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Christine Mauric

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1. Introduction

This thesis seeks to explore the representation of rape in selected poems by means of feminist criticism as well as feminist narratology.

Rape is a ubiquitous crime that primarily affects women. The representation of rape in literature dates back as far as depictions in the Bible (Frenzel 172). As this work focuses on the exploration of rape representation, it is especially of significance to consider literary views upon this crime. Quay argues that the importance of literary analysis of rape reflects the prevalent prejudices and points of view of society towards sexual violence and the lack of early literary criticism of representations of rape in literature (476).

Furthermore, another aspect of this thesis is the feminist view upon the depiction of rape within literature. A central concern of feminist criticism was the connection between representations of rape and real-life experiences of rape victims (Quay 477). By focusing on the representation of rape in poetry, this thesis aims to participate in the literary analysis that is concerned with how feminism contributes to raising awareness to the topic of rape, as Quay states the need for continuous analysis of rape in literature and to “move beyond familiar readings” in order to demystify rape and its assumptions shared by society, which contribute to passive attitudes towards the topic of rape (477).

The aim of this thesis was developed during the primary literary review of poems that deal with rape. Consequentially, the central question arose: How do the selected poems contribute to the fight for women’s equality?

Thus, the resulting research questions are: How is rape represented in the selected poems? Moreover, by which means do the selected poems exhibit feminist notions?

Firstly, the second chapter will present the theoretical background concerning the definition of rape, by means of intersectional research informed by legal and feminist notions. According to Freedman, “Rape is a word in flux” (1). Several attempts have

been made to define rape throughout history, and until recently, the notions varied gravely. Although there is no universal definition applicable to rape, in the late second half of the 20th century, a universal concept could be agreed upon, to some degree, by scholars and policymakers in the fields of law, and feminism (Eriksson 3).

Secondly, aspects of feminist criticism, as well as feminist narratology, will be discussed. Feminist criticism applies the political aims of feminists in the analysis of literature, particularly in which manner literature aligns with feminist ideology (Humm 2).

Furthermore, to address the first research question concerning the representation of rape, the selected poems will be analyzed through close reading, examining imagery and representations of rape. Subsequently, to answer the second research question, the selected poems will be analyzed regarding the different narrative modes of voice, according to the concept that Susan Lanser (1992) postulates in her work of feminist narratology. Moreover, the utilized voice or voices will provide insight on if and how the selected poems exhibit feminist notions.

In order to analyze in which manner the selected poems convey feminist notions concerning rape, the methodological framework will draw from concepts of feminist narratology.

In their Introduction to Theory into Poetry, Müller-Zettelmann and Rubik (7) cite Warning: "There is no theory of the lyrics in the way that there is a theory of the drama or the narrative" (qtd. in Müller-Zettelmann and Rubik 7). The authors further argue that poetry is regarded as the "epitome of the literary" (Müller-Zettelmann and Rubik 7) while simultaneously being challenging to analyze, as there is no complete and universal toolkit that can be applied to the analysis of poetry. It is suggested that poetic analysis can be achieved by adopting methods from different disciplines outside the poetic genre (Müller-Zettelmann and Rubik 7).

In order to deepen the analysis of voice in poetry, the methodology regarding narrative modes of voice will consist of a multifaceted approach by adopting concepts of narratology. As Hühn (147) states, theoretical frameworks of poetry criticism exhibit deficits in comparison to narratological techniques, the solution to these deficits seems

to be lying within the use of narratological concepts being applied to the analysis of poetry. Efforts of defining poetry as a genre analogous to narrative fiction, or drama, were unsuccessful. As a result, the categories of analysis regarding interpretations of poetry were substantiated in emotions, and intuition, exhibiting an inadequate framework. Hence, Hühn argues that by applying analytical methodology from narratology to poetry, the deficient procedures utilized in poetry analysis can be remedied:

As for poetry, such a transgeneric recourse to narratology is able to demonstrate that narrative texts and lyric poems, in spite of their apparent differences in form, technique and function, share essential constituents and that therefore narratological categories can profitably be applied to poetry in the expectation that the more comprehensive scope and highly developed status of narratology as well as the discriminatory capacity of narratological terminology will both offer a fresh impetus to the theory of poetry and suggest new practical methods for the analysis of poems (Hühn 147).

Moreover, Culler states that narrative is commonly mediated by characters, which the author fabricated (204). In contrast, the author or implied author in the lyric is accountable for the poem's diction and its negotiated notions of the world. Thus, we as readers tend to experience narrative fiction through the eyes of the character, whereas in the lyric, the reader identifies with the poet's words in a more direct manner (Culler 204).

To successfully detect feminist notions in the selected poems, the analysis of narrative voice will be grounded in Susan Lanser's feminist narratology. Furthermore, the historical background, as well as the reception of the poem, will be discussed in order to identify similarities and differences between the poems.

Lastly, the conclusion will summarize and discuss the findings.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Rape

To preface the analysis in chapter 3, it is essential to define the term “rape” first. Throughout history, the meaning of the term rape fluctuated considerably. Quay argues that legal definitions “vary depending on which legal system, or which individual does the defining” (Quay 475), or simply put, there is no universal definition.

Undoubtedly, rape is one of the oldest crimes and common occurrences all over the world. It is a criminal act that is severely underreported due to social stigma, fear, or shame. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), an American non-profit anti-sexual assault organization, roughly 433.000 members of the general public (age 12 and older) were sexually assaulted or raped, 60.000 children were victims of substantiated or indicated sexual abuse, 80.000 inmates were sexually assaulted or raped, and 19.000 military members experienced unwanted sexual contact each year (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network *Statistics*). Moreover, in 90% of the reported rapes, the victims were female.

In the scope of this thesis, the focus lies on how rape is represented in literature and tied to feminism and how *Feminist Poetry of Rape* attempts to unite representations of rape with real instances of rape in public discourse. Discourses about rape blur the lines between the fields of law, politics, and popular culture. Therefore, the attempt to define the term rape will also be informed by legal, political, and cultural research.

2.1.1. Definition of rape

Firstly, according to the United Nations Secretary-General, rape is a crime that primarily affects women and is prevalent in all states, cultures, and contexts, whether it occurs in peacetime or armed conflict (Eriksson 3). It has been described as “history’s greatest silence” by the United Nations (qtd. in Eriksson 3), and its elimination is regarded as a fundamental focus in the organization's work. Thus, in eradicating sexual

violence, it is essential to systematically address and condemn sexual violence by exposing rape myths to publicly address that it is an act of discrimination based on sex. Furthermore, the occurrence of rape outside of armed conflicts is regarded as an act done by sexual deviants (Eriksson 3). Consequently, a minimization of the gravity of the crime is provoked, followed by a failure to acknowledge its pervasive nature (Eriksson 3).

Secondly, in her work *The Concept and Measurement of Violence*, Walby describes different types of violence and discusses their respective characteristics. The conducted research is based on international legal concepts such as the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Walby 57). Furthermore, Walby recognizes rape as embedded in sexual violence, which she defines as “a specific form of violence concerning contact with the body in the absence of consent that violates sexual autonomy. Rape is a subset of sexual violence that includes penetration of the body” (Walby 71).

It is of significance how we define the actus reus, i.e., the physical part of the criminal act, of rape (Eriksson 13). Rape has traditionally been restricted to notions of “penetration of the vagina by a male sexual organ” (Eriksson 49). The Istanbul Convention defines rape as “engaging in non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of another person with any body part or object” (qtd. in Walby 73).

Similarly, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda has widened its scope of the narrow definition of rape to subsume objects such as bottles and weapons, which were commonly used for means of penetration under the criminal act of rape (Eriksson 69). Hence, whether a rape has occurred relies heavily on context and who does the defining.

Moreover, another limiting factor when defining rape has been the differentiation of body parts. Traditionally, rape was inherently gendered in that the main focus was sexual organs such as the penis and vagina. Nevertheless, rape can occur in many different forms and aspects and may include anal and oral rape, whether digitally or by means of a sexual organ (Walby 73).

Furthermore, until recently, there has not been an incontestable understanding of situations such as marital rape (Walby 76). Marital rape was legally exempted, as the law declared that marriage grants husbands unlimited sexual access to their wives (Walby 76). Eventually, marital rape was criminalized and therefore equated to rape committed by strangers. For the last 100 years, women have possessed the right to vote to put the issue in perspective, but their husbands could have legally raped women in Sweden until 1965. In Ireland, marital rape was criminalized in 1990, in France in 1992, Germany in 1997, followed by Greece in 2006 (Walby 76). In contrast, Austrian jurisdiction repealed the law §203 of the Penal Code, which permitted spousal and marital rape unless the injured person requested prosecution of the perpetrator (Bundesgesetzblatt 2004). Nevertheless, in some countries, marital rape remains legal (Walby 77).

The following section will attempt to define rape by means of intersectional research.

2.1.2. Legal definitions of rape

In general, rape outside an armed conflict context occurs in all societies by “strangers, acquaintances, and intimate partners” (Eriksson 5). The common understanding of international law is that rape is a crime of private nature and not to be controlled by public international law (Eriksson 5). Although quality of human dignity is a central aspect international human rights law is founded on, rape has not been interpreted in a manner that includes sexual autonomy until recently (Eriksson 6). Sexual violence came into relevance in the final decades of the 20th century. Then, in 1998, rape was explicitly defined on the international level in the context of the Akayesu decision of Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Rape was, therefore, “a physical invasion of a sexual nature committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive” (MacKinnon 942).

Undoubtedly, this is a rather broad definition. Eriksson states that Sweden is understood to have the most inclusive, encompassing definition of the crime in Europe, namely

a person who, by violence or threat involving or appearing to the threatened person as an imminent danger, forces the latter to have sexual

intercourse or to engage in a comparable sexual act...Having intercourse with a person who is unconscious, sleeping, intoxicated, handicapped or in a similarly helpless state shall be regarded as equivalent to rape by threat or violence (Eriksson 91).

Due to the lack of a universal definition of rape, jurisdiction varies greatly. Eriksson states, that in international law, rape has not been discussed extensively until recently (4). For instance, the 1949 Geneva Conventions define rape as harming a woman's honor rather than classifying it as a physical attack. To give some additional historical perspective, the Nuremberg war trials were held in 1945-1946 to prosecute members of the political, military, judicial, and economic leadership of Nazi Germany for their crimes concerning the Holocaust (Eriksson 4). Transcripts from the Nuremberg trials emerged and show that although there were numerous instances of rape mentioned by several victims, the focus still lies on other violations (Eriksson 4).

Moreover, Eriksson states that instances of marital rape or rape without a considerable amount of resistance and struggle on the woman's part have still not been recognized as a crime until recently (42). The notion that marital rape does not qualify as rape remained unchanged until recent history and varied noticeably (Eriksson 42).

Additionally, scholars in the field of biology, such as Thornhill and Palmer, also contribute to spreading rape myths in their work, comparing animal behavior, such as the scorpionfly, to human behavior and defining rape as "[...] copulation resisted to the best of the victim's ability unless such resistance would probably result in death or serious injury to the victim or death or injury to individuals the victim commonly protects" (Thornhill and Palmer 172).

Feminists are opposed to such notions of biological differences, in what they state is "biological determinism" (Gamble 159). Furthermore, feminist scholars argue that both the male and female attributes result from socialization rather than biology. This notion corresponds with Simone de Beauvoir's work, which states that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Gamble 158).

Furthermore, various scholars' notion resulted in the conclusion that the reason men rape is due to four factors, namely "irresistible impulse, mental illness or disease, alcohol or drugs, and victim precipitation" (Suzuki 1). Rape is, therefore, an inevitable

byproduct of natural circumstances. Nevertheless, due to the rape myth that women secretly enjoy rape, legal scholars required proof of physical resistance of the woman, requiring the victim to display “such earnest resistance as might reasonably be expected under the circumstances” (Eriksson 44).

Moreover, Eriksson states that another requirement to fortify the victim's claims was the disclosure of her past sexual history (45). In particular, if past sexual behavior were deemed “inappropriate,” the trial would be more or less over. If the victim happened to be a prostitute, if the rape occurred in a marriage, or if other seemingly insignificant and irrelevant details such as smoking, swearing, drinking, the choice of clothing, or hitchhiking were revealed, the victim’s credibility was severely tainted (Eriksson 45).

Furthermore, Eriksson argues that there is an apparent disregard in international law concerning the rights of women (47). In her essay, which connects law and literature, Theurer (434) confirms Eriksson’s statement. Furthermore, Theurer argues that legal texts recognize rape as a private matter, perpetuate rape myths and issues of consent, thus fortifying hegemonic patriarchal structures (434).

As a result, laws should concern themselves with current issues of inequality, as the law is not merely an instrument of punishment but also an instrument that has the potential of generating value and can catalyze social change. Furthermore, Eriksson states that international law has the potential of continuously developing, adapting, and expanding in scope (6). Thus, sexual violence is to be recognized as a human rights violation against women, not only harming one individual but rather affecting whole societies (Eriksson 7).

2.1.3. Feminists and rape

In order to further contextualize the definition of rape, feminist theories can be considered.

Firstly, Baumeister argues that feminists regard the categories of sex and gender as essential aspects of society and stand united against patriarchy (28). Gamble defines patriarchy as “a system ruled over by men, whose authority is enforced through social,

political, economic and religious institutions” (271). Essentially, all feminists stand united in the desire to abolish patriarchy.

Moreover, second-wave feminism addressed the political relationship between power and sex, arguing that rape is a means of patriarchal control (Gamble 283).

The feminist theory examines representations of rape in literature in great detail. Since the feminist theorists in the 1970s have highlighted the issue of rape, it has been regarded as a crime committed by men that affects women, therefore a gendered crime, which is supported by statistics that show that 98% of victims are women (Mardorossian 2). Moreover, feminist theorists are devoted to the study of rape as they connect instances of rape in literature and the violence of rape that is inflicted upon women in real life (Quay 475). Nevertheless, Mardorossian argues, that contrary to popular notions that describe rape as a women’s issue, it is, in fact, a matter concerning masculinity as it is “an ideological construct that cannot and should not be reduced to biological sex differences and whose authority in culture derives from its structural and relational positioning vis-à-vis femininity” (3).

Furthermore, patriarchy's oppression concerns every woman, despite race, class, and culture (Gamble 265). Brownmiller has stated in *Against Our Will* (1976), a foundational work in the field of feminism, that the fact that men are physically able to rape culminates in the constant fear that is instilled in women (14). As a result, this constant fear of the imminent rape can be regarded as a threat in the everyday lives of women, a form of social control over women: “rape is nothing more than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” (Brownmiller 15).

Additionally, Alcoff and Gray (261) argue that the goal of feminism is to shift the focus from individual instances of rape to a general discussion into the public eye, where everybody is allowed to participate in the discourse.

Moreover, the so-called second-wave feminism movement, which can be located within the period of the late 1960s and 1970s, illustrated how victims of rape were represented in the general public and how these representations negatively affected dominant discourse about rape. A central characteristic and tactic of second-wave feminism is consciousness-raising (Gamble 174). In that, it was essential to gather as

many individual accounts and experiences of women, to highlight that oppression affects every woman, in order to speak out against it collectively (Gamble 174). Also, second-wave feminism revealed how myths and misrepresentations were perpetuated within the patriarchal hegemony, resulting in victimization and oppression of women (Mardorossian 41).

In contrast to today's notions of feminism, Mardorossian states that second-wave feminism has used the negative connotation of loss of agency during rape and the subsequent trial to their advantage in order to bring about social change (41). Today, so-called postmodern feminism aims to find the origin of women's sexual oppression not in societal norms, such as second-wave feminism, but rather in feminist representations (Mardorossian 41). Furthermore, the Mardorossian argues that agency's postmodern model "emphasizes the linguistic, representational, and cultural structures that constitute the subject" (42).

Thus, postmodern feminists argue that feminist discourse has often contributed to maintaining the inequality they seek to abolish by reducing women to agentless victims, by merging choice with consent, by equating agency to power (Mardorossian 66). It is, therefore, crucial to reclaim agency as a form of power in public discourses about rape instead of highlighting the term's connotation that invokes passivity and helplessness (Mardorossian 66).

Based on the presented definitions of rape, this thesis will recognize rape as follows. Rape invades and harms the bodily autonomy of a victim by acts of sexual nature. It occurs by threat of force or force and includes but is not limited to non-consensual vaginal, oral, and anal intercourse and other forced acts of sexual nature. Rape is not limited to merely body parts but includes objects as well. Furthermore, consent cannot be given while the victim is incapacitated by occurrences of intoxication, sleep, or unconsciousness. The definition includes instances of marital rape, as well as incestuous rape.

2.1.4. Rape in literary history

Etymologically, “rape” is derived from the German word “Raub”, which translates to theft. Moreover, in Latin, the verb “rapere” means abducting, looting, or stealing (Frenzel 171). Thus, the German and Latin connotations are much more neutral and insinuate the removal of an immobile thing, an object, rather than acknowledging the fact that it is an invasion of a person’s body. Furthermore, the notion that male rape does not exist changed over time to reflect more modern, neutral, and inclusive views of the world (Eriksson 111).

