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A NEW BODY THROUGH A NEW NATURE: AN ECOFEMINIST REVISION OF THE BODY IN THE POETIC WORKS OF GRACE NICHOLS AND RUPI KAUR

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ATA DA DEFESA DE TESE DE LETÍCIA NOGUEIRA ROMARIZ MEDEIROS

Número de registro: 2021675224. Às 14:00 horas do dia 25 (vinte e cinco) do mês de abril de 2025, reuniu-se na Faculdade de Letras da UFMG a Banca Examinadora de Tese, indicada pelo Colegiado do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras: Estudos Literários da UFMG em 03/04/2025, para julgar, em exame final, o trabalho final intitulado *A New Body through a New Nature: An Ecofeminist Revision of the Body in The Poetic Works of Grace Nichols and Rupi Kaur*, requisito final para obtenção do Grau de DOUTOR em Letras: Estudos Literários, área de concentração Literaturas de Língua Inglesa/Doutorado. Abrindo a sessão, a Orientadora e Presidente da Banca Examinadora, Profa. Dra. Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, após dar a conhecer aos presentes o teor das Normas Regulamentares do Trabalho Final, passou a palavra à candidata para apresentação de seu trabalho. Seguiu-se a arguição pelos examinadores, com a respectiva defesa da candidata. Logo após, a Banca Examinadora se reuniu, sem a presença da candidata e do público, para julgamento e expedição do resultado final. Foram atribuídas as seguintes indicações:

Profa. Dra. Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida - POSLIT/FALE/UFMG - indicou a aprovação da candidata.

Profa. Dra. Elisa Maria Amorim Vieira - POSLIT/FALE/UFMG - indicou a aprovação da candidata.

Profa. Dra. Miriam Piedade Mansur Andrade - POSLIT/FALE/UFMG - indicou a aprovação da candidata.

Profa. Dra. Izabel de Fátima Oliveira Brandão - UFAL - indicou a aprovação da candidata.

Profa. Dra. Juliana Borges Oliveira de Morais - UFSJ - indicou a aprovação da candidata.

Pelas indicações, a candidata foi considerada APROVADA.

O resultado final foi comunicado publicamente à candidata pela Presidente da Banca. Nada mais havendo a tratar, a Presidente lavrou a presente ATA, que será assinada por todos os membros participantes da Banca Examinadora. Belo Horizonte, 25 de abril de 2025.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to present a revision of the conceptualization of the body by analyzing Grace Nichols's and Rupi Kaur's poetry from the perspective of ecofeminism. According to ecofeminist theory, the different forms of oppression and marginalization are connected to how we understand nature as inferior, with its hierarchical differentiation from what we call culture. The body is at the center of this study due to its dual configurations both as materiality and as a more abstract identification of a being. Occupying such space, the body has been the instrument to justify many types of marginalization and, therefore, it can also be a route to rethink the body itself and such social constructions.The representation of the body, and mainly the female body, in the works by both poets points to new ways it can be understood and to its social relations. In order to develop a conceptualization of the body departing from such alternate manners of representation provided by literature, this study discusses the authors' poems through three main elements present in their depictions of the female body: animals, plants, and other forms of life; food; and witchcraft. This dissertation focuses on these elements and provides, through the literary analyses, a revised vision of the body and of the world.

Keywords: Ecofeminism; Body; Grace Nichols; Rupi Kaur; More-than-human life; Food; Witchcraft.

RESUMO

Esta tese propõe uma revisão da conceitualização de corpo a partir de uma análise ecofeminista das obras poéticas de Grace Nichols e Rupi Kaur. A teoria ecofeminista traz a compreensão de que as diferentes formas de opressão e marginalização estão conectadas com a maneira como entendemos a natureza como sendo inferior a partir de uma diferenciação hierárquica com o que chamamos de cultura. O corpo está no centro deste estudo em função de sua configuração dupla tanto como materialidade como identificação mais abstrata de um ser. Ocupando tal espaço, o corpo tem sido o instrumento usado para justificar os muitos tipos de marginalizações, e, por conta disso, também pode ser um instrumento para repensarmos tais construções sociais. A representação do corpo e, principalmente, do corpo feminino, nos trabalhos de ambas as autoras, aponta para novas formas de repensar o corpo em si e as suas relações sociais. Para desenvolver uma conceitualização do corpo, partindo dessas formas de representação alternativas que a literatura é capaz de criar, esta tese analisa os trabalhos das autoras a partir de três elementos principais: animais, plantas e outras formas de vida; comida e feitiçaria. A tese enfoca esses elementos e estabelece, por meio da análise das obras poéticas, uma visão renovada do corpo e do mundo.

Palavras-chave: Ecofeminismo; Corpo; Grace Nichols; Rupi Kaur; Vida mais-que-humana; Comida; Feitiçaria.

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INTRODUCTION

NEW POSSIBLE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BODY

This dissertation is born out of an interest and a desire to research the body and its literary representations. According to Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, the status of the body "within the dominant Western intellectual tradition has largely been one of absence or dismissal" (1). However, at the end of the twentieth century, "that familiar form of incorporeal abstraction is a site of serious contestation, emanating not least from the advent of a substantial corpus of feminist theory" (Price and Shildrick 1). Since then, the body has been at the center of feminist and many other intellectual discussions; therefore, the representation of the body in literature has become a vast field of research. In this study the body gains the center stage through the analyses of Grace Nichols's and Rupi Kaur's poetic productions.

Grace Nichols is a Caribbean author, born in Georgetown, Guyana, in 1950. She majored in Communications at the University of Guyana. In 1977, she moved to Great Britain with her partner mainly because of the "economic devastation of her country after independence in 1966 and the fact that there was not . . . a Guyanese publishing house to support native writers" (Nichols, "Free Verse" np). She still lives in England and the place has become one of the themes in her poems. Nichols has published more than 20 poetry books and one novel; she is today one of the main voices in the Caribbean literary scenario. Her works carry a strong mark of the Caribbean culture, its history and the world history of colonization. Her first book, *i is a long memoried woman*, published in 1983, develops a story of a journey from the Caribbean back to Africa. It won the 1983 Commonwealth Poetry Prize and pinpointed the start of a successful path for the poet. A common theme in Nichols's poems is the representation of the body, specifically the black female body, the struggles it

goes through and what it is representative of. Ana Bringas López argues that Nichols's work is "part of a general trend in contemporary black women writers that attempts this redefinition and the construction of new female subjectivities that are able to resist (neo)colonial and patriarchal ideological structures marginalizing black women" (8). These new female subjectivities also come with new ways of understanding and relating to the body. Nichols herself draws attention to the need of having to "come up with new myths and other images that please us" (Nichols, "The Battle" 287), among which there are new ways to look at the body itself.

About *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*, Alison Easton discusses the uses of the body in Nichols's verses. Easton affirms that "repeatedly, Nichols envisages the past as embodied" and sees this body as a site of oppression (62). Nichols's works resist such oppression through an "imaginative project of transforming the past and present realities into new possibilities" (Easton 65). This imaginative project takes place when "the imaginary and the social symbolic order are thus brought together in the body" (Easton 65). Gudrun Webhofer states that in the poetry, "Nichols draws on the 'body' as her source of strength and eroticism as the creative principle" (3). The body, then, is a main piece in analyzing the author's poems and the ways they offer other possibilities of new worlds and systems. It is what Webhofer argues as well: "representing the body is a central aspect of Nichols identity as a poet" mainly because the female experience, a recurring image in her writings, "is bound up with physical experience" (76). Gabrielle Griffin is another critic who sees the presence of the body in Nichols's productions as embodiment of oppression (32). However, the body is not only a means of representation. Izabel Brandão, commenting on verses by Nichols and by Irish writer Jackie Kay, explains that although "the body can be addressed as a 'cultural text'. . ., a

part of nature that discloses not only society's contradictions," it "allows the poets to reweave this connection through images that although portraying a long story of oppression, show ways of escaping from it" ("Grace Nichols and Jackie Kay's corporeal black venus" 185). The body, then, is a crucial aspect of Nichols's poetry for the renewal of oppressive images.

This corporeal aspect also appears in the verses by Rupi Kaur, an Indian-Canadian author, born in Punjab, India, in 1992. When she was four years old, her family moved to Canada, where she has lived since then. When she was still young, "encouraged by her mother, she soon began to be interested in art; she started drawing and painting at the age of five and became interested in writing as a means of self-expression at school" (Sainz 10). In her adult life, she started posting her poems on blogs under a pseudonym. It was not until 2013 that "she plucked up enough courage to use her own name" (Sainz 10). Kaur graduated with a degree in Rhetoric and Professional Writing at the University of Waterloo and continued dedicating herself to poetry. Her first book, *Milk and Honey*, was a self-publication that came out in 2014. Five months after its release, the publishing house Andrews McMeel contacted her and published her book in 2015. Since then, "she has become a #1 New York Times bestselling writer and illustrator, selling millions of copies over the last years and getting her book translated into many languages" (Sainz 10). Today, Kaur has four published books and travels the world with her readings and performances.

A distinguishing aspect of Kaur's work is its structure. The author uses, mostly, what can be called micro poetry (Sainz 11). In addition, she is also described as an "instapoet" (Lulic 1), since she posts online, mainly on Instagram, having become known initially through that social media. Both of these attributions lead to Kaur's poems to "often be[ing] dismissed and marginalized by literary critics" (Lulic 6), due to the minimalism present in this micro poetry which, according to the critic, "testifies to her lack of experience

and practice" (Sainz 15). However, micro poetry is an ancient literary genre that has been used since the ancient Greece, appearing in Japanese haikus, in biblical proverbs, and even in the Imagism movement of the twentieth century (Sainz 12). Therefore, the so-called simplicity of her verses can suggest accessibility rather than inexperience (Golob 70). This simplicity is also connected to her native language, Punjabi, that marks her poetry, as can be seen in the use of lower case "I" and in the the unusual punctuation. Furthermore, it can question literary conventions (Sainz 14) through the development and experimentation of new forms of poetic productions. Sofía Sainz defends that Kaur's minimalism reflects the most important achievement of her poems, i.e., "the proliferation of an ideal platform for conversation, collaboration, and support among women, which the new technologies of information and communication facilitate" (27-28). This leads to her feature as an"instapoet." In general, instapoetry means "a new type of poetry that is brief, straight to the point, often accompanied with illustration and posted on Instagram" (Lulic 1). Originally, it was dismissed "by the literary critics for its incongruity with traditional ideas of what poetry should be," but it "has become globally popular and introduced poetry even to those Instagram users who probably would not be the ones to pick up traditional poetry volumes" (Lulic 1). Dina Lulic states that Kaur is one of the founders of such genre and with that she has "redefined the way modern audience sees poetry — it is no longer reserved only for the published collection of poems but is now available to everyone through a few taps on their smartphones" (3). Not only does this lead to more accessible poetic writings in terms of cultural representation, but it also has financial implications. David McQuillan defends the accessibility of Kaur's productions in his thesis *Aesthetic Scandal and Accessibility: The subversive simplicity of Rupi Kaur's* Milk and Honey (2018). Discussing the concepts of the canon, literary difficulty, and culture, McQuillan explains that "readers seeking to distance themselves from 'simple'

poetry cast difficulty as a prerequisite for artistry, or at least for good or worthwhile artistry" because of the "so closely associating aesthetic difficulty in poetry with the artistic value of a given text" (10). The author proposes that what is deemed as simplicity is in fact an alternate aesthetic system that somehow is not granted a certain prestige (29); he then highlights how easy it is "to dismiss such poetry as inadequate, as poorly-crafted, or as non-literary, but to do so risks supporting a hegemonic, Eurocentric, naturalized system of aesthetic value at a time when subversion and alterity are in high demand" (40). A big part of the world's population feels distant from the canonical works but has gotten closer to poems by writers and artists like Kaur. Consequently, Kaur is framed as "an activist who resists and rejects authority, turning from the status quo to highlight the structural inequalities that have traditionally sought to keep the 'other' on the outside" (Miller np). Kaur's main themes also contribute to her global success and to people's perception that she is a political activist.

Both Kaur and Nichols focus mainly on female body presentation. According to Kell Hagerman, "[t]he feminine acts as Kaur's centre and home space" (106) and it functions through a "reclaiming of physical processes" that "takes ownership of the body" (107). Differently from Nichols's, Kaur's verses are known for its "feminist and social justice themes" (Anjutha 338), and its embodied experience relates more to romantic and love experiences as well as violence against women. In addition, her books point to the "healing process and the overcoming of hardships, emancipation from male superiority and the togetherness and the solidarity between women and therefore female sisterhood" (Golob 46). Although it can be said that these subjects appear in both the authors' productions, each one has its own, different strategies. Kaur's approach of the body faces the challenges of "female biological taboos that suffocate womanhood," reframing "socially constructed notions about female biology and foster[ing] gender equality and self-acceptance" (Sainz 32). Moreover,

Kaur seeks to "trouble and subvert the limitations placed upon the identities of women, often by revealing in subject matter regarded as taboo, including a focus on menstruation, female desire, sexual violence and abuse" (Miller np). Her work also shows "close attention to the ways in which the bodies of women are surveilled and policed, and a rejection of patriarchal containment and control, such as Western beauty myths" (Miller np). Through the body, a center topic in the authors' poems, the two authors defy and question the world as it is, creating and looking at new ways of representing the body.

Nichols's and Kaur's verses unsettle the boundaries and limits established by the western logic, which stems from the binary system that has traditionally informed our world. According to Patricia Hill Collins, "[t]he foundations of intersecting oppressions become grounded in interdependent concepts of binary thinking, oppositional difference, objectification, and social hierarchy" (72). The body, represented by the poets analyzed herein, is centrally located inside this system, since it has been used, as we will see, to erect such structure. Consequently, it is the means through which such categorizations and hierarchies can be questioned. Sarah Lawson Welsh claims that Nichols's work is a series of border crossings, both symbolic and geographical ("Grace Nichols" 114). Rowan Abdelbaki also comments on such border crossing in Kaur's productions, pointing mostly to the "writing at the borders of two spaces" (125), a situation of Kaur's diasporic life, and to how this "hybrid space of cultures" becomes "a place where meaning is decentered and displaced" (125-126). Due to such crossing, their verses are able to indicate other possibilities. In this dissertation, I intend to look at the body in Nichols's and Kaur's poetic writings as the path to new forms of existence.

The body is the locus in which the material and the transcendental connect. It is who we are, the carrier of our identities and the way we exist in the world; but it is the peak

material existence in the world. too. Because of such dual presence, the body acts as it does in the poetic works herein discussed. A fundamental aspect of the intersection of the body with these alleged separate realms is its connection with the realm we call nature. More often than not, the natural aspect of Nichols's and Kaur's poetry is neglected in face of political and social matters, as though the ecological question were not an immanent part in these discussions. According to Stacy Alaimo, "[p]otential ethical and political possibilities emerge from the literal contact zone" between human corporeality and what we call nature ("Bodily" 2). This issue cannot be dismissed anymore, and no consideration of the body can neglect it any longer. Nature has "long been waged as a philosophical concept, a potent ideological node, and a cultural repository of norms and moralism against women, people of color, indigenous peoples, queers, and the lower classes" (Alaimo, "Bodily" 4), but it must be understood as much more. The author summarizes this thought with a specific argument related to the ecological consequences of our daily acts: "[f]orgetting that bodily waste must go somewhere allows us to imagine ourselves as rarefied beings distinct from nature's muck and muddle" ("Bodily" 8). This example shows how we have been disconnected from our closest links and how we need to reconsider them in our lives and in literary representations. It seems, as Alaimo states, that "we have been granted the right to choose whether or not we 'believe in' global warming, as if (quasi-religious) beliefs or personal opinions could insulate us from the emergent processes of material/political realities" ("Bodily" 16). The purpose of this dissertation is to develop, from Nichols's and Kaur's literary works, a conceptualization of the body that takes into account such fundamental issue, going beyond the dual hierarchization of the world and of ourselves.

The authors' poems focus on the natural and ecological matters and even though the topic has only relatively recently gotten more attention, it has appeared as the core of some

research for some time. In 1995, Terry Gifford referred to Nichols as one of the contemporary green poets in England (175) in *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry*, in which he affirmed that her green voice is "politicized, witty and exploring what it means to live with the constructions of nature located in two places" (177), i.e., England and the Caribbean. In 2007, Denise deCaires Narain discussed the way Nichols (and other poets) represents "nature, landscape, and place" (41), coming to the conclusion that "while women poets may share a self-consciousness about Nature, their distinct subjective experiences as women as well as their varied engagements with poetic traditions, results in distinct political and poetic agendas in their work, which, in turn, inflects their inscriptions of Nature" (62). In 2013, in an article called "Reweaving the place of nature: two contemporary women poets," Izabel Brandão looked into Nichols's representation of nature in two of her poems, stating that the poet shows "the interconnection between external nature and the nature of the human being in a dialogue with the non-human, which interacts through language in a body of texts through which such dialogues and conflicts can be poetically posed, considered, resisted, celebrated" (265). The representation of nature, therefore, is not a mere symbolic image in the works; it is one of the core elements of the poetry and a mark of the resistance in Nichols's *oeuvre*.

The endeavors of Kaur's productions with the literary representation of nature have also been acknowledged and researched. In his master thesis, Eden Golob affirms that "[n]ature symbols play a significant role and create a variety of different meanings" in Kaur's poems (5). One of the strategies Golob sees in her writings is the symbolic naturalization of men. The author claims that "[a]s masculinity is usually alienated or separated from nature and 'feminine' qualities such as being nurturing or caring. . .a reversal of this disassociation results in a relocation of men in the value hierarchy within patriarchy" (54). As for the female

presence in Nichols's writings, Golob states that the verses "feature nature symbolism as a vehicle for female empowerment and riddance of patriarchal oppression" (70). These strategies attempt to disturb the value dualism related to gender and to question the inferior hierarchization of non-human life (Golob 70). Golob even discusses how the structure of Kaur's poems acts as another strategy of emphasizing the link with this naturalness (71). For Ranganathan Anjutha, the main strategy used by Kaur is highlighting "the negative impacts of human actions on the environment and the importance of acknowledging the interconnectedness of human and non-human life" (341). Accordingly, Anjutha argues that Kaur's poetry urges us to "take responsibility for our actions and work towards a more sustainable and equitable relationship with the environment" (341). Jaleel Abd Jaleel also points to this harmony in Kaur's productions. The author states that "the metaphoric use of the natural elements in Rupi Kaur's verses assumes no supremacy of nature but equality in features and characteristics of human disposition" (78). This balance and equitable relationship are not proposed in the analyses of these writers, but it is a proposal of the books. My aim here is to see these literary works as guides to rethink our association with the body by reestablishing the way we see nature and the material world.

Bearing that in mind, this dissertation uses the ecofeminist theoretical approach to investigate Nichols's and Kaur's writings. Ecofeminism is a trend of thought that understands that the most different forms of oppression are connected and innately based on the oppression of nature as well. Thus, we cannot look at our societies without considering our relations with the natural world. The poems by the authors can demonstrate that a renewed association of the female body with nature is also a new connection of such body with culture. They challenge the dichotomy in our ways of thinking, by revising the body. Their literary

subjects are often women of color who dismantle the prejudices and stereotypes imposed on their bodies through the subversion of these very bodies.

However, the links between Nichols and Kaur exceed the presence of body and nature relations. In fact, the authors have similar production circumstances. Nichols and Kaur are both diasporic authors who write on the borders of their places of inhabitance, be it the Caribbean and England with Nichols or India and Canada with Kaur. Such aspect is in the language they use; both write in the colonizer's language, i.e., English, but they maintain features of orality and of their original languages in their structures. In addition, they show strong markers of their cultures and use them to defy and unsettle the idea of culture and of how their diasporic inhabitation is constructed. As Magali Cornier Michael states, Nichols's text "participates in a dynamic process of revision that literally and figuratively involves and results in a seeing again with a difference" (213). That can be said about Kaur's texts as well. Residing inside borders also brings similarities to their works since they both constantly present dismantling reconfigurations of the social systems.

These poets have been chosen for this dissertation because the liminal space they inhabit, and their poetry contribute to the creation of new possible imaginations of the world. Through their literature, we can see other means of existence being acknowledged and reconstructed. Considering the realities with which we are faced, Sandra Harding questions "where are we to find the analytical concepts and categories that are free of the patriarchal [and anthropocentric] flaws?" (648) in order to construct an adequate feminist theory — and, in this case, an ecofeminist theory, too. I propose that we look at the literature by Nichols and by Kaur as the answer to those questions. Their works are able to present us with imaginary worlds, free – or at least, freer – from our stereotypes, through new conceptions of the body, especially the female body, and new forms of relations between human and nature.

The proposal here, then, is to depart from Nichols's and Kaur's poems in order to elaborate a notion of body that understands that nature and culture, that objectivity and subjectivity, that emotional and rational, are not separated areas, but function through interconnection and dialogue. This dissertation analyzes how the themes of food, plants, animals, and other forms of life, as well as witchcraft, appear in the authors' works and how they relate to nature and the body, with a view to developing a comprehension of body that considers it in its entirety not its divided parts. I intend to examine the natural imagery in the poems through three themes or categories of analyses that I see as fundamental for Nichols's and Kaur's representation of the body. These categories are plants, animals, and other forms of life, food, and witchcraft.

The first chapter, entitled "Ecofeminism, Nature, and Female Body," provides a theoretical background concerning the body and the ecofeminist theory. It looks into the historical development of the ecofeminist field, its main theoretical questions, and its status as a field of research. The body appears frequently in the feminist and ecofeminist discussions and the ways through which it is approached are addressed in this dissertation. Thus, the three concepts that name this chapter are connected, as well as their intersections.

In the second chapter, "Life in All Its Forms: An Analysis of the More-than-human," I look into the first element of analysis, other forms of life. The portrayal of life forms other than humans are present in the productions by both authors. These forms of life, usually degraded and exploited by human agents and deemed as passive and inert objects, acquire the status of intelligent forms in the books examined. Their understanding as supposedly inferior derives from our anthropocentric views, which completely disregard any other types of agency and intelligence that are not based on human models. Nonetheless, animals have an

“evident capacity for sentience and suffering” (Clark, “The Cambridge Introduction” 180), and plants are able to perceive the surrounding environment with a sensibility even higher than animals’, competing actively for the limited resources available in the ground and in the atmosphere, even without an organ similar to the human brain (Mancuso 12). Our definitions of individual, agency, and biology are anthropocentric and often do not embrace other forms of intelligence. The redefinition of a social and even political matter takes place through human and non-human agency. It is the recognition that most human affairs are also influenced by the nature surrounding us. Through the reconfiguration of our relationships with these other forms of life, we can begin to comprehend that our bodies and minds have an agency and an intelligence of their own.

The third chapter is called “The Eating Continuum: Food as Mediation.” It addresses the second element of analysis, food, which is seen in this dissertation as a mediator because it is constantly transgressing the limits of what nature and culture are understood to be. These transgressions can be explained through food’s most basic function for human beings. Food is “external matter, it becomes integral to the consuming subject via the bodily processes of ingestion, digestion and absorption” (Boyce 285). Furthermore, food has a deep relation with the transgressions of the body itself. Mouth, for example, acts “as the threshold of the body as the body of that of embodied identity” (Rao Garg np). Therefore, it is part of the very transgressions of the limits of the body and of our subjectivity. In order to investigate how food can be such a mediator, I present some theoretical considerations from the field of quantum physics that may allow us to better understand the transgressions marked with and by food.

In the fourth chapter, "Queering the Witch: Affect, Science, and The Construction of Knowledge," I arrive at the third and last element of analysis: witchcraft, which may be a curious topic when discussing the natural representations of the body. However, witchcraft, as comprehended herein, is a different type of knowledge that was historically dismissed and demonized, and thus it has gained the most current conception of a supernatural power. By recreating the image of the witch, Kaur and Nichols explore these hidden and neglected knowledge related to the instinctual and emotional spheres. The image of the witch can show us other kinds of wisdom that do not separate or divide the rational and the emotional – the rational is usually connected to the mind, and the instinctual and emotional are usually associated with the body. The image of the witch demonstrates that these forms of knowledge are only separated in our imaginary. Nichols and Kaur present this image of witches that reframes such notion. They are also able to reframe the notions of the body, which should be thought of as important and valid as well.

Through the analyses of these elements, in Nichols's and Kaur's representations of the body, this dissertation discusses new manners of thinking and imagining conceptualizations of the body and of its existence in our social systems. With literature, new worlds become possible. This study aims at providing, by means of the analysis of the authors' works, a conceptualization of the body from an ecofeminist perspective that connects the gaps in our systems of knowledge and proposes a viable route of more sustainable and equitable existences.

CHAPTER ONE

ECOFEMINISM, NATURE, AND FEMALE BODY

> Mãe, sou eu, a menina que corre sob os rios. Sou eu que dou a eles as cores, que controlo a temperatura da água, que forneço alimento aos peixes e que protejo os pescadores de qualquer mal. Sou eu que ilumino as águas e protejo o coração das mulheres para que não sofram e sejam fortes. Sou eu que acalanto as crianças quando sentem fome e dor. Sou eu que ajudo as mães e os bebês na hora dos nascimento. Sou eu que tiro as dores do parto e dou paz à natureza. E sou também a filha e a irmã de coração que dá intuição às meninas, às jovens, às mulheres, às viúvas, às trabalhadoras e às anciãs. A todas fortaleço. Sou o coração que nelas bate e a alma que nelas cria. A guia na trajetória de uma vida. Eu sou a menina, a moça, a adulta e a anciã. Sou mulher antiga e do hoje, em ação com o todo do tempo. Eu sou o antes, o durante e o depois.
>
> Eliane Potiguara, “Omáua, a menina que mora no fundo dos rios"

The concern with nature and humans’ place in it has been the subject of literature for centuries. Even when there was no theoretical field of discussion for such literary endeavours, nature was present in writers’ productions. In addition, literary critics have approached nature as a literary element for ages, although there was no structured field of criticism related to it. In 1995, Terry Gifford published *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* in the UK, bringing analyses about different poetic voices and their involvement with the natural. In 1996, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm edited one of the first books addressing literary ecocriticism, *The Ecocriticism Reader,* in the USA. In the introduction, the editors state that “[u]ntil very recently there has been no sign that the institution of literary studies has even been aware of the environmental crisis,” as “there have been no journals, no jargon, no jobs, no professional societies or discussion groups, and no conferences on literature and the

environment", whereas "related humanities disciplines, like history, philosophy, law, sociology, and religion have been 'greening' since the 1970s" (xvi). Nonetheless, the authors point out that "individual literary and cultural scholars have been developing ecologically informed criticism and theory since the seventies" (xvi). Thus, they simply were not yet organized under a specific literary school. Given that this book was published almost 30 years ago, it can be said that ecocriticism is not such a recent area, even if it is still being developed in several countries and literary trends. Ecocriticism was defined by Glotfeltty and Fromm as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii); a simple but accurate definition that has been complexified, polished, and expanded in the last decades. It is important to mention that in different parts of the world the same area and the same endeavors had other nomenclatures, such as the use of the term green studies or environmental studies in the UK. Also, the idea that ecocriticism espouses can be seen in several indigenous and traditional philosophies and other types of knowledge under different names or conceptions. Examples of such are the ubuntu in South Africa and svadeshi, swaraj, and apargrama in India (Acosta 84). It is fundamental to consider the different names under which this perspective has been theorized.

In the Brazilian scenario, Angelica Soares published *Ecologia e Literatura* in 1992, which was before Gifford and Glotfeltty and Fromm. Despite such earlier beginning, the ecocritical field has spread faster in the English language countries than in Brazil. In 2003, Izabel Brandão wrote "Ecofeminismo e Literatura: Novas Fronteiras Críticas," one of the first Brazilian academic texts that addressed ecofeminism and literature. The author states that ecocriticism is a relatively recent area in literary criticism in Europe and in the United States, whilst in Brazil it is still being established ("Ecofeminismo e Literatura" 462). Likewise, in

"Reweaving the Place of Nature: Two Contemporary Women Poets" (2013), Brandão affirms that ecocriticism “is only now renewing literary studies in Brazil” (253), and we can say the same for ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is not a literary perspective of ecocriticism, although it sometimes may be perceived that way. In fact, it appeared before. The term “ecofeminism” was coined by French feminist François D’Eaubonne in 1974, in *Féminism ou la mort* (Vakoch and Mickey 3). The author “introduced the idea to raise awareness about interconnections between women’s oppression and nature’s domination in an attempt to liberate women and nature from unjust subordination” (ibid). I focus more specifically on ecofeminist theories as they provide foundations for the literary analysis conducted in this dissertation. Therefore, my concern is the presence of ecology in literature, and the differences and similarities between ecocriticism and ecofeminism.

Two decades after the publication of Brandão’s text, the ecological concern in literature is well established in the world scenario, but it still has a long path ahead, especially in Brazil. One of the ways we can see the growth of the area is in the creation of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment – ASLE –, which began “from a localized North American ferment,” and has expanded “into a thousand-member organization with chapters worldwide from the UK to Japan and Korea to Australia-New Zealand” (Buell 1). In the Brazilian context, we can cite recent publications such as the 2019 book *Ecofeminismos: Fundamentos Teóricos e Práxis Interseccionais*, edited by Daniela Rosendo, Fábio Oliveira, Priscila Carvalho, and Tânia Kuhnen; and the 2020 volume of Ártemis journal, number 1, entitled “Literatura e Ecologia: Vozes Feministas e Interseccionais,” proposed by professor Izabel Brandão. In the broader Latin American context, we can also mention Mónica Chuji, the indigenous Ecuadorian politician, who discusses the idea of the

buen vivir in an chapter on the book *Pluriverso: Un Diccionario del Posdesarollo* (2019) or the Bolivian philosopher and politician, Fernando Huanacuni, and his "Los Derechos de La Madre Tierra" (2016). Still, neither ecocriticism nor ecofeminism has achieved the same status as other areas in the academies and even in political activism and artistic spheres have, like postcolonialism, feminism and cultural studies, but they are in the process of achieving such status.

Ecocriticism in literature propels reflections and answers questions we have been asking science and ourselves for decades, regarding relations between humans and nature. It also shows us which questions we should be asking, such as women's alleged proximity with nature (Ortner 72; Merchant, "The Death of Nature" xix), nature's role in our lives, human attitudes toward the environment, and the consequences of these connections. In the words of Douglas Vakoch and Sam Mickey, "ecofeminism began with various efforts to develop theories and methods for understanding and responding to the complex connections between gender roles, sexually differentiated bodies, and the life, land, air and water that make up the natural environment" (xix), and the systems of domination and oppression related to and established through these categories. Although ecofeminists like Great Gaard and Stacy Alaimo have been making theses connections for decades now, Vakoch and Mickey's words summarize well this argument. Greta Gard and Patrick Murphy define ecofeminism as:

> . . .a practical movement for social change arising out of the struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities. These struggles are waged against the "maldevelopment" and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism. They are waged for environmental balance, heterarchical and matrifocal societies, the continuance of indigenous cultures, and economic values and programs based on subsistence and sustainability. The foundation and ground of

> ecofeminism's existence, then, consists of both resistance and vision, critiques and heuristics. (2)

I agree with the definition above. Nonetheless, I believe that it can be more comprehensive. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, for example, claim that, basically, ecofeminism "propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care and love" (6). This is another way to describe the basis of ecofeminism, from the perspective of affect and spirituality. Such differences in perspective have existed since the origin of ecofeminism and, perhaps, will always exist.

This multiplicity of ideas can be seen in the movement's very formation. As already mentioned, the origin of the movement is attributed to D'Eaubonne's 1974 book. Since then, ecofeminism has expanded into multiple fields and disciplines and matured its ideas. Nonetheless, feminists did not start addressing it right away. According to Mies and Shiva, although the term was first used by D'Eaubonne, "it became popular only in the context of numerous protests and activities against environmental destruction, sparked-off initially by recurring ecological disasters" (13). In 1979, there was a partial meltdown of a nuclear reactor in Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania. It was considered the most serious accident in the US commercial nuclear power plant history and it "prompted large numbers of women in the USA to come together in the first ecofeminist conference – 'Women and Life on Earth: A Conference on Eco-Feminism and the Eighties' – in March 1980, at Amherst" (Mies and Shiva 13). Even though this is usually told as the origin of ecofeminism, it is focused on an American-Eurocentric perspective and, according to Barbara Gates, ecofeminism saw multiple rises in the world (15). Gates stated that, "as D'Eaubonne was publishing her books," "women in the United States were protesting the atrocities at Love Canal and analyzing the

shock waves of the nuclear leak at Three Mile Island and women in northern India were initiating the Chipko movement, hugging trees to save them from felling" (15). It is important to consider these multiple rises and the different accounts of the origin of ecofeminism when dealing with a theory of interconnections.

Accordingly, ecofeminism "grew out of various social movements – the feminist, peace and the ecology movements – in the late 1970s and early 1980s" (Mies and Shiva 13). Despite having started in political activism, ecofeminism has also become a bright theoretical and critical perspective in the academies for literary analyses, which does not entail a rupture with its political origins. In the academies, one of the major features of ecofeminism is intersectionality and interdisciplinarity, which stems from its history in political activism.

Ecofeminism is, in fact, a theory of connections. Ecofeminists Cathleen McGuire and Coleen McGuire assert that "to make connections between struggles" is "a hallmark of ecofeminism" (192). Thus, ecofeminism recognizes how different oppressions are associated by the same logic and how they connect to the ways we comprehend nature and our attitudes towards it. Western societies were established through a logic of dualism, i.e., "we exist in an androcentric and anthropocentric world, where value is placed on some but not on others" (Alexandre 43). Vakoch and Mickey explain that "historically and presently, dualistic categories are used as justification for the aggrandizing of humans as the sole subjects in the universe and the subordination of non-humans as mere objects with no agency or intrinsic value" (xix). Moreover, "the human/nature dualism," which is "harmful toward non-human modes of existence," clearly, "also has disastrous consequences for humans" (Vakoch and Mickey xix). This is true in two senses. Firstly, the damage we cause to nature also affects us, as our livelihood depends on it (the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we need for

survival). Secondly, this dualistic logic values certain classes of human beings to the detriment of others, due to race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, age, and many other categories. Nevertheless, this does not imply that all dualisms or divisions are symmetrical. We cannot claim that the objectification of women, for example, "is exactly parallel to the control of emotions by reason or the exploitation of the environment by humans" (Vakoch and Mickey xx). Dualistic hierarchies do intersect, but "it is important to attend to the differences between them and not overemphasize their symmetry or continuity" (ibid.). Otherwise, we would walk in the opposite direction of intersectionality (Crenshaw 140) and towards exclusion.

The interdisciplinarity ecofeminism espouses is quite relevant. According to Mies and Shiva, "that search and experience of interdependence and integrity is the basis for creating a science and knowledge that nurtures, rather than violates, nature's sustainable systems" (34) and human social systems as well. However, Brandão points out that ecofeminism is mostly criticized for its interdisciplinarity, i.e., its connection with several areas and points of view, as it would allegedly fail to consolidate into a single ideological orientation ("Ecofeminismo e Literatura" 463). Nevertheless, it is precisely this philosophical plurality that enables ecofeminism to dialogue with multiple forms of domination and to conceive multiple forms of liberation as well. Hence, this presumed weakness becomes, according to Brandão, a strength (ibid). It is in fact what allows ecofeminism to advance, its critiques to be analyzed, and its path to be reorientated (Vakoch and Mickey xx-xxi). It is also what interests this research the most, since the literature analyzed herein is marked by intersectionality.

Concerning such intersectionality, when one first reads about ecofeminism, this one question posed by Karen Warren might become rather important: "why is special attention

given to women – only one of many groups of humans who are unjustified and dominated?" especially in an intersectional and interdisciplinary area which is "about interconnections among *all* systems of unjustified human domination" (2). No one can deny that ecofeminism focuses on women, on gender, given its name. This does not mean ecofeminists believe that gender oppression is more important or more relevant. As Warren claims, "a focus on 'women' reveals important features of interconnected systems of human domination" (2). According to the ecofeminist author, the reasons whereto are: "[f]irst, among white people, people of color, poor people, children, the elderly, colonized peoples, so-called Third World people, and other human groups harmed by environmental destruction, it is often women who suffer disproportionately higher risks and harms than men" (2). Second, she continues, "often female-gender roles (e.g., as managers of domestic economies) overlap with a particular environmental issue in a way that are distinct from other sorts of bias" (2). Therefore, even if the impact of ecological exploitation on people varies according to class, race or location, the gender issue is often present. Furthermore, "everywhere, women were the first to protest against environmental movements" (Mies and Shiva 3). Thus, even though ecofeminism does not exclusively concentrate on gender and sexual oppression, it does focus on women's roles in the context of ecological consciousness, which results from, mostly, the direct connection of anthropocentrism with androcentrism and patriarchy, addressed further later in this dissertation. Let us bear in mind that the goals of feminism (and ecofeminism) are "the eradication of all oppressive sex-gender (and oppressive race, class, age, affectional preference, colonialist) categories and the creation of world in which difference does not breed domination – say, a world in 4001" (Warren, "Ecofeminist Philosophy" 93). In this hypothetical year of 4001, "an adequate environmental ethic would be a feminist environmental ethic and the prefix 'feminist' would be redundant and unnecessary". In fact,

even "'environmental ethics' would be unnecessary" (Warren, "Ecofeminist Philosophy" 93). However, we are not in 4001. In our reality "dominations of nature, women, and other subordinate humans are intimately connected" and failing to make this visible "perpetuates the mistaken (and privileged) view that environmental ethics is *not* a feminist issue, and that the prefix *feminist* adds nothing to environmental ethics" (Warren, "Ecofeminist Philosophy" 93). Thus, the name ecofeminism adds a necessary emphasis to the movement that substantiates all discussions on human and non-human injustice. This is one of the reasons why this dissertation focuses on ecofeminism specifically. The other reason is addressed later in this chapter and is related to the historical roots of ecological movements.

When discussing the presence of a gender marker in the name "ecofeminism," we must acknowledge the possible interpretation of an essentialist view, which, however, is not what I endorse. Although an extensive discussion about the essentialist character that is sometimes attributed to ecofeminism is not the focus of my discussion, I believe a comment is necessary here. According to Stacy Alaimo (2000), historically, there was a misunderstanding of what ecofeminism is and what it stands for as many feminists "fled" from nature because "[n]ature, charged as an accessory to essentialism, has served as feminism's abject" ("Material" 237). We will discuss this in depth in the following pages, but for now, I aim to focus on how this notion of nature being a bad connection for the cause of feminism led to the mistake of viewing ecofeminism as an essentialist theory. In fact, ecofeminism does not propose an essentialist connection with nature, it simply understands that both women and nature are social constructs that share the same alleged inferior social attribution in a patriarchal and androcentric logic. Because of such debate, the term ecofeminism has been put under analysis as well.

In “New Directions for Ecofeminism,” Gaard proposes the denominations “ecofeminist literary criticism” and “feminist ecocriticism” interchangeably, by explaining that “[t]he misrepresentation of ecofeminism as an exclusively essentialist standpoint, and the subsequent difficulty of reclaiming a mislabeled term, has redirected new feminist scholars away from ecofeminism, and led many formerly ecofeminist writers to eschew this self-descriptor and to advance their thinking within frameworks” (“New Directions” 660) that are more specific. Nevertheless, there are still some feminists who “continue to use the term ‘ecofeminism’ in the hope of recuperating both the term and the critical history it represents” (“New Directions” 660) and this is where I stand. Gaard suggests that authors use “ecofeminist literary criticism” and “feminist ecocriticism” interchangeably, as she does. Nonetheless, I believe that in order to assign new meanings to it and to rehabilitate the term, we must use it widely, thus, based on readings of important names for ecofeminism such as Alaimo and Gaard, who have extensively debated the use of such terms, I choose to use ecofeminist literary criticism.

Another point readers might also wonder here is how the ecofeminist thought may not seem so innovative, but rather a coalescence of thoughts, since many of the questions discussed by it existed in the collective consciousness in some way. In fact, “in one way or another, its essence has almost always existed in the collective consciousness” (McGuire and McGuire 192). Ecofeminism contributes “in coalescing and popularizing ancient and modern wisdom” (McGuire and McGuire 192). Greta Gaard, one of the major exponents of ecofeminism, calls attention to how this thinking logic has existed for much longer, although the Three Mile Island meltdown and its related events are considered the beginning of ecofeminism. The author states that “[l]ike feminisms developed by women of color,

ecological feminism is neither a second- nor a third-wave feminism;" in fact, "it has been present in various forms from the start of feminism in the nineteenth century, articulated through the work of women gardeners, botanists, illustrators, animal rights and animal welfare advocates, outdoors-women, scientists, and writers" ("New directions" 646). It was not until the 1970s that ecofeminism gained a name and took form as a movement, but this line of thought has existed for a long time.

After answering these two potential questions readers might face when reading about ecofeminism for the first time, I will discuss the history of ecofeminism and ecocriticism. The term ecocriticism was first used by William Ruckert in 1978 – after the coinage of the term ecofeminism –, whose text was reedited and published by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in 1996, in *The Ecocriticism Reader*. Rueckert defined it as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (107). Nowadays, diverse ecocritical theorists seem to have obliterated the previous existence of ecofeminism and its contributions to ecological and environmental studies – especially in literature. Accordingly, Gaard claims that "the first task for feminist ecocritics involves recuperating the large history of feminist ecocriticism, and the contributions of ecofeminist literary criticism from within ecological thinking" ("New Directions" 644), to fight against the erasure of ecofeminism from ecocritical historical maps. This omission of ecofeminism in ecocritical studies is not merely "a bibliographic matter of failing to cite feminist scholarship but signify a more profound conceptual failure to grapple with the issues being raised by that scholarship as feminist, a failure made more egregious when the same ideas are later celebrated when presented via non-feminist sources" (Gaard, "New Directions" 645). In a comment on this text on the book that translated to Portuguese several foundational texts on the field of

feminism and feminism literary criticism, *Traduções da Cultura: Perspectivas Críticas Feministas (1970-2010)* (2017), Brandão names this context a disservice to ecofeminism, once it may lead those who have little to no knowledge of the field to understand ecofeminism as related to mere essentialist issues (822). Therefore, not only are we dealing with omission of ecofeminism from ecocritical maps, but also with appropriation of its ideas and a possible distancing of new adepts to the field.

Lawrence Buell, a well-known ecocritical theorist, in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, asserts that "the environmental turn in literary studies is best understood, then, less as a monolith than as a concourse of discrepant practices" (11) and cites ecofeminism as "one of the catalysts" of literary ecotheory (11). However, he does not include ecofeminism in his historical narrative of environmental literary criticism. Gaard criticizes this narrative that "curiously backgrounds or omits ecofeminism, both from his 'wave' version of history and from his dual-axis mapping of ecocentric/biocentric and environmental health/social justice viewpoints" ("New Directions" 644). Gaard is very straightforward about this omission. She states that:

> At first glance, this narrative seems to have some descriptive power— until one asks, where are the analytical frameworks for gender, species, and sexuality? They do not appear. Buell's chapter describing the history of environmental criticism in terms of the dual-axis of environmental concern provides a five-page section addressing gender as a "complication" (108), revealing the unfortunate possibility that the framework of this historical narrative advanced is otherwise "free" of the complications of gender—in other words, despite good intentions, feminism receives scant attention in Buell's descriptions of ecocriticism's history, present, or future ("New Directions" 644).

The problem with such omission is that it "will surely limit our capacity to envision potential maps for viable futures" (Gaard, "New Directions" 660). This is one of the reasons why

ecofeminism is the focus of this dissertation. Nonetheless, there are indeed many similarities between ecofeminism and ecocriticism despite their deep philosophical differences, according to Gaard.

In the introduction of *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty outlines the historical paths of the ecological thought and its connections with literary criticism. About nomenclatures, she states that "[r]egardless of what name it goes by, most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems" (xx), which is true for ecofeminism as well. Such motivation poses the question: "[h]ow then can we contribute to environmental restoration, not just in our spare time, but from within our capacity as professors of literature?" (Glotfelty and Fromm xxi). A possible answer to this question "lies in recognizing that current environmental problems are largely of our own making, are, in other words, a by-product of culture" (ibid), and, specifically, of literary creations, since language is indeed one of the ways reality can be framed. An example of such recognition is Mario Ortiz's considerations about what he names "literary animals." Ortiz reflects on the arbitrariness of the classification of animals when quoting Jorge Luis Borges's "a certain Chinese Encyclopedia." Ortiz claims that this classification possesses an "inevitability of its imperfection" (302). We name a cow and a lizard animals, but they have as much similarities as humans beings do with a pig — perhaps even less. Given these thoughts, Ortiz states that "Borges's fictional taxonomy thus invites us to entertain the possibility that animals are themselves fictional; that the entity we call 'animal' cannot be conceived apart from its literariness; that animals, in short, are a literary invention" (303). Ortiz's reflection invites us to think of literary production as a constructor of our reality as

well. Similarly, Teresa de Lauretis affirms that “practices – events and behaviors occurring in social formations – weigh in the constitution of subjectivity as much as does language” (“Technologies of Gender” 42). About the studies by Umberto Eco and Charles Sanders Pierce in relation to violence and gender, De Lauretis states that “in the process of unlimited semiosis, the nexus object-sign-meaning is a series of ongoing mediations between ‘outer world’ and ‘inner’ or mental representations” (“Technologies of Gender” 41). Therefore, the interpretant, i.e., the one who interprets and gives meanings, acts in the world by departing from such meanings. In other words, the meanings created and engendered through language somehow create our reality.

