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ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS Y CULTURALES INGLESES Y
SU PROYECCIÓN SOCIAL

POETRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES, *INSTAPOETRY*
AND SOCIETY

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0. ABSTRACT

This MA thesis aims to explore the literature generated on the social platform Instagram, known as *Instapoetry*, by analysing a selection of poems of the *Instapoets* Rupi Kaur, Nikita Gill and Amanda Lovelace, who address immigration, the Western beauty canon and rape, respectively. Throughout this thesis, the history of the Internet and social media is reviewed to give a context for the creation of Instagram, as well as an examination of previous poetic movements that share characteristics with this new trend. In addition, the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks and Susan Brownmiller are also commented for they have been pioneers in talking publicly about the topics found in the *Instapoems*.

Key words: Instapoetry, Instagram, online literature, female poets, society.

El objetivo de este trabajo fin de máster es estudiar la literatura generada en la red social Instagram, conocida como *Instapoesía*. El análisis se llevará a cabo a través de poemas seleccionados de las *Instapoetas* Rupi Kaur, Nikita Gill y Amanda Lovelace, que tratan, respectivamente, de inmigración, el ideal de belleza occidental y la violación. A lo largo de esta tesis, se revisará la historia de Internet y las redes sociales, así como movimientos poéticos previos que comparten características con la *Instapoesía*. Asimismo, también se comentarán los trabajos de Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks y Susan Brownmiller ya que estas han sido pioneras en hablar públicamente acerca de los temas encontrados en la *Instapoesía*.

Palabras clave: Instapoesía, Instagram, literatura online, mujeres poetas, sociedad.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue – my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence. (Anzaldúa, 81)

These words of the Chicana writer, Gloria Anzaldúa, albeit addressing her own experience, lead us towards a much broader context, a context in which women have been continuously silenced. Since literature, throughout history, has been written from a male perspective, for men were the only ones with access to the literary creation, we have exclusively received their feelings and experiences, overlooking women's. The presence of women in the literary creation has nonetheless augmented over the years. Thanks to previous women writers, who set the path for future authors, along with the facilities provided by the current technological developments, an increasing number of women are now able to raise their voices and share their experiences with the world, reaching thousand, even millions, of people.

The Internet, one of the most salient creations of the Digital Revolution, has reached many spheres within its short life and one of those domains has been literature. Nowadays, we do no longer need the physical, traditional and paperback book in order to enjoy our favourite novel; technology has enabled us to read anything we want through the usage of its different devices, which include e-books, computers or smartphones. On the other hand, in addition to the creation of those new instruments, the Internet has played a fundamental role regarding the literary creation and its dissemination. The emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram has allowed people to share their thoughts or opinions on any given topic, being of special interest the latter. Instagram has become a new medium to access literature as well as the cradle of a new trend, the so-called *Instapoetry*.

Due to *Instapoetry*, and considering that there are no restrictions regarding the content uploaded, anyone can share their compositions online without having to face rejection from different publishers. This translates into the rise of those who have been, with some exceptions, long silenced; that is, women. Consequently, we have uncountable poems addressing topics such as female sexual pleasure, the imposition of beauty canons and its implications, or trauma, among many others. It is no longer just the white and upper-class women who have access to the literary creation, now racialized women, from any social class can publish their compositions and share their perspective of the world. It should be

highlighted that their circumstances are not purely personal, millions of women have been, and are, subjected to similar situations; thus, *Instapoets* do not give voice to their sole experiences; rather, they have become spokespeople in the denunciation of certain situations.

My interest on social media and the literature that arose from the creation of Instagram has led me to expand my knowledge on this subject. The objective of this MA dissertation is, therefore, to analyse the poetry generated on the social media platform and its function as a mirror of society. In order to do so, I am going to comment on selected poems of the *Instapoets* Rupi Kaur, Nikita Gill and Amanda Lovelace for they tackle current issues such as racism, the imposition of the Western beauty canon or sexual violence.

For the development of this project, I will provide the historical context for the Digital Humanities, in which I will explore the different Webs thus far, and its influence on linguistics analyses and literary production. The second part will be devoted to social media and the emergence of *Instapoetry*, its characteristics and its less literary side, as well as a section in which, without engaging in the debate, I will acknowledge the discourse of this trend's detractors and supporters. Considering that the attributes of *Instapoetry* are not unique, in the next section of this dissertation I will explore different forms and movements that share some characteristics with this twenty-first century trend; the poetic form of haiku, the Imagist poetic movement, and Confessional poetry, paying special attention to two of its most salient poets, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Following, I will approach the discourses of previous women writers, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks and Susan Brownmiller, whom I have labelled as "Mothers" for they have been pioneers in theorising and addressing controversial topics dealing with different types of oppression, such as the ones mentioned above, in their respective books; *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1978), *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) and *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975). Finally, the last part of this paper will be devoted to the analysis of the selected poems of Rupi Kaur, Nikita Gill and Amanda Lovelace regarding their personal views and experiences as migrants, as racialized people in predominantly white societies, and as survivors of gender and sexual violence respectively.

2. THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

2. 1. Introduction to the Digital World

In the twenty-first century, with the use and dependence we have on the ever-evolving technology and the Internet, there is no doubt that we live in a digital world. We are now able to study, hold conferences or even do grocery shopping online and without leaving our homes. Indeed, the exponential increase of the Internet use since the lockdown has demonstrated how both our professional and personal lives depend, to a greater or lesser extent, on the Internet and its services.

This global system refers to “the electronic network of networks that links people and information through computers and other digital devices allowing person-to-person communication and information retrieval” (DiMaggio et al. 307). Although the Internet as we understand it did not appear until 1990, its predecessor, the ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), was created in the 1960s by the US Department of Defence. This system, used initially by the government, was designed for the purpose of managing the new national security concerns (Lukasik, 4); concerns which arose due to the so-called Cold War, the silent confrontation occurring since the mid to late twentieth century between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. The ARPANET was the first system to communicate two computers and, even though the first attempt was not successful, the second time it worked, setting the path for the Internet to develop and become what we know nowadays.

2. 2. Web 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0

The Internet and the digital media are currently playing an important role in changing our methods of obtaining information and communicating with each other (Fenton, 123) thanks to innovative tools never seen before. The ease with which we can get in touch with someone in the other part of the world or instantly know what is happening in a specific place is largely thanks to the creator of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee. Nonetheless, it is important to clarify that the Internet and the World Wide Web are not the same even though in some contexts they could be used as synonyms.

As it was previously mentioned, while the Internet refers to the global system of interconnected networks, the World Wide Web, or the Web or Net, whose proposal dates back to 1989, is “a system of interlinked hypertext documents accessed via the Internet” (Choudhury, 8096). Consequently, the Internet is the medium through which we are able to access all the documents, webpages or social networks; without the Internet connection, it would not be possible to access the Net and its contents. The Web has existed since the end of the twentieth century and it has been constantly evolving in the years thereafter. Although there is not an actual consensus about the amounts of webs developed so far, in this paper, Web 1.0, Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 will be introduced and discussed, paying special attention to Web 2.0.

Even though it was not until 1991 when the Web 1.0 was released, in 1989 Tim Berners-Lee proposed the creation of this global hypertext space, creating a “common information space in which we communicate[d] by sharing information” (Berners-Lee), the information could be either personal or global provided that its purpose, to socialise and work, was accomplished. Nonetheless, this first web was very passive and aimed for business to present their brochures or catalogues; therefore, the interaction was minimum. The consumer could access the web pages and browse through them; however, they could not interact with the websites. In general terms, Web 1.0 users were only allowed to search for information and read it, but not have any sort of interaction on the different web pages.

Despite Web 1.0 lasted until 2005, Dale Dougherty, co-founder of O’Reilly Media, officially defined Web 2.0 in 2004 during the Web 2.0 Conference. Tim O’Reilly, a technology guru, claimed that Web 2.0 would mark the second generation of the Internet and “[it] is best defined by interactivity and user participation (rather than data aggregation)” (Davidson, 478), in this way, the users would be more involved, being able to participate creating content themselves, instead of merely perusing the different web pages. Indeed, as Davidson points out,

Web 2.0 includes all forms of corporate or social networking (from Google to MySpace); collaborative knowledge building (sites such as Wikipedia); user-generated content (including photo-sharing sites like Flickr or video-posting sites like YouTube); and blogs, wikis, virtual environments, and other sites that use a many-to-many model of participation and customization. (478)

Because of the interactive usage of the web, Web 2.0 became more accessible in comparison to its predecessor, Web 1.0. This second generation of the web evolved to be more participative so its users could share their thoughts, knowledge or art in the different

sites and receive feedback afterwards. Thus, the great novelty of Web 2.0 was its bidirectionality.

Web 3.0 was first coined by the journalist John Markoff in the New York Times in 2006. According to Markoff, this web would be the third generation of the web, hence the name. Web 3.0 is also known as the “Semantic Web”, “[t]he word semantic stands for “meaning of” so Semantic Web term is understood as “to add meaning to the web” (Solanki and Dongaonkar, 76); indeed, as it was originally conceived, this system “enables machines to “understand” and respond to complex human requests based on their meaning” (Choudhury, 8098). In other words, the aim of Web 3.0 is to have computers being able to comprehend and process the meaning of the words in order to provide results that are more precise. This advancement in technology is considerably interesting for the humanities, our field of study, since it implies the use of linguistics and, probably, the use of literature too.

2. 3. Digital Humanities

The term Digital Humanities, a growing field within the humanities, presents some challenges regarding the future of the discipline. A sphere that had always been directly connected with the texts in their physical format is now forced to adapt and evolve towards a digital one. Owing to this new discipline, some challenges arise, such as bringing together the work of computer scientist and humanities researches in order to apply digital methods to the humanities investigation. Furthermore, Digital Humanities does not only involve the analysis of novel texts that have appeared as a result of the development of technology, but it also implies the creation of new tools or innovation of previous existing ones as a means to carry out those analyses.

The field of humanities, on its own, is concerned with the study of languages, literature, history, film, civics, philosophy, religion, and the arts and, all that combined, helps us acknowledge where we come from and where we are going (Brodhead and Rowe, 9). Certainly, these disciplines have been around us for centuries; however, by adding “digital” to humanities, the meaning changes. It does not simply imply that the humanities is now studied on computers; instead, the computer is also used as a tool of work. Agreeing on a specific definition for digital humanities is still an arduous task due to the numerous opinions regarding it; nonetheless, the definition adopted in this essay is the one proposed in the “Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0” by Jeffrey Schnapp et al. According to them,

Digital Humanities is not a unified field but an array of convergent practices that explore a universe in which: a) print is no longer the exclusive or the normative medium in which knowledge is produced and/or disseminated; instead, print finds itself absorbed into new, multimedia configurations; and b) digital tools, techniques, and media have altered the production and dissemination of knowledge in the arts, human and social sciences. (2)

Consequently, digital humanities implies the usage of digital technology, such as social media and online publishing in e-book format and digital devices including, among others, smartphones, tablets and computers, as a means of spreading the information. As a result, thanks to these digital gadgets, the methods of promulgation of knowledge regarding the humanities spheres have changed. Nowadays information reaches more people and more easily and faster than decades, and even years, ago.

Although digital humanities¹ might seem a rather actual term, its origins date back to 1949. One of the pioneers of this field, with the usage of computers for linguistic and literary analysis, was an Italian Jesuit priest, Father Roberto Busa. Busa was the developer of the *Index Thomisticus*, a linguistic corpus for the Thomas Aquinas' texts, as well as other texts by other authors related to Thomas Aquinas. What the priest wanted was to have each word of the different writings "examined in isolation from any context; [considering] only its generative possibilities" (Busa, 86). Thus, the result of such examination was a corpus that encompassed around 11 million words that, after being alphabetically sorted, were classified according to the different morphological categories defined and gathered in punch cards that would be later read in computers. In addition, the Italian priest also claimed that "the use of computers in the humanities has as its principal aim the enhancement of the quality, depth and extension of research and not merely the lessening of human effort and time" (89). Busa's aim was not simply to reduce the amount of work and effort required when analysing a text, but also to improve the quality of those analyses. Therefore, he opened the path for future researchers to use the computer as a tool not only to obtain faster results, but also better and more precise.

The usage of computers was not only useful for a linguistic analysis, but it also reached the literary creation. Uncountable texts have been created using the computer as the sole tool; hence, at this point it is imperative to clarify the confusions that electronic, digitized, and digital literature may raise. Although the three terms might seem similar, they refer to different concepts. On the one hand, according to the literary critic N. Katherine

¹ Previously known as Digital Computing.

Hayles, “[e]lectronic literature, generally considered to exclude print literature that has been digitized, is by contrast “digital born”, a first-generation digital object created on a computer and (usually) meant to be read on a computer” (198). This means that these works are not intended to be printed for they need the resources provided by the electronic device for their proper reading; thus, they cannot be transferred to a physical text. On the other hand, we should distinguish between digitized and digital.

Digitized and digital literature differ in their presentation and expression—digitized literature mirrors the codex on a screen, whereas digital literature allows computer-driven transformations to occur beyond the surface; the impact of the digital is not merely seen in the display but embedded throughout the entire aesthetic configuration. (Heckman and O’Sullivan)

Hence, while digitized literature is the one that has been transferred to a digital medium after having been originally written on a physical one; digital literature concerns the texts originated on a computer, or any other electronic device, and intended to be read on one, although they could also be printed.

In addition, digital literature does not only consist of texts written in a computer with the sole purpose of being read in one; “digital literature has to go beyond the employment of letters and it has to make an *aesthetic* use of the features of digital media” (Simanowski, 17). Therefore, digital literature, apart from involving writing on an electronic device, also concerns the usage of the tools the digital media provides in order to make the works more pleasant or visually attractive and engaging for the readers.

