as if what is beneath these videos and these objects is what is important. What is beneath is that this artwork is not made by Rune but Harriet has made it as well, in collaboration with Rune. What the visitors did not see is Harriet, because her artworks are described by the art dealer William Burridge as "round feminine shapes, mutant bodies, that kind of thing. *Beneath* is hard geometrical, a real engineering feat. It's just not her style, but it made sense for Rune" (277). After reading this review, Harriet points out that he "does not know he has written about me, not Rune. He doesn't know that the adjectives, *muscular, rigorous, cerebral* can be claimed by me" (292). These observations highlight the stereotypes between art produced by men and that produced by women: art by men is "geometric", "muscular", "cerebral", while women's art is dismissed as "feminine", "squishy", "round". The first group of adjectives are *claimed* by Harriet, a strong verb that discloses how she is claiming masculinity as a part of herself. As just said, these adjectives would normally be used for men, but Harry identifies in these words through her art. However, these adjectives are used to describe her work only when she uses a male mask: whether it be the three men or Richard Brickman, she can only be cold, calculated, geometrical and cerebral when she looks like a man. And this shows the stark difference between how men's and women's art is perceived and interpreted.

5.4. If I were a boy: the dismissal of women's work and the problem of authorship.

Perception and how we look at things is an important topic of the novel; there is, however, another important discussion that stems from this topic, and that is the problem of authorship for women and the dismissal of their work. In 1967 Roland Barthes proclaims the death of the author in his essay "The Death of The Author", where he writes:

> We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every paint of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing. (142)

For Barthes, as well as Michel Foucault, the author should be erased from the process of writing and literature is where "language […] speaks, not the author", it has to reach the point where "only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'" (143).

However, as Natalie Kon-Yu and Julienne Van Loon write in the essay "Gendered Authorship" (2018), "For [historian Liz] Stanley the death of the author was a very convenient death for the beneficiaries of patriarchy" (58) and even Rita Felski, in her book *Literature after Feminism* (2003), agrees that "it is no coincidence […] that at the very moment women were gaining prominence in the academy, male scholars began to disparage all talk of authorship as passé" (58). While it can be said that this last statement takes a strong stance against the death of the author, it is true that feminist scholars have been trying to retrieve the works of lost women writers as well as re-reading well-known authors that have been misread. As Adrienne Rich wrote in her essay, "re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction: it is an act of survival" (Rich 1972, 18). So, in the end, the author is important when there is a biased perception of women's writing. Margaret Atwood writes in her essay "On Being a Woman. Paradoxes and Dilemmas" (1976) that whenever the a "male reviewer is impressed by a female writer" he says that "she writes like a man" (Atwood 197), which is meant as a compliment. In relation to this, the adjectives used for men's writing are "strong, gutsy, hard, mean" (197), with the assumption that women's writing is "soft, weak and not very good, and that if a woman writer happens to be good, she should be deprived of her identity as a female and provided with higher (male) status" (197-198). Another element that is mentioned by Atwood and by Hustvedt as well regards

the theme of domesticity in a book: "when a man writes about things like doing the dishes, it's realism; when a woman does, it's an unfortunate feminine genetic limitation" (199). In the case of *The Blazing World*, Hustvedt places an artist as the central figure that tries to dismantle the social constructions of gender roles and exposes the "persisting problem of gender discrimination and also the inadequacies of traditional feminist approaches to female and (male) identity" (Anna Thiemann, "Portraits of the (Post-)Feminist Artist", 2016, 315).

In regard to gender discrimination, it is important to talk about the expedients women have used to be taken seriously: pseudonyms. If Fernando Pessoa or Søren Kierkegaard used pseudonyms to play with different perspectives and different "poetized personalities", women have used them to be taken seriously from editors and readers. When they have not used pseudonyms, their work has been dismissed as less than, as not good enough for the public of (male) readers. Women's writing is too rooted in their experience that men cannot empathize with female protagonists, while women readers who have been reading men's work have been able to for centuries. In *The Blazing World* Hustvedt, through Harriet, writes about the Tiptree drama as a mirror of Harriet's mask project. The story of Alice Sheldon, a.k.a. James Tiptree, is narrated through the written testament of Maise Lord, where Harriet explains to Maise the story of Alice Bradley Sheldon, a science fiction writer who published her books with the name James Tiptree. She continues by saying that "for at least ten years no one actually saw Tiptree in the flesh, not even his editor" (Hustvedt 198), and this secret identity caused a lot of speculation on who this person could be. Some have suggested that the person behind Tiptree was actually a man working for the CIA that needed to use a pseudonym in order to be a writer. Harriet says that Robert Silverberg, another science fiction writer, "argued

