

# Planetarium

By Adrienne Rich

*Thinking of Caroline Herschel (1750—1848)  
astronomer, sister of William; and others.*

A woman in the shape of a monster  
a monster in the shape of a woman  
the skies are full of them

a woman 'in the snow  
among the Clocks and instruments  
or measuring the ground with poles'

in her 98 years to discover  
8 comets

she whom the moon ruled  
like us  
levitating into the night sky  
riding the polished lenses

Galaxies of women, there  
doing penance for impetuosity  
ribs chilled  
in those spaces of the mind

An eye,

'virile, precise and absolutely certain'  
from the mad webs of Uranusborg

encountering the NOVA

every impulse of light exploding

from the core  
as life flies out of us

Tycho whispering at last  
'Let me not seem to have lived in vain'

What we see, we see  
and seeing is changing

the light that shrivels a mountain  
and leaves a man alive

Heartbeat of the pulsar  
heart sweating through my body

The radio impulse  
pouring in from Taurus

I am bombarded yet      I stand

I have been standing all my life in the  
direct path of a battery of signals  
the most accurately transmitted most  
untranslatable language in the universe  
I am a galactic cloud so deep    so involuted  
that a light wave could take 15  
years to travel through me    And has  
taken    I am an instrument in the shape  
of a woman trying to translate pulsations  
into images    for the relief of the body  
and the reconstruction of the mind.

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