3. LITERATURE AND SOCIAL MEDIA: INSTAPOETRY, THE 21ST CENTURY POETIC TREND

3. 1. Social Media

The development and improvement of technology did not only affect literature, but also our ways of interacting; the breakthrough of online social platforms has completely influenced and altered our social nature. Although the origins of social webpages date back to the emergence of the ARPANET, the social media platforms as we currently know them became prominent and started to grow with the rise of Web 2.0 (Van Dijck, 10), that is, throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Providing a definition for social media is an arduous task since it comprises numerous and distinct websites with different purposes; thus, José Van Dijck, a

distinguished university professor in social media, has grouped and defined the different social platforms into four categories depending on their characteristics or goals. The first category involves the well-known “social network sites” (SNSs); these webpages promote interpersonal contact, encouraging personal or professional connections between its users. Some examples of social network sites are the giants Facebook or Twitter. The second category contains the sites for “user-generated content” (UGC). In this case, these pages encourage their users’ creativity and the exchange of amateur or professional content since they can also receive feedback from their followers. This group comprises sites such as YouTube, Wikipedia or Instagram. Thirdly, Van Dijck includes the category of trading and marketing sites (TMSs) whose aim is the exchange or sale of products. Amazon or eBay are some of the many examples of TMSs. Finally yet importantly, she distinguishes the play and game sites (PGS), a genre of websites with online games such as FarmVille, The Sims Social or Angry Birds (Van Dijck, 8).

Despite these four categories, it is important to consider that they are rather general and, consequently, flexible since one social webpage could share characteristics with the other groups. Nowadays, it is increasingly common to use the UGC sites to advertise and sell products and in some TMSs we might find characteristics of the SNSs thank to the comment section available for the buyers to share their opinions of a certain product.

3. 2. #Instapoetry

At the time of writing this paper, the most prominent social media platform these days is Facebook, with a total of 2853 million active users worldwide as of July 2021, followed by YouTube and WhatsApp with 2291 and 2000 active million users respectively. Nonetheless, Instagram, the social platform concerning this essay, ranks fourth with 1386 active million users (Statista.com). Instagram is a free application born in 2010, designed for Android and iPhone, where its users can upload photos or videos and share them with their followers or selected friends; moreover, they can also view, like and comment on the posts published by their friends on the platform and even share live broadcasts. Although it started as a mere application to upload pictures, currently it is not only a platform where you can find content on almost any topic, but it has also become the main source of income for some of its users.

As unexpected as it may seem, taking into account Instagram’s first goals of just uploading pictures of oneself, one’s food or landscapes, there is a current trend of uploading short stories and, especially, poetry, also known as *Instapoetry*², in picture format, which has gained increasing acceptance among the platform’s users (Adek and Satria, 10). Such is the popularity of this new trend that there are over four and a half million of publications under the hashtag *#instapoetry*, which is constantly and rapidly growing (see fig. 1). Now poetry is available to whoever has access not only to Instagram, but also to the Internet thanks to countless online repositories. Anyone can share their own creations online, regardless of their experience, age, race, social class, or religion; there are no requisites, the authors are entirely free to upload what they consider worthy of sharing. Indeed, more and more authors use social media platforms for self-publishing their works instead of going through the process of finding an editor, publisher and the respective economic outlay it entails.

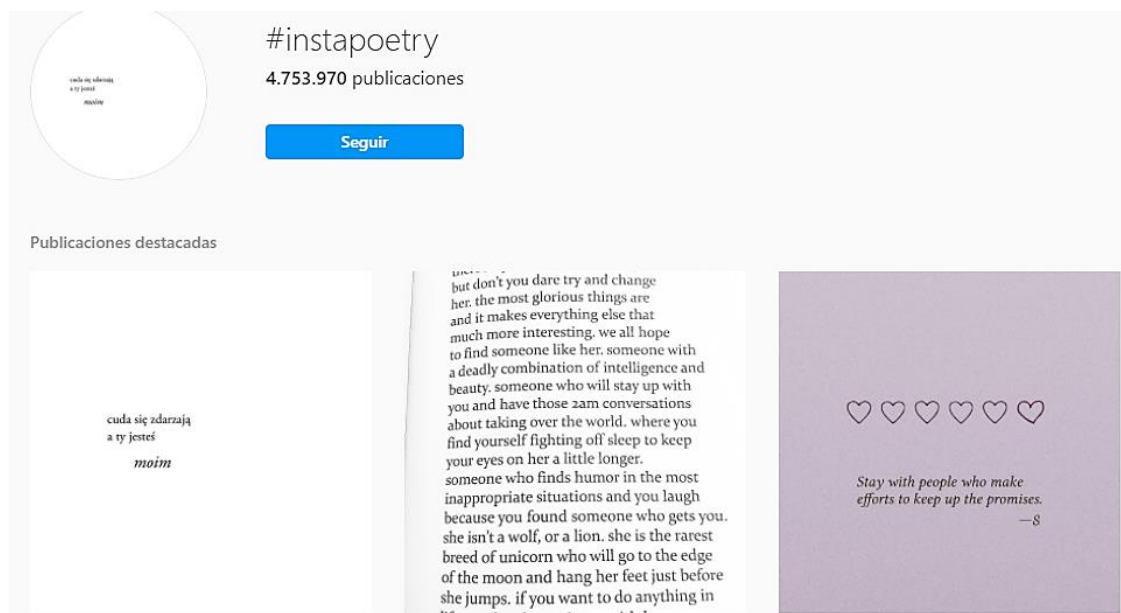


Figure 1. “Publications under the hashtag *#instapoetry* and recent notable publications.” *Instagram*. <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/instapoetry/>

The success of *Instapoetry* is not restricted only to the application, but also outside the platform, in physical format. The sale of *Instapoetry* books has been increasing since 2013 following the publication of Lang Leav’s *Love & Misadventure*. In 2015, Rupi Kaur’s first book *milk and honey*³ sold three million copies worldwide and it was translated into twenty-five languages. After her second poetry book *the sun and her flowers* (2017), Kaur

² Although this essay focuses on *Instapoetry*, there are platforms such as Tumblr, Facebook or Twitter that share similar types of poetry.

³ The title is written on lower case letter on purpose, it is the format chosen by the author.

entered the top three of the poetry bestseller list in the United States. However, even though she is the biggest writer in terms of followers, Kaur is not the only successful *Instapoet*; *Instapoets* “comprised *twelve* of 2017’s top twenty bestselling poets [in the US]. That’s *60%* of *bestsellers* in a publishing field that had been considered moribund” (Berens, “E-Literature’s #1 Hit”). Given this data, it is clear that Instagram has boosted the poetic genre; and despite 2017 was the year when this trend peaked, several *Instapoetry* collections currently appear on Amazon Best Sellers in Poetry.

Instapoetry is characterised by some attributes that makes it recognisable even outside the platform, such as in print form. The poems uploaded are usually short; most of them do not comprise more than 10 lines. In numerous occasions, the *Instapoets* do not use capital letters and they even omit some punctuation marks, if not all. They write in non-rhyming free verse, and the language and grammar are rather uncomplicated and with no deep meaning, so that the message the authors transmit is quite straightforward. Certainly, poems written with a specific rhyme structure do exist; however, the compositions of the five most followed *Instapoets* (Rupi Kaur, R. M. Drake, Atticus, Najwa Zebian and Cleo Wade) reveal that they do not apply a particular structure or rhyme in their writings, showing that the lack of these elements is an identifying characteristic of this trend.

Although some of the attributes of *Instapoetry* remain once the poems are printed, such as their form, several of its features are lost when the format changes. When the readers buy the collection of poems, they receive the compositions in isolation. In other words, even though the poems are likely to follow a certain progression in order to tell a story, the communication with the readers is unidirectional; there is no reader-writer interaction. Nonetheless, when the *Instapoets* upload poems, or fragments, to the platform, they tend to accompany the picture with a caption in which they share what inspired them to create that poem, some reflexion (see fig. 2), or they even ask questions to their followers, who can answer in the comment section of the post (see fig. 3). Thus, creating an instantaneous and direct engagement with the readers that, otherwise, would only be achieved at in-person events, such as book launch events.



Figure 2. Wade, Cleo [@cleowade]. “Handwritten poem.” *Instagram*, 4 June 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPrtshPDT1P/>.

play is when we escape time

- rupi kaur



Figure 3. Kaur, Rupi [@rupikaur_]. “When was the last time you played?” *Instagram*, 10 June 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CP6uXTGhCuS/>.

Through Instagram, *Instapoets* enjoy certain liberties that invite them to play with or innovate the aesthetic of the compositions, modifications that would not be possible outside the platform. When buying the book, either physical or electronical, the poems appear on a white page, sometimes accompanied by a simple drawing. Notwithstanding, when the verses are uploaded to the social network, the authors occasionally post a snippet of the poems handwritten in a piece of paper (see fig. 4) or they might even superimpose them over a picture or a video, as well as adding music to it, modifying the typical minimalist aesthetic presented in the books.



Figure 4. Lovelace, Amanda [@ladybookmad]. “Make Persephone proud.” *Instagram*, 11 Nov. 2018. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BqC7GfKnV1m/>.

3. 3. *Instapoetry*, the Trend that Divides the Critics

Before starting this section, I would like to clarify that it is not my intention to enter into a debate with the controversy regarding *Instapoetry*; I would like, nonetheless, to address both points of view and acknowledge the words of others for I consider them important for the progression of this essay.

Ever since *Instapoetry* grew in popularity, much controversy has surrounded this format because of the characteristics discussed on the previous section. Part of the polemic

concerning this new trend lies on its form and grammar; many detractors concur that “as an artform, *Instapoetry* lacks most of the attributes readers of print-based poetry associate with poems. *Instapoetry* is semantically simple” (Berens, “Instapoetry Matter”). Nevertheless, this simplicity is a deliberate choice that the authors make, and, as we shall later see, it is not a particular feature of *Instapoetry*, but also of a renowned poetic form, the haiku.

The motive behind *Instapoetry*’s structure are the Instagram’s limitations. The platform imposes some space restrictions⁴ for the pictures uploaded; hence, those limitations have become a must that *Instapoets* take into artistic advantages for their compositions. The poems need to be short and simple; otherwise, they would not fit into the platform’s format. Furthermore, their brevity, and combination of visual art, makes them more attractive and readable for Instagram’s users; indeed, this “easily digestible sort of poetry that can be wedged between pretty pictures on newsfeeds ... encourages a younger readership” (Morris). As a result, now poetry is more accessible than ever, reaching a popularity not witnessed in years, thanks to its publishing medium and the simplicity of this new trend, which, in turn, also helps to the constant sharing of the poems, increasing its audience.

Instapoetry’s format has not been the sole target of criticism, more attributes of this trend have also been criticised. Several articles, including “‘Instapoetry’ may be popular, but most of it is terrible”, “Those Instagram poets are ruining everything good in the world” or “The Cult of the Noble Amateur”, by Hodgkinson, Bakdash and Watts respectively, are some of the examples of the *Instapoets*’ detractors. They put the spotlight on the *Instapoets*’ usage of a social media platform for the building of a readership and publication of their works, rather than publishing them exclusively in physical format; their, apparent, amateurism revealed in their poems due to the use of clichés or repetition of themes, and the lack of a formal structure or literary devices.

In response to the criticism concerning *Instapoetry* and *Instapoets*, the supporters of this new trend emerged. The defenders claim that *Instapoetry* has popularised a genre that was reputed to be dead, as we have previously seen with the increase in sales of poetry books. They argue that this trend is harshly criticised because it is mainly written by young female poets, whilst poets such as Ernest Hemingway or Raymond Carver, who are known for writing minimalist prose or poetry, gained timeless critical acclaim (Ce Miller); therefore much of the criticism would come from a sexist and misogynistic point of view. The

⁴ The size of the pictures are 1080x1080 pixels.

relatability of *Instapoetry* is another argument adopted by its supporters since the readers can relate to the poem at the instant they read it (Hein). Finally, according to Varinder Taprial and Priya Kanwar “[s]ocial media *empowered* the people to express their thoughts, [experiences] and opinions and share them with others” (6). This is what *Instapoets* do, they capture in their poems past and present experiences, such as sexual abuses, heartbreaks or different forms of discrimination they have suffered, and even denounce attitudes that result from the heteropatriarchy or the beauty canons imposed on women.

Due to the wide range of themes collected in their poems, anyone can find a piece they relate to or that expresses their feelings. In addition, bearing in mind that the most successful *Instapoets* are young, feminist, usually women from a minority or immigrant background, or who belong to the queer community, they have given voice to those communities historically dismissed or misrepresented and whose perspectives are not part of the hegemonic discourse.

3. 4. Not Everything is Poetry: The Marketing Side of *Instapoetry*

Instagram is not just a canvas for *Instapoets*' art; it has also become a valuable and helpful instrument for promoting their work and obtaining new readers. Indeed, in spite of the criticism, the followers of *Instapoetry* have not decreased; on the contrary, *Instapoets* see how the size of their social media following increases continuously.

The relatability of the poems, and the fact that they are accessible online, has played an active role in the growth of readers; the poems are shareable and they have a much broader scope than traditional poets do (Sovich). This aspect is highly important since they reach a wide audience, encouraging younger people to take an interest in poetry. This undisputed popularity is consequently embraced and taken into marketing and economic advantages. Thanks to social media, *Instapoets* proved capable of building and nurturing their own audience without the need to find an agent, editor or publisher. The autonomy they enjoy was successful since a handful of them have already exceeded one million followers on the platform and many others have amassed more than one hundred thousand readers.

The number of followers on Instagram has become an important factor for publishers. Now, the publishing houses increasingly base their decisions to take on writers depending on the amount of followers they have on social media for many *Instapoets* have already built

a community of readers who would be willing to buy the poetry collections (Ford). Publishers such as Andrews McMeel have hired Amanda Lovelace, Cleo Wade or r. h. Sin⁵ after they gained some weight on social media. The publishing of *Instapoetry* by actual publishing houses, and not just on the platform, has become a great opportunity for authors, whose work in numerous occasions had previously been rejected, since after the publication of their poetry collections they have seen how their number of readers increased even further, propelling their careers.

Although much of their compositions are published online, *Instapoets* use social media as a means to share excerpts of their work, but not all, so that the most avid readers are incentivised to buy a copy of the book. Thus, considering that they are expected to self-promote online, the Instagram profiles of *Instapoets* have become a powerful and free marketing tool. Browsing through the different profiles, we see how they use it to advertise tour dates (see fig. 5), book launches (see fig. 6), book discounts, or even to sell merchandising (see fig. 7). In addition, in some occasions, they would delete every post they have ever uploaded to present a feed completely dedicated to their new book.



Figure 5. Kaur, Rupi [@rupikaur_]. “Presale tickets are available now.” *Instagram*, 12 Nov. 2018. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BqFaNoEHyTF/>

⁵ Lower case of the first two initials intended.