that just as no man could have written the novels of Jane Austen, no woman could have produced the stories of Ernest Hemingway or James Tiptree. When rumors about the gender of Tiptree started circulating, Silverberg wrote "it has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory that I find absurd, for there is something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree's writing" (Kon-Yu & Van Loon 56). At one point Sheldon decided to send stories with a female pseudonym, Raccoona Sheldon, Sheldon's biographer Julie Phillips notes that "David Gerrold recalled finding Raccoona's first stories to be 'too light, too fluffy, too delicate' and having 'no bite'" (Kon-Yu 56). Phillips also notes that "Alli (Sheldon) herself felt more authority as a man: she felt she could write about sex, science, and violence without being second-guessed" (Kon-Yu 56). So, Alice Sheldon had not one but two pseudonyms, two different selves in the game that were treated differently. In the testament, Harriet says the name Raccoona evokes the animal raccoon that wears a mask without actually having one. The big revelation did not work well for Sheldon, as much as it didn't work for Harriet, as Sheldon lost not only male friends – even though she had been welcomed by other women writers such as Ursula Le Guin – but she also lost her creative spark as her purpose had never been to uncover sexism, as James Tiptree was part of Alice Sheldon as much as Raccoona Sheldon is part of Alice. Harriet explains that Ursula Le Guin writes to Sheldon that she preferred Tiptree to Raccoona as she "has less control, thus less wit and power" (Hustvedt 199), which Harriet comments with "Le Guin had understood something deep. When you take on a male persona, something happens. You get to be the father" (199), which means that the woman can distance herself from the conformed role of the mother, of the nurturing and caring role that society imposes on women, but she can experiment the freedom that men (fathers) have that women don't. Harriet goes on saying that in 1987 "Tiptree shot her husband and then killed herself.

Sheldon couldn't live without her man – not her husband obviously, but the man inside her – and that's why she exploded into violence" (199). Alli tells her friends "My biography is ambisexual", a statement that can be applied to Harriet, as she does not conform much to the

> conventional ways of dividing up the world – black/white, male/female, gay/straight, abnormal/normal – none of these boundaries convinced her. These were impositions, defining categories that failed to recognize the muddle that is us, us human beings. "Reductionism!" She used to shout this every now and then. (Hustvedt 130).

However, Harriet states in her notebooks that her purpose was not "experimenting with my own body, strapping down my boobs and packing my pants" or to "live as a man", but what interested her "were the perceptions and their mutability, the fact that we mostly see what we expect to see" (35). So, Harriet's objective was to have her own "indirect communications à la Kierkegaard" (35), not to dress up as a man, pose as a man, or to use pseudonyms. Instead of using abstract pseudonyms, Harry used real people as masks which would pose for her and uncover the sexism, which became more and more blatant by the end of the project. For this reason, Harriet becomes more and more depressed due to the effect that her hoax was having not only on the masks but also on her. As she says in relation to Alice Sheldon, becoming a man had changed her. Harriet has been longing for recognition for years, initially from her father, then from her husband and with him, from the art world altogether. In the end, "Harry cannot claim ownership of all the pieces of her work. The effect on her is traumatic. Her body beings to deteriorate" (Kon-Yu 61).