Moreover, Eriksson (38) states that rape was categorized as an act of theft and, ultimately, the violation of men’s property rights. The early criminalization of rape in Roman law or the Middle Ages was primarily attached to the social judgment and stigma of consensual sex between non-married parties. Legally, women were seen as minors due to the biological differences between sexes regarding strength and the misconception of a difference in intellect. Therefore, the act of rape was regarded as a severe offense towards the guardian, i.e., the husband, brother, or father. In cases of rape, the male guardian would be reimbursed to compensate for the devalued woman or girl (Eriksson 38). In the 12th century, the definition of rape shifted from a violation of property to a crime against a person, comprised of four distinct elements, namely “abduction, coitus, violence, and a lack of free consent on the part of the woman” (Eriksson 41).

Furthermore, similar to legal texts, literature in the form of novels, stories, plays, and poetry have equally contributed to the reproduction of cultural understandings of the notion of rape, as well as gendered power relations (Theurer 436).

As mentioned earlier, representations of rape in literature can be traced back to depictions in the Bible, for instance the kidnapping of women by men belonging to the tribe of Benjamin (Frenzel 172). Subsequently, the trope of “Frauenraub” which translates to the abduction of a woman, is employed in several works of Greek mythology (Frenzel 173).

Anglophone literature employed the rape trope in the more literal sense of the word. William Shakespeare has drawn from sources such as *Ab Urbe Condita* and *Books*

from the *Foundation of the City*, which describe the foundation and history of Rome, to compose his poem *The Rape of Lucrece* (Kujawinska Courtney 58). Moreover, Thomas Nashe portrays the rape of Heraclide in *The Unfortunate Teller* (1594) through the eyes of a voyeuristic narrator (Catty 22) and almost all of Edmund Spenser's characters in *The Faerie Queene* (1590) are exposed to the imminent threat of rape (Catty 74). Philip Sidney depicts five definitions of "ravishment" in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, namely "rape, attempted rape, illicit (but consensual) intercourse, abduction or elopement" (Catty 42).

Moreover, Catty states that representations of rape in literature have gained in popularity from early Elizabethan fiction to late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, depicted as titillating "romance rape" (23). These representations do not culminate in the actual act of rape, but rather attempts of rape, as Catty identifies rape as a "stock motif in romance" (25).

Furthermore, works of Renaissance drama including Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1592), Heywood's *The Four Prentices of London* (1594), as well as *Appius and Virginia* by R.B. (1575), depict either threats of rape or attempted rape (Catty 91). Catty argues that Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594) and George Peele's *The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe* (1599) incorporate representations of violent rape (91). Moreover, Samuel Richardson depicts the rape of Clarissa by Lovelace in *Clarissa* (1748) (Eagleton 60).

Moreover, Wall identifies states threats of rape in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (88), the blurred lines between seduction and rape in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter* (99), and the absence of representation of the rape in Thomas Hardy's *Tess D'Urbervilles* (119).

In American literature, depictions of rape can be found as early as in Lodge's *A Margarite of America* (1596) (Catty 32). Sielke identifies representations of rape in works such as Sutton Griggs's *The Hindered Hand* (54), Edith Warton's *The House of Mirth* (64), Djuna Barnes' *Ryder* (77), as well as William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* (86).

2.2. Feminism and feminist criticism

Feminism has emerged as a philosophy of social critique, aiming to change women's lives for the better and to obtain equal rights in all aspects of life (Androne 171). The women's movement and feminism may be used interchangeably, as both describe women's desire to dismantle patriarchal structures, which oppress them. Gamble states that feminists regarded equal rights as "a fundamental goal for female emancipation and the right to "pursue self-fulfillment unconstrained by gender" (193). According to Mills (6), feminism is split into various strands, which depend on age, ethnicity, class, social systems, and culture.

Moreover, concerning the method of categorizing the different strands of feminism in the commonly used wave-metaphor, it is to be noted that this is not a universally accepted way of classifying feminism (Hewitt 1). Furthermore, scholars do not concur with fixed dates to pinpoint the commencement of a new wave of feminism, as numerous strands are ever-evolving, some created by synergies, some developed out of criticism, and the need to set the respective ideals apart (Hewitt 1). Nevertheless, a central and unifying aspect is the desire to improve the position of women. Although there are differences in what feminists consider deficits, they collectively concur that women are being treated unequally to men and that these differences are socially constructed (Mills 6). This thesis will attempt to contextualize the most important historical events pertaining to feminism and identify essential agents.

Firstly, as far as first-wave feminism is concerned, the movement concentrated on the "reform of women's social and legal inequalities in the nineteenth century" (Gamble 202). The main concerns of first-wave feminists included aspects of education, employment, and marriage laws (Gamble 202). According to Humm, feminism can be understood as a reaction to social injustices and first appeared as the movement to achieve women's liberation in the 19th century (1). Accomplishments in the fight for women's equality were the "inclusion of women into higher education, the reform of girls' secondary-school system [...], the widening of access to the professions, especially medicine, married women's property rights [...] and some improvement in divorced and separated women's child custody rights" (Gamble 203).

Early movements concerned with equal rights for women were concerned with women's suffrage. In Britain, women's suffrage movement commenced in the 1830s (Gamble 23) and culminated in 1918, when women over the age of 30 were granted the right to vote. Finally, in 1928, women were enfranchised under the same conditions as men. The Seneca Falls women's rights convention, which took place in New York in 1848, is regarded as the beginning of an organized movement concerned with women's right in the United States (Gamble 153). After several decades, the fight for women's suffrage in the United States proved successful when the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution granted American women the right to vote (Paglia 7).

According to Humm, in Europe, the term feminism began to be used synonymously with women's emancipation in the 1880s (1). The field of feminist criticism has grown alongside the women's movement, as the nature of criticism is inherent to feminism. There is no feminism without questioning, criticizing, and challenging hegemonic patriarchal structures (Humm 1).

Scholars have identified *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf, published in 1929, as an early milestone in feminist criticism, as it exhibits autobiographical elements and criticizing "social, cultural, and literary aspects of female difference" (Humm 1). In her pioneering work, Woolf illustrates that social reality is gendered and that women's literary representations have the potential of breaking with the patriarchal language system. Based on Woolf's work and findings, Kate Millett has similarly adopted feminist literary criticism in her work *Sexual Politics*, published in 1970 (Humm 2). Humm argues that Millett attempts to disrupt patriarchal structures through literary criticism and questions the representations of raped women in literature. By analyzing these representations, Humm argues that Millett aims to overturn male power which is inscribed into these literary rape narratives (2).

Furthermore, Mills argues that second-wave feminists in the 1960s and 1970s have been concerned with establishing equal opportunities for women (6). These so-called 'liberal equal-opportunities' feminists (Mills 6) consisted of white, middle-class women, and their demands reflected their particular interests and issues. This circumstance has been widely criticized, and as a result, feminists strands have developed out of the general second-wave feminism movement. These new strands of feminism have been

coined post-feminism or third-wave feminism (Mills 6). Gamble states that second-wave feminism manifested itself by an upsurge of feminist activity in America, Britain, and Europe from the 1960s (291).

Furthermore, Gamble summarizes the central notion of second-wave feminism as the idea that “the personal is the political” (291). In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir’s work *Le Deuxième Sexe* (*The Second Sex*, published in 1953) was published and is generally regarded as the mark of the beginning of second-wave feminism (Gamble 158). De Beauvoir examined women’s inequality in a society that benefits men and how women are mere projections of male needs (Reisman 3). A central focal point of second-wave feminism is the notion that culture is “emblematic of patriarchal social attitudes (Humm 21). Scholars such as Friedan and de Beauvoir address highlight the “sex caste system” (Humm 21) represented in literature and culture. Drawing from the suffrage movement’s accomplishments, Beauvoir considers women in the patriarchal society and highlights the differentiation made between sex and gender (Humm 8). This work marks another focus of feminists, namely the inequality in both work and domestic life. Consequently, women writers were included in University canons, and more and more female-produced literature was discussed (Humm 5). Thus, feminist criticism evolved from condemning stereotypes that were disseminated by patriarchal notions in society to criticizing the lack of representation of women writers in literary theory (Humm 7).

In general, feminist criticism lends itself to be merged with other critical methods, such as deconstruction, psychoanalytic criticism, as well as Marxist criticism (Reisman 1). Reisman further argues that, in general, feminist thoughts can be summarized as being concerned with the political, social, and cultural equality of women (1).

According to Humm, scholars concur in three defining aspects of feminist criticism (4). Firstly, gender is constructed through language and made visible through the style of writing. Here, the style represents the articulation of ideologies of gender (Humm 4). Secondly, writing strategies are related to sex. Humm states that due to the access women were granted to literature, women and men do employ different writing strategies (Humm 4).

Thirdly, the tradition of literary criticism, such as its inherent economic and social traditions, employs norms which are inherently masculine to exclude or undervalue

women's writing (Humm 5). To put simply, for hundreds of years, men have written books pertaining to women and women's issues.

In accordance with Humm, Reisman states that the accomplishment of feminist criticism has been the research of so-called "feminine traditions in literature" (8). Numerous feminist scholars have brought to light various forgotten women writers and introduced them into the literary canon (Reisman 8). According to Reisman (1), feminist critics have developed theoretic models to identify a male-dominated society's structures and its structures that limit women's possibilities. By identifying prevalent methods used in works of male authors and examining it through women's perspectives, feminist critics can recognize and label the underlying ideologies implicit in male characterizations of women, for instance (Reisman 1).

Additionally, in the 1970s, a new critical approach joined the forces of feminism, namely gynocriticism or "the study of women writers" (Humm 19), coined by Elaine Showalter. A central aspect of this methodology was to rediscover forgotten woman writers. It is essentially an approach that attempts to uphold the history of women's writing. Showalter argues that women's writing can be summarized as a culture of "Others" as it is distinctly marginalized (Reisman 2). Hence, other marginalized voices who, thus far, were not included in feminist activism began to speak out, as they regarded themselves to be marginalized in numerous respects, not just in terms of their sex.

Consequently, Reisman argues that black writers such as Phillis Wheatley Peters, Toni Morrison, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Nikki Giovanni contribute to feminist discourse by criticizing the fact that the voices of black women writers were neglected (Reisman 2). They stand united in the notion that it is of utmost importance to include works of black authors into the literary canon (Reisman 3). Thus, the conversation about the need for intersectional feminism is opened up. In her work *Notes towards a Politics of Location* (1984), Adrienne Rich addresses the problem of the absence of black female writers (Humm 18). As a black writer and activist, Audre Lorde famously criticized that women writers can never overthrow oppressive patriarchal structures by applying them. Moreover, she argues the need for distinct female writing techniques (Humm 18):

For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never

enable us to bring about genuine change. Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives here. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices (Audre Lorde qtd. in Moraga 94).

Additionally, Humm states that during the 1980s, French scholars such as Cixous and Kristeva attempted to break with traditional patriarchal norms by means of devising a new technique that was unique to women, namely *écriture féminine*. Cixous argues that “if women’s writing becomes *écriture féminine*, it can subvert masculine, symbolic language” (Cixous qtd. in Gamble 171). According to Humm (16), this technique is not to be understood as complementary to men’s writing but as a distinctly feminine style, which is made available to both women and men.

Moreover, third-wave feminism established itself as a movement that concerned primarily younger women, who desired to stand out against the postfeminist label (Gamble 310). The main concerns of third-wave feminism included the fight against economic and racial inequality (Gamble 310). The beginning of third-wave of feminism can be roughly dated to the period of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s when Walker discussed its emergence in 1992 (Rivers 22).

Furthermore, Rivers states that the emergence of fourth-wave feminism is characterized by the emergence of new technologies and the age of digitalization (22). Rivers argues that fourth-wave feminism is complex and “frequently reinforcing the advancement of the individual and centering the seductive notions of ‘choice,’ ‘empowerment,’ and ‘agency.’” (24).

Feminist linguistic theories developed out of concern about social issues pertaining to women (Mills 7). By analyzing the systematic discrimination against women, feminist linguists have demonstrated how language itself can be analyzed to raise awareness of inequality issues (Mills 8). With the rise of poststructural analysis, which concentrated on language and discourse, the importance of language and its ties to the representation of ideologies and stereotypes was highlighted. Mills argues that one’s identity is established through language (8). This identity is then performed in negotiation with other people, informed by the language resources made available by

the given society. Through the analysis of those language resources, represented in conversation as well as texts, it is possible to describe the unequal ways in which women are treated to challenge the discriminatory patterns subsequently (Mills 8). Feminist linguistics analysis has drawn on authors such as Bourdieu, Foucault, and Althusser and their theories on identity structuring through language (Mills 8). Feminist linguists do not expect to bring about an equal terrain in the workplace, but they focus on exposing inequalities politically and propose changes.

Furthermore, parallel to second-wave feminism in the 1970s, the number of women who write and publish poetry, which is well received, has increased significantly (Sewell 109). Furthermore, Sewell states during this time, women writers delve into the practice of writing about their experiences, perceived injustices, and other issues pertaining to women, such as pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood, child rearing, female sexuality, domestic violence and sexual abuse (109). While these themes and topics can be subsumed under feminist concerns, there is a difference to authors who explicitly identified themselves as feminist, as they regard themselves as participating in a movement, which is concerned with women's issues on a political level (Sewell 109). While all feminist authors participate in criticism against patriarchy and the absence of women in the literary canon, there is no general agreement on the methods to articulate and execute a feminist position in poetry (Sewell 109). Some of the different strands are identified by Sewell, for instance radical and mainstream feminist poets, who focus on amending the cultural notion of the feminine and criticize "masculinist values" (109).

Furthermore, the strand of multicultural feminist poets, whose work not only consists of issues of gender but also addresses differences and criticizes the heterosexist, classist and racist tendencies of mainstream feminism (Sewell 109). Lastly, the strand of experimental feminist poets, who address patriarchal structures and its assumptions, that are ingrained in language itself, and rejecting dominant notions of expression (Sewell 109).

2.3. Feminist narratology

In this section, the concept of feminist narratology will be discussed in more detail. Narratology is the formal analysis of narratives, and narratologists focus on the “nature, form and functioning” of a text, which tells a story (Warhol 398). Warhol argues that the common goal among narratologists is to identify which aspects are common in all narratives and what sets them apart (398). According to Warhol, traditionally, narratology separates a text into two levels, namely story and discourse. The aspect of story encompasses the character’s traits and events, whereas narration, the management of perspective and time are all aspects of discourse (398). These two aspects are used to draw comparisons and contrasts between texts in order to generalize the phenomena of how narratives function. Narratological concepts are thought in binaries, a fact that poststructuralist feminist theorists have criticized. Feminist narratologists have advocated for a revised, more inclusive model of analysis and, most importantly, to include works by women writers, as the examples used by narratologists were almost exclusively written by men (Warhol 398).

Furthermore, the narratological concept of voice can be applied to poetry, as Hühn states that while lyric poems and narrative texts differ in terms of form, technique and function (147), aspects such as mediacy and sequentiality are shared. Thus, he argues that

lyric poems generally share the fundamental constituents of story and discourse as well as the narrative act with narrative fiction in that they likewise feature a sequence of incidents (usually of a mental kind), mediate and shape it from a specific perspective and present it from a particular point of time vis-à-vis the sequence of incidents (Hühn 148).

Page argues that feminist narratology can be regarded as a united, single entity, although it has not been historically (16). The notions behind it were compiled through two separate fields and characterized as rather chaotic. Nonetheless, Page reinforces the benefits of feminist narratology: “However, at Formalist poetics may seem to feminists this point in its development, the multiplicity it might embrace is more expansive and increasingly necessary. In this pluralistic re-envisioning, feminist narratology has become thoroughly postmodern [...]” (Page 16).

Feminist narratologists have urged to amend the analyzed examples by adding works of women writers. Another aspect that feminist narratologists seek to adjust is that narratology claims a universal application of the proposed methods, in that they apply to most narratives, regardless of their historical, social, or cultural context and background (Warhol 398). According to Warhol, feminist narratologists have argued, since the 1970s, that cultural context has to be included and analyzed for each text (398). After all, literature is produced within some kind of social and historical setting. Warhol includes race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and the nationality of the writer as the set of factors with which feminist narratologists tend to analyze (398).

Susan Lanser's notions in the field of feminist narratology are widely regarded as foundational as her work merges feminism and narratology (Page 4), in which she proposes a gender-conscious revision of the definition of "voice", formulated by narratologists (Warhol 399). Lanser suggested merging structuralist narratology with the political interests of feminism, a marriage of sorts, benefitting both approaches (Warhol 399). Her work is argued in line with the notions of second-wave feminism, as Lanser identifies with fellow U.S. feminist critics of the period whose main concerns were eradicating differences made between women and men (Page 46).

Furthermore, as Page argues, feminist narratology should not be regarded as a new set of narrative models, separate from narratology, but rather as a "feminist critique of narratology which operates based on feminist applications of narrative theory to a range of texts that goes beyond the corpus originally drawn upon by the early structuralist work" (5). As Gamble states, feminist critique describes criticism which highlights the omission of women in texts by male authors (200). The term was coined by Elaine Showalter, who argues that "if we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are no learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be" (Showalter qtd. in Gamble 200).

Moreover, Lanser argues in her work *Fictions of authority* that narratives are not produced in a bubble but rather that they are reflections of society. Feminist narratologists, however, look beyond structural aspects and determine common aspects as well as aspects that differ regarding gender (Lanser 3).