We can even argue that the reflections on the influence of literature in our apprehension of the world are, by and large, common to all ecological thought related with literary analysis. However, having one common basis does not imply the absence of different segments that stem from this trend. In fact, this diversity encourages dialogue and makes the area evolve.

In ecofeminism there are several positions emerging from a common ground. Hence, ecofeminism is an “umbrella term” that “refers to a plurality of positions, some of which are mutually compatible and some of which are not” (Warren, “Ecofeminist Philosophy” 21). Just as “there is not one version of feminism, there also is not one version of ecofeminism” (Warren, “Ecofeminist Philosophy” 21). Ecofeminists agree that “there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women and nature, but they disagree about both the nature of those connections and whether some of the connections are potentially liberating or grounds for reinforcing harmful stereotypes about women” (ibid). Karen Warren delineates ten positions, each with a different understanding of the

interconnection among women, nature, and the other classes of marginalized people that she calls other human Others (ibid). Although Warren's book was published over twenty years ago, her division remains one of the most consistent and comprehensive definitions, some of which I mention, in order to better understand the philosophy and ontology of ecofeminism.

Warren divides the positions into types of connections. She names the first one "Historical Interconnections," based on the idea that "historical data and causal explanation are used to generate theories concerning the sources of the dominations of women, other human Others, and non-human nature" (Warren, "Ecofeminist Philosophy" 22). These explanations can be identified in Kaur's and Nichols's poems, especially in those relating to colonialism and imperialism. Their literature can show, from the perspective adopted herein, how certain logics of domination were created and how they can be deconstructed.

"Conceptual Interconnections," the second position, according to Warren, is more focused on the concepts and on the logic that created such dominations. Although it may seem very close to the first position, it centers around the ideas that support such logic, not on how it was established. This position can also be related to Kaur's and Nichols's works, which, in my reading, question such logic of domination, as in the poem "Thoughts drifting through the fat black woman's head while having a full bubble bath" in Nichols's *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (1984).

Two other positions I would like to present are "Linguistic Interconnections" and "Symbolic and Literary Interconnections." Despite the different focuses of linguistics and literature, both positions are centered on the power of language to shape and construct our points of view. As Warren recalls, "[m]any philosophers (e.g., Ludwig Wittgenstein) have argued that the language one uses mirrors and reflects one's concept of oneself and one's

world". Thus, "language plays a crucial role in concept formation" ("Ecofeminist Philosophy" 27). An important part of language is the images it conveys. For this dissertation, "symbolic patterns linking women and nature" (ibid) are of utmost importance.

Another position discussed by Warren is called "Spiritual Interconnections." The author states that "that earth-based, feminist spiritualities and symbols (such as Gaia and the Goddess) are essential to ecofeminism" (ibid), even though the spiritual ecofeminists disagree on some basic issues as mainstream religious tradition (Warren, "Ecofeminist Philosophy" 31). This position will not often be referred to in this dissertation, but it is important to notice that it is growing and that it brings great contributions to the area, despite having faced strong hesitation due to its alleged association with mysticism.

One more position analyzed by Warren, which will be relevant for the fourth chapter of this dissertation, is "Epistemological Interconnections." Ecofeminists interested in epistemology "challenge some trademark Western views about knowledge" (Warren, "Ecofeminist Philosophy" 33). Hence, this type of ecofeminism may question the ideas that "knowledge is objective, that the 'knower' is an objective, detached, independent, and rational observer; that nonhuman nature is a passive object of knowledge" (ibid), which are crucial points for this dissertation. Political Interconections also centers around how "[e]cofeminism has always been a grassroot political movement motivated by pressing pragmatic concerns" (Warren, "Ecofeminist Philosophy" 35), which relates to the historical origins of the movement. Other positions cited by Warren are not discussed here, neither are other ecofeminist authors who name other positions differently, such as "Reawakening the Erotic: Why the Conservation Movement Needs Ecofeminism" by Patsy Hellen in 1994. In this dissertation, I do not address all the positions. I merely intend to briefly show how

ecofeminism is plural, and, mostly, to define the perspectives of ecofeminist theory used in this dissertation.

I endorse Warren's view as she does not espouse one single position and also Carolyn Merchant's who sees "ecofeminism as a broad, diverse, worldwide movement" ("Earthcare" 206). The former creates a new position for herself through an informed reading of all the possibilities she describes. Creating a new position is not the objective of this dissertation. I intend to look at different trends in order to select those which are most relevant for accomplishing the objectives of this research. It is important to notice that this division is not universal or closed. Ecofeminism is more complex and varied than it seems, and even the term itself is a matter of debate, as already discussed.

These debates related to the term are essential to understand the development of ecofeminism and how it can propose new forms of understanding our world. "Ecofeminism" is an object of criticism because it allegedly relates women with nature in an essentialist way. Many feminists, when ecofeminism first began to be studied in academy, "fled from nature," to use Alaimo's metaphor ("Bodily Natures" 5) mentioned before. According to the author, "because *woman* has long been defined in Western thought as a creature mired in 'nature' and thus outside the domain of human transcendence, rationality, subjectivity, and agency, most feminist theory has worked to disentangle *woman* from *nature*" ("Bodily Natures" 5). However, Alaimo establishes that "[r]ather than fleeing from this debased nature, which is associated with corporeality, mindlessness, and passivity, it would be more productive for feminist theory to undertake the transformation of gendered dualisms. . .that have been cultivated to denigrate [sic] and silence certain groups of humans as well as nonhuman life" (ibid). Accordingly, the word ecofeminist, strongly associated in its beginning with an

essentialist connection of women with nature, was thus, sidelined. However, as I have argued above, I believe the more research is done and the more the term is used unwaveringly, it will be rehabilitated, if I may put it as so.

In this initial section, I discuss some of the main questions for the origins of ecofeminist theories and literary criticism related thereto. Ecofeminist Barbara Gates, after discussing D'Eaubonne's text and some of its necessary updates, claims that "[n]ow, more than twenty years [the text is from 1996] after D'Eaubonne published her first book on *écofeminisme*, her desires have found company in ecofeminists around the globe who are working diligently to effect changes in attitudes toward women and nature that may in turn promote the survival of all people, other living creatures, and the earth" (21). It is with the same inclination that I now turn to key topics of ecofeminism, as the term suggests: nature and women.

1.1 NATURE AS THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN

Ecofeminism's view on nature departs from a non-dualization of nature and humans. Pursuant to the theory, human beings are part of nature, not a separated and especial form of life, and nature is certainly not an object or lifeless entity that must be protected for human well-being. Accordingly, I will henceforth use the designation more-than-human[1] instead of nature or non-human (with some exceptions for emphatic purposes or for avoiding repetition). The term refers to the fact that nature is not dualistically opposed from the human element but

[1] My choice for the use of more-than-human instead of living beings or other terms that avoid the mention to human beings is because, by pointing to the human, we acknowledge the human centrality that is inherent in our conceptions of other beings. To avoid this mention can be, somehow, to dismiss or even conceal the inherent anthropocentrism in our forms of thought. I choose to acknowledge it in order to point to other ways of thinking and writing about the lives surrounding us, following other thinkers that also make use of the term, such as Stacy Alaimo and Greta Gaard.

rather encompasses it. Although the concept of more-than-human does not avoid an anthropocentric reference, it renders the natural element central stage, which is exactly what Stacy Alaimo has been arguing for since her first articles and books on the topic and what Olli Pyyhtinen, more recently, argues in *More-than-Human Sociology: A New Sociological Imagination* (91). Since "to author is to have the power to originate" (Haraway, "In the Beginning" 471), the first step to change our comprehension of nature to a more encompassing one is, in fact, to change the way we name it. First of all, we must understand what the name entails and how it came to be.

According to Gaard, "the localities of third world communities have been pillaged, resourced and outsourced, as well as polluted and degraded in the process of globalization" ("New Directions" 654), but the logic of the exploitation of nature has more ancient historical roots. In the sixteenth century there was "the image of an organic cosmos with a living female earth at its center" (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" xvi), which gave way, somewhere between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to "a mechanistic world view in which nature was reconstructed as dead and passive, to be dominated and controlled by humans" (ibid). In *The Death of Nature*, Merchant conducts a historical analysis of the social constructions of nature throughout time in order to understand the way it is comprehended today. The author goes back to the 1500s when "the daily interaction with nature was still structured for most Europeans, as it was for other peoples, by close-knit, cooperative, organic communities" ("The Death of Nature" 1). The root metaphor of nature at the time was that of an organism. Although Merchant has a Eurocentric and North-American approach and her book is not as recent, thus cannot be said to encompass the most recent changes in our

comprehension and knowledge of nature, her historical analysis remains deeply important for the understanding of nature, mainly in the west.

The image of an organic unity was based on the relation of nature with a female motherly image. It was the image of earth as a nurturing mother, a "kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe" (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" 2), which served as a "cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings," because "one does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold or mutilate her body" (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" 3). Nonetheless, neither Merchant nor I propose a return to such conception. Reinstating nature as the mother of humankind is not only problematically essentialist, but also stereotypically anthropocentric. This traditional and outdated connection is prejudicial to both nature and women. Although it may not seem such a degrading image, it is a stereotype and, as such, it is restricting and has a double-sided characteristic. The ambiguity of the woman-nature relation can be seen in the tales of "wilderness in Europe and Anglo-Saxon folklore" which "were dramatized by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century explorations of the New World" (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" 131). In these stories, voyagers "brought back reports of wild, desolate, chaotic lands hostile to human settlement" (ibid). This unruly side of nature was symbolically associated with "the dark side of woman," and, as nature, "women needed to be subdued and kept in their place" (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" 132). Annette Kolodny, in her foundational book *Lay of the Land* (1975), provides several examples of this stereotype in her analyses of several accounts of settlers and colonialists about the nature of the "new world," reflecting upon the archetypes of gender that appear through such accounts (67, 87). According to this logic, both women and

nature exist to serve, to obey. Although the organic image of the cosmos may seem to be positive, it still imposes limitations on nature and on women.

With the advent of the modern age, the Scientific Revolution, along with the industrialization of the world, a new view of the more-than-human was necessary. It brought a mechanization and rationalization of the worldview. In this scenario, "two new ideas, those of mechanism and of the domination and mastery of nature, became core concepts of the modern world" (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" 2). The processes of industrialization and commercialism "depended on activities directly altering the earth – mining, drainage, deforestation, and assarting" (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" 2). Obviously, this change did not occur quickly; it took place gradually throughout the centuries. Mediterranean and Greek civilizations, for example, mined and quarried over the mountainsides for hundreds of years, but they did not have advanced technologies, and the image of organic unity from the sixteenth century still had influence in people's minds (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" 3). Hence, even if the type and intensity of the exploitation of nature were increased, they were already present in earlier societies.

This epoch saw not only a renewal in sciences and the world's logic, but also in economy and in geography. The world began to expand as colonialism took place and feudalism faded. The old structures of an organic unity, as Merchant describes, were no longer convincing or abiding to the needs of the time. Therefore, the image of nature in the modern era was that of "a disorderly and chaotic realm to be subdued and controlled" (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" 127). New forms of order and power arose. Previously, "order meant the function of each part within the larger whole," but with the development of mechanist logic, "order was redefined to mean the predictable behavior of each part within a rationally determined system

of laws, while power derived from active and immediate intervention in a secularized world" (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" 192-193). Order and power redefined constituted control. The images of organism and machine are herein compared, but they are not opposed neither do they represent good *versus* bad. They were sequential images in history that had different degrees of influence in the exploitation of nature, but they are insufficient for the current need to rewrite our connection with the more-than-human.

Merchant summarizes well how these two ideas of organism and mechanism pose unbalanced ways of living. In reference to the organic image, she states that for millennia, "nature held the upper hand over humans" ("The Death of Nature" 218). Furthermore, "[p]eople were subordinate to nature and fatalistically accepted the hand that nature dealt" (ibid). On the other hand, "[s]ince the seventeenth century, the balance of power has shifted and humans have gained the upper hand over Nature" (ibid), which was established by the image of the machine. The functioning of such machine was associated with – or might have been itself – the "Baconian method [that] has reduced the Great Living Mother into inert matter" (Valera 15). Bacon's thoughts and also "the modern Scientific Revolution – from Descartes to Galileo to Newton – instituted without doubt the basis of the next techno-scientific development" that "reduced the universe to a governable machine, once and for all separating all the world of thought from the world of extension" (Valera 15-16). Although I agree with Luca Valera's comprehension of how and where this logic was developed, I would not use the expression "once and for all" since it is not possible to universalize such world comprehension.

Instead of the organic/machine images, Merchant proposes a partnership ethic, which "calls for a new balance in which both humans and nonhuman nature are equal partners,

neither having the upper hand, yet cooperating with each other" (ibid). They are both "active agents" and both defend that "the needs of nature to continue to exist and the basic needs of human beings must be considered" (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" 218). What is proposed by Merchant then is another image that could refer to humanity's social imaginary and promote a more balanced form of living, which is exactly what Nichols's and Kaur's works suggest – a new imaginary for our relation with the more-than-human within and without us.

Unfortunately, the image that had a great influence on our history as a civilization is that of the machine. This machine image established a form of control over nature that led "technology and economics [to] have mutually reinforced the assumption that nature's limits must be overridden in order to create abundance and freedom" (Mies and Shiva 28). However, these notions of abundance and, mainly, of freedom are distorted. The ecofeminist view of an "all-life embracing cosmology and anthropology, must necessarily imply a concept of freedom different from that used since the Enlightenment," which "involves rejecting the notion that Man's [sic] freedom and happiness depend on an ongoing process of emancipation from nature, on independence from, and dominance over natural processes by the power of reason and rationality" (Mies and Shiva 6). It was a march "from the 'realm of necessity' (the realm of nature), to the 'realm of freedom' – the 'real' human realm – which entailed transforming nature and natural forces into what was called a 'second nature', or culture" (Mies and Shiva 6). This concept of freedom is exclusivist because "freedom within the realm of necessity can be universalized to all; freedom from necessity can be available only to a few" (Mies and Shiva 8). Hence, it did not constitute freedom, but a kind of privilege for some.

Accordingly, “matter, the vast stuff of the world and of ourselves, has been subdivided into manageable ‘bits’ or flattened into a ‘blank slate’ for human inscription” (Alaimo, “Bodily Natures” 1). “The environment,” as Alaimo states, “has been drained of its blood, its lively creatures, its interactions and relations – in short, all that is recognizable as ‘nature’ – in order for it to become a mere empty space, an ‘uncontested ground,’ for human ‘development’” (“Bodily Natures” 1-2). The more-than-human, then, began to be seen “as a system of dead, inert particles moved by external, rather than inherent forces” (“The Death of Nature” 193). This new comprehension of nature also led to a new comprehension of the self as “a rational master of the passions housed in a machinelike body began to replace the concept of the self as an integral part of a close-knit harmony of organic parts united to the cosmos and society” (Merchant, “The Death of Nature” 214). All types of matter began to be considered inferior and marginalized, both the matter in the so-called nature and the matter in our bodies.

To understand the more-than-human merely as non-human, in opposition to us and to the qualities we assume (life and agency, for starters), is to depict nature as undeserving of respect and care. Why not grant nature the due respect and care we grant human beings? How different can nature be from us – since we are part of it – that it should not deserve rights? Although these questions may raise ethical and philosophical implications, this is not my aim. This is the issue on which I wish to focus: if we are part of nature, if we are made of the same elements that compose plants, animals, dirt, how are we so certain of our superiority? And how can our forms of expression, mainly literature, work to make us question this superiority and propose a different perception? We need to challenge our “fantasies of human uniqueness in the eyes of God, of escape from materiality, or of mastery of nature” (Bennet ix). The idea

of a dead nature feeds “human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption” (Bennet ix) – which Merchant names “Baconian hubris” (“Earthcare” 218) – and it does so by “preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies” (Bennet ix-x). Such fantasies were created through imagination and they can be rebuilt through imagination as well, in this case, literature. Ailton Krenak, an indigenous leader from Brazil who recently became part of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, claims that in narratives of a world where only the human acts, such centrality silences the other presences (“Futuro" 37) and he proposes a challenge to imagine layers of worlds with more plural narratives (32). Almeida claims that literature is the space for articulating and contesting narratives that still insist on positing themselves as hegemonic (“Sobre mulheres” 20), thus it is the place to imagine such plural narratives. The author proposes that we look at literature not only as an object of study, but also as our master (“Sobre mulheres” 14), which is how I intend to look at literature in this dissertation – to look at Nichols’s and Kaur’s poetry not just as artifacts for analysis, but as guides for theorization.

Like Jane Bennet, Alaimo affirms that our bodies are not within our range of control. We develop self-immune diseases we cannot control, and our cells and organs are constantly acting without our knowledge (“Trans-corporeal Feminisms” 250), but we still believe we can dominate the natural world. The idea of transcendence, i.e., escaping from nature and from materiality, is a fantasy. We do not have control over the more-than-human and acknowledging that provides us with a logic of connection with it that may render humanity a more environmental ethics. We must accept that nature, “often imagined as inert, empty space or as a resource for human use, is, in fact, a world of fleshy beings with their own needs,

claims and actions" (Alaimo, "Bodily Natures" 2), which includes human beings as well. We may even take on Ailton Krenak's idea to think of humanity as more than just the *Homo sapiens* ("A Vida" 9), but also to multitude of beings we exclude but still interact with and depend upon.

The agency/passivity binary has been used to justify the exploitation of nature. Consequently, we need a new way to comprehend the agency of the more-than-human. Indeed, it is a challenge to conceive of nature's agency in a non-anthropomorphic, non-reductionist manner (Alaimo, "Trans-corporeal" 245). Some examples of this more-than-human agency are the natural disasters as responses to human intervention with toxic waste and pesticides. Merchant (1996) in *Earthcare: Woman and the Enviroment*, proposes a different approach from the ones outlined above with the mechanic and organic images. While the "mechanistic science assumes that nature is divided into parts and that change comes from external forces (a billiard ball model)," ecology "emphasizes nature as continuous change and process" ("Earthcare" 220). Bearing that in mind, the author argues that "[c]haos theory goes a step further, suggesting that the human ability to predict the outcome of those processes is limited", in fact, "[d]isorderly order, the world represented by chaos theory, is the second component of the partnership ethic" ("Earthcare" 220). Science, according to Merchant, "can no longer perform the god-trick-imposing the view of everything from nowhere" and "cannot offer the totalizing viewpoint associated with modernism, the Enlightenment, and mechanistic science," as "[t]he real world is both orderly and disorderly, predictable and unpredictable, controllable and uncontrollable, depending on context and situation (Merchant, "Earthcare" 220). Acknowledging our incapacity to control the more-than-human is the first step to comprehend it with a non-anthropocentric focus that allows other understandings of our

relationship with it, and other modes of looking at and writing about it. It is also possible to analyze it through chaos theory, as proposed by Merchant, among several other perspectives.

Nonetheless, even if we consider nature as a passive and dead realm, we must not forget that we are still part of one world and that our actions towards the more-than-human have an impact in our own lives. As Alaimo states, "forgetting that bodily waste must go somewhere allows us to imagine ourselves as rarified rational beings distinct from nature's muck and muddle" ("Bodily Natures" 8). It seems then that "we have been granted the right to choose whether or not we 'believe in' global warming [among other environmental issues], as if (quasi-religious) beliefs or personal opinion could insulate us from the emergent processes of material political realities" (Alaimo, "Bodily Natures" 16). However, we have witnessed how the material effects of irresponsible actions towards the more-than-human have caused unsurmountable responses. Hence, even if it is out of self-interest, humans must change their relationship with nature. Nichols's and Kaur's works can show us how intimately we are connected to the more-than-human and how matter is at the center of our lives.

Their poems can demonstrate how the more-than-human has responded to our actions of violence. Due to such responses, human beings have begun to rethink their behavior. Today there are several societies, agencies, environmental justice groups, and organizations that protect animals and nature, which promote awareness campaigns such as ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), World Animal Protection, Mercy for Animals, Citizens Climate Lobby, Indigenous Environment Network, among many others. This means that we have not stagnated in time and that our awareness of the more-than-human has been enhanced, which can also be noticed in arts and literature. Our forms of expression follow the emergent trends in society and sometimes are even the forerunners of

new ways of thinking, and literature can be a good measure of that. Although I have discussed some discourses that still pervade our collective consciousness, there are many others that arise in society. Merchant properly affirms that "while some ideas of the mechanists provided a stimulus to the new science, others were criticized and rejected in favor of older organic theories of nature and society" ("The Death of Nature" 235), which is how discourses and ideas take place.

According to Michel Foucault, discourse must be conceived as "a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable" (100). In other words, "we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (Foucault 100). It is exactly because of this existing multiplicity that such a work as mine is possible or that decades ago several women were already fighting and writing about environmental issues. Generally, the logic of exploitation of nature has had a greater impact in our history as civilizations, but there have been many who question such rationale, such as the theorists who support this dissertation and the analyses presented herein.

One of the places in which we can see different discourses and ways to understand nature is literature. Since nature is, as already mentioned, socially constructed and influences our experiences and ways of living, our communication about it and the images we create of the more-than-human are affected by it as well. As Patrick Murphy establishes, several women have been giving voice to such ecofeminist concerns, in literature, and we must listen to these voices ("'The Women are Speaking'" 46). Murphy explains how ecofeminism, since its inception, "has insisted on the link between nature and culture, between the forms of

exploitation of nature and the forms of the oppression of women" ("'The Women are Speaking'" 23). He adds that these connections "have been most fully explored in philosophy and practiced through a variety of means in the streets and forests, an increasing body of literature identified as ecofeminist has emerged, as has an even larger number of works recognized as demonstrating or containing significant elements of a feminist ecological sensibility" ("'The Women are Speaking'" 22-23). This may be so because the more-than-human is a center topic on the agenda, given the current situation of the world.

However, these statements do not mean that ecofeminist literary criticism is limited to analyzing texts written only by women or those considered ecofeminists/feminists. It has a more open and more democratic proposal (Brandão, "Ecofeminismo e Literatura" 465). Nor does it mean that only now literature is delving into the theme of nature. We can go back to Roman and Greek literature and also to more recent expressions such as Henry David Thoreau's explorations of the natural realm, and trace throughout history several attempts to rewrite and create new comprehensions of the more-than-human. D.H. Lawrence, Jane Austen, and James Joyce are examples of authors who have gained renewed literary interest through an ecocritical optic. In Brazil, Marina Colasanti, Euclides da Cunha, José de Alencar, Rachel de Queiroz, and Graciliano Ramos are some of the names that can be mentioned as well. Nonetheless, it may be argued that a great part of ecofeminist analyses focuses on more recent and contemporary literary production.

In this dissertation, the authors analyzed are currently and continuously publishing new works. I am interested in the more recent expressions of literature for the new ideas they elicit. Earlier fictional works and their imaginary can still be explored. However, as for the new perspectives to discuss the more-than-human, more recent productions offer more

innovative and original features, as they have been continually questioning the effects of our relation with nature and the consequences of such relation.

Brandão presents a list of examples that summarizes the concerns of ecofeminist literary criticism. They refer to investigating, for instance, what definition of nature a text can elicit, how the environmental crisis is filtered, what type of subject a text brings, if the text exhibits the influence of non-human agents in the more-than-human and vice versa without resorting to essentialism, if the text avoids or reinstates dualisms and hierarchical notions of difference etc. ("Ecofeminismo e Literatura" 467-468). Such examples are useful to think of possibilities literature can offer, to describe and propose new forms of understanding the more-than-human.

The last example on Brandão's list, the one related to hierarchical notions of difference, focuses on the dualistic thought and how it can be perceived in literary works. The nature-culture distinction, which is one of the main forms of dualisms still existing in our forms of knowledge, is described by Merchant as "fundamental to humanistic disciplines such as history, literature, and anthropology" ("The Death of Nature" 143). The author goes further and states that the nature-culture dualism "is a key factor in Western civilization's advance at the expense of nature" (ibid). Such advance severed the links between nature and culture and established them as opposites. It also constituted other dual distinctions which are connected – woman/man, emotion/reason, passivity/agency, etc. These opposites were jointly formed as part of one system of thought, which guaranteed their perpetuation. Hence, they are the basis for different kinds of oppression the nature-culture opposition and the hierarchical devaluation of the former. Therefore, the distorted concepts of nature reflect disturbing concepts of gender, sex, race, ethnicity, social classes, and difference. How we perceive the more-than-

human and the social connections we build regarding it are of utmost importance in order to comprehend nature in other ways, to propose new relations with the more-than-human, and to address the forms of marginalization in our societies.

Because we still do not have or live under a system of thought that embraces such different possibilities of comprehension, we must turn to our imagination in its most creative forms, i.e., literature and other arts. As Susan Bordo states, "[w]ithout imaginations (or embodiements) of alterity, from what vantage point can we seek transformation or culture?" ("Unbearable Weight" 41). This dissertation focuses on the analyses of literary works, as in literature we can find other worlds and other ways of living better. Nichols's and Kaur's poems establish the connections among the different types of dualisms that hierarchize people and the human and more-than-human. In the next section, I will address such connections.

1.2 ECOFEMINIST INTERSECTIONS: WOMEN AND THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN

The intersectional characteristic of ecofeminism is one of its greatest strength. Understanding the connection among multiple forms of dualism is fundamental to comprehend the logic that established the supposed hierarchical inferiority of some classes of people. Although ecofeminism perceives the multiple forms of marginalization as relevant and acknowledges that they should be addressed, the women-nature relation is central for these connections, as it is a sort of baseline from which other considerations can depart. It also plays a central role in Nichols' and Kaur's poems in which the majority of literary personas are female – the female body is always on central stage.

In fact, this is the one thing ecofeminists usually share. Ecofeminist authors tend to agree that "the same patriarchal attitudes which degrade nature are responsible for the exploitation and abuse of women" (Salleh 98). This does not mean that ecofeminists agree that women are closer to nature, but an understanding that Western societies, in their majority, have created this association and used it to oppress women and destroy nature. Throughout history women and nature have been connected. In literature, one of the first known literary pieces in English, Beowulf, associates women with the realm of nature, whether they be monsters or perfect housewives. One of the most famous authors of English literature, John Donne, also portrays this relation in "To His Mistress Going to Bed," by using the symbol of a newfound land to represent the act of a woman undressing. William Shakespeare clearly connects women with nature as witches, for example. Philosophy also has shown, since its beginning in Greece, the same women-nature association. Aristotle states in *Generation of Animals* that women lack souls and, therefore, they relate to the material and the natural sphere. Christianity also presents us with the connection of Eve with nature, and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. Even in contemporaneity, such association still exists, not only in several fields of knowledge, but also in our social imaginary. Therefore, this understanding, perpetuated throughout time and history, has founded a logic that permeates all forms of thought and systems of organization.

Feminism arose in order to combat gender inequalities, which are embedded in our social, political, and private configurations. However, in its beginning it was not such an inclusive theory as it has become today. In fact, "feminism has undergone major conflict, transformation and enrichment as a result of its encounters with other forms of domination and their theories, especially those of race and class" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the

Mastery" 1). It is time for nature to be included in these categories. A "feminist account of nature presents an essential but difficult further frontier for feminist theory, all the more testing and controversial because the problematic of nature has been so closely interwoven with that of gender" (ibid). Nature in the context of the Western dualistic logic is defined "as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the 'environment' or invisible background conditions against which the 'foreground' achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery" 5). Hence, in order to combat gender inequalities – as well as other inequalities associated to race, class, and other identitary constituents – we must question the logic that creates and maintains some categories as inferior, which is what I see in the literature in this dissertation. By using images typically related with the women-nature connection, such as the domestic space, in controversial ways, the poems can contest these images and the ideas associated therewith. In addition, such images can challenge other forms of inequalities, showing the relation among them.

If feminism is to be in fact an emancipatory theory it must add nature and its gendered character to its preoccupations and make it a major concern. Nonetheless, feminism needs to be careful not to replicate the very dual logic it wishes to dismantle. Universalizing the concept of humanity and replicating the human/non-human dualism are steps towards an essentialist aspect of white feminism, for example. We should not state that "it is simply humanity as a species which is the problem and use the blanket concept 'human' to cover over vitally important social, political and genderbased analyses of the problem" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery" 12). Such universalized concept of humanity "can be used to deflect political critique and to obscure the fact that the forces directing the destruction of

nature and the wealth produces from it are owned and controlled overwhelmingly by an unaccountable, mainly white, mainly male elite" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery" 11-12). The concept of human and of humanity still prevalent is not only androcentric, but it is also white, male, and West-based. It has been constructed in the framework of "exclusion, denial, and denigration [sic] of the feminine sphere, the natural sphere and the sphere associated with subsistence" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery" 22). If nature is, in the dual logic of the Western world, the opposite of human, then to envisage nature is to envisage human beings as well. Hence, "only a shallow feminism could rest content with affirming the 'full humanity' of women without challenging this model" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery" 23). Therefore, to see women merely as human, without complexifying the notion of human, is to endorse several types of exclusion.

The logic that builds and maintains the idea of women's proximity with nature is traditionally based on a biological explanation. As feminist theorist Gerda Lerner explains, the traditionalist explanation for that is based on the belief that the superiority of men is historically built given the natural conditions of life (43). Male hunters, in the earlier times of humanity, were superior in strength and developed the most important activities of the household – protection and hunting –, whereas women were confined to the domestic space because of their relation to bearing and feeding the children (Lerner 43). In other words, the biological differences of the sexes were used to create social and cultural differences that, by their turn, expanded into different values and attributions in society.

Sherry Ortner explains that this logic, that of biological determinism, refers to the idea that "[t]here is something genetically inherent in the male of the species, so the biological determinists would argue, that makes them the naturally dominant sex; that 'something' is

lacking in females, and as a result women are not only naturally subordinate but in general quite satisfied with their position" (71). Ortner questions: "What could there be in the generalized structure and conditions of existence, common to every culture, that would lead every culture to place a lower value upon women?" (71). Although I disagree with the universalizing aspect of her research, I do endorse the answer Ortner proposes: "woman is being identified with – or, if you will, seems to be a symbol of – something that every culture devalues, something that every culture defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself" (72). The author elaborates her argument, by claiming that "[e]very culture, or, generically, 'culture,' is engaged in the process of generating and sustaining systems of meaningful forms (symbols, artifacts, etc.) by means of which humanity transcends the givens of natural existence, bends them to its purposes, controls them in its interest" (73). "We may thus," according to Ortner, "broadly equate culture with the notion of human consciousness, or with the products of human consciousness (i.e., systems of thought and technology), by means of which humanity attempts to assert control over nature" (73).

Therefore, Ortner explains that the distinction made between nature and culture is based on an alleged superiority of men. The logic underlying this idea comes from the assumption that "woman's body and its functions, more involved more of the time with 'species life,' seem to place her closer to nature, in contrast to man's physiology, which frees him more completely to take up the projects of culture" (73). Thus, a specific and biased comprehension of human biology led to the establishment of social division.

The core of the explanations presented by both authors is the connection of women with nature and biology. Therefore, the social consideration of nature and its related spheres, the domestic space, for example, is what built such division of gender roles and its hierarchy.

There are two processes in the creation of this system: firstly, the construction of a hierarchical division that established both nature and women as inferior; and secondly, each gender is assigned different social roles, which gain different social values as well – not to mention other gender relations and sexual orientations not included in such logic. However, if we analyze how the construction of a hierarchical division first came about, we can see some gaps. As Lerner claims, plenty of anthropological evidence denies such traditionalist explanation for the fact that, in most hunter gatherers societies, the hunting of large animals usually attributed to men was an auxiliary activity (44). The main activities for the supply of food in these societies was the harvesting and the hunting of small animals, i.e., activities usually attributed to women and children (Lerner 44). Thus, it can be inferred that the understanding of nature and women is indeed a social construction used to achieve certain ends and to establish a certain upper patriarchal order.

These ideas related to the alleged association between women and nature have led theorists to judge ecofeminism as an essentialist field (Brandão, "Literature e Ecologia" 3). It is one of the reasons, if not the main, for Greta Gaard's argument to use different terms for the idea of ecofeminism, as mentioned above. However, the focus of ecofeminist theories is not that women are closer to nature, but that there is a social connection, culturally constructed, that approximates women with nature. It is a recognition of centuries of a discourse that used this alleged approximation in order to maintain a certain social order. Essentialism was discussed broadly by Diana Fuss in her book *Essentially Speaking* (2013), originally published in 1989 in which she discusses the counterposed ideas of pure essence and social construct, showing her reader a bit of each inside the other and the frailty of our rigid ideas. Another author who is acknowledged for her ideas on essentialism is Gayatri Spivak, who

argues in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1999), even before Fuss, for a strategic essentialism or a strategic use of it. If essentialism is something we must encounter and deal with in our lives, if we cannot escape from it entirely, then we can use it strategically to subvert the categories that use and establish it in the first place.

It is in line with these ideas that I believe that the notion of essentialism must be reconsidered. Ecofeminism is not considered and used here through an essentialist position. However, essentialism is connected with its ideas in the very name and in its pathway through the very dealing with the association between women and nature. Thus, in having to face this idea, we must, as Brandão defends it, re-weave such term and the its neighboring ideas.

In this dicussion, however, it is important to bear in mind that the references of culture and societies are western. We cannot, then, "see the alignment of women to nature as the entire basis and source of women's oppression, as some accounts have done, since women often stand in relatively powerless positions even in cultures which have not made the connection of women to nature or which have a different set of genderised dichotomies" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery" 11). Once we reject universalism of the concept of human or of the woman/nature alignment, "we can draw on these features [woman and nature association] to explain much that is especially western in our ways of relating to each other and to nature" (ibid). Considering that Kaur's and Nichols's works were produced in the West, and refer to the consequences of Western history and ways of thought, it is important to discuss what it means to be "especially western," even though their origins and their historical backgrounds also need to be considered.

In fact, it is not only in such societies and cultures that today occupy the mainstream of knowledge production, but other secular societies have always had an ecofeminist logic in

their origins. In the case of Nichols's and Kaur's countries and societies, we can mention the Caribbean's relation with the very creole and its African heritage and the secular faith and philosophy of India. According to Nicole Anae, Africa, "the continent upon which human prehistory begins" (101), many philosophies possess ecological and ecofeminist concerns in their basis, even if they are not considered under such terms. "Indigenous woman and women of African descent," Anae continues, "have occupied positions at the vanguard of speculative and attentive discourses about race, women and the natural environment, asserting that their notional and creative texts, together with their activism, offer critical contributions to ecofeminist thinking" (108). One example Anae gives the reader is that of the Ubantu philosophy that is not conventionally understood as and eco-philosophy, but that is a "viable perspective that moves beyond the oft-cited limitations of 'ecofeminism' as a western concept" (111). Another author who attempts to "revisit the value of ecological indigenous knowledge in the hope of applying that knowledge to the discussion on African feminism" (Siwila 145) is Lilian Cheelo Siwila. The author claims that the limited attention that is given to such topic "has denied the field its essence and significance" (132), which is what also occurs in the case of Indian knowledge. In many parts and acts of "Indian spiritual traditions there remain traces of an eco/logical wisdom that is dormant and hieratic" (Sivaramakrishnan 67). Murali Sivaramakrishnan takes great care when analyzing such concepts and practices on an ancient time not to fall "into fundamentalist or essentialist views" (67). The author points to how ecological and world-embracing ideas were present in texts or lines of thought as old as eight centuries before Christ, like the Jainism and its *ahimsa* (72), the *Upanishads* with their human concern with nature and the spiritual value that is intrinsic, and not derivative, from the environment and ecological wisdoms (70). These examples show how ecofeminism is not limited — and should not be — to the west. In reality, it has much to grow with the help

of other non-western philosophies. Although the focus of this dissertation is in many western productions, also because of the English language influence, my readings of such texts aim to challenge these limiting ideas to such an embracing field of study as ecofeminism.

Universalism must, then, be rejected in the scope of feminist and ecofeminist theories. Even though the arguments above discussed are largely accepted by ecofeminists, "they disagree about the usefulness and wisdom of equating women and nature" (Kircher 16). There is a disagreement among the several trends of ecofeminism related to such connection, as shown in the first part of this chapter. Radical feminists, for example, "reinforce the dichotomies by emphasizing the morally superior character of women and nature in relation to the patriarchal culture that dominates them" (Kircher 16). Thus, instead of trying to avoid such connection, they do what Mies and Shiva establish as having "simply up-ended it, and thus women are superior to men, nature to culture, and so on." However, by doing this, the "basic structure of the world-view remains as also does the basically antagonistic relationship that, at the surface, exists between the two divided and hierarchically ordered parts" (5). Val Plumwood reminds us of the importance to produce critical theories. She states that "some ecofeminists have endorsed the association between women and nature without uncritically examining how the association is produced by exclusion" ("Feminism and the Mastery" 20). On the other hand, "some equality feminists, equally uncritically, have endorsed women's ascent from the sphere of nature into that of culture or reason without remarking the problematic oppositional nature of a concept of reason defined by such exclusions" (ibid). What I deem most adequate is a critique of the duality of thought, as the categories are connected, i.e., they are a continuum rather than an opposition. This is the perspective from which I analyze Nichols's and Kaur's works.

This diversity of points of view regarding the women-nature connection is due to the difficulty to address such connection without tending towards essentialism or reinforcing the existing binary structure. As already mentioned, Alaimo claims that there is an accelerated escape from nature, which is a legacy of poststructuralist and postmodern feminism ("Trans-corporeal feminisms" 237). As the women-nature essentialist proximity has been the main argument for women's devaluation for a long time, women and feminists have tried to distance themselves and the feminist theory from such association, as discussed in the first section of this chapter. According to Terri Field, "the kind of characterization that usually reduces the complexities in ecofeminists positions on women-nature connections to one kind of connection based on a notion of essence is. . .a mischaracterization of ecofeminism" (39). Such a mischaracterization only disqualifies ecofeminism and limits its diverse range of perspectives and, therefore, it has been challenged by ecofeminists for long. Plumwood, for instance, about feminist utopias, questions her readers if

> is it only women (and perhaps only certain proper womanly women) who know the mysterious forest, or is that knowledge, that love, in principle accessible to us all? Do we have to renounce the achievements of culture and technology to come to inhabit the enchanted forest? Can we affirm women's special qualities without endorsing their traditional role and confinement to a 'woman's sphere'? Can a reign of women possibly be the answer to the earth's destruction and to all the other related problems? Is ecofeminism giving us another version of the story that all problems will cease when the powerless take over power? ("Feminism and the Mastery" 8).

In other words, one may ask: [is] "ecofeminism inevitably based in gynocentric essentialism?" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery" 8), i.e., is it based on an essentialism exclusively centered on or concerned with women? This perspective is frowned upon by many feminists and even theorists from other study areas, as such idea seems "regressive and

insulting, summoning up images of women as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals, contented cows immersed in the body and in the unreflective experience of life" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery" 20). For those with knowledge of ecofeminism, the first answer that comes to mind to the questions posed above is that ecofeminism is not about an essential and romantic idea of the women-nature connection. Yet, the issue is more complex than it may appear. Biology, as described by Ortner and Lerner, is not to be accepted as a link between women and nature; but it is not to be simple disregarded as well. About this complexity, Plumwood states that "it seemed to be a romantic conception of both women and nature, the idea that women have special powers and capacities of nurturance, empathy and 'closeness to nature', which are unsharable by men and which justify their special treatment, which of course nearly always turns out to be inferior treatment" ("Feminism and the Mastery" 8). It seemed "to be an antithesis of feminism, giving positive value to the 'barefoot and pregnant' image of women and validating their exclusion from the world of culture and relegation to that of nature" ("Feminism and the Mastery" 8). Nonetheless, Plumwood's conclusion, with which I agree, is that "later reading showed me the diversity of the position and that, while an element of this [romantic, utopic, and essentialist] is present in some accounts, by no means all of them conform to this romantic picture, nor is it a necessary part of a position which takes seriously the idea of a non-accidental connection between the liberation movements" ("Feminism and the Mastery" 8). The perspective defended in this dissertation is that ecofeminism is not essentialist nor romantic, as far as the women-nature connection is concerned, but a social critical position related to this association and its consequences.

The categories of women and nature, or the more-than-human, have been socially connected throughout history and, hence, can be socially transformed. Ecofeminism proposes specifically to "give positive value to a connection of women and nature which was previously, in the west, given negative cultural value and which was the main ground for women's devaluation and oppression", it is a "great cultural revaluation of the status of women, the feminine and the natural" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery" 8). Accordingly, "women do not necessarily treat other women as sisters or the earth as a mother; women are capable of conflict, of domination and even, in the right circumstances, of violence" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery" 9). Western women, for example, "may not have been in the forefront of the attack on nature, driving the bulldozers and operating the chainsaws," but "many of them have been supporting troops, or have been participants, often unwitting but still enthusiastic, in a modern consumer culture of which they are the main symbols, and which assaults nature in myriad direct and indirect ways daily" (ibid). Therefore, being a woman does not entail an ecological awareness. However, it does imply a connection with nature in the social sphere.

Bearing that in mind, I understand that such connections are built socially and culturally, i.e., the connection is not essentialist. I agree with Alaimo on that: rather "than fleeing from this debased nature, which is associated with corporeality, mindlessness, and passivity" or creating another hierarchical system, "it would be more productive for feminist theory to undertake the transformation of gendered dualisms – nature/culture, body/mind, object/ subject, resource/agency, and others – that have been cultivated to denigrate [sic] and silence certain groups of human as well as nonhuman life" ("Bodily Natures" 5). Hence, this connection can challenge the very marginalizing logic that created it.

In fact, this logic has changed through time and developed more complex configurations. Although the women-nature connections remain strong, they have been "overlain by some more recent and conflicting ones in which unchangeable 'male' essence ('virility') is connected to a nature no longer viewed as reproductive and providing, but 'wild', 'violent', competitive and sexual. . .and 'the female' is viewed in contrasting terms as insipid, domestic, asexual and civilizing" (Plumwood, "Feminism and the Mastery" 20). Nevertheless, men are still considered superior in the hierarchy, whereas women are deemed inferior. Therefore, the dual logic still prevails. As Plumwood argues, "both the dominant tradition of men as reason and women as nature, and the more recent conflicting one of men as forceful and wild and women as tamed and domestic, have had the effect of confirming masculine power" ("Feminism and the Mastery" 20). Hence, the binary configuration must be overcome instead of being transformed into a new hierarchical order. However, we must bear in mind that "[m]odern power-relations are […] unstable; resistance is perpetual and hegemony precarious" (Bordo, "Unbearable Weight" 28). This means that types of marginalization and oppressive constructions vary in time, but there is resistance. Such resistance can be found in artistic manifestation, for example, in this case in literature.

In these configurations, previous or contemporary, women have not lost their alleged connection with nature as a marginalized group, but again, I argue that these ideas can be overcome through this very connection. Being aligned with nature means being aligned with the material and the corporeal sphere, and it is exactly through this association that such constructions can be revalued. I see the challenge of these constructions in Nichols's and Kaur's poetry. The female body, connected with the material, becomes a central topic of analysis, not only in accordance with the theory, but also in this dissertation

1.3 THE FEMALE BODY AS A THEORETICAL ROUTE

It is not by chance that the body is a major topic in feminist theories. Body studies is a wide research area, larger than feminism, but it was feminism who "opened up universities to new fields of study, including what we now call 'body studies' (Schiebinger 1). From the start, "feminism has. . .been deeply concerned with the body" (Price and Shildrick 2), which does not mean it has been an easy task. In fact, "many feminists themselves have been reluctant to engage with the female body, or have found it difficult to provide a positive theorization of it" (Price and Shildrick 3). This reluctance derives from the roles that have been culturally attributed to the body in the west.

In western tradition, the body has assumed a status of "absence or dismissal" (Price and Shildrick 1). The processes of theorizing "and theory itself have proceeded as though the body itself is of no account, and that the thinking subject is in fact disembodied, able to operate in terms of pure mind alone" (ibid). There is an alleged battle between the transcendence of the mind and the immanence of the material body that reflects the dual apprehension of our world. While nature has been used as the instrument that socially connects the marginalized classes of people, the body has been the link between nature and those categories. These classes, presumably associated with the natural through the body, are connected to one another through the same logic. According to Bordo, in this logic the body is seen as "animal, as appetite, as deceiver, as prison of the soul and confounder of its projects" ("Unbearable Weight" 3). On the other hand, white males are allegedly connected with the mind, believed to be our transcendent feature, and with culture.