A recurrent theme in Eagleton's *Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction* (2005) is:

> The loss of a woman's authority over her work, in terms of content, form and legal ownership, results not in a dispersal of power and a liberating deposing of 'the Author' but in a redistribution of power which confirms existing hierarchies of gender, class and race. (5)

And while we can see this happening in the book, the last artwork that readers encounter is *The Blazing World Mother*, "her Margaret", a private project that Harriet had begun years before but abandoned as it "never satisfied her" (314). Bruno Kleinfeld, Harriet's boyfriend, writes that this artwork was "no sweet, dreaming, oversized odalisque", "this woman had worlds inside her" (315). This project was personal and private, "it wouldn't matter whether anyone saw them or not. She needed to make them, and she did" (315). Margaret Cavendish had seen her treaties on philosophy, science and knowledge dismissed and her 1666 *The Blazing World* is a text about worldmaking, where the women have the power through the Empress and the English woman. During her life, Cavendish was adamant about entering the world of men: in 1662 she was the first to enter and "partake in conversation at The Royal Society, for example, and, like Harry Burden, her insistence on being heard and on having her work noticed, was deeply performative" (Kon-Yu 50). She was defended by other women who were as educated as her, but many prominent male figures of that time ridiculed her calling her a "mad, conceited, ridiculous woman" (quoted in Kun-Yu 50), and she was even given the name Mad Madge. In *Notebook M*, Harriet describes the first moments when she started thinking about her Margaret. She writes:

> I am going to build a house-woman. She will have an inside and an outside, so that we can walk in and out of her. I am drawing her, drawing and thinking about her form. She must be large, and she must be a difficult woman, but she cannot be a natural horror or a fantasy creature with a vagina dentata. She cannot be a Picasso or a de Kooning monster or Madonna. No either/or for this woman. No, she must be true. […] Let her be my Lady Contemplation in honor of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, that seventeenth-century monstrosity: female intellectual. […] The duchess in all her eccentric glory was duly recorded by Samuel Pepys, who recorded everything. It was easy. It's still easy. You simply refuse to answer the woman. You let her words or her pictures die. (Hustvedt 221)

Harriet designs this woman as squatting and giving birth, a clear expression of maternity, of fertility. She welcomes the nickname she has been given of the "Witch" as the "enchantment of magic and the power of night, which is procreative, fertile, wet" (222). She continues by arguing that women are the "makers and shakers of generations" (222). And finally quotes a part of the Gulliver Travels where Gulliver looks up at the giant nurse and is disgusted by the sight of this woman with her "monstrous breast", an alarming size and "every imperfection of the skin visible. A Swiftian conflation of microscope and misogyny" (222).

The final description of Margaret comes from Sweet Autumn Pinkney, a young woman who is interested and passionate about new age topics such as manifesting, crystals, auras and chakras. She heard a voice call Harriet's name and decided to go visit her in Red Hook, where she found Harriet on her death bed. She stayed until her death to help her pass with a cleansed aura and spirit. During her time there she connected with Ethan Lord and after eight months from her passing, Ethan invited Sweet Autumn to go see Harriet's art. In the end, the only person who really saw Harriet's artwork as an extension of Harriet herself was Sweet Autumn, a person who didn't understand and was not interested in art, and despite this was able to really see and connects with it. Margaret is described as a "big statue with no hair", "she had lots of people inside her head, but also numbers and letters, and she was raining numbers and letters and little people from her private parts" (378). Sweet Autumn moved closer and kneeled in front of the statue because she felt a "sacred feeling": amidst the little statues, Harriet had put herself as well, "walking along, all happy and healthy, just minding her own business, looking up at the sky" (378). The last thing that Sweet Autumn sees is this statue glowing a purple light, and when she turns around to look at the other artworks, she saw "their auras blazing

out all around them", because, in the end, these were "just things a person had made" and by making these things Harriet "had given her spirits and energies into what she has made" (379). The last lines are the most emblematic of the whole book in relation to the topic of perception:

> I closed my eyes. I opened them again, and I just stood there smiling because the colors were still there – reds and oranges and yellows and greens and blues and violets – blazing hot and bright in that big room where Harry used to work, and I knew for certain that each and every one of those wild, nutty, sad things Harry had made was alive with spirit. (379)