Moreover, Lanser points out that various disciplines such as history, philosophy, sociology, literature, and psychology are preoccupied with the term “voice” and its meaning, form, and function. She argues that voice has become “a trope of identity and power” (4). By “finding” their voice, an author can establish themselves in the realm of literature and its practices (Lanser 3). Traditionally, narratology argues that voice designates the tellers of a story. Nevertheless, Lanser argues that narration involves social relationships, and therefore, “the narrative voice and the narrated world are mutually constitutive” (4).

When feminists explore the term “voice”, they are generally referring to writers who claim and produce women-centered perspectives (Lanser 4). By employing other voices, feminists may refer to a literary character who defies patriarchal norms as the process of “finding a voice”, regardless of whether this voice is explicitly represented in the text (Lanser 4). On the other hand, when narratologists are concerned with voice, they focus on formal structures instead of ideologies or social implications:

Formalist poetics may seem to feminists naively empiricist, masking ideology as objective truth, sacrificing significance for precision, incapable of producing politically meaningful distinctions. Feminist criticism may seem to narratologists naively subjectivist, sacrificing precision for ideology, incapable of producing textually relevant distinctions (Lanser 4-5).

In narratological terms, “voice” is preoccupied with specific forms of textual practice, whereas in a political sense, “voice” reinscribes agenda and historical influences into literary events. Lanser claims that when those two approaches are combined, it is possible to regard narrative technique as a product of ideology and ideology itself (Lanser 5).

In her work, *Fictions of Authority*, Lanser analyzes instances of textual voice in fiction by European as well as American women writers spanning from the mid-18th century to mid-20th, a period that corresponds with “the hegemony of the novel and its notions of authorship” (Lanser 5). Western literary authority is comprised of white, privileged-class male notions, and Lanser argues further that narrative authority can also be constituted through textual strategies that “even socially unauthorized writers” (Lanser 6) can appropriate. However, it is essential to state that narrative authority is not “universally desirable” (Lanser 7), and some women writers have challenged those

who hold authority and the mechanisms behind it and the importance and value placed upon authority. Lanser argues that while some authors might challenge these concepts of authority, they are nevertheless forced to reproduce conventional narrative voice techniques to criticize them, respectively (7). She states

In other words, I assume that regardless of any woman writer's ambivalence toward authoritative institutions and ideologies, the act of writing a novel and seeking to publish it [...] is implicitly a quest for discursive authority: a quest to be heard, respected, and believed, a hope of influence. I assume, that is, that every writer who publishes a novel wants it to be authoritative for her readers, even if authoritatively antiauthoritarian, within the sphere and for the receiving community that the work carves out (Lanser 7).

As authors seek to expose "fictions of authority" they may re-establish the authority as the Western novel has created. While Lanser claims that there is no such thing as an authentic female voice and that women do not write differently from their male colleagues, she suggests that different communities of women were allowed varying levels of access to narrative forms. Thus, Lanser is particularly interested in women writers who declare public authority, as historically, it has not been the denial of voice per se as much as a public voice (Lanser 8). By analyzing a letter written in 1832 and published in a magazine, she identifies female public speech as being perceived as "polite, emotional, enthusiastic, gossipy, talkative, uncertain, dull, and chatty" (Lanser 10). The letter is written by a newlywed woman who has to show all her letters to her husband for approval before sending them to her friend. It is composed in a rather self-deprecating tone, but once the key is identified in order to decode it (by reading every other line), the subtext is revealed, namely the bride being severely dissatisfied with her marriage. The subtext, the letter within the letter, is analyzed by Lanser, who concludes that this version of the letter exhibits aspects of "men's language", namely "capable, direct, rational, strong, forceful, efficient, blunt, authoritative, serious, effective, sparing and masterful" (Lanser 11). This difference in tone does not stem from a sudden change of sex. The narrator simply adopts a female voice in the public version and conforms to the concepts that are inherently read as "female" style in the surface text (Lanser 11).

Another concern of Lanser's work is to reveal which modes of voice women had access to and at which moments in time. Lanser establishes three narrative modes, namely the authorial, personal and communal voice (15). Each mode is further categorized into either a public or private voice. By utilizing a public voice, the narration is directed "toward a narratee outside the fiction" (Lanser 15), akin to the historical reader. A public voice does not allow a narrative self-reference, that is, the explicit attention to the narrating act. The private voice, however, describes narration as directed "toward a narratee who is a fictional character" (Lanser 15). Furthermore, Lanser hypothesizes (15) that "gendered conventions of public voice and of narrative self-reference serve important roles in regulating women's access to discursive authority".

The concept of Lanser's authorial voice corresponds with Stanzel's concept of the authorial narrator in that it is heterodiegetic, external to the narrative, potentially self-referencing, but extended by a feminist component: historical contextualization (Lanser 16). Lanser suggests that the narrator lies outside the story. As it is located outside the story, the authorial voice possesses greater textual authority than any characters within the story, even the narrators. This external, outside narrator can be likened to the author and the reader. Authorial narration asserts the highest degree of authority and has been traditionally read as male unless marked otherwise (Lanser 17). The risk here is that although an authorial voice possesses greater authority than a personal or communal voice, it has been traditionally linked to male writers' masculine authority. It has been viewed as problematic when women writers have used authorial voice, as this "adoption of overt authority has usually meant transgressing gendered rhetorical codes" (Lanser 17-18). If a writer would "out" themselves as female, it could weaken the text's level of authority. Hence, numerous female writers have used male pseudonyms in the past.

By using the mode of personal voice, narrators are self-consciously telling their own stories (Lanser 18), denoting a narrative voice that is autodiegetic. Frye argues that "It is through the use of the first person that women writers achieve the dual outcomes of femininity and authorship and create protagonists who are both female and autonomous" (47). Furthermore, Lanser states that personal voice can be either public or private and, similarly to authorial voice, may also be self-referential:

The authority of personal voice is contingent in ways that the authority of authorial voice is not. While the autodiegetic “I” remains a structurally ‘superior’ voice mediating the voices of other characters, it does not carry the superhuman privileges that attach to authorial voice, and its status is dependent on a reader’s response not only to the narrator’s acts but to the character’s actions (Lanser 19).

These differences between authorial and personal voice suggest that the use of the latter might not be as desirable since authorial narrators can claim knowledge, absolute authority, and judgment, while personal narrators can only do so in the realms of their experience (Lanser 19). Therefore, personal narrators are limited in terms as they are limited to the representation of one perspective.

Lanser describes communal voice as a mode in which narrative authority is assigned to a “definable community and textually inscribed either through multiple, mutually authorizing voices or the voice of a single individual authorized by a community” (21). This can be achieved by employing either a singular form, in which one narrator represents a collective, or in a simultaneous form as a plural “we”, or in a subsequential form, in which individual members of a group narrate in turns (Lanser 21). Lanser argues that communal narrative voice offers “political possibilities of constituting a collective female voice through narrative” (22). By utilizing communal voice, there is the potential of moving away from focusing on individual protagonists and “calling into question the heterosocial contract that has defined woman’s place in Western fiction” (Lanser 22). Communal voices are validated by the connection they have to the represented communities.

3. „Rape, she wrote“ – Analysis of Feminist Poetry of Rape

The analysis of the selected poems is divided into five parts. First, a short biography of the poet will be given. The second part will provide general information about the poem. Third, imagery, diction, and representations of rape will be examined by means of close reading. In the fourth section, narrative voices in the poems will be analyzed, according to the framework provided by Lanser's feminist narratology. The last section discusses how notions of feminism are exhibited in the selected poems.

3.1. Briar Rose (Anne Sexton, 1971)

3.1.1. Biographical context

Anne Sexton, born Anne Gray Harvey in Newton, Massachusetts, was an American poet, participating in confessional poetry. The term confessional poetry was established by Rosenthal in 1959, and its central figures include Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton (Gill 428). Rosenthal identifies aspects of experiences that are most intimate in confessional poetry, as "the experience of the work is inevitable and necessary suffering" (Gill 428). This notion is validated by James Dickey, who reviews Sexton's work and states that her poems stem from "deep, painful sections of the author's life" (Dickey qtd. in Gill 429).

As the term *confessional* suggests, the authors often allowed insight into personal realms and intimate thoughts. In Sexton's case, she dealt with themes such as struggles with motherhood, marriage, and sexuality as a form of therapy. She committed suicide in 1974 (Lehman 853).

Sexton, a confessional poet, drew inspiration from her most intimate thoughts, experiences, and reality. While she was initially ordered to write poetry by her therapist as a means of self-reflection and introspect, this fundamental concept permeates her

entire body of work. In *Transformations*, she revisits classic fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm and retells them in a postmodern way “of reversed, redescrbed, and deconstructed meanings” (Korzeniwska-Nowakowska 16).

3.1.2. General information about the poem

Firstly, Sexton gives her poem Briar Rose the epithet “Sleeping Beauty”, referring to the Brothers Grimm's fairy tale. It is, therefore, an adaption and a modern retelling. The poem is sectioned into three parts: a prologue, the central part of the tale, and an epilogue. Briar Rose is the last poem in Sexton's collection of poems *Transformations*.

The original tale of Sleeping Beauty is commonly known. Over the course of six weeks in the summer of 1970, Sexton composed her rewriting titled *Briar Rose*. She describes the conception as a “trippy feeling, which then accelerated to a state of confusion and delusion” (Golden 237).

Sexton transforms the tale of Sleeping Beauty not only by means of various narrative voices, the inclusion of themes of incest, and by continuation of the story after the conventional “happily ever after”. Moreover, she includes contemporary references such as “Bab-o” (Sexton 292), or Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (Sexton 291).

Furthermore, Golden states that while Sexton adheres to the original tales in *Transformations*, Briar Rose stands out as it diverges from the tale by the Brothers Grimm significantly (Golden 237), as it exhibits aspects of Sexton's own struggles with drugs: “Sexton, alas, was not Iron Hans; she was Sleeping Beauty/Briar Rose. It had been so for years. She had been dependent on pills to fall asleep for most of her adult life, and the overdose of sleeping pills that occurred while she was working on the Sleeping Beauty poem was hardly the first such incident, nor the last” (Golden 238).

3.1.3. Analysis of imagery and representation of rape

In Sexton's adaption, Briar Rose is portrayed as a young woman who is suffering from her childhood traumas. The reader is introduced to a girl, who is hypnotized, and slipping in and out of consciousness, while she is going on a metaphorical journey back to her childhood:

Consider
a girl who keeps slipping off,
arms limp as old carrots,
into the hypnotist's trance,
into a spirit world,
speaking with the gift of tongues.
She is stuck in the time machine,
suddenly two years old sucking her thumb,
as inward as a snail,
learning to talk again.
She's on a voyage.
She is swimming further and further back,
up like a salmon,
struggling into her mother's pocketbook. (Sexton 290)

The imagery used by Sexton, such as "slipping off" and the girl's limbs being described as "limp as old carrots," accompany the mental connection to her being in a therapist's office in a "hypnotist's trance", ordered to go back to her childhood ("stuck in a time machine"), as she traverses through stages of her childhood ("suddenly two years old sucking her thumb") and finally wanting to revert to her mother's womb ("her mother's pocketbook"). The concept of time is prominent here, as Briar Rose uses it as an escape to her mother and subsequently into her mother's womb, which symbolizes a safe space from potential assaulters.

This introduction is abruptly interrupted by the voice of the father, who orders the girl to come and sit on his lap:

Little doll child,
come here to Papa.
Sit on my knee.
I have kisses for the back of your neck.
A penny for your thoughts, Princess.
I will hunt them like an emerald.

Come be my snooky
and I will give you a root.
That kind of voyage,
rank as a honeysuckle. (Sexton 290-291)

Furthermore, her father's choice of words implies his dominance, as he refers to her as a "little doll child", contrasting his adult physique. He bribes her with "a penny" to reveal the daughter's innermost thoughts but immediately afterward threatens her and states that he will forcefully pursue them ("I will hunt them like an emerald") whether she gives them up willingly or not. If the daughter will be his "snooky", which can be interpreted as a pet name ("snookums"), he will give her "a root" in exchange for her cooperation, which has phallic connotations. The subsequent line, "that kind of voyage, rank as a honeysuckle," is the first of two instances where Sexton uses the imagery of a flower combined with the word "rank", implying it is putrid and gone bad. Various authors have used honeysuckle to symbolize intense love and sex, such as Faulkner in his work *The Sound and The Fury*.

Moreover, the dominance asserted by the father is mentioned various times throughout the poem, which tells the story of *Briar Rose* and how she ended up being cursed due to her father's mistake, pricked her finger, and fell asleep only to be rescued by a prince. In contrast to the Brothers Grimm's original tale, the story does not end after the wedding, as Sexton describes the princess' life after being rescued from the curse.

In this section, the narration similar to the tale by the Brothers Grimm begins. After the interruption by the king's speech, in which he invites Briar Rose to sit on his lap, the poem continues with the king ordering a party for his newborn daughter's christening. As he only possesses twelve gold plates, he does not invite the thirteenth fairy. Nevertheless, she appears at the festivities.

The thirteenth fairy,
Her fingers long and thin as straws,
Her eyes burnt by cigarettes,
Her uterus an empty teacup (Sexton 291)

The detailed physical characterization of the fairy evokes a gaunt, witch-like, and grim figure. The thirteenth fairy's fingers are long, undernourished, and likened to "straws". Straw is dried grass, lifeless and stale, which is in stark contrast to what characteristics grass evokes in its original state, namely being luscious and succulent. Moreover, in the line "her eyes burnt by cigarettes" the association with something being parched and burned is continued. In Greek and Latin literature, the imagery of burning was frequently linked to the notion of anger or pride (Ferber 73). Hence, this description of the fairy emphasizes the anger or dented pride she feels due to the king not inviting her. It also has to be noted that the fairy's physical attributes are in stark contrast to Briar Rose, whose youthful beauty will later be described as "goddess"-like.

The last line of this section mentions the fairy's uterus being "an empty teacup", implying that she is incapable of producing offspring. From a feminist criticism point of view, the descriptors used to depict the thirteenth fairy are loaded with patriarchal notions. It can be interpreted that out of all the fairies, the king does not invite the one, who does not comply with the patriarchal ideals of youth and beauty, as. Feminists as early as Wollstonecraft have criticized the "beauty myth" (Gamble 158) that forces women to conform to a certain standard of beauty, which is declared by patriarchal opinions. Furthermore, Gamble argues that these ideals of beauty render women rivals and can result in cosmetic changes to the body and eating disorders (158). The fairy does not possess the ability to bear children any longer and is therefore rendered useless. Her emaciated figure does not fit the model of youthful, voluptuous, and fertile women, who are objectified and exploited by the patriarchy.

Furthermore, the line "her eyes burnt by cigarettes", in a feminist context, might be interpreted as wisdom and serve as a warning. As the thirteenth fairy, presumably of old age and therefore experienced, has come into contact with patriarchal structures and oppression in her life, her eyes are "burnt" by it, as she chooses not to be affected by oppression anymore. Subsequently, she curses Briar Rose to prick herself on a spinning wheel and "fall down dead". Although gruesome, this might be interpreted as saving Briar Rose from oppression, and objectification of patriarchy, preying on her youth and beauty. By cursing her to die right at the brink of the age in which it was

customary to marry, the fairy ultimately saves the princess from a much tragic existence. Another fairy softens the curse:

However the twelfth fairy
had a certain kind of eraser
and thus she mitigated the curse
changing that death
into a hundred-year sleep (Sexton 291).

The twelfth fairy, therefore, adjusts the curse to a hundred-year sleep instead of death. This might convey the notion that Briar Rose is given an extension of time to prepare for life in oppression, essentially bracing herself and gather strength.

Once Briar Rose is cursed, the king orders “every spinning wheel exterminated and exorcised”, to keep his daughter from harm, potentially, as the king wants his daughter for himself, in her untainted, virginal, and pure state, and untouched by other men. The king does not realize that his overbearing ways and the lengths he goes to in order to protect his daughter might potentially harm her more than the curse being triggered, as she is deprived of a somewhat normal upbringing with her peers. As she grows up “to be a goddess”, he visits her chambers every night:

Briar Rose grew up to be a goddess
and each night the king
bit the hem of her gown
to keep her safe. (Sexton 291-292)

The biting of the hem seems like a strange bedtime ritual, and it signifies his oral intrusion into the intimate and personal space of his pubescent daughter. Furthermore, he decides to keep her away from every man in the kingdom:

He forced every male in the court
to scour his tongue with Bab-o
lest they poison the air she dwelt in.
Thus she dwelt in his odor.
Rank as honeysuckle (Sexton 292).

What is more, the king does not order every subject, women and men likewise, to keep away from his daughter. Only the men have to treat their tongues with Bab-o, a cleaning agent containing bleach, in order to render it powerless. The disabling of the tongue signifies both the elimination of its power to be used sexually as well as verbally. It also implies sterilization, both in terms of “disinfecting” as well as rendering the men infertile. Thus, the king renders his male subjects asexual and unable to approach his daughter, eliminating all distractions and ultimately keeping her to himself. By doing so, he seeks to establish male dominance – not only in the function of king but a man as well. He is not used that his desires are not being met. Unable to “dwell” in their “poison” Briar Rose was forced to dwell “in his odor” which is again described as “rank as honeysuckle”. This section implies that Briar Rose was sexually abused by her father, who disguised his lust for his daughter as an attempt to keep her safe.