Based on such logic, the body is "the site of unruly passions and appetites that might disrupt the pursuit of truth and knowledge" (Price and Shildrick 2). The denial of corporeality

and the consequent valorization of mind and transcendence marks a "transhistorical desire to access the pure Intelligible as the highest form of Being" (Price and Shildrick 2). The Judeo-Christian tradition, for example, "saw the body as the mundane path to a higher, valorised, spirituality" (ibid). However, with Enlightenment and the post-Cartesian modernist period there was a "change of emphasis," marked by "a rejection of the body as an obstacle to pure rational thought" (Price and Shildrick 2). Therefore, the historical marginalization of the body was aggravated by the establishment of the mechanic image (Merchant, "The Death of Nature" 192).

The industrialization, the Scientific Revolution, and the establishment of such mechanic view of the world assigned the body and the dead nature the same characteristics. The body became "a material and unchanging given, a fixed biological entity obeying the mathematical-causal laws, that must be transcended in order to free the mind for the intellectual pursuits of fully rational subjectivity" (Price and Shildrick 2). The relative plasticity of the body, its agency, and its importance for the construction of our subjectivity were completely set aside. Ironically, as Krenak argues, the majority of our inventions is a human attempt to project ourselves in matter over and above our bodies, which gives us a sensation of power, permanence, the illusion that we will continue to exist ("A Vida" 17). We have been trying, then, to overcome the very limiting constructions we created to restrict the body.

The women-body connection, particularly, is explained biologically, as Ortner and Lerner state, but it also arises from a certain fear. The "dangerous volatility that marks female body as out of control, beyond, and set against, the force of reason" (Price and Shildrick 3), especially in comparison with the alleged containment of the male body, is the cause of such

fear. The processes of biological reproduction associated with the female body, i.e., menstruation, and lactation, may point to the body's "propensity to leak, to overflow the proper distinctions between self and other, to contaminate and engulf" (Price and Shildrick 3). In other words, the body's capacity to transgress. Such transgression leads to "deep ontological anxiety" (ibid) or to what is called "somatophobia" (Price and Shildrick 4), a fear of the body and, hence, and of its associated categories, such as nature and women.

Although somatophobia is mainly referred to as a "masculinist fear and rejection of the body," it is also addressed in "emergent feminist theory" (Price and Shildrick 4), as the body has become a positive central focus in feminism, due to the strength of such masculinist rejection of it in our Western world. Indeed, the body has been an instrument of patriarchal oppression. Yet, precisely because of this it can be re-signified. As the body "has been so intimately associated with racially, sexually, and environmentally destructive ideologies of nature, it offers a potent site for contestation and transformation" (Alaimo, "'Skin-dreaming'" 125-126). The body is, in short, "the threshold or borderline concept that hovers perilously and undecidably at the pivotal point of binary pairs" (Grosz 23). Brandão claims that the body is a place of reconnection, especially when it comes to women ("Dimensões políticas e afetivas" 118), thus, it is a place of re-construction. Almeida establishes the body as having "the potential of evoking resistance in the very locus of its oppression" ("Untouchable Bodies" 261). Both Nichols's and Kaur's works use the body as a site of creation of new possibilities about the world around us. In an chapter from 2005 entitled "Grace Nichols e o Corpo como Poética de Resistência," Brandão, while analyzing three poems written by Nichols, argues how, in the context of Nichols's work, the exploitation of the woman and of her body has a direct relation with the exploitation of nature and of everything it represents in

our society (100) and shows how it is in the body that resistance and subversion can take place (109). The body, then, is indispensable for theorizations from cultural, ecofeminist perspectives.

In an article about the history of the Saartjie Bartman, known as the Hottentot Venus, and Nichols's poem about her, Brandão discusses what she calls the Bakhtinian transgressive body to reflect upon the possibilities of transgression of the body ("Grace Nichols and Jackie Kay's" 191). It is an example of how Nichols's poems (and Kaur's) use the female body as a symbol of transgression. Thus, this interpretation points to the body as a possible theoretical route.

As Field unequivocally states, "given that it is our bodies that have situated us as 'mere' nature, animality, flesh, immanence, I suggest that it is our bodies that we should turn to rethink these notions" (56). The author also lays out how she believes in this new theorization of the body: "[t]his needs to be done in such a way that our enmeshment in artificial and technological 'landscapes' is taken into account, but not at the expense of the 'physical' elements of our embodiment" (56). The rejection of the physical elements of the body mentioned by Field is related to the discussion of whether the body should be seen as nature or culture. It is undoubtedly a discussion that maintains the binary logic and, therefore, does not bring much contribution to this debate. However, we must understand the development of such discussion in order to comprehend how feminisms approach the body as an element of analysis.

As stated above, the body is at the core of feminism. Although they encompass a larger field, "the social studies of the body own a considerable debt to feminist theory" (Clough 94). In the 1970s, "feminists reinserted the body into history, bringing to light issues that had

previously been considered too vulgar, trivial, or risqué to merit serious scholarly attention" (Schiebinger 1). Nowadays, body studies are plentiful. According to Niall Richardson and Adam Locks, "[i]t seems that contemporary culture is obsessed with the body" and "one of the reasons for the increasing fascination with the body is an acknowledgement that the body is not fixed or essential but (to a certain extent) flexible" (1). Therefore, such comprehension of the body's flexibility must be defended and reinforced. The alleged body-mind division has been diffused so widely that it is rooted in our views of the world. Fortunately, such dualistic view is still under discussion.

According to Bryan S. Turner, the sociology of the body has "involved an ongoing – sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit – criticism of the conventional division between mind and body that has been the hallmark of the empirical sciences and especially medical science since the famous intervention by René Descartes" (62). Comprehending the body as natural and material in an essentialized way has justified women's inferiority. In order to oppose such view, a large part of feminist studies analyzes the body as cultural and its social construction has been an important theoretical issue. Throughout time feminism has changed and acknowledged other aspects of the body. Judith Butler, one of the main theorists of the cultural construction of the body, states, in *Gender Trouble,* that the body "appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed" (12). In a later work, "Contingent Foundations," she argues that to deconstruct the concept of mater or that of bodies is not to negate or refuse either term (17). She also states that we must "mobilize the signifier" (17), and that we should "repeat them [the terms matter and body] subversively. . .to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power"

(17). Thus, as Butler's studies show, the material aspect of the body has also been placed at the center of feminist theory.

In order to challenge how women are seen in society, I believe we have to deal with the instrument used to produce such view: the body. Therefore, it is necessary to consider both aspects of it: the material and the social. According to Field, "why should 'thinking through the body' be associated with essentialism, and why should 'the body' pose such a risky topic for feminists?" (39). I agree with Butler in that we must displace the body from these dual representations. I propose more comprehensive forms of representation through the works herein analyzed as will be seen in the next chapters, forms that embrace neither one or the other sides of dualisms, but that cross a line to connect these so-called opposites.

Lately, in feminist studies and in other fields, the concepts of matter and biology have changed greatly to encompass new forms of agency and life — a shift that Alaimo calls the "material turn" ("Bodily Natures" 7). As stated by feminist Rosi Braidotti, in this "new form of corporeal materialism," the body is seen as "an inter-face, a threshold, a field of intersection of material and symbolic forces" (219). The previous biological notion that undermined the position of the body, "regarded as the subject minus culture" (Grosz 191), considered it a mere surface, a passive matter animated by the mind. However, biology must be seen as an "open materiality" (Grosz 191), as fluid, flexible, and constantly changing.

Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality can help us understand such agent materiality. In *Material Feminisms*, the theorist describes transcorporeality as an emphasis on the inseparability of human corporeality from the corporeality of nature (252-253). It focuses on the movement among the bodies, not their inert existences (ibid). Hence, it encompasses the body – all bodies – as living, agent, and in continual (ex)change. In a similar way, Elizabeth

Grosz considers bodies as theoretical routes that "stretch and extend the notion of physicality that dominates the physical sciences" (Grosz xi). According to both authors, the material aspects of the body are less fixed and more complex than was once thought.

Nonetheless, we should not prioritize a certain perspective of the body over another, at the risk of incurring another dualism. Even though the focus on this materiality is necessary and "insisting on the 'lived body' is important, understanding how it is signified – and lived – is critical for feminist theorizing which no longer ignores the body" (Birke 43). For example, the physical accounts of the body may fail, firstly, "to pay much heed to the body's interior and its processes", and secondly, they do not "sufficiently address bodily development" (Birke 43). Thirdly, I would say, they do not show how the body is understood socially, which affects how we live and relate to our own bodies. According to Birke, "[a]ll our cells constantly renew themselves, even bone. . .There are, nevertheless, constraints imposed by one part of the body on another; as a result, our overall bodily appearance changes relatively little in adulthood" (Birke 45). This may be the reason why such interior processes are not fully acknowledged. Birke also calls attention to the independence of the actions inside our bodies, by claiming that organisms "are more than just strategic assemblages of cells/information: they are self-actualizing agents" (47). Consequently, we must insist on "the uncertainty and indeterminacy of bodies" and acknowledge "that indeterminacy and transformability are not without limit" (Birke 48). The body is not more cultural or more natural; it is not divided, and these two features should not be, either. The social and the biological comprehensions of the body must be analyzed hand in hand.

To consider the discursive construction of the body "is not to deny a substantial corpus, but to insist that our apprehension of it, our understanding of it, is necessarily mediated by the

contexts in which we speak" (Price and Shildrick 7). In Grosz's theory and specifically in her idea of infinite pliability of the body, there is still another concern. As Field points out, Grosz seems to do away with the body (44). Such affirmation is in accordance with Susan Bordo's statement related to Grosz's theorization that "if the body is a metaphor of our locatedness in space and time and thus for the finitude of human perception and knowledge, then postmodern body is no body at all" ("Feminism, postmodernism" 145). What must be perceived is that no partial vision of the body can englobe its complexity in theorizations. We must understand the body integrally in its physical, biological, social, and cultural dimensions, besides assigning new meanings to these categories. The body is "undoubtedly flesh and blood" (Richardson and Locks 2), but the way we comprehend it is cultural and social. As Sandra Almeida claims, "rather than being a neutral object, as several critics have since pointed out, the human body is a signified and material body, one upon which social and historical elements are inscribed" ("Untouchable Bodies" 260). Hence, only an indivisible view of the body can help us change the concepts previously attributed to it and the consequences of such concepts for certain groups of humans and more-than-humans. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to develop, from the literary objects already established, a notion of body that understands the inseparability between nature and culture, objectivity and subjectivity, emotion and rationality, all of which functioning through interconnection and dialogue. We must "ask always what purpose and whose interests do particular constructions serve" (Price and Shildrick 7) and develop new, more comprehensive and inclusive, forms of understanding.

One way to achieve such understanding is acknowledging that the body is political. The old metaphor of the body politic found in Plato, Aristotle and many of the Greek

philosophers, was “inverted and converted” by feminism (Bordo, “Feminism, Foucault” 251). In the old metaphor, “the state or society was imagined as a human body” (Bordo, “Feminism, Foucault” 251). It was a masculine and idealized concept according to patriarchal and essentialist precepts (Almeida, “Cartografias contemporâneas” 101). On the other hand, with the new metaphor of the politics of the body, feminism “imagined the human *body* as itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped and marked by histories and practices of containment and control” (Bordo, “Feminism, Foucault” 251). The body must then be understood as a symbolic and material element in which social and historical factors are inscribed (Almeida, “Cartografias Contemporâneas” 102). There is another way to understand and use the body politically. In Butler’s theorization, for instance, the notion of performativity establishes how “the body is never given; it is performed, a performance of material cause that is inseparable from its historical formation and meanings” (Clough 95). However, even though Butler’s performativity discusses the difference between sex and gender, it “leaves certain oppositions in play, such as human and non-human, nature and culture, form and matter” (Clough 95). Still, Butler’s theorizations are important in the history of feminist studies. The body, as a mediator of the spheres of nature and culture, has more to show through its political consideration.

The ecological question, political in its roots, also has in the body an ally to its theorizations. Field argues that “a change in attitudes toward nature will necessarily be accompanied by a change in attitudes toward our bodies” (50-51). Thus, the politics of the body must include ecological perspectives and how the body is related to them. Ecofeminists, then, “are in an ideal position to accept the challenge of demonstrating how our, that is, women’s, embodiement (normally associated with ‘nature’) and theorism (considered to be a

'cultural' activity) might be integrated in new and insightful ways" (Field 40). In fact, ecofeminists have long "recognized the problem of the mind/body distinct and how it maps onto other harmful hierarchical dualistic pairs" (Field 40). The body is indeed essential for ecofeminism. If recovered "from its devalued position in our somatophobic culture, it provides a way to deconstruct phallocentric metaphysics." Moreover, it "can be used to overcome major problems associated with essentialism" (Field 55). Thus, in order to develop a non-dualistic concept of the body, one that considers its multiple aspects, the analysis will focus on three categories in Kaur's and Nichols's works and are divided in the next three chapters. The categories discussed are: other forms of life, food, and witchcraft. Through the analysis of these three categories in Kaur's and Nichols's poems, I show how the female body is rebuild and how nature can be seen, as a means to reflect on our culture.

CHAPTER TWO

LIFE IN ALL ITS FORMS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN

> Esas ambigüedades, redundancias y deficiencias recuerdan las que el doctor Franz Kuhn atribuye a cierta enciclopedia china que se titula Emporio celestial de conocimientos benévolos. En sus remotas páginas está escrito que los animales se dividen en (a) pertenecientes al Emperador, (b) embalsamados, (e) amaestrados, (d) lechones, (e) sirenas, (f) fabulosos, (g) perros sueltos, (h) incluidos en esta clasificación, (i) que se agitan como locos, (j) innumerables, (k) dibujados con un pincel finísimo de pelo de camello, (l) etcétera, (m) que acaban de romper el jarrón, (n) que de lejos parecen moscas.
>
> Jorge Luis Borges, *Manual de Zoologia Fantastica*

Humanity has reached a point of no return. It is what the Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) 6 establishes. The GEO is a series of reports about the environment periodically published by the United Nations Organization. It addresses pressing environmental issues to achieve Sustainable Development Goals. Its latest publication, GEO 6, 2019, has some troubling information: “over the last few decades, human activities. . .have transformed the Earth’s natural systems, exceeding their capacity and disrupting their self-regulatory mechanisms, with irreversible consequences for global humanity” (4). In the Global Environmental Outlook 5, published in 2012, it was stated that the world’s population already exceeded the capacity of the planet (xviii). Nevertheless, humanity continues to live, basically, by the same rules and systems.

One possible explanation for such behavior is that, as Timothy Clark claims, “the phenomenal self-evidence of my singular world is itself a scalar effect unable, so to speak, to see itself as such” (36). In other words, a tree dying is easy to notice, but when the entire planet is collapsing, it may be harder to understand and consider its material effects. Nonetheless, there have been uncountable warnings about the serious situation of the environment. Yet we still live practically by the same rules, systems, and ways that harm the more-than-human and ourselves. Our most familiar and ordinary ways of life “may now be implicated in destructive scenarios we can neither see nor barely calculate” (Clark 40). For centuries literature has called attention upon such matters. The authors studied in this dissertation have taken part in movements that challenge such systems. In this chapter, I aim at analyzing the different ways these authors works relate to the more-than-human forms of life for I believe that to de-center from the human ideal and to widen our visions of life and relationships to include the more-than-human are the first step towards more balanced ways of life.

We continue to use extensively the human as a point of reference for all life on Earth and all systems. However, we must expand our visions of the world and of how we are inserted in it. We must adopt a biocentric posture based on an alternative ethical perspective that accepts that the environment — all ecosystems and living beings — have an intrinsic, ontological value even when they show no utility for human life (Acosta 28). There are two key terms that refer to our times as well as to our future that may be useful to understand this changing context and the new models Kaur’s and Nichols’s literature present: the Posthuman and the Anthropocene.

The former term relates to what was discussed about the human as a normative category in the first chapter. Continuing in such discussion, I bring Rosi Braidotti's argument of how "the concept of the human has exploded under the double pressure of contemporary scientific advances and global economic concerns" ("The Posthuman" 1). The author explains succinctly that the posthuman, "far from being the nth variation in a sequence of prefixes that may appear both endless and somehow arbitrary," in fact "introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet" ("The Posthuman" 1-2). Hence, the posthuman has an important focus on the other types of life in our planet, and it also discusses the type of normative model of human (white, male, etc.). This normative ideal of what it means to be human was constructed by Humanism, which "spells out a systematized standard of recognizability – of Sameness – by which all others can be assessed, regulated and allotted to a designated social location" (Braidotti, "The Posthuman" 26). If we wish to consider other species, we need to create consideration for our own species integrally.

The reference to Humanism mentioned by Braidotti is related to the classical ideal of "Man," "formulated first by Protagoras as 'the measure of all things', later renewed in Italian Renaissance as a universal model and represented in Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man" ("The Posthuman" 13), an iconic emblem of Humanism. In a more metaphorical way, Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston establish the configuration of the human as "a tribal circle gathered around the fire amid the looming darkness of a dangerous world, as the party of revelers sequestered from the plague, as the exclusive club of the Human, complete with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereunto (for example, the right to eat non-members of the club and the privilege not to be eaten)" (10). However, as the authors acknowledge, the

club has different types of "membership," giving more power and rights to some than to others. The difference between this type of hierarchization within this club of the Human and the one with other forms of life is described through the logic that "[t]he human functions to domesticate and hierarchize difference within the human (whether according to race, class, gender) and to absolutize difference between the human and the nonhuman" (10). Nonetheless, this logic is questionable.

The human ideal was challenged by the emancipatory movements of postmodernity: women's rights, anti-racism, de-colonizing, anti-nuclear and pro-environment, through which several marginalized voices started to be heard. This period "marks that crisis of the former humanist 'centre' or dominant subject-position and are not merely anti-humanist, but move beyond it to an altogether novel, posthuman project" (Braidotti, "The Posthuman" 37). Braidotti shares another description of the posthuman as "the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism and traces a discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives" ("The Posthuman" 37). Although I agree with the existence of such new alternatives, I do not believe that it is the end of an opposition. Perhaps, we can speak of the desire to end oppositions, as we still live under a social binary system.

Katherine Hayles, who follows a similar line of thought, claims that "the human is giving way to a different construction called the posthuman" ("How We Became" 2). Thus, it is not a middle ground between Humanism and anti-humanism, but a new model emerging from another perspective. Hayles's debates on posthumanism refers to the cybernetic context, but she discusses the same structure addressed in this dissertation. A common denominator for the posthuman condition in which ever context is "an assumption about the vital, self-

organizing and yet non-naturalistic structure of living matter itself" (Braidotti, "The Posthuman" 2). The view of nature and culture as a continuum is a shared starting point for the posthuman discussion. This may be why Braidoti considers ecology and environmentalism "an altogether different and powerful source of inspiration for contemporary re-configuration of critical posthumanism" ("The Posthuman" 47). Environmental theories defend the association among all forms of life and challenge the anthropocentric focus, which is exactly the proposal of posthumanism – to contest the arrogance and hubris of anthropocentrism and of the Human as a transcendental category. Instead, posthumanism strikes "an alliance with the productive and immanent force of *zoe*, or life in its non-human aspects" (Braidotti, "The Posthuman" 66). All these efforts require changing our thinking patterns, mainly towards replacing dualism with the recognition of a "zoe-egalitarianism" (Braidotti, "The Posthuman" 71) among humans and all other forms of life.

Unsettling the borders of these divisions is also a characteristic of the Anthropocene, the second concept in question. The term was "first coined by atmospheric scientists as a name for the geological epoch that the Earth entered with the industrial revolution around 1800" (Clark, "Ecocriticism" 1). Since this epoch, humanity has unprecedentedly played "a decisive, if still largely incalculable, role in the planet's ecology and geology" (ibid). Although there is some discussion about the starting point of the Anthropocene, "the force of the term. . .applies mostly to the 'Great Acceleration' since 1945 in which human impacts on the entire biosphere have achieved unprecedented and arguably dangerous intensity" (ibid), which, as we can see in the GEO 5 and 6, have not changed. As a matter of fact, these impacts have been aggravated.

Albeit the relation of the coinage of the term to the geological field, it "has rapidly become adopted in the humanities in a sense beyond strictly geological" (Clark, "Ecocriticism" 2). The Anthropocene is described by Clark in two possible ways: (1) "a loose short-hand term for all the new contexts and demands – cultural, ethical, aesthetic, philosophical and political – of environmental issues that are truly planetary in scale, notably climate change, ocean acidification, effects of overpopulation, deforestation" etc. ("Ecocriticism" 2); and (2) as "a catchphrase, used as both intellectual shortcut and expanded question mark to refer to the novel situation we are in" ("Ecocriticism" 3). However we decide to understand the term, we must consider that the Anthropocene "blurs and scrambles some crucial categories by which people have made sense of the world and their lives" (Clark, "Ecocriticism" 9). As Clark delineates, the Anthropocene "puts in crisis the lines between culture and nature, fact and value, and between the human and the geological or metereological." It also "manifests itself in innumerable possible hairline cracks in the familiar life-world, at the local and personal scale of each individual life" ("Ecocriticism" 9). From such perspective, the works analyzed in this dissertation provide ruptures in the way we see and understand the body, the more-than-human, and ourselves.

The Anthropocene also brings "to an unavoidable point of stress the question of the nature of Nature and of the human." In other words, "it represents, for the first time, the demand made upon a species consciously to consider its impact as a totality made upon the whole planet, the advent of a kind of new reflexivity as a species" (Clark, "Ecocriticism" 16). Both the Anthropocene and the Posthuman, then, foster a turning-point in humanity's way of thinking, of seeing itself, and of engaging with the other forms of life, by moving from an anthropocentric and androcentric perspective to a more inclusive and embracing one.

However, our systems of thought, concepts and modes of life were all developed in a context embedded with Humanist ideas. Thus, "[w]hat was once a norm, the 'natural', emerges as a biological contingency that is becoming deeply problematic" (Clark, "Ecocriticism" 40). Hence, in order to change the way we think we must begin with a defamiliarization or estrangement of life as we know it, which starts, here, with considering and discussing the two terms above.

The defamiliarization or "critical distance from the dominant vision of the subject" (Braidotti, "The Posthuman 89) involves the "loss of familiar habits of thought and representation in order to pave the way for creative alternatives" (Braidotti, "The Posthuman 89). Some notions such as "moral rationality, unitary identity, transcendent consciousness or innate and universal moral values" demand a "radical estrangement" in order to follow a more egalitarian road, according to Braidotti ("The Posthuman 92). In this chapter, I will address defamiliarization and estrangement of the ways we perceive other forms of life, in the analyses of the female body in Kaur's and Nichols's poems.

As Braidotti beautifully summarizes, "[t]heory today is about coming to terms with unprecedent changes and transformations of the basic unit of reference for what counts as human" and this "affirmative, unprogrammed mutation can help actualize new concepts, affects and planetary subject formations" ("The Posthuman 104). I see unprecedented changes in Kaur's and Nichols's works. In this chapter I present my discussion of their *oeuvre* in relation to new forms of understanding agency and space. It is through the ideas of the Posthuman and the Anthropocene that both these notions can be defamiliarized and re-constructed under more embracing conditions.

2.1 CONSIDERING MORE-THAN-HUMAN AGENCY

Our social imaginary is mainly formed by the representation of the more-than-human in literature. Unfortunately, it is too often "imagined as inert, empty space or as resource for human use" (Alaimo, "Bodily" 2). When compared to "a human endowed with mind and agentic determinations, the material world – a world that includes 'inanimate' matter as well as non-human forms of living – has always been considered as passive, inert, unable to convey any independent expression of meaning" (Iovino and Opperman, "Introduction" 2). This binarism shows how, at a fundamental level, "dualist models define basic constituents of nature as objects" (Opperman, "From Ecological" 21), attributing, in sum, "agency to humans, instinct to animals, and the deterministic forces of nature to everything else" (Alaimo, "Bodily" 143). Accordingly, all living beings are ranked in a value hierarchy.

This logic has enormous consequences for our lives. Serpil Opperman states that "one of the destructive practical consequences of anthropocentric models of knowledge that describe nature either as a lifeless mechanism or as mere textual construct is the capitalization of local ecosystems in the name of economic progress" ("From Ecological" 22-23). This progress, however, based on the permanent accumulation of goods is, as Ecuadorian thinker Alberto Acosta names it, a collective suicide (34). Another consequence is "the oppressive social practices such as racism, sexism, and speciesism" (Opperman, "From Ecological" 23). In a text written by Serenella Iovino and Opperman, they list other consequences, arguing that "besides restricting the latitude of ethics to our species, this dichotomous ontology has also reinforced other common misunderstandings" such as the "break-it-and-fix-it-mentality" that Iovino and Opperman quote from Dana Philips and Heather Sullivan ("Introduction" 2-3). This mentality, according to Philips and Sullivan, is "informed by the assumption that human

agents (knowingly or inadvertently) create ecological problems but can readily solve all of them at will with the right technology" (Philips and Sullivan, "Introduction" 446), which does not consider other influences and resistances. Acosta questions for how long are we going to expect technological progress to fiz our huge problems if the very basis of this progress is harmful to our planet and ourselves (37). We must understand that the consequences of such logic affect our human lives directly, even if we wrongly consider ourselves separately from the more-than-human.

In Kaur and Nichols's books, I start analyzing our relation to other forms of life through agency because it is what inferiorized more-than-human lives. Alaimo claims that a reconsideration of materiality "must nonetheless grapple with the question of material agency, since the evacuation of agency from nature underwrites the transformation of the world into a passive repository of resources for human use" ("Bodily" 143). We need alternative conceptions "which accentuate the lively, active, emergent, agential aspects of nature [to] foster ethical/epistemological stances that generate concern, care, wonder, respect, caution (or precaution), epistemological humility, kinship, difference, and deviance" (ibid). In the footsteps of Alaimo and later of Jane Bennet and Karen Barad, the ecofeminist field developed new forms of understanding the connections and exchanges among all living beings.

Hannes Bergthaller states that "to simply replace 'nature' with 'matter' and leave the rest of the conceptual edifice undisturbed" would not do much for the ecological theories. From such perspective I discuss the literary works of the authors herein selected. How we interpret agency and to whom we attribute it is related to numerous categories which are important for the ecological thought and for the analysis herein proposed.

The concept of agency is a "tricky" one because "there is no consensus among scholars about the notion" (Matusov *et al* 420). We can analyze agency through several perspectives, such as legal, religious, economic, etc. What calls for a concept of agency, and, "heuristically defines" it, arises from "a need for legal, ethical, moral, and practical notions of human responsibility" (Matusov *et al* 422). This does not mean that a revision of the concept would not entail moral accountability. In Western and Christian religious thought, agency is necessary for good to exist:

> There have been theological debates of why the almighty god cannot make all people good. Some theologians (e.g., St. Thomas Aquinas) have argued that by making all people good, the people would stop being in the image of the God — i.e., they would lose their agency and judgments ascribing the possibility of their actions to be bad and evil. Thus, in philosophical and religious assumptions, good is meaningless without people being free agents (Matusov *et al* 422).

We can also look at the neoliberal rationale "that regards the individual as an autonomous, rational, universal, self-disciplining, and self-entrepreneuring subject who needs to continuously compete in a social sphere, like in an economic market, based on calculations of a 'cost-benefit' economic analysis" (ibid). Another view comes from "an exponential rise of automatization, robotization, computerization, telecommunication, nanotechnology, and outsourcing of the standards-based labor" that sees agency as "what might be, what cannot be presently thought of, and what cannot be automatized and calculated in advance" (ibid). It is important to pay attention to how all these definitions of agency are connected with a human ideal or a human viewpoint. They are only concerned with it in the cultural and social spheres.

In the Cambridge Online Dictionary, agency is described as "the ability to take action or to choose what action to take," which is also a definition through an anthropocentric lens. Agency must be understood "less by the essentialist capacities apparently required to effect change than by the effecting of change itself," if we are to "have not only a less anthropocentric but also a less circular definition of agency" (Huggan and Tiffin 208). Such transformed interpretation of agency began – at least academically – with the material turn.

The material turn is "an extensive conversation across the territories of the sciences and the humanities and embraces such fields as philosophy, quantum physics, biology, sociology, feminist theories, anthropology, archeology, and culture studies, just to name a few" (Iovino and Opperman 2). It is an "emerging paradigm [that] elicits not only new non-anthropocentric approaches, but also possible ways to analyze language and reality, human and nonhuman life, mind and matter, without falling into dichotomous patterns of thinking" (Iovino and Opperman 2). The development of post-structuralist, post-modernist and cultural studies paradigms consider agency, thought, and dynamic of bodies and nature in more productive ways (Alaimo, "Trans-corporeal" 242). The revolution – if it may be called as such – of post-structuralism and of linguistic turn in the humanities has already been surpassed at some level, even though it has not been fully accepted, by the material turn. Material ecocriticism is a combination of "ecocriticism's interest in revealing the bonds between text and world with the insights of the new materialist wave of thought" (ibid). According to such theory, "the world's material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be 'read' and interpreted as forming narratives, stories" (Iovino and Opperman 1). It "examines matter both *in* texts and *as* text, trying to shed light on the way bodily natures and discursive forces *express* their interaction whether in representations or in

their concrete reality" (Iovino and Opperman 2). The question that opens Iovino and Opperman's text is an exemplary provocation to think of matter and its agency:

> An ancient Mediterranean landscape; an endangered species in the Amazon; the Library of Congress; the Gulf Stream; carcinogenic cells, DNA, dioxin; a volcano, a school, a city, a factory farm; the outbreak of a virus, a toxic plume; bio-luminescent water; your eyes, our hands, this book: what do all these things have in common? . . . Whether visible or invisible, socialized or wild, they are all material forms emerging in combination with forces, agency, and other matter.

This quote prompts the thought that every piece of matter and its body are forces and possess agency. Thus, we can think of other forms of life – the more-than-human – in other more inclusive ways and of the world as "of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims and actions" (Alaimo "Bodily" 2). These forms of life are, then, no longer seen as an exterior we simply inhabit. Krenak also expresses these ideas in his book *Futuro Ancestral* when he talks about the possibility of worlds affecting one another, of experimenting the encounter with a mountain not as an abstraction, but as a in dynamic of affects in which the mountain can be a subject and can present the initiative of the approach (83). These other forms of life, then, have agency, and I analyze Nichols's and Kaur's poems from such perspective.

Kaur's *Home Body* (p. 103)[2] can be associated with the ideas of material ecocriticism:

> being the loudest on earth's playground
>
> doesn't make us any more important than
>
> the dirt we crush beneath our feet

[2] Kaur's poems, in its great majority, do not possess a title and are identified by the page where they are and this is how this dissertation will refer to them.

we are nothing except air

and fire and water and oil

we are a people

who forget what we are made of

a people who talk about the weather

as if it's mundane and not magic

as if the oceans

are not holy water

as if the sky

is not a vision

as if the animals

are not our siblings

as if nature is not god

and rain is not god's tears

and we are not god's children

as if god is not the earth itself (1-19)

The very beginning of the poem favors a non-hierarchized view of the world and all forms of life. By establishing how we are all made of the same materials as air, fire, water, and oil, the poem evokes equity of matter. According to Jane Bennet, "[e]ach human is a

heterogeneous compound of wonderfully vibrant, dangerously vibrant matter" (12) and "if matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of shared materiality of all things is elevated" (12-13). The poem begins by showing human agency separately from the rest – the dirt we crush, upon which we act. But as poem goes along, all living beings can be seen as equal, which dismantles the current logic of the world. The enjambement strategy, a mark of Kaur's writing, in ". . .except of air / and fire and water and oil" (4-5), shows the separation as only an illusion, a strategy, as is the enjambement.

Despite the equity of importance given to humans and "the dirt we crush beneath our feet" (3), I can still see the reinforcement of certain divisions among the different forms of life in the poem. The elements of nature only gain relevance in relation to humans. Oceans are holy water, rain is god's tears, the sky is a vision, and animals are our siblings. Holy water is related to our Catholic religion and, even as a symbol to attribute value to oceans, it is still a human reference. We are not the only ones who enjoy and use the ocean. Numerous other living beings depend upon it much more than humans do. "God's tears" also refers to a human notion and image of god. The sky is only a vision – it is beautiful. Animals are only relevant because of their relation to us. This human centeredness vision of the world can be seen even in the attempt to attribute value to the more-than-human. The agency of all these elements and the types of life within them do not gain respect and worth outside human culture, values, and configurations.

The poem can be analyzed as an endeavor to re-evaluate our anthropocentrism. However, it does not seem to escape it. In order to expand our current notions of life and how we see the world, we must understand that we are not superior to any other form of life. This

superiority is an illusion, a strategy to justify the exploitation of the more-than-human. For instance, even though plants do not have a central brain, they can perceive their surrounding environment with a higher sensibility than that of animals. They compete actively for the limited resources available in dirt and in the atmosphere and, ultimately, define and perform appropriate actions in response to environmental stimuli (Macuso 12). These statements show how, in a non-anthropocentric way or model, plants are capable of producing change and, therefore, they possess some kind of agency. Stefano Mancuso gives us an example of non-human types of agency, which may be even more effective than our human-based systems. Plants have a modular composition, a cooperative and distributive architecture, with no one single center of command. Thus, they are capable of perfectly resisting repeated catastrophic events without losing their functionality. Furthermore, they are able to adapt rapidly to huge environmental changes (Mancuso 13). Due to evolution, plants have developed very different solutions from those found by animals – humans included. From this point of view, they are far more modern and innovative organisms (Mancuso 13). By looking at other forms of life through a less anthropomorphic lens, we realize how much we can learn from their organizations.

We can do the same by looking at animals, considered the closest species to human beings. According to Timothy Clark, dealing with animals is, for ecocriticism, perhaps the "most striking ethical challenge" ("The Cambridge Companion" 179). This is due to the challenge of anthropomorphism and also to the fact that we eat animals; we use them in scientific laboratories and medical development; in short, we use them to our advantage. If we think of them as intelligent and sensitive beings, the way we treat them could be considered monstrous. The very division we establish between humans and animals is homogenizing and

violent. Jacques Derrida, a famous name in the defense of such argument, claims that "[a]mong nonhumans and separate from nonhumans there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general" (25-26). Mario Ortiz has a different perspective on the way we see animals. He states that the very existence of the notion of "animal" is a literary invention, by arguing that "the entity we call 'animal' cannot be conceived apart from its literarity" (303) and that the invention of the animal is also the invention of the human. According to him, "to construct an animal metaphor is to compare ourselves to other animals in order to establish what we hold in common and what we don't" (304). What is, after all, the similarity between a frog and a cow? Or between an octopus and an eagle? Are the differences among themselves not as varied as the differences between a human and any of those animals? How did we come to divide the world between human and animals? Can the taxonomy by Jorge Luis Borges, in the epigraph of this chapter, be considered as arbitrary than the one we created?

Although such discussion is centered on the classes of animals and plants, it is important to bear in mind that the other forms of life are not limited to them. The world has a vast array of living beings, including bacteria, fungi, and many others, present in our life on a daily basis and in our bodies. The vitality of matter also encompasses these forms of life, which are not always considered in some ecocritical texts.

When Kaur's poem (103) quoted above deems animals as our siblings, all these questions necessarily arise. However, the poem can also be associated with our anthropocentrism. The opening verse brings an image of human's self-granted centrality – "Being the loudest on earth's playground" (1) –, in which the belief that only humans can

produce meaning is implied. With the material turn, the new materialisms "suggest that things (or matter) draw their agentic power from their relation to discourses that in turn structure human relations to materiality" (Iovino and Opperman 4). This idea resists "the emphasis on linguistic constructions of the world, formulated by some trends of postmodern thought;" the paradigm of the new materialisms "is premised on the integral ways of thinking language and reality, meaning and matter together" (ibid). Even though these ideas may appear to be recent, in Glotfelty and Fromm's founding book *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Glotfelty defends that "literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system in which energy, matter, and ideas interact" ("Introduction" xix). Thus, the notion of ideas interacting among different types of matter has existed for a long time. Nevertheless, only recently it has been comprehensively theorized.

The notion of matter as text and as narratives is not difficult to grasp. According to Iovino and Opperman, "every living creature, from humans to fungi, tells evolutionary stories of coexistence, interdependence, adaptation and hybridization, extinctions and survivals" (7), whether or not they are perceived and interpreted by humans as narratives. According to Karen Barad, meaning is "an ontological performance of the world in its ongoing articulation" ("Meeting" 149). Thus, the stories of "evolutionary histories, climate narratives, biological memories, geological narratives, and histories of earth movements" make "meaning the necessary complement of matter" (Opperman 32). When the poem (p.103 of *Home Body*) implies that human beings are the loudest in earth's playground, it can be inferred that we only listen to ourselves and that we remain blind and deaf to the world's other narratives. The use of the world "playground" in the poem refers to the children's universe. The playground is where they gather and play, which may be a reference to the existence of many agents in our

planet besides humans, whose lives we are too self-centered to perceive. It may refer to how, evolutionarily, human beings are the most recent species in Earth, i.e., we are children in comparison to the millenary existence of other forms of life.

This notion of the planet and our ecosystem as a playground in which multiple agents are in contact is also present in another poem by Kaur, also in *Home Body*, page 102. This poem reflects on the damage we cause in the planet, not only in other living beings:

we've ruined

our only home for

convenience and profit

neither of which will be

useful once the earth

can't breathe (1-6)

An argument favoring the interconnection of all things can be seen in the poem. Thinking of planet Earth simply as an exterior we inhabit, instead of a entanglement of agencies and vitalities, is dangerous. As the poem says, what use will there be of the profit made from pesticides, animal exploitation and deforestation, when our planet life supporting systems no longer maintain our own lives?

Alaimo's theory accounts for such exchanges among matter and their relevance. Transcorporeality, as it is called, emphasizes "the material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world" ("Bodily" 2). The transcorporeal concept calls attention to "the material transit across bodies and environments" which "may render it more

difficult to seek refuge within fantasies of transcendence or imperviousness" ("Bodily" 16). As Kaur's poem (page 102) shows, it has become increasingly difficult for us to ignore transcorporeality. It is important to notice that these ideas, even if they have been and continue to be ignored, have existed for a long time. Ailton Krenak brings the tradition of the Tukano people that claims the body is made of clay to show how, based on such ancient philosophy, there is frontier between the human body and the other organisms that surround it ("Futuro" 39). Thus, the transcorporeal notion — or any other name one desires to call it — has permeated the philosophies, minds, and histories of many ancient peoples such as one here mentioned. If we still have not understood the power of such metaphor and lessons it brings, it is only our fault. Our fantasies of arrogance were built by discarding such longstanding traditions and by putting huge efforts to erase them, specially considering the colonial context.

In Kaur's poem on page 149 (*Home Body)*, the earth is personified, it gains the attributes of a human being in order to convey such idea.

the world is changing

can you feel it

undressing itself and slipping into

something uncomfortable

and more just

-*waves* (1-6)

Kaur's poems usually do not have a title, but many have a name at the end, mostly written in italics and preceded by a hyphen. These words or even sentences, as in the poem above, do not often linearly continue the previous verses. They bring a new element that can make one think about the poem from a different perspective. In the one above transcribed, the word "waves" may refer to how changes occur. We can see changes in literary movements, fashion, and political eras. Such changes are usually described with the movement of waves. This may be an overused metaphor, but when it is considered with the rest of the poem, other meanings may be inferred. Firstly, there is a certain inevitability of the course of water that comes with the word "waves." The change is inevitably in the word itself. Our world is always evolving and maturing, biologically and socially. In the more-than-human context, humans cannot escape the consequences of the damage caused by their exploitation over the centuries. Sooner or later, we will have to acknowledge the existence of other forces and agencies in the world and somehow be liable for our attitudes. Secondly, there is an opposite movement between the first stanza and the separate verse with the word "waves." At the end, "waves" is used to describe the process humanity is going through in becoming more conscious of its surroundings in ecological terms. The entire poem presents a personification of the world itself as a person changing clothes, which suggests an awareness of the anthropocentric bias in the personification device.

The personification of more-than-human elements is not what matter narratives are about. The narrative agency "does not purport to enhance human qualities in fictive or material domains; rather, it denotes the vitality, autonomy, agency, and other signs that designate an expressive dimension in nonhuman entities" (Opperman 30). Personification, on the other hand, "attributes human traits to objects or ideas" (ibid). The use of such device is,

thus, a consequence of our anthropocentrism that insists on trying to find human characteristics in the more-than-human, in order to consider it as deserving of respect and ethical treatments. Clark relates anthropomorphism "to what may be the inherently anthropocentric nature of human language, projecting as it does a world usually understood according to our own scale, dimensions, interests and desires" ("The Cambridge" 192). Clark questions, then, how "can one represent an animal in ways that do justice to its own perceptions and interests?' ("The Cambridge" 193). At one extreme, he claims that "there are those who maintain that any anthropomorphism is simply a category mistake, that is, to attribute pride to a dog is like attributing colour to a mathematical equation." However, "[g]iven that all human representations project a human measure of some sort, it soon becomes debatable where 'anthropomorphism' stops" ("The Cambridge" 193). As a result, the question of anthropomorphism cannot, at least yet, be solved, because we do not possess a non-anthropocentric language. This means that all forms of human representation of the more-than-human are, in one way or another, anthropomorphic.

For fewer anthropocentric accounts of the more-than-human, we need to firstly accept that our language and forms of representation were created and modeled according to anthropocentric parameters. Secondly, we must make efforts to challenge such patterns. Although our language is anthropocentric, we can create new concepts and redefine the ones we already have, in order to render the more-than-human world more ethical values. The personification in Kaur's poem may be seen as an attempt at redefining our views. Even though personification portrays human parameters, it can be used as a strategy to challenge these very parameters.

I call such use strategic anthropocentrism, by borrowing the notion of Spivak's strategic essentialism, as well as Diana Fuss's, in *Essentially Speaking*. For Spivak, in an interview with Angela McRobbie, "once you begin selectively to use idealization, empiricism, transcendentalism, essentialism, as positions promised within an awareness of the limits of (self—) positioning—individual—collective—then you can see them to be strategically effective" (McRobbie 123). Although the author was later critical of her own term because of certain nationalistic uses of it, the term is still valid for this discussion. Fuss stresses the difference between "to use" and "to activate" essentialism and also between "to surrender" and "to fall" into essentialism (20). I borrow these considerations, arguing that, since one cannot escape from anthropocentrism altogether, strategic anthropocentrism can be a way to critically use anthropocentric languages, as well as ways of expression, in order to call attention to other forms of thinking, seeing, and existing. This does not entail an endorsement of anthropocentrism, but a way to deal with it by questioning its very basis. Edilane Ferreira, in her PhD dissertation proposes a strategic essentialism — in a similar way to what I am proposing here — claiming that, in her analysis of Brazilian author Marina Colasanti's work, the essentialism used can be strategic because it provokes subversion and resistance to imposed violence (61). Basing myself in this same logic and possibility, here, the use of the strategic anthropocentrism is strategic — and valid — because it may lead to a subversion of our limited and pre-established ideas of the more-than-human.

We must also consider, in the poem above, the word "uncomfortable" (4) described as "more just" (5). As already discussed, one of the consequences of a human-centred view upon the world is the inferiorization of the more-than-human and the hierarchization of classes of human. Thus, if our vision upon what we call nature, agency, and other related categories is

transformed, our vision of ourselves and our systems of hierarchization and inferiorization will be transformed as well. In Kaur's poem of page 148, this can be more directly perceived.

no one on this planet

is in more denial

than the white man

who regardless of all

the evidence in front of him

still thinks racism and sexism

and all the world's pain don't exist (1-7)

The white male represents the ideal human being, as established throughout history. In a society with racism, sexism, and many other types of oppression, the white, male, heterosexual, cis, and western human has the most privileges. Of course, this is not a dictum. Not all white men defend such oppressive system. Nonetheless, we must recognize the privileged position they occupy.

The fact that racism and sexism correspond with the world's pain is a transcorporeal statement, as it joints the mutual affects among human and more-than-human, which for centuries were considered separately. It could be argued that the world's pain is related to the human world only. However, by reading Kaur's poems in context (on page 148 as discussed above), the view may be different. The transcorporeal space is one where the human agents are present, but not in the center and not as the only actants.

In Kaur's poems here analyzed, we can see personifications, considerations about the natural and cultural systems, and more straight-forward affirmations towards our relationship with the world. I would like to bring a different view with a poem by Nichols in which the focus is more on matter and on the body itself. It attempts to point to flaws in our biased systems. We can see an example of such in "Dust" (3) from *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman and Other Poems* (1989):

Dust has a right to settle

Milk the right to curdle

Cheese the right to turn green

Scum and fungi are rich words. (1-4)

The poem does not show any human presence or interaction, which may be the first estrangement for readers. The only literary personas – or literary agents – are more-than-human elements. Not even animals or plants in general are present; only matter itself. These central words act through a narrative strategy of metonymy, using these elements to represent the entire more-than-human. It is matter in itself, but it also points to abstract ideas and how matter can be symbolic as well.

The poem basically defends the rights of matter. The word "right" invokes the legal realm, according to which agency "is to attribute choice, decision, practice and responsibility to a person's, an individual's, or a group's judgment outside natural and external causes, iron logic, laws of nature, and necessities" (Matusov *et al* 421). In other words, the term "right" invokes a notion of agency related to a human ideal of free will and rational thinking. The

notion that elements such as dust and milk (matter which is not technically alive) have rights can make readers rethink the concept of matter.