These last lines remind the reader that even the book that they are holding has a blazing aura of the person who wrote it, and everything we, as human beings immersed in the world, create is permeated with our embodied experience, which can or cannot be perceived from another person, but when both parts are speaking the same language, it becomes easier for them to perceive what the other person wants to convey, even though there is still the influence of the embodied mind when looking at the object. This final statement can also be interpreted of how Hustvedt wants readers to understand what art should be and what it is for – connection on a deeper level, on an emotional level – and is shows us how judging art can be fallacious and destructive. In this sense, Hustvedt uses Harriet as a mask for herself: through the story of Harriet Burden, Hustvedt conveys her opinions on how perception can be biased and how women, whether they are artists or writers, will have to face a different reaction from the "public" just because they are women. Hustvedt comments on this in an interview, where she is asked if she has ever written under a male pen name, to which she responds:

> When I was young, I had the experience of receiving responses to my work (both rejection and acceptance letters) from editors who believed I was a man: Mr. Hustvedt . . . The tone of the letters addressed to the male Siri Hustvedt was strikingly different from the tone of those addressed to the female Siri Hustvedt. The respect and seriousness granted me as a man was frankly astounding. I

> confess I felt rather shocked by the difference, and I have never forgotten it. (Quoted in Kun-Yu et al. 59)

She, also, speaks about the sexism she has faced because of her writing. She elaborates:

> Literature, however, labors under a cloud of inferiority in a culture where science has become the arbiter of truth. Poems and novels are often seen as fluffy, soft, imaginary, and feminine in ways physics never is. Add to that the fact that women are the great consumers of fiction, not men, then you have a roiling sea of worry. Therefore, the desire to make literature serious, to dignify it with tough, masculine traits, with beards and bulging biceps and swagger, becomes all the more important. To a significant degree this has meant championing work written by men or work that connotes masculinity in one way or the other. (Quoted in Kun-Yu et al. 59)

When reading these quotes, it becomes clear that Harriet isn't just the main character of the story but also an alter-ego of Hustvedt, who lets the reader have a look at what it means to be a woman artist – and writer – through the story of someone else. Harriet, however, is not just Hustvedt but she is also the mask for every woman artist.

Cavendish's work as well as Harriet's final artwork can both be read as the rejection of the dominant discourse and they translate in an effort to do things differently. The reason why this artwork comes at the end of the book can be read as the restoration of Harriet's reputation and a model for the creation of new work on women's terms. The fictional character of Harriet can be read as a real-life Siri Hustvedt, only in the terms of Barthes essay, where "the very identity of the body that writes" is considered important by contemporary culture, and what Hustvedt has done with her *Blazing World* is to shed a light on the problem of biased perception and demands access to the dominant, commercial mode of success, with the cultural authority that comes with it. And as long as the identity of the writer matters, then it should be considered despite whether it comes with or without a "cock and a pair of balls".

Conclusions

The initial question of my thesis was if anger could be considered a creative emotion rather than a destructive one. After reading Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde and Siri Hustvedt it has become clear to me that anger is always in the back of a woman's mind because of her experience of the world.

Starting with Virginia Woolf, the cool and detached writer, who used irony and sarcasm to criticize society in her two most political texts, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, she was ambivalent on her position towards suffragettes in the 1910s, but we can see in the two aforementioned texts (1929 and 1938) that her position did change. Her most famous statement is that a woman needs money and a room of her own if she wishes to write fiction, and while it certainly does seem like an important thing, just they are both not enough. Woman need that to write fiction but what about being considered worthy enough of being read? In *A Room of One's Own* she writes about a drawing she made of a professor, whom she calls Professor Von X and who wrote a book titled *The Mental, Moral and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*. She describes her drawing stating that he looked like he was stabbing the paper and that the killing on the page didn't satisfy him, and he had to continue with it. Woolf asks herself if it was his wife the reason of that anger and frustration, his wife having an affair, people mocking the professor because he was ugly, the cause of such anger? Woolf drew him very ugly and very angry in her sketch and the reason behind that was not his anger but her own anger. "Anger had snatched my pencil while I dreamt" (29). But as she says, it is in "idleness" that the truth comes out: Virginia Woolf was angry, and the reason was the statement of the professor stating the inferiority of women. She describes herself as with flushed cheeks, her heart

