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**INNER LANDSCAPE REPRESENTATIONS: MEMORY AND TRAUMA IN
RUPI KAUR'S POETRY COLLECTIONS**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis investigation to my whole family, who were always there supporting me and giving me all the love I could ever ask for to get ahead and do what I love.

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I want to thank the University for giving me the opportunity to grow as a professional in an area that moves me as literature. Also, to Andrés, such a great mentor, for trusting on my thoughts and beliefs, as well as guiding me in the writing process with patience and calmness.

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RESUMEN

La presente investigación examina en profundidad una selección de poemas pertenecientes a las tres colecciones de la escritora Rupi Kaur, *milk and honey* (2015), *the sun and her flowers* (2017) y *home body* (2020), abordándolos desde una perspectiva enfocada en la construcción de paisajes interiores a partir de las experiencias de la hablante lírica. A través de los poemas, se dilucidan representaciones de paisajes interiores inspirados por elementos tanto naturales como urbanos, los cuales construyen y afirman la interioridad y subjetividad de la hablante, al mismo tiempo que surgen otros conceptos que Kaur discute en sus