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 impetuositys
    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 invo-
luted 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.