Figure 6. Gill, Nikita [@nikita_gill]. “Great Goddesses is here.” *Instagram*, 7 Aug. 2019. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B03CM-xn7IN/>



Figure 7. Leav, Lang [@langleav]. “Merchandising range.” *Instagram*, 15 Sept. 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CFItuyxhWXD/>

4. INSTAPOETRY AND ITS PRECURSORS

Instapoetry emerged as a result of social media, therefore being a new trend of poetry. Nonetheless, despite the novelty of this style, the attributes that characterise it are not completely novel. In this this part, we will see how their simplicity, lack of structure or the addressing of controversial topics have been present in previous and acclaimed poetic styles or movements such as haiku, Imagism and Confessional poetry, and how these features manifest in *Instapoetry*.

4. 1. *Instapoetry* and Other Short Poetic Forms

Instapoetry has been harshly criticised due to the brevity and simplicity of its poems; however, those characteristics are not something new nor groundbreaking and they did not come out of the blue. Their succinctness is also one of the most important identifying elements of a previous and notable form of Japanese poetry, the haiku.

Haiku, previously known as hokku, was originally part of a longer poem called renga; nevertheless, by the seventeenth century it divorced from the just mentioned poetic sequence and started to appear as an independent composition. Haiku consists of seventeen syllables divided into three lines of five, seven and five syllables each, which is, indeed, the classical rhythm of Japanese poetry (Miner, 570); consequently, its distinctive rigidity and succinctness originates in the formal constrain imposed by the form. And yet, despite its brevity, the haiku is “rich with meaning and reverberation by pointing out what we all know but often fail to notice” (Welch, 97); the poets “focus on the things of the external world, behind which may lie, by implication, the various ideas, biases or emotions of the internal world” (Welch, 96). Through this type of poetry, the authors condense different meanings and emotions in just a few words by addressing the elements of nature.

Haiku’s simplicity is not only rich in meaning, but also deceptive for those hidden meanings are difficult to grasp. Because of their form’s limitations, “Japanese poets have evolved a style of condensation, ellipsis, suggestion, image and symbol” (Miner, 570); that is, they employ literary devices in a way that they are able to convey a myriad of meanings in a few words. Consequently, in their apparent simplicity lies the difficulty to comprehend their inner sense (Harr, 112). Despite the simple words or structure, multiple interpretations hide behind the verses that usually address nature, since they are a written representation of

nature or natural events (Harr, 113); they describe a specific moment or experience through the allusion to the natural world. Indeed, as Matsuo Bashō, a renowned haiku poet, claimed, “haiku is simply what is happening in this place at this moment” (qtd. in Kennedy and Gioia, 104). For this reason, the aim of haiku is not expressing an opinion nor reaching a conclusion; rather, they focus on the moment and provide spiritual insight.

Matsuo Bashō composed one of the most notable haiku, “An Old Pond” (1686), which reads as follows “An old pond / a frog jumps in— / the sound of water” (1-3). Bashō presents three different images using elements of nature in order to describe a specific moment. Without using any connector, the poet is able to juxtapose the first two images, a static and a dynamic one, which lead to an auditory one in the third line. In the first verse, we encounter an old pond, which may lead us to think of a tranquil place far from human, and even animal, activity; the pond is old, consequently it must have been there for a long time, uninterrupted. Nonetheless, this peacefulness is disrupted in the second line due to a frog jumping into the pond. The frog contrasts with the pond for it represents a young and lively element whilst the former epitomises quietude and durability. Finally, because of the contact between the animal and the pond, the image that emerges in the third verse is auditory due to the “sound of water” (3), which makes us shift our attention from sight to sound. Notwithstanding, the sound of water is not as disturbing as the jump of the animal; the water does not seem to make a loud or annoying noise, on the contrary, the sound it makes is a quite one, for it is just one small frog jumping into it. The animal might be the representation of restless thoughts in search of a moment of quietude within the mind, the pond, to organise them. Although the mind is disturbed, it seems to manage the unrest of the different thoughts and calm them down, for it just makes a simple sound, not even a noise. Therefore, the peaceful atmosphere presented in the first line, albeit interrupted, is attained at the end.

In contrast, despite *Instapoetry* is also characterised by its simplicity, there is a distinctive factor between these two forms; while the structure of the haiku follows a formal constrain, the length of the *Instapoems* is determined by the author, always considering the application’s limitation. It should also be noted the different purposes; while *Instapoets* do intend to express an opinion, sometimes even a political one, or share personal experiences in order to denounce or raise awareness about a specific situation, the aim of the haiku is to focus on a specific moment, not providing a personal opinion. Thus, the topics *Instapoetry* tackles, unlike haiku, do not exclusively concern nature, they reach a wide range of subjects such as trauma, feminism or violence.

4.2. Imagism and the Lack of Formal Structure

Imagism was a poetic movement born in the early years of the twentieth century. This movement, whose members rejected the traditions of the Romantic and Victorian poetry, was characterised by its simplicity of expression and the accuracy of the use of visual images with the most precise language possible.

Hilda Doolittle, Amy Lowell, or Ezra Pound are some representatives of Imagism, being the latter the most prominent figure of the movement. Indeed, in 1913 the magazine *Poetry* published Pound's short essay "A Few Don'ts by an Imagist". In it, he explored how, with the proper use of language, rhythm and rhyme, a good Imagist poem could be created. From this essay, some points need to be taken into account regarding how to write in accordance with this movement. First of all, the language should not be superfluous and "there is a preference for the use of the common speech" (García and Zamorano, 51); every word must have a purpose in the poem and adjectives should be avoided unless they are excellent and necessary. When writing, the poem does not have to follow a specific rhythm nor rhyme; hence, the poems tend to be free verse. The poet ought to avoid ending the sentences at the end of each line; instead, they should continue on the next one, since an abrupt stop at the end of the line could damage the rhythm of the work. Therefore, with the appropriate use of the language, rhythm and rhyme, the main goal of this movement should be achieved, provoking an emotion on the reader through a particular image.

"In a Station of the Metro" (1913) is one of Ezra Pound's most famous compositions and an example of an Imagist poem, in which he applies the principles developed in "A Few Don'ts by an Imagist". In merely two lines, twenty words including the title, Pound proves capable of evoking vivid images from both the natural world and the urban life. Thanks to the brevity of the poem and the conscious selection of descriptive words, in the first line, the reader is able to imagine a transient scene, the hustle and bustle of a train station where one sees the faces of the people for an instant, before they disappear. Yet in the second line, Pound addresses a complete different setting, the natural world. Through the image of the petals on a bough, which are compared with the people, he makes reference to the fragility and brevity of life; the petals are wet, they freeze in winter and die, but new buds will bloom, just like people do, continuing the circle of life. The poem reflects on how nature takes its course and life does not stop; thus, provoking a melancholic or nostalgic feeling on the reader. Through a simple image and careful selection of words, Pound is able to make the reader reflect on the course of life and its brevity.

Instapoetry also shares some Imagist characteristics. Regarding the language, as it has already been mentioned, *Instapoets* opt for the common language as well, rejecting grandiloquent words. The poetry found in the platform is clearly free verse, since the poems do not follow a specific structure, apart from a certain length imposed by the social network's restrictions. Nonetheless, *Instapoets'* goal is not necessarily to suggest a sentiment; rather they transform an experience they have suffered into art or raise awareness of a concrete subject, which, in turn, might also provoke an emotion on its readers.

4. 3. Confessional Poetry, Revelations of the Inner-Self

“Confessional poetry” is a poetic tendency characteristic of the United States of the 50s and 60s. The origins confessional literature, however, are to be found in Europe and we have to go back as far as the fourth century to find Saint Augustine's *Confessions*⁶, considered the first Western Christian autobiography ever written, where he delves into how he regrets having lived a sinful youth and his conversion to Christianity. Despite the antiquity of the genre, the tradition of confession is perceived in different literary works throughout history such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* in the eighteenth century or Thomas De Quince's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* in the nineteenth century. This, nonetheless, does not mean that the confessional art did not change; on the contrary, it acquired new characteristics since its inception. While in its beginnings Saint Augustine focused on religion and his aim was the purification and salvation of the soul, the confessional poets of the mid-twentieth century explored, as we shall later see, taboo topics such as sex, addictions or suicide.

M. L. Rosenthal officially coined the term “confessional poetry” in his essay “Poetry as Confession” (1959) after reviewing Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959). The critic claimed that “because of the way Lowell brought his private humiliations, sufferings, and psychological problems into the poems of *Life Studies*, the word “confessional” seemed appropriate enough” (26). The themes of the poems and their truthfulness resembled a confession considering that the poets brought to light their struggles with their most private and, in numerous occasions, controversial experiences.

⁶ In modern editions, the book can also be found under the title of *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* to distinguish it from future books with similar titles.

The focus on the individual or the mention of polemical topics was nothing new since previous movements such as Realism or Modernism also shared those characteristics. Thus, according to Deborah Nelson, “[w]hat made confessional poetry confessional, as opposed to just personal or autobiographical, was the nature and context of its revelations. There [was], first of all, the urgency and “rawness” of the revelations” (34). The poets would capture their most inner thoughts however macabre they might be, and unburden themselves through their compositions. What is more, and concerning the content of this type of poetry, Nelson also stated that “[t]he revelations of confessional poetry were extreme and transgressive, particularly with respect to norms of white, middle-class, heterosexual society” (34). Nevertheless, and despite the fact that these poems addressed taboo issues such as marital failure, abortion or addictions, confessional poetry became an important trend in the much conservative American society of the 1950s and 60s.

Regarding the creation of confessional poems, they implied the self-reflection of their authors and, as a result, various aspects of their identity would arise. When the movement emerged, the confessional poets would identify as wife/husband, mother/father, as an American, as a writer or even as a mentally ill patient (Brunner, 191); thus, the identity of each author would manifest in and influence on their compositions. Confessional poets are generally discussed as a group; yet the gender of the poet would not be taken into account, a factor that proved to be influential on their writings. Notwithstanding the individual poems or the individual style of each author, there was a difference between male authors and female authors in how they would approach their worrying matters. The male confessional poet, such as Robert Lowell or John Berryman, did not only feel his own personal crisis as the embodiment of national or cultural crisis, but he also believed the past had shaped whom he was. In this sense, the male poet considered himself the inheritor of major traditions; he “observe[d] himself as a representative specimen with a sort of scientific exactitude” (Gilbert, 446). In other words, the male confessional poet knew who he was; he had a history, a well-defined past that had made him who he was then. Consequently, he could detach from his own person in order to analyse himself. The poet believed he was able to examine his sufferings, even in a state of madness, because he would not be just examining himself, but any man, for they would share similar anxieties.

The female confessional poets of the 50s, the most prominent ones being Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, on the other hand, would struggle with their own identity. The female confessional poets did not have a fixed identity as their male counterpart did; they did not

have their own history and well defined past. Contrariwise, they wrote “in the hope of discovering or defining a self, a certainty, a tradition” (Gilbert, 447). The female poets were in constant search of their own nature by trying different statements, and, sometimes, even sharing their sufferings; “I am your opus, / I am your valuable” (Plath, 67-68), “Everyone in me is a bird. / I am beating all my wings.” (Sexton, 1-2), “I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain powers / and those powers severely limited.” (Rich, 2-3). With the clause “I am”, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and Adrienne Rich respectively, and with all the differences among these poets, are trying different selves, different persons in order to achieve their goal, the discovery of their own identity.

Aside from the lack of a past that defined who the female confessional poet was, part of her struggles arose from the fact that the male author had constantly mythologized her, making her the incarnation of otherness (Gilbert, 448); hence, becoming an object subjugated to the male’s imagination. As a result,

Many of her hypotheses about herself are therefore in one way or another replies to prevalent definitions of her femininity, replies expressing either her distress at the disparity between male myths about her and her own sense of herself, or else her triumphant repudiation of those myths. Men tell her that she is a muse. Yet she knows that she is not a muse, she *has* a muse (and what is its sex?). Men tell her she is the “angel in the house,” yet she doesn't *feel* angelic, and wonders, therefore, if she is a devil, a witch, an animal, a criminal. (Gilbert, 448)

What had been said about women, always from a male perspective, is what led them to question their inner self. In numerous occasions, men idealised them or, conversely, demonised them. Nonetheless, those descriptions did not coincide with how they really felt. In consequence, the female confessional poets started to question and rise up against the identities that had been used to describe them in the arts.

Due to the themes of countless poems and the fact that women positioned themselves against what men had written about them, confessional poetry also reached the political realm, becoming particularly important for the feminist movement (Nelson, 33). Despite the fact that relevant poets such as Sylvia Plath or Anne Sexton, who witnessed the origins of the second wave feminism, did not identify with the movement, they are nonetheless considered feminist writers of great significance; indeed, the academic Ellen Moers asserted that “no writer has meant more to the [second wave] feminist movement [than Sylvia Plath]” (15). Plath, as well as Sexton, became icons of a generation after talking publicly from the space of the private, the domestic and the marginal. They spoke openly about the restricted possibilities available to women who lived confined to their homes, not protected by them

(Nelson, 40). They broke ground in feminist writing since in their poems we can appreciate how they denounced the patriarchal order they lived in and how it affected their lives. Thus, and considering that people, especially women, should not disclose what happened in their private lives, the impact of the confessional poetry written by women was of great importance.

One of Sylvia Plath's most famous poems, "Lady Lazarus", is told from the perspective of a woman in a male dominated society. In the poem, we find instances of how women do not have any control, not even over their own bodies and lives. In this case, the speaker has committed suicide for the third time because she does not want to live anymore. Notwithstanding, she is not even allowed to die, given that they keep bringing her back to life. She addresses those who save her, "Herr Doktor, ... Herr Enemy" (65-66), who are men, for "Herr" is a German word meaning "Sir" or "Gentleman". Hence, men are in command of women's bodies and lives. It is also important to mention some of the other characteristics of confessional poetry found in this poem. As it was previously mentioned, the revelations of this style of poetry were "raw" and transgressive. These attributes are present in "Lady Lazarus" as well; "Soon, soon the flesh / The grave cave ate will be / At home on me" (16-18) or "They had to call and call / And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls." (41-42). Plath talks openly about her suicide attempts through explicit, and even unsettling, descriptions regarding them. Overall, and although not the only one, "Lady Lazarus" is not only a great example of this movement but also an extraordinary act of rebellion against the established patriarchal rule.