leaping, she “flushed with anger”. She then goes on pondering on why she is angry and comes to the conclusion that the professor is angry, and with professor Woolf means men in general. The professor wrote that book in spite of anger because of the threat women pose on his superiority. From this thought she goes on writing that in fact women act as magnifying glasses for men and when they are being criticized by a woman, they get angry. But what does men’s anger against the threat of women have to do with women and fiction, for Woolf? The connection here is between the book of Professor Von X and the fact that there are not many books by women on the shelves. She starts imagining what would have happened to an imaginary sister of Shakespeare, Judith Shakespeare, and it ends with Judith not being educated and killing herself because of the gift she has been given and cannot use. So, going back to her initial statement, a woman needs a room and money and to have both, she would have to wait a long time. And what about the novelists such as the Bronte sisters or Jane Austen? Woolf criticizes the writing of women, especially Charlotte Bronte, as she thinks that the anger and frustration that can be perceived when reading *Jane Eyre* has ruined the experience of the book because of the voice in the back of their head reminding them of the criticism, the fact that their writing wasn’t as good as men’s writing. On the other hand, she praises Emily Bronte and Jane Austen because “they wrote as women write, not as men write” (73). In the end, what Woolf is concerned about in her book is that women who express their anger for their situation and write as men and for men instead of as women and for women, are not as good as Jane Austen or Emily Bronte. And this is coherent with how Woolf treated her anger, by toning it down, by using her diaries as a buffer for her anger. She did, however, fail to conceal it completely, because the sarcasm and irony in her writing leaves space for imagination and that anger is lurking behind her words. And the anger of not seeing

women books on the shelves or of being denied access to the library because she was a woman, did urge her to write about the issue. The paper on Women and Fiction is much more that the fact that women don't write many books, it is about how women have been denied access to the freedom of writing, of using their genius, of giving voice to their imagination because men have decided that they were inferior or deemed not good enough. So, even though Woolf criticizes the anger in writing, she didn't write *A Room of One's Own* to just write about women and their (inexistent) fiction.

And it's this anger that Adrienne Rich felt while reading Virginia Woolf and she writes about it in her essay "When We Dead Awaken". What is fascinating here is that Woolf writes that for her the writing of Jane Austen and Emily Bronte were the perfect example of women writing as women, but the two could not be more different: the former writing ironic commentaries on how society was structured; the latter writing a love-hate story that is permeated with death, anger, violence. What they both had was education, money, a place to write and freedom from a man, everything that Woolf thought fundamental for a woman writer. Adrienne Rich, on the other hand, was born in another time, where women could go to university, and she had all the freedom to write. Despite this, she felt pressured by society to jump into married life, have kids and dedicate herself to her husband. All this, however, took her freedom away, leaving her with anger and frustration for this situation, which she decided to change in order to really be herself. But the anger for her own situation became the anger for every woman's situation as soon as her political commitment became real and intense. Anger here is not just an emotion that makes her blood boil and her cheeks red, it's an emotion that has urged her to write poetry on her personal experience as a woman in order to become the means through which other women can identify and find inside themselves the anger and power to change their

situation. She wrote essays on political and literary matters; as a mother and a feminist, she talked about motherhood and the difficulties of being not just a mother. While she was on a journey to discover herself, she was also engaged in searching for a new way of communicating, a new language that would move away from the "oppressor's language" and move closer to women's experience. Anger lurked behind the verses and words as the fuel that urged Rich to write about oppression, rape, war, racism, sexism and homophobia.

And some of the topics were brought forward even by Audre Lorde, a Black, feminist, lesbian poet, who wrote poetry as a way to identify, understand and express her emotions, and wrote essays to break the silence around those important topics. Audre Lorde finds anger useful as it is what urges people to change and fight against oppression. Her poetry is not just a way of describing her experience in the world she lives in, but it is also a way of learning more about herself. In the first chapter on metaphors, I write that it is only through the creative listening of others that the expressions of lived experiences can be linked to mature levels of articulation. In this way, the listener might come to know something from the speaker that they still cannot think in a logical way. And this can be applied to all writers, not only Lorde, but in the case of Lorde, she herself uses poetry as a way of understanding more about herself and her emotions and also to understand the world, and us readers can read through these verses and understand the poet more, but also ourselves more.