The curse is triggered by Briar Rose pricking her finger on a charred spinning wheel at the age of fifteen. This particular age evokes a connection to religious ceremonies that happen at or around that stage in life, such as confirmations, and are supposed to symbolize the step into maturity and womanhood. Briar Rose draws blood by pricking her finger on a sharp, phallic object and immediately falls into a comatose sleep. The blood that results as a pricking of the finger also symbolizes the breaking of the hymen after the first intercourse, resulting in bleeding. Not only her, but the entire court falls asleep. The only living things are briars, plants with thorny stems, that entangle the kingdom over time. Numerous princes are mentioned who try to rescue the princess unsuccessfully.

Many princes
tried to get through the brambles
for they had heard much of Briar Rose
but they had not scoured their tongues
so they were held by the thorns
and thus were crucified (Sexton 292).

Although many men tried to get through to Briar Rose and might have possessed the prowess to get through the physical barrier of thorns, they did not overcome the barrier imposed by the king: their tongues were not scoured, so they remained his rivals in

terms of sexual access to his daughter. Another interpretation might be that Briar Rose was already so damaged, mentally and physically exhausted, and paralyzed by the sexual abuse and trauma she suffered at the hands of her father. Therefore, the briars acted as a protection against other men coming from the outside world. Her father was still dangerous inside the castle, although disabled by the curse, as he was asleep as well. After one hundred years, the predetermined period of the curse by the fairy, a prince can finally break through physical obstacles. The briars also symbolize the emotional barrier the princess puts up. Nevertheless, the prince kisses her and thus breaks the curse.

A hundred years passed
and a prince got through.
The briars parted as if for Moses
and the prince found the tableau intact.
He kissed Briar Rose
and she woke up crying:
Daddy! Daddy! (Sexton 293)

The poem employs several biblical and religious allusions, such as “crucified”, the parting of the briars like “Moses”, as well as the description of Briar Rose likened to “goddess”. Briar Rose awakens in an upset state, disturbed and crying in ambiguity. This cry could either be a cry for help wanting her father to stop or a cry as if she awakened from a bad dream, wanting to be comforted. She might recognize her father's kiss as the implied beginning of another rape, so in an attempt to stop it, she begs her father to stop. In the original tale, the story stops here, resulting in a positive end in which Briar Rose and the prince marry and live happily ever after. Nevertheless, Sexton does not end the story at this point but takes the reader on a continuation of the story, as dark as it began.

She married the prince
and all went well
except for the fear –
the fear of sleep. (Sexton 293)

The happy ending is explicitly stated in the poem for it to be retracted in the subsequent line. An immediate negative turn overshadows the happy ending as it is stated that Briar Rose experiences fear of sleeping. The fear of sleep can be interpreted as a fear of being unconscious and unable to ward off her father, who comes at night and abuses her. The only time Briar Rose can sleep is when the court's chemist administers her sleep-inducing medicine. A common coping mechanism for survivors of sexual assault is the use and possible abuse of drugs.

Briar Rose
was an insomniac...
she could not nap
or lie in sleep
without the court chemist
mixing her some knock-out drops
and never in the prince's presence.
If it is to come, she said,
sleep must take me unawares (Sexton 293)

Briar Rose cannot go to sleep naturally and never in the presence of her husband, the prince. It is implied that he is now her abuser, molesting her at night. The only circumstance under which the princess wants to go to sleep is after she has been dancing or laughing not to experience the full reality "of the brutal place", meaning the abusive situation. Sleep as a literary symbol is often used as a means of prophecy, as they are conventionally sent by God (Ferber 64). Briar Rose might therefore avoid sleep and, subsequently, the possibility of dreaming to avoid being confronted with haunting prophecies of sexual abuse.

She is described as "catatonic", a body in stupor, unresponsive and comatose state, which is a common coping mechanism for rape and sexual abuse victims. Furthermore, the princess states that she is in a constant state of being drugged or self-medicated and remains defenseless unless a kiss awakes her.

I'm all shot up with Novocain.
This trance girl

is yours to do with.
You could lay her in a grave,
an awful package,
and shovel dirt in her face
and she'd never call back: Hello there!
but if you kissed her on the mouth
her eyes would spring open
and she'd call out: Daddy! Daddy! (Sexton 294)

In this section, Novocain, an anesthetic, is mentioned again ("knock out drops"). Briar Rose is traumatized but does not take her life. She only numbs her pain and can feel safe in a sleep-like state, a "trance". Briar Rose is described as a defenseless, almost suicidal girl, with whom one could do as one pleased: she could be buried alive, with dirt in her face, but she would not resist. This is a very significant part of the poem since it illustrates how atrocious her father's abuse must be that Briar Rose would rather be dead than endure one more incident of rape again. She characterizes herself as being broken, "an awful package". This line implies that once something is broken, it cannot be fixed. It might be her broken hymen and her damaged psyche. Either way, death is the only acceptable and legitimate way out of her misery. Although once kissed, her eyes would open, and she would cry out in fear of her father, which is reminiscent of the situation earlier in the poem. The poem culminates in a section in which the princess herself described her memories' fragments when she was abused.

There was a theft.
That much I am told.
I was abandoned.
That much I know.
I was forced backward.
I was forced forward.
I was passed hand to hand
like a bowl of fruit (Sexton 294).

This section can be interpreted as Briar Rose assuming a theft, as someone told her that something was taken. It could be understood as the theft of her virtue. She was

deprived of her virginity by her father, moreover, not only her virginity but also the autonomy over her body, her self-determination, and self-worth. She cannot decide freely over what happens to her body or who she willingly gives it to out of love, passion, or lust. Furthermore, she is deprived of her youthful spirit and the lightness that comes with not yet being an adult.

Moreover, she is robbed of the notion that sex can be a source of pleasure. Briar Rose adds that she knows for a fact that she was abandoned, which might imply that she was helpless and nobody, such as her mother or the king's subjects, knew of the incidents of rape, or they would have come to her defense and rescued her from the sexual abuse by the hands of her father. She was pulled and jerked around, forwards and backward, but also passed around "like a bowl of fruit", in a literal sense, as her body was a playground of the sexual desires of both the father and the husband. It can also mean that she was being passed from her initial abuser, her father, to her husband.

Moreover, "fruit" can symbolize matureness, a certain ripeness, a readiness to be devoured. Fruit can be associated with babies, and her being a bowl of fruit might mean that her body is a vessel, which possesses the power to bear children, the "fruit" of her loins. Furthermore, in a biblical sense such as the forbidden apple, fruit is associated as being taboo and prohibited. Lastly, a common association with fruit can be sweetness, richness, and something appetizing. Thus, one cannot resist but devour it. The poem ends with Briar Rose coming to terms that the abuse reverts to her father:

Each night I am nailed into place
And forget who I am
Daddy?
That's another kind of prison.
It's not the prince at all,
but my father
drunkenly bends over my bed,
circling the abyss like a shark,
my father thick upon me

like some sleeping jellyfish (Sexton 294).

In this section, Sexton explicitly mentions the father, standing over his daughter's bed in one of numerous, clandestine and inappropriate visits to his daughter's chambers. Moreover, this part is accompanied with sexually connotated imagery. Briar Rose is "nailed into place" each night, a colloquial term for having sex, or instead being the passive party someone else is having sex with. Furthermore, the choice of diction "nailed into place" suggests that Briar Rose thinks that this is the place where she belongs, as she only knows abuse. During this act, she forgets who she is, which is a common coping mechanism for victims of rape and sexual abuse, namely dissociation from the situation. Furthermore, Briar Rose recognizes that it is her father at the edge of the bed, in a drunken state. The line "rank as honeysuckle" used earlier in the poem could describe the drunken breath after consuming, for instance, wine. She compares the sexual predator with an animal predator, a shark, who circles his immobile prey, ready to attack. The line "my father thick upon me" can be interpreted as the final act of the abuse, her father ejaculating onto his daughter, as "thick upon me" is reminiscent of the texture of semen. Followed by this climax is the relaxation of the predator into a jellyfish, more malleable, limp, and detached but still dangerous.

The last line reveals Briar Rose's revelation as she asks, "God help – this life after death?". In this, she turns to God after identifying her father as her abuser, the "killer" of her youth, and the perpetrator of her death by incest. Although the word "rape" is not explicitly mentioned, Sexton uses imagery and circumlocutions to allude to the incestuous relationship between father and daughter, and possibly the husband as well.

3.1.4. Narrative voice

Wainwright (57) defines the narrative voice as a persona, which is detached from the poet but still enables them to exhibit characteristics more freely.

In her poem, which serves as an introduction in *Transformations*, Sexton employs the character of a "middle-aged witch" (Sexton 223). This witch first appears in the poem *The Gold Key* (Sexton 223) and frames every poem throughout Sexton's collection. In *The Gold Key*, Sexton establishes an aspect that paves the way for the different

narrative voices in her rewritten fairy tales. By stating that the narrator is a “middle-aged witch, me –“ (223), Sexton reverts the role of the usually warm and loving character of the storyteller, a mother or grandmother, to that of a witch, which is usually associated negatively in traditional fairy tales.

Lucas (54) argues that Sexton borrows the witch's image from traditional representations of the witches in fairytales. In the prologue of *Briar Rose*, in which the reader is asked to “Consider a girl who keeps slipping off” the narrative voice belongs to the witch, who frames the poem. Moreover, Gamble connects the negative connotation of witches back to when women were excluded from the field of medicine (322). She argues that the witch hunts, which took place in the 15th century, can be linked to patriarchal desires to oppress and control women (Gamble 322).

According to Lanser's concept of merging the traditional aspects of narratology with political aspects, specific agendas and ideologies can be reinscribed into literary works (4). In Sexton's case, it is important to contextualize how the poem was produced, namely the 1970s. According to Lanser's concept of authorial, personal, and communal voice, which can be exhibited either privately or publicly, Sexton's use of narrative voice in *Briar Rose* will be analyzed.

In *Briar Rose*, there are a few narrative voices employed. It can be argued that the voice in the prologue is a public, authorial voice. It is public because the narration is directed towards a narratee outside the fiction. We, as readers, are invited to consider the protagonist's therapeutic journey back in time. It is authorial, as the witch's voice is heterodiegetic, external to the narrative, and possesses great textual authority.

This prologue is interrupted by a character inside the poem, namely the father. He asks his daughter, *Briar Rose*, to sit on his lap. This interruption of a personal voice can be interpreted as the interruption of patriarchy, an apparent interference to tell a story from a female perspective.

The central part of the poem, in which the tale of *Briar Rose's* fate is detailed, is narrated by the witch's public, authorial voice in the prologue.

After the description of *Briar Rose's* struggles with insomnia, the narrative voice switches mid-reported speech into the mode of personal voice of *Briar Rose*. She

describes her insomnia, her nightmares, and her use of sleeping medication. Alternating with the voice of Briar, Rose is again the authorial voice of the witch, as she narrates how Briar Rose could be buried alive and only awoken by the kiss of her father. Once again, in the last stanza, the narrative voice switches back to the personal voice of Briar Rose, as she details how she was passed “like a bowl of fruit” and that she recognized her drunk father standing at the edge of her bed at night.

The last four lines of the poem employ the mode of the public, communal voice. It is, again, the witch’s voice, but in this case, it can be interpreted as communal, as the witch represents the community of women, speaking for a collective, offering “political possibilities” through narrative, establishing a female voice (Lanser 22). The witch asks, “What voyage is this, little girl? / This coming out of prison? / God help – this life after death?” (Sexton 295).

Concerning feminist notions, there are apparent feminist ambitions in the poem Briar Rose. Sexton defies the traditional notion of the ideal female protagonist and reimagines the princess as broken from her traumas and addicted to drugs. Korzeniwska-Nowakowska (20) argues that Briar Rose falls victim to her youthful beauty, which is preyed upon by her father. By employing the communal voice of the witch, Sexton comments on the ideal promoted by canonical pieces of ideologies communicated by fairy tales, which are harmful to human, but predominantly female, nature.

Moreover, Lee (122) raises an interesting aspect of the usage of sleep in Briar Rose. The author argues that Sexton uses sleep as an essential part of the process in the protagonist’s development, as it signifies the transition from childhood to womanhood. Further, Lee states that the “tension in the protagonist’s sleep is a dilemma between her objective identity as an individual” (122). Sleep in Briar Rose can be interpreted as a means of self-defense mechanism, which secures the protagonist from her abusive father and society.

According to Plate (2), who has analyzed Sexton’s collections of poems before and including Transformations, there was a significant and distinct shift in voice in Transformations. While Sexton’s personal experiences influenced earlier collections of poems, Transformations is narrated by a middle-aged witch, who self-identifies as a

wise sage and “finds power from her wisdom and who wishes to pass it on to her audience” (Plate 4). Plate argues that *Transformations* features Sexton’s poetic voice, which is infused by her knowledge, wisdom, and power in order to educate her audience, teach behavior, values, and morals (33). This notion can be identified in a letter Sexton wrote to Kurt Vonnegut, who provided the Introduction to *Transformations* (Keely 71):

I’ve taken Grimm’s Fairy Tales and “Transformed” them into something all of my own ... I do something very modern to them ... They are small, funny and horrifying. Without quite meaning to I have joined the black humorists. I don’t know if you know my other work, but humor was never a very prominent feature ... terror, deformity, madness and torture were my bag. But this little universe of Grimm is not that far away. I think they end up being as wholly personal as my most intimate poems, in a different language, a different rhythm, but coming strangely, for all their story sound, from a deep a place (Sexton qtd. in Keely 71).

Furthermore, Plate concludes her analysis by stating that *Transformations* is Sexton’s pivotal work regarding her poetic voice. Plate argues that Sexton’s voice is now more authoritative and confident than her earlier work, exhibiting aspects of self-determination and a sense of emancipation (44). According to Plate, Sexton employs the wise witch’s voice, which is infused by feminist thought, to serve as a role model to readers (44).

Numerous scholars have assumed the interpretation that the character of the witch is Anne Sexton herself. By adopting the witch’s voice, Sexton cloaks herself in the protection of a communal voice to put forth her notions and thoughts about the inequality of women in society.

3.1.5. Feminist aspects

The following section will argue how Sexton’s *Briar Rose* exhibits notions of feminism.

As Röhrich states, the fairy is usually, but not generally, “the first poetic form with which people come into contact in their lives” (1). Furthermore, it has the potential to shape our ideologies, impress morals upon us, or model our notions of right and wrong, as he states that “more and more people are recognizing that fairy tales are essential and substantial stories which offer paradigmatic examples of conflicts in decisive life

situations" (Röhrich 1). A consequence of that is that fairy tales written in patriarchal structures follow that specific hegemonic body of thought. Hence, contemporary research seeks to reevaluate fairy tales and the underlying ideologies. In the scope of this thesis, it is specifically interesting how the women's movement has reevaluated the "role of the feminine" in fairy tales (Röhrich 4). There exists an underlying pattern of role constraints when it comes to gender. While the male characters tend to be active, heroic saviors, women are reduced to being passive, in need of a male figure to save them. Female stereotypes, however, in which the female (re)claims agency and is independent, are portrayed negatively in the form of ugly, old witches or wicked stepmothers (Röhrich 5). Fenglin argues that the Brothers Grimm wrote their collection of fairy tales by changing the original folk tales to fit the notions of characteristics of both female, and male protagonists, corresponding to the prevalent patriarchal notions of that time (25). Essentially, Fenglin argues that the Grimm Brothers have diluted female agency and rendered female protagonists rather fragile and in need of male rescue (25).

Furthermore, Zipes (Korzeniewska-Nowakowska 16), who is critical of gynocritical readings of fairy tales, states that the Brothers Grimm deliberately left out nuances in their tales, which would spark outrage in 19th century Germany. He argues that the Brothers Grimm "eliminated erotic and sexual elements [...] and emphasized specific role models for male and female protagonists according to the dominant patriarchal code of that time" (Zipes qtd. in Korzeniewksa-Nowakowska 16).

Korzeniewska-Nowakowska (15) reiterates that fairy tales have shaped the moral codex and the stereotypical depiction of female protagonists. Fairy tales are deeply rooted in a patriarchal canon, which echoes the hegemonic structures that oppress women. By imitating, whether consciously or unconsciously, the mandated structures in fairy tales, young girls are taught to behave similarly. Gonzales states that this cultural procedure is internalized by women, which they then

tactically assume as a truthful dispenser of womanhood. Fairy tales, then, constitute another, and very effective, normalizing discipline which show women the version of 'femininity' that the social norm expects from them; they are unawarely socialized and rendered docile to the cultural discourses at work in a given society and historical period. (Gonzales qtd. in Korzeniewska-Nowakowsa 12).

By rewriting fairy tales in her collection *Transformations*, Sexton tries to give a more independent voice to those who have been silenced and minimized before. (Fenglin 25).

Fenglin argues that Sexton's revised fairy tales in *Transformations* are a "process of deconstruction and rebuilding than simply retelling" (27). Furthermore, Fenglin states that the poems in *Transformations* can be regarded as a mirror Sexton holds up to society, attempting to educate her readership and "raise awareness towards female issues", by "creating unease, ambivalence, and subtle imageries" (27).