Regarding Anne Sexton, "The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator" is one of her most notable poems, in which she addresses her innermost desires after a break-up with her husband and, as the title suggests, the poem focuses on female sexuality. Without mentioning the word "sex", and "masturbator" appearing only in the title, Sexton skilfully describes the act of masturbation through colloquial and suggestive language creating a remarkably explicit poem. The poem starts with some context for the reader, "The end of the affair is always death" (1), in other words, Sexton does not have a love affair anymore. Nevertheless, this verse becomes a highly sexual statement once we know that in French "la petit mort", thus "death", is a euphemism for "orgasm". Hence, even though Sexton is referring to the end of her marriage, she is also addressing the climax at the end of a sexual encounter. In the first two stanzas, the writer alludes several times to a mysterious "she"; "She's my workshop" (2), "now she's mine. / She's not too far" (8-9). What at first could make us think

of another woman is actually Sexton's vagina. The poet does not only personify it since she addresses a "she" or "her", but she also talks about it as if her vagina did not belong to her, as if it were another woman, "I beat her like a bell. I recline / in the bower where you used to mount her" (9-10). In these lines, Sexton describes how she is giving pleasure to herself. Indeed, the act of masturbation is present throughout the whole poem at the end of each stanza with the refrain "At night, alone, I marry the bed", emphasising her loneliness; she is alone and has no one to share her bed with, so she "marries" it, implying that she masturbates at night. Despite the lack of sexual words or expressions, Anne Sexton is able to create vivid images and keep the erotic tone throughout the whole poem. At a time in which talking about sex and pleasure, especially for women, was taboo, with "The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator" Anne Sexton dexterously defies the patriarchal standards imposed on women.

The poetry of the confessional female poets became a major precedent in speaking publicly about issues that society, and especially women, were not allowed to. They rebelled, even if it was unconsciously, against the constraints of the established patriarchal order and its impositions on women. Their poetry, as we shall later see, influenced and prepared the ground for future female poets who also raise their voice and talk openly about controversial, or even taboo, topics that affect our society nowadays.

5. THEORISING ABOUT THE OPPRESSION. THE "MOTHERS"

In any society, there exist distinctive elements that differentiate its inhabitants, from their gender to their religious beliefs. Yet, instead of embracing and celebrating the heterogeneity of society, those characteristics divide the population into two main categories: the oppressor and the oppressed. For centuries, women have been the oppressed, not being allowed to talk publicly and expressing their fears, desires or merely recounting their daily lives. Regarding the artistic world, they have been relegated to a second place if given the opportunity to create and publish their pieces, which, in numerous cases, were signed under a pseudonym to avoid rejection. However, despite all the obstacles and their oppression, they have not stopped creating and sharing their voices. These authors can be considered the Mothers of the present writers since they have become referents and pioneers for their works and theories addressed certain unspoken or ignored topics, paving the way for future authors to have greater opportunities when sharing their creations. Consequently, in this section, I will delve into the theories proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa regarding the

diaspora and its implications; bell hooks, who explores the notions of racism and sisterhood and Susan Brownmiller, pioneer in addressing and condemning the crime of rape.

5.1. Gloria Anzaldúa, the Diaspora and the Emergence of Borders

Human migration is a process that has happened since the early dawn of humankind creating different societies all over the world. However, throughout history, the migratory movement has not happened uniformly since not all communities have been forced to move. Once the displacement starts and the people leave their home migrating to another country, they become part of the diaspora.

“Diaspora” is a term that, for years, has referred to the displacement and exile of the Jews from their homeland and their dispersion throughout the world, which entailed the oppression and discrimination they received in the host countries (Safran, 83). There have been nonetheless more communities forced to flee from their homes; hence, from the twentieth century onwards, the term has expanded and now we can read about Asian diasporas, Iranian diasporas or even queer diasporas (Wofford, 74), propelled by the globalization and the freedom of movement around the world. Therefore, and according to professor Judith Shuval, “the term has acquired a broad semantic domain and now encompasses a motley array of groups such as political refugees, alien residents, guest workers, immigrants, expellees, ethnic and racial minorities, [and] overseas communities” (42). Even though in its origins diaspora referred to the Jewish population displaced because of their persecution, now it also applies to the people who moved due to different reasons, from political to work related.

When migrants leave their homeland, they relocate to a place they have never lived in looking for better living conditions for them and their families, many times left behind. Notwithstanding, the reality they face is that, once in the host country, a large number of them, especially the ones belonging to minority groups, experience discrimination (Wilkes and Wu, 1), what complicates their adaptation to the new society. The discrimination derives from the migrants’ ethnicity, national origin, gender, religious beliefs or even language since they displaced to a country where they are the minority, which makes them particularly targeted by racism and xenophobia. This rejection does not only have implications on the newcomers, who have to adapt to a completely new culture and language, but also on their offspring. The migrants’ children are considered second-generation migrants, regardless of

whether they were born in their parents' host country or they moved there at an early age⁷ (King and Christou, 168); therefore, despite being raised in this new culture and having learnt the language and its customs, the immigrants' children are also victims of such discrimination.

Once the migrants settle in the host country, they become part of the borderland. Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana writer, feminist and queer theorist, devised the notion of borderland in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1978). In this semi-autobiographical book, Anzaldúa depicts her life living in the Mexico-Texas border and, from her perspective of Chicana, Latino and queer woman, she delves into the concepts of heteronormativity, male dominance and colonialism. However, for the purpose of this essay, the focus will be on the aforementioned borderland; according to Anzaldúa,

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. ... The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (25)

Those living in the borders, either metaphorical or physical, are the residents who are different from the norm of the majority of the population, either by the colour of their skin, their language or their religion. These frontiers manifest themselves physically or socially in order to separate the aliens from the dominant culture, even if they have assimilated some, or the majority, of the customs of the host country, as in the case of the second-generation migrants.

When the borders are social, they “frequently become salient around such lines as sexual orientation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, dress, politics, [religion], food, or taste” (Rosaldo, 208). These borderlands have their source in social discrimination, hence the name, in the aspects that the host society finds troublesome since they break with the prevailing homogeneity. Because the borders are not physical, they can be very difficult to perceive; nonetheless, they might become recognisable through language with offensive and hatred expressions such as *bloody Paki* or *nigger*⁸. By using those words, which refer to the person's race or nationality, the speaker creates an invisible border through which they dissociate from the person or people they are trying to offend, emphasising their belonging to different groups. Moreover, these social borders deny a full citizenship experience to some

⁷ This is a general definition adopted for the purpose of the study, albeit it can embrace more meanings.

⁸ See “‘Black This, Black That’: Racial Insults and Reported Speech in Neighbour Complaints and Police Interrogations” by Stokoe and Edwards.

communities, which have to deal with “high levels of poverty, uneven access to employment and employment income, segregated neighbourhood selection leading to racialized enclaves, disproportionate contact with the criminal justice system, and low health status” (Galabuzi, 173). Therefore, the migrants are highly exposed to poorer living and working conditions due to their impossibility to fit into the characteristics of the predominant and powerful society.

The existence of those social borders, and all their implications, leads to the creation of physical ones. Anzaldúa provided a definition for physical borders in *Borderlands/La Frontera*; she claimed that they are “present whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrink with intimacy” (19). These borderlands appear when there is a conflict between two cultures, and they can take many forms, from neighbourhoods to whole countries, where its inhabitants are, to a lesser or greater extent, isolated.

Ghettos are the perfect example of physical borders, and, despite their long history, it was not until the sixteenth century when they became more prominent following the segregation of the Jews in Italy (qtd. in Wirth, 18), and reached its peak during Nazism when the Jews were forced to live in miserable conditions. The Jews were, nonetheless, not the only victims of the existence of the borders, both social and physical. The African-American, the Romany or the Indian are communities that have been targets of hatred and discrimination and have been obliged to live isolated from the powerful society.

The reason behind the segregation of certain communities varies from their race, religion or nationality, among others. However, what they do have in common is that in most cases, the imposition, either explicit or implicit, to marginalise themselves comes from a Caucasian, and usually Western society. A society that judges and hates the aliens due to their own misconceptions regarding the different communities. The perception of the Eastern world by the West has, indeed, its roots in the inaccurate representations of the East that became part of the Western thought. Edward Said, a professor and literary critic, theorized about these misrepresentations in his book *Orientalism* (1978). As Said stated, “we need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate” (71). The Westerners visualise the Orientals, or any other racialized community, as something alien and do not strive to deconstruct the knowledge they have regarding other

cultures, or even learn about them from scratch; instead, they perpetuate the prejudices they have against them, favouring the creation of such detrimental borders.

Migrating, leaving your country, and sometimes family, behind and belonging to the diaspora is not an easy process, which becomes even more difficult when the migrants settle in a place where they are not well received. They do not only have to face discriminatory attitudes but they are very likely to be isolated from the host society that, in multiple cases, has internalised incorrect and pernicious prejudices about the migrants, what leads to the creation and continuation of the social and physical borders.

5.1.1. Women in the Diaspora

Becoming part of the diaspora is a big change and presents a challenge for anyone because of its implications since in numerous cases their migration implies living in a completely different culture. Nevertheless, the diaspora has not the same impact on all of its members; women are who suffer the most. They are not only oppressed in the host country, for they are both women and racialized migrants, but also in their own households.

When a family moves to another country, the women become the representation of their homeland; thus, they are forced to carry the burden of their culture, while men become the labour power and the providers for their families. Diasporic communities frequently consider women “a source of cultural influence and moral corruptibility” (Bhatia, 515); because of that, and since they want to protect their cultural interests, the women have to be protected from the Western influences for they could contaminate the women’s, and therefore the family’s, values. Since women are considered the “transmitters of cultural traditions, customs, songs, cuisine and ... the mother tongue” (Yuval-Davis, 627), they have to assume the role of being the embodiment of their cultural elements as well as instilling them into their households, which are a sacred space that has to be free from Western ideas.

Women’s embodiment of their home cultures implies the perpetuation of the patriarchal standards of their home country⁹. They have their roles perfectly established as mothers and wives, being the ones responsible for taking care of the households and their members. Nonetheless, once they migrate and are exposed to a different culture where

⁹ I would like to clarify that I am not implying that the society they move to is better or that patriarchy does not exist anymore there. What I mean is that they might have customs that have never existed there or that no longer exist.

women might have more liberties, their family members, especially those who want the patriarchal system to continue, “become critical of women’s attempts towards self-empowerment, dismissing acts of resistance as contaminatory influences of western culture, and a loss of “respect” for one’s own community and cultural ideals” (Bhatia, 517). If a woman challenges the impositions or traditions of her culture, she will face rejection from her family or community members, as she would be breaking with the patriarchal ideal of “woman”.

This notion of women’s obligation to follow their culture’s tradition is what Gloria Anzaldúa called “Cultural Tyranny”. According to the Chicana writer, “[d]ominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture. Culture is made by those in power – men” (38). Culture is what shapes our beliefs; hence, if men are the creators of culture, they could shape it and change it in any way they consider necessary, making it more flexible for them and tougher for women, who will learn their traditions and transmit them from generation to generation. Indeed, “[t]he culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men” (Anzaldúa, 39); and, as it was previously stated, the community of those women who want to break with their traditions will disregard their efforts blaming them on the prejudicial Western influences.

As aforementioned, women’s role is frequently to be wives or mothers; however, once they are able to break with those positions, or at least be more than that, and access to the labour market, either because they want to or because of necessity, they will face the so-called “double-disadvantage”. This double disadvantage emerges from the unequal employment opportunities that affects negatively to both women and migrants. Even so, when they do find a job, it is usually precarious in the form of involuntary part-time working or temporary-contract employment (Rubin et al. 43, 44). As soon as they are hired, “they must also equal or surpass their counterparts in capability ... a premise that stems from the need to be accepted by a racist society” (Bhatia, 517). Thus, struggling both with the established patriarchal and racist standards that force them to demonstrate that they are as valid as their co-workers are.

It should also be noted that once women are settled in the host country, and especially if they have the possibility of leaving their homes to work or study, they start to be exposed to the new culture. This results in the cultural hybridization of those women. Numerous

definitions for the term have been proposed¹⁰; however, regarding the diaspora, the most prevailing acceptance considers hybridity “as the process of cultural mixing where the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the host culture and rework, reform and reconfigure this in production of a new hybrid culture or “hybrid identities”” (Kalra, et al. 71). Therefore, due to the contact with this new society and traditions, they start the process of adopting different features of the host, and usually most powerful, culture. Notwithstanding, this does not necessarily mean that the changes they assimilate are positive or enriching. Although they can be encouraged towards self-empowerment and the questioning of some of their culture’s traditions, they also become targets of the impossible or unrealistic Western beauty standards.

Migrant women are doubly disadvantaged. They have to fight the prejudices against the racialized communities as well as women for they are not only oppressed in their households, but also by the Western society. They become the embodiment of their culture, forced to keep their traditions and avoid any influence of the West; otherwise, their families will dismiss them. They have to work harder in order to demonstrate their value and capabilities and fight the racist and sexist standards. However, whilst their fully adaptation to the host society might free them from restrictive practices of their home culture, it can also turn them into victims of the Western thinking and conventions.

5.2. bell hooks, Racism and Sisterhood

Racism is a problem that has existed for centuries and has affected, to a lesser or greater extent, the racialized population; hence, it has become a recurrent topic in countless articles and books. The denunciation of racial discrimination and its implications has taken numerous angles since its victims have suffered them in uncountable situations. Nonetheless, the discrimination these people undergo is not only owing to their race, but also to different factors, such as gender, religious beliefs or social class. In order to address how these components create distinctive social positions where some subjects are oppressed while the others are the oppressors, an intersectional approach is needed.

The concept of intersectionality refers to how the intersection of power relations influences not only social relations in different societies but also its individuals’ experiences.

¹⁰ For further information, see *Diaspora and Hybridity*.