Poetry has always been considered the space where metaphors thrive best, where the lyrical use of language is enhanced by the use of metaphors and other figures of speech, but novels themselves are not excluded from the use of metaphors, especially writers such as Siri Hustvedt, who uses real life experiences and transforms them into psychological and philosophical teachings on how the world works. Hustvedt uses visual

representations of art as metaphors for what she wants the reader to learn and understand about the story. In her novel *The Blazing World*, all the different artworks that are described are the representations of what she thinks about perception and gendered authorship. Harriet Burden herself becomes the representation of women artists and novelists as well, almost an alter-ego of Hustvedt herself. And it is through Hustvedt's reflection on perception that we realize that probably we have perceived anger in each and every woman writer not only because they wrote thanks to it, but also because us readers, us women readers, have it hidden and suppressed inside ourselves. Hustvedt finds that the borders between subjectivity and objectivity are blurred, "creating zones of focused ambiguity" ("Borderlands", 105), where the different perspectives are a resource rather than an issue, as human beings are not only an objective mind or a subjective body, but they are both at the same time, the mind is connected to the body and the body to the mind and both of them are connected and immersed in a context – social, cultural and political – and this influences perception in many ways. So, when reading what we read, we often come to look at things from our own biased point of view, which can be negative if it comes to discredit one thing as good and one thing as bad solely based on one aspect, such as gender. And a biased perception is even more negative when it influences society's mind, as in the case of women in any type of job (in our case as artists and novelists).

However, the fact that our body and mind are connected can lead us to what I have already mentioned and which is "embodied simulation", a process that I find extremely interesting as a reader. This process, however, has made me think: did Adrienne Rich really perceive Woolf as "almost in touch with her anger", or was that her own anger peaking through the curtains? Was she emphasizing with the writing or was she reading the text through her own biased perception? In Siri Hustvedt's novel, anger is the push

for Harriet's revenge project and it is described throughout the book as an inner repressed force that has finally been liberated once Harriet was free from men's control. Despite this representation, Hustvedt is married with a daughter and does not express her anger as Harriet does, in a theatrical and violent way. But it does come through her writing: the anger and frustration of being a woman and being considered less good than a man, even of her husband Paul Auster, another writer; the way men look at what woman create, whether it's writing or art and how their way of looking is the mirror of how the patriarchal society considers women. All these elements that are part of a woman's experience, even those women who are privileged and luckier than others, are what sparks that anger that has urged artists, novelists, poets to write, create, speak up, break the silences around their experiences. Voices and artworks that have become not just the product of a creative mind but a push towards a different future.

As a twenty-first century reader and after reading the works from Woolf (1929), Rich and Lorde (1956-1980), and Hustvedt (2010), I feel that there has been little change from 1929 until nowadays, but the one thing that I have found different is that emotions are becoming more and more validated and important, that expressing them does not make the book less valid. However, it still is difficult for a woman to prove herself as worthy enough. As Hustvedt says in an interview:

> SH: There are of course women in the canon, but there are many fewer than there should be. A woman's text is judged as softer than a man's, even when it's hard. This is part of Harry's story and it isn't a fantasy: it is more difficult for women to be taken seriously. Louise Bourgeois said "A woman has to prove over and over and over again that she can't be discounted." There's something to it. (Munez, "Interview" 10)

In her essay "Art and Anger" Jane Marcus talks about how it will be after women have

let their anger out, “When the fires of our rage have burnt out, think how clear the air will be for our daughters. They will write in joy and freedom only after we have written in anger” (94). She even quotes Virginia Woolf’s words “The future of fictions depends very much upon what extent men can be educated to stand free speech in women”. And it is in light of this “after anger” that I conclude my thesis with the thought that there is still no true after anger as demonstrated by Hustvedt’s words as well. The patriarchal society still doesn’t stand the free speech in women and women’s work is still deemed less than: less than men, less than good, less than valuable. So, there will probably still be anger urging women to create, to speak up through any means.

The question of this thesis is still not completely answered, as the corpus of women’s writing is getting bigger and bigger and the multitude of backgrounds and experiences might change the final answer or might confirm it. I have reduced the research to three authors not too distant in time to create a continuum, but as a woman and as a reader, there is still plenty to read and understand.

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