Moreover, Stone analyzes the genre of the fairy tale from a feminist perspective. She argues that feminists have been fascinated by fairy tales due to their popularity as a genre of children's literature, as an ensemble of negative female stereotypes (229).

Mohammed argues that after the second-wave of feminism during the 1970s, numerous female authors turned to the genre of fairy tales, and by rewriting them, they defied the expectedly heroic notions inherent to them (31). Feminist criticism ascribes both political and aesthetic reasons to the common habit to rewrite fairy tales (Mohammed 31). Ostriker claims that fairy tale rewritings contribute to challenging the genre's inherent gender (68). Furthermore, Mohammed (31) argues that Sexton exposes traditional notions of heroism, romance, and virtues and alters them to tales of violence, incest, and greed. Unlike her colleagues, even other confessional poets, Sexton let her personal life struggles influence her work heavily. Ostriker claims that "Sexton challenges our residual certainties that the life of the body should be private and not public and that women especially should be seen not heard, except among each other, talking about their messy anatomies" (11).

Similar to her earlier work, Sexton garnered varied criticism for *Transformations*. On the one hand, Helen Vendler identifies Sexton's "infantile fantasy" channeled in her rewritings (Vendler, qtd. in Mohammed 32), while Sage criticizes Sexton for transforming "comforting children's narratives into adult horror stories", framed with "sadly ironic riffs on adult discontents that shift perspective" (Sage qtd. in Mohammed 32). Moreover, Carol Leventen, classifies *Transformations* part of the "significant body of revisionist/ feminist work" (Leventen qtd. in Mohammed 32). Furthermore, Ostriker

claims that *Transformation* is "a brilliant synthesis of public 'story' and psychological revelations" (84).

The notion that feminist aspects can be found in Sexton's poetry is partly validated by Fukuda, although she states that scholars well as her close reading analysis of *Transformations* show that Sexton is not sufficiently consequent to follow through with her firm feminist stance (Fukuda 31). The author states that both influences, namely patriarchy as well as the new notions of feminism, can be found in *Transformations* and that Sexton seems torn between them. Fukuda argues that while Sexton employs a feminist criticism on patriarchy in the poem, she never commits fully to bridging the necessary last step to embrace the notions of feminism (31).

In comparison to the other analyzed poems by Rich, Kaur, and Carragher, Sexton's *Briar Rose* exhibits feminist notions in a more reserved, and distanced manner and employs far more narrative modes of voice, almost to dilute the message of the poem.

3.2. Rape (Adrienne Rich, 1973)

3.2.1. Biographical context

Adrienne Rich, born in 1929, was an American poet and "witness for social justice" (Millier 241) and a self-proclaimed feminist. She refused the notion that poetry should not be political and continued to "forge a political lyric voice" (Millier 241), which enables the poet to function as a mediator between the reader and culture.

According to Kort, Adrienne Rich grew up as an avid reader and was encouraged by her family to write (273). Rich's father, a physician and educator, supported Rich's literary aspirations and provided his daughter works by canonical nineteenth-century poets. Adrienne Rich began her writing career with the publication of her first collection of poems *A Change of World* in 1951 (Millier 241).

Moreover, the collection *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* was published in 1963, and was deemed as too personal by critics. Millier (241) states that this work is emblematic of a change in Rich's writing, as she addressed topics concerning women to a greater

extent. Furthermore, Kort stated that Rich wanted to utilize the privilege of her influence and presence in literature as a way of speaking for women who did not have the same privilege (273). Her collection *Diving into the Wreck* was published in 1973 and received rather negative reviews by critics, who condemned it for its so-called “apparent male-bashing” (Kort 273). Despite the criticism and backlash from members of the literature industry, Adrienne Rich was awarded numerous prizes for her literary accomplishments (Kort 273).

Furthermore, Rich has written over twenty collections of verse, penned several foundational essays in the context of feminism, and published a study of motherhood. She believed that “the search for justice and compassion is the great wellspring for poetry in our time” (Rich 2000:115). Millier states, that the influence of Rich has contributed to a shift of recognizing poetry’s political power, and its value to culture and society (256).

3.2.2. General information about the poem

Rape is directed at a narratee inside the story, who is one of the main protagonists. The only pronoun used is “you”, therefore the gender of the protagonist is not evidently stated.

The poem caused controversy among critics and readers, who generally admired Rich’s work for “its supposed ender-essentialized depiction of a female rape victim’s interactions with a masculine and not comprehended criminal justice system” (Millier 247). For instance, Vendler criticized the poem in regards to how it seems to portray all men as sadistic rapists (Vendler qtd. in Holladay 290). Another instance is stated by Holladay, in which Pritchard published a review in *The Hudson Review*, regarding Rich’s poem as propaganda that “with a little polish added, could have been written by a small committee composed of Germaine Greer, Susan Brownmiller, and Ti-Grace Atkinson” (Pritchard qtd. in Holladay, 290). Moreover, Sewell states that *Rape* exhibits “clear, direct, and passionate” language, differing from her earlier work and identifies the theme of victimization of women (111).

Furthermore, Millier states that Rich often employed first-person accounts of women who fell victim to the justice system and the actors involved in it, and in her poems, she pleaded for changes in the manner in which rape cases were processed in the United States (247).

3.2.3. Analysis of imagery and representation of rape

This section will examine the imagery used in Rich's poem *Rape* and its representations of rape. In the beginning, *Rape* introduces a policeman who, as the second line suggests, is known to the narratee.

There is a cop who is both prowler and father:
he comes from your block, grew up with your brothers,
had certain ideals.
You hardly know him in his boots and silver badge,
on horseback, one hand touching his gun. (Rich 44)

The poem's title and the introduction of the policeman invoke a specific connection, namely that the "cop" might be the rapist of the person addressed by "you". Rich employs a dichotomy with the choice of words to describe the policeman, namely "prowler" and "father". While prowler is connotated rather negatively, as someone who is lurking, hunting, and being untrustworthy, "father" is connotated more positively, as the caregiver, protector, and loved family man. Rich employs this dichotomy to underline the hypocrisy of being a "man of the law" who is still biased against victims of rape. The fact that the narratee knows the policeman, as he grew up with their brothers, invokes a certain familiarity. This is then revoked as the narratee is described to hardly know him in his police uniform. Moreover, the line "on horseback" describes how he is sat on a horse and looks down on the victim, not only in the literal sense but also figuratively. The poem continues with a repetition of the line "You hardly know him" and continues with:

[...] but you have to get to know him:
he has access to machinery that could kill you.
He and his stallion clop like warlords among the trash,

his ideals stand in the air, a frozen cloud
from between his unsmiling lips. (Rich 44)

The line “he has access to machinery that could kill you” might be interpreted as the him having a gun, which he touches with one hand at the beginning of the poem, as stated in the lines prior. On the other hand, as Brownmiller has described men’s genitalia as weapons (14), the choice of diction might imply that the policeman poses a source of danger, as the “machinery” that could kill, alludes to his penis. Furthermore, the “machinery” might represent patriarchy and its ideologies that are harmful to women. The line “he and his stallion clop like warlords among the trash” suggests power and aggression. He and his stallion are powerful. The imagery of stallions evokes notions of sexual prowess and virility. With the simile “like warlords”, the poem evokes images of conflict and male aggression. He, a warlord, is standing “among the trash”, namely the rape victim. The line “his ideals stand in the air” might be interpreted as his moral codex being momentarily suspended, that he temporarily dismisses his obligations to protect civilians. His breath meets the cold air, resulting in “a frozen cloud”, which escapes from a stoic, unsmiling face, suggests a distance, although it is implied that the policeman and the narratee know each other. The poem continues with the criminal act’s revelation, namely the physical result of the potential rape, that is implied in the title of the poem.

And so, when the time comes, you have to turn to him,
the maniac’s sperm still greasing your thighs,
your mind whirling like crazy. You have to confess
to him, you are guilty of the crime
of having been forced. (Rich 44)

Now, the narratee has to turn towards the policeman, and expose themselves. It is noted that the perpetrator’s sperm is still fresh, as it is “greasing” the narratee’s thighs. Here, a possible rape is suggested. Furthermore, the situation is described in a highly ambiguous way, as it could be construed in the way that the narratee towards their rapist, the policeman, after the act. Moreover, the lines “You have to confess” and “you are guilty of the crime” are connected by “to him”. By this connection, this section is stating the literal fact, that the narratee has to confide in the policeman “you have to

confess to him”, as well as suggesting that to the policeman, the narratee is deemed guilty of the crime “to him, you are guilty of the crime”. The crime might imply being guilty of having been forced or possibly elicited the act of rape.

And you see his blue eyes, the blue eyes of all the family
whom you used to know, grow narrow and glisten,
his hand types out the details
and he wants them all
but the hysteria in your voice pleases him best. (Rich 44)

In this stanza, there is a change of location. The narration possibly takes place in the police precinct, where the policeman has to document the incident and possible rape charges. The notion of familiarity between the narratee and the policeman is revisited by mentioning his eye color that the narratee “used to know”. The choice of the past tense suggests that this familiarity is no longer applicable and that the friendly dynamic between the two has changed. Furthermore, this situation suggests that there might be a possible change in the policeman's once known personality and that the narratee does not know him any longer. The once-familiar eyes now “grow narrow”, as if to concentrate better or possibly express disbelief.

Furthermore, it is mentioned that the policeman's eyes glisten. This can imply a twofold interpretation. Firstly, the eyes glisten with tears due to empathy for the situation of the narratee, or secondly, they are a sign of possible excitement and elation over the situation. The policeman's hands are recording the incident, merely doing their job, but in connection with his expression, an aspect of unprofessionalism is suggested, as he wants to know “all the details”. It is almost voyeuristic that he is invested in all of the details of the rape because they secretly excite him. This is confirmed by the line in which the hysteria in the narratee's voice excites him more and “pleases him best”. The last line of the stanza is highly sexually connotated, as the policeman takes delight in the fate of the narratee and is possibly aroused by it.

You hardly know him but now he thinks he knows you:
he has taken down your worst moment
on a machine and filed it in a file.

He knows, or he thinks he knows, how much you imagined;

he knows, or thinks he knows, what you secretly wanted. (Rich 44)

Moreover, in this stanza, an apparent imbalance of power is established, as the narratee knows nothing about the policeman, but the policeman now knows the possibly most intimate, traumatizing moment of the narratee's life. It is likely the worst moment of the narratee's life, and it is now documented by somebody who highly enjoys the account of the rape. For the policeman, the documentation and reconstruction of the rape should be executed in a professional, empathetic and sensitive manner. The act of filing a report should be mundane and not something that visibly arouses him. The line "how much you imagined" suggests that although there is physical evidence of the rapist's sperm still "greasing" the victim's thighs, there seems to be mistrust between the policeman and the victim. The mistrust might stem from notions of rape myths instilled in public discourse. Factors such as the victim's choice of clothing, level of intoxication, or possible refutation of consent given prior.

He has access to machinery that could get you put away;

and if, in the sickening light of the precinct,

and if, in the sickening light of the precinct,

your details sound like a portrait of your confessor,

will you swallow, will you deny them, will you lie your way home? (Rich 45)

In the first line of the stanza, a kind of "machinery" is mentioned. It might be interpreted as the gun he was touching earlier, or possibly he possesses the same machinery of the rapist, namely the sexual organs that abused the victim. Another option is that he represents the law that is frequently biased and does not protect the victim but rather the perpetrator. In stating that, Rich suggests that the policeman as an individual is part of a bigger problem, namely the biased jurisdiction against female victims of rape. The mention of the narratee "swallowing" the details of her rapists is sexually connotated as well, as it suggests the swallowing of sperm after oral sex. It could also be interpreted as swallowing their pride by refuting the testimonial they gave and withdrawing the rape charges. The last stanza opens up the situation between two people, precisely the policeman and the rape victim, to a broader context of the justice system, which ideologies are deeply embedded in patriarchy.

3.2.4. Narrative voice

In this section, the narrative mode which is employed in Rich's poem *Rape* will be examined.

Firstly, Reisman (192) states that throughout Adrienne Rich's career, she adapted to conventions regarding poetics in order to pursue themes that were important to her, thus creating her own voice. One of the central aspects of *Diving into the Wreck* is the relationship between the individual and society. Reisman (196) states that *Rape* is published in a collection of poems which represent women who attempt to re-establish fragments of themselves, which were lost. Several women's issues become the foci of *Diving into the Wreck* as Rich tries to develop a "common language" (Reisman 196), unifying women and calling attention to their experiences in public discourse and society. Moreover, Reisman argues that Rich regards patriarchy, and its "exaggerated aggressiveness, competition, and repression of emotions" have led to Western civilization almost being eradicated (196). Reisman argues that *Diving into the Wreck* features poems that are almost exclusively cast as dialogue, which can be likened to conversation. Thus, conversation and opening up discourse about women's issues are central notions in Rich's collection of poems (196).

Reisman states, that Rich employed a more distanced voice, namely "the language of the universal" in her earlier work (Reisman 200). Similar to Sexton, she adhered to male poetic peers' literary conventions, not willing to fully commit to establishing a new, feminist, self-assured voice. Furthermore, Reisman detects a lack of emotional depth in Rich's earlier poetry due to the hesitancy to echo her own experiences in her work (200). Finally, in *Diving into the Wreck*, Rich uses her poetry to express her concerns about women's oppression and the inequality that is propagated by patriarchy (Reisman 200).

As Lanser stated, narratives are not produced in a vacuum but tend to reflect prevalent issues in society (105). Since the publications of the aforementioned poem *Briar Rose* and *Rape* lie only two years apart, the general tenor of both production times is similar. Notions of second-wave feminism were already part of academic as well as public discourse. Although the media frenzy around rape victims who decided to speak out

publicly about their experiences was not as tumultuous as in the 1980s, the public was still interested and invested in rape victim's accounts of their personal tragedies (Serisier 185). These incidents of speaking out publicly as well as the public's response are themes that Rich picks up and deals with in *Rape*. The central motif in the poem is what Higgins and Silver pose as a central question regarding rape narratives: "Who is speaking may be all that matters" (1).

By applying Lanser's concept of narrative voice to the poem *Rape*, I argue that Rich employs the mode of a private voice. Lanser describes private voice as directed toward a narratee, who is a fictional character, inside the narrative (15).

Furthermore, the narrative voice, apart from being private, is also communal. According to Lanser, narrative authority is invested in a definable community, and authority is established by means of a communal "I", that addresses the "you", the fictional narratee in the poem, as a representative agent of feminists (21). By uniting all the other rape victim's experiences with the juridical system, the communal "I" addresses the narratee in the second line of the first stanza. When they say that the policeman "comes from your block, grew up with your brothers", the communal "I" implies that the threat of patriarchal oppression might come from "one of their own", a familiar person, who is close to the narratee's brothers. Thus, familiarity will not protect you from the mistreatment that will happen if you speak out about rape.

Moreover, the second stanza's second line, "he has access to machinery that could kill you" implies that the narratee is on their own, as were all the other victims after their incidents of rape. A friend "on the inside", on the side of hegemonic power will not be of great assistance or even a source of empathy, as rape myths contribute to the fact that rape victims are mistreated from the moment they decide to come forward. The communal voice possesses authority in this matter, as it draws from the collective knowledge of abused women's community. Furthermore, the communal "I" warns the narratee of the dangerous weapon of patriarchy and the "access to machinery" that could kill if they do not subject themselves to the ways which are imposed on women in the patriarchy.

In addition, throughout the poem, the communal "I" alludes to several instances of mistrust between the policeman and the narratee. The lines "to him you are guilty of

the crime”, “the hysteria in your voice pleases him best”, and “he knows, or thinks he knows, what you secretly wanted” imply further that the narratee should be alert and conscious of the doubts and prejudices of the policeman, who is an agent of a whole apparatus of male dominance and power. By using the communal voice, Rich moves away from the focus of one instance of rape and shifts it to a warning compiled of all the other experiences of rape victims who chose to speak up to instruct and caution the narratee about the gravity of their situation. According to Lanser (21), the mode of communal voice appears to be primarily used when marginal communities are involved. She states further that she has “not observed it in fiction by white, ruling-class men perhaps because such an “I” is already in some sense speaking with the authority of a hegemonic ‘we’” (Lanser 21).

Thus, the authority instilled in the communal “I” is validated by the shared experiences and connection of the represented community, namely oppressed victims of rape.

3.2.5. Feminist aspects

According to Abraham, Rich’s poetry and prose concern themselves with socially relevant topics such as feminism, motherhood, and sexual orientation in a self-reflective manner (251). Rich criticizes patriarchal hegemony while also exploring her own issues of being a woman, a Jew, and later in life, a lesbian (Abraham 251). Furthermore, Abraham argues that in exploring these topics by writing about them, Rich overcame her marginalized position (251).

The collection of poems in *Diving into the Wreck* is influenced by Rich’s fight for women’s equal rights (Abraham 252). Adrienne Rich was heavily involved in feminism, as she witnessed the beginning of its second-wave, contributed to the emergence of intersectional feminism, joined the women’s movement, and became one of feminism’s leading actors. By publishing several essays that highlight the marginalized position of women in society by drawing from her own and other women’s experiences, Rich demands equality for women and to abolish all notions and oppression of patriarchy (Birkle 119).