Intersectionality distinguishes different categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality or age, among others, which interrelate; they are not mutually exclusive (Collins and Bilge). Therefore, if a person is discriminated because of their gender, age and sexuality, the categories should not be analysed in isolation but in relation to the others in order to comprehend how that person with that specific background experiences the world.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a lawyer, professor and civil rights advocate, was the first to use and coin the term in her article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989). Although the concept has evolved since then and embraced more categories of discrimination, Crenshaw’s early work focused on heterosexual Black¹¹ women due to the fact that they were marginalised simply because they were Black women; the lawyer and civil rights advocate claimed that,

The paradigm of sex discrimination tends to be based on the experiences of white women; the model of race discrimination tends to be based on the experiences of the most privileged Blacks. Notions of what constitutes race and sex discrimination are, as a result, narrowly tailored to embrace only a small set of circumstances, none of which include discrimination against Black women. (151)

Although Black women suffer a different kind of discrimination that arises as a result of the intersection of both their race and gender, their oppression cannot be merely reduced to racism and sexism isolated from each other. The struggles Black women face and their experiences are unique and cannot be exclusively examined through a white woman’s or Black man’s lens, otherwise part of the problem would be omitted and a comprehensive analysis impossible to make.

bell hooks, pseudonym of Gloria Jean Watkins, who decapitalised the initials of her name in order for others to focus on her ideas rather than on her identity, is a Black writer, professor, feminist and social activist who grew up in a segregated community in Hopkinsville, Kentucky during the 50s and 60s. Consequently, she faced double discrimination due to both her gender and race from an early age, what influenced much of her career for her work has focused on the intersectionality of race and gender as well as of sex and class.

Nevertheless, during the 80s, the lack of an intersectional approach was decisive for Black women. As hooks claimed, “[c]ontemporary black women could not join together to

¹¹ I will uppercase the word Black when referring to Black people and cultures of African origins.

fight for women's rights because we did not see "womanhood" as an important aspect of our identity" (1). Without an intersectional perspective, they were unaware that their oppression came from both their gender and race; in a racist and sexist society, they were forced to fight for just one part of their identity, ignoring the other.

One of the most important and influential books addressing the experiences and oppression of Black women is bell hooks' *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981). This work was titled after Sojourner Truth's, an antislavery speaker, extemporaneous speech "Ain't I A Woman?" in 1851 in which she wanted to show the need to fight for equal rights for African-American women. In the case of bell hooks, she delves into not only how Black women have been, and are, subjects of oppression and devaluation since slavery times because of their race and gender, but also into how they should embrace the feminist movement and fight the racism inside it in order to be fully included, seeking an intersectional feminism.

hooks' starting point for the development of her feminist theory is how Black women "regard[ed] race as the only relevant label of identification" (1); thus, by relegating their gender to a second place, they would only focus on the racist discrimination they suffered but not on the sexist one, even though the latter was as oppressive as the former. Unlike Black men and white women, who could be either the oppressor or the oppressed, Black women were always in an oppressed position; consequently, they felt that they had to choose the side that could protect best their interests. In other words, they could ally with the Black, sexist patriarchy or with the white, racist feminism. The result was that, in the vast majority of cases, their choice was to reject the feminist movement¹² (hooks, 9), they would position themselves with the Black patriarchy since Black women did not want to be perceived as supporters of a movement considered racist even though they defended many of the ideas promoted by feminism.

Notwithstanding, their alliance with their male counterparts was not as expected inasmuch as "what had begun as a movement to free all black people from racist oppression became a movement with its primary goal the establishment of black male patriarchy" (hooks, 5). In this way, Black women were blatantly relegated to the background and their rights were never taken into consideration, perpetuating racist and sexist oppression towards them.

¹² Not only Black women, but also other racialized women.

Not only did their male counterparts, when trying to end with racist oppression, ignore Black women's rights, but the white feminist women also neglected them. In her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), bell hooks claims that despite the sexist tyranny that oppresses women, there are other factors, such as race or class, that divide women and affect every aspect of their lives and, therefore, impede them to create a "common bond" (4). Regardless of their shared experience of being women, the existence of different discriminatory elements proved more influential, precluding them from joining to not only fight against the established patriarchal system but also to strive to end with other discriminatory aspects of society such as racism or classism. Indeed, if at any time, the feminist movement called attention to the racist oppression of Black women, it was rapidly dismissed to focus on their strength to endure such oppression instead of actually helping them to bring it to an end. What is more, "[t]he stereotypical image of the "strong" black woman was no longer seen as dehumanizing, it became the new badge of black female glory" (6, *Ain't I A Woman*). White feminists would romanticise the Black female experience instead of actively including them in the movement. Hence, the strength of Black women, previously considered negative, was now seen as a positive and intrinsic characteristic of their experience, and not as a resource they had to recur to in order to adapt and cope with the sexist and racist society.

Despite this lack of the common bond derived from different sexist attitudes, racism and even class privilege, among others, hooks nevertheless encourages women to unite and embrace sisterhood. She claims that "unless [women] can show that barriers separating [them] can be eliminated, that solidarity can exist, [they] cannot hope to change and transform society as a whole" (*Feminist Theory*, 44). Women should aim to work together and support each other in order to confront and terminate with those attitudes that divide them and, at the same time, favour the patriarchal society.

This notion of sisterhood needed to be revised nonetheless. The white bourgeois women's liberationists of the 60s adopted that concept to talk about a common oppression that created a bond between them; notwithstanding, this bonding came from their victimization, a consequence of male supremacist thinking (hooks, 45). Women would consider themselves victims, a belief that was behind the patriarchal world of seeing women as weak and incapable, and used their victimization as a cover-up to oppress other women. There was no intersectional approach, they would only focus on their oppression as white and upper class women, but they would omit the oppression suffered by those non-white,

middle and low-class women, and in occasions inflicted by their white counterparts. Consequently, many women who did not identify themselves as victims, and Black women, who were seen as strong, were omitted from the movement, making it difficult to create a common bonding to fight the patriarchal rule.

As a result, what hooks proposed was a transformation of the female consciousness. She claimed that “[white women liberationists] were not challenging one another to examine their sexist attitudes towards women unlike themselves or exploring the impact of race and class privilege on their relationships to women outside their race/class groups.” (46) They would use their role as victims to perpetuate the oppression on women who were not part of such sisterhood, instead of educating themselves on the diverse dynamics that positioned women on different levels and joining together in order to create an inclusive and intersectional sisterhood that would not only fight against sexism, but also racism and classism.

Women need to communicate and share their unique and personal experiences such as Black, Asian, middle-class or queer to eliminate the different discriminations all of them are subjected to. Without sorority, an intersectional approach, and movement that embraces, celebrates and protects the diversity of women, it will not be possible to resist and bring to an end the heteropatriarchal world we live in.

5.3. Susan Brownmiller and Rape as a Poetical Theme

Living in a patriarchal world implies that men are the powerful, the dominant and women are the powerless and the dominated. Despite representing half of the global population, women have been disregarded, mistreated and considered second-class citizens on the basis of their gender. Thus, they have been subjected to gender violence until the present day.

Gender violence is a serious social and global problem that affects not only women but also girls. According to UN Women, gender violence, or gender-based violence, refers to those harmful acts that put at risk individuals because of their gender. Moreover, it “results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (UN Women). Not only men perform this type of violence, the

different States also participate in the perpetuation of this extended and rooted social problem. Considering that it may manifest economically, emotionally or psychologically, that is, not physically, it might go unnoticed, which makes it difficult to discern and combat.

Domestic violence, forced marriage or online violence are some of the many forms that gender violence may take; notwithstanding, the focus of this essay will be on sexual violence paying specific attention to rape. Sexual violence is a serious social problem and it is defined as

any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. (Krug et al. 149)

That definition can be condensed as any non-consented sexual act and it encompasses practices such as sexual harassment, rape or sending unwanted and unrequested sexual pictures. Nonetheless, regardless of the antiquity of some of these acts, they have not been properly approached until rather recently, in the 1960s and 70s, during the second wave feminism. The feminist movement took a stance against not only those sexual practices both at home and in the workplace, but also against the domestic violence women suffered and that had been long disregarded and even normalised.

Susan Brownmiller, an American journalist, writer and radical feminist activist, is noted for being one of the first feminists to address the problem of rape publicly in her influential book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) in which she conducted a thorough study regarding the history, politics and sociology of rape and its consequences on society. *Against Our Will*, which was later included in the "Women Rise" category of the New York Public Library's Books of the Century, contained an unprecedented analysis since "until the 1970s, most Americans assumed that rape, incest, and wife-beating rarely happened" (Davis, 308). This ignorance concerning sexual and domestic violence was very problematic for if there was no visibility or acknowledging of a problem, it would not be possible to resolve it.

Thus, *Against Our Will* marked a turning point since it changed public attitudes towards rape and many rape laws were modified after its publication. Brownmiller identified rape as an unnatural and exclusively human act for she claimed that in the animal kingdom rapes did not occur and defined it as "nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men keep all women* in a state of fear" (15). Thus, men would use

rape, or the idea of rape, as a tool to control women and exert power over them. Even though not all women have been raped and not all of them will, they have been taught nonetheless to fear sexual assaults, and that terror is used to hold them in a subordinate position to the male population.

When a woman is raped, such a serious crime does not only affect her physically, but it also has a psychological and emotional impact. Brownmiller claimed that rape has different meanings for women than for men; for women it means “[a] sexual invasion of the body by force, an incursion into the private, personal inner space without consent . . . [which] constitutes a deliberate violation of emotional, physical and rational integrity and is a hostile, degrading act of violence” (376). Thus, rape is not just a physical act, it also has a psychological and emotional component that leaves a mark on its victims; the emotional reaction may manifest from crying and screaming to telling the story as if it were a funny anecdote and the psychological sequel might appear through the development of post-traumatic stress disorder¹³. Conversely, for men rape is a “temporary access to the victim’s intimate parts, and the intent is not merely to “take”, but to humiliate and degrade” (Brownmiller, 377-378). Hence, while for women rape is a terrifying and traumatic event that has short-term and long-term consequences, for men is a mere tool through which they sexually objectify, control and belittle women.

Rapes have happened throughout human history and even if the first rape was unexpected and accomplished despite the woman’s refusal, the second rape was indubitably planned (Brownmiller, 14). From that moment on, rape culture was gradually formed, yet it was not until the 1970s, during the second wave feminism, when the coining of “rape culture” occurred thanks to the radical feminists who addressed this social problem. The term referred to the “social, cultural and structural discourses and practices in which sexual violence is tolerated, accepted, eroticised, minimised and trivialised” (Powell and Henry, 2). Since not all of the practices that contribute to rape culture are violent, they may be difficult to grasp; nevertheless, all of them favour and even encourage the perpetuation of sexual violence against women.

Susan Brownmiller addressed this trivialization of sexual violence through the so-called “confessional magazines”. These magazines contained stories told in the first person

¹³ For further information, see “Risk Factors for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Female Help-Seeking Victims of Sexual Assault”.

and whose main character was a woman who despite experiencing trauma or unhappiness was able to return to normality or at least had the expectation that soon everything would be well. They were aimed at working class women who identified with the temptations and sufferings of their characters and perceived these publications as helpful, realistic and moral (Crow et al. 1328). Some of those stories included tales of rape, near-rapes or even rape fantasies and “they promulgated a philosophy of submission in which the female victim was often to blame, whereas the men in her life – husband, boyfriend or rapist – emerged as persons of complex emotion deserving of sympathy” (Brownmiller, 343). In addition, the rape was not condemned in any way, on the contrary, “the rape functioned as a positive catalyst for the heroine in her never-ending quest for a new boyfriend or an improved relationship with a husband” (Brownmiller, 343). These stories normalised and even romanticised terrifying situations in which the rapists were excused and worthy of sympathy while the victims were to be blamed after being sexually assaulted, but, at the same time, they depicted a future in which women would find a new relationship or improve the one they already had. Consequently, the existence of such magazines was very dangerous since their target were the millions of girls and women who read it each month for they received constant, confusing and dangerous stimuli.

Although confessional magazines tried to romanticise rape and its outcomes, they did not hide the fact that the survivor of the sexual assault would be to blame. Not only do the victims of a sexual assault have to suffer the physical and psychological consequences of the abuse; if they come forward and denounce the rapist, they will face what is known as “victim blaming”, a phenomenon that plays a great role in the perpetuation of rape culture. William Ryan first coined the term in 1971 and it referred to the transfer of blame from the perpetrator of the crime to the victim. Consequently, when dealing with sexual violence, victim blaming can be defined as someone saying or implying that the woman’s character, behaviour, appearance, decisions or situation for being subjected to sexual violence was her fault, rather than attributing the blame to the male offender who committed the crime (qtd. in Taylor). Thus, instead of acknowledging the traumatic event the woman has experienced and helping her to recover from it, she is ignored and the rapists excused under the pretext that “she was asking for it”.

Considering that victim blaming is so rooted in our society and consciousness, many victims do not denounce the rape in order to avoid being accused of encouraging the assault and, in numerous occasions, they agonize wondering whether their behaviour, manner or

dress was inviting to commit such an awful act (Brownmiller, 312). This is the result of victim blaming, even the victim herself starts to question her own actions or appearance, rather than realising that she did not do anything wrong, that under no circumstance is she responsible for what happened.

Victim blaming is closely related to another practice that helps perpetuate rape culture, “slut-shaming”. The term is defined as the “the act of criticizing women or girls for their real or presumed sexuality or sexual activity, as well as for looking or behaving in ways that are believed to transgress sexual norms” (Karaian, 296). Women are slut-shamed and discredited by associating them with a supposed transgression of the accepted sexual conduct, stigmatising them as immodest and promiscuous. When they want to be involved in any sexual activity or their appearance seems provocative, under the patriarchal lens, they are condemned.

Women are not allowed to divert from the norm imposed on them. Furthermore, due to slut-shaming, the victims “may attain a poor reputation, experience social isolation and a loss of social status, as well as feel negative, painful emotions such as embarrassment, humiliation, regret, and sadness” (Sweeney, 1579-1580). As with victim blaming, slut-shaming also affects its victims psychologically for it puts them on the spotlight, humiliating them, instead of focusing on the perpetrators. A change of mind-set is imperative so that the focal point of the crimes are on the criminals and not on the victims.

Women have been victims and survivors of sexual violence for centuries. They have always been to blame under the pretext that they were asking for it due to their looks or behaviour; men, however, have been excused and forgiven. Therefore, the focus on the crime was always on the victims, requiring them to comply with the patriarchal standards, the same standards that help perpetuate rape culture. The second wave feminism brought forth the crime of rape, and feminists such as Susan Brownmiller took a stance to reveal the serious problem that was rooted globally, raise awareness and eradicate it.