The rights of such elements follow their path according to natural laws: dust will settle and milk will curdle. We cannot control that. Humans and more-than-humans live by the same natural laws. Even though we continuously attempt to redirect, divert, or deviate these laws, we can only, at most, delay their outcome. Dust will settle, no matter how many times one cleans. Milk will curdle at some point even if it is in the refrigerator. Cheese will turn green because of its life and agency, which follows natural laws the same way humans do. Matter will perform its roles in the mesh and flows of a transcorporeal space.

The last two forms of life presented in the poem are the ones usually acknowledged as living beings. They are both seen as unwanted beings. For example, fungi can spoil food and scum makes water dirty. These forms of life are not the most appreciated by humans in our ecosystem. For humans, the word “scum” can even be a way to curse. I have two considerations about this. Although we overwhelmingly focus on what we think of as negative effects of scum and fungi, these forms of life are important for the ecosystem – and for humans –, like many other forms of life. Fungi have an important function in nature of nutrient cycling by decomposing dead animals and plants and by giving the nutrients back to the earth, which can be absorbed by other animals, plants, and even human beings. Sea scum, in turn, when produced solely by more-than-human action, represents a key organic element in the equilibrium of the ocean and also of its inhabitants. When it is formed by humans, i.e., by pollution, it is simply a response to our action. Therefore, there are agents in the planet other than humans. Consequently, to attribute richness to scum and to fungi means to

acknowledge the exchanges among living beings and to accept the existence of agency in more-than-human lives.

The second comment I would like to bring attention to is on the use of the term scum as a curse. The use of swear words originating from more-than-human elements and characteristics is actually common in our languages. The systems of oppression were based on the inferiorization of nature. About this, Clark states that "[r]acism's first move is usually to dissociate its object from the respect normally accorded other people, with the use of animal names as insults ('pig', 'rat', 'dog')" ("The Cambridge" 185). This is what happens with the use of the word scum in the poem above. The author also states that "a response that objects 'these people are not rats' and so on, does not undo the force of hatred at work in the animal terms themselves" (ibid). Similarly, the word scum as a negative reference to a person also creates negativity to the more-than-human elements.

Another consideration about the poem centers on relating scum and fungi as "rich words." As discussed above, matter is a producer of meaning as well, not only *in* texts but also *as* texts. Depending on its composition, the sea scum can tell a story about how the environment is treated in that place. Accordingly, many other elements may tell a story about a city and its human and more-than-human population.

These elements in "Dust" are not as personified as in Kaur's poems, even if they are a metonymy for something bigger. However, Nichols also uses personification in her poems, even if in a lesser degree. "Grease" (76), also in *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman*, is an example.

Grease steals in like a lover

over the body of my oven.

Grease kisses the knobs

of my stove.

Grease plays with the small

hands of my spoons.

Grease caresses the skin

of my table-cloth,

laying claim to my every crease.

Grease reassures me that life

is naturally sticky.

Grese is obviously having an affair with me. (1-12)

In this poem, although metonymy is present again in the element of grease to represent more-than-human and even non-living elements. However, I would like to focus on the use of personification and on how it is used more as a questioning than as an acceptance of anthropocentrism. Although grease and the elements of a kitchen are assigned human characteristics, the human realm also becomes “sticky.” This inversion associated with the last verse, which installs a romantic relation between the literary persona and the grease, points to the exchanges between these bodies. The notion of exchange in transcorporeality demands “more responsible, less confident epistemologies” (Alaimo, “Bodily” 22). In addition, there is

the romantic relation with matter in the poem, which then requests a more considerate view upon such matter. bell hooks sees love (in all its types) as “the will to nurture one’s own or another’s spiritual growth, revealed through acts of care, respect, knowing, and assuming responsibility” (“All About Love” 136). Although this definition may seem anthropocentric, it assumes a degree of care and responsibility with one another. Hence, if there is any type of loving relation established, regardless of the types of lives involved, there is an action of care and respect.

Moreover, it is important to notice that the human agent only appears in the last verses. Throughout the entire poem there is only matter. Even more relevant is that not only does matter receive center stage, but it also performs exchanges: the grease with the oven, with the spoons, with the tablecloth. There are several relations taking place without the disruption of human action of any kind. Matter at the center creates the possibility to enquire if the literary persona is in fact human or a personified more-than-human.

However, even if we do consider the literary persona as human, other important and challenging issues arise. In an analysis of this poem, Brandão considers that it brings a topsy-turvy image of a housewife, who is not very fond of housework such as cleaning and thus leaves her kitchen free to be taken over by grease (“Grace Nichols: Do Fragmento” 167). If we consider a woman as the literary persona, as Brandão does, the question of gender oppression arises. Household chores are usually attributed to women. Therefore, when the persona refuses such role, she rejects the stereotype connected with it. Such refusal enhances the notion of interconnectedness among different forms of marginalization. It connects, in a transcorporeal way, the exploitation of matter with gender oppression and adds yet another layer to the challenging ideas the poem can provoke.

Moving towards the transcorporeal a bit further, we find Nichols's poem "Chalk" (34) in *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* (2009), which draws considerations about the agency of matter and presents another approach to the very existence of matter.

1

Chalk that speaks of the metamorphoses

of sea into land and land into sea;

of epochs laid down by minute crustaceans

leaving behind the poetry of themselves –

their starry works of towering limestone.

Chalk that talks of the blackboard

where my school days began –

the scuttling crab of my father's hand –

his dust-capped fingertips – as we chanted

our alphabet within hibiscus hearing

Now after thirty years in a coastal Sussex town

I freely admit to loving, you, luminous white cliffs.

As much as miners love the coal that kills them.

2

What's all this talk about chalk

I hear you say. Big deal.

Perhaps you should ask my mother,

Who, when she was carrying me,

felt strangely drawn to the little boxes

my father kept of chalk –

a chewy-craving for its hidden calcium.

Or McEnroe, who should certainly know –

at least when it comes to tennis –

the importance of chalk and its dust –

Chalk that sparkles a Wimbledon tantrum

Chalk that writes the bone and blood. (1-25)

The entire poem, especially the first part, is centered on chalk, whether the chalk used in schools or chalk found on beaches, which is a variation of limestone derived from the shells of marine animals and other forms of sea life composed by calcium. The matter here is

again in the center stage, but the focus is not as much on the exchanges among bodies, but on the effects of matter in our lives. Matter, represented by chalk, is part of affective memories, a result of more-than-human agency. It is part of the educational process. However, more than just being part of these stories, it participates in them as well. In the last stanza of the second part, chalk is part of a chain that leads to a certain result, as in the example of a tennis game.

Jane Bennet argues that with globalization "the earth itself had become a space of events," with its parts "intimately interconnected and highly conflictual" ("Vibrant" 23). This new context "of the coexistence of mutual dependence with friction and violence between parts" called for new "conceptualizations of the part-whole relation" (ibid). The term the author chooses "to describe this event-space and its style of structuration is, following Deleuze and Guattari, *assemblage*" (ibid). Assemblage refers to "groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts." In other words, it is related to "living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within" (Bennet, "Vibrant" 23-24). The most important point about assemblages, for the discussions herein, is that it "has no central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory of impact of the group" (24). Thus, all parts have equal value and importance.

This notion of assemblage can be applied in the case of the chalk. In a tennis match, we tend to think that the player is the one who will take action and be entirely responsible for it. However, there are many other factors that may affect the outcome. In an assemblage, the effects generated are "emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen (a newly inflected materialism, a blackout, a hurricane, a war on terror) is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone" (Bennet, "Vibrant" 24).

Thus, we can speak of an agency of the assemblage itself instead of separate agencies of each member or proto-member, as Bennet names it. By following this reasoning, we avoid the doer-deed dualism and begin to think more in terms of a doing and an effect by human and more-than-human members of an assemblage. According to Bennet, assemblages have a distributive agency, in which there is a "swarm of vitalities at play" and in this swarm we can see "human intention as always in competition and confederation with many other strivings, for an intention is like a pebble thrown into a pond, or an electrical current sent through a wire or neural network: it vibrates and merges with other currents, to affect and be affected" (Bennet, "Vibrant" 32). In the tennis match, the wind, the racket, and the chalk are also present in an assemblage along with the human intentionality and physics.

Another question raised by the poem is viewing chalk not only as producer of effect but also as an effect itself. It is produced by other agents and becomes itself a member of an assemblage with its distributive agency. It is interesting to notice that the poem begins only with matter in focus. The human member does not appear until the second part, when we actually see the exchange among the chalk and such human elements. Therefore, chalk can become part of an assemblage, an object of desire or an agent provocateur of desire by the mother — if not an element responding to the pregnant body's organic necessity of calcium. The poem, at last, allows us to reflect upon the cyclicity of the world and how we coexist with other forms of life. We may all be agents, objects of desire and, always, members of assemblages. On the one hand, we occupy a certain position. On the other hand, there is basically the perception or realization of a new relation with the more-than-human lives, one that is not hierarchical or stable, but one that changes and is changed by other actants at all times.

If the human body has an open transit with other types of body, then we are made of the same materials as these other bodies, like in Kaur's poem. There is a transit of substances taking place continuously, which can lead to toxic bodies, according to Alaimo's coinage of such term. Such bodies insist in "that environmentalism, human health, and social justice cannot be severed" ("Bodily" 22). In fact, "they encourage us to imagine ourselves in constant interchange with the environment and, paradoxically, perhaps, to image an epistemological space that allows for both the unpredictable becomings of other creatures and the limits of human knowledge" (Alaimo, "Bodily" 22). Alaimo claims that in contemporaneity all bodies are, in some degree, toxic bodies, even those who live distant from the more polluted zones. Toxic bodies, in sum, carry toxic substances in their formations, from food ingested or from contact with such substances in the daily life. We can also see these toxic bodies, in another type of metaphor, as toxic for being violent; violence-causing or violence-suffering. The poem "Price We Pay for the Sun" (Nichols, "The Fat Black" 52) in *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (1984), describes the two forms of a toxic body:

> These islands
>
> not picture postcards
>
> for unravelling tourist
>
> you know
>
> these islands real
>
> more real
>
> than flesh and blood
>
> past stone

past foam

these islands split

bone

my mother’s breasts

like sleeping volcanoes

who know

what kinda sulph-furious

cancer tricking her

below

while the wind

constantly whipping

my father’s tears

to salty hurricanes

and my grandmothers croon

sifting sand

water mirroring palm

Poverty is the price

we pay for the sun girl

run come (1-27)

The first image I will discuss here is that of the toxic body. The mother's cancer related with Sulphur is a clear association with the toxic substance that enters our bodies and may cause diseases. The transit among the substances connected to the dirt that gets in through food is one of the ways toxic bodies can be thought of. Living in areas near toxic disposal, working with extraction, handling cleaning products, and so many other types of contact with the world can explain our toxic bodies, showing how "the human body is never a rigidly enclosed, protected entity, but is vulnerable to the substances and flows of its environments, which may include industrial environments and their social/economic forces" (Alaimo, "Bodily" 28). The human body becomes, then, less of a fortitude that contains a mind and more of what we call the external environment. In addition, the toxic body can also be seen metaphorically, one that shows "after-effects of Afro-Caribbean people's traumatic losses" (Sarikaya-Sen 83), which assigns the toxic bodies that relate to the second meaning mentioned above.

This other understanding of the toxic body relates to how the social and cultural systems influence the formation of the environment, and to the types of contact we have with it. Environmental justice, for example, "insists upon the material interconnections among specific bodies and specific places, especially the peoples and areas that have been literally dumped upon" (Alaimo, "Bodily" 28). This means that areas where toxic substance is dumped are usually more peripherical regions, usually inhabited by impoverished populations. The economic condition of a class is also connected with its racial and social

conditions, which is why Alaimo defends "casting racism as environmental," since it "exposes how sociopolitical forces generate landscapes that infiltrate human bodies" ("Bodily" 28). In the poem transcribed above, the toxic body leads to death – the mother dies and leaves the father in tears, the grandmother crooning, and the daughter lost to her reflections.

There is an implicit relation between the islands and the mother's body. The islands, described as "more real / than flesh and blood" (6-7), are the same islands which ". . .split / bone" (10-11). The human and more-than-human elements in the poem are mingled and act upon one another. The father's tears are whipped by the wind, and the grandmother's croon sifts sand. However, the transcorporeality is not the only thing connecting these human/more-than-human agents. The land was used as a commodification – "not picture postcards / for unravelling tourist" (2-3) – and the people that inhabit this island are commodified as well. The mention to poverty and the social-economic situation of such people reveals the question of environmental justice as a necessary concern not only for the health of the planet, but also for human health. However, not all humans inhabit such peripherical space, with dumped waste. Only those in disadvantaged situations do. Thus, the mother's body epitomizes a toxic body that demands environmental justice, a body "in which social power and material/ geographic agencies intra-act" (Alaimo, "Bodily" 63). By acknowledging this, we acknowledge that our material bodies relate to the more-than-human agencies, and also to our social and cultural systems.

This view of the world takes us beyond the fragmented and diffractive perception of the interconnections among all matter. Although words, concepts, and theories discussed in this dissertation can be considered new, they do not defend the formation of new maps of transit in the world. What matters is acknowledging how the world really is, how literature

should be read, and how all bodies, humans and more-than-humans, are connected and in constant exchange. We need to read both "the discursive and the material, the cultural and the natural *diffractively*, not in separation" (Iovino and Opperman 9), i.e., we must read them "through one another" (ibid). This can be done by redefining our conceptions of agency to more open and inclusive ones, and by perceiving agency less as a moral capacity and more as distributive, according to Jane Bennet. Such understanding does not "posit a subject as the root cause of an effect". Instead, there is "a swarm of vitalities at play" (Bennet, "Vibrant" 31-32). To see and to read agency in such a way does not imply denying the existence of intentionality. It means understanding that the outcomes are not direct or definitive. New considerations towards agency entail new manners to understand and read the representations of matter, of the more-than-human and of the human lives in a more connected, flowing, and continuous, non-hierarchized, exchange. Understanding what the ideas of Posthumanism and Anthropocentrism show us about our world is used as the first step in this chapter to understand the different ways agency can be seeing and what it may engender: the connection between bodies, all types of bodies, their materiality, and the connection of this materiality with the abstract systems that mold their lives and relations.

2.2 NO LONGER A BACKDROP: CONSIDERATIONS OF SPACE

Space is the second concept I discuss in this chapter through a defamiliarizing optics. With the notion of agency, the more-than-human forms of life are understood as not passive or inert; they produce effect and change. Our lives are far more influenced by and interconnected with such actants than we can imagine. Now I approach the more-than-human considered as

scenery, so often deemed as a mere context for our actions. Let us see how we perceive and relate to this alleged backdrop of our lives. Space can be a location, features of a site, environmental conditions. It can also allude to human characteristics, systems, and influences that make a certain locale unique. In this dissertation I comprehend space, or place, as more than just a background, more than a set of characteristics or a certain portion of land. Space is more than what is within its delimited borders, more than its cultural or physical specificities; it is much more.

Before approaching the relations established with space and how space is constructed, let us first address the nomenclature. According to Doreen Massey, there are two key terms that refer to the place that surrounds us: space and place, terms that "have long histories and bear with them a multiplicity of meanings and connotations which reverberate with other debates and many aspects of life" ("Space, Place, and Gender" 1). Space is usually understood as "the product of interrelations" (Massey, "For Space" 9), "the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality" (Massey, "For Space" 9), and is "always under construction" (Massey, "For Space" 9). On the other hand, place "can raise an image of one's place in the world, of the reputedly. . .deep meanings of 'a place called home' or, with much greater intimations of mobility and agility, can be used in the context of discussions of positionality" (Massey, "Space, Place, and Gender" 1). This counter position between "place" and "space" "resonates with an equation of the local with realness, with local place as earthy and meaningful, standing in opposition to a presumed abstraction of a global space" (Massey, "For Space" 183). However, these definitions are not so closed and rigid as they may seem. Indeed, the physical territory one inhabits (which may be the country, the city, the neighborhood, or the house one lives in) can

have different meanings, depending on how we name it. Nonetheless, I do not think it is possible to sever these meanings from one another. Brandão argues for the interchange between both terms, since these ideas can slide and incorporate different meanings, depending on context ("Dimensões Políticas" 100). Similarly, I believe that the geographical aspect cannot be severed from the emotional or symbolic character of a location. Just like we divide our world into nature and culture, our knowledge into emotion and reason, ourselves into mind and body, we also try to dualistically divide the types of experience we have with the physical world. I understand that at times a decision to use one term or the other is necessary. The terms place and space, despite having been defined as different, refer to the same notion and can be used interchangeably. In this dissertation, the term space is used more often for seeming broader, but I do use both words to allude to the same concept: the physical territories that surround us, the ways we imagine and, by doing so, create such territories.

Imagination plays a major role in constructing a place. Ursula Heise, in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), states that "literary and cultural critics. . . have investigated the imaginative strategies and devices that allow individuals and communities to form attachments to these different types of spaces and to maintain them over time as an integral part of their identities" (5), which shows how space is mainly imagined. Furthermore, not only does imagination about a place create the idea of space but also our own conceptions of ourselves. Gaston Bachelard argues that "the house we were born is physically inscribed in us" (14) and that "our house is our corner in the world. . . it is our first universe, a realm cosmos in every sense of the world" (4). Considering such arguments, we can infer that the place we inhabit, also, somehow, inhabits us. The way we see our relations in life, and how

we deal with the world and all its beings, is shaped by the very first space we inhabited and how we learned to connect with it.

The dual inhabitance of a place in us and of us in a place has many consequences. As mentioned above, when discussing the imaginary constructions of individuals about a space, Heise claims that these individuals also explore "what overarching cultural and ideological purposes such commitments have been made to serve in different communities" ("Sense of Place" 5). In other words, all communities, collective, or even elite, create for themselves ideas and definitions that best fit their interests. The thought of space, then, is included in these creations and can help shape a desired view of the world.

About the history of colonization, Doreen Massey reflects on the encounter between Cortés and the people of Monteczuma in the so-called discovery of Americas, and on the implications of such view of space. The author affirms that these "voyages of discovery" equate "space with the land and sea, with the earth which stretches around us"; in other words, it makes space seem like "a surface; continuous and given" ("For Space" 4). A surface can be crossed, delineated, conquered. However, it is also necessary to remember that territories were inhabited by peoples whose cultures have been viscerally connected with the place in which they developed their societies. In the history of colonization, the thought that a territory can be conquered is in accordance with the idea that other peoples can be violently conquered as well. Beyond the clear historical implications related thereto, we can point to the notions of nationalism and parochialism (Massey, "For Space"6) and to the ones of control over the world, peoples, and places. There is a contradiction in the fact that in imagination, we develop a global perspective of the world in which we are all connected by social systems, but the alleged material and physical boundaries of territories still govern our laws and our

interchange. We can ask ourselves, then, how material are these borders? How imaginary are the systems created by us, when they manufacture exclusion that can be felt on the skin? Kaur's poems in *the sun and her flowers* (pages 128 and 137) reflect upon the creation of such material and ideological borders and their influence on our lives.

borders

are man made

they only divide us physically

don't let them make us

turn on each other

- *we are not enemies* (1-6)

you split the world

into pieces and

called them countries

declared ownership on

what never belonged to you

and left the rest with nothing

- *colonize* (1-7)

The poems are associated with the historical and political divisions of the world and their consequences. They point to the history of Imperialism, enslavement, and Orientalism (Said). The second one mentions colonialism directly. Bearing in mind that Kaur is an immigrant herself and that her books carry an autobiographical tone (Imran 122), we can assume, without limiting the range of possible meanings engendered in the reading process, that "enemies" in the first poem may refer to the battles faced by immigrants in foreign countries, even if not only that.

The way space was understood in the Eurocentric vision of the world allowed — and created a justification — for the so-called conquering of lands and peoples. Because space was comprehended as simply a surface, a land, without agency or living beings in it (more-than-human included), it could be crossed, taken, dominated. When the poem mentions that the world was "split into pieces", it points to the idea of the world as in a map. Again, the notion of surface appears, but beyond that, it establishes how our imagination of a place can take over the entire existence of the place itself, making it difficult to maintain the separation of the types of experience we have with the territory we inhabit. Maps are products of our imagination but they are also one of the elements used to shape such imagination. Borders only exist in a map which is "an archetype of representation" (Massey, "For Space"107), but our actions inscribe borders on physical places through our social systems. The map itself may not be a problem, but if we believe that "that vertical distance lends you truth", then we are accepting this one dimensional and anthropocentric representation as the space itself. Although this discussion is supported by the poem lines "borders / are man made," I would

like to rethink the idea that “they only divide us physically.” Firstly, the word “man" instead of human indicates that the order which shaped the world into such division was not just anthropocentrically created, but androcentric as well. Secondly, the thought that borders divide us physically is only existent inside a map. Outside the map, the only thing that divides us is our imagination and the agreement with the social and legal systems created by and for ourselves. Massey presents an example of how space is not a surface, which I find particularly enlightening. The author mentions a hypothetical train, going from London to Milton Keynes, but on which you are not just “travelling through space or across it” (“For Space” 119). Since space is the product of social interactions (with more-than-humans as well, may I add), “you are also helping. . .to *alter* space, to participate in its continuing production” (“For Space” 119). When traveling on this train, then, “you are part of the constant process of the making and breaking of links which is an element in the constitution of yourself” (“For Space” 119). London, during the time you are gone, “will not have the pleasure of your company for the day” while Milton Keynes will, so you are not just “traveling *through* space or across it, you are altering it a little” (“For Space” 119). At the same time, this space, the links, the people, and the more-than-human beings you meet and relate to are also altering you a bit. With this example, Massey proposes space as “the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories” (“For Space” 119). Moreover, thinking only of the human trajectories in space means neglecting an enormous part of what is happening in the world and in our lives. The smell of a fire in the woods that one may feel, for example, while on the train to Milton Keynes, may affect one’s mood and focus. The sight of animals and even their companionship on the train can alter those as well. The geographical formation of the path through which the train goes will affect the travel and the rails. The more-than-human is in this world with us, whether we want it or

not. It makes us wonder, then, how come we can believe that imagined borders have such an impact on our lives, but that the actual physical and more-than-human material lives do not.

Accordingly, we must understand that while imaging how space forms a sort of co-constituency with us, and, therefore, we are not alone in this space. Our ideas about it are not merely controlled by us, human beings. I am not alone in making this argument and I am far from being the first person to consider the more-than-human influence in how space is constituted. Doreen Massey and Val Plumwood, for example, have analyzed broadly how the more-than-human shapes our perceptions of space. More recently, Lenka Filipova claims that place "helps to articulate eco-ethical problems by posing questions of how human should effectively address ecological problems in particular places" (5). Massey provokes her readers when she questions "[w]hat if we open the imagination of the single narrative to give space (literally) for a multiplicity of trajectories?" ("For Space" 5). Although in this excerpt of the book she is discussing the different trajectories of the different peoples and cultures, she proposes in other parts that we open our minds to the more-than-human beings in these places too.

In Kaur's poems transcribed above, the perception that these spaces were not simply surfaces to be crossed and conquered appears in the use of the verb "split." Splitting is usually related to a cake, to a piece of a log, to a check, or to other material things. Splitting the world entails its materiality, but the colonialist splitting of the world neglected the fact that it has a material aspect, which is not dead, passive, or indifferent towards our actions. Declaring ownership on "what never belonged to you" may be indeed a reference to those who claimed to be the owners of lands were not the ones who already inhabited the places, prior to

colonization. However, we can also understand it as life forms in those places and the life of the place itself, which are objects, i.e., cannot belong to anyone, but exist in relation with us.

As a consequence, the more-than-human must be considered as to the effects of historical and political divisions, because its continuous mutual affect on humans. The way we divide space and the consequent separation of it from ourselves entail a fragmented life. Not only do we divide ourselves as humanity, but we also create a severed more-than-human in our social imaginary. However, in the world "environmental effects so immediately disregard borders" (Clark, "Cambridge" 137). The second poem transcribed above points to this inseparability and to the fictional character of this division, when the literary persona states that the world "never belonged to you" (5). Thus, "you" should not have separated it and cannot turn us into "enemies." The space we inhabit is not ours; it is an entity in itself and all other forms of life that inhabit it are as agentic as we are and actively engaged in forming it. Fungi, viruses, and animals are not aware of the frontiers we have built. By defending the space and its entirety, the poems can be read as arguments in favor of a new ecological view of the world as well. By accepting the references of "enemies" and of the "rest" in the poems as associations to both the human and the more-than-human, we can comprehend the impacts of human's actions on the more-than-human and on space. More importantly, we should investigate how the more-than-human can affect our behaviors and thoughts towards the space we inhabit.

One of the characteristics in Kaur's poetry is the estrangement felt by her readers, in connection with the most common and daily issues, usually taken for granted. The separation of borders, countries, peoples, and lands is an ongoing problem, which perpetuates dualistic and oppositional thoughts. One of these persisting ideas is the local/global opposition, as

already mentioned, based on the nature/culture dualism that takes a new incarnation. The global is seen as the web of economic, social, and political systems developed by human beings, whereas the local is perceived as the physical and material nature. However, this division is flawed as, to begin with, there is no such thing as “pure nature.” Both human and more-than-human lives are part of this so-called "pure nature.” The other persisting dualistic notion is that nature is not free from human influence, whereas the most abstract human systems are free from the more-than-human influences and effects. Nevertheless, according to Filipova, “‘nature’ is understood in terms of power relations which determine how the environmental qualities of particular places which make them inhabitable are managed and to whom they are made accessible” (12). Therefore, ‘nature' is considered as something to serve us, human beings. The poem “Beauty” (Nichols, “The Fat Black Woman” 3) reflects on how, in reality, our influence on the more-than-human is part of a reflective, two-way movement.

Beauty

is a fat black woman

walking the fields

pressing a breezed

hibiscus

to her cheek

while the sun lights up

her feet

Beauty

is a fat black woman

riding the waves

drifting in happy oblivion

while the sea turns back

to hug her shape (1-14)

Webhofer states that, in this poem, we can see "a very intimate relationship between woman and the natural elements" (19). I believe there is more than just an intimate relationship. These verses can relate to the mutual action and influence between human and more-than-human actants. The conjunction "while" places these actions in equal, rather than hierarchical, positions. Beauty is based on certain patterns established by epoch, fashion, social classes, and other factors, which reflect power relations in a society and, therefore, perpetuate the prejudice ingrained in a population. Hence, the poem corroborates the fact that beauty patterns are forms of regulation and expressions of power, parts of our social and political systems. Yet, elements of nature describe a new type of beauty that includes female fat black bodies.

Considering the Londoner society, where the fat black woman lives and where the stories of the poems are set, we can infer that a female, fat, and black body is not valued, due to the history of colonization, of patriarchy, and of fashion in the western world. By using such body to define beauty in association with more-than-human elements, the lyrical subject challenges human systems. Thus, the more-than-human effects have a central influence on human social and political configurations.

These considerations propel new perspectives in relation to space. Massey affirms that space is relational – "[w]e are always, inevitably, making spaces and places" ("For Space" 175) and we must understand that we live in a world "in which the local and global really are 'mutually constituted' [which] renders untenable these kinds of separation" ("For Space" 187) or any kinds of territorial and imaginary separation in our lives. It is a matter of constant negotiation. Filipova states that space must be comprehended as "both an idea and a location" (12). Such an idea cannot be understood without "invoking relationalities such as events, socio-ecological relations, histories or memories, all of which have produced those places in spacetime" (Filipova 15). Spaces are as much social constructs as they are constituted by more-than-human materiality – they are "ecosystems which consist of both human and non-human relations" (Filipova 17). The non-material constituents, which go beyond sociocultural human systems, are one of the important characteristics of relational space. Ideas, memories, and feelings perceived in Kaur's and Nichols's work point to such non-material constituents, even though the poets deal with them differently. Kaur refers to space generally, without specifying the kind of place depicted in the poems; it is mostly an entity called space or place. Nichols, on the other hand, uses specific places – many times the Caribbean and England – to allude to, for example, historical processes, which are discussed in general in most of Kaur's poems. This type of specificity is most evident in Nichols's "Two Old Black Men on a Leicester Square Park Bench" ("The fat black" 42-43):

> What do you dream of you
>
> old black men sitting
>
> on park benches staunchly
>
> wrapped up in scarves

and coats of silence

eyes far away from the cold

grey and strutting

pigeon

ashy fingers trembling

(though it's said that the old

Hardly ever feel the cold) (1-11)

In Nichols's *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*, the fat black woman (the literary persona) reflects upon and describes her daily life in London. This poem differs from the others, as the fat black woman ponders on an image of old black men on a bench in Leicester Square. This specific reference is not a mere detail, as it is a tourist place in London, filled with theatres and cinemas, which conflicts with the image of these men. Further along the description of the scene, readers find out these men are, most likely, immigrants – they might be Caribbean. The description in the first stanza shows the conflict, noticed by the use of the words "silence," "cold," and "ashy fingers trembling" regarding the men. In the entire book, London city is described as cold, contrasting with the warm and sunny Caribbean. This cold is mainly figurative, connected to a city that does not welcome its immigrants, one that was the central stage of colonialism. Then the two immigrant men, wrapped in silence, feel the cold and the emotions related thereto in such a place. The touristic scenery is associated with a city where there are welcoming people and a lot of sightseeing options. However, this welcoming scenery is not for all – this space somehow excludes these two men and becomes a grey scenery in the metaphorical sense. Spaces carry emotional baggage and memories, and they

might be of joy as well as of despair. According to Sarikaya-Sen, “nostalgia is deployed with the aim of recognizing and healing the traumatic past of the Caribbean” (94). The spaces in this poem (London and the Caribbean) are laden with historical memories of fights and colonization that still affect its inhabitants. Almeida discusses cosmopolitan cities and, through her reading of Elizabeth Grosz’s work, argues that the space of mobility in cities of contemporaneity proposes a fertile articulation between constant interactions and the plural, moving bodies that inhabit these cities (“Cartografias" 143). The interaction of the two old black men in the poem above with the space of the city of London is indeed a locus of questioning. From the interaction of these bodies with the materialities and imaginations of the city, other imaginations can be constructed and defied. Furthermore, following Almeida’s claim that gender issues can be modified or restructured in the cosmopolitan transit (“Cartografias”155), I believe that the very ideas of bodies, materiality, and the more-than-human also find in these transits a fertile ground for new forms of imagination. It is in these transits, or meeting of trajectories, as Massey establishes, that our rigid notions of the world are questioned by our very experiences. The mention to the grey pigeon in Nichols’s poem makes us think how both the body of the pigeon, usually seen as unwanted by the people in the city, relates to the materiality of exclusion of the two old black men, who, like the pigeon, have ashy fingers (grey). They can learn from the bird to strut around, to occupy the places and spaces with their allegedly unwanted presence.

Nichols’s poems above approach the emotional aspects of space by referring to feelings and memories of an exterior physical place and the emotions associated with the experiences lived in those places. Kaur’s literary persona establishes an abstract concept of space where feelings reside. In *the sun and her flowers* (75), place is used as a metaphor.

tell them i was the

warmest place you knew

and you turned me cold (1-3)

This book is divided into five sections, named after the blooming stages of a flower: wilting, falling, rooting, rising, and blooming. This poem is part of "falling." The metaphor of the flower is attributed to the literary persona in her quest for self-love, for self-comprehension, and for life. In this poem, and in several others in this book, the literary persona reflects upon her love relationships and how this one in particular was damaging. What interests us the most is how a person is described as a "place." To create such an image is to connect human being and space by some of the same characteristics. In this case, the literary persona gives the space attributes of feelings, such as those we feel for our home, while she herself gains the attributes of being a physical locality to which one can return. Such interpretation can be sustained by how the literary persona describes her relationships in other poems of her work, including one when she herself is described as a city (Kaur, "milk and honey" 247):

did you think i was a city

big enough for a weekend getaway

i am the town surrounding it

the one you've never heard of

but always pass through

there are no neon lights here

no skyscrapers or statues

but there is thunder

for i make bridges tremble (1-9)

When the literary persona refers to herself as a city and opposes the city to a town, there is an inverse strategy in relation to that used by Kaur and showed above – personification. Instead of attributing human characteristics to more-than-human agents, the human receives the attributes of a place. The body is drawn "akin to a town". Thus, instead of "making 'public' her 'privates,' Kaur's poetry privatizes her persona's bodies publicly" (Kruger 5). Such dialogue between public and private has to do with the relation between local and global. Therefore, the poem presents a dialogue between human relations and space.

The poetic explorations we have seen so far relate, mostly, to the emotional and social connections with space and to how the abstract or imaginative is intrinsically linked with the physical. In Nichols's poem "In Guyana Dreaming" ("Picasso" 22-24), we see a bigger emphasis on the more-than-human materiality, side by side with the history of her home country, Guyana.

1

Smell of old ancestor blood

smell of conquistador

colour of the biblle

colour of the sword

Turquoise blue of morning

dark of jungle night

yellow brest of toucan

green of parrot flight

Red of Mayan warning

Kaieteur smoking white

rituals of colour

in dawn of forest-light (1-12)

This poem is a homage to the Guyanese artist, Aubrey Williams, born in 1926. This first section seems to be a description-reflection of his works. Even though this built image of Guyana is based on Williams's works, it can still engender other interpretations, when its material and cultural aspects are considered.

The history of violent colonization, religious control, and power hierarchies joins the colours the more-than-human grants Guyana. In the poem, this country, this space, is remembered by its human and more-than-human beings. The memories are constructed by both groups and they dialogue with one another. In Nichols's *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* (2009), inspired by the author's residency in the Tate Gallery in London, the lyrical subject plays with colours and their uses. In the poem presented above, we can also see the presence of the play with colours and their impressions. The red and the green, aligned with blood and hope, respectively, for example, can be easily connected with the history depicted in the first

stanza. This space, then, is coloured by historical memories of the past, and also by the more-than-human elements and agents.

Ursula Heise is one of the authors who propose the notion of eco-cosmopolitanism, which can be associated with this poem as well. According to Heise, the term cosmopolitanism "provide[s] a shorthand for a cultural and political understanding that allows individuals to think beyond the boundaries of their own cultures, ethnicities, or nations to a range of other sociocultural frameworks" ("Sense of place" 60). However, "whether this understanding is framed as thinking in terms of a shared humanity or in terms of access to and valuation of cultural differences, cosmopolitanism in these discussions is circumscribed by human social experience" (ibid). Thus, the concept of eco-cosmopolitanism broadens the horizon. It "reaches toward what some environmental writers and philosophers have called the 'more-than-human world' – the realm of nonhuman species, but also that of influence and exchange" ("Sense of place" 61). The depiction of Guyana points to these other influences that surround us, which are usually overlooked. It attempts, as eco-cosmopolitanism does, to "envision individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds" (Heise, "Sense of Place" 61). As Filipova argues, it is necessary "for environmentalism in the time of globalisation to envision an ecological ethics that is not based on ties to particular places but rather to the global" (21). It pictures us all – humans and more-than-humans – as world citizens, or even as planet citizens.

Nonetheless, the necessity to "examine how the perception of ties to the natural world fosters or obstructs regional, national or supranational forms of identification" (Filipova 22) must not overshadow the important and indispensable examination of the local. Filipova points that "advocates of eco-cosmopolitanism have also been criticized for playing down the

importance of environmental localism for the sake of embracing a dislocated cosmopolitan view, and for failing to acknowledge the presence of the global in some forms of environmental localism that they examine" (22). One form of environmental localism that eco-cosmopolitanism fails to examine is the affective ties one (or a community) develops with a certain space and its importance in individual and collective identitary construction. The last poem transcribed here shows one's attachment to a place, which stays in the literary persona's memory, as part of her view throughout life. The relationally, then, must be emphasized here, bearing in mind that the global the local (as the many other types of division of the world) are two sides of the same coin and cannot be severed.

Whether through the notion of space or of agency, we must expand our vision in order to embrace other forms of life. Nichols's and Kaur's poems allow for new forms of understanding the world surrounding us and the different forms of life and matter that exist. We must work towards a non-anthropocentric view of the world in order to fully grasp how the space we inhabit is more than just a background. It is alive and affects us. Defamiliarizing means looking with fresh eyes at something at which we have been used to looking from a single viewpoint. Comprehending how more-than-human life is as alive as we are and how it has an affect on our lives is the first step to achieve a new vision of the world. The second one is understanding how space is not a surface, but the meeting of trajectories and relations among human and more-than-human beings. It is not a thing, but a reflective, two-way movement happening at all times and altering itself and our lives at the same moment. Re-signifying the way we comprehend the world itself, the lives that share it with us, and the very notion of the space we inhabit is the beginning of acknowledging the processes, life, and relations that exist. By acknowledging the presence and effects that the more-than-human

establishes in our lives, bodies, and spaces, we can reframe the concepts by which we see our existence and our systems, and then, it becomes possible to accept new forms of reading literature and reflecting upon it.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EATING CONTINUUM: FOOD AS MEDIATION

> Si Aristóteles hubiera guisado, mucho más hubiera escrito.
> Juana Inés de la Cruz, *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*

> Food is Spirit. From food all things are born, by food they live, towards food they move, into food they return.
> Swami Chinmayananda, *The Tattiriya Upanishad*

Matter is alive and it has agency. Our surroundings are not mere background in which human beings perform actions. We continuously interact, change, and are changed by the more-than-human around and within us; in other words, the existing bodies of the world interact with one another. Bearing that in mind, in this chapter I examine one particular type of matter, food. I analyze the works of Kaur and Nichols in order to show that food, as an element with which human beings constantly and necessarily interact, can be seen as a mediator. Accordingly, I aim at dismantling another limit that has often been imposed on the body. The body, in its oppositional and binary division with the mind, has been understood as completely closed and unchangeable, as discussed in the first chapter. However, human handling and experimenting with food, as shown in the poems of Nichols and Kaur, can point to another form of understanding of how our bodies are connected and how they are in continual exchange with other forms of life, outside the limits we have imposed on our own materiality.

Food is the link to all beings. The most intimate form of contact humans have with the more-than-human is through food. Such contact is, certainly, realized through the act of eating. Nevertheless, this contact also refers to the ways in which human beings have strived

to control and live off nature. We have bred animals, cultivated plants, discovered medicines, and formed cultures by exploring land. We have started our contact with the natural world through food. Since the first known literary pieces written by humans, food has been present. The classic Indian text *Mahabharata*, written more than 2000 years ago, depicts food as a symbol of status and power, for example. Sarah Lawson Welsh, discussing the Caribbean cravings, as she names it, draws attention to the connection of the Anansi god in African oral narratives and myths to food and starvation ("Caribbean Cravings" np). We can even go further and look at cave paintings and see how food and eating have always been central themes of human expression. Even when theory and western philosophy had not yet been aware of it, literature "has always been attuned to commensality" and other food related themes (D. B. Goldstein 41). In fact, Dara Goldstein claims that literature not only has been attuned to eating and food, but that such link is necessary because, although food carries a big intellectual weight, it is essentially visceral (356). Thus, she comes to the conclusion that "what is missing from in food studies is the sensory and. . . the literary which is closely linked" (356). The literary is important for us to understand and express our connection with food, as "without the carnal textuality there is no doctrine" (Hostetter 26). Aaron Hostetter goes even further and claims that "ideals arise in partnership with materiality" (26). Accordingly, food in literature is not only a medium, a tool or an object. It is a subject that allows the development of thought.

In literature, food can become many things. Literary critic Robert Appelbaum states that food can be categorized in various ways. He chooses six of these categorizations that seem especially important to his discussion (130) and I believe they are relevant to mine as well. The author lists them in his article "Existential Disgust and the Food of the Philosopher." The first categorization is food as a material object; the second one, similarly

yet differently, as an occasion of gustatory and olfactory sensation. In the third one, it can be a historical phenomenon — as when “it is observed that new products and technologies of trade and cookery have been discovered or developed” (130) —; in the fourth categorization, food can be a sociocultural phenomenon (130). In the fifth one, food can be not just a subject of meaning, but the object of a practice, like in rituals (131). Finally, the sixth categorization is divided into two — both related to the metaphysical identity of food. In 6a, as Appelbaum establishes, food is identified as pure nutrition, whereas in 6b, it is identified as a characteristic or index of an order of being itself (131). By analyzing Appelbaum’s descriptions, we can see that there are many aspects to consider in relation to food and they all intersect. Nonetheless, most of them refer to human assignment of meanings, practices, and values to it. Thus, food becomes what we make of it.

Professor David B. Goldstein also discusses how he sees food, or rather, how western tradition sees it. He affirms that we usually think of food as “a thing, a discrete object that we measure and absorb” (39). From culinary preferences, to poisons, calories, nutrients, vegan, gluten-free or organic choices, food is termed as a basic biological element and as simply a part of a material, biological act. After considering some of the Greek philosophical tradition relating to food, Goldstein argues that Socrates and Plato’s vision of food has “influenced Western culture in countless ways”, and that can be succinctly described as forming an “empirical model of food” (40). Thus, if food is what we make of it, we can see how limited our comprehensions of it have been throughout the centuries.

Although food can be so vast in meanings and forms of understanding, it has only very recently become a category of literary analysis. The origin of such field does not have a single official story, but most of its existing stories "converge on the moment when food came to matter in new ways in the 1960s and 1970s because of pioneering work by anthropologists

Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu" (Coghlan 2). However, Michelle Coghlan offers an alternative entryway into food studies through Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*, published in 1957. Considering the many different existing origin stories, we could claim that food studies in the West started to actually appear about 60 years ago. Nonetheless, as noted by Mary Douglas, some previous works by anthropologists Audrey Richards and Margaret Mead were the actual pioneers on the field of Food Studies with publications as soon as 1939 and 1943, respectively (np). Many authors, like the ones quoted herein, have failed to explore the history of food studies in more traditional cultures outside the English-speaking world and Europe, even if the topic of food is present in all cultures and literatures. To what concerns the western academy, we can mention the date of 1985, when the Association for the Study of Food and Society was established. However, the term food studies first emerged in the 1990s, "when a range of disciplines. . . began to analyze food and foodways" (Coghlan 2). In 1996, the Department of Nutrition and Food Studies at New York University was founded. It is one of the undergraduate programs in US universities in this area. In 2001, the *Gastronomica* journal was started, underscoring the crystallization of the field (Coghlan 2). Also in 2001, in *Near a Thousand Tables*, Professor Felipe Fernández-Armesto stated that "most academic institutions still neglect it [food history]" (xi). Although the book was written more than 20 years ago, it can give us an idea of the area itself, along with the temporal marks established above. Undoubtedly, a lot has changed from 2001 to the present days and the field of food studies has grown substantially.

Nonetheless, I cannot refrain from pointing out how long it took the academy to delve into this area, even if now we have an effervescent number of works in the area and more being developed. Additionally, I must point out how food has been considered inside a limited point of view. Some previous and foundational works on Food Studies tried to develop more

considerations on the social and cultural aspects of food, such as Bourdieu's *Distinction*, originally published in 1979, that presented a vast ethnography of France society's eating habits, mainly the bourgeois, but that, as stated by Douglas, departs from a vision "far from unprejudiced" (np). Because food before such studies was usually dealt with only in nutritional terms, these authors failed to consider the material aspect of it, putting too much focus on the cultural and social aspects of eating and food. Following Douglas, "[g]iving food away unilaterally makes an asymmetrical relation" (np) and also fails to embrace the more-than-human as an active agent in our lives.

The development of food studies and the opening of our visions in relation to the topic of food was only made possible through a "feminist recovery of an under explored mode of women's writing: recipes" (Fretwell 182). In 1973, Mary Douglas already considered how the division of labor between the genders (or sexes, as she uses) has an impact on food (np), and, may I add, on the publishing scenario. However, even before that, Douglas analyzed food in her 1966 *Purity and Danger* by investigating the food taboos laid out in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. In relation to the gender intersectionality, scholars began to understand with time that "studying the relationship between women and food can help us to understand how women reproduce, resist, and rebel against gender constructions as they are practiced and contested in various sites, as well as illuminate the contexts in which these struggles are located" (Avakian and Haber 2). In 1991, Marjorie DeVault's book *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*, even if she did not name such theorization as Food Studies or even as Feminist Food Studies, somehow inaugurated this area. Following her, there were the 1998 Arlene Avakian's editing of *Through the Kitchen Window: Women Explore the Intimate Meanings of Food and Cooking* and the 1999 Penny Van Esterik's

article, “Right to Food, Right to Feed, Right to Be Fed:The Intersection of Women’s Rights and the Right to Food.” It is valid to point out also those books that were not considered as theory, but that offered instigating insights into the topic, such as Laura Shapiro’s 1986 *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century*. Along with these, many other books and articles came to contribute and expand the area of Feminist Food Studies. In addition to what we now term Feminist Food Studies but that also delve into the topic of food and gender, we must remember Susan Bordo’s foundational writings collected in the book *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* and how the author investigates the relation of women with food as well, even though food does not occupy the central stage of analysis.