From the 1950s onward, however, Birkle states that the genre of poetry became equated with the women's movement and was regarded as a great source of power (121). In her poetry and essays, Rich employs topics that deal with both public and private issues (Birkle 121). Furthermore, Rich's body of work is described as emblematic "of the position of contemporary, educated women" (Stimpson qtd. in Birkle 121).

According to Birkle, in trying to deconstruct patriarchal social norms, Rich gives a voice to oppressed women, incorporating both black and white women writers (121). *Rape* is a foundational work in that it attempts to cease the dissemination of rape myths. Furthermore, *Diving into the Wreck* was regarded by the women's movement as "a guideline in poetry to active feminism" (Gould qtd. in Birkle 118).

Moreover, Rich acknowledges that the genre of poetry might be associated primarily with women, following Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine*, which is the notion that poetry is inherently "female" and possesses the power to supersede inherently "masculine" language (Cixous qtd. in Gamble 171). Moreover, when she was asked why poetry is regarded as the medium for women, Rich responded:

I wonder if women haven't always written poetry that has been burned, hidden away in drawers, buried with them, and so on. I think that poetry, as much as journals and letters and diaries, has been an almost natural women's form . . ." (Rich qtd. in Benjamin 629).

In contrast to Sexton, who was not involved in the women's movement in the same intensity, Rich was very conscious of the gravity of openly addressing issues pertaining to feminism and women's fight for equality. She acknowledges that the urgency to transform experiences that arise from being a woman into art was the step that led to the acceptance and validation of a political community (Abraham 255). For Rich, the fusion of personal experiences inherent to women with her work as an author, and activist, ultimately led to her feeling for the first time that she closed the "gap between poet and women. (Rich qtd. in Abraham 255).

3.3. *Untitled poem from the sun and her flowers* by Rupī Kaur (the sun and her flowers, 2017)

3.3.1. Biographical context

Rupī Kaur, born in 1992, is a Punjabi-born Sikh Canadian author (Chasar 185). In the biographical section of her personal website, Kaur states that when she “was a 21-year-old university student, Rupī wrote, illustrated and self-published her first poetry collection, *milk and honey*” (Kaur *About Me*). In 2017, Kaur published her second collection of poetry titled *the sun and her flowers*. Her third book *home body* was written during the Covid19 pandemic, during which she moved back into her parents’ home (Kaur *About Me*).

Common themes in Kaur’s poetry include topics such as women’s bodies, sexuality, abuse, and healing. The examination of those themes resonates with a rather large readership, which at first manifested in the number of comments, likes, and shares of her poetry on the social media platform Instagram (Chasar 185), which resulted in Kaur publishing three collections of poems.

3.3.2. General information about the poem

The entirety of Rupī Kaur’s poetry is written in lowercase letters. On her website, Kaur addresses this on the frequently asked questions page (Kaur *F.A.Q.*) and states that she could only read and understand in her first language Punjabi, when she began writing poetry. She had not yet developed writing skills to compose poetry in Punjabi. There are no upper- or lowercase letters within the Gurmukhi script, and according to Kaur, it is the script’s simplicity which she enjoys (Kaur *F.A.Q.*). Kaur argues that there are symmetry and equality, which she tries to emulate, as she says that it is “a visual representation of what i want to see more of within the world: equalness” (Kaur *F.A.Q.*). Furthermore, Kaur does not title all of her poems. Thus, the analyzed poem will be referred to by the book and chapter it was published in.

Kaur began publishing her poems on the social media platform Instagram. Alongside photos she uploaded, she has written captions in the form of poetry. Chasar argues that social media platforms can generate rather large readerships and “fan followings” outside the official literary culture (22), which the authors then are able to harness and transform into book sales (23). Kaur demonstrated this by acquiring a large number of followers on Instagram and subsequently translated her popularity into success in the literary tradition, publishing several books of poetry. Out of the authors, which employed the same medium, it is argued that Kaur is the most successful one (Chasar 23). She is digitally self-published, and her first collection of poetry, titled *milk and honey*, ranked on the New York Times bestseller list for over a year, selling over 2.5 million copies (Chasar 23).

3.3.3. Analysis of imagery and representations of rape

In the following section, imagery and representations of rape in Rupī Kaur’s poem from *the sun and her flowers* (ch. “falling”) will be examined.

at home that night
i filled the bathtub with scorching water
tossed in spearmint from the garden
two tablespoons almond oil
some milk
and honey
a pinch of salt
rose petals from the neighbour’s lawn (the sun and her flowers, ch. “falling”)

The poem begins with the exposition and the introduction of the narrator. It is nighttime, and they begin to fill a bathtub with “scorching water”, which one might argue is rather uninviting, as it evokes a boiling, searing, blister-inducing environment that is used to get rid of bacteria or clean something that has been soiled. The narrator adds “spearmint / two tablespoons almond oil / some milk / and honey / a pinch of salt / rose petals” into the bathtub, which evokes a kind of concoction and reads like the narrator is reciting a recipe for soup. The elements which they add to the bathtub are all plant-based, except for the two components, milk and honey. The choice to enumerate all

the things they put into their bath highlights their importance and shall be analyzed further.

According to Ferber (9-10), almonds are symbolic of spring, as they are regarded as the “prophets” of spring’s arrival and the dawn of a new season. Almond trees bloom as early as January in Palestine, and March in England, thus, earlier than any other tree. Spearmint has a very tingling and fresh notion to it, further emphasizing the arrival of something fresh or a new chapter, similar to almonds’ symbolism (Ferber 10).

Furthermore, the Greeks regarded bees as a sign of eloquence or poetic gift. Therefore, idioms such as “honey-voiced” or “sweet-lipped” allude to the poetic connotation (Ferber 21). In combination with milk, the line exhibits biblical symbology (Ferber 21). According to Levine (33), milk and honey is one of the most familiar biblical expressions describing The Promised Land. The line “a land flowing with milk and honey” occurs about twenty times in scripture. Beyond its biblical scope, “milk and honey” evokes opulence, richness, and satiation. Levine further argues that milk and honey are considered luxury items, precious gifts, and valuable trade articles (33). The Bible refers to milk and honey as foods that are high in energy and represent wisdom (Levine 33).

Moreover, in a sexual connotation, honey evokes female bodily fluids’ sweetness, a nexus of pleasure, health, and fertility. Traditionally, milk can symbolize female tenderness and innocence, as it stems from the breasts of a mother nursing her innocent child, therefore also implying female tenderness (Ferber 32).

Furthermore, similar to the almond tree, roses only bloom in spring but wither away rather quickly in the span of a few weeks. Thus, there is an unavoidable aspect of exclusivity to the rose, as it is gone as quickly as it blooms, spanning only a few weeks between its blossoming youth and maturity. The exclusivity is further implied by the rose’s thorns, guarding its delicate beauty. Moreover, the rose’s blooming alludes to the sexual awakening of a woman, as the vulva can be likened to a rose in its physical resemblance. Ferber states that the rose has two natural enemies, namely worms and winds. In a sexual sense, worms can allude to the image of male genitalia. Furthermore, the Latin phrase “sub rosa” translates to “in secret” which intensifies the

connotation of a woman's body and secrets, which are not to be elicited by force (Ferber 181-182).

All in all, Kaur uses lush, satiated, and sensual imagery in the first lines of the poem. Referring back to the notion as mentioned above of a soup recipe, one might argue that it is instead a recipe for self-care and an act of kindness to their own body.

However, the subsequent lines "i soaked myself in the mixture / desperate to wash the dirty off" revoke the sensual imagery to establish that the narrator wishes to cleanse themselves of something unclean or contaminated. The process of soaking the body in all these warmly connotated earthy things is in stark contrast with the body being in a state of disarray. Moreover, the narrator either desires to cleanse herself in the literal sense, of all the remnants of the rape, as well as figuratively, implying a feeling of shame.

the first hour

i picked pine needles from my hair

counted them one two three

lined them up on their backs (the sun and her flowers, ch. "falling")

The poem continues with the lines "the first hour / i picked pine needles from my hair / counted them one two three / lined them up on their backs". Time is now broken down into hours. The first hour, the narrator spends with plucking pine needles from their hair. The pine needles are not intentionally added into the bath as the rest of the mixture. Thus, the placement is unintentional, either from an external force or a second party. The fact that the narrator wants to get rid of them implies that the needles should not be in the narrator's hair to begin with. As they count the pine needles, the narrator lines "them up on their backs", which alludes to the possibility that the narrator has lied on their back before as well, and unbeknownst to them, entangling the needles in their hair.

the second hour

i wept

a howling escaped me

who knew girl could become beast

during the third hour (the sun and her flowers, ch. "falling")

In the second hour, the narrator cries, rather zealously, as they state that "a howling" escaped them, like from a "beast". They liken their visceral howling to that of a wolf howling in agony. The narrator is taken aback by surprise that "girl could become beast", revealing that she is a girl.

i found bits of him on bits of me

the sweat was not mine

the white between my legs

not mine

bite marks

not mine

the smell

not mine

the blood

mine (the sun and her flowers, ch. "falling")

The poem culminates in the description of the third hour, in which the narrator describes finding "bits of him on bits of me", suggesting physical evidence of a man, which can be found on her body. Furthermore, the narrator comments on the "sweat" that was not hers, as well as the "white between [her] legs". As far as the physical evidence is concerned, the white between her legs might imply a foreign white bodily fluid, presumably semen, which is reinforced by the mention of bite marks on her body, which are remnants of aggressive sexual behavior, as it suggests that he wanted to devour her. The narrator can detect the foreign smell of the man on herself. The choice of diction, namely "smell" ultimately reveals that his presence is not wanted, as it is negatively connotated with the smell of his sweat, semen, or other bodily fluids. By the end of the enumeration, she states that the blood is hers. Consequently, it is implied that the bath takes place after an aggressive sexual encounter, unwanted because the narrator feels the urgency to cleanse herself in scorching water that is filled with calming elements in order to emerge as a cleaner version of herself, who rids herself of the trauma, shame, and pain. The bath in milk, which is seen as an innocent notion

of motherly nurture, can be interpreted as the wish to revert to her mother's womb and erase the physical and mental evidence of the rape.

Finally, in the fourth hour, the narrator states "the fourth hour I prayed". This line contributes to the bath's components, which reference biblical symbolism. Overall, the poem deals with the aftermath of a rape and the metamorphosis, which takes place in a bath, cleansing herself physically and emotionally.

By taking care of both their physical as well as mental state, it can be argued that the protagonist attempts to reclaim agency after it has been taken away from them by an incident of rape. Frequently, rape victims are deprived of their autonomy twofold, firstly by the act of rape itself and secondly, by the aftermath and their inability to speak out and reclaim their lost agency.

3.3.4. Narrative voice

In this section, the mode of narrative voice, which is employed in the poem *the sun and her flowers* will be analyzed. Lanser claims that regardless of whether an author's stance toward authoritative institutions and ideologies is ambiguous, by the act of writing a novel and publishing it is implied that the goal is to obtain discursive authority and "a quest to be heard, respected, and believed, a hope of influence" (7).

I argue that Kaur does intend to claim authority in her work by seeking to educate and influence her readership to take a stand against the oppression by patriarchy. This is further emphasized by the act of self-publishing her work, independently from patriarchal structures that might be inherent in the literary world. In the following, notions of voice, as postulated by Lanser, will be analyzed in the selected poem by Rupi Kaur.

Firstly, Rupi Kaur's poem exhibits a private voice, as it is directed towards the narratee in the poem. Secondly, the narrative mode of the poem is that of a personal voice. By means of a personal voice, narrators are self-consciously telling their own stories (Lanser 18).

According to Frye, the first person's use allows women writers to create protagonists who are both female and autonomous (Frye 47). Similar to the narrative mode of

authorial voice, the personal voice can also be self-referential. Lanser argues that the authority of the personal voice is more limited in terms of knowledge than the authorial voice:

The authority of personal voice is contingent in ways that the authority of authorial voice is not: while the autodiegetic “I” remains a structurally ‘superior’ voice mediating the voices of other characters, it does not carry the superhuman privileges that attach to authorial voice, and its status is dependent on a reader’s response not only to the narrator’s acts but to the character’s actions (Lanser 19).

While Lanser argues that the use of personal voice might not be desirable to some women writers, as it is limited in terms of the representation of only one perspective, without possessing and declaring knowledge that goes beyond the scope of only one person’s experiences (19). Nevertheless, it can be argued that Kaur employs a personal voice, more specifically an autodiegetic narrator, to step out of the conventions of notions of authority and its legitimacy in order to forge a new way for women’s voices. The reveal of an innermost, intimate perspective might resonate more with people who share the same experience and tragedies and connect on a more meaningful level.

Furthermore, Chasar states that Kaur frees herself from patriarchal structures of the literary world by producing and publishing poetry in the digital age, which enables her to write about her experiences in an unedited manner (187). Chasar argues that by breaking free of the norm that is prevalent in media conditions and literary production, Kaur is able to construct her authorship independent from patriarchal structures. Hence, the digital age conditions, which are free from oppressive structures, influenced Kaur’s relationship to her own voice “and by extension, other poet’s relations to their voices” (Chasar 189).

Furthermore, in her poetry, Kaur exhibits mostly the narrative use of personal voice. Chasar states that the fascination with so-called “Instapoetry”, i.e., poetry that gained popularity on social media platforms, enables the poet to transition smoothly to the arena of their literary peers (Chasar 190). Although, as Paquet states, academic scholarship has, for the most part, neglected to recognize Instagram poetry, deeming it lower in quality and exhibiting little literary value (296). However, Chasar argues that

the capturing of the authentic voice of the poets, without being edited or held back by “traditional authorship” as he defines it, is what makes it interesting to readers (190).

3.3.5. Feminist aspects

Paquet states that “From the outset, Kaur’s public image was unapologetically feminist and loud. By showing the truth of menstruation, she branded herself as authentic on a SNS¹ known for its filters” (298). Rupi Kaur’s poetry has evolved from being published in the context of her social media presence, particularly Instagram, to publishing three collections of poems. Paquet argues that Kaur has gained her vast readership as one of the first “social media poets” (296), reimagining traditional forms of literature.

Common themes of Kaur’s poetry include women’s bodies, and mental health in a feminist context. Kaur has repeatedly raised awareness to misogynist behavior, for instance, when Instagram removed a photo she posted that allegedly violated Instagram’s guidelines. Kaur posted a picture of her fully clothed, lying on the bed, with menstruation stains on both her linens as well as her pants. Kaur responded to Instagram’s actions with this caption:

thank you @instagram for providing me with the exact response my work was created to critique. you deleted a photo of a woman who is fully covered and menstruating stating that it goes against community guidelines when your guidelines outline that it is nothing but acceptable. the girl is fully clothed. the photo is mine. it is not attacking a certain group. nor is it spam. and because it does not break those guidelines i will repost it again. i will not apologize for not feeding the ego and pride of misogynist society that will have my body in an underwear but not be okay with a small leak. when your pages are filled with countless photos/accounts where women (so many who are underage) are objectified. pornified. and treated less than human. thank you. (Kaur Instagram post).

Evidently, Kaur is a self-proclaimed feminist. She argues that Instagram’s decision to take down a fully clothed photo that displays linens and pants soaked with

¹ Social networking service

menstruation blood is synonymous with a misogynist society that deems women's pictures in underwear acceptable, but not if it is stained with something that is inherently natural to all women. This statement is a call to action to abolish patriarchal systems that seek to push personal problems back into women's private realm by marking it a taboo subject. Kaur proclaims that she will not be “feeding the ego and pride of misogynist society” (Kaur Instagram post). Thus, she acknowledges society's oppression with sexist tendencies and takes an unequivocal stand against it, echoing second-wave feminists, as they politicized the personal. Further, she criticizes Instagram's policies by stating that there are numerous instances of underage girls, who are being “objectified. pornofied. and treated less than human” (Kaur Instagram Post).

Moreover, she put the photo and its meaning into context, as her caption provides the following explanation:

this image is a part of my photoseries project for my visual rhetoric course. you can view the full series at rupikaur.com the photos were shot by myself and @prabhkaur1

i bleed each month to help make humankind a possibility. my womb is home to the divine. a source of life for our species. whether i choose to create or not. but very few times it is seen that way. in older civilizations this blood was considered holy. in some it still is. but a majority of people. societies. and communities shun this natural process. some are more comfortable with the pornification of women. the sexualization of women. the violence and degradation of women than this. they cannot be bothered to express their disgust about all that. but will be angered and bothered by this. we menstruate and they see it as dirty. attention seeking. sick. a burden. as if this process is less natural than breathing. as if it is not a bridge between this universe and the last. as if this process is not love. labour. life. selfless and strikingly beautiful (Kaur qtd. in Rao).