6. INSTAPOETRY AS A REFLECTION OF SOCIETY

Throughout the centuries, the authors have gathered in their works the historical and cultural characteristics of their corresponding epochs, and the literature of the twenty-first century is no different. *Instapoetry* has also become a reflection of society for it addresses

current political and social subjects that range from immigration to the Western beauty canon.

Instapoems have reached and engaged millions of readers not only for their aesthetic and simplicity of the format, but the topics treated played an important role as well. The feelings expressed in such short and simple poems have enthralled the followers of this trend for, in uncountable occasions, they have seen themselves in the poems; *Instapoets* would capture the experiences that, not only them, but also millions of people have endured. Although much of *Instapoetry* deals with the recurrent topic of love, this trend also involves poems concerning racism, sexual abuse or feminism. Thus, the authors raise awareness and make visible in such a mainstream platform subjects that have been long ignored or undermined.

In the following section of this paper, selected poems of the *Instapoets* Rupri Kaur, Nikita Gill and Amanda Lovelace will be reviewed for they have addressed the topics of immigration, beauty canons and sexual violence respectively. Since *Instapoetry* can be found both in Instagram and in physical format, for the purpose of this analysis, the poems chosen dealing with the aforementioned subjects have been taken from the *Instapoets* social media profiles and their books.

6. 1. Rupri Kaur, Perspectives of an Immigrant Child

Rupri Kaur is considered the queen of *Instapoetry*, being the most followed *Instapoet* with a total of 4,3 millions of followers on Instagram. Kaur, born in 1992 in Punjab, India, had to move to Canada at the age of three due to the persecution that was taking place against the Sikh community, community to which she belongs; therefore being forced to become an immigrant at an early age, what would later have a great impact on her literary career.

The *Instapoet's* rise began in 2015 after Instagram removed a photo she had posted containing menstrual bloodstains on her clothing and bedsheet, part of a university project, and she responded to the removal with a critique that became viral. As a result, she started to gain prominence on the platform, which led to the increase of followers and popularity of her poetry. Although Kaur had already self-published her first poetry collection in 2014, *milk and honey*, her growth on social media drew the attention of publishers and in 2015, Andrews McMeel Publishing became her editor and re-released her book. This first poetry collection

was later followed by *the sun and her flowers* (2017) and *home body* (2020), and the three of them contain poems concerning love, loss, trauma, femininity, family and migration.

Regarding her social media, Rupi Kaur takes great care of cultivating a specific aesthetic on her Instagram profile. In her publications, she alternates different photographs with some of her poems, combining colour pictures with minimalistic posts in black and white. Because of the amount of publications, many of them being poems, we find in her account a great number of excerpts taken from her three books. Consequently, the poems selected for this first section have been taken both from Instagram and from her second book, *the sun and her flowers*.

Before starting with the analyses, it should be highlighted that, unlike the vast majority of *Instapoets*, the reason behind Kaur's usage of lower case is not merely aesthetic; it is to honour her mother tongue, Punjabi, which can be written in Gurmukhi script, in which capitalization does not exist for there are no uppercase or lower case letters.

The only punctuation that exists within Gurmukhi script is a period ... So in order to symbolize and preserve these small details of my mother language, I ascribe them within my work. No case distinction and only periods. A visual manifestation and ode to my identity as a diasporic Punjabi Sikh woman. (rupikaur.com)

Hence, even though she does not makes reference to her origins in every single composition, her Sikh roots are present and respected both in some of the themes covered throughout her three books and behind the aesthetic presented in them.

As regards the themes of the poems, being the daughter of immigrants, and an immigrant herself, Kaur has several compositions addressing the subject of migration and her life in the diaspora. In her poetry collection, *the sun and her flowers*, she even devotes a whole chapter, *rooting*, to explore the "South Asian experience" and the issues faced by Indian women and immigrants, all of them from a feminist discourse and a contemporary context. In those poems, she pays homage to her parents' struggles both as migrants and as refugees, spotlights her mother's experience as an Indian woman and immigrant, and explores the Indian patriarchal culture. For this reason, for the purpose of this essay, I will analyse some of Kaur's poems, written from a perspective of a child of migrants, since they offer social criticism and reflection regarding the adversities that immigrants endure.

On this basis, and as it was previously mentioned, Kaur and her family migrated to Canada; notwithstanding, despite the cultural diversity the country enjoys, Kaur's parents experienced repudiation when they migrated to the North American nation. In her poem

“*broken english*”¹⁴, one of her longest compositions, Kaur skilfully narrates and summarises the hardships of her parents’ migration; how they saved and spent all their money on a dream that became a nightmare. She tackles different issues, from the rejection and isolation they felt to how she admires and values what they have done. Regarding the reality they encountered when they first arrived, the *Instapoet* wrote, “a discombobulated couple / who landed in the new world with hopes / that left the bitter taste of rejection in their mouths” (8-9) and “[papa] wants to give her a home in a country that looks at her / with the word *visitor* wrapped around its tongue” (24-25).

Due to the origin of Kaur’s family, they were more prone to experience racism, even if it was subtle, for in Canada there is a hierarchy of “social distance” in which European immigrants rank higher than Blacks, Jews or Asian, who are lower on the preference scale; therefore, those belonging to lower positions are exposed to racist attitudes and practices. Studies have shown that if racialized immigrants wanted to rent accommodation, apply for a job, or when treating with immigration officers, they would experience hostility, discrimination and even violence (Richmond, 15). When Kaur’s parents decided to move to another country, they did not expect a state that would not fully accept them, that would see them as outsiders and not as full citizens of that receiving society, and yet, despite the enmity and racism, they thrived and were able to provide for their children.

Within this context, the rejection migrants felt did not only come from those of the host society, in the same poem, the *Instapoet* makes a reference to how even the own children of immigrants might feel ashamed of their parents, or ridicule them, in this case, due to their accent.

so how dare you mock your mother
 when she opens her mouth and
 broken english spills out
 don’t be ashamed of the fact that
 she split through countries to be here
 so you wouldn’t have to cross a shoreline
 her accent is thick like honey
 hold it with your life
 it’s the only thing she has left from home
 don’t you stomp on that richness

 kiss the side of her tender cheek
 she already knows what it feels like
 to have an entire nation laugh when she speaks
 she is more than our punctuation and language (60-69, 73-76)

¹⁴ Lower case and italics intended.

Along with skin colour, dress and mannerisms, the accent a person has is one of the characteristics that identifies them as foreigners. When a child, or a young person, moves to another country, they are likely to assimilate the host culture and therefore integrate in that society; conversely, the older ones have more difficulties adapting to it. Indeed, some immigrants are subjected to discrimination and harassment, occasionally from other immigrants themselves, on the basis of their “foreign accent” for it is unintelligible or it requires effort to understand (Munro). The rejection of the foreign accent transcends to the immigrants’ children so that they might also feel ashamed of how their parents speak, which, at the same time, is a rejection of their own culture for they are turning their backs on an identifying and characteristic element of their history.

In those lines, Kaur goes to the origin of the accent of that mother. The *Instapoet* relegates to the background the incorrect language and the heavy accent of the woman in order to highlight how she has come from a different place with a different language preventing her child to go through the same process, a process that has left her with a distinctive characteristic that reveals her origins. In fact, Kaur equates her accent with a treasure, for it is a precious asset, one of the few things she could bring with her to this new country and life, a priceless possession to remind her of her origins and ancestry.

“*accent*” (see Fig. 9) is the title of another piece she composed regarding the way a migrant speaks. Yet, while “broken english” addresses the accent of the parents, this poem deals with her own, or any migrant’s child, accent. In this case, the *Instapoet* addresses the shame the offspring of migrants might feel due to their own accent, for not even they are exempt from the discrimination either. Part of that shame originates in the school environment, mostly from their classmates, since “[children] are made to feel “different” and “not normal” and their language or their accent is ridiculed. The children begin to develop a strong sense of

my voice
is the offspring
of two countries colliding
what is there to be ashamed of
if english
and my mother tongue
made love
my voice
is her father’s words
and mother’s accent
what does it matter if
my mouth carries two worlds

accent - rupi kaur

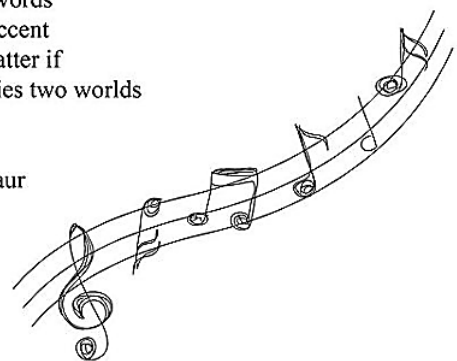


Figure 9. “*accent*.” *Instagram*, 16 Apr. 2019. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BwTHNTLnqNQ/>

shame about their language and their heritage culture” (Hinton, 335). Even if outside their household they speak in the language of the host country, when they are at home they use their native language; therefore, their mother tongue permeates the second language developing a characteristic accent that differentiates them from the natives and makes them targets of discrimination. In this poem, Kaur, once again, praises the accent of immigrants describing it not just as the outcome of her two languages mixing, but also as a result born out of an act of love. The poem is also accompanied by a little drawing of a stave with some musical notes, implying that, besides considering her accent the “offspring” of two languages, the *Instapoet* sees it as a melody, a piece of art.

Mention should be made of the fact that once the migrants settle in the host country, in order to support their families they have to work hard and are exposed to precarious and demanding employment in which they are underpaid. The struggles they face do not go unnoticed, not even for their children. The hard work they need to do for the sake of their families tire them and Kaur captures her point of view as a child of hardworking migrants in the following passage,

my parents never sat us down in the evening to share stories of their younger days. one was always working. the other too tired. perhaps being an immigrant does that to you. ... their bodies were hard at work paying in blood and sweat for their citizenship. perhaps the weight of the new world was too much. and the pain and sorrow of the old was better left buried. ... they had an entire life before me which i am an stranger to. it would be my greatest regret to see them leave this place before i even got to know them. (138)¹⁵

Although the *Instapoet* writes mainly poetry, she does have some prose compositions such as this excerpt. In this case, whilst Kaur is aware of the arduous work of her parents, she also wishes they would have had more free time to sit and talk with her and her siblings. Yet, it was a necessity for her parents to have such an exhausting life, both in and outside the home, in order to provide for their family. The children of immigrants are more likely to experience problems with education, medical conditions both mental and physical, are more exposed to poverty and might have difficulty assimilating to the host country (Tienda and Haskins). Therefore, their goal would be to offer their children the best live possible, albeit the tough and precarious work, even if it meant to treat communication as secondary.

¹⁵ The lower case letters throughout the whole excerpt are intended.

In addition to the poems she writes addressing both her parents, the *Instapoet* also has some compositions that are devoted to her mother or father in particular. One of these examples is the following poem (see fig. 10), which is enhanced with a doodle of typical Indian ingredients. In merely five lines, Kaur both acknowledges the hard decision of her parents, in this case her mother, of leaving their home behind in order to provide a better life for their children, and her mother's homesickness. This poem, shared on Instagram, is also accompanied

leaving her country
was not easy for my mother
i still catch her searching for it
in foreign films
and the international food aisle

- rupi kaur



Figure 10. "leaving her country." *Instagram*, 15 Dec. 2019. <https://www.instagram.com/p/B6Ep-ehhUeN/>

by a short comment of the *Instapoet*, "sometimes home is a smell. of diesel and smoke and spices. ... sometimes after years you go back. realize home is gone. the one you knew is somewhere in the past. and you're wondering where home is now" (Kaur, Instagram.com).

Migrating implies leaving behind a familiar environment and moving, in numerous occasions, to a completely different and dominant culture in which the newcomers are outsiders. This is what can be seen in Kaur's poem; in this case, the *Instapoet's* mother does not seem to have a sense of belonging to the receiving society. For immigrants, this sense of belonging "to their source country can provide a cultural anchor during the transition into the new society. And a sense of belonging to the receiving society reflects whether they feel accepted, secure, and "at home" in their adopted country" (Berry and Hou, 255). Regardless of the years living in the receiving country, her mother is still yearning for home and trying to find it in familiar places; it is interesting to notice how she searches for home in the "foreign films" section and "the international food aisle". She is not part of the host country; she does not belong to, or does not feel accepted in, the ruling culture since she needs to go to the foreign section, the alien section, in order to find her home.

Taking into consideration the poems studied, it is noteworthy the fact that Rupi Kaur's poetry is full of references to her life as a migrant, as well as its implications in a society with prevailing prejudices against migrants. Thus, her work cannot be analysed outside her context and personal experiences.

6.2. Nikita Gill, the Criticism of the Western Beauty Canon

Nikita Gill is currently the most successful British *Instapoet* with a social media following of over 625.000 users. Gill was born in 1987 in Belfast, for her parents were temporarily living in Northern Ireland, and moved to New Delhi when she was just a few months old, where she grew up; therefore, despite being Irish by birth, her ancestry and the culture in which she was raised is Indian. Although at the age of 12 Gill had a story published in a local newspaper, her journey as an *Instapoet* began when she was already living in London, city that she had to move to due to academic purposes, to complete her master's degree.

Because of her degree Gill started to work with children with special needs, a major decision since “[i]t made [her] realise there are so many marginalised people who don't have a voice, and who just need someone who can understand” (Gill). Consequently, she decided to give voice to those silenced by sharing her own experiences through poems. This process was not an easy one for she was rejected 137 times by numerous publishers. The rejections, however, did not stop her from publishing her compositions online, first in the social media platform Tumblr (platform that she is still using) and later on Instagram. Even though her first poetry collection, *Your Soul Is a River* (2016), was published by the online magazine Thought Catalog, through the sharing of her compositions on social media, Gill was able to garner a huge following that caught the attention of Orion Publishing, which published her subsequent books.

At first glance, Gill's *Instapoetry* does not seem to fit into the trend for it does not share the characteristic lower case throughout her compositions; however, the free verses and the subjects tackled, together with the publication of her poems on Instagram, demonstrate that she is indeed an *Instapoet*. Regarding the topics addressed, in Gill's poetry collections, we will mainly find pieces dealing with trauma, survival, female empowerment, and the retelling of fairy tales or Greek myths in which she deconstructs damaging myths.

Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, I will examine those pieces that deal with and criticise, either implicit or explicit, the prevailing beauty canons. In addition, for this second part of review of poems, all of them will be selected from those the *Instapoet* uploaded to Instagram since she shares reflections or experiences that supplement her compositions on the comment section in order to engage more with her readers.

It is important to consider, first of all, that women are exposed to beauty canons, which are almost impossible to fulfil, from a very early age since they are targets of constant stimuli that build on their consciousness an ideal of a woman; how she should look like, what is considered pretty and what is not. This oppressive patriarchal ideal, for its aim is to be sexually desirable for men, has been created by the Western society and, albeit it changes throughout the years, its essence remains unchanged; in other words, being white, young, toned and slim is the goal to achieve, although the last element might suffer slight changes depending on the epoch. Since the Western beauty canon is predominantly white, it creates an unachievable standard that racialized women might internalize, even if it is impossible for them to accomplish. In the following poem, “Pretty Is A Lie” (see Fig. 11), Gill addresses how women receive constant comments regarding their physical appearance when they do not meet the Western beauty standard.

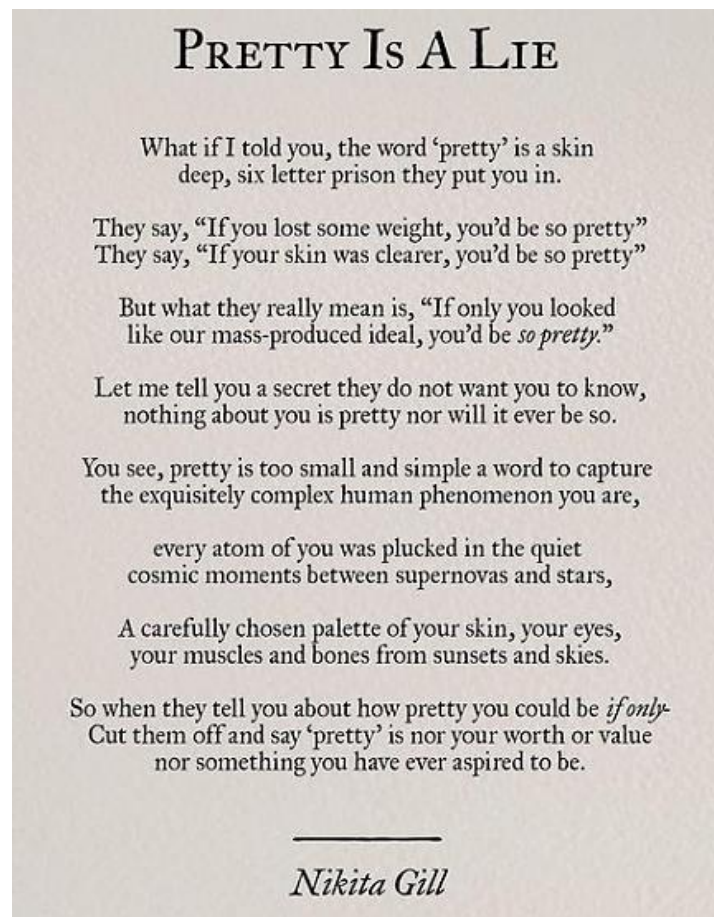


Figure 11. “Pretty Is A Lie.” *Instagram*, 17 Sept. 2018.
<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bn1J3pZHRFj/>

The *Instapoet* starts the composition equating the word “pretty” with a cage since it is a goal impossible to achieve considering that it is conditional upon the prevailing ideal;

hence, those who try to reach such beauty might be trapped in an unattainable task for the ideal is constantly changing. In the second stanza, Gill writes, “They say, “If your skin was clearer, you’d be so pretty”” (4); this is a sentence most likely aimed at a person of colour. Studies have shown that the skin tone is a significant factor since it influences on how attractive we perceive an individual, which derives from the role race plays in the construction of beauty in our society. Furthermore, “within certain racial communities, colorism, or discrimination based on skin tone, is a significant problem and contributes to racial biases” (Silvestrini, 307). Discrimination does not solely happen among races, but inside racial communities themselves light-skinned people are considered more beautiful. The lighter the skin tone, the more attractive that person is for they would conform best the Western, and therefore white, “mass-produced” ideal, an ideal that ignores, on purpose or not, all those people who cannot meet that standard.

The allusion of the skin tone is not the only comment regarding the physical appearance within this poem, Gill also added, “They say, “If you lost some weight, you’d be so pretty”” (3). Although in the composition she just mentions the weight on a line, she supplements the poem in the comment section of the post with the event that inspired her to write it,

My friend’s eight year old daughter came up to us when we were talking the other day looking extremely upset and sad. Apparently someone had told her, “oh you’d be so pretty if only you lost all this baby fat.” ... I wrote this poem for her. And for all little girls out there facing the “pretty” label and being told what they should be to fit that very small limited mould. (Gill, Instagram.com)

This kind of comments, that might occur from an early childhood, are deeply normalised in our society and, regardless of whether they are said with good intentions, they might be very damaging for the receiver, especially during adolescence, since they could leave sequels in the form of low self-esteem, poor emotional health and eating disorders (Eisenberg et al. 12). These remarks are an example of the consequences derived from the social problem known as “fatphobia”, the pathological fear of fatness that manifests in negative attitudes and bias towards fat people (Robinson et al. 468). Due to the fact that fatness is frowned upon in the Western society, people tend to comment or behave inappropriately towards those individuals who they consider to be fat.

It should be noted that fatphobia is not a social problem that came out of nowhere. Behind this subject stands the incessant work of the media in the construction of an idealised female body. Through films, advertisement or social media among others, the public is led

to internalise a specific ideal, usually in the form of a slim woman, as beautiful, for it receives a limited variety of models of how an attractive woman should look like.

The media informs and reflects what people should consider beautiful; it plays a fundamental role for it transmits the current beauty ideal showing different aspects of appearance that convey skin, hair or body type, among others. The constant exposure to the media and, therefore, to the canon displayed leads to body dissatisfaction “which is experienced when someone perceives that their body falls short of the societal ideal in terms of size and/or shape, regardless of that person’s objective size or shape” (Mills et al. 146). In other words, the images presented in the media influences on how people perceive themselves, feeling guilty for not being able to comply with the quasi-impossible standard.

In the following poem (see Fig. 12), Gill tackles this problem; how different elements of the visual culture (magazines, advertisements, famous people) affect the perceptions of beauty and perpetuate the prejudicial idea that being thin is positive, beautiful and the goal to reach, whilst being fat symbolises the opposite.



Figure 12. “Weight.” *Instagram*, 16 July 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CRZM3ujobyL/>

The *Instapoet* captures in her poem how women are exposed to and are impacted by the ever-elusive ideal, reiterated by their families or peer groups as well. This standard forces them to lose weight and be thinner pursuing an appearance similar to those beautiful women appearing in the media, and the subsequent internal struggle due to the damaging practices carried out to achieve that ideal. Once more, in the comment section the *Instapoet* shares a personal incident concerning, in this case, her weight,

Our society is structured in a way that we are never allowed to feel happy within our own skin, entire industries are made to keep us feeling uncomfortable or unhappy and I remember as a teenager and a young woman in my twenties, my experience with this was deeply damaging - I stopped eating at one point and became so thin, I couldn't sleep on my side at night because my hip bones made it so uncomfortable. (Gill, Instagram.com)

The beauty standard reaches many aspects of our daily lives so that it is very difficult to avoid the exposure. Consequently, the pressure it exerts on people, especially young women, can alter their own body perception or make them vulnerable to developing disorderly eating habits, such as anorexia or bulimia, when they measure themselves against the established standard and perceive they have failed to meet the acceptable and socially desirable objective. As the Western beauty ideal expands its reach, the impact of eating disorders are no longer confined to a specific class, race or gender (Hesse-Biber et al. 209); white, middle-class women are no more the only group affected by these illnesses, now more diverse populations, as well as men, are victims of an unattainable ideal.

The last verse of the poem, “the easier I am to love” (15), shows another consequence of fatphobia. Research shows that women believe that being appealing to men, going on a date, getting married or achieving anything they want depends on their weight (Hesse-Biber, 208); according to their own perception, the lower their weight, the more love they will receive and the more successful they will be. Thus, fatphobia does not only deceive people into thinking that thinness equals beauty; rather, that their weight is an indicator of how worthy of love they are and the means to achieve what they want in life.

On the other hand, as briefly mentioned previously, our peers and, especially, parents have become an important agent on the dissemination of the established standard. Since they have also internalised the canon as something positive and the goal to reach, in numerous occasions they might exert pressure on their children, mainly on their daughters, to meet the flawless beauty ideal.

Gill is aware of the power parents have; thus, in the poem “Tell Your Daughters” (see Fig. 13), the *Instapoet* acknowledges the fundamental role of the parents in educating their daughters to love themselves regardless of their body shape and size.

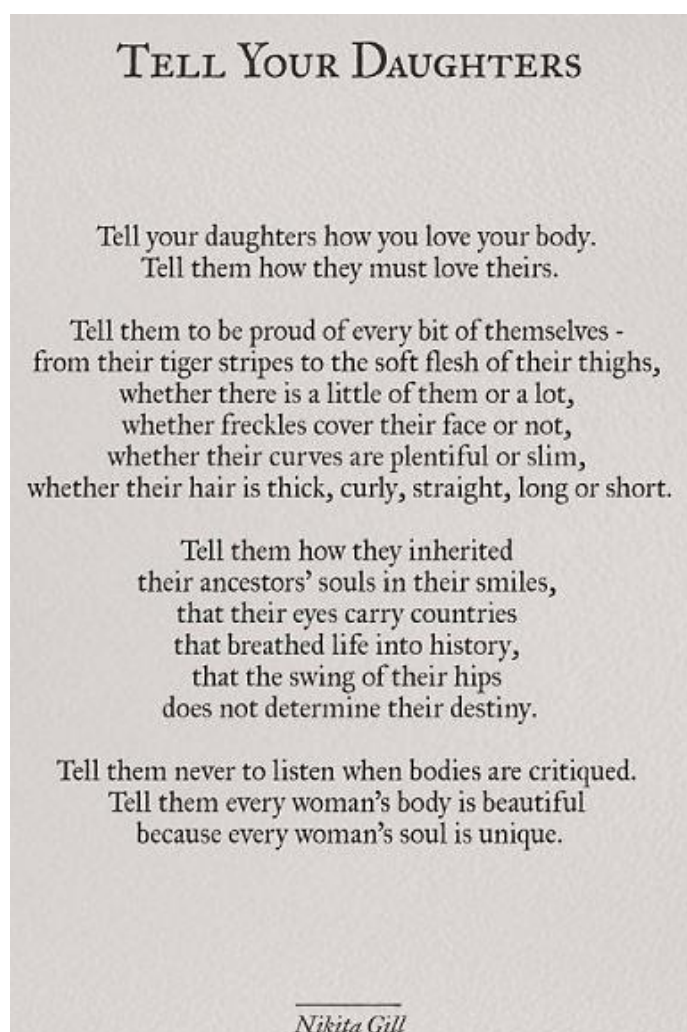


Figure 13. “Tell Your Daughters.” *Instagram*, 23 Aug. 2018. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bm0-bnJHeFv/>

Body image is not an objective phenomenon since it refers to the way we *perceive* our body, not our objective body shape, and it has a major impact in numerous aspects of our human experience such as family relationships, identity or self-esteem. Although it affects both men and women, women’s self-esteem may be influenced depending on the exposure to the cultural standards and whether or not they believe they fulfil them. Moreover, “[t]his can be particularly problematic for adolescent girls who are continually exposed to contemporary images in the media that depict the ideal woman as unrealistically thin, passive, and overly sexualized” (Usmiani and Daniluk, 47). During puberty, girls are witnesses of how their bodies change and, in some cases, they do not meet the images shown

in the media; hence, through this poem, Gill encourages parents to instil in their daughters self-love. Due to their influence over their children, they could teach them to embrace their bodies regardless of their shapes and sizes, and whether they meet the beauty canon or not.

Together with fat and racialized women, old women represent another group that the beauty industry ignores. The female ideal of a woman does not encompass older women, they are erased from the industry once they reach a certain age; therefore sending the implicit message that age should be hidden and not considered beautiful or attractive. In the following poem, “The Beauty Paradox” (fig. 14), the *Instapoet* addresses once more the dangers of the labelling someone as pretty or, as in this case, as “beautiful”, and she raises the subject of ageing.

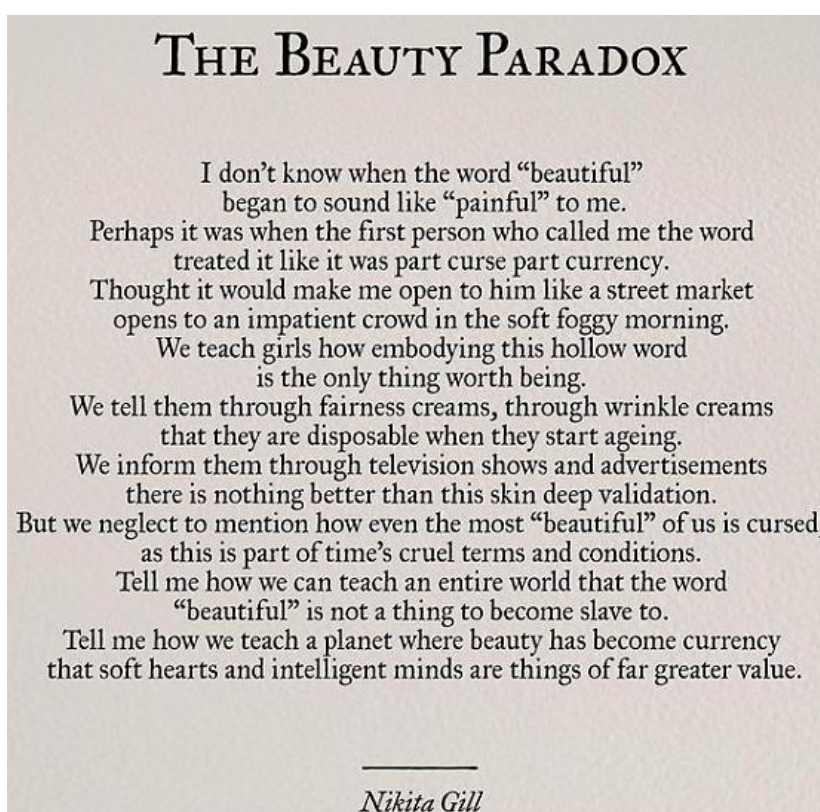


Figure 14. “The Beauty Paradox.” *Instagram*, 27 Jan. 2018.
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BednIgWB1fP/>

There is a whole industry with ceaseless marketing campaigns, which perpetuate the female ideal, whose goal is sending messages that getting old is negative and unwanted, yet controllable and avoidable, “We tell them through television fairness creams, through wrinkle creams / that they are disposable when they start ageing” (10-11). This pressure over women to look young, and therefore be sexually attractive for men, favours the proliferation

of beauty and anti-ageing products. The imposed obsession with women's youthfulness and attractiveness has led many of them to undergo through different procedures at the first signs of ageing, from dying their hair to more invasive practices such as Botox injections. These measures to stop people, especially women, from ageing derive from the notion of "ageism", that is, the "systematic stereotyping of, and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin colour and gender" (Butler, 243). Women are thus subjected to double disadvantage for they belong to the categories of "old" and "female", a worsening situation for those who are racialized for they also belong to the category of "Black", "Latino" or "Asian", among others.