I bring these important works to show how the path of Food Studies was paved first and foremost by Feminist Studies itself and how the connection between food and women has been acknowledged, felt, investigated, and provoked by these authors. In Barbara Parker *et al*.’s introduction to the book *Feminist Food Studies: Intersectional Perspectives* (2019), Feminist Food Studies are described as comprising “interdisciplinary scholarship and activism and uses[ing] food as a lens to explore and advance social justice” (1). More than that, the authors claim that the theory “employs a gender analysis and includes a concern for women and girls, and the various complex relationships that we have with food” but extends well beyond “gender and the idea that feminist food scholarship is synonymous with the concerns of women and girls as a biologically defined and assumedly homogeneous group” (1). They claim that “[r]ather, for us, feminist food studies is intersectional and concerned with the ways that various forms of oppression and privilege including, but not limited to, gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, religion, and age are shaped and experienced in relation to food” (1). This connection between food and the feminist field shows how both are connected through a

constructed marginalization, after all, “women have unique relationships with food in care work (of people, animals, and the natural environment); as food providers in the private and public realms; or in many cases as farmers, fishers, hunters, and gatherers” (Parker *et al*. 5). This may explain the marginalization both women and food were given throughout the centuries.

In Brazil, Sabrina Sedlmayer has tackled the topic for more than two decades now bringing enormous contributions about the hunger in Brazil and Brazilian literature as in her article “Comer o Passado Como Pão de Fome: Relações entre Comida e Literatura” published in 2014 and most recently in 2020 with the chapter “On Hunger and Brazilian Literature" in the book *Food, Texts, and Cultures in Latin America and Spain*, in which she explores the connection between hunger and words in a similar way to this dissertation’s exploration of the more-than-human agency and textuality. In 2015, professor Sandra Almeida published the book *Cartografias Contemporâneas* in which she discusses the relation of food, body, and gender issues in the books of the Japanese-Canadian writer Hiromi Goto. The diasporic component of Goto’s writing about food is also present in professor Gláucia Renate Gonçalves analysis of a Diana Abu-Jaber’s novel in the article “Diaspora and Sites of Memory: An Approach to Literature by Immigrants in the United States”. In this article, the cultural connection of food as emblematic of a belonging and of cultural negotiation is present in Gonçalves’s analysis showing the importance food has in understanding our links to human and more-than-human elements and agents. Despite these leading researches, the topic of food in literary studies, even with its relation and growth inside the feminist area, is not as developed as it could be.

The logic of marginalization of food studies stems from human exceptionalism, something I have already discussed in this dissertation. It is the false notion that humans are

disentangled from the rest of the world and that human beings are somehow superior and more important than other beings. This hierarchization has roots in the allegedly superior ability of humans to think, to have a consciousness (Mol 2). The sense of superiority rendered to humans, because of their thinking ability, led to a hierarchization of the senses as well. Thinking was considered superior to tasting, for example. Therefore, the attributes of the mind were deemed more valuable than the attributes of the body. This body-mind dichotomy also divided the senses of the human body. The undermining of the material world was followed — or perhaps led — by the undermining of the senses considered to be connected to the material. Hence, Western logic mistrusts smell or taste, doubts touch, and praises sight and hearing because they provide information about the outside world (Mol 3). However, we must begin to consider Annemarie Mol's proposal to "stop celebrating 'the humans' cognitive reflections *about* the world, and take our cues instead from human metabolic engagements *with* the world" (3). This would necessarily entail understanding humans as part of the world and nature, not apart from or superior to them. The material, then, would not be regarded as inferior nor would it belong to any other category, as there would be no hierarchization. The world would then be perceived as more connected, as it actually is.

If we were to do that, we would somehow equate ourselves to other creatures of this world. The material aspect of eating brings humans "down to earth" (Mol 126) and makes us face our own materiality. We can no longer pretend we are merely transcendental beings that have no material connections and necessities. Consequently, we must acknowledge that "'thinking' is not 'the human's' unique destiny" (Mol 128) and that we are continuously intertwined with the material world.

From such perspective, we may see how food can mediate between the allegedly opposed categories of the body and mind as well as the binary categories connected to this

division. It can be understood both as nature and culture. It is external matter that becomes internal. It is subjective, but also collective. It is a basic biological necessity, but also an affective marker. As stated by Douglas in her foundational work, food “enters the moral and social intentions of individuals” (np) and collectives at the same time that “a meal is a physical event” (np). Lévi-Strauss, in his mythological analysis in *The Raw and The Cooked*, already showed how the transformation of food from the realm of nature to that of culture is a form of language for societies, pointing to food’s mediating aspect.

Because food is a mediating force between the binary oppositions Western logic has created, it can lead us to other forms of understanding our world. Even from an academic standpoint, “the rise of food studies in programs in university structures and curricula clearly shows that food is a junction where diverse disciplines in the humanities, social and natural sciences, health and nutrition, and medicine can meet by creating a widening interest in interdisciplinary research and collaboration (Climent-Espino and Gómez-Bravo, “Introduction" np). Through literature we can see how food points to a continuum, instead of a division into categories. The term continuum is borrowed from the field of quantum physics, a field in physics that studies matter below the scale of atoms. According to physicist Carlo Rovelli, classical prerelativistic physics “provided a coherent picture of the physical world” (3). On the other hand, quantum physics or quantum mechanics is merely “an approximation” (Susskind and Freeman xx). The coherent and fixed picture no longer exists; the world becomes much bigger, uncertain, and somehow flexible. In a very acute explanation, Bruce Rosenblum and Fred Kuttner affirm that “[C]lassical physics explains the world quite well; it′s just the details it can′t handle”, whereas "Quantum physics handles the details perfectly; it′s just the world it can′t explain” (51). The acknowledgement that the vastness of the world

and our incapacity to understand fully, at least yet, is what most attracts me and my theorization to this field.

The notion of a continuum lies within this area of study. For quantum physics, then, the continuum is used in many situations, but I am especially interested in its relation to spacetime. Spacetime, from the perspective of quantum physics, is believed to be a continuum of four dimensions: three dimensions of space and one of time. They are not the same thing, but they are so entangled that they must be described as a continuum. I understand that food can be thought of in the same way. Rather than being sides of a binary, according to my analyses of Nichols and Kaur, food shows us how these binaries are more of a continuum than clearcut categories, such as spacetime. I bring such concept of a gradation first and foremost because it agrees with my thoughts on food as a mediator element. However, there is another reason as well. It is related to the idea that the field of physics is such a concrete, objective, and reason-based field of studies. Nonetheless, it is many times a field that constructs models of how the world may function and then tests them. It is not in fact a field of certainties, but of possibilities. The very idea of the continuum is one way to try to understand how the world functions. The continuum, even inside quantum physics, points to human incapacity to grasp our world entirely. It leads to a mitigation of our human hubris and, perhaps, an incorporation of how the more-than-human is much more than we consider, it has strengths, intelligence, and so many other attributes reserved only to the human and to the human-connected axis of the binary logic. Food, understood as a continuum, can point us another way to think and theorize, a way that is being pointed to us by literature, specifically here Nichols's and Kaur's works.

In order to show how food can be such a mediator, now I address the poems from such theoretical frame, by analyzing the categories of taste and of fruits. Such categories are the

focus of the exploration of food and of eating in the books discussed herein. Accordingly, I elaborate on the idea of food as a mediating force, which leads us to understand our bodies in a continuum.

The poems analyzed ahead bring interesting images related to taste and to fruits. Taste is a physical and biological element, connected with our organs and chemical reactions of the body, however, it is also connected with our emotions, affective memory, and other more abstract factors. It presents, then, in the poems, an important connection with the notion of the continuum. Fruits, on the other hand, provide us with a different vision of the continuum and of food as mediation. Fruits' connection with life and as a symbol of the cycles of life can point to a different form of mediation through the types of representation of food in the poems that connect the human and the more-than-human. Both elements, as portrayed in the authors' poetic works, have specific ways of pointing to how food is an important element that shows different forms to understand our bodies and their relation with the world surrounding us.

3.1 TASTING THE WORLD

The interaction with food can only happen through the act of tasting something. That is how we engage with the outside world. The human body opens itself to the more-than-human world. Taste is a word of many definitions. It has been used in the most different areas, metaphorically and literally. In Nichols's poem "The Decision" (9) from *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman and Other Poems* (1989), we can see the connections of the physical taste to other metaphors.

In restaurants he fed her

In bed said how he loved her

but she decided to leave him

because he was squeamish

Now she has a new lover

who doesn't feed her

or tell her he loves her

but who buries his face

in plain curiosity of her taste

And tells her how good she is O

And tells her how good she is.

The decision refers to the lazy woman's choice of partner, associated with how he is able to "taste her." The poem addresses female sexual freedom through the idea of taste. Before elaborating on the poem's discussion, we must understand the notion of taste.

The term taste has had several meanings throughout history, but all of them "relate in some way to the idea of intimate acquaintance with an object by means of one's own sensory experience" (Korsmeyer 40). A taste of something can have a quantitative connotation. It can also mean to touch or to smell, or even to test. It may also refer to personal preference, it can carry an affective valence, and it can provide an analogy for judgments of the quality of experience (Korsmeyer 41). Taste, then, can mean many things, but its meanings always indicate sensory experience. Its original use indicates physical sensation and all the attributions it has obtained throughout history refer to it.

One of the most recurrent ways taste has appeared in philosophy as a metaphor is through the notion of aesthetic taste. Its aesthetic feature is considered to have a “high" value. The five senses of the body have been organized in a hierarchy by science and philosophy. It is believed that the senses of sight and hearing may be labeled as cognitive or intellectual and, therefore, they are considered as higher senses (Korsmeyer 3). On the other hand, taste, smell, and touch are thought of, in western logic, as inferior. This happens because they require intimate relations with the object of attention, materially, and because of their relation with the material body. When taste is transferred from this material sphere to the aesthetic one, mainly in art, it gains more importance in the binary logic that divides the body from the mind, nature from culture, etc., a theme already approached in the previous chapters of this dissertation. Ironically, out of all metaphors, philosophy chooses one that is so visceral. It is almost as if this abstract discussion needed foundation on physical experiences, which would rebuke the very separation on which this logic is based.

The connection between taste and art is quite complex. Art is considered in the realm of the transcendent mind, whereas taste is in the bodily domain. Hence, they occupy almost opposite places and are given very different importances. Nonetheless, since the fifteenth century — with a wider usage from the seventeenth century on— there has been a connection between taste and appreciative judgment (Korsmeyer 41). Taste has been then construed as “the ability to perceive beautiful qualities and to discriminate fine differences among objects of perception, differences that might escape notice by someone without Taste” (Korsmeyer 42). The use of the word taste with a capital T by Carolyn Korsmeyer points to the differentiation between literal taste and its analogical use.

There is another complexity in the analogy of taste in art. Although the appreciation of art has always related to the establishment of beauty standards and, therefore, reason, the use

of the word taste points to a subjective experience. The so-called committees of taste formed in the eighteenth-century philosophy are today highly criticized for their association with social discrimination. Nonetheless, we still use this term not only to provide aesthetic judgments but also as a form of discrimination — or at least a critical one — of one's aesthetic opinion. The Latin saying *de gustibus non est disputandum* (there is no disputing about taste), hence, can be challenged.

Consequently, the historical use of taste shows that the analogy of the sense was included in the allegedly superior realm of reason, but the sense itself was not admitted into philosophical deliberations. Philosophy started contemplating taste with discussions on universal, collective, and individual preferences. Even though taste, with a lower-case t, was permitted to enter philosophical discussions in its analogy, the sense itself has "rarely caught attention of philosophers" – i.e., it was almost never considered. When it was indeed considered, it was "often to be dismissed as unworthy of extended examination" (Korsmeyer 1). This is due to the close connection of bodily senses to our material, physical nature, as already mentioned. It is also believed that it demands more control of ourselves with respect to moral behavior.

These notions were founded in classical antiquity. Unfortunately, they persist "in philosophies of perception through the centuries that follow" (Korsmeyer 26). This neglect cannot be mended by simply adding a philosophy or a science of taste to the existing tradition, for this deprecation is inscribed in a logic that lies in the foundation of the way we relate to others, to ourselves, and to food. Carolyn Korsmeyer asks, "[i]s the territory of taste really so bereft of interesting philosophical questions of its own? Or rather, have theoreticians prematurely dismissed complex issues because they were already assuming the unimportance of the bodily senses and the baseness of their pleasures?" (37). I believe that taste, in its

relation with food, can be richly discussed in literary analyses and in many other areas of knowledge because it brings us back to our inward knowledge, to our visceral perceptions of the world as it and not as the centuries of accumulated constructions we call knowledge claim the world to be. All the considerations and analogies involving taste showed here point to the impossibility of disentangling the transcendental thinking from the material feeling, and taste is a key to this discussion.

In Nichols's poem discussed above, we can see one of the ways taste can instigate a greater discussion. In the verses, there is a specific type of engagement: the relation of taste, or food, with sex. This association comes from the notion of drives or appetite. Our basic bodily needs of nutrition are often classified as drives (Korsmeyer 95). A drive is an "uncontrollable, physically generated urgency, and it signals another way in which taste may be associated with 'primitive' forces" (Korsmeyer 95). In other words, a drive is a sensation considered uncivilized, basic in the evolutionary way, and in need of control. However, in the second chapter of this dissertation, I defend that the body has its own agency and that the need for control should be dismissed. Accordingly, what I understand as drive is a bodily expression of something the body knows, but perhaps the mind does not, at least not consciously. In Nichols's poem, a decision is made, which is something usually attributed to the works of the mind. However, the lazy woman made her choice by listening to her body.

The image of the female body is a symbol for the language of drives. It is commonly employed as a figure of temptation of sexual desire (Korsmeyer 36). Everything associated with the body is usually seen as in need of control, but here, "loosing" such control is what makes the lazy woman achieve what she wants. The desire, the taste, leads her to the best outcome, as shown at the end of the poem. It is interesting to think of how the body and the mind are placed in opposite paths. Nevertheless, in Nichols's poem, when the lazy woman

decided to listen to her body's cravings, she found the reason in her choice, but not through the paths it is usually associated with by society. She found reason based on the urges of her body.

The poem has two main sound patterns: one is softer and the other one is more marked. The stricter one is the sound of R, present in the words lover, buries, curiosity, restaurants, and her, repeated multiple times. The pronunciation of R in these words demands a forceful muscular use of the tongue and the jaw and requires a strong movement of one's phonetic system. It also provokes the formation of an O with the lips, even if the sound of O is not muttered. However, after provoking so much tension in the repetition of the consonant R, in the final verses the letter O is pronounced and written in upper case, as in a sigh of relief. This pattern of sound builds up tension that has a final alleviation, which may refer to the sexual act itself. More than that, it may be associated with the sexual climax the lazy woman reaches with her new partner. Considering the binary logic that divides our world in opposing categories and that diminishes the body and its functions, sexual pleasure, connected here with the idea of food, can be a liberating and subverting tool to understand body and mind in a non-dichotomizing way. In fact, the word taste can also mean knowledge. The etymological Latin words for taste and knowledge are very close – *sapere* and *sapore*. Massimo Montanari argues that this shows how the "sensorial assessment of what is good or bad, pleasing or displeasing" (61) is a type of knowledge. It is an evaluation of the world, a way to know more about what surrounds us and it comes from, as in the poem above, from the bodily realm.

Brillat-Savarin was one of the first intellectuals of food studies — at a time when the notion of food studies was far from being acknowledged as such —, who reflected deeply on the subject of taste. He wrote the book *The Physiology of Taste, or Meditations on*

Transcendental Gastronomy (in the English translation) in eighteenth-century France. Even at that time, he established how taste was connected with knowledge, something with which many of his colleagues disagreed and which was dully theorized centuries later. He affirmed that "gastronomical knowledge is necessary to all men [sic], for it tends to augment the sum of happiness" (np). The preoccupation with food and taste, then, since his time — at least for him — has been related to more than just biological nutrition.

On another note, the reference to taste in Nichols's poem does not only function to connect the lazy woman's sexual desire with appetite for food. First of all, it attributes taste to a person, which can be unusual. The reference to the previous partner as "squeamish" also relates to this universe, since squeamish can be connected to someone feeling nauseated, i.e., being sick to one's stomach. Thus, we could infer that her former lover was not so keen on "tasting" her. The taste attributed to women is usually manifested in two ways: it is either the taste of a culinary concoction the woman has made (since the domestic and cooking space are relegated to the feminine as both are understood as inferior) or the taste of her body in a sexual context. In the latter sense, the lazy woman wants to be tasted and actually demands a partner that is willing to taste her (which is associated with orality in sexual intercourse). From such perspective, we resume the question of sexual freedom. However, by conferring taste to a person, the poem is also open to the interpretation of cannibalism. I am not suggesting that the poem is about the cannibalistic act itself, but the logic of cannibalism can be found in this piece of poetry.

In the cannibalistic logic, the act is not seen as something primitive or violent. It is a "conspicuous instance of a universal fact: food reinterpreted as more than the bodily sustenance — the replacement of nutrition by symbolic value or magic power as reason for eating," i.e., "the discovery that food has meaning" (Fernández-Armesto 29). Felipe

Fernández-Armesto, considering what cannibal means, states that health foodies, or other "contemporary faddists who eat for beauty or brain-power or sex drive or tranquility or spirituality", fall into the category of cannibals as well (29). Cannibalism has become such a horrifying idea due to the colonial enterprise. When European colonizers first interacted with the original peoples of the colonized lands, they needed a justification for their domination and violence against other human beings. The connection made to establish those peoples as inferior and, in the colonial logic, in need of guidance, was to relate them with savagery and, therefore, with animals. One of the ways this was conducted was by attributing cannibal practices to these peoples. We see, then, how the idea of cannibalism as a horrible practice and not as a symbolic statement came into being mainly because of colonialism.

Nichols is from the Caribbean and her poetry is closely related to such Caribbean culture. Therefore, it is imperative to consider the meanings assigned to cannibalism in this colonial context. Accordingly, we could claim that the Caribbean has been consumed by European enforcement. Literally, it is consumed because of the economical exploitation of their products and enforced production of sugar, tobacco, and many other foodstuffs. Metaphorically, it is consumed by the colonial exploitation of lands and peoples. According to Njeri Githire, "the production of colonial goods and their role in transforming European diets and tastes is a historical phenomenon that indelibly etched Caribbean/Indian Ocean societies in the European subconscious and led to the metonymic displacement of these societies' identities to the comestibles they produced" (4). More recently, consumption has taken other forms. As Caribbean societies have become mass producers of immigrants to North America and Europe, "the consumption of Caribbean/Indian Ocean bodies as immigrant labor is propagated through artificially low wages and poor prospects" (Githire 5). Moreover, Caribbean and Indian Ocean islands have become "popular and profitable tourist destinations

correlated with the appeal of commercial activities such as carnivals and other sites of cultural reproduction." As they have been "transformed into exotic cultural products, these societies have become packaged commodities for external consumption" (Githire 5). In all these forms, the European colonizer has consumed the Caribbean, but it is the Caribbean that was deemed as savage and primitive, and associated with cannibalism, which "provided the ultimate justification for domination, consumption, and exploitation of these societies as a preemptive measure that would ensure the security of the imperial/colonizing self" (Githire 5). The very name Caribbean is related to the origins of the word cannibal. However, "while there was little evidence of native anthropophagous practices, there *was* some evidence of European cannibalism, albeit in extreme situations of shipwreck and starvation, while. . . symbolic cannibalism became, and to a large extent remains, the core ritual of Christian practice" (Huggan and Tiffin 188). Despite such colonial construction of cannibalism and its relation with the former colonized and racialized peoples, as addressed by the Brazilian movement of anthropophagy, the cannibal association can be dismantled and reconstructed. In the analysis of the Goto's book *Chorus of a Mushroom* previously mentioned, Almeida shows how the consumption under a cannibalistic optic inside the anthropophagous logic may evoke the possibility of many things such as cultural translation, critical hybridism, and rescue of the cultural legacy left behind in a diasporic scenario (139). In "Tea with Demerara Sugar" (39) in Nichols's *Passport to Here and There* (2020), we can also see such association reframed.

> I've given up trying to give you up,
> Demerara (not that I've ever tried).
> Friends admonish me gently as they sip
> their own unsweetened brew (ironically)

tucking into cakes far beyond me and you.
I say I've paid too high a price to give you up
and that just a teaspoon of you is enough
to brighten the tone of my tastebuds.
I know your cost in tears, brown sugar,
the bloody sweat behind each crystal grain —
you whose shadow still haunts the sun,
our riddling water stand-up water lay down —
turning me inward to my Demerara days,
your canetalk whispers fermenting the night air.

The idea of giving up Demerara sugar relates to erasing the history of slavery and suffering. The material sugar and its act of consumption are a symbol of the act of liberation from colonial domain. The cannibal logic can be seen here too: food has meaning, and eating has magical powers to free people from their history and from the history of their previous generations of exploitation and hardship. Considering that in plantation culture, slaves were beaten or even killed for eating or taking, in this case, sugar, eating Demerara is indeed, according to the poem, a subversive action. The literary persona refuses to give it up because of an allegedly healthy diet, although those who admonish her probably eat industrialized, sugary cakes.

Therefore, in this analysis, cannibalism is very much anthropophagical. It is the devouring of one's right. In a 2022 article, Cimara Valim de Melo describes what she names "decolonial anthropophagy" as a proposition to devour the remains of a single story (in a reference to Chimamanda Adichie's danger of a single story TEDTalk) to address plural

narratives, with attention to diversity and to the agglutination of silenced voices throughout the centuries (129). It is in the same way that, in the poem above , the act of eating and tasting the sweet sugar becomes a metaphor for liberation, however materially performed. The mention of the taste buds as brightened has the connotation of how the material taste can affect one's mind, humor or even life. Food is fundamental not only for our biological nutritional requirements, but also for our other essential needs for a broader sense of life. One may survive on bread and water, but this literary persona needs Demerara sugar to actually live. This is what cannibal means in this poem: eating and tasting are not mere artifacts of a mechanical body; they are necessary for a fulfilling life.

Beyond the considerations of cannibalism in the poem, there are other ways through which the poem constructs the importance of the materiality of eating. This focus on the materiality is achieved through the very materiality of the text. In the verse "Friends admonish me as they sip," the repetition of the letter S points to the act of sipping a drink. Also, when the poem refers to the cost of the sugar, it uses bodily fluids as measurement units, e.g., blood, tears, and sweat. These bodily fluids not only approximate the history of sugar and the relation of literary persona with it in a visceral aspect, but it emphasises the physical suffering colonized and enslaved people went through because of sugar. Throughout the entire poem, the literary persona is speaking with the Demerara sugar. It is as if there is a dialogue with it. The literary persona refers to the demerara as "you," repeated times and, at the end of the poem, claims that remembering such history involving the Demerara turns her inward "to my Demerara days." These Demerara days may suggest the time of slavery and forced work of sugarcane fields. Nonetheless, considering that the literary persona does not live in such times – as the analysis of the book shows – and that she somehow claims possession of sugar by

eating it and transforming such acts into a liberation, Demerara days may be a metaphor of better days as well. Demerara sugar, then, although being the center of so much suffering, at the same time, is hope.

The mentioning of Demerara in the form of "you," thus in a kind of dialogue, along with the turning inward also brings us to the idea of the visceral connection with Demerara. This vision supports Mol's proposal of taking cues "from human metabolic engagements *with* the world" (3). The act of turning inward can be seen as a visceral encounter with our bodies and with how the eating of Demerara invites one to reflect upon the inner workings of the body and how they affect our lives and constructions of the world.

This turning the Demerara into a participant of this dialogue by calling it you is also a form of anthropomorphization of the sugar. In the final verse, the sugar even talks back with its "canetalk" and it also ferments the night air. These two actions turn the sugar into an equal of some sort, someone or something with which I can talk and whose actions affect me. Considering the discussions elaborated in the second chapter about agency and about the impossibility of escaping anthropomorphism entirely, then sugar becomes an actor, a living being such as the literary persona, and the idea of cannibalism as a symbolic act appears again. It points, once more, to the symbol of cannibalism in an anthropofagous way.

In a different manner, in "The Decision" analyzed previously in this dissertation, the idea of cannibalism is connected to the body in a sexual tone and to a desired consumption. It is the pleasure of being tasted, not that of eating or tasting the sugar, for example. The last verses of the poem are a repetition of an affirmation about the taste of the lazy woman, declared by her new partner. It is, metaphorically, the pleasure of being eaten. However, in this case, the lazy woman is the one who possesses power, she is the one who makes the

decision. In a shift of the balance, — referring to the idea of agency as established in the previous chapter — the agency in "The Decision" is not related to the one who is performing the act, but to the one receiving it as she wished. Therefore, not only does the idea of taste encompass a mediation between what we understand to be the workings of the mind and the body, but it also encompasses the workings of the body itself.

This happens because the literal gustatory taste is only understood in connection to bodily actions. However, if we analyze how the actual process of recognizing taste works in our body, we can realize the complexity of such operation. The first thing to consider is that taste does not act alone. Smell is considered the closest cousin to taste (Gigante 3). Touch is also connected to taste because of the organ of the tongue (Gigante 13), but smell is considered the most connected with it, as its kin. As one of the "chemical" senses, it is indeed very difficult, if not impossible, to conceive a taste or flavor without the olfactory complement (Korsmeyer 3; 68). Korsmeyer argues that both smell and taste need a proximity to the object of knowledge, which conflicts with a high aesthetic and even scientific experience. Besides, because they engage viscerally with the object of gustatory taste, which enters the body, they are said to draw attention to the body, inwardly, and not to the world outside (68). I disagree with such argument for two reasons: firstly, the idea that experiencing something with one's body cannot be the means for obtaining knowledge about it and about the world; and secondly, our body is completely severed and different from our surroundings. Therefore, attention to its inward workings would be unfavorable to obtain knowledge about us, about the world, about nature and about the more-than-human – whatever terminology used to refer to the world in and surrounding us.

In Nichols's *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*, "Like a Beacon" (29) provides food for thought, concerning the topic of smell and the assertions with which I disagree, as stated in the previous paragraph.

In London
every now and then
I get this craving
for my mother's food
I leave art galleries
in search of plantains
saltfish/sweet potatoes

I need this link

I need this touch
of home
swinging my bag
like a beacon
against the cold

The most striking feature in the poem at first sight is how the memory of taste is what drives the fat black woman through the streets. Searching for food in the street may be accomplished by the sight, looking out for restaurants or food carts. Looking for a specific type of food, especially one that has flavor particularities such as the ones mentioned, is

accomplished by smell. The smell is what guides the fat black woman to find what she desires.

Throughout the whole poem, the narrated scene has a very emotional and flexible tone. There are no temporal markers except “every now and then.” The motivation for the entire tale is a memory of her mother’s food, a very emotional motif. The very mention of the word “craving” and the repetition of the words “I need”, along with the aforementioned points, can suggest how this narrated scene is founded on bodily senses and functions. The notion of craving or drive may be linked to a primitive response of the body. However, in the final stanza, the object of desire is connected to a beacon, in dialogue with the title. A beacon is a reference to light and light has been seen, since antiquity, in association with reason. Furthermore, the fact that the fat black woman leaves art galleries, in order to pursue her craving, leads us back to the discussion of aesthetic and gustatory taste. Art is sometimes referred to as “food for the soul/mind,”, due to its transcendental and intellectual connotations. Interestingly, Sarah Lawson Welsh connects the African-American concept of “soul-food” with “Like a Beacon” because of how Caribbean food functions as a link, a “touch of home” (“Grace Nichols” 96). The aspect of taste mediating between mind and body is present not only in the mention of a soul-food, but also in how differently this soul-food can be interpreted. If art is also soul-food, why would the fat black woman leave the art galleries in pursuit of material food to fulfill what her soul was craving? M.F. K. Fisher, gastronomical writer from the twentieth century, establishes how we have three basic needs and the why there are three, “for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others” (353). This idea is associated with the soul-food idea and establishes that the basic things one needs to live — not only survive — are biological, but also abstract, mental or even affective. From a different but related

perspective, the famous pyramid by psychologist Abraham Maslow defined a hierarchy of necessities. On the bottom there are physiological needs. On top there is safety, followed by social needs, status or esteem, and finally self-fulfillment. Contrary to what is established in the pyramid, and according to Fisher's ideas, I do not believe our physiological needs can be considered more important than some of the others. For example, people with severe psychological and affective issues sometimes cannot eat for they do not feel hungry, which leads to the deterioration of the body. Thus, physiological needs and, as we may call them, affective ones, cannot have such a clearcut division. I also believe that, by analyzing the poem, the importance of food over and above mere biological needs has a clear connection with its cultural aspect — even if the biological should not be considered hierarchically inferior.

In fact, in the poem, there is a certain "power of reminiscence," as called by Karen Concannon, that puts the idea of physiological *versus* affective need in question. Concannon claims that such is demonstrated "[t]hrough the beautiful art in the galleries and the continued desire for the food of childhood despite the surroundings" (216). The memories the fat black woman has of "the mother's cooking are intense enough that they supersede the surrounding beauty and importance of the galleries, and the imagery of taste brings about the nostalgia of childhood and place" (Concannon 216). Through these tensions, then, the link between the fat black woman and her home becomes also the link between these divided categories that permeate our body and are, as the poem goes, enmeshed. The visual construction of the poem also points to such enmeshment. The verse "I need this link" is separated from the other two longer stanzas and stands alone in the middle of the poem, acting, then, as link itself.

The reference to the “touch / of home / swinging my bag” also brings some insight about the link being established. The movement of the bag suggests that the fat black woman's body is in movement and, therefore, the bag, possibly on her shoulder or body, moves too. The bag's movement of going back and forth is connected to the circular movement of a beacon that circles with the light it points. The relevant point here is that the beacon is not herself nor the food. The movement her senses put her body into are represented by a third object, the bag. This distancing of the agent – herself – points to the action and the consequences, not to the cause of it. In other words, the action of looking for her hometown food guided by her senses is what stands in the center. It is not about making decisions, but following instincts or, in this case, the senses of smell, taste, and even nostalgia. It is almost as if the fat black woman is seduced, in transe, suggesting how our senses are as important and affect us as much as our alleged rational thought. Food, then, becomes not only a part of culture, but also a guiding identitary mechanism.

The association of food with culture may be a strange one, as we tend to easily relate food to nature, just as we tend to separate nature from culture. However, “the dominant values of the food system in human experience are. . .not defined in terms of ‘naturalness,’ but result from and represent cultural processes dependent upon the taming, transformation, and reinterpretation of Nature” (Montanari xi). In other words, although we may see food as nature because it comes from earth, the processes necessary for it to actually become food are inherently cultural.

By preparing food, transforming it with fire, fermentation, or any other technology humans have invented, we are creating something. According to Western logic, culture is defined in opposition to nature, i.e., it is the sphere of human creation and manipulation. However, I would like to point out that I do not agree with this definition nor with the

separation of culture from the so-called natural realm. Separating culture from nature so distinctly is to ignore that we, human beings, the ones who create and produce culture, are part of nature. If culture, then, is produced by us, nature, how can they bear such separation? Even more, our culture is affected by natural effects and by actions of those beings considered nature themselves, e.g., animals, plants, bacterias. Did the world and our culture not stop for more than a year due to a virus in 2020? Food becomes an ally of our thought. It comes from what is seen as nature but must be transformed for our taste/consumption. After that, it becomes culture. It circulates, first "through ecological transformations that start with soils, plants, and non-human animals, and then through relationships with other people" (D.B. Goldstein 40). It is a "material trace of the biological, ecological, social, and symbolic interactions that link eater, eaten, and the macrocosm that surrounds them" (ibid). Therefore, food is a mediator in its very core.

There is also another aspect to consider, which I deem to be even more relevant, that food is a cultural matter. It is related to the collectivity of the act of eating and tasting. Food is both a form of socializing and of identification. In the former, the table and the communion of the act of eating creates a social bond. In the latter, social, racial, or geographical classes of people develop a common culinary based on shared tastes and knowledge. This can make a group of people living in the same place, by choice or fate, become an actual community. According to Fernández-Armesto in *Near a Thousand Tables* (2001), food sharing is a "fundamental form of gift exchange, cement of societies" (103). However, even more than creating identity, food can destabilize it (Cheng 218). In the poem "Like a Beacon" discussed above, the soul-food becomes a soul-food because of its communal characteristic. In fact, Sarah Lawson Welsh uses such poem as an example to establish that "literary texts do not merely reflect but sometimes also mediate process of culinary deterritorialization and

reterritorialization" ("Caribbean Cravings" np). As the literary persona feels connected to her social group through food, the experience of tasting saltfish, for example, is more valuable for her soul than going to the art galleries. It is also destabilizing because it questions the colonial formation of identity and race, by rejecting what is supposed to be seen as a superior form of expression. Food becomes more intellectually instigating than the aesthetic work of art. Once more, taste shows how food mediates between previously fixed opposed categories and how such categories are more of a continuum than opposites. Accordingly, taste, along with smell, may lead us to a more inclusive theory.

The second consideration that must be made about how taste comes to happen is about the organ with which it is mostly associated: the tongue. To consider the tongue is to consider the most physical aspect of eating and the poems here discussed use such physical presence to question how food is actually seen. Simply put, the tongue is "a rough-surfaced muscle that churns and moves food during the process of mastication and swallowing" (Korsmeyer 72). It has taste buds, clusters of receptor cells, that are globular and possess an opening called the taste pore at the top through which the flavor of food enters and interacts with the "microvilli," which are projections from the taste cells that surround the pore (Korsmeyer 73). Although the tongue is indeed the receptor of flavors, it is not exactly through the tongue that we experience taste. The tongue acts only as the receptor. After the "tastants" (molecules of dissolved substance) come into contact with the taste buds, there are several chemical reactions that produce further chemicals, "which act as neurotransmitters and stimulate neurons that extend into the taste bud" (Korsmeyer 73-74). These neurotransmitters convey the information along several cranial nerves until it reaches the brain. Then, and only then, the taste sensation itself occurs in our consciousness (ibid). Therefore, the necessary process in order for us to experience taste may begin in the mouth, but it only fully occurs in the brain.

This may be seen as another way to corroborate that the brain – our mind – is what really provides us with knowledge. However, in my understanding, our knowledge can be formed only through tongue, taste, smell, i.e., through physical contact with the outside world. It is through the questioning of such divisions and associations that Nichols's and Kaur's portrayal of food draws our attention to how food can be an element of mediation and, as I argue in this chapter, a continuum.

Among other themes, “A Poem for Us” (48) in *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman* (1989) addresses the workings of the brain, in comparison to the preparation of a dish.

Today I’m going to make a poem for us

I get out the big ware bowl
and wooden spoon

I reach for the flour in the box
that says; GARDEN OF EDEN
(Before the advent of the Serpent)

I add the simple aware-seed ring you gave
the granite and rainbow miracle
still amaze me

I add our butter love
I add your chain

(it makes a hell of a rattle)

I find the tightly screwed down bottle

with my woman howl

The container with your man pain

Now I'm a dealer in mud and water

Now I'm a dealer in mud and water

Giving shape

Giving shape to our unborn

The child who watches us from some place.

Who is both happy and sad. Watching us.

In my reading, the most remarkable motif of the poem is the loss of a child. At the end of the poem, there is a child watching from some place, which is very close to the common popular reference to heaven, paradise, or any other religious notion of the afterlife. There is also the use of the word unborn, which may suggest a stillborn, which renders a different connotation to the act of making a poem or a dish. The creation of something, be it an intellectual object such as a poem or a material dish, is now connected to the creation of life — and to its loss as well. Although the literary persona puts herself in the place of a mother, by referring to mud and water, the Serpent, and the Garden of Eden, she also somehow puts herself in the place of a goddess. This goddess creates a poem, a dish, a child — or so she wishes she could.

The creation occurs through the mixing of ingredients that are listed in the poem. The structure follows the genre of a recipe, detailing the necessary tools. However, these physical tools, such as the bottle, begin to have more abstract features. The bottle is screwed tightly by a woman howl and contains a man pain. This metaphorical use of a physical container to hold an abstract idea — even if it is very visceral — is another way to see food as a mediator between spheres. However, the act of making a child is not the element that connects the making of a poem with the making of food. Instead, the poetic idea of creating something is associated with the creation of life by means of food. Food provides the visceral feature of a very intellectual object that cannot be touched but can transmit the very depths of a mother's pain. It is through a recipe of making a poem that this pain can be tasted — or conveyed.

The "butter love" is an interesting image to discuss. Butter can be used in cuisine as a bonding material. It is also slippery, which assigns to it a possible dual metaphorical meaning. It is the same with love, especially the one referred to in the poem, that of a romantic relationship. The "butter love" element, then, makes us think about the hardships and sweetness of love as a creating force — metaphorically, surely, but also physically in the case of procreation. Furthermore, the metaphor of "butter love" also has a pinch of synesthesia. The element of butter invokes taste, a physical sensation, whereas love — and pain, in this case, the loss of a child — is an abstract idea of an emotion that can be, and often is, felt physically as well. It is a sort of synesthesia which combines two different types of sensation and, more importantly, which establishes them as equal. Thus, there is equality among taste, emotions, creation; visceral, physical, and intellectual sensations. The link between these realms means we can also connect the areas that separate theoretical apparatus and concepts. Butter love, then, collaborates with the idea that food functions as a continuum not only

between the division of nature and culture, but between the other divisions that derive from such a binary view of the world.

Similarly, but in a more incisive and direct manner, Nichols's poem “O Tea” (34) in *Passport to Here and There* (2020) also addresses such type of connection.

Like the heart that hungers for the perfect poem,
the palate hungers for the perfect cup of tea,
not unlike poetry, since the outcome will be
how it wants to be, a marriage of balance and taste
(a little more hot water, a bit more milk)
an alchemist, running on pure instinct —
O Tea that speaks of a leisurely
conviviality and a giving back to yourself
Tea that reaches the parts other brews can’t
Tea that won’t give you the quick
pick-me-uppedness of coffee
but will subtly change the chemistry of the blood.
Tea that will infuse like an orchestra
infuses a great opera, which is of course yourself.

In this poem, the flow of the rhymes resembles that of the water, or of tea being poured. The rhymes occur in the final and mid verse, as in orchestra-opera; leisurely-conviviality; will be-wants to be. Sometimes it is a repetition more than a rhyme per se, but the sound similarities give a certain flowing tone from one verse to the other. The lack of

division in separate stanzas is also united in such tone. This wavy form of flow in the sound of the verses may indicate a continuity and a correlation among categories and associations. Water itself is an element of fluency — in the physical sense of flow. Tea is an element of connection in its physical form, but also in the idea associated with the poem. Tea is compared to an orchestra, aesthetically pleasing and mind challenging, but it is also capable of changing the chemistry of the blood in a very physical and visceral way. Once more, there is no division between these ideas, which mingle and interact with one another, in a continuum.

An important aspect of tea is that it is made through infusion, which is carried out in a few steps. The first one is the immersion of the plant in hot water. The properties, especially the taste of the herb, are transferred to the water, which becomes tea. In a continuum, materials are constantly interacting with one another and creating new entanglements, which, in turn, interact with the preexisting and new materials, going on to create other materials as well. In the case under discussion, tea is not only created through one of such processes, but its effects on the body and mind of a person provoke even more changes. Accordingly, infusion is the process through which one makes tea, but it can also be interpreted as a metaphor for transformations that occur in our life and in theory. These changes are not always intentional or even conscious, as the tea in the poem, which “not unlike poetry” turns out “how it wants to be” in a marriage of “balance and taste.” These images are compared to those of an alchemist working merely with instinct. Instinct in animals (all animals) is considered as a typically fixed pattern or behavior that responds to certain stimuli. Although the idea of instinct is historically connected to an inborn and innate biological response, psychology has some contemporary theorizations that acknowledge that instinct can be a form

of knowledge as well, i.e., it is not always innate; it can be learned[3]. Therefore, the figure of the alchemist is pre-scientific, but, at the same time, alchemy is also a misunderstood and underrated type of knowledge. The same happens with taste. Its physical workings in our body – beginning with the tongue but not in any way limited to it –, and its other forms, affect body and mind.

The considerations about taste presented so far in the analysis of the poems by Nichols and Kaur have showed us that it is more than a physical aspect of our eating experience. Let us turn to the meanings taste itself can have due to other-than-physical processes involved in the poems. In Kaur's poem from *The Sun and Her Flowers* (2017) on page 191, the flavor sweet is taken to a metaphorical level that may reveal a lot about how taste comes to mean.

you must have a
honeycomb
for a heart
how else
could a man
be this sweet

The heart is an organ commonly associated with feelings. It is said to be impulsive, passionate, and irrational. It is often seen in opposition to the brain, because of the many associations between mind and transcendent reason, already discussed in this dissertation. In Kaur's poem, the heart, metaphorically considered the home of feelings, gains a new metaphor: that of a honeycomb. The honeycomb is where the honey is produced, where it

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[3] See Mark s. Blumberg, "Development Evolving: The origins and meanings of instinct," 2017.

comes from. Owing to the metaphor of the heart as a honeycomb, we can infer that the heart, home of feelings, produces honey. Honey, in turn, has many characteristics that could be used in this metaphor, but the one adopted in the poem is that of its sweetness. Honey may be, indeed, one of the sweetest natural elements found in nature. It is, then, a natural, more-than-human source of sweetness.

The sense of taste, despite being really complex, as shown with details of its biological and neurological processes, has four basic divisions. The different tastes a person may experience are divided into four basic flavors: sweet, sour, salty, and bitter. Our tongue has different receptors for each of them. The reception for saltiness occurs along “the front and sides” of the tongue, while the reception for bitterness is “relegated to the back of the tongue, just before the throat” (Korsmeyer 74). The sourness “is most acute along the sides” (Korsmeyer 74), and the sweetness has its most sensitive part in tip of the tongue (ibid). This division in our tongue is not random; it is biologically relevant, said to be “a safety factor” (Korsmeyer 74). The bitterness, for example, which stands "guard at the last point where swallowing can be halted” cannot be a mere coincidence with the fact that “many poisons are intensely bitter” (Korsmeyer 74). That is why many people experience gag reflexes with bitter tastes. Similarly, tentative licks of sweetness of food “can detect healthful carbohydrates” (Korsmeyer 74). The taste experience, then, goes beyond mere pleasure. But more than that, as these four flavors are, in a somewhat equally way, apprehended universally, they can gain somewhat equally apprehended meanings. In many cultures, the use of sweet flavors signifies good luck or even divine favor. For example, the Jew eat honey at New Year (Korsmeyer 101). Moreover, if we consider the universal attraction to sweet and salt and aversion to bitter (Korsmeyer 103), we can see how taste is complex, as it is individual and collective at the same time.

Because of such shared experiences with taste, the flavors can become a symbol system. Sweet, then, becomes good luck, and bitterness can refer to a very depressing expression. In the case of Kaur's poem above transcribed, the metaphor used for the representation of the heart, which is a metaphor itself, uses a symbolic system of what it means to be sweet. This symbolic dimension can go even further than the taste identification. Meals and dishes can become meaningful as well. The examples given by Carolyn Korsmeyer concerning soup and croissants are pertinent cases. The author states that the former has historically become an expression of care, supported by the "literal properties that soup also has: a rich but not taxing flavor, ingredients that are easy to swallow, and so on" (132). It is also true that such symbolic systems may function within a closed community or even a family but cannot be universalized. Nonetheless, I would say we might be able to generalize about the existence of symbolic systems related to food and taste. The second example, according to Korsmeyer, is not so much about the physical properties of croissants, but about their history. The author recounts that croissants were invented in Vienna, in 1683, in celebration of the defense of the city against the Ottoman Turks. Viennese bakers "crafted little buns in the shape of crescent moons on the flag of their enemies" (20). Thus, people could symbolically devour the invaders. With time, croissants stopped referring to the Christian victory over Islam, and became known for a different culture, as "how long such references continue to function will vary greatly with time and place" (Korsmeyer 20). However, this example shows us how food can be used in a meaningful way to establish common repertoires, as seen in the poems analyzed here.

That is how the metaphors in Kaur's poem work. The poet uses two common meanings attributed both to the heart and to the sweet taste, and such meanings create an idea about someone. The poem is a description of a loving man, shown as a romantic partner. This

description, then, is grounded on a common symbolic system that manages to make sense for the global public of Kaur's poetry. In the example of the soup, it was its properties that gave it meaning, but in the case of the croissant, it was the historical experience of a group of people. In the poem, it is neither. All sweet things have common properties but cultures do not use sweet foods the same way. Taste and its complex system in the human body provide all human beings — and I would risk saying even more-than-human beings — with a similar experience. Therefore, there is a common reaction to and metaphorical understanding of it. Once again, body and mind work jointly. Experiences, which are usually attributed to each of them separately, occur together and are shaped by one another. The good feeling of sensing a sweet meal is formed in the brain, and the idea that something sweet is good depends on our tongue's receptors. Kaur's poem even hints at the human/more-than-human interaction when it places a more-than-human product inside a human body.