Therefore, the picture put up by Kaur was part of a project in her rhetorics course at University, in collaboration with her sister. Kaur employed a theory inspired by Susan Sontag's essay on “how context influences art consumption” (Rao) and analyzed different receptions. She posted various photos, such as the one that Instagram removed, to several social media platforms and compared the reactions. As a response to Instagram's decision to remove her photo, Kaur posted the following statement on her personal Facebook page:

Some women aren't allowed in their religious place of worship. Out of their homes to do certain things. And are told they are sick. As if the period is a common cold. Yes. This is here in North America. I have been hospitalized many times because of issues associated with my period. I have been suffering from a sickness related to my period. And ever since I have been working so hard to love it. Embrace it. Celebrate it. Even though [sic] it's given me so much pain in the the past few years. And they want to tell me I should be quiet about this. That all of this we experience collectively does not need to be seen. Just felt secretly behind closed doors. That's why this is important. Because when I first got my period my mother was sad and worries. And they want to censor all that pain. Experience. Learning. No.

Their patriarchy is leaking.

Their misogyny is leaking.

We will not be censored. (Kaur qtd. in Rao)

This statement is yet another instance of Kaur taking a public stand against patriarchy. Consequently, her actions outside her poetic work support and echo the common themes in her poetry. By mentioning addressing the censorship, she utilizes the social media platform to highlight the shaming of women's natural bodily functions. Like Sexton, Kaur employs the themes of reproduction and women's bodies in her poetry to fight against patriarchal notions that these topics should remain private.

Another aspect of Kaur's poetry is her stand against sexual violence. In her talk on sexual assault, which she held at the TEDx Talk in 2016, titled "I'm Taking My Body Back", Rupi Kaur deals with the aftermath of rape and how she is reclaiming her bodily autonomy (Kaur TEDxKC).

Barnett raises an important aspect, as she states that poetry is subjected to "the little magazine effect", which is a "particular type of lyric alienation not caused by exposure to world war, fast, trains, or moving pictures, but to modernist editing and publishing" (667).

This notion is affirmed by Chasar, who claims that editors and publishers are agents of the patriarchal system (185). They exhibit their power by deciding whether particular poetry by certain authors will be published, in many cases after they alter it (Chasar 185). Barnett states that "even if a poem is textually unchanged between submission

and publication, the bibliographic framing and legitimacy the magazine provide become necessary for its status as poetry” (668).

Therefore, Kaur circumvents this process by self-publishing. Chasar further argues that this form of autonomy in terms of reproductivity in the literary world correlates with the themes Kaur employs in her poetry (186). As women possess more access to means of literary distribution, they regain autonomy of their bodies. Independent of an editor, who might impose oppressive notions onto her poetry, Kaur can express herself authentically and unrestrained. Kaur explicitly broaches the issue on her website as a response to a “frequently asked question” (Kaur *F.A.Q.*) of how she self-published:

After writing and performing poetry for many years, I was inspired to publish my work. I was in writing workshops – that whole deal. I asked a creative writing professor what I needed to do in order to get published, and their response was don’t bother. I was told it was too difficult. They said poetry basically never got published. I was told that I had a better chance having individual poems published in literary journals, magazines, and anthologies. I then asked them if self-publishing was a good route to take. Immediately I was told – no. To surpass the gatekeeper would be looked down upon by my literary peers. (Kaur *About Me*)

This response reflects the statements made by Barnett and Chasar, in that Kaur is advised to go against the norm by “surpass[ing] the gatekeeper”, which represents the literary world and its rules, norms, and hierarchies. By not passing through the filter of a literary hegemony, Kaur would be “looked down upon by [her] literary peers” (Kaur *About Me*). Kaur further states in her section “About Me” that she

started submitting individual poems to anthologies, magazines, and journals. The result was one rejection after another. As I was in the middle of picking and choosing which pieces to submit, I came upon a realization. I felt I was doing a disservice to my larger body of work by plucking pieces out of the collection, throwing them out there in the world, hoping they would land. I realized that my work read differently, when read in its entirety, and separating them didn’t make any sense. That’s when I set my eyes on self-publishing, regardless of what the creative writing professor had said. I couldn’t be held back by this gatekeeper who was never going to pay attention to me anyway. And so, I edited and designed the book, cover to cover over a span of one to two months (Kaur *About Me*).

Kaur states that creative control was essential to her, as she did not want to see her individual pieces that are received best in their entirety exist in a literary world and system, which wants to edit her poetry.

Golob connects notions of ecofeminism, a strand of feminism, to Rupri Kaur's poetry (2020). In the analyzed poem from *the sun and her flowers*, the employed symbolism of nature is evident. Cixous states a connection between nature and women writers and argues that "patriarchal thought is structured around a system of binary opposition 'related to "the" couple, man/woman'. Nature is firmly relegated to the female side of the equation, leaving culture the province of the male" (Cixous qtd. in Gamble 258).

Moreover, two out of the three collections of poetry by Kaur, namely *milk and honey* (2014) and *the sun and her flowers* (2017), exhibit nature and food connections. The imagery employed in *the sun and her flowers* is heavily associated with nature.

Salleh defines ecofeminism as the combination of feminism and ecological thinking, dating back to the 1970s when women responded to globalization and modernization by arguing that the "material resourcing" of nature (Salleh xi) can be equated to the resourcing and capitalizing of women's bodies. Furthermore, Gamble states that all ecofeminists "agree that important connections exist between the domination of women and the domination of nature" (190).

Bedford (200) argues that the ecofeminist movement commenced as a response "to the effects of capitalism and colonialism upon ecosystems and communities". The first women involved in ecofeminism were poor, as they were among the first groups affected by the degeneration of nature (Bedford 200).

One of the main concerns of ecofeminism is the salvation of livelihoods of unprotected and exploited women in terms of labor. Nevertheless, Salleh further states that restricting the notions of ecofeminism to one particular concern is not possible

'Only connect' – this sums up what the perspective is about. Ecofeminism is the only political framework I know of that can spell out the historical links between neoliberal capital, militarism, corporate science, worker alienation, domestic violence, reproductive technologies, sex tourism, child molestation, neocolonialism, Islamophobia, extractivism, nuclear weapons, industrial toxics, land and water grabs, deforestation, genetic

engineering, climate change and the myth of modern progress (Salleh ix).

Furthermore, Salleh argues that ecofeminists equate the oppression of nature to the oppression of women. Ecofeminism's common goal is to rid society of sexist oppression, which is also environmentally sustainable (Salleh ix).

Moreover, Rumens and Philips argue that especially women feel drawn to the notions of ecofeminism as a result of their “special affinity with and closeness to nature based in biologically determined and embodied experiences of, for example, childbirth and menstruation” (4).

Thus, ecofeminism's concerns and aspects are inscribed in women because of the notion that women are closer to nature as, for instance, men. There is an explicit feminine attribution to “Mother Earth”, and there are specific characteristics that are implicitly regarded as female, such as women being nurturing and caring beings (Rumens and Phillips 4). Therefore, it is comprehensible that some scholars ascribe the role that ecofeminism entails in nurturing women, as they are regarded as being closer to nature. Bedford affirms those claims and states further that women account for most of the world's farmers and are thus, more susceptible to capitalist transformation of land (200). Traditionally, women are farmers, responsible for raising livestock, collecting drinking water, reaping crops, as well as raising children (Bedford 200).

Kaur's poetry and underlying notions of feminism, especially the ones discussed in the analysis of her poem, conform to the idea of ecofeminism, which states that reconnecting to nature is seen as an act of standing up against the patriarchy.

3.4. *Numb* (Alvy Carragher, 2016)

3.4.1. Biographical context

Alvy Carragher is an Irish poet who began focusing on poetry in her studies at The National University of Ireland Galway. The short biography provided by the Irish publishing house Salmon Poetry, which also published her work *Falling in love with*

broken things (2016), lists Carragher's awards including "Over the Edge New Writer of the Year, The Gregory O'Donoghue Award, The Cúirt New Writing Prize, Doire Press International Poetry Competition, and the Irish People's Poetry Prize." (Bourke). Furthermore, Carragher's list of achievements includes several prizes which she won during slam poetry competitions and the Irish representant of the Poetry Ireland Introduction Series, which was held in New York. Moreover, it is stated that Carragher's poems have appeared in several publications (Bourke).

3.4.2. General information about the poem

Before its publication in Carragher's work *Falling in love with broken things* in 2016, the poem was recited by Carragher on YouTube in 2014. As Hooker states in her online article "Beauty in Broken Things", Carragher is "known as a performance poet, and her spoken delivery of her work is a tour de force, but it also carries to the page with equal vigour." (Hooker). Moreover, referring to the poem *Numb*, Hooker argues that it is "a chant between the dissociation of mind and a body under attack, and whose refrain is no. The pace is relentless, and with infrequent punctuation, the stress falls each time on the word no." (Hooker).

The poem *Numb* depicts a situation at a house party, which takes place on New Year's Eve. The narrator finds herself in a situation warding off unwanted sexual advances from a man, and albeit the narrator does not consent to sex and attempts several times to regain control, nevertheless, she is raped. Furthermore, the narrator also recalls a rape that happened earlier with another man, precisely her then-boyfriend.

In an interview with The Guardian, the author Alvy Carragher was asked about her poem *Numb* and the subsequent criticism she received after publishing it. Carragher stated that since her poem's publication, several people had contacted her, resulting in a "campaign of abuse" (McDonald) since she made her rape public. Furthermore, the author states that readers who have reached out to her objected to her rape, arguing that it was not, in fact, rape, even discussing whether she was "rapeable", in relation to her attractiveness (McDonald). Among those critics were also women, notes Carragher. Moreover, she affirms that it was rape, although she consciously wrote it in an ambiguous tone (McDonald).

3.4.3. Analysis of imagery and representation of rape

In the following, Carragher's poem *Numb* will be analyzed in terms of representation of rape and imagery.

a mouldy old house party, crushed into the dustbin,
as he kissed me, the smell of a dead fish
and I was thinking, this is not ideal, not ideal,
kept glancing over his kisses at a girl in the corner
passed out from space cakes and a dog with cross-eyes
I could have sworn was trying to save me (Carragher *Numb*)

The poem begins by setting the narration's location, which is a "mouldy old house party". The narrator describes themselves as being "crushed into the dustbin", seemingly by force of a man kissing them. This first line alludes to the feeling of claustrophobia and being trapped by somebody who is physically aggressive. Furthermore, the narrator describes the kiss as being rather unenjoyable, as the other person's breath evokes "the smell of a dead fish", which evokes associations with decay, death, and something rotten.

The narration turns inward, as the narrator thinks that the situation is "not ideal", which is repeated twice. The narrator looks for allies that can rescue her, but they are comprised of an intoxicated, unconscious girl and a cross-eyed dog. In terms of literary symbols, dogs can often be associated with abuse (Ferber 59), and are sometimes utilized as a means of insult in literature, referring to their indiscrete display of mating behavior, or to symbolize sexual looseness (Ferber 60). The cross-eyed dog can be interpreted as an embodiment of the narrator's situation, almost as if the dog mirrors her actions. Furthermore, the dog's connotation in literature, namely as a symbol for animalistic sexual behavior, might serve as a premonition of the narrator's impending fate.

in the cold room, just upstairs, my hands shivering
in the new moon of a fresh year,
thinking this is not what I resolved,
the burn of whiskey between us

trying to mean something,
and I was thinking, this is not romantic, not romantic,
his hands snatching at me in darkness,
the black of spiders crawling behind my eyelids,
the scrawl of his body pushing me backwards,
and I was thinking, not here, not here (Carragher *Numb*)

The location changes to a room upstairs, and the narrator's hand are shivering, either from being cold or due to fear. As she refers to "the new moon of a fresh year" it can be assumed that the situation takes place on New Year's Eve, as the moon is described to herald the beginning of a "fresh year". The line "the burn of whiskey between us" implies that at least one person is intoxicated and the smell is unpleasant. Again, the narration turns inward as the narrator thinks that this situation is anything but romantic, further validating the earlier thought of "this is not ideal". The narrator's eyes remain closed, and they describe "the black of spiders crawling behind [their] eyelids". Spiders are utilized in literature to evoke "neglect or decay" and imply the notion of feeling trapped, as spiders use their webs for hunting their prey (Ferber 198-199). Here, the choice of diction and imagery accompanies the narrator's feeling of being trapped by the man and repeating the unpleasant mise en scene in the first line of the poem. The man's movement is described by the narrator as a "scrawl", further reinforcing the spider's metaphorical image, hunting its prey. Now mirroring the situation at the beginning of the poem, the man continues to push against the narrator aggressively, continuing to push them "backwards", presumably onto a couch or a bed, therefore repeatedly executing force. The narrator thinks to themselves "not here", further affirming that they are overwhelmed by the situation and do not want it to continue.

but he didn't know what no means,
didn't know that it was a barrier I was setting up between us,
that it was a wish not to wake four times from my dreams
to his hands and all their nightmares (Carragher *Numb*)

In the subsequent section of the poem, the narrator implies that they have already voiced their discomfort, but the man "didn't know what no means", implying a neglect

of the narrator's needs and boundaries, and ignorance towards her repeated assertion of not giving consent. The narrator tries to establish a "barrier" between them so that this situation does not haunt the narrator in their sleep. They note the wish to not "wake four times from [their] dreams", implying that this situation will be the source of nightmares. The choice of combining the plural form of hand with "all their nightmares" implies a multiplication, as two hands provoke multiple nightmares. This choice of diction further strengthens the metaphor between the man and a spider.

no meant that it hurt to be drowned in desire,
no was the white of my mind as I shut down
and off until it was all just silence,
'til it was all just movements,
no was my eyes fixed on a ceiling crack
as he moved above me,
hoping it would splinter outwards
and let the stars through
no is a word I've had misunderstood before
by a long term boyfriend (Carragher *Numb*)

The poem continues with the narrator likening the imminent rape to being "drowned" in the other person's "desire" not to defend themselves. By repeatedly signaling their unwillingness to participate in the man's actions, they want to protect themselves from the aftermath's emotional and physical pain. As they describe "the white of [their] mind", they shut down both physically and mentally in order to prevent any further harm. The narrator continues this state of being shut down "until it was all just silence", as they successfully dissociated from the situation to protect themselves. The rape itself is described as "movements", during which the narrator stares at the ceiling while the rapist moves "above" them.

Furthermore, the narrator fixates on a crack in the ceiling, "hoping it would splinter outwards" to free them from the situation and "let the stars through". The narrator remembers a time when a similar situation occurred with a long-term boyfriend. By saying "no is a word I've had misunderstood before," they imply that is it not the first

instance in which they have not given consent to a man, alluding to another possible rape.

after we first split,
he whispered to me in the
back room of my mother's house
the same thing,
the step too far,
the kind of guy that doesn't know
what no means
afterwards, saying we'll get married,
my heart screaming no, no, no
my heart saying, baby,
you don't know what you've done (Carragher *Numb*)

In this section, the narrator reverts to a memory of a situation in which they and their then-boyfriend have broken up but found themselves in the narrator's mother's house. The narrator reveals that the same situation happened, as their boyfriend stepped "too far", ignoring their "no". After the rape, the boyfriend promised the narrator that they would get married, to possibly legitimate the situation and save the narrator from feeling shame. The narrator describes their "heart screaming no" repeatedly, as well as referring to their rapist as "baby", who does not know the amount of damage he has done with his actions.

I thought it was my fault,
blamed my short skirt,
or my big eyes,
how they were asking for it
under all that mascara (Carragher *Numb*)

In this section, the narrator refers to their insecurities in terms of their choice of clothes. They describe feeling responsible or possibly deserving of the rape, as they were wearing a "short skirt", and wore makeup that emphasized their "big eyes". The narrator mentions that their eyes might signal that they were "asking for it", i.e., asking to be

raped. These lines insinuate that the narrator feels as if they were to be held responsible for the rape due to factors that should never determine sexual assault and rape.

I've heard this same story too many times
most days it's not even mine,
these skeletons of men
that don't know what no means,
we tell each other stories about one night stands
that don't sound like one night stands, laugh-hollow
at things we don't understand, not realising that
the way you said no, it meant something,
even if he never heard you (Carragher *Numb*)

In this section, the narrator refers to conversations with other women about their experiences with rape. It is to be noted, that this is the first time the narrator identifies herself as female, therefore I will continue the analysis using female pronouns. Apart from the two instances, the narrator has found herself in, she now confirms that other men do not know what "no" means. Thus, this kind of situation is not an isolated incidence, as it happens to numerous other women. In these conversations about their experiences, the narrator continues by stating that the women describe the incidents of rape as "one night stands" to ameliorate the situation instead of facing the truth. Often, they are not sure whether it was actual rape, as the manner of consenting to sex can be vague. This uncertainty might be a consequence of disseminating rape myths by a patriarchal society and the widespread uncertainty of the meaning of consent and how it manifests itself. The narrator affirms that regardless of how someone does not consent to sex, it is to be respected by the other person, otherwise, it is rape.

this is not our fault
no short skirt, or lingerie, or red lipstick
can speak for you
because no means no
and what about the wedge of another word,

beneath your tongue
not sure you should say it,
because it belongs with strangers faces,
and dark alleys and spiked drinks,
rape is a whisper from another girl
a kind of helpless stranger (Carragher *Numb*)

In this section, the narrator asserts that rape occurs to women, regardless of their choice of clothing and makeup, whether they wear “short skirt[s]”, “lingerie”, or “red lipstick”. She asserts that it is not the fault of assaulted women, but rather the fault of men who do not respect consent and others' boundaries. By stating that “the wedge of another word”, the narrator claims that refusing consent can be communicated in numerous ways other than saying “no”, even if it is non-verbally, manifesting in actions or body language if the word is “beneath your tongue” because the assaulted party is “not sure” about how to say it. The narrator further states that while raped women might not be sure whether they can define their experiences as rape because they associate rape incidents with something that only happens to other women, whose assailants have “strangers faces”, and it happens in “dark alleys” rather than in their homes, or in this case, a house party. Furthermore, it is still rape if it does not happen due to “spiked drinks”. She states that rape is not only something that happens to other women, who are “helpless stranger[s]”, but can occur in many other situations.

