

Planetarium By Adrienne Rich

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

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

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

in her 98 years to discover
8 comets

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

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

An eye,

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

encountering the NOVA

every impulse of light exploding

from the core
as life flies out of us

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

What we see, we see
and seeing is changing

the light that shrivels a mountain
and leaves a man alive

Heartbeat of the pulsar
heart sweating through my body

The radio impulse
pouring in from Taurus

I am bombarded yet I stand

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