It is interesting how the poem only mentions the word sweet in the last verse. It is the very last word, maybe because it marks a strong ending, but maybe because the poem counts on our common experiences to make sense of it. A honeycomb may be similar to a heart in format, but this is not the feature that draws them together in the metaphorical connection, at least not the only feature. What joins the honeycomb and the heart is the idea of a sweet person as a good person. In its initial sections, Kaur's book portrays cycles of violent and abusive relationships that are overcome throughout the other sections. When we reach the section called "blooming," which includes the poem under discussion here, we encounter a strong and confident literary persona that has positive romantic relationships. Thus, we expect the romantic partner to be good and kind. Therefore, the mention of the honeycomb in the beginning of the stanza creates an expectation of sweetness, which is met in the last word. The poem plays with the reader's expectations and, thus, it is able to connect its multiple

metaphorical ideas in a light and easy manner. In another poem by Kaur, in *Home Body* (2020), page 184, the idea of meaningful taste is also present.

nothing tastes better than
being on your own side

In this case, the poem does not work with an idea of a flavor, but the idea of tasting good. Something tasty may mean different things for each reader, and that may evoke one's own memories of affective food. *Home Body*, like Kaur's other books, presents the topic of loving relationships, but has a strong focus on the literary persona's relationship with herself. It is divided into sections that refer to the literary subject more than to her relationship with others: "mind," "heart," "rest," and "awake." In the poem above, the literary persona is commenting on how good it is to be "on your own side." Being on one's own side means, in a short definition, to believe in yourself. This is one of the last poems of the book, which is meaningful, as it is associated with the end of the literary persona's journey within herself. The poem with only two verses, a common structure in Kaur's work, synthesizes the accomplishments of such journey. It is a statement, an assertion. It has strength and power; it is short and incisive. In order to connect these meanings in such a short poem, the idea of taste was used, which may indicate that taste has complex understandings for us and experiences within ourselves. To say that nothing tastes better is to associate the idea of empowerment with that of tasting something good, in many possible ways. Perhaps certain readers will think of the taste of the poem in relation to the best food they ever had and its consequent physical and neurological pleasure. Others may relate it to the aesthetic idea of taste and think of the most beautiful painting or sculpture, which moved them deeply, in a classical sense of

aesthetics. There are others who may remember the affective taste of their mother's food and how they felt every time they smelled or ate the dish. Such images of taste open innumerable possibilities and, at the same time, join them together.

In an opposite way, in the poem on page 124 of *Honey and Milk* (2017), the taste evoked is negative.

my tongue is sour
from the hunger of
missing you

Here, the idea of hunger is evoked. It is interesting to think about what the absence of taste may do. We must acknowledge that true hunger undoubtedly entails physical and psychological damage to our body and life. The hunger I am referring to is the one we see in wars, impoverished locations, and unjust situations in the world. Facing the unfulfilled basic necessities of life, no one can think of love, hope, or anything else that does not remotely suggest the act of simply eating. However, the optics from which I analyze this poem is that of the absence of taste, given the subject of this section and the lack of evidence in the literary text to suggest any connection with actual devastating hunger.

In the beginning of this section, I discussed how taste has been constructed historically as a "lower sense," which allegedly has inferior attributes, "merely physical" contributions to a being. However, in the poem transcribed above, the absence of taste, i.e., hunger, is connected to a negative sensation. The sourness of the tongue is not a desired feeling and a sour tongue can even be a symptom of some diseases. In the case here, this sourness is due to hunger, which I do not deem as physical, but emotional. The mixed sensations of physical and

abstract perceptions may suggest that the lack of taste in one's life has other meanings besides those related to physical hunger.

Taste is not only eating, even if the right to eat is a basic human right. Taste also refers to feeling pleasure, having cultural connections, possessing an identity, developing the intellect. The absence of taste, for whatever reasons, suggests a lack of something so deeply entrenched in our souls, hearts, minds, or however one desires to call it, and whose deprivation is a source of pain. I do not refer to mechanical or chemical reactions our brain, nerves, tongues, and medulla develop in order for us to identify a flavor. I speak of everything that comes with and stems from eating. Taste is not simply a physical act, although the physical act is highly important. It is part of how people see themselves and the world. In the poem, the absence of this symbolic act causes pain and suffering, interwoven with the sour tongue. It is a type of violence.

As a matter of fact, the ability to eat and taste foods is itself a violent act. On page 101 of *Home Body* (2020), Kaur shows such violence.

> the land sprawled its limbs
> and said *put your feet up*
> the trees said *we will give you life*
> the air said *breath me in*
> the earth said
> *take care of what takes care of you*
> and we turned our backs on all of them
>
> -*betrayal*

Although the poem does not mention the act of eating itself, it is indicative of violence. The more-than-human world, represented by the elements of the land – the trees, the air, and the earth – is portrayed as the one which provides humans beings with everything we need to live. However, as the final verse of the poem shows, we betrayed the more-than-human, by not taking care of what takes care of us. This betrayal is evocative of how we have not been attuned to the life surrounding us and how we have exploited other forms of life violently, as shown in the second chapter of this dissertation. Nevertheless, we must not forget that eating demands death. Thus, our very survival depends on some type of violence.

The more-than-human elements in Kaur's poem have anthropomorphic characteristics, such as the land that has limbs, the trees and the air, addressing us in human language. Certainly, the personification of these elements indicate that they are seen as living beings and that matter can be, as already pointed out, an agent of change. However, such personification is also used in order to create empathy. It is easy to feel bad for a child in a war or for a mother who has lost her son or daughter, but it is not so easy for us to develop empathy or feel sorry for a being that does not trigger memories and experiences which are similar to ours. The use of personification of these elements, then, is an attempt to approximate the more-than-human world to the human consciousness. It can be understood as what I termed strategic anthropocentrism in the second chapter. At the end, the last element that is brought to the poem in a similar way to the description of all the more-than-human elements is the humans' "back." Using this similarity and parallelism in the writing also contributes to developing empathy. It may promote an idea of equality among these forms of life and help dismantling human exceptionalism and its consequent hierarchization.

The violence associated with the poem is the excessive and immoderate type of destruction. Destruction in itself is necessary, if it is in harmony. For any being to eat, something needs to be destroyed, i.e., a life is torn apart. The cycle of life is an example of this. Vital energy follows a similar cycle among creatures that feed on other creatures. It is a cycle because, like all matter, things cannot actually be destroyed but transformed. Microorganisms feed on decaying matter on the soil and, in turn, feed plants. These plants feed smaller animals, who feed bigger animals, and so forth. Humans have a choice of what to eat – plants, animals, fungi; some choose to eat them all. Thus, we feed on this cycle of consuming. However, the cycle does not end with us. In the poem, the tree from which we get fruits may be the same tree under which a human being is buried, having become decaying matter that feeds soil microorganism. So, the cycle begins again. From such viewpoint, violence may not be the best term to describe a harmonic cycle of life. Nonetheless, as human beings constantly act in disharmony and in a unbalanced manner, violence is indeed present in consuming, in eating, in buying, in stocking more than necessary etc.

Food – or this type of matter that we name food, responsible for the existence of our sense of taste – mediates between processes of life and death. This cycle of life and ingestion also points to the permeability of our bodies. Something external to us becomes internal, becomes us, through the act of ingestion. After some bodily processes, this matter becomes external again. Because we need to eat in order to survive, such external-internal-external dynamics never ceases and our bodies continuously interact, which makes us part of the more-than-human world.

In Kaur's *Betrayal*, the way our consumption of air is referred to makes me think about how taste can be expanded beyond the category of what is considered food. Just like aesthetic taste is used widely, I argue for the use of taste in reference to everything our bodies

consume. According to such logic, the way we understand our bodies is also changed significantly. When we consume food, food becomes us, and then some of this food exits our body, on its way to become food again. Therefore, our bodies are permeable, and this makes it very difficult to establish the boundaries that limit it. According to Mol, "in eating, *I am* a semi permeable, internally differentiated being, getting enmeshed in intricate ways with pieces of my surroundings" (36). More than simply being enmeshed, our bodies change with what is ingested and consumed. When eaten, food is altered in the process and many nutrients are taken from it to become us. But we are also transformed. Our blood changes, our muscles may grow, our fat tissue may alter, our organs may be affected by what we make them process, and our brain chemistry can be affected as well. Thus, the violence we impose upon the world is reciprocally imposed upon us. The body, the brain, the mind, we and everything are connected and cannot be separated, being all part of a continuum. In fact, the very continuity of life, of our life, depends on "never-ending change" (Mol 45) since our bodies are also transformed by consuming food. Eating demands, contrary to what may be thought, an active engagement with the world. We must not forget that the more-than-human world, of which we are part, also actively engages with us.

Resuming my initial considerations in this section, let us remember that food works as a mediating force, which shows that the divisions, believed by society to be so firmly divided, are in fact a continuum. In Nichols's poem "Blackberrying Black Woman" (40) from *Passport to Here and There* (2020), we can see the metaphorical epitome of such logic: the becoming.

> Everyone has a blackberry poem. Why not this?
> On a black road leading up to Sussex downs
> where the blackberries belong to no one —

A black woman is gathering in avid compulsion —
full-strecth against summer sun —
the sweetfull promise of blackberries.

Lost in the berrinness of it, oblivious
of passing glances and blackberry-lore
(the devil landed from heaven on this bush briar)
The black woman — innocent as a newcomer —

Goes on picking the melodious blackberries
heedless of the blood from the prickling vine
as if pressed on by those giddying goblins
offering their succulent goblets of wine.

The black woman is indeed blackberried, as she and the blackberry bush become one. In the beginning of the poem, the physical limits and geographic location of the blackberries are well established, which points to a clear separation from other bodies, such as the black woman's. However, when the black woman begins to stretch, the limits between these bodies begin to stretch as well. She gets lost in the berrinness and, at the end, we may be confused about whose blood it is, in that last stanza. This interpretation can be supported by the fact that the verses are structurally enjambed. The sentence that begins on one line is only finished on the other, sometimes even in the next stanza. By blackberrying the black woman, we can also think of how food becomes us, and we become it, and how this is the apotheosis of food

as a mediating force. Not only does this help us blur the boundaries culturally imposed, but it also brings out the very measuring element in human exceptionalism: humans themselves. Tasting the world, then, the food and all its elements, means testing the limits to the self-imposed barriers of our knowledge as discussed in the poems.

3.2 THE FRUITFUL THRESHOLD

When discussing food, we tend to agglutinate all types of comestibles under this category. Everything that may be or is consumed is called food and we do not normally question this nomenclature. Nonetheless, there are specific types of food that must be analyzed separately, by virtue of their specific history or complexity. This is the case of fruits.

The reason fruits are so special is that we have a long history and an intricate connection with them. According to Adam Leith Gollner, “fruits have activated our basest genetic instincts and elevated us to rapturous heights” (np). The development of humanity, including sedentary settlements, establishment of religions and art, the most ancient types of science etc., is all somehow connected with fruits.

Fruits are, simply put, the product of a tree or a plant that contains seeds. The word “fruit" comes from the Latin words *fruor*, which means “to delight in,” and *fructus*, which means enjoyment, pleasure, and gratification (Gollner np). These definitions point to a different manner of understanding what fruits are. Fruits have fascinated us for so long, having become the very element of many foundational stories. The Bible with Adam, Eve, and the apple; the Kiche people and the Popol Vuh with corn; the Hawaiian breadfruit; the Cherokees and the strawberry; Kananda people in South India and the mango are only a few of the various examples. Adam Leith Gollner states that human kind’s communion with fruits

can be explained through the idea of biophilia (np). Biophilia means the love for life and can be used to describe our innate attraction to the processes of life and growth. It is even believed to be an evolutionary mechanism of ensuring the survival of interdependent life-forms by biologists (Gollner np). Fruits may seem mundane, but they are omnipresent; they are alluring, they are live givers, and they are history. Gollner explains that "[e]verytime we eat a fruit, we are tasting forgotten histories" (np). I believe that fruits are one of the main links human beings have with nature. Such connection is realized by the act of eating. Consequently, fruits are important elements for analyzing our human experience.

Historically, fruits literally opened our eyes. Humans, along with some types of birds and primates, "are part of a select group of species that can detect a difference between the colors green and red," capacity that stems from "the need to notice red-ripe fruits in a sea of green leaves and foliage" (Gollner np). However, even if our evolutionary development depended on the existence of fruits, the recent history of humanity has not shown a stable relation with them in the western world. According to Gollner, it was not until the sixteenth century that the European royalty firstly considered raw fruits as delicacies (np), even though indigenous tribes and traditional peoples all over the rest of the world had already consumed fruits in mystical and even divine acts. I associate such disregard for fruits with the lack of a great variety in the European continent. The sixteenth century was, not by coincidence, the time when Europeans began to colonize the "New World" and import, or steal, the crops of the colonized. Of course, at this point in history, "most fruits were still smaller and less juicy than they are today" (Gollner np), which is due to domestication and breeding of fruits. Besides, the impoverished masses of the European continent, who accounted for the majority of the population and ate what they could find, buy or exchange, did not have access to fruit. Although history tells us that a great portion of the population in the past centuries lived in

rural areas, the consumption of fresh fruit was very limited because of weather conditions, storage, and insufficient technology. Before the early nineteenth century, "with exception of a few landowners and noblemen, everybody around the world was dirt poor" (Gollner np) and up until the Industrial Revolution, the predominantly rural North American population grew their own food, had little fresh fruit in the summer and none in the winter (Gollner np). The situation was even scarcer for the urban population. These people had real access to fruit for the first time "as colonial conquests coughed up stimulants like coffee, tea and chocolate, a hungry urban labor class emerged. . .clamoring for calories," which led to a fall in the price of sugar, "making fruits-based preservatives, jams and marmalades more widely available" (Gollner np). However, they never had access to actual fruit.

Nonetheless, in the past decades there was a great change in the consumption of fruit. This came with a decrease in quality, considered by Gollner, perhaps, "a necessary transition" (np). Never before, according to Gollner, "have so many of us had access to such a wide range of fresh fruits. . .[a]nd the produce section will be getting even more interesting in coming years as innovative breeders and growers continue to focus on flavor as shoppers rediscover seasonality" (np). The relevance of this European and North-American context is that our relation to fruits, even if it is different from earlier times, has been one of constant attraction. Fruits and our desire to obtain them have led humanity to develop many inventions: the Sumerians invented writing to document grain and fruit trades; our first bowls and containers were actually fruit parts; wheels appeared as a way to transport fruits (Gollner np). Fruits are entangled with the very existence of our cultures. In order to understand our relation with food or with nature itself, we must understand our relation with fruits. In the poems here analyzed, many of the images presented construct the connection between the body and the more-than-human through the image of fruits. The last poem presented above,

“Blackberrying the black woman,” creates an intricate connection between human and more-than-human through the blackberry.

Similarly, in Kaur’s *The Sun and Her Flowers* (2017), the poem on page 167 associates blossoming fruits with human beings.

the orange trees refused to blossom
unless we bloomed first
when we met
they wept tangerines
can’t you tell
the earth has waited its whole life for this

-celebration

In this poem, as in several others in Kaur’s work, we can find an exploration of the relationship between human beings and the natural or more-than-human world (Anjutha 341). This relationship includes a second attachment: the literary persona’s romantic involvement with her partner. As mentioned before, this book is divided into five sections that describe the cycle of death and the (re)birth of a flower. Despite the titles of the sections and the name of the book, this process is used to refer to the literary persona’s journey to love and to self-acceptance. In this journey, we also encounter her quest for a healthy, loving romantic relationship, since the very thing that mainly contributed to the “wilting" phase was the literary persona’s mourning for a past love. This poem is in the section “rising,” which is before the final one called “blossoming" of the literary persona. Her own journey to self-love

is accompanied by her search for a lover that treats her well and respects her individuality. In the poem above, this context has to do with the literary persona meeting her lover, which has a wonderful outcome, and which may have been even predestined. Corroborating the force of this predestination, images from the more-than-human world are presented in the poem, which I see as an indicative of reverence to the more-than-human and to our insertion in it, rather than apart from it. Such connection can be verified in the verbs “met" and “wept,” regarding the humans and the more-than-human tree respectively, as the only two words in the entire poem with a perfect rhyme, one that matches the subjects with their action.

The tree’s refusal to blossom before the lovers meet, and its crying fruits (instead of tears) when they did, can be associated with this couple’s romantic encounter as a natural thing; in other words, as something indubitably bound to happen, essential, and unstoppable. The use of the personification of the tree, as well as the clear anthropocentric focus that leads the entire earth to expect the lovers’ meeting, are indeed points to consider. However, the poem is posed in such a way that, instead of leading to a super valorization of the human (which is the basis of an anthropocentric focus), it helps to understand the tree and the fruits as intrinsic parts of our lives. Even though the tree is not thought of in her own more-than-human features (if that is even possible), it is vested with agency. It has actions, but they are mirrored human actions, and they are not hierarchically above or below the human actions. In fact, we can even establish that the tree’s refusal to blossom was its demand to humans. The focus of the poem is indeed on human characters. However, the use of the tree and the fruits to express meaning and strength is indicative of how strong fruits are, as symbols in our coded culture.

We tend to think that humans manipulate the more-than-human world in any way we want and that this is a unilateral action. Indeed, human beings have manipulated fruits with

breeding, chemicals, and many different technologies. However, fruits have somehow manipulated us as well. We eat fruits mainly because of their taste and nutrients, and, historically, for survival. Fruits also need to survive and thus they "have enlisted us to extend their reach" (Gollner np). Being eaten is how many plants distribute themselves and maintain their continuity. To this end, "they use color and sweetness the way certain European restaurants use unctuous pitchmen to lure in hapless tourists" (Gollner np). Fruits, then, sacrifice themselves for their species, for their seed to travel and grow new trees. Genetically speaking, "plants want the same thing as any other species: survival and replication" and "anyone eating a fruit helps it achieve its goal of making as many copies of itself as possible" (Gollner np). In order to ensure that, "fruits send out attraction signals" and can be even said to "have programmed us" (ibid). In a certain way, then, we may be elements in the history of fruit development and survival, just as fruits were boosters for human inventions, as already indicated.

I believe that the attribution of agency, even if it is human agency, to the tree in the poem points to this direction. Like humans, plants are alive. Throughout many years of studying, we have discovered that the "flora have sensory capacity to compute everything from temperature to light, pulsating with electrical receptors when under threat and flooding areas under attack with toxins" (Gollner np). Plants have found a way to communicate by using RNA transcripts and protein links (Narby np). Basically, they "learn, remember, and decide, without brains" (Narby np). Although we think that brains are necessary for agency to take place, plants, for example, have proven us wrong.

This information leads us to think about how, in Kaur's literary piece, the tree did more than just gain the attributes of human agency. In fact, the tree's action demanded the humans to engage in "blooming." Hence, humans are asked to perform an action usually

attributed to the more-than-human realm. Evidence of such intermingling through the exchanged roles is the sonorous harmony carried throughout the poem, with the alliteration of the letter "s" as in "trees," "blossom," "unless," "first," "tangerines," "has," "its," and "this." This harmonic sound may also suggest a balance and connection between the spheres we divide into human and more-than-human. According to Gollner, "by discovering fruits. . .we can reconnect with nature, the realm of the sublime," and to experience such biophilia "is to love a diversity that, as limitless as it is fragile, both haunts us and fills us with hope" (np). To experiment this kind of connection is to understand the unpredictability of nature, and to insert ourselves into the domain of the more-than-human.

Another poem that shows this human connection with fruits is the one called "the art of growing" (94-96) in *The Sun and Her Flowers* (2017). It is one of the few poems, in Kaur's oeuvre, with a title. This poem presents the literary persona's experience with growing up, how the changes in her body impacted her life, and how those around her reacted to such transformations. It describes conversations with her mother, with boys in her school, and her own thoughts. It is a reflection on learned, harmful and sexist behaviors we continue to pass on to our girls.

> i felt beautiful until the age of twelve
> when my body began to ripen like new fruit
> and suddenly
> the men looked at my newborn hips with salivating lips (1-4)

The idea that she ripens with age connects her body with a tree, which carries fruit at the right time. The men assume that they have the right to act in such a way towards a 12-year-old girl,

which is related to how western society has taken advantage of nature, as if it was our right to exploit the more-than-human as we please. In the poem, the girl tells her mother about this situation and her mother's answer reflects sexist ideas, still upheld in our society.

> when i go home i tell my mother
> *the men outside are starving*
> she tells me
> i must not dress with my breasts hanging
> said *the boys will get hungry if they see fruit*
> says i should sit with my legs closed
> like a woman oughta
> or the men will get angry and fight
> said i can avoid all this trouble
> if i just learn to act like a lady (30-39)

The advice given by the mother is most likely the same given to her by her own mother when she was 12. They are the things society tells girls and women about how to deal with their bodies and how to behave, as "men will be men" and "boys will be boys." This sexist and limiting mode expected from women is a recurrent discussion. In the poem, we can see several phrases or expressions that refer to this mentality, like "a woman oughta," "sit with my legs closed" or "act like a lady." In this type of discourse, we can see the association of female body parts — usually the ones that are (hyper)sexualized — with fruits. In the literary text, the comparison refers to the girl's breasts. The association of fruits with sexual(ized) body parts, since fruits are "inherently erotic" (Gollner np), is connected to how

they are themselves interwoven with reproduction. Gollner calls flowers the plant kingdom's sex machines (np) and the fruits their "love children" (np). All fruits start as flowers; when those are pollinated, fruits grow. Fruits, therefore, derive from a sexual act in the more-than-human realm.

Nonetheless, fruits are a bit more than the simple result of the sexual act. For a fruit to grow, the flower has to die. For the cycle of life to happen in a tree, death has to come about as well. Fruits themselves are part of this second act of the cycle. The goal of a fruit is to continue its species; hence, the seeds are enveloped, protected and spread. The fruit may ripen, fall, and rot, or it may be eaten and "rot" in another manner. It can even decompose and feed the original tree; it does not matter how it happens. The fruit decomposes for the seeds to live. According to Gollner, "[n]ature is a feedback loop, from putrefaction to perfection and back again" (np). Once again, we see the presence of the continuum in the cycles of which we are part. Food opens our eyes to the integration of the world. When we compare Gollner's quotation to human's sexuality and species survival, we may not see this loop so easily, because of the way our western society understands and depicts our sexuality and sexual acts.

With respect to human sexuality, a recurring image is that of (hyper)sexualization and exploitation of women's bodies. Like other stereotypes, female sexuality has an ambivalent character, such as its association with fruit. According to Liz Bellamy, "the identification of women as fruits that are part of the commercial system, and available to be eaten by men is accompanied by the condemnation of women who see themselves as active consumers of fruit, rather than as items of consumption" (np). In the poem cited above, the association of the female body with fruits is in line with this idea. Fruits are connected with items available for male consumption, even if one of such items refers to the body of another individual

person. The poem continues to show how the literary persona reacts when she learns and is exposed to such an unfair logic.

but the problem is

that doesn't even make sense

i can't wrap my head around the fact

that i have to convince half the world's population

my body is not their bed

i am busy learning the consequences of womanhood

when i should be learning science and math instead

…

the next time i go to school

and the boys hoot at my backside

i push them down

foot over their necks

and defiantly say

boobs

and the look in their eyes is priceless (40-46, 62-68)

The literary persona defies this order of thought as she feels wronged by its logic. She takes matters into her own hands, or feet, and takes control over her own body, her own fruits. The poem flows at a pace which is similar to one's line of thought, showing, perhaps, the attempt of this young girl to understand such an unfair and distorted logic, and it also shows her denial of the images to which she and her body are subjected. It is relevant to notice how

it was through language that this girl took control of herself again. By saying the word "boobs," she was able to verbally claim possession of her own body back to herself. Language, the means through which an idea is posed, made it possible for the literary persona to change the order of things — at least in the school patio. The final verse of the poem also contributes to the notion that she in fact took possession of her body. If along the poem the greatest problem she encountered was the way "man looked at" her body, or how the boy in school told her to "let me see yours [boobs]," changing the way her body is looked at means indeed overcoming such question. The priceless look in the boys' eyes may be of surprise, fear, or simple acknowledgment of how that body is not theirs. Be it as it may, the idea of a "priceless" look, even if it is a common way to describe something, also reports once again to the belief that nature is exploited for commercial enterprise. Furthermore, we are reminded that the respect to one's own sovereignty — the girl or a tree (on behalf of the more-than-human) — is more valuable than the economic system.

The title of the poem – "the art of growing" – also connects this girl's body with the more-than-human. The title alone may not point to such an understanding, but with the references of her body as fruit, it may suggest how our material body is associated with the more-than-human, or it may indicate a way to find such association. Accordingly, the material is used as a connection to an abstract, emotional, and sublime (as Gollner puts it) relation. Fruits are once again showing us how human connection to them is not merely through the act of eating or collecting it. More than that, we are possessors of life and of whatever being alive entails.

Similarly, Nichols's poem "Invitation" (10-11) in *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (1984) relates the female body to the fruit universe. After establishing how comfortable she is in her fat body, despite opinions of others, the literary persona invites a third person to "come

up and see me sometime." This verse ends the first part of the poem and is repeated in the opening of the second part.

2

Come up and see me sometime
Come up and see me sometime

My breasts are huge exciting
amnions of watermelon
                your hands can't cup
my thighs are twin seals
                fat slick pups
there's a purple cherry
bellow the blues
                of my black sea belly
there's a mole that gets a ride
each time I shift the heritage
of my behind

Come up and see me sometime (19-32)

The description of this woman's body is carried out through its association with more-than-human elements, which demonstrate that "the power of the erotic is fully realized by a fat black woman, centred and confident in her own body" (Lawson Welsh, "Grace Nichols"

41). The use of the image of fruits is referred to by Gudrun Webhofer as a connotation of the woman's size and fertility (22), which is related to the reproductive feature of fruits. Although many points can be made about this rich and complex poem — including the reference to Mae West's line — I want to focus on the connection of the human body with the more-than-human body of fruits through inherent sexuality. Be it the metaphor that connects her breasts with watermelons, impossible to be grasped, or the presence of a purple cherry in her belly as huge as the sea, the fat black woman invites the reader to taste her body as one is tasting a fruit. The invitation to consume the female body is made from the woman herself, which is an assertion that she in fact owns her own body and sexuality. In alignment with the argument presented above – that fruits manipulate us into consuming them –, the fat black woman's invitation is a similar inversion of roles. Her breasts are significantly described as "exciting," which may suggest this woman's enjoyment of her own body without the need for an outsider, even less for a male one. The connection of the female body in these poems with fruits can be analyzed as an attempt to subvert the stereotypes attributed to them. Women's sexuality is historically framed as either unwanted or deviant. The association of the sexuality of these bodies with the sexual aspects of the more-than-human may be an avenue to reform the way our own sexuality is understood. Fruits, as emanations of pulsating life, can teach us so much – they are not only connected to reproduction. They are connected to sexual liberation as well. Therefore, they can help us understand our sexual lives in a more abundant way, by demonstrating that sexuality is part of life cycles and that there is much more to it than simple physical pleasure.

We can also reflect on the description of the female body in both poems, which occurs through the images of fruits, regarding the systems that exploit both. Fruits themselves are part of an economic system of exploitation. They share with these female bodies the

ambivalence of being construed by the male gaze while existing as living beings on their own. In fact, one of the many ambivalences Bellamy addresses in *The Language of Fruit* (2019) is that of fruits as human labor and a natural product. The idea, for example, of the Garden of Eden, "in which fruit is freely available without the effort of cultivation," is contrasted with the reality that fruit production "requires both labor and knowledge" (Bellamy np). These notions are enmeshed in our cultural imaginary, which ranges from conceiving fruits as consequences of divine providence to fruits as consequences of hard work and highly manipulated by humans, sometimes with not so positive technologies. The processes human beings put fruits through, in the name of a so-called development, are the same that subject female bodies – the logic of exploitation and commodification.

Agriculture is the art or science of plant domestication. It is said to be "the decisive leap that forms 'civilized' man [sic], separating him from nature" (Montanari 4). Although I disagree with the separation of humans from the more-than-human world, agriculture was indeed an important step for human development and evolution. It was around plant domestication that our entire societies were organized (Montanari 5). Cities, considered the epitome of civilization, would be inconceivable without agricultural development, both on a material level and on a mental plane (Montanari 6). With time, instead of searching for a balance with the more-than-human, human beings have understood this domestication, i.e. agriculture, as their control over nature, without considering that they also depend on it. No matter how many proofs we have that the more-than-human cannot be tampered with, we continue to stretch the limits of such tampering and also to suffer the consequences of such actions.

Development is necessary for our evolution, but the way we understand development varies and is sometimes dangerous. Wolfgang Sachs summarized the idea of development in

the modern western world, by stating that the meaning of development depends on how the rich nations feel (26). In general, definitions of development are "in part arguments about the social, as well as economic, benefits of a world market system that, depending on perspective, is (1) not necessarily antithetical to human equality or (2) rides roughshod over local human and environmental interests in the attempt to secure preferential conditions to international trade" (Huggan and Tiffin 31-32). In many areas of thought, such as post-colonialism and feminism, the idea of development has been rearranged. Many notions and concepts have been created in order to overcome such perceptions. One of them is that of post-development, which consists in "a set of revisionist strategies through which development is re-articulated at grass-roots levels, and which emerges from the recognition that non-homogeneity of the world system requires that the multiple modernities encapsulated within it be negotiated in local terms" (Huggan and Tiffin 33). However, this is not what we find in most corners of the world. The global market of fruits has radically changed over time. Massimo Montanari affirms that today, "in the industrialized countries, one can find *fresh* produce at any time of the year, using the total world system as one production and distribution zone" (20). However, the notion of fresh in the text can be disputed. Furthermore, the consequences of this global market are alarming. Fernández-Armesto, discussing the problems of food industrialization, states that "the role of the next revolution in food history will be to subvert the last" (224), pointing to the inevitably of a collapse of the current forms of food production and distribution. In two of Nichols's poems, we can see different descriptions of the experience of buying fruits and fresh produce in Bourda, an open-air market in Georgetown, Guyana, where the poet lived, and the experience of the fat black woman in a London supermarket. The first poem receives the market's name, "Bourda" (50), and is in *Passport to Here and There* (2020).

Marvel again at the market stalls
singing the earth's abundance
in the heaped-up homegrown freshness
of their own vernacular favoured names.

Not Aubergine but Balanjay
    Not Spinach but Calaloo
Not Green-beans but Bora
    Not Chilli but Bird-pepper
And not just any mango
    but the one crowned, Buxton Spice,

Still hiding its ambrosia in the roof
of my mouth, still flowering
like the bird-picked mornings
on the branches of my memory.

Here, the literary persona reminisces about her home's street market, but the memories are of something more than just the market itself. The memories registered in the final stanza describe the feelings and sensation related to the ambiance of the market and its experiences. An important part of such experience is associated to the names given to the fruits. It is not just a mango, but a Buxton Spice; it is not chilli, it is Bird-pepper. The reference to the Caribbean names of such foodstuffs is based on the cultural heritage of the literary persona.

Although the cultural identity of an individual and of a community is strongly connected to the foods consumed, in the analysis of this poem I am more interested in other aspects.

In the beginning of the poem, there are two words that determine how fruits are understood: “earth's abundance” and “freshness.” Both words point to the life in fruits and in the more-than-human world. The market itself is alive with singing stalls, and so are the literary persona’s memories, which become trees with branches in the final stanza. The idea of life flows through the entire poem. All symbols and images become alive, switching roles and gaining actions that are not usually attributed to them. The mornings are bird-picked, the market stalls taste of ambrosia and flowering inside the memories. It is a big overflowing scenario of animated and bustling actors.

This liveliness of the poem is even more alluring when considering the book in which it is included. *Passport to Here and There*, Nichols’s most recent publication, presents a going back and forth between the places she now calls home, Guyana and the United Kingdom. Thus, every poem must be read with the comparison of these two places in mind — even if the comparison has a more complex idea than at first imagined. The second poem I wish to discuss, in the light of such comparison, is in *The Fat Black Woman’s Poems* (1984), which presents the life of the fat black woman in London. The poem called “Shopping" (36-37) demonstrates a situation which is similar to the one in the Bourda Market, but with a very different experience.

I’m guilty of buying too little food

1 carton milk

1 carton juice

1 half chicken

a little veg and fruit

Why can’t you buy

for more than one day

at a time

my old man whines

Still blank as a zombie

I wander the supermarket aisles

The chunky red odors

behind the cellophane

cannot revive

the spritely apples

the lady reluctantly urging samples

Between the bulge of the shelf

and the cast of my eye

between the nerve of my trolley

and the will of my mind

I’m always paralysed

The differences in both poems are striking. The most impressive thing is that they were written in different times (1984 and 2020) and belong to different contexts. However,

they convey an almost perfect comparison. The Londoner supermarket is, unlike Bourda, dead. The minute the literary persona walks in there, she is a zombie, a dead walker strolling through the aisles. The very aisles, unlike the Bourda stalls, have cellophane covers that not only point to an absence of life, but to the over industrialization of food. The apples are behind such cellophane and cannot be revived. The last word of the poem summarizes the image of this supermarket: "paralysed," like a still life painting that can only pretend to be or represent something that was once alive. The fat black woman cannot escape such paralysis and, therefore, she is caught up between the shelf and trolley's deadly demands and life inside her, in her eye and the will of her mind. She is paralyzed between these commands and none prevails. Andrew Warnes describes US supermarkets — and we can extend the description to London's supermarkets as well — as a semiautonomous nonhuman sphere (59) and that, by no coincidence, seeks to optimize impulse purchases, luring "passing shoppers into reaching out and grabbing various products over and over again, and without thinking much about it" (63). The fat black woman is still able to avoid such impulsive shopping, maybe because her memories of the Bourda market, and many other markets in her Caribbean home, are still flickering inside her mind.

It is also interesting to notice that, while one third of the previous poem is dedicated to naming the fruits and vegetables, in this poem they are not named and only appear incidentally. The foods that are mentioned have a very demarcated quantity, e.g., "1 carton," and come packaged, which may point to industrialization processes and food commodification. Shane Hamilton, writer of *Supermarket USA: Food and Power in the Cold War* and many other works, in an article regarding commodity chains, debates what he calls the distance between farm to fork (16). The author also reminds us that "[a] supermarket consumer's choice of what to eat is articulated through a vast of individuals and organizations

woven together by technological networks — from farmers to processors to scientific researches to wholesalers to retailers to government regulators to truck drivers to supermarket employees to consumers, and so on" (16). This leads us to think of two things: one, that eating is an act of "extraordinary consequence" (Hamilton 17), and two, that we are no longer simply eating what grows from earth. In fact, there is "a constant unease about what exactly we are eating, where it came from, and what the implications of our diet choices are" (Hamilton 16). While the food in "Bourda" is described as "homegrown," the food in "Shopping" is, basically, dead. It has no connection to life. Even the apples, interwoven with nature's reproduction, and associated with the more-than-human sublime sphere, cannot escape such horror.

Of course, one can find industrialized food in Guyana and fresh organic fruits in the UK. The comparison I am proposing between these two poems is not to characterize each of these places with a generalization of the foodstuffs present. The purpose of my analysis is to compare forms of consumption and demonstrate how food, especially fruits, arrives at the consumers and are seen by them (us). Throughout this entire section, I have discussed how fruits are a symbol of the sublime, of life, but when we encounter fruits in our contemporary industrialized world, we may be faced with a different situation. The problem with the commodification and industrialization of the more-than-human is more than just our lost connection with nature. It comprises labor problems, ecological harm, human health issues, economic, social, and many more factors. The combination of all of these factors also works to show how everything in this world (us included) is connected, in a constant, continuous exchange — part of a continuum. We have reached a point in which real actual fresh fruits are themselves a subversion of this entire system.

Our global economic production demands standard products. Having commodified nature, “we’re eating the shrapnel of a worldwide homogeneity bomb” that result in “Stepford Fruits: gorgeous replicants that look perfect, feel like silicone implants and taste like tennis balls, mothballs or mealy, juiceless cotton wads” (Gollner np), just like the apples in Nichols’s poem. Real fruits, the ones we can find in “Bourda,” which have real names instead of the universal standardized industrial nomenclature, “are delicate, living things that need to be handled with care” and which, “despite our manipulation. . . are at their core rebellious and unpredictable” (Gollner np). We already have many alternatives to this type of production. Many of us are beginning to walk towards this path that honors the necessities of our planet and of our bodies. Embracing the unpredictability of fruits may not be so easy for the market, but it is a necessary step for humanity. To help us with that, we can look at fruits themselves. According to Gollner (np), they “are symbols that guide us across a threshold into a new reality.” It may be “Aeneas tossing a fruit to sop to the three-headed guard dog of Hades or Dante finding a barren fruit tree that bursts to life in between purgatory and heaven,” fruits “inhabit a liminal boundary zone where they whisper of salvation” (Gollner np). Although these examples show fruits as symbolic thresholds, they are literally and materially inhabiting this liminal boundary zone as well. The connection human beings have with fruits shows the continuum of our life, imbricated with that of the more-than-human world. This interweaving link establishes itself, of course, through the act of eating, but not only through it. This continuum, different from what happens with taste, is about life and the balance among all forms of life sustaining systems and bodies.

When discussing taste, we saw how food in the poems, by being tasted, through the necessary processes, can be a mediator, as it shows us that we are part of a never-ending change in life. In order for us to maintain our body, our life, we must eat. In “The Right to

Literature[4],” Brazilian literary critic Antônio Candido affirms that people should be entitled to literature as much as they have the right to live, to eat, to walk freely. Literature, from this perspective, humanizes us and organizes our minds, our chaos, and our emotions (188). Likewise, I believe one should have the right to taste. By eating, and tasting, we enter a cycle of life and death that continually alters the outside world and our inside world. We begin to realize how our bodies are permeable, i.e., they are not separated from the more-than-human. Nichols's and Kaur's works show us through their images and wordplay that our divisions are inaccurate constructions of how the world really works.

With the image of fruits, we have dived into the manipulation both humans and fruits themselves have carried out in relation with one another, and how they connect us within this material and sublime realm as the literary depictions show. By embracing the unpredictability of fruits that Kaur and Nichols bring in the poems, we begin to embrace our own unpredictability and understand that we are not in possession of barely any type of control. It is through the contact with food, and its effects on our bodies, that we can acknowledge that the intellectual, abstract and affective and physical realms are not clearcut divided, as we tend to think. Literature, through its play with words and the construction of the world, allows us to reexamine such divisions. The liminal boundary zone fruits inhabit is a threshold of the continuum that humans and more-than-humans also inhabit. It is the continuum between our bodies and our minds, too. The metaphor of the continuum can be apprehended through our engagement with the world occurring in the act of eating in the poems. Eating, as portrayed here, then, opens our eyes to the way life happens, opens our bodies to the permeability of the world, and opens our science to other perspectives. In order for science to exist, I believe, we

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[4]My translation. Original text’s title: O Direito à Literatura.

can never stop eating and, more than that, can never stop writing about it. We shall let eating and writing be a continuum.

CHAPTER FOUR

QUEERING THE WITCH: AFFECT, SCIENCE, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Over the years they hunted,
the wayward apprentices watchmakers,
the disappointing sons who transformed
their surnames, hunted over acres
of hinges, cogs, calluses, hidden whiskey,
mustaches a breath from feral,
poured an ocean of fortune
into fabrications of brass and iron,
spent entire season strumming
massive harps of wire into perfect
calibrations of invisibility,
prayed to the gods of adjustable mirrors,
cursed the gods of temperamental gaslights,
broke the legs of imitators and thieves,
chewed holes in each other's pockets,
harnessed nightmares of giant silver hoops
making endless passes over the bodies
of the dead, hoisted high a cenotaph
for hundreds of sacrificed rabbits,
breathed miles of delicate thread
into the lost labyrinths of their lungs.
all to make a woman float
to make a woman float
and none of them ever thought
of simply asking her.

Nicky Beer, "The Magicians at Work"

Witchcraft is the name given to the activity of performing magic to help or harm other people, according to the Cambridge Online English Dictionary. Michael D. Bailey, historian of the European Middle Ages, states that witchcraft is many things, but most broadly it can "mean almost any kind of harmful magic (*maleficium*);" "[i]t can mean magic performed mainly by women;" nearly always it expresses "magic performed in relatively simple ways (a few words, a gesture, or even threatening glance) by people of relatively low social status" (371). Although the author provides some other possibilities for the definition of witchcraft,

these arguments are proof enough of how witchcraft is seen in general. Nichols's and Kaur's works, on the other hand, and the images related to the use of magic or to the supernatural realm in their works allow for an interpretation which is different from the ones indicated above. It is an image linked with other types of knowledge that understand the magic world as a discourse rather than as an actual entity. In this dissertation, witchcraft is understood from within a certain context of time and history strongly connected to the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Age. Nonetheless, before discussing the construction of this image and how it came to be during those centuries, we must go a bit earlier in time to comprehend how western societies, mainly European, established their relationship with what we call magic.

To begin with, the term magic has its origin usually associated with the Greek word *mageía*, but this word "owes its existence to a loanword from an ancient Near Eastern language" (Schwemer 17). However, it was not used by the population of this ancient Near East – it "was not a word that objectively referred to ancient Near Eastern practices; rather, it is a term that carries a value judgement prompted by Greek perceptions of their neighbors to the East" (Schwemer 17). This means that the origins of magic "may well be regarded therefore as an early example of 'Orientalism,' reflecting a blend of fascination, contempt, and misunderstanding that has accompanied the concept of magic ever since its inception" (Schwemer, 17). The term, then, began to designate a value judgment of religion or other types of spiritual practices other than one's own (Schwemer 17). This is not to say that ancient peoples did not have a magical understanding of life or any type of supernatural belief, but it does indicate how magic and the names we use to refer to this context were, from the beginning, external, judgmental, and even anachronistic.

This view became stronger with the Christianization of the world. When the populations, especially in the countryside, were forced into a Christianization of the state, they did not abandon their so-called pagan practices and beliefs; they incorporated these practices to the imposed body of catholic traditions, called as an incomplete Christianization by French historian Jean Delumeau (556). A people that had a polytheistic inheritance maintained these beliefs, even if unconsciously. Delumeau claims that there was indeed a lingering religious syncretism that can be seen in historical registers. However, this paganism was not intentional; it was present in peoples' mindset and in some practices, most likely understood as part of Christian faith (556). This points, once again, to how the term magic designates something external. The notion of an actual magical entity existed, but it is not the notion dealt with in this chapter. The idea of magic that interests me is the one that arose when the church began to exert more control over the people and the civil society, vilifying these so-called pagan practices.

This mindset regarding magic lingered mainly in the countryside and in the lower classes of people when the Middle Ages started, with the formation of the image of witchcraft. Even though the processes that I will describe here were mainly led by elite members, by the church superior posts and by the civil law, they counted on popular support and comprehension in order to become as strong and intense as they did.

The passage from the polytheist and pagan societies to a monotheistic, catholic one did not happen spontaneously and peacefully. Not only was this process based on ideological persuasion, but it also entailed physical destruction (Stone np). In *When God Was a Woman* (1976), Merlin Stone describes the intentional destruction of registers, statues, and other artifacts that proved and attested to a mentality which was different from the one the society and religion of the time wanted to uphold (np). The remnant materials that survived this

annihilation “today tell their own version of the nature of those dreaded ‘pagan' rituals and beliefs” (Stone np). Nonetheless, the survival of this material is not the only thing necessary for us to understand the framing of the time’s mentality. There needs to be an adequate processing and analysis of this data. Stone reports that, during her research, another problem she encountered was “the sexual and religious bias of many of the erudite scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (np). The author explains that “[m]ost of the available information in both archeological and ancient religious history was compiled and discussed by male authors” (np), who, predominantly, were raised “in societies that embrace male-oriented religions of Judaism and Christianity” which “influence[d] heavily what was included and expanded upon and what was considered to be minor and hardly worth mentioning” (np). Thus, even with our access to some material, our own views are still biased and must be questioned.

One of the most important points that Stone addresses in the revisitation of these historical and archeological analyses is the presence of mythical or metaphysical female images of power, such as goddesses. According to the author, “[t]he worship of female deities appeared in every area of the world, presenting an image of woman that I have never before encountered” (np). Stone alludes to the images of Nut or Hathor in Egypt; Jammu or Ninhursag in Sumer; Mami, Tiamat, or Aruru in other parts of Mesopotamia; Mawu in Africa; and others (np). Gerda Lerner, in her work about the creation of patriarchy, also reflects upon these ancient images of female goddesses and establishes how, when there were goddesses as powerful as male gods, the equality between genders could not be banned from the social imaginary (204). Considering the power of myths and such images and how they influence our social life (Stone np), it is not by chance that “the orders for the destruction of the religion of the Goddess were built into the very canons and laws of the male religions that replaced it”

(Stone np). The ancient worship of female deities, then, "did not simply cease to be, but. . .its disappearance was gradually brought about, initially by the Indo-European invaders, later by the Hebrews, eventually by the Christians and even further by the Mohammedans" (Stone np). In this chapter I focus on the gender division and hierarchy that was reinforced by these religious and social changes because it is the basis for understanding the realm of magic.

Although the connection of gender with magic may seem uncertain, it is in fact at the core of the constructions of both concepts. Magic, as we have seen, was first built from a judgmental view which considered it something external, foreigner. The idea of women, as a social group, can be related to such view even nowadays. It is not by chance that the anti-Judaism and the witch-hunt coincided (Delumeau 462). According to Delumeau, like Jewish people and the French Huguenots, women were considered dangerous and were seen as agents of Satan (462, 570). The more a group was perceived as dissident, the more accusations were made against them; heresy and dissidence were seen as equal (Delumeau 570). The image of the witch, as we have today, was developed, and, more importantly, feminized, in this environment of fear. The association of the female gender with magic stems from the connection of both concepts to the carnality of the body and matter, and thus related to the lower axis of the binary system that has historically been constructed, as discussed at length in this dissertation.

This strategy to turn a group which was considered dangerous into a heretic one is not new and was not invented by Christians. In fact, when Christianism was still forbidden, Roman emperors tried to justify their persecution to Christians by claiming that they devoured newborns in their cults in the catacombs in the second and third centuries (Chicangana-Bayona and Sawczuk 508). This image was later used to describe exactly what female witches did to remain young, for example. This process of chiseling the image of the witch began in

an atmosphere of fear, in which a scapegoat was needed. This scapegoat was Eve, Pandora, the supposedly subversive half of humanity. Since the fourteenth century, with plagues, poverty, scarcity, uprisings, the Turkish threat, the Great Schism, and the protestant secession, the Christian culture felt threatened (Delumeau 586). The leaders of the church and of the state were in desperate need to identify the enemy; evidently, Satan was guiding this combat against God, but Satan had instruments (Delumeau 586). It was the fallen angel who made the Turkish advance, who inspired the pagan cults in America, who inhabited the hearts of Jewish people, and, mainly, it was this fallen angel who, thanks to the alleged feminine temptations and sexual guilt (not to mention the idea of the weaker mind), acted through these witches, disturbing the life of the people (Delumeau 586). Therefore, the enemy was not only on the borders, but on the very corners of the city and had to be tamed (ibid). Delumeau explains this historical context and shows how fear led to all types of persecution, intimidation, and combat against everything that was not considered holy (586). This persecution became an obsession against heresy in which every enemy was heretic and all heretics were enemies. This civil-religious power became more and more controlling, centralizing, and annexionist, feared deviation, and created an end-of-the-world atmosphere with the certainty that God avenges the betrayals of his people through collective punishments (Delumeau 593).

Such fear, however, had a specific focus – the fear of women. To explain the fear of the female gender, we must firstly acknowledge the ambiguous and contradictory stereotypes women have faced since the beginning of times. The masculine attitude towards women was always oscillating between repulsion and admiration (Delumeau 462). When the fear of losing control was added to this scale, hostility and repulsion weighed more than admiration. The roots of this fear are wider and more numerous than the simple fear of castration of Freud's psychoanalysis (Delumeau 463), even if this idea is not discarded. The marginalization of

women intensified, along with the male fear, because of the Christian endorsement of women's secondary role, with the oppression of sexuality. Delumeau relates this misogynist intensification to a psychological analysis of male libido repression owing to the catholic rules that flowed into a greater aggression against women (477). It was no longer enough only to portray the image women had to follow (e.g., the pure virgin, the abdicating mother), the deviations had to be punished as well. For a woman to avoid scrutiny, then, "she must remain feminine," i.e., she must "maintain gender order" (Rosen 29). As a result, the image of the witch originated from the deviation from this order.

Accordingly, the witch was the representation of many fears. Paola Zordan affirms that every expression of power on the part of women resulted in punishment (332) and the creation of the Inquisition and its mindset were established as the most perverse element ever produced by western patriarchal society (332). The witch was the expurgation of all the evils attributed to the feminine (Zordan 333) and was coined, of course, through these alleged attributes. The witch was, unlike the Cambridge Dictionary defines it, the image of a woman in power, who was discredited and persecuted (Rosen 22). However, even in the case of witchcraft, despite these powerful figures that the civilizational machine could not contain (Zordan 332), the woman herself was not the powerful one. She was connected to the image of Satan, who, although many times represented as hermaphrodite, is an explicitly phallic and masculine image (Zordan 333). It was through the association with this male figure of power that women themselves could achieve power.

Even though witchcraft historically does not only involve female images, it was also the female witch and not the male wizard who suffered from religious superstitions, social hatreds, and desperate revolts (Hanciau 82), and this is strongly related to this Satanic male image. The collective imagination joins the female gender with the magical universe (Hanciau

82). One of the reasons for this is that women were "generally more legally vulnerable than men were" (Bailey 378); thus, they were more vulnerable to accusations and persecutions. Another reason is that "a great deal of witchcraft. . .was associated with areas of predominantly female activity: childbirth, the care of sick children, food preparation (with attendant possibility for poisoning), and so forth" (Bailey 378). Furthermore, many demonologists and other elite authorities of the time, based on misogynist views, considered that women were "[w]eaker than men physically, mentally, and spiritually" – "women were more vulnerable to outright demonic assaults, such as possession, and more susceptible to the alluring wiles of demonic temptation" (Bailey 378). I am inclined to believe that the last reason prevailed at the time given the fact that the very construction of the imagination of the witch is based on a hierarchical binary association that includes gender stereotypes. Maggie Rosen claims that "powerful women and/or women who transgressed boundaries of the gender binary were seen as evil" simply because "a woman's transgressive behavior could only be explained by possession of the devil" (24). Either as the young seductive maiden or as the old child-eater crone, the witch is always a figure to be feared.

The arguments elaborated above explain the possible reasons for the feminization of the image of the witch. We shall now analyze how such image came to be and the use of one main strategy related thereto. One of the cornerstones of the development of the imagination of the witch is the *Malleus Maleficarum*, or *The Hammer of the Witches*, by the German friar Heinrich Kramer, published in 1487. It was a "widely read European text to identify witches specially as female" (Jones and Zell 48). A central argument for this feminization was the idea of the diabolic pact, which the book supported and, perhaps, even cemented. This idea did not appear widely in documents and witch trials until the seventeenth century (Jones and Zell 49), but functioned, after its appearance, as the "rationale for the prosecution of witchcraft by the

church courts" (Jones and Zell 49). The diabolical pact was used to change the image of witches from the possibility of "white" and "black" magic, i.e., different moral uses of their power, to an idea that all witches were evil and in connection with the devil (ibid). This change is relevant because when the mindset regarding magic was a lasting inheritance of the people, the alleged magical powers one had were simply attributes that could be used well or badly, as any other attribute or talent. With the creation of the diabolical pact, not only were all uses of magical powers deemed evil, but certain stereotypes also came into existence. Witches were accused of harming others, and of "night-flight, attending the witches' sabbath and sealing a pact with the devil by copulating with him" as well (Jones and Zell 48). Witches, consequently, became a threat, no longer part of the society, but an evil to be purged. In Kaur's poem on pages 198 and 199 from *the sun and her flowers* (2017), we can see the association of the fear with this threat women represent(ed) because of the creation of the imagination of the witch and its relationship with sexuality.

> when the first woman spread her legs
> to let the first man in
> what did he see
> when she led him down the hallway
> toward the sacred room
> what sat waiting
> what shook him so deeply
> that all confidence shattered
> from then on
> the first man

watched the first woman

every night and day

built a cage to keep her in

so she could sin no more

he set fire to her books

called her witch

and shouted whore

until the evening came

when his tired eyes betrayed him

the first women noticed it

as he unwillingly fell asleep

the quiet humming

the drumming

a knocking between her legs

a doorbell

a voice

a pulse

asking her to open up

and off her hand went running

down the hall

toward the sacred room

she found

god

the magician’s wand

the snake's tongue

sitting inside her smiling

- *when the first woman drew magic with her fingers*

The first aspect I analyze in this poem is its connection with a creation narrative. Not only does the poem bring a story about the first woman and the first man, but it also portrays the type of direct, cryptic language used in the origin stories about the world and the universe. The story goes on, telling the reader about how the first man and the first woman had what we can only assume as their first interaction or relation. Creation narratives usually focus on how the first woman and the first man originated the entire humanity; thus, they focus on the reproduction of the species. In the Christian Bible, the story of the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve, has become an image of female oppression due to its most common interpretations. Eve is the original sinner, the cause for human suffering and expulsion from paradise. This narrative was used in the construction of the patriarchal western society to ground female marginalization. The relation between women's social status and the myth of Eve is intrinsically interrelated in our society. Because of this, Stone claims that "[t]he vindication of the rights of women was in a sense a vindication of the woman Eve" (np). It is not by chance that witches were called the daughters of Eve, since Eve was the first woman to fraternize with Satan and to be depreciated. The author's Hindu tradition also has a story of creation about the first man and the first woman, Manu and Shatarupa. However, because this poem questions the established patriarchal western order and brings images such as the snake and the original sin, I would like to focus on the Christian story of creation and its myths.

If we consider Eve's bite of the forbidden fruit as a metaphor for sex and sexual freedom, which is supported by the poem's narration of a metaphor for the sexual encounter,

we face a tale of sexual repression and liberation as the very subject of the creation of humanity. The story goes on to show how the first man was afraid, terrified of what he encountered inside the first woman. This fear is what led the first man to contain the woman by creating a cage to keep her inside. What interests me the most here is the connection of how this fear was transformed into a persecution. The knowledge possessed by this first woman was erased, denied (her books were burned), and she was considered a witch, as the first man could not do without fear and awe. This awe is demonstrated by the mystery attributed to that which was found inside the woman. The poem does not name what it was, neither does it describe it. The only reference to it is this first man's dismay when he encountered it. Although the poem puts this dismay in the form of questions, no question marks are used, as if the answer is known, in a rhetorical way. Nevertheless, these answers cannot be said or even fully comprehended by the first man.

This first man cannot comprehend nor endure or embrace sexuality. Not only is it deviated to the construction of the image of the witch but also to the construction of the repression of female sexuality. Kaur's poem links the image of the witch to that of the whore. The correlation of the terms "witch" and "whore" suggests that the image of the witch is intrinsically connected with female sexuality, as already discussed. It also relates the necessity of sexual repression to the very idea of witches in its basis, hence the idea that they copulated with the devil.

It is because of the first woman's discovering of her own sexuality, regardless of the first man, that she can escape the metaphorical cage. The movement of internalization of such escape points to how the female oppression can be overcome by empowering the female class within women's own bodies and minds; the oppression based on discourse must be discursively subverted.

The images of the female body and its carnality in Kaur's poem are part of this subversion. The body is, at the beginning of the story, the reason or the cause of the first woman's imprisonment by the first man. It is because of what he finds inside the hallway of this body that he decides to build the cage. Nonetheless, it is also because of the body and the discoveries the first woman makes in it that the plot changes. In the carnality of the depths of her body, the first woman encounters God. Creation stories always involve one or more deities and in this one the deity only appears inside the women, which leads us to the idea of women as bearers of all life in the world; hence, women are creators of life, and the transcendent aspect of the plot cannot be severed from the material one. The thing that terrified the first man, then, was not the first woman herself, but the fact that within her there was a God; within her there was power, and she was not allowed to find that out.

The last few images we encounter in Kaur's poem, those that relate and are somehow equated with the presence of God, are the snake's tongue and the magician wand. Both images have to do with the universe of magic and, most specifically, to witchcraft. The snake, inside the context of Eve and Adam's story, is the representation of Lucifer, who gave Eve the apple. The snake's tongue is how Lucifer convinced Eve, through his malicious and persuasive words. The tongue is the instrument that represents language. The magician's wand is a reference to the current image of the magician we have – a man with a black and white suit, a wand, and a top hat. This type of magician, although having, obviously, a connection with the realm of magic, is much more related and understood nowadays within the realm of pretense or artifice. The association of the snake's tongue with artifice is recurrent. However, when put together with the idea of God, they point to a new definition of transcendence. What this new definition may tell us is that the idea of witches, magic, and religion themselves were creations – human creations, with intention, objectives, and bias.

Magic, thence, as well as witchcraft, was coined as a discourse, with the association to certain images and determined practices, but mainly as a form of control through marginalization. Kimberly B. Stratton claims, likewise, that magic "should be conceived not as a specific set of practices but as a form of discourse that shaped stereotypes of magicians and witches as well as the actual practice of certain rituals in antiquity" (84). To depict magic and witchcraft as discourses is not to ignore or disregard the practices that those peoples carried out, but to understand those practices as they truly were: part of the ordinary life and, with time, transformed and vilified. If we take a closer look, we can see that these practices were nothing more than forms of dealing with daily affairs through a popular form of knowledge. I agree with Zordan when she notes that what was named witchcraft by the Catholic church is today understood as beliefs and practices which outlined ways to treat diseases and deal with life situations departing from nature (332). The practices referred to as witchcraft can be related to basic domestic medicine: cooking balms and sirups, baths, etc. (Zordan 337). Nubia Hanciau compares the official academic medicine of the time to the so-called magical medicine of the people and shows how little they differed (80). These witches were holders of a specific type of knowledge about plants, the position of the stars, (Hanciau 81), i.e., natural knowledge, that they used to achieve their objectives and even help others. Karen Jones and Michael Zell, in their work on several legal and civil historic documents, mention examples of witch-hunt practices as they are being described here. "Mother Roberts," they begin, "diagnosed a sick child's condition from its urine" and for thus "was described as a witch in 1561" (50). Another example is "Joan Harper, cited in 1560 for using '*ars magica*. . .*viz* witchecrafter', reportedly brought cures by magic" (50). Not surprisingly, many anthropologists today claim that "magic and witchcraft mainly constitute elements of everyday life in regions beyond Europe's borders" (Wiener 482) – I may say, however, within

those borders as well. These different forms of knowledge, related to the natural realm, were constructed as unacceptable by Christianism (Zordan 332), probably because they gave those women a type of power achieved through the natural realm, i.e., they could make money and live in the time's society with no need for a man to support them or order them around –they had freedom.

This type of knowledge differs from the one that was framed and has been, until nowadays, considered the official knowledge we have. The knowledge witches were the holders of points to the murky terrain of the irrational (Zordan 339)— or what we frame as irrational. This non-rational, affective strength differs from the type of thought instituted by the History of Philosophy, an "other" knowledge, marked by the connection with the body and, as the body, in constant change, always in the making (Zordan 340). Such type of knowledge challenges the western science, its structures, and the categorization of reason. In this dissertation, this is how I understand magic and witchcraft: as a different type of knowledge that exists, influences our lives and practices, and must be investigated. They are a type of knowledge that were not only overlooked and expunged, but one that, against all odds, remained. They are connected to the affective realm, to the more-than-human realm, and, especially, to the body. Because of their associations with the lower axes of the binary system, they are considered evil and, specifically because of this, the concept of magic and witchcraft has such strength in questioning this rigid system of knowledge that exist today.

In this chapter, I analyze the works of Nichols and Kaur from such perspective, attempting to understand how the images of magic and witchcraft point to different manners to see, acknowledge, and interact with the world and, more importantly, to produce knowledge with it, not just about it. In Maggie Rosen's words, I attempt to queer the witch, understanding that women "will still continue to be seen as witches" but "like so many other

degrading images or words, there can be a shift in the way they are understood" (30). As a result, "[q]ueering the witch can prospectively change the way women understand its meaning" and instead of being a tool for oppression, it can become "an identity for empowerment" (Rosen 30). Further than that, I show how the image of the witch can help us interrogate, dismantle, and update the very notions of what we see as knowledge, science, and reason. Through this discussion, I aim at reconfiguring how we understand the knowledge that comes from our own bodies and that frames these bodies as agents, mediators, and now, holders of knowledge.

4.1 REFRAMING REASON AND SCIENCE: SPELL AGAINST TOO MUCH RATIONALITY

Throughout this dissertation, I have addressed many concepts and ways of understanding the world and ourselves that ground our forms of knowledge. I have done this to reconceptualize the idea we have of the body and the categories with which it is connected. In this chapter, I turn, through the analysis of the images of the witch and magic in the works of Nichols and Kaur, to the very notion of what we understand as reason, science, and knowledge.

The study of magic, historically, also shows to be the study of the most primitive forms of science: "since the outset of scholarly reflection on magic, it has commonly been defined in relation to religion and science, sometimes as their more primitive, less rational, or incipient manifestation" (Collins 6). Therefore, magic has been understood as a form of investigation of the world that produces knowledge.

During a certain time of history, the boundaries among these three (magic, religion, and science) were very porous. According to Hanciau, magic, witchcraft, sorcery, superstition

in general and religion would mix relentlessly during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and up to the seventeenth century (82). Daniel Schwemer states that science is "concerned with rational, empirical human investigations producing objective, verifiable knowledge," while "the sphere of religion encompasses all phenomena associated with the worship of the divine, including theology and ethics" (18). On that account, they are very clearly distinct realms. Magic appears, as the author notes, as "the wayward (and therefore often secret) child spawned by science and religion, combining the latter's credulous engagement with the supernatural with the former's belief in the unlimited power and effectiveness of human actions" (Schwemer 18). Ergo, the connection of magic with both areas deserves to be attributed. Firstly, I would like to comment on the relation between magic and religion. The elements that attach both concepts are indeed very unequivocal. They relate to the supernatural, transcendent, spiritual, or mystical aspect of human life. In fact, as established by Kimberly B. Stratton, "the distinction between magic and religion is thus a modern one imposed on ancient practitioners and does not reflect their own state of mind or perceptions of their practices" (85). It has been, as discussed before, a discursive construction much like the idea of Orientalism than an actual separate realm of human experience. I agree with Sabina Magliocco in that magic "is used as a foil against which to define legitimate religious practice, perpetuating a pattern going back to classical times" that is grounded on "a concept of religion as an analytic category that privileges Christian monotheism as the norm and views religions that deviate from it as deficient" (636). This is not to say that the idea of magic did not exist in those times or that I am rejecting the ancient ideas of magic and religion. Nonetheless, I am more interested in understanding how our current ideas of magic were ideologically labeled. For this reason, and because of the scope of the poets' works

analyzed herein, the connection between religion and magic is not the one on which I desire to focus more, since it is based on the same instruments.

The second association, that between magic and science, is the one I will be focusing now. The first aspect of this connection is related to the science of medicine. As we could see from Karen Jones and Michael Zell's work on historical documents earlier in this chapter, the practices established as magical most often related to healing and discovering diseases. Actually, healing magic poses "some of the most serious problems of definition, because it overlapped both with prayers asking for healing and with non-magic medicine" (Rider 310). During the Middle Ages and even during Renaissance, the difference between academic medicine and magical medicine was very slight; both mixed poisons, chemical products, and well-wishes to attempt to cure people (Hanciau 80). The primitive medicine of the time was very much based on attempt and error and on suppositions which are today seen as illusional or even superstitious. Consequently, folk healing and magical healing competed, at the time, with the medicine considered regular and the one considered traditional. In the poem "Abra-Cadabra" (29), in Nichols's *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman and Other Poems* (1989), we can see such ideas at place.

My mother had more magic
in her thumb
than the length and breadth
of any magician

Weaving incredible stories
around the dark-green senna brew

just to make us slake

the ritual Sunday purgative

Knowing when to place a cochineal poultice

on a fevered forehead

Knowing how to measure a belly's symmetry

kneading the narah pains away

Once my baby sister stuffed

a split-pea up her nostril

my mother got a crochet needle

and gently tried to pry it out

We stood around her

like inquisitive gauldings

Suddenly, in surgeon's tone she ordered,

'Pass the black pepper',

and patted a little

under the dozing nose

My baby sister sneezed.

The rest was history.

The poem revolves around the image of the literary persona's mother who, as the poem goes, possessed some type of magical knowledge. Throughout the poem, we are told some tales about the mother's magical power which focuses, in the final part, on a specific story. The first description that opens the text gives the reader many symbols that point to the idea of magic. The first one is the portrayal of the mother's magic in her thumb. Although this is a common image to express authority and expertise, the presence of magical knowledge in a body part is in tone with Zordan's characterization of magic and witchcraft. The author claims that the image of the witch relates to a thought that feels the matter that swallows us, in a very poetic description, under the perception that everything is part of an immeasurable devouring (340). Zordan establishes how this other type of knowledge relates to the magical realm, in connection with the material domain, with the body and with the ideals associated thereto. The devouring is a metaphor for materiality and to how this type of knowledge is embedded in corporeality. In Nichols's poem, the fact that the thumb is used as the first image to portray this knowledge is not random.

The second description is a comparison. The mother's magic is compared with a magician. The word magician, which also appears in Kaur's poem approached earlier, points to illusions and willful deception. When talking about magic and magical powers, the image of the magician may ignite the discussion of what is actually magical. The stories the poem brings share no transcendent or spiritual capacity of the mother, but ways to live life and to tend to children – a capacity that not everybody possesses. Ergo, magic in this poem may be simply the exquisite knowledge this mother has in the caring of her offspring.

The first story relates to the senna brew. Senna is a plant, usually used to treat constipation and other intestinal conditions. It is a dark-green plant and, as the literary persona's testimony, it does not have a mild flavour. To make the kids drink the tea, or the

brew, every Sunday, the mother invented stories about it, which made the “Sunday purgative” much more delighting. In the poem, the word “weaving” describes the connection of the stories with the brew. The act of weaving is usually seen as a female activity, especially older woman. It is also present in several myths and mythical imagery, such as that of Penelope, in which it is a symbol of resistance as well. In the Salem trials, many women were accused of “weaving witchcraft” – a pagan practice of ancient peoples in history. Weaving, therefore, is indeed a magical symbol.

The second tale is related to healing. The cochineal poultice is made from cochineal and put on a child’s forehead to heal fevers. Nonetheless, there is more to the story of cochineal. It was also used for a long time in history as a red dye, much sought after. During some time, Spain had the monopoly of cochineal import from the Americas. Yet, as historian Jordan Kellman states, cochineal “had likely been in use for over a thousand years when Cortez first recorded its use among Aztecs” (375), who not only used but manufactured it for a long time before Spanish conquerors “discovered" it. It was first imported in 1518 and because of its superiority as a red dye there was a large-scale consumption throughout Europe which lasted until the nineteenth century, when synthetic aniline dyes replaced it (Kellman 376). The interesting part about the history of cochineal, however, is the definition of what it was. Today, it is known that cochineal is the larva of a bug that feeds on cactus sap and is collected before it grows into the bug per se. This larva goes through water submersion, heat exposure, and manual handling for the extraction of the red powder. Nevertheless, during the seventeenth century, when the question came into the spotlight, this information was not a given. According to Kellman, “[i]n the summer of 1693, the French botanist and droguiste Pierre Pomet was manning his Paris dispensary and composing what was to be the standard reference for exotic natural substances for most of the eighteenth century.” He was caught

perplexed because, “in spite of his proximity to the Jardin du Roi, hub of the early modern European botanical knowledge, where he was frequently invited to give lectures, he lacked an answer to a simple question: was cochineal, the powdered base of the brilliant red and purple dyes that made the most prized textiles of the era, and one of the most common substances in the trade, a plant or an animal?” (373). Of course, Pomet was not the first person in Europe to question the nature of cochineal, but it was through him and this event that a series of discussions and investigations led to the definitive answer. Such discussions involved scholars from several countries of Europe, microscopic laboratories, and many academic circuits. However, European scholars only found the answer with the knowledge of the local native people of the Americas who handled the cochineal.

In Kellman’s article, the nature of the cochineal and the history of its investigation are reported with details, but the author’s vision on what such discovery caused in the seventeenth-century science is far more interesting. Kellman claims that the debate on the cochineal “suggests a far more complex interaction between center and periphery than previous models [of science] have suggested, one in which not only knowledge and plants, but expertise and authority could flow both toward and away from the metropolitan center, and could be embodied in different ways by different participants in the often inverted social hierarchies of the Atlantic world” (386). More than that, in terms of science itself, Kellman shows that the resolution of the debate “suggests that the experience of the colonial Atlantic world of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century stretched the boundaries not only of the content of European science, but of its methods, tools, and epistemology in ways we have only begun to explore” (386). This scientific stretch comes from the fact that the idea of science at place in the seventeenth century (and even nowadays) did not view indigenous, popular knowledge as valuable or as equally valuable to the knowledge produced and applied

in laboratories and academic institutions. Nevertheless, a shift was needed when the greatest European scientists could not resolve this issue and had to resort to native knowledge.

In the poem, the use of the cochineal refers to the mother's type of knowledge which is portrayed as magical. Such representation indicates that magic is excluded or marginalized. What was not understood was feared and thus vilified. In the same stanza, the literary persona presents the "narah pains." Narah is basically a strain on a muscle in the region of the belly, usually caused by physical exertion from lifting something heavy, for example. This type of pain can only go away, according to popular knowledge, by a specific type of belly rub, which cannot be learned through books, microscopes, or any other so-called traditional research method. The mother possesses such knowledge and in the last story of the poem, her healing skills are juxtaposed with traditional medicine.

The last story is about the literary persona's baby sister stuffing a pea up her nostril and how the mother resolved such problem. The instruments used by the mother were a crochet needle and black pepper, both items of the domestic realm, also considered female elements. However, the mother is described differently from what may be expected within this domain. The verse "Suddenly, in surgeon's tone she ordered," describes a voice of authority, with the image of the traditional medicine – a surgeon. The mixture of these realms and types of knowledge points to a comprehension of knowledge, and therefore of science, which is different from the ways mentioned above. Science is the investigation of the natural world; it should not be limited to a single manner of understanding and building knowledge with the more-than-human. Science is the study of all around us, including ourselves, i.e., nature, but we have been trying to control nature through science instead of learning from it. Nichols's "Abra-Cadabra" shows that our notion of science must be expanded and that what we call science now may have a deficit. We need a way to talk about and do science that does

not exclude other types of knowledge, the ones that were once called magic or witchcraft. They are simply different perspectives to understand the world.

The use of symbols from the alleged female and domestic realms in the last story of the poem calls attention to yet another shortcoming in our western current idea of science. Even though science is supposed to be neutral and objective, it was not created as universal, but rather it is conceived as male, white, and western. This is what Evelyn Fox Keller implies when she questions "how much of the nature of science is bound up with the idea of masculinity, and what would it mean for science if it were otherwise?" (3). It is not by chance that Lawson Welsh claims that "Abracadabra" returns magic to the ordinary and reinvests the powers of women in the everyday world ("Grace Nichols" 65). Nichols's poem "Spell Against Too Much Male White Power" (18) from the same book as the last poem reflects upon such issue.

There is too much male white power at loose in the world
There is too much male white power at loose in the world

The smell of Pretoria
The breath of the Pentagon
The eye of the Kremlin

How can I trap it
How can I embalm it
How can I roll it up
like a burial shroud

and put it away

Or at least

How can I persuade it

How can I dissuade it

How can I dissipate it

and spread it thin thin

across my loaf

which of course

would have to be eaten

There is too much male white power at loose in the world

There is too much male white power at loose in the world

How can I cull it

How can I curb it

How can I muzzle the hound

Or at least

How can I bemuse it

How can I confuse it

and like the tower of Babel

bring it all down

O I am the cutter of cataracts

A salter of tongues

There is too much male white power at loose in the world

There is too much male white power at loose in the world

How can I rebound

the missiles and rockets

How can I confound

multinational octopuses

Or at least

How can I remove the ‘Big Chiefs’

from the helm

How can I put them to sit on benches

quiet, sea-gazing, retired old men.

The title of the poem already evokes the idea of witchcraft by mentioning a spell. Spells were used as strategies to perform witchcraft, as means to achieve goals. In the poem, the goal is to “remove the ‘Big Chiefs,’ to stop the male white power at loose in the world. This brings a reflection on how our systems of knowledge were built and still are maintained by a male and white perspective and on how, to break it, a method from outside this system must be used – in this case, witchcraft and the knowledge it represents.

One specific way in which this is carried out in the poem is by bringing such abstract systems of power to the realm of the physical, the corporeal. The Pentagon, the Kremlin, and Pretoria, places of legal and military power, are represented as parts or elements of the body: the smell, the breath, the eye. The materialization of these centers suggests how power, seen as abstract and even metaphorical, acts and can be felt through very physical, material ways. Not only that, but they were built by human beings, with bodies, ideas, and perspectives of their own. Besides such materialization, to claim that these centers of power have eyes, breath, and smell is also to defend that they are alive and acting upon people and the world.

The following stanzas also use corporeal images such as trapping, embalming, and rolling up of a burial shroud, and the spreading it thin across a loaf to eat. Both images are associated with intriguing representations of death and eating. They are both images of crossing boundaries: one crosses the very boundary between life and death, and the other crosses the limits of the body and the outside, the me and the others. Such poem can be read as an attempt at transformation, when we resume the discussion in the last chapter of this dissertation, in that the act of eating can be seen as an act of change, and death can be considered the ultimate confrontation of life. It is, in fact, what the title of the poem proposes: to use a spell against too much male white power. Basically, it seems to argue that there is too much male white power at loose in the world and the literary persona believes it is possible to confront such power and maybe change it through magic. The structure of the poem itself resembles a spell. The verses are repeated in the beginning and through the stanzas, as an anchor to which the spell comes back. Thus, the poem acts as a spell, as an instrument to perform change or, at least, challenge the current social structures.

In the penultimate stanza, with the mention to missiles, rockets, and multinational octopuses, the poem connects three different realms. The metonymy of missiles represents

military force and violence; the rockets represent scientific advance in technology and the conquest (or colonization) of space; and the metaphor of the octopus is related to the several arms that multinational companies have and to how capitalism has ingrained itself, with its corroding logic, in every aspect of our lives. These three realms are not as separate as we think they are. The first two point to innovation and the use of technology, i.e. science advancement in order to maintain power. Science, therefore, becomes a consequence of human historical and social construction. According to Ruth Bleier, "in patriarchal civilizations that have been our cultural context for the past several thousand years, a particular, consistent, and profound bias shapes scientific theories in general" and science, "like all culture, reflects that consistent historical bias" (2). Military and technological power walk hand in hand in all the major processes of colonization and conquest (physical and ideological) in our human history. Science, consequently, has been used to achieve such goals and has become biased itself in some cases.

In Nichols's poem, the spell attempts to fight such reality, but even as it does so, it also admits this system is so deeply rooted that the sentence "or at least" is repeated throughout the text. However, it is not a passive acceptance. What the poem does is search for other types of knowledge (in this case, represented by magic) that can, hopefully, "break out of the cultural constraints that some human beings have constructed to the detriment of others" (Bleier 13), because they are not based on hierarchical exclusions.

There are several exclusions at place in the current form of science of which we are part. One of them is the very exclusion of nature as a producer of knowledge. The second chapter of this dissertation was dedicated to the more-than-human forms of life and their agency upon us. If we take such notion of agency, then the more-than-human is no longer simply an object, but a knowledgeable subject as well. Fox Keller reminds us of Bacon's

affirmations about modern science and the use of reason based on a certain philosophy that "deserved to be called 'masculine,' that could be distinguished from its ineffective predecessors by its 'virile' power, its capacity to bound Nature to man's service and make her his slave" (7). In this excerpt we can see the attitude towards nature that has established this system. It is a dead and feminized nature that must be slave to humanity's (or men's) wishes.

Beyond this vision of the more-than-human, the basis of our modern science is also a very masculine one, as "Abracadabra" demonstrates. Similarly, "masculine and feminine are categories defined by a culture, not by biological necessity," thus, "[w]omen, men, and science are created, together, out of a complex dynamic of interwoven cognitive, emotional, and social forces" (Fox Keller 4). Hence, the concepts of gender and science are created by the same logic.

Further discussing such associations, Fox Keller affirms that the binary gender categories relate to other binaries as well. The author observes that the binary logic casts "objectivity, reason, and mind as male, and subjectivity, feeling and nature as female" (6), division in which I would like to include the realms of the mind and the body. Therefore, not only can science be based on exclusions, but it has "harmed women's bodies (in our best interests, of course), and has threatened the environment itself" (Rose 2). The consequences of these associations are connected, as are the roots of their problems. Fox Keller claims that "a principal task of feminist theory has been to redress the absence of women in the history of social and political thought" (6). It seems that the current system of knowledge cannot work for women or any other marginalized group. As Phyllis Rooney questions, "[w]hat, then, are we feminists to do about reason? Are we to reject reason and anything historically associated with it, and endorse everything historically associated with the feminine, be it feeling, emotion, intuition, or nature? Or are we to seek simply to 'balance out,' to value equally

qualities traditionally associated with the masculine and the feminine?" (95). The answer, as the author continues, lies in neither, as to do so would be to continue endorsing problematic divisions. To be clear, the problem is not simply that there exists a division of gender, but that "the loci of voice, of agency, of subjectivity, of (rational) power and knowledge are all located within the male node" (95). Furthermore, I would add that the elements within the female realm also have importance, but are, according to the western logic, devalued. However, when it comes to answering the questions posed above, Rooney states that it is not simply "of whether reason is good or bad, for, given its history, we hardly know what reason is" (96). The central issue is that "the parameters and politics of 'rational' method, discourse, and voice are defined in ways that still subtly but powerfully diminish women's voices" (96) and of so many other groups of living beings. The quest, we may say, is to understand other types of reason or of thought that have been discredited and excluded.

Following Fox Keller's proposition, then, and considering ecofeminism and the understanding of the connection between gender division and the more-than-human, we must ask ourselves what the principal task of ecofeminism in scientific history is. I believe that the answer lies in Keller's premises. We must investigate the current absences and approach other, new or old, possibilities. The possibility established by Kaur's and Nichols's work is that of magic. Magic is perceived in association with the realm of the body, of the carnality, of the more-than-human, but not in a binary way; it is perceived in a logic of inclusion of all the knowledge these domains carry. In Kaur's poem from the book *Home Body* (2020) we can see magic as the other possibility been offered when the current system fails us.

but magic

doesn't work like that

magic doesn’t happen

cause i’ve figured out how to

pack more work in a day

magic moves

by the laws of nature

and nature has its own clock

magic happens

when we play

when we escape

daydream and imagine

that's where everything

with the power to fulfill us

is waiting on its knees for us

- *productivity anxiety*

The poem evokes, at the end, a type of sickness (mental sickness) that can be caused by the accelerated and unfocused way of life our social systems enforce upon us. The type of mental sickness invoked – anxiety – has physical symptoms, even as a mental condition, which makes it an intriguing example of the impossibility of completely dividing mind and body. Not only does the poem challenge the systems based on this division, but it also challenges the very idea of such binarism.

The first verse of the poem starts with a contrasting conjunction, “but,” which may be read as a denial or confrontation of something that was said before. Considering that the verse

addresses magic and how it happens in our lives, we can infer that the poem begins by contradicting the way our lives are lived. It also approaches the definition and functions of magic. Hence, magic is an inherent part of our lives.

This description of how magic functions evokes significant symbols. One of them is the connection of magic with the laws of nature. We have seen how these laws were established as fixed elements discovered by the strict discipline of science that is based on such laws. Associating magic with these laws dissolves such connection. The solid threads linking science with the laws of nature are softened and the laws of nature not only gain a possible new understanding but also new associations. To correlate magic with such laws is to take magic away from the realm of the supernatural and mystical. If magic is something natural, part of nature, it is part of us as well. The allusion to nature's own clock confirms such ideas, and it also introduces something else: a valorization of nature as an entity. We live by the laws of nature, not the other way around, according to Bacon. The notion of time, present in the metonymy of the clock, is a mark of modern capitalist societies. Our social imagination is filled with many sayings that revolve around the notion of time, like "Time is of the essence," "Time is money" etc. Time becomes something to be conquered, and we all stand in a race against each other and against ourselves, our bodies. By claiming that nature has its own clock, the poetic persona invites the readers to stop such race and to enter a realm of acceptance of life conditions.

The rhythm that flows through Kaur's poem reinforces such ideas. The sounds alternate between flowing words marked by the consonants "s" and "m" and words that demand sharper stops, such as "happen," "clock," and "escape," which not only end with such sharp sounds but are followed by words starting with consonants as well. This change of sound demands the reader to stop sometimes among the verses, often changing the

vocalization from soft to hard. It is as if the rhythm attempted to follow the modern brutal rhythm of work that leads to productivity anxiety. However, the poem keeps reminding us to slow down. Magic, then, has a more balanced rhythm.

Another image linked to magic in the poem is the one of creativity. It appears when we play, escape, daydream, and imagine. These images are connected to playful activities, which usually belong to the childhood universe – activities that demand creative energy but are not draining. This type of intellectual and creative work that has "the power to fulfill us" contrasts with the intellectual work mentioned by the poem that leads to anxiety and other unbalances. Two types of energy are put into question: one runs counter to healthy ways of living and the other, associated with magic, fulfills us. Although they seem very dualistic, the two types of creation or production are more intertwined than we might think. Both relate the creation of something to some kind of work but are described differently. While one invites us to a race against everything and everyone (including the more-than-human and ourselves), the other is waiting for us "on its knees." If we extrapolate the images present in the poem to think about the bigger picture of what is being represented, we can infer that these two forms are basically two types of knowledge or ways to achieve and create knowledge.

This knowledge of which magic or witchcraft are holders and representatives is not new. It has been called many things, but I would like to name it people's natural knowledge, which is taken from Clifford D. Conner's definition of this type of wisdom – "[i]f science is understood in the fundamental sense of *knowledge of nature,*. . .it should not be surprising to find that it originated with the people closest to nature: hunter-gatherers, peasant farmers, sailors, miners, blacksmiths, folk healers, and others forced by the conditions of their lives to wrest the means of their survival from an encounter with nature on a daily basis" (2). Even though the author does not mark the gender gap here, his work gives the necessary

recognition to the fact that women were at the forefront of the production of this knowledge. To defend that science belongs, in its roots, to these folk people, is to defend that the history of science as we know is a deceptive narrative.

In Nichols's poem "The Big Giggle" (61), in the book *Picasso, I want my face back* (2009), the history of science is questioned or, in a way, laughed at.

With due respect to all the serious scientists
of the world — Copernicus and Ptolemy,
Galileo and Archimedes, Newton's gravity,
Einstein's relativity, not to mention
Hawking's partiality for the dreaded black-hole —

Laughing Woman, in all seriousness,
has her own beginning theory of the universe.
Even as a child, she felt it in her bones,
gazing love-struck at the smiling stars
in the great laboratory of the skies.

Remembering her teacher's mnemonic-trick
to help her remember the planets —
(Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn,
Uranus, Neptune, Pluto).
My very educated mother just served us nine pies.

Yet in the heart of their staggering statistics
her own spin on the heavenly drama persisted —
'What if' (as she had thought as a child)
What if it was all set off by light-headed Helium
upsetting the equation? A squeaky emotion

Causing not the Big Bang but the Big Giggle —
the giggle-effect, rippling and growing
buckling the very knees of matter in space
until bubbling in its own hilarious girth
the whole shebang exploded into fits —

'What if', she thought. 'What gift'.

The literary persona is proposing a narrative which is different from the official scientific narrative, about the beginning of the world. Instead of the Big Ben, there is the Big Giggle. The presentation of this different narrative questions the universality of knowledge and reminds us that most of our theories are narratives, and as narratives they can be changed, modified, and even replaced. In the poem, the replacement of the Big Bang theory with the Big Giggle comes with a dose of humour that is in harmony with the very name of the Laughing Woman's theory.

Laughter and the comic have a history of marginalization in the sciences considered "serious", to use the poem's term, and laughter itself has been connected with the image of the witch as an association with the fear we have of witches and their consequent demonization.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival is based on folk knowledge and on the idea of a second life opposing the official order of the world. His book, *Rabelais and His World* (19XX), analyzes and theorizes on François Rabelais's *oeuvre*. For Bakhtin, the comprehension of carnival and its laughter changed from time to time and reached its full expression during the Middle Ages. It is described as "a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man[sic], and of human relations; they [the people] built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, world in which all medieval people participated more or less" (6). The importance of Bakhtin's work to this discussion is the considerations about laughter. Laughter is many times understood in a derogatory manner, even considered a low genre in literary history. For the theorist, laughter is not opposed to seriousness, only to intolerant, dogmatic seriousness, as it "purifies and completes it. . .purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and petrified, it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naiveté, illusion, from the single meaning, the single level" (Bakhtin 123). Laughter, then, enhances seriousness and contributes with other ways of constructing meaning. From the Bakhtinian, carnivalesque, point of view, laughter has a positive, regenerating, creative meaning (Bakhtin 71). It is this vision of laughter that I attribute to the idea of the Big Giggle in Nichols's poem.

Proposing that the world started because of a giggle is to propose that we lead more positive lives, that we think of our serious, political, scientific matters with more embracing and including paradigms. However, this is not the only element that brings humour to the poem. The first verse seems to point respectfully to a consideration of famous scientists and their theories. At the end of the first stanza, there is a mocking construction, which is not, as carnivalesque laughter shows, derogatory. When the literary persona begins to list the names and theories of these men, we do not expect that something humorous might appear. Our

expectations, as readers, are teased when the ambiguity of the “black-hole” appears. This does not imply that respect is not given to these names and to the scientific history, but the laughing tone has an ability to propose a revision of how we understand such “serious scientists” and the narrative of their theories.

The following stanza begins with this juggling of laughter and seriousness, when it presents the literary persona under the name of Laughing Woman and claims that she is in “all seriousness.” This verse points, then, to laughter as an all-encompassing form of looking at the world; after all, it is not by chance that the main topic of the poem is the creation of a different narrative for the beginning of the universe. I interpret it as a proposal to, perhaps, rewrite the narratives told so far with one that understands the world in its entirety and gives equal value to the different forms of knowledge and of expression. Laughter is representative of that.

The third stanza of the poem brings the childhood universe. It presents something very commonly used in the learning process for memorization: a mnemonic trick. When the children’s universe is brought to the center of the poem, we can think of two possible considerations. The first one is that childhood is a part of our lives when we are not so rigidly guided by the laws and norms imposed during our learning processes. Kids do not know how words function; nor have they learned all the strict norms by which adults act. Thus, a child’s thought is freer from certain social and political ties and is, more frequently, less biased. When she was a kid the Laughing Woman contrasted what she learned in school and what she truly believed in (the power of laughter), and, therefore, the Big Giggle theory is more inclusive and balanced than our own traditional dividing narratives.

The second consideration I draw from such children’s universe is about the mnemonic trick used to memorize the names and order of the planets. Kids have an inherent curiosity

about getting to know the world and all beings surrounding them. It is innate in all living beings to investigate, to be curious. It feels wrong to make children use tricks to memorize things, as part of the rigid process of official education instead of their intuitive competence and possibility of actually getting to know things. When the Laughing Woman says her child-self "felt it in her bones," there is a clear contradiction between something she understands with her own body and something that she must memorize for, perhaps, standardized tests that attempt to measure knowledge. Both forms of addressing the learning process point to very different approaches toward knowledge itself.

One of these types of knowledge is represented by the infant thought, which can be felt in the body and is, consequently, related to the rational knowledge. At the same time, it has a connection with the emotional, instinctual field. This type of knowledge is the one that comes from the masses, from experience, from people, and not from individual, punctual figures that discovered everything by themselves. Conner, about the history of science, states that the purpose of his book is to "demonstrate a much, much greater contribution to the production and propagation of scientific knowledge on the part of anonymous masses of humble people — the common people — than is generally recognized or acknowledged" (2). The author is not trying to say that "the formulation of quantum theory or the structure of DNA can be credited directly to artisans or peasants," which would be absurd, but "if modern science is likened to a skyscraper, then those twentieth-century triumphs are the sophisticated filigrees and its pinnacle that are supported by — and could not exist apart from — the massive foundation created by human laborers" (2). In other words, "[s]cience as it exists today was created out of folk and artisanal sources" (Conner 4). It is a history of continuity, then, not of solitary stars that develop science by themselves.

In “The Big Giggle”, this other vision of knowledge is related to the realm of the body. The verse in which the child laughing woman “felt it in her bones,” mentioned above briefly, is the first allusion to this realm. Throughout this dissertation, I have established how the binary vision of the world not only divides the world into dualism, but it joins the different axis of this dualism too. In such alleged division, the realm of the body represents the association with the instinctual. The words “to feel it in your bones” use the body (bones) in order to refer to a sensation, a “gut feeling,” something our instincts know. The child laughing woman knew that the world came into existence with something so powerful as laughter. When laughter comes to be in our bodies, it activates much more than just our mouths. As a sensation, laughter can be felt in our stomach, our legs, our arms; hence it can put all those body parts into motion. It is, at times, irrepressible. Sometimes, a laughter can be healing, and at other times very dangerous. A laughter is, indeed, powerful, both in the sense that it controls our bodies and in the sense that it can do many things to us and to others. The child laughing woman, perhaps, considering all this, decided that the “great laboratory of the skies” had to relate to the powerful occurrence of laughter.

The mention of the skies as “great laboratories”, which is preceded by a personification of stars, points to an intersection of the different visions of knowledge. The world laboratory invites the idea of “serious" and official science, and in the poem, it is put side by side with “smiling stars.” The personification of the stars is not so surprising since the stars are alive; thus, this is not such a paradox with the laboratories. However, the child is “love-struck” with the smiling stars. When the emotion of love comes into the scenery, the idea of the laboratories seems quite far. As already discussed, emotions are usually put outside of laboratories, academies, and other official scientific places. The two realms are also put together in the first verse of the fourth stanza: “Yet in the heart of their staggering statistics.”

Once more, two different imagined contexts are juxtaposed: the statistics of science and research and the heart as the bodily organ, usually associated to our emotions. Indeed, saying "the heart of something" can allude to its center. The poem is filled with ambiguities and allows us to extrapolate its meanings. Other juxtapositions also contribute to this interpretation, such as "equation" and "squeaky emanation" or "the very knees of matter in space."

The final verse plays sonorously with the sentences "what if" and "what gift." The former presents a conditional element while the latter presents a hopeful statement. We can interpret the Big Giggle as a gift in different ways; the simple fact that the Laughing Woman sees the world in such a hopeful, inclusive manner can be deemed as a gift. We can also understand that it would be a gift if the world functioned on the basis of inclusivity represented by Bakhtin's carnivalesque laughter. A third possibility is that the Big Giggle can simply describe how the world actually is, not how it could be, or how the Laughing Woman thinks of it. It is a gift to live in such a world, then, even if our main form of knowledge does not understand it fully — yet.

Another poem by Grace Nichols that reconfigures knowledge is "Sacred Flame", page eighteen from the book *I have crossed an ocean* (2010).

Our women
the ones I left behind
always know the taste
of their own strength —
bitter at times it might be

But I

armed only with

my mother's smile

must be forever gathering

my life together like scattered beads.

*

What was your secret mother —

the one that made you a woman

and not just Obafemi's wife

With your thighs you gave

a generation of beautiful children

With your mind you willed the crops

commanding a good harvest

With your hands and heart

plantain soup and love

But the sacred flame of your woman's

kra you gave to no man, mother

Perhaps that was the secret then —

the one that made you a woman

and not just Obafemi's wife

This poem addresses women's liberation. A daughter questions the ways her mother used to be such a powerful woman, as her vision shows. In the context of Nichols's work, we can interpret that the women she left behind are the women from the literary persona's home country and culture. The literary persona recalls her mother's actions and life by reflecting upon what made her mother a woman, not just a wife, i.e., what her mother did to maintain her subjectivity in a patriarchal system. Through such actions her mother gains or maintains her power, her agency, and her rights, which are all exemplified in her body parts – once more an embodiment of knowledge. One of these actions is her generation of children, of life, with her thighs. The thighs, such a sexualized element of the female body, are put in line with the woman's power to create life, to birth her own children, not only to satisfy or pleasure someone else.

Another action is the one connected to the mind, with which she "willed crops." This example contrasts with the first one in many ways. The image of a woman being a mother is very common and even expected inside patriarchal expectations. Although in the poem the imagery of the mother is not one of subjection, but of empowerment, it is still associated with such social imagination. With the addition of the "commanding" subject to the image of the mother, the body and mind realms are interrelated. Not only does the mother's power come from the commanding mind, but also from the material and living body.

The last example is the mother giving food and love through hands and hearts. As addressed in the third chapter, food is very much linked with affection. Here, there is a comparison – and maybe an equation of – knowing how to cook plantain soup with giving love to her children. The knowledge necessary to cook comes from the same place as the knowledge necessary to provide emotional support.

All these actions derive from a place named in the poem as "sacred flame." Fire, in the myth of Prometheus, is a symbol of knowledge. This image is accordant with my interpretation of this poem. The knowledge the literary persona's mother had about life ranges from commanding the fields to giving love and food to her children. It is a form of wisdom that understands how the different spheres of knowledge are intricately connected. It is a vision that embraces all types of knowledge and comprehends that they are all part of and necessary for life. As Rooney thoroughly expounds:

> In reconceptualizing reason and its allies knowledge and truth, we have to uproot a rhetorical matrix that admits these concepts to the realm of action, insight, and power yet has expelled feeling, passion, instinct, and nature from any enduring claims to rational power and knowledge. In learning to authentically speak anew our insights and truths about our experience as embodied humans, we need an empowering reason, on that doesn't require an opposing force over which it needs to gain transcendence with all of the deep conceptual trappings that have gone along with this gendering of reason. Our history has given us what, at best, can only be described as a vey impoverished discourse. We have been able to talk about the power of reason, but not about the power of empathy. We can talk about the insight and understanding that rational knowledge brings, but we cannot talk about the understanding a deepening sense of compassion brings. Just as we have bust a caricature of reason, we also are left with a caricature of feeling, feeling robbed of any claim to rationality and understanding. (97-98).

By analyzing Nichols's and Kaur's works, I discuss the ways the affective, instinctual realm of our lives has a knowledge of its own and deserves to be seen as important, valid, and

to have its presence in our existences and actions recognized. Now let us turn to what can be called the affective realm as the path that witchcraft (or what is called witchcraft, herein comprehended as a type of wisdom) points to: embracing more than just a meagre form of reason.

4.2 QUANTUM AFFECTS OR THE POWER OF EMOTIONS

I have discussed how reason, rationality, and science have been considered the only correct and valid sources that can produce knowledge. This realm of the reason has been dually constructed in opposition to emotions, instinct, and the body, and this distinction has been used to exclude different forms of knowledge and certain classes of people that were, then, connected to it. However, I am not implying that these people are indeed closer to such "body-related" knowledge or to the realm of emotions, nor that the emotional should outrank the rational. I aim to demonstrate that although different, reason and emotion need not be opposite neither gain different values. Our emotions and our bodies can be sources of knowledge production as well. In fact, I would like to show that Nichols's and Kaur's poetry point to how this other type of knowledge comes to be and how it is present in our lives. Therefore, my purpose is to discuss the strength and power that such knowledge has so that we can feel comfortable in acknowledging its part in our lives. It is not an opposite to reason, despite being different. It is also not irrational; it may even be a complement to what we call reason and to the way we frame our knowledge and knowledge producing systems. My reasonings come from the ideas espoused by witchcraft, as I have theorized above.

In Kaur's poem *the sun and her flowers* (2017), we can notice an endeavor to understand affect as a fundamental need.

we need more love

not from men

but from ourselves

and each other

- *medicine*

Lili Pâquet, about this poem, defends that Kaur "writes that women need to be kinder to themselves and each other, rather than looking for support from men. . . she advocates both self-love and the support of a female community in order to heal body image problems" (309). Although I agree with such understanding and acknowledge that Kaur's poetry has a "selfie-help" dynamic — to use Pâquet's term —, I do not believe the readings of such poem are exhausted by this analysis, despite its importance.

When reading about love in poetry, it is easy to turn to mushy and outmoded readings, especially in micro poems such as Kaur's. But it only happens because we usually understand emotions as inferior, non-serious, non-complex parts of our lives. In Kaur's poem transcribed above, love is equated with medicine. This analogy uses something as valued in our society as medicine to reflect upon the status love is given. I could use human's necessity of socialization as an argument for the importance of love since it establishes the emotional bonds in our lives. Nonetheless, my arguments go further. Feelings, emotions or affects are not only part of our lives, but are immanent, fundamental, and necessary for maintaining our existences.

The etymological origin of the word passion from the latin *passio* indicates how feelings and emotions have been historically understood. The word *passio* signifies suffering and it is also the root word for the word passive. To be passive, then, to be enacted upon, becomes a fear, "tied to the fear of emotionality, in which weakness is defined in terms of a

tendency to be shaped by others" (Ahmed 2). These connections show that "'emotion' has been viewed as 'beneath' the faculties of thought and reason" and as soft. This "softness is narrated as a proneness to injury" (Ahmed 2). For this reason, a hierarchy is formed between emotion and reason, like all binary categories related to them, as already mentioned. However, this hierarchy considers emotions only as static and passive. Yet, emotions "are not 'in' either the individual or the social but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects" (Ahmed 10). According to Sarah Ahmed, we should not be asking "what are emotions?" but "what do emotions do?" (4). Emotions, the way we connect with others (living or not), delineate the very surfaces and boundaries of the world.

In two of Kaur's poems from the book *the sun and her flowers* (2017), this derogatory vision of emotions is counterposed. The poems on pages 171 and 179 bring the idea of emotions as part of ourselves. The first one (p. 171) talks about the relation of emotions inside the gender division.

a

man

who cries

-a gift

The negative idea that a man who cries is a gift comes from a social order that, as seen above, puts emotions as inferior and passive. Ergo, the category of man, which is usually put on the dual axis of reason, objectivity, and superiority, cannot be connected with the emotional realm. The idea that the literary persona has found a man (and in the context of a book, a romantic partner) that can acknowledge and deal with his emotional side is seen as a

gift. The poem, then, questions the most common and traditional ideas connected with emotions, but more than that, it questions the very base that defines emotions as inferior. By delving into gender hierarchy and the associations it brings, the poem questions an entire social symbolic system. The poem on page 179 also delves into the acceptance of emotions.

i am

made of water

of course i am emotional

Here, the idea that our emotions are innate to us comes associated with our biological structure. Thus, emotions are put as something as natural and inherent as our physical formation. Besides that, the idea that being emotional is something to be feared is subverted, because it becomes fundamentally human. As in the poem on 171, this poem also questions other categories associated with the idea that emotions are inferior. The division of the poem that puts the first verse, "i am," separated from the rest of what would be the predicate of the sentence establishes and emphasizes the essential nature of the literary persona. The affirmation of the poem is not of a simple characteristic, but of the innate core of the being. The last verse is an affirmation beginning with the expression "of course," that may be an indicative that the poem is an answer to the accusation of being "too emotional." The poem, then, is an assertion that subverts the negative tone of an imaginary question, one which censures the literary persona for her emotions. The symbol used to create such association is that of water. Water is an image of movement and of flow, which brings to the idea of emotions the notion that they are also not static and passive. It is interesting to mention as well that the illustrations present in these two poems are very similar. Both portray waves and, therefore, symbolize water and movement. Because the image of water brings this notion of

movement, it can be seen as questioning the static characteristic of emotions and consequently subverts traditional association with emotions.

In fact, the very word “emotion" points to movement. It comes from the Latin word *emovere*, which means to move or to move out. Of course, emotions are “not only about movement, but they are also about attachments or about what connects us to this or that” (Ahmed 11). We must understand, thus, that the fear of passivity is a fallacy, since we are all at some point both passive and active, both acting and being acted upon. Emotions show us how we form attachments and define what surrounds us; they also show that all the other beings in the world do that to us, too. We again resume the notion of control, which we do not have, at least not absolutely. We must embrace the idea of chaos, as observed in the second chapter, and acknowledge that this is how the world functions.

The necessity for control – the idea of human attempt to control nature – stems from the fear of weakness and of being injured, as already discussed. This uneasiness refers to self-containment, to how we see the body as having strict and rigid borders that do not interact with the so-called other, be it human, a living being, or non-living matter. As Teresa Brennan affirms, there is “no secure distinction between ‘individual' and the ‘environment’" (6). In Kaur’s poem about love, we see the movement of love between people and its inner importance as well. The use of the pronouns “each other” and “ourselves" points to this movement of love both within one’s own self or body and among society. It is not static nor is it simply there – it needs active engagement; hence the poem urges for “more love.”

In another of Kaur’s poem from *milk and honey* (2015, p.160), we can see the immanence of emotions in our lives and the fallacy that being emotional is a weakness, as it would make us prone to be injured, as if feeling something could be bad and as if we could avoid it.

it is part of the

human experience to feel pain

do not be afraid

open yourself to it

- *evolving*

Evolving is part of the human development. We evolve genetically, historically, and, as the poem shows, emotionally. The use of the enjambement is a common strategy in Kaur's poems, present in practically all of them and in all her books. In this piece of poetry, the enjambement creates a very specific pattern of breaking the verses. Every verse but the second is brief and short. The second, however, continues until what seems to be the end of that line. Moreover, the first verse ends in an article, which suggests a brusque cutting of the line. This contrasts with the second verse, which, besides being longer than the others, connects two ideas. The exception of the second verse may point to an emphasis on the immanence of feeling pain in the human experience. Pain is so inherent in our lives that not even the usual structure of the poem could part these words.

The poem overcomes immanence by claiming that it should not be feared. We should open ourselves to it, and that by doing so, we are evolving. Feeling pain is not just a part of human experience; it is necessary for us to develop, to become better, to build a more successful society. The term evolving reports back to pre-historic narratives of human evolving, to discourses of cave men and women and genetic evolution. The historical discourses that we usually see about cave people are related to how they learned to survive,

and the knowledge that made that possible, such as the discovery of fire, the wheel, the first finer instruments for hunting etc. “Evolving,” then leads us to a trail of knowledge, and that trail can only be found when we embrace our emotions.

It was not reason alone that lead those primitive peoples to the discoveries. It was experience, feelings, attempt and error, attention to how the body answered to the experiments. We have seen how the knowledge we have today is indebted to the folk wisdom that came from the body, its feelings, its expertise — what I call witchcraft. According to Ahmed, knowledge “cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world (171). This is why our science cannot be severed from the knowledge of the corporeal. They simply cannot be separated, even if we believe they can.

The affective turn, a term coined by Patricia Ticineto Clough (2007), is a trend that proposes a focus on emotions or affects. Michael Hardt states that “(l)ike other ‘turns’ that academic field have undergone in recent decades — the linguist turn, the cultural turn, and so forth — this focus on affects consolidates and extends some of the most productive existing trends in research” (ix). Hardt notes that the major shifts in thought, regarding the affective turn, are the focuses on the body and on emotions, of course, and on the connections related thereto since “affects refer equally to the body and the mind” (ix). In another view, Caroline Braunmuhl points out that “(t)he turn to affect has been a necessary consequence drawn from the latent rationalism of earlier poststructuralisms, as entailed in their cognitive reductionism” (84). Both visions show that the so-called affective turn is but one step towards a science which is more tuned with reality and with our needs.

The affective turn names affect as the center of its study, but the idea of affect is not such a simple and direct concept. What Teresa Brennan considers affect is "the physiological shift accompanying a judgment" (5). Similarly, Patricia Ticineto Clough establishes affectivity as "a substrate of potential bodily responses, often autonomic responses, in excess of consciousness;" "bodily capacities to affect and be affected or the augmentation or diminution of a body's capacity to act, to engage, and to connect, such that autoaffection is linked to the self-feeling of being alive — that is, aliveness or vitality" ("Introduction" 2). The definition by Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg adds a different vision to the concept, although it is close to the definitions above. They claim that "affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities." In other words, "affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages and variations between these intensities and resonances themselves" (1). Affect, therefore, "at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces — visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion" (Seigworth and Gregg 1). What we can infer from these definitions is that affect is, first and foremost, a type of knowledge, of knowing, which comes from the body, from a visceral connection with the world. Secondly, we conclude that it is not static, but inherently a movement. Thirdly, affect is a force. In line with these ideas, Patricia Ticineto Clough affirms that "the turn to affect points. . .to a dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally — matter's capacity for self-organization in being informational — which, I want to argue, may be the most provocative and enduring contribution of the affective turn" ("The

Affective Turn" 206-207). Affect, thus, points to matter's wisdom and to its capacity of creating knowledge.

The ideas I have discussed insofar are related to the term affect. Affect is usually seen as different from or perhaps more than emotion. It is "often viewed as a preliminal, preconscious phenomenon. . .autonomous and ephemeral" against a more "social expression of emotion" (Watkins 269). This is based on an idea that affect "precedes emotions; affect is not conscious" (Wissinger 232). Nonetheless, more often than not our emotions do not appear nor are formed consciously. Perhaps, the use of the term affect indicates a denial of the way emotions and feelings have been regarded, as inferior and undeserving. Yet, the way affect is described connects with my comprehension of emotions – complex systems and vital forces. Caroline Braunmuhl uses the terms interchangeably in her book *Matter, Affect, AntiNormativity* (2017) for understanding the affect-emotion opposition as a sort of replication of the body-mind dualism (86). As a result, she uses a different and allegedly more encompassing term as an attempt to escape such dualism. But by doing so, these theories refuse to deal with dualism and its problems and end up replicating it. Teresa Brennan also addresses the difference between the terms affects and emotions, claiming that "there is no reason to challenge the idea that emotions are basically synonymous with affects. . .or that moods and sentiments are subsets referring to longer-lasting affective constellations" (6). Thus, like Braunmuhl, I use, in this dissertation, the terms affect, feeling, and emotion interchangeably.

We continue to view emotions as unimportant because we have refused to deal or avoided dealing with them and with the dualism they entail. In Kaur's poem from *milk and honey* (2015, p. 174), such idea is upended.

to be

soft

is

to be

powerful

The short and direct verses give the tone to the poem from the beginning. It is a blunt, unequivocal affirmation. However, the poem does not use authoritative language; the verb tense, for example, is the infinitive, pointing to a general state of being. The message advocates for being soft. Usually, the term soft is used derogatorily and associated with being open and emotional. It can also mean to be weak (Ahmed 2). These ideas around the word soft are so widely known that the entire poem is based on these allegations. The upending in the poem is not actually in it materially, but in the meanings it challenges.

Accordingly, to be soft, to have emotions, and to wear them with pride, in a way, is to be powerful. This is in line with the idea that affects are energies or forces and that they provide a type of knowledge about the world and about us that no other type of wisdom can. Teresa Brennan delineates how the transmission of affect takes place. The author defends that "the form of transmission whereby people become alike is a process whereby one person's or one group's nervous and hormonal systems are brought into alignment with another's" (9). This process is named by neurologists "entraiment" (Brennan 9) and it can be chemical or electrical. Brennan gives the example of smell and pheromones, "mollecules that can be airborne and that communicate chemical information" and may "signal and produce reactions by unnoticeable odor in many hormonal interactions, including aggressions, as well as sex" (9). This is in line with Ahmed's idea that "attending to emotions might show us how all actions are reactions, in the sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others" (4). The process of the transmission of affect, then, and affect itself perhaps, "is social

in origin but biological and physical in effect" (Brennan 9); not only do they come from interaction with other people, but also with the environment. One example is the proved positive effects of our bodies with the environment, plants, sea water, and even the touch of our bare feet on the soil. We can see how this transmission of affect works in Nichols's "Georgetown Romance" (p. 30) from *Passport to Here and There* (2020).

> Set us loose in dis city
> of wood and *tings hard bad*
>
> Put a heap-of-crisscross streets
> between us —
> put traffic-light, road-block,
> put seawall and canal.
>
> Put iron railing
> put hibiscus-paling
> put clothesline
> put coastline —
>
> Because we so high on each other
> Because we eyes can't wait
> to make four together —
> Dis not unfeeling city
> will pull out all the stops
> to bring us into each other's harbour.

The literary persona reflects upon her romance that takes place in Georgetown. The entire book delves into the symbolic bridges between the Guyana and England, the differences and similarities of inhabiting these two places. In this poem, the literary persona's experience is located in Guyana's capital, Georgetown. The focus of the poem is the connection these two people have and how the city becomes a third part of this romance. Much of the poem mentions the material constructions that may be in the way of this romance's concretion. Nonetheless, no matter what comes between them, they will eventually arrive at "each other's harbour." The images used to symbolize what could get in the way of this romance are hard, big, mainly human-made structures. Even so, the smitten pair are so "high on each other" that these obstacles do not mean much. The effects they cause on one another, the physical entrainment, as Brennan names it, is stronger than the concrete seawall or the canal, or the iron-railing. Their feelings as forces that flow to one another are stronger than these barriers. However, not only is the pair influencing one another through this flowing of emotions, but their feeling is also felt by the city. In the poem, the city comes alive and becomes smitten by this romance as well. The flow of emotions is so forceful that even the city helps them to be together. The characterization of the city is "not unfeeling." By using this double negation, the poem plays with our conventions that a city is, of course, passive, since it is not alive. However, when the poem uses inert objects as obstacles to a love romance and puts the city where they are located as alive, we can infer that the use of inanimate beings as symbols of life and of feeling represent the social and communal aspects of affects. The love pair, in the end, become inanimate as well, they become a place, since they have habours. This is a metaphor to represent the coming together of the couple. But when the poem upends the human/more-than-human hierarchy by mixing these elements through the connection of

emotions, the metaphor gains another meaning. It emphasizes that our affection is not limited to the individual, private action. In fact, the poem uses a very social and public sphere to describe such romance.

Bearing that in mind, we come to the conclusion that there cannot be "a model of social structure that neglects emotional intensities, which allow such structures to be reified as forms of being", which means that emotions are, in Ahmed's words, "world making" (12). Likewise, Braunmuhl claims that "feelings [have] an important role in struggles for political change" (95) because "discourses may undergo historical transformation partially as a consequence of the insistence (in symptomatic or barely speakable form) of affects which the relevant discourses would nullify or fail to acknowledge" (98). This is what she calls "*the emotional costs of social subordination and exclusion* to those negatively affected thereby" and their insistence on having their emotions felt (98). Furthermore, Braunmuhl states that "without a focus on emotions, the call — and the desire — for political change is in fact less than fully intelligible" (84).

A poem by Kaur in the book *the sun and her flowers* (2017) attests to such discursive and social side of emotions.

remember the body
of your community
breath in the people
who sewed you whole
it is you who became yourself
but those before you
are part of your fabric

-honor the roots

The poem does not mention any specific emotion or affects directly. However, it delineates a social community that is based on affects. The first verse of the poem uses the common image of the body of a community, but it divides this expression in the two first verses, ending the first verse with the word "body." This puts a focus on the word body and may lead to an interpretation of how the bodily realm of emotions and physical experience, i.e., knowledge, is a central aspect of this community construction. When the poem asks the reader to "breath in the people," we may circle back to the entrainment Brennan theorizes. The mention to breathing can be associated with the example of airborne molecules called pheromones, which are one of the ways our affects can produce effect on others. The demand to metaphorically breath your people, then, can be analyzed literally as well. Another image that points to the idea of affectivity is the idea of being sewed by the community, which is part of "your fabric." As mentioned before in this chapter, the image of sewing is closely related with the female realm and, even more, as a symbol of witchcraft as well. The notion that the social body of a community is part of a fabric, made by each and everyone, connects the affectivity with the social body. The poem's communal and social order is carried out affectively. The last command of the poem is for the reader to "honor your roots," in other words, to honor those that came before and, in this context, it can point to one's ancestors. In this case, then, the transmission of affect, the entrainment that affect produces is not only among individuals that share a social situation, but a community that developed through time because and with help from such affects that could influence the shaping of discourse, social action, and the building of the community.

This relation between affect and discourse connects to the idea that affects or emotions are forces and, as such, cannot be severed in a dualist way from the actions and reactions we

have as a society. Braunmuhl proposes a new model to deal with the dualism between emotions/affects and reason/discourse. The author states that the usual resolutions to the binary are the reduction of feelings by means of discourse/cognition, in an over-identification that ultimately "renders it quasi-discursive" or dissociates feeling from discourse (90). Both options still maintain the dualistic idea and do not contribute much to an actual politics of emotion. According to her, this is due to the fact that the problem with dualism is not the differentiation of two ideas, but their hierarchization. The alternative the author proposes is that of a chiasm, a relational model, "embrace[ing] them as complementary, as mutual correctives — thus rendering productive the tension between them" (Braunmuhl 107). This means that we must see emotion and discourse as indeed different, but somehow related, and understand that the tension between them can be productive. Therefore, we should not deny one or the other but see both as part of our lives and assign the necessary importance to them. Kaur's poem about softness argues for just that. It is not, in my view, a proposal to hierarchize emotions as better or more important. The poem has a force because of its blunt outburst of such a neglected idea. To be soft is indeed powerful, for it makes us acknowledge a big part of ourselves and understand how our knowledge about the world is constructed.

Such power comes, as referred to above, from the idea that affects are energies, forces, and that they travel. As they are always in movement, they can be transmitted. Physics, a well-established field of science that describes and studies the world, has one famous equation, coined by Einstein, according to whom energy equals mass times the speed of light square. As this widely proved equation means that matter and energy are the same thing, in different states or conditions, it could explain, in very palpable terms, how affects, as forces or energies, can influence, alter or, basically, affect, another person.

Quantum physics, already mentioned in this dissertation, deals with the universe in its atomic level. I would like to apply one of its theories to the field of the affect – quantum entanglement. Entanglement itself can mean a range of things and it evokes different images in our minds. It "bring[s] to mind a kitten tied up in an unraveled ball of wool, or the complex personal relationship between two human beings" (Clegg np) – this latter example would even relate to the idea of entrainment, indicated above. But in physics, "it refers to a very specific and strange concept, an idea so bizarre, so fundamental, and so far reaching that I [Clegg] have called it the God Effect" (np). Brian Clegg is not the only one who finds the idea of quantum entanglement bizarre. The thing that interests me the most in this theory is the fact that our current science has difficulty in grasping it. Einstein himself called it "spooky" (Clegg np). My take on this is that our neutral and rational science is finally understanding that there is more to knowledge than the so-called neutral reason and rationality. There are so many things in the world we cannot explain or comprehend fully. Physics as a field understands that what it does is not "about defining the nature of the absolute reality," but "is about building models" (Clegg np). This means that there is much more we do not fully grasp – about the world and ourselves – than what we believe we know. The expertise of quantum physics is dealing with possibilities rather that really knowing. As Brian Clegg explains, "[w]e can never directly examine a photon or an electron," it is simply not possible (np). "We can't handle them [photon or electron], touch them, look at them, or taste them" (Clegg np). We may see or feel their results, but not the actual thing itself. The author observes that "[w]e can't pull an atom apart by hand and see how it works as we might disassemble a clock;" in reality, "[a]ll we can do is build a mental model, a physical metaphor for the quantum object, and see how well the model matches up to reality" (Clegg np).

Quantum entanglement, nevertheless, was not a model created. It was a type of behavior, let us say, which was perceived and documented. Let us discuss why it is spooky.

The phenomenon called quantum entanglement is “a linkage between the incomprehensibly small particles that make up the world around us” (Clegg np). Basically, at a quantum level, “it is possible to link particles together so completely that the linked objects (photons, electrons, and atoms, for instance) become, to all intents and purposes, part of the same thing” (Clegg np). The bizarre part is that “[e]ven if these entangled particles are then separated to opposite sides of the universe, they retain this strange connection” in a way that if we make a change to one particle, “that change is instantly reflected in the other(s) — however far apart they may be” (Clegg np). Clegg affirms that this God Effect, as he calls it, has “an unsettling omnipresence” (np). This signifies that physics discovered a way to carry a message, secretly and effectively. There have been many developments in the construction of quantum computers, message carrying within quantum entanglement for business sections, and so forth. But what this means for this study is very different.

Because quantum entanglement is something yet not fully comprehended, there are many possibilities to be studied. Entanglement may be responsible for several other types of phenomena (Clegg np), not only in the physics area, but in a great deal of other theoretical fields. In the least, it "can result in a very healthy shaking up of what can otherwise be entrenched and self-satisfied thinking” (Clegg np). If the idea of quantum entanglement works for the tiniest particles we know and they make up the entire world, maybe “quantum entanglement can influence not only the tiny individual behaviors of pairs of particles, but that of a whole magnetic structure” (Clegg np). In fact, the consequences and phenomena related to quantum entanglement are yet unknown, but many possibilities are being considered.

Vlatko Vedral is one of the thinkers that elaborates the meanings of quantum entanglement. In “Entanglement Hits Big Time” (2003), Vedral debates on the consequences of entanglement for physics, but he also admits some speculations of other sorts. He claims that, since it is “widely accepted that quantum mechanics is our most accurate description of how atoms combine to form molecules, and it lies behind all chemistry” and that “[c]hemistry in turn provides a basis for biological processes, including the metabolic cycles and the replication machinery making it possible for life to be sustained,” then, might it be that “not only that quantum effects are responsible for the behavior of inanimate mater, but that the magic of entanglement is also crucial in the existence of life?” (Vedral 28-29). Such question may seem only speculative, but if we relate it to the discussion on affect presented herein so far, it may seem more concrete. My goal is to join the idea of quantum entanglement with the idea of the transmission of affect. Kaur has a short poem from the book *the sun and her flowers* (2017) that points to how the quantum entanglement may take place.

your absence is a missing limb

The poem points out how emotionally missing someone can be felt physically. More than that, it points to how we affect each other when we develop emotional links with one another. The quantum entanglement can be seen in the physical effect of the emotional connection. Once we create a link with someone through the affective forces, we are entangled with them. In the quantum level, it means that these affective forces, being energies this connection can produce a shift in our magnetic and, perhaps, physical structure. The reference to the missing limb reminds us of the cases when people lose a limb because of an undesirable event, and, even after the removal of the limb continue feeling it. In these cases, there is a psychological reason for the continual feeling of the missing limb. However, in the metaphor that uses such cases

for contrast, we can claim that it is even more than a mental aspect. It is a physical, energetic, entrainment of people.

Nichols's poem "Love" (22), from *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman* (1989), may also shed some light on the connection of the transmission of affect with quantum entanglement.

Love is not a grindstone
constantly grinding
wearing down to bone

Love is not an interlocking
deadlock
of inseparable flesh
or a merging of metals
to smooth alloy

Love is a sun shawl
that keeps the beloved warm

Even the undeserving
love floods
risking all.

The poem attempts to describe or, at least, hint at what love is. It starts with what love is not, but, apparently, usually thought to be. Firstly, it denies love is a grindstone. Grindstone is a thick disk of stone used to sharp, grind or polish metal objects. The emphasis on

grindstones refers to the fact that the more you use them, the more the instrument is consumed. Love, then, is not a physical instrument that becomes worn as you use it. It cannot be worn-out.

Moreover, it is not an "interlocking / deadlock." The words in this second stanza call attention to the emphasis on materiality and on a physical connection. The mention to merging metals relates to love in the sense that it forms a bind of some sort. However, the binds that love forms as forces and affects are neither as rough as metals nor as fragile as these binds can be, ironically.

The poem arrives at a desired metaphor: that of a sun shawl. A sun shawl is used to protect one from sun rays. At the same time, it offers protection, and it allows, as the poem asserts, to keep the beloved warm. Although the sun shawl is a physical metaphor as well, it has a relation to a rarefied form of involvement, that of sun rays. Not only is this what differs this metaphor from the others, but it also evokes the idea that love is something that protects and remains, in other words, something entrained. At the end, we see that love is bigger than certain human ideas of merit or "deserving," with a metaphor of the flood, which points to its unstoppability and impossibility to control.

Besides prompting considerations through metaphors that try to describe what is love, the poem itself is an attempt. There are so many things in our lives and world that we do not know or understand, but feel; likewise, love is also something we feel, we take part in but cannot fully grasp. In this aspect, it is like the idea of quantum entanglement. Even though we know the effect of quantum entanglement, and although we have given it a name, and are even able to use it somehow — or at least use its effects — we cannot explain how or why it happens. It is the same with Love, be it a flood or a sun shawl. Affect and emotions, in general, are part of our daily affairs, are transmitted among us — human and more-than-

human beings — and affect us in ways we cannot explain. If that were not true, surgeons would not be forbidden to operate on their loved ones — or unloved ones. Moreover, commissions in academic departments and journals would not be anonymous. In so many ways we are able to acknowledge the forms in which emotions affect our choices and actions. Nonetheless, we have limited ourselves to see the negative effects affects could cause. I argue for us all to incorporate the positive power that they can have in our formation and construction of knowledge.

If atoms can attach one another and forever remain attached through time and space, so can we. We are shaped by atoms, magnetic fields, and such complex systems that are all affected by the phenomenon of quantum entanglement. I want us to try and see that emotions are a type of quantum entanglement as well. Do they not form binds that cannot be explained? Do they not show a sort of transcendent effect as spooky as Einstein felt about the "God Effect"? If quantum entanglement can be understood as one of the phenomena that are crucial to the existence of life, so can it be the very existence, movement, and transmission of affect.

Understanding this and taking it to the ways we have framed our science and our reason, in order to coin new forms of relating what we have divided into reason and emotion, may lead us to stronger and more powerful paths inside science. Our different types of knowledge are already among us, and they must be acknowledged and used for our — and the world's — well-being and development. By considering, like Braunmuhl, that the binaries have a productive tension, we can use the idea of witchcraft as a form of wisdom to recreate our most valued form of wisdom. To queer the witch, then, is to transform our forms of knowledge and how we relate to them, grasping and making use of the powerful instruments affects can be.

In this chapter, I have analyzed how the image of the witch and the elements related to it appear in the works of Nichols and Kaur. I investigate the types of knowledge and knowledge producing systems of which witchcraft is a representative in its symbolic use by the authors. By understanding witchcraft as a discourse that is systematically vilified as employed in the authors' poems, along with the classes of people related to it, I was able to look at the forms of knowledge it entails with a fresher perspective — that offered by Nichols's and Kaur's poetry. Through this process, I am able to connect the form of knowledge I called folk knowledge to the affects and emotions of the lived experience. These associations in their poetry frame the body as more than just an object, it is the holder of a type of knowledge that, as witchcraft, has been undermined and ignored. Nichols and Kaur bring this type of knowledge to the central stage in their poems and allow us to rethink about how we have understood our bodies, our reason, our affects, and, ultimately, the way we conduct science. We can learn from their poetry to look with new eyes to these petrified categories and think anew from the provocations and stimulation that their literary constructions are able to convey.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

WEAVINGS OF THE LITERARY AND OF THE BODY

This dissertation has grown out of a concern on how the concept of the body can synthesize considerations about our lives and how its depiction in literature can offer other paths and conceptualizations regarding our existences. The objective of this study is to discuss and develop a conceptualization of the body through an ecofeminist analysis of Grace Nichols's and Rupi Kaur's poetic works. By using the ecofeminist lens to study how the body is portrayed along with the images of other forms of life, food, and witchcraft, I develop a notion of the body that disputes the marginalization the body endures.

The ecofeminist perspective presented herein explores the connection between human issues, nature and culture. The poems demand such view because of how the body is dealt with in the poems. Any analysis of the body in Nichols's and Kaur's poetry should not neglect the ecological and natural aspect of their embodied images. Therefore, ecofeminism is a possible route to reflect upon multiple forms of exclusion as it offers a potential to disrupt an oppressive "constellation of ideologies," (Alaimo, "Skin-dreaming" 125). Ergo, I approach the body from the perspective of such framework.

Nichols's and Kaur's poetry stands, as already mentioned in this dissertation, as resistance to colonial and patriarchal ideologies. Through literature, these female diasporic authors of colour resist norms and historical constructions of the world. These systems are, in their works, intimately entangled with the physical experience and are portrayed in embodied images. I question how the body, the material point of contact for marginalized classes, is a way to challenge the binary logic of division that western civilizations have maintained/ Accordingly, the body is the way through this logic can be reassessed. In their poems, the

authors propose a redefinition of many categories we hold as true and universal. The notions of more-than-human, anthropocentrism, androcentrism, and many others are used to show how the body lies at the heart of anthropocentric ideas, and how it is connected to the way we cope with difference, and to how we engage with the more-than-human world. On that account, the body can be deemed a threshold and, therefore, a possibility to overcome oppression. I also focus on how ecofeminist and ecological thought can address the questions we have been asking science and ourselves for decades. In these final considerations, I present the findings of this study, as possible avenues for literary analyses.

From the perspective of the Anthropocene and the posthuman, I address more-than-human lives through a lens of defamiliarization, focusing on agency and space. I show how the poetic works portray our relations with the more-than-human less separately than we believe such relations to be. The symbols of the human sphere are inseparable from those of what we call more-than-human. I develop the ideas of assemblages, matter narratives, and strategic anthropocentrism in order to discuss how more-than-human lives, like humans, have agency and are attributed importance through images of the body. Furthermore, I consider their influence upon us, which is greater than we tend to think. I argue that space is not a stable and concrete background, but a sphere of multiple trajectories, in continual production; in other words, it is relational. Accordingly, I allude to eco-cosmopolitanism as one possible way to comprehend how space is portrayed by the authors in its material and abstract representations. I read the works by Kaur and Nichols as an appeal to re-signify how we understand and exist in the world. The notion of the body is enhanced by an idea of connection among all types of bodies and their materialities. The poems challenge the androcentric, anthropocentric, and hierarchizing thoughts that have built our current concepts of body.

By investigating the limits of our bodies as imposed by western logic, I delve into the theory of continuum from the field of physics in order to propose that we look at food as mediator of spheres. Through Nichols's and Kaur's representations of taste and of fruits, I further develop the theory of continuum. Taste, as portrayed in the authors' books, defies the hierarchization of the senses and guides us to understand how our visceral perceptions of the world relate to our knowledge of it, and how this knowledge is formed through experience and contact. I examine the image of the tongue and how the flavors are present in our symbolic systems and in our physical perceptions in order to discuss how food is a medium between the material and the transcendent, i.e., between the natural and the cultural. I underscore the permeability of our bodies, which are always changing and never complete. This image appears in the poems through the connection of the physical taste with its more abstract metaphors as well as the social constructions it carries. With the images of fruits, I indicate another direction, that of enmeshment. Not only are fruits important symbols of our social imaginary and relevant markers in human history and development, but they are also mediators of human relations with the more-than-human, since they point to cycles of life. The images of fruits in the poems open our eyes to the integration of the world, which relates the reproductive aspect of fruits with human sexuality and the natural and cultural aspect of their commerce. They inhabit a liminal boundary zone, as Golner affirms, and become symbolic and material thresholds of life. I widen the concept of body in that it is not only necessarily human and open to the world, but it also inhabits a limit between our binary social divisions. In the examination of Kaur's and Nichols's works, the body becomes a porous net, which changes and incorporates everything with which it enters in contact, but one that is permeable and can affect its surroundings.

After comprehending that the body is not necessarily human and fixed, but one which is constantly in the process of becoming, I explore more possibilities. By examining how Nichols and Kaur portray images from the realm of magic and the images of witches, I analyze witchcraft and magic as a discourse, rather than actual practices of supernatural forces. Acknowledging the gendered connection of these images, I develop a notion of witches and of magic as another type of knowledge, one that has been deemed inferior because of its association with the material body. In the poetic works analyzed, the images related to witchcraft depict a connection with female empowerment and folk knowledge, represented as laws of nature. Bearing in mind our main source of knowledge, that is, science, I look into the poetry of Nichols and Kaur to address magic, considering that science is not neutral nor universal, but biased, as it is a human construction. This does not mean that the poems deny the importance of science to our civilization and to our knowledge. Instead, they recognize that the science we build is influenced by many factors we continue to ignore. Some of these factors, highlighted in the poetry, are the foundations upon which science and the scientific methods have been established. Magic, then, appears as another possibility to understand how knowledge is produced and how it works. The poems present images of folk knowledge, of knowledge derived from experience, and from the contact with the natural world, establishing a connection between the different spheres of knowledge and how they are based on one another through the use of inversion, metaphors, and metonyms. The different spheres of knowledge can be connected through these weavings of language.

By further developing such reasoning, I perceive that the poetic works associate this realm of magic with the realm of emotions, i.e., the affective realm. Firstly, the poems point to how emotions, contrarily to our binary logic, are not beneath reason. Secondly, emotions, like all things in the universe, are not stable. They are always in movement, forming attachments,

or, according to Teresa Brenna, they are a transmission of forces. In the poems, we can see how these forces exist and travel within and around us, connecting us with other forms of lives (human and more-than-human), spaces, things, and even abstract notions, such as memory. Moreover, they affect us, our decisions and actions. In order to point to how these affects are indeed forces, I comment on entanglement from the field of quantum physics. I use such concept by approximating the entanglement — or enmeshment — of atomic particles with the entanglement of living beings through emotions or affects. I analyze how the poetry regards affects and emotions as powerful instruments, for instance, for political change. I demonstrate how, in the poems, we can produce knowledge in a more sustainable, more inclusive, and better way. This type of knowledge is in our actions and ways of thinking, even if we usually do not acknowledge them.

Throughout the dissertation the concept of the body is shown as the holder of, the producer of, and the path towards knowledge. Bearing in mind that the poems acknowledge the laws that actually govern our lives and science, and by understanding that our materiality actually functions through these laws, I propose a relational view of the body as an open body, produced through physical materiality but also through symbolic discourses. It is a body which reveals that nature and culture are more enmeshed than we think. By pointing to all the things the body can do and can show us, Nichols's and Kaur's poems lead me to conceptualize the body from such perspective.

I use the body in the poetic images to indicate other paths towards the perception of our lives and our embodied materiality. With the more-than-human forms of life, I analyze how the poems develop the notion of agency as flowing in assemblages of forces. With the images of space, I can understand that this flow of agency is continually shaping and changing our world.

With food, I am able to comprehend that our limits are actually a fictitious construction and do not resemble the world. The poems point to how porous and changeable the body is. Through magic, I question the bases of our knowledge and acknowledge that our emotions influence and affect our daily affairs, including our most important decisions, such as Nichols's images of a mother raising her children and Kaur's idea of community construction. Through the authors' creation of different literary worlds and points of view, I show how the poetic works build a different portrayal of the body and stress its power to enlighten many aspects of our lives and the ways we perceive everything that surrounds us.

Although the works by Nichols and by Kaur allow for these considerations, I find that each author uses a different strategy. In relation to the more-than-human, I have found different ways of representation. Even though both authors use what I call strategic anthropocentrism, Kaur approaches more-than-human forms of life mostly through a human connection and appeals to the necessity of life-sustaining systems. Kaur's poems center on how similar we are to the more-than-human lives and how we share the world with them. Nichols also uses, on some level, such approximations, but her poetry focuses most often on the material existences of these other forms of life, which means that no human representation escapes anthropocentrism. The way Nichols's poems portray the more-than-human has more to do with a change of point of view, showing grease, dust or chalk, for example. Despite these differences, both types of depiction are attached to the idea of assemblages and to the agency of the more-than-human. As for space and representations of the physical places we inhabit, Kaur's poetry concentrates more on the concept of an entire globe, associated with eco-cosmopolitanism, whereas Nichols's poetry adopts the point of view of individuals inside these places and their relations with them. Even though these differences are not rigid, they

indicate how each work breaks with certain fixed systems through distinct, but equally effective, ways.

In the analyses of food, the strategies by both authors are approximated. Although the poems differ in their depictions both use the images of food as metaphors and metonyms for human emotions and social systems. With regard to taste, Kaur focuses more on different flavors and their symbolic connections to our social imaginaries, whilst Nichols presents a view of taste related to cravings. Either way, their works approximate the physical aspect of taste to abstract and even transcendent aspects of our lives, according to which food is considered as a continuum. In the topic of fruits their poems are even further approximated. Both poetic works portray strong correlations of fruits with the female body and its sexuality. Although this image is current in our societies, these poems use this association subversively, either criticizing the patriarchal exploitation of the female body or assigning new meanings to this common sexualization.

I have also found similar representations in both authors as far as witchcraft is concerned. The two poetic works display witchcraft and magic in connection to discourse and to the magical world as a type of knowledge. They use the association of material elements and abstract institutions or historical themes to contextualize ideas of magic, which suggests that magic as discourse can be understood as an avenue to reconsider our current forms of knowledge and the way we conduct science. Through the connection of such perspective with the realm of emotions, the poems allow for an acceptance of emotions as fundamental parts of our lives. I have found contradictory associations as a counter-narrative to how emotions and the affective realm are currently comprehended.

I have chosen to study Nichols and Kaur jointly because their books of poems offer an alternative view to represent reality in similar literary perspectives. With the ingenious

weaving work of words, the authors' literature is able to suggest new possibilities of understanding our social order and our material bodies, defying the binary order under which the world has been traditionally construed. Both poets depart from similar social configurations, due to their similar diasporic condition and the impacts of colonial history. Therefore, they provide new defying images of the female body and the more-than-human sphere, questioning the binary associations related to these elements. More than simply showing how they are established, Nichols's and Kaur's works present ways to escape them.

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, Caroline Braunmuhl states that the problem does not lie in the existence of binaries but in the hierarchization between them. According to her, the problem with dualism is not that "it distinguishes between theoretically fundamental terms." In fact, it "is perfectly possible to *distinguish*, for instance, subjects from objects in non-hierarchizing terms — that is, in an egalitarian spirit" (16). She states that theory "*operates* by drawing distinctions; it could not be possible to proceed otherwise" because it is only "when a given distinction — or, alternatively, an identitarian assimilation of terms — entails any kind of *hierarchical position* between the terms in question. . .that either move may become complicit with hegemonic orders, namely, when such oppositions stabilize *social inequalities*" (17). Instead, Braunmuhl proposes that we look at difference as relationality-in-tension (17). I agree with such proposition, and this is what I defend in the analyses presented in this study. Both Nichols's and Kaur's poetry do not argue for the extinction of differences, but for a more respectful and inclusive way to look at them by bringing different and unexpected images of things we are used to seeing from one singular point of view.

My purpose in this dissertation has not been to conceptualize body simply as equal to mind or to propose an erasure of their differences through literary analyses. Instead, I recognize, by examining the poetic works, that the separate realms of body and mind (and

those related to them) are indeed different, but in a relational manner, which can be thought of more as a spectrum. Body and the mind are separate, but their limits are open barriers that have different, but equally fundamental functions and importance in our lives. The study presented herein corroborate such perspective. I have approximated agency and passivity in relation to the authors' works, attributing new considerations on how more-than-human forms of life are defined. Regarding food, I have shown how the different bodies cross and contaminate each other, which indicates that food travels from the realm of culture to that of nature (and vice-versa), suggesting that there is an open conversation between them. As for witchcraft, I have demonstrated that emotions or affects also have an influence in the so-called realm of reason and that our bodies prove it to us.

In all cases, the body as represented in Nichols's and Kaur's poetry is the way through which the above-mentioned issues can be challenged. Their poems provide us with a net of entanglements involving the body, and these interconnections indicate that the constructions we impose upon the body are limiting. This analysis shows that the body is actually an open, visceral yet abstract, ever changing, and challenging part of our lives. Ergo, it is the main element through which the authors' works defy our social constructions and marginalizations.

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