Gill accompanies the poem, as usual, with a reflexion, in this case a concern regarding ageism.

"I often think and worry about the erasure of women as we get older. The way all our adverts are geared to fighting ageing and trying to hold onto our youth for as long as possible. Basically, I wish more adverts and media was geared towards embracing your age and the beauty of being the age you are." (Gill, Instagram.com)

Not only are women compelled to stop any sign of ageing by applying different methods, once they fall into the category of "old" they disappear from the media and younger ones take their place. As a result, the damaging idea that ageing should be concealed is perpetuated instead of encouraging women to accept and embrace their bodies regardless of how they look and their age, for ageing is a natural process of life.

Bearing in mind the compositions analysed, Gill's poems represent a denunciation of the prevailing beauty canons, which, in turn, become an exaltation of the different body types. Through her poetry, Gill encourages her readers to love their bodies regardless of their body shape, race or age.

6.3. Amanda Lovelace, Poetry as a Tool to Denounce Rape and Rape Culture

The next and last *Instapoet* to address in this essay is the American author Amanda Lovelace. Although she is not as prominent on social media as Rupi Kaur or Nikita Gill, Lovelace has a readership on the platform of almost a hundred thousand followers, even though she barely posts any of her poetry online and has deleted mostly of what she had previously published. Hence, her current content is mainly focused on the advertisement of her work and merchandising. Consequently, the excerpts commented on this section will be taken, as we shall shortly see, solely from her physical book.

Regarding her personal life, during her childhood and the beginnings of her adulthood, Lovelace suffered different abuses (child abuse, intimate partner abuse and bullying) and experienced traumatic events such as the premature death of her mother due to cancer. The different circumstances that the *Instapoet* underwent had a great impact on her literary career for her work is mainly autobiographical; writing poetry became a cathartic method for the channelling of her feelings. Thus, because of the harshness of the poems, in the first pages of her books we can find a trigger warning for she addresses delicate subjects such as sexual assault, eating disorders or suicide.

With respect to her professional career, Lovelace started publishing her poems on Tumblr and in 2016 she decided to self-publish her first book *the princess saves herself in this one* with the self-publishing business CreateSpace. After the publication of the book, she moved to Instagram to post her poetry and, due to the success she had both on social media and with her published poetry collection, Lovelace caught the attention of the traditional publishing industry. As a result, in 2017, she joined the American publisher Andrews McMeel, which re-released her poetry collection and published her subsequent books thus far.

Although Lovelace deals with a great variety of topics, in this last section of the paper, I will comment on those related to rape culture and sexual violence. The selected poems will be taken from the *Instapoet's* second book *the witch doesn't burn in this one* (2018) and second instalment of her series of poetry collection "Women Are Some Kind of Magic" in which the figures of female archetypes such as princess, witch or mermaid become the lyrical speakers of the poems. The book follows the minimalist aesthetic of *Instapoetry* but with a subtle modification; instead of the white pages and black letters, when we open the book we see that all of the compositions are written in red as an allusion to the fire, a recurrent topic throughout the book. In order to be as faithful as possible Lovelace's aesthetic decision, the poems have been transcribed in red.

It is relevant to note that many of the poems found in *the witch doesn't burn in this one* have an angry, almost vindictive, tone even though the *Instapoet* addresses sensitive issues such as intimate partner violence, but that was indeed her goal, she claimed that the book "was going to be angry. It was going to be blunt. It was going to make most people uncomfortable. But that's where conversations start — in [that] discomfort" (Lovelace). Through the poems, she explores the different aspects of rape culture, from the normalization of rape to women's self-incrimination when they face an unsafe situation.

As a feminist writer concerned about gender violence, and a survivor herself, Lovelace is aware of the existence and perpetuation of rape culture. Hence, in her poetry, she addresses it and some of its premises, such as the objectification of women as it can be seen in the following poem, “*we lock those doors & eat those keys*”¹⁶,

women are
considered to be

possessions
before we are ever

considered to be
human beings,

& if our doors
& our windows

are ever smashed in
by wicked men,

then we are deemed
worthless – (1-12)

In this composition, she puts in the spotlight the sexual objectification of women since she equates them with “possessions”; a building considering they have doors and windows that the perpetrators, in this case men, destroy, as a metaphor of rape. To be sexually objectified means “having a social meaning imposed on your being that defines you as to be sexually used, according to your desired uses, and then using you that way” (MacKinnon, 329). Women have an unwanted social meaning imposed on them that marks them out as objects for the sexual pleasure of men and that undermine their equal social standing.

Due to rape culture, women are not allowed to be sexual beings in the way that men are; the latter have been taught that they can use women for their own pleasure regardless of whether they are willing to engage in a sexual encounter or not. Moreover, once the rape is done, men continue with their regular lives whilst women are judged, blamed and, as Lovelace states, considered “worthless”.

As we saw in section 5.3, “rape culture” was coined during the second wave feminism and the feminists were able to point out the structural conditions that helped with

¹⁶ Italics are intended in this poem and the following ones, for it is the format chosen by Lovelace to write them.

the perpetuation of not only the sexual violence against women, but also the double standard that privileged male sexuality but suppressed women's sexual autonomy. Yet, despite the years elapsed since the identification of such a social problem, it is still much embedded in our society and Lovelace presents some examples in "*witch girl gang*".

every time
you "joke" to your other
red-handed
rapist friends

that it's
not rape if
you warn them
first –

every time
you press
your callous-hard
hand

over her
pink lemonade lipstick,
"no please no"
mouth –

every time
you think of slipping
something smooth & sleepy

into her drink – (1-20)

In this composition, she addresses some of the consequences of rape culture. Due to the normalisation of rape, even though there is a growing awareness thanks to the feminist movement, men continue to joke about it without impunity and some practices, such as drugging a woman to rape her afterwards, are still happening. Lovelace depicts how rapists see women as sexual objects whose only purpose is to satisfy their own sexual drive instead of treating them as human beings and taking into consideration their opinion. Instead of trying to engage with them on a consented sexual relationship, they would rather force a woman to go through a traumatic experience that would mark her forever.

The rise of social media, along with the help of mass media, is enabling, and even encouraging, the perpetuation of this social scourge. There still exist webpages that overtly celebrate physical and sexual violence against women, or TV programmes in which men are portrayed as aggressive and entitled to sex, while women are depicted as passive characters and decorative objects (Sills et al.). Hence, social media plays a fundamental role on the

displaying of certain behaviours for it has a great impact on society; if people see sexist attitudes toward women, they would internalise them, men would see them as normal and women would not be aware of the fact that those behaviours are detrimental for them.

Although not all men have committed, or will commit, rape, all women have been taught to fear sexual assaults. This fear, which Lovelace captures in the following poem, translates into being wary of men, especially if the woman does not know the person, and even adopting some rape preventing measures in the event of being at risk of being sexually abused. In “*expectation vs. reality*”, Lovelace captures the feelings and behaviours of women to avoid being sexually assaulted.

telling me
not all men
have
bad intentions

doesn't do
anything to
reassure
me.

after i
walk away from you,
nothing will have
changed.

i will still
be scared to
leave my house
after sundown,

i will still
find comfort
in keys resting
between my fingers,

i will still
question
the intentions of
every man i know, (1-24)

The procedures that the *Instapoet* enumerates do not represent an isolated case, she is not the only woman who takes such precautions; on the contrary, these are extended and normalised practices. Studies have shown that women have adopted a myriad of behaviours to minimise the chances of being raped. In addition to those mentioned in the poem, some other practices are refusing drinks from unknown men, being cautious of male friends, avoiding wearing revealing clothes or carrying spray pepper when leaving their homes

(McKibbin et al.). As a result, women are the ones obliged to bear the weight of rape, as if they were guilty of being sexually abused, to be alert and take conscious decisions on a regular basis that might prevent them from being sexually assaulted, regardless of how many times they hear that not all men are rapists.

Despite the measures they take, they may not feel safe even in their own homes or family environments. In “*everything is a distraction*”, the *Instapoet* addresses how in some cases the rapist is not a stranger waiting and hidden in the dark for a random victim to assault, but an acquaintance of the victim,

they try to
convince us
that our rapists
will only ever be

strangers
lurking in bushes
in the dark,
dark night

.....
so
that when
our rapists
end up being

our grandfathers / fathers /
brothers / uncles / cousins /
best friends / boyfriends /
husbands

we have no words
to describe it (1-8, 25-36)

Although in some cases the rapist is indeed a complete stranger to the victim, that does not represent the majority of the sexual abuses. According to RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), the largest American anti-sexual violence organization, more than the 90% of rapist are known to the victim. However, claiming that an unfamiliar person perpetrates the vast majority of rapes is detrimental for it hides the fact that women are raped by their own family members and perpetuate the idea that rapes cannot occur within a marriage or romantic relationship. As Lovelace wrote in the last stanza, “we have no words / to describe it” (35-36); if an action is unknown, it is not possible to talk about it, if we do not know that a relative can commit a rape, we will not find the words to address such crime.

Taking into account the poems studied, in Amanda Lovelace’s poetry we find a constant condemnation of rape, rape culture and its implications, which affects all women

regardless of their background. Thus, unless there is an active effort by a big part of society to change our consciousness, end with the practices that treat women as sexual objects and educate on feminism, these problems will continue to happen.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The development of technology and the birth of Internet has affected many aspects of our lives and it has modified how we perform certain activities such as studying, working or even doing sport. At the same time, it has had a huge impact on the different fields of study, one of them being the humanities. Within this discipline, it has emerged a growing field known as digital humanities; therefore, the humanities is no longer an area of study solely related to a physical format where every analysis and work is done on paper. The tools devised as a result of the technological development have helped to carry out faster and more precise linguistic analyses and, simultaneously, implied an innovation on the literary creation since texts can be created on a computer and intended to be read on one.

Our means of communicating have also been altered. Whilst decades ago, communicating with someone on the other part of the world could imply days; nowadays, we can get in touch with that person with a single click, or a single touch on our smart devices. Consequently, technology has enabled us to communicate faster than ever before. However, the developments regarding getting in touch with our loved ones did not stop there, our social nature propelled the creation of social media. Thanks to the development of social networks we are now able to not only be in touch with our family and friends, but also with people we have never met.

Instagram is currently one of the most prominent social platforms. This social network is devised to the sharing of photos or videos uploaded by its users who, in turn, can like and comment the content their friends have uploaded. Since there are no restrictions concerning the content shared, what began as a platform where people would upload pictures of themselves, food, or landscapes, has evolved to be a site where we can find content of any topic, including literature. Instagram has favoured the creation and development of a new poetic trend, *Instapoetry* and, with it, the emergence of the *Instapoets*. Because of the restrictions imposed by the platform regarding the size of the pictures, which *Instapoets* took into artistic advantages, this current trend is characterised by the shortness and simplicity of its poems since the compositions need to be easily read for the better engagement of the

audience. It also needs to be highlighted the topicality of the subjects tackled in the poems; although *Instapoets* address traditional issues such as love or heartbreaks, they also deal with feminism, migration or sexual violence. However, neither its formal characteristics nor its themes are a complete novelty.

Prior to *Instapoetry*, there have been different movements and poetic styles that share similar characteristics with this new trend. Both haiku and Imagism are noted for the shortness of their formats and simplicity of their language, which hide deeper meanings that are not necessarily understood in a first reading, in contrast to *Instapoetry*, whose aim is to provoke an instant reaction on its readers. Because of the explicitness of the trend, Confessional poetry has also been studied for it is characterised by the rawness of its revelations, how they would deal with any topic regardless of how macabre or personal it may be. On the other hand, regarding the content of the poems, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks or Susan Brownmiller have been referents and pioneers in the addressing and theorising about controversial topics such as racism or the social problem of rape culture. They have been some of the few voices able to bring to light problems that oppressed women in general, and racialized women in particular.

Despite its simplicity, aesthetically pleasing attributes and the subjects addressed, which are key characteristics of this type of poetry, what differentiates *Instapoetry* from previous literary movements, and one of the novelties of this trend, is its publishing platform. Instagram has had a fundamental role in the dissemination of the compositions and has even made the younger generations, and those reluctant to poetry, take an interest in the genre. At the same time, voices that have been barely heard before, have now reached an audience of millions, breaking with the hegemonic discourse and providing the points of view from those long silenced and dismissed. Therefore, for the purpose of this MA dissertation, I have studied a selection of poems of the *Instapoets* Rupi Kaur, Nikita Gill and Amanda Lovelace who have dealt with the life of migrants, the Western beauty canons and rape culture respectively.

These authors represent a new generation of writers, many of whom are young, racialized and feminist women who have something to say and have taken advantage of the rise of social media in order to share their voices thanks to the liberty provided by the platform. They have denounced the racism experienced by migrants and its detrimental consequences, the prejudicial effects of beauty canons on women and put on the spotlight how rape culture is still much embedded in our society. The *Instapoets* have become the

spokespeople for the millions of women who have undergone through similar events by putting into words past or present experiences and, thus, creating a community of women who now feel that they are not alone and their sufferings are not individual.

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