I kissed both those men goodbye
because I wanted it to be more
than a headache of memory,
more than a dead thing sitting on my chest,
more than the thought of them
criss-crossed and dead-eyed above me,
how it happens again and again and again
more than a girl whose been fucked-over and under,
until she can't remember if she said no,
can't remember if she meant it (Carragher *Numb*)

In this section, the poem ends with the narrator's statement that she has "kissed both those men goodbye", implying that even if it was indeed rape, she tried to normalize the situation so that it seemed "more than a headache of memory" to her, and a "dead thing sitting on [her] chest", weighing her down emotionally. By trying to rationalize the rape, she attempts to avoid feeling being numb when she thinks back to the situation in which the rapist was "dead-eyed above her", while he raped her. Furthermore, the narrator asserts that she wishes to be more than "just the girl who has been fucked-over" meaning not only somebody whom a man wronged, but also alluding to the physical act of being "fucked-over as well as under".

3.4.4. Narrative voice

In the following, the mode of narrative voice employed in *Numb* will be analyzed, according to Lanser's concept of feminist narratology.

Lanser states that the mode of personal voice is used by authors to self-consciously their own stories. I argue that Carragher employs this mode in *Numb*. It is also employed by means of a private voice, as the narration is directed toward a narratee who is a fictional character (Lanser 15). Lanser describes the narrative modes as possessing "a distinctive narrative consciousness – and hence a particular nexus of powers, dangers, prohibitions, and possibilities" (15). In this case, the powers of the personal voice include introspect into the narrator's thoughts and feelings, and the perspective on past events, such as recalling the rape by an ex-boyfriend. Moreover, by referring to the past and connecting the two incidents of rape, the narration exhibits self-referential aspects.

Furthermore, the poem *Numb* depicts a rape, which the author Alvy Carragher publicly acknowledged has happened to her. Hence, *Numb* exhibits autobiographical aspects. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Carragher asserted that she does not intend on staying silent about her rape: "It took me nearly three years to write about the rape, which happened on New Year's Eve when I had just turned 24. I recited it in public at avenue in Dublin in the early summer this year, and that is when my troubles with the trolls really started" (Carragher qtd. in Courtney).

In the last stanza of the poem, Carragher utilizes the mode of a communal voice, which is characterized by Lanser as “either a collective voice of a collective of voices that share narrative authority” (21). In this case, *Numb* employs the narrative mode of a single, collective voice informed and authorized by other women who share the same experience, therefore possessing shared authority. The communal voice is employed in order to merge the shared notions and doubts pertaining to rape, and the insecurities of other victims of rape, echoing the hesitancy to speak up. In the last lines of the poem, the communal voice asserts that while society may voice their doubts concerning the experienced incidents of rape or even blame the rape on being the victim’s fault, it is crucial to reclaim agency and speak up.

Furthermore, Serisier raises an essential aspect regarding consent when discussed in rape trials as well as media (71). She cites Julia Grix, who recalled her personal experience during a rape trial, and the cross-examination by attorneys, which was biased against rape victims. Grix describes the attorney’s attempt to refute her statement as follows: “The scorned Woman. The Woman who wanted attention. The Woman who changed her mind afterward. The Woman who imagined the whole thing. The Woman who deserved it. The Woman who liked it that way (Grix qtd. in Serisier 71).

The statement by the communal “I” can therefore be interpreted as both speaking for past victims and itself and addressing the readers and educating them on the topic of rape and consent.

3.4.5. Feminist aspects

Carragher discusses the notion of consent in *Numb*, a topic that has occupied feminist and legal scholars alike. Similar to the definition of rape, there is no universal and definite understanding of consent (Beres 93).

Furthermore, Beres states the importance of a shared definition of consent in discussions about sexual violence, as lack of consent is often the “defining characteristic of sexual violence” (93). In addition, she states that since one is not

involved in the sexual experiences of others, it is not possible to talk about consensual sex based on other people's experiences (Beres 93).

In her article, Roantree states that Carragher's poem *Numb* received appraisal for its display of honesty. In the interview, Carragher speaks on the topic of why it is essential to continuously speak up against the criticism of women's experiences of rape: "[It's] the fact that I am constantly seeing other female writers plagued by these kinds of people. I think it's important to speak up – because so many people don't realise it happens to other people too." (Carragher qtd. in Roantree).

In another online article, published in The Irish Times, Alvy Carragher and Louise O'Neill, who wrote *Asking For It*, review each other's work, respectively. Carragher states that while reading O'Neill's work, she experienced flashbacks of her visiting a Rape Crisis Centre:

It gave me the same tight feeling I got sitting in front of a counsellor trying to say the word rape out loud. The powerlessness I felt as a kind-eyed woman explained the complexity of the legal system, the unlikelihood of conviction, the stigma against victims and how impossible it was to prove anything (O'Neill qtd. in Carragher and O'Neill).

This statement validates the criticism of several feminist as well as legal scholars who have spoken on the topic of the aftermath of rape incidents, affirming Higgins' and Silver's statement of "Who is speaking might be all that matters" (1). Furthermore, she states that there is evidence of "blurred lines of consent" in O'Neill's work, which results in women frequently blaming themselves for being raped. She further argues that by speaking out about rape and continuing the conversation about consent, she identifies herself and her friends in that situation (Carragher and O'Neill).

Moreover, in her review of *Numb*, O'Neill argues that the poem is "brutal, visceral, harrowing, and – like all the best art – absolutely true" (O'Neill qtd. in Carragher and O'Neill). Furthermore, she states that the poem's story could be the story of a thousand other girls who have experienced the same situation. O'Neill emphasizes the importance of continuously speaking out about rape "so that people will realise that sexual violence towards women is not an anomaly, that it is almost an epidemic." (O'Neill qtd. in Carragher and O'Neill).

As Carragher has experienced similar criticism of female writers, she has since decided to speak out against the criticism she has received over the poem *Numb*, by responding with the poem “Unsolicited Advice from a Failed Male Poet” (Carragher *Unsolicited Advice*). In this poem, Carragher recites the email which was sent by an older man, who “graduated the year [she] was born”, thereby claiming greater knowledge and wisdom (Carragher *Unsolicited Advice*). He offers unsolicited advice and states that nothing Carragher has written is “poetically right”. He proceeds to categorize Carragher’s act of speaking out against rape as “some form of female entitlement” (Carragher *Unsolicited Advice*). Carragher makes a very public stance against these claims by reciting this email in a video that has been uploaded to the platform YouTube.

In the interview, Carragher has stated that this poem is a response to criticism and doubt to “take the power away from him. It is my way of doing something about this” (Carragher qtd. in McDonald). Thus, by not avoiding confrontation and asserting her position on this issue, she reclaims agency.

Blackwell, who was contacted by the Guardian for the same interview, is the CEO of The Rape Crisis Centre in Dublin and affirmed that people who speak out publicly about their rape are likely to receive severe criticism and are frequently met with doubt. Moreover, she elaborates further and says that when “people speak out publicly, they can be met by a wide range of reactions of people not wanting to know and turning away, through solid support to yes, outright abuse” (Blackwell qtd. in McDonald).

One might argue that Carragher has not reached the level of notoriety of Sexton, Rich, or Kaur and that her poetry has not been analyzed by literary scholars abundantly. Nevertheless, Carragher aligns herself with notions of fellow feminists, who demand a rethinking of how society speaks about rape and treats victims of rape. It can be argued that after several decades of female poets writing poetry pertaining to rape, the way has been paved for their contemporary peers. Thus, poets nowadays can broach the topic freely and in a more personal manner, although a certain level of criticism and doubt from peers or readers still prevails.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, the main findings will be summarized and discussed.

According to Serisier, the success of Brownmiller's work *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* is to be understood as "the beginning of an era" (3), which became the stepping stone of feminists to raise awareness to the topic of rape, and how it affects women. Furthermore, Serisier argues that personal stories of rape play an important role in the public discourse of rape and sexual abuse, as "feminist anti-rape politics is founded on the belief that producing and disseminating a genre of personal experiential narratives can end sexual violence" (4).

Moreover, Serisier claims that "feminist anti-rape politics is founded on the belief that producing and disseminating a genre of personal experiential narratives can end sexual violence" (4). Furthermore, she believes that the foundation of this particular genre of personal stories, which address rape, was established by second-wave feminist politics (Serisier 4). Thus, Serisier connects the political demands of second-wave feminists to the formulation of a new genre, which enables authors to speak about rape. Moreover, apart from establishing a genre, feminism has aided the accounts of rape to be told in "new modes of telling, understanding, hearing and reading", by providing a structure for discourse, which makes the personal stories politically meaningful (Serisier 8).

Initially, Brownmiller rejected the notion of rape being a topic of public, feminist discourse, as she stated that it was a criminal act and not a feminist topic of discussion (Serisier 8). After numerous women came forward with their accounts and experiences of rape, Brownmiller amended her initial objection and accepted the discussion of rape as a feminist issue as well. Hence, Serisier argues that Brownmiller was "one of the major figures in a discursive struggle by feminism to move rape and sexual violence out of the discursive orbit of criminal justice and into the domain of feminism and the politics of gender" (8). Reverting to the notion of how feminism provided a "safe" framework for public discourse about rape, it is important to mention that acceptance is still a challenging endeavor: "the horizons of possibility for new stories are constrained

by the norms and conventions surrounding existing representations” (Ewick and Sibley qtd. in Serisier 8). Therefore, Serisier states that “the discursive shift” of rape accounts have to draw from past stories, and building upon the existing canon (9).

In this thesis, four poems by female authors were analyzed in terms of their representations of rape, which narrative voices were employed, and which aspects of feminism were exhibited to contribute to the narratives that can end sexual violence.

Firstly, *Briar Rose* by Anne Sexton was discussed. Historically, Sexton’s poem can be placed into the era of second-wave feminism. Although Brownmiller’s foundational work *Against Our Will* was not yet published, Sexton utilizes a rewritten fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm to incorporate themes of rape and incest. Sexton did not necessarily offer a personal account of rape, but by retelling the story of a commonly-known fairy tale with the underlying theme of rape, she attempts to educate readers about this topic. Furthermore, Sexton uses several narrative modes, which are formulated by Lanser. By the narrative medium of a “middle-aged witch”, she uses a public, authorial voice to share her wisdom with the reader. Sexton utilizes Briar Rose’s father’s interruption as a metaphor for the intervention and oppression of women by patriarchy. In contrast to the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* by the Brothers Grimm, Sexton gives a voice to Briar Rose in order to articulate the princess’s thoughts and experiences in a personal voice.

As I have argued in the analysis of feminist aspects in *Briar Rose*, Sexton’s work does depict notions of feminism. Although Sexton was not as politically involved as, for instance, Adrienne Rich, she does contribute to the public’s discourse of rape and addresses taboo topics, such as incest. It can be argued that Sexton disguises her own notions by means of a middle-aged witch narrator, in order to distance herself. Fukuda (31) affirms this notion by stating that although Sexton’s work features aspects of feminist criticism, she never fully commits to it. Nevertheless, *Briar Rose* is an essential work in the scope of poems that deal with rape and has contributed to discourse of sexual violence, incest, and rape.

Secondly, *Rape* by Adrienne Rich was analyzed. The poem depicts the aftermath of a rape and the subsequent interaction between the rape victim and a policeman. The poem’s themes are embedded in the context of the public’s reception of rape narratives

and how society's apprehensions of believing rape victims shape the victim's willingness to come forth publicly. By employing a communal voice, which unifies the collective of voices of rape victims who were contended or not believed, Rich uses this narrative mode as a guiding, warning voice to the narratee. The authority in the narrative communal voice is validated by the shared experiences of the represented collective of rape victims. Rich's poem heavily criticizes the bias of police, and the jurisdictional system against rape victims. Furthermore, Rich broaches the issue of rape myths and their contribution to the negative experience that is associated with speaking out about rape. Moreover, Rich depicts the hesitancy of rape victims to speak up in her poem as well. In contrast to Sexton, Rich was a self-proclaimed feminist and thus heavily involved in the women's movement (Abraham 119). Rich contributed positively not only to the discourse about rape. Moreover, she attempted to weaken the dissemination of rape myths, assuring rape victims that their experiences are valid.

Thirdly, a poem by Rupi Kaur was discussed. In terms of a historical classification, Kaur's poetry is embedded in fourth-wave feminism. Similar to Rich, Kaur is a self-proclaimed feminist and has argued that the themes displayed in her poetry are heavily influenced by feminist notions (Paquet 298). Kaur bypassed literary mechanisms and its often patriarchal agents by self-publishing her poetry. Several poems of Kaur address rape, although only one was analyzed in the scope of this thesis. Rupi Kaur utilizes imagery that is connected to nature, thus suggesting a liaison to ecofeminism. Ecofeminism can be summarized as the notion that nature's resourcing and capitalizing can be likened to women's oppression (Salleh xi). Like Sexton, whose poems frequently depict bodily functions, Kaur also addresses topics of, for instance, menstruation in her poetry in order to contribute to the normalization of women's bodies and their natural functions.

Lastly, *Numb* by the Irish poet Alvy Carragher was analyzed. The poem is autobiographical, as Carragher has stated in several interviews. She employs both the narrative mode of a personal voice, providing introspection to her innermost thoughts, as well as a communal voice. The communal voice used by Carragher evokes parallelism to Rich's poem, in that both utilize a collective voice, which has been authorized by other women with the same experiences. Another similarity is the aspect

of refuting the notions about rape survivors voiced by society. Carragher raises awareness to the fact that since the publication of Rich's poem *Rape*, there is still a need for speaking out about rape, regardless of the public backlash it might cause.

Furthermore, Carragher addresses the aspect of consent in the context of sex. *Numb* was published merely four years after the events of the Steubenville Ohio rape case, which involved two students of the high school raping an intoxicated and unconscious 16-year old girl (Brian 153). This rape case provoked an extensive debate about consent and its implications. In relation to sex, consent is a topic of discussion which concerns feminists as well as lawmakers in equal measure. As Beres points out, there is no shared and universal understanding of consent and addresses the importance of further research on consent, as well as public discourse about consent (93).

According to Reisman (1), feminists are concerned with women's political, social, and cultural equality. All of the discussed poems in this thesis share the agenda of highlighting issues surrounding women's inequality and oppression by patriarchy. Although they were published in a period spanning almost 50 years, the motives for action are similar. In terms of the method they employ to speak about rape, it can be argued that the mode has shifted from a relatively neutral way by employing fictional characters to the use of personal voices and publicly acknowledging that the respective work is, in fact, autobiographical. As Ashton states, poetry in the 21st century has shifted to the central notion of the self, rendering the speaker indistinguishable from the poet's self (Ashton 216).

Overall, it can be concluded that representations of rape in literature, especially poetry, are essential to raising awareness to incidents of rape outside the realms of literature. By continuously reflecting on representation of rape in literature,

Furthermore, it is essential to continuously explore the topic of rape and its implications in society in order to eradicate the dissemination of rape myths and encourage victims of rape to speak out. Only by frequently highlighting the topic of rape in literary discourse, significant changes can be brought about.

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6. Appendix

6.1. English Abstract

This diploma thesis seeks to explore how poems, that exhibit representations of rape, contribute to the fight for women's quality. Rape is a crime that affects women globally, regardless of their age, social and ethnic background. On the basis of the selected poems, concepts of feminist criticism will be applied to determine the extent to which these poems contribute to gender equality.

A central focus of feminist criticism is to analyze the instances of women's oppression in literature and to determine to what extent these representations are reflected in reality.

Furthermore, the selected poems will be analyzed by means of applying a feminist narratology concept, namely the aspect of narrative voice. In the course of the analysis of the poems, this thesis aims to illustrate how representations of rape in poetry contribute to the fight for women's equality.

6.2. German Abstract

Diese Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Analyse von Gedichten, die Repräsentationen von Vergewaltigung thematisieren. Vergewaltigung ist ein Verbrechen, welches Frauen global betrifft, unabhängig ihres Alters, oder ihrem sozialen und ethnischen Hintergrund.

Anhand von ausgewählten Gedichten wird mittels feministischer Kritik ermittelt, inwiefern diese Gedichte zu der Gleichstellung der Geschlechter beitragen. Ein zentrales Anliegen der feministischen Kritik ist es, Repräsentationen von Unterdrückung von Frauen in der Literatur zu analysieren und zu ermitteln, inwieweit sich diese mit der Realität decken.

Weiters wird mithilfe von Konzepten der feministischen Narratologie, genauer dem Aspekt der Stimme, aufgezeigt, welchen narrativen Modus die Autoren einsetzen.

Im Zuge der Analyse der ausgewählten Gedichte soll veranschaulicht werden, wie diese im Kontext des Feminismus der Gleichstellung der Geschlechter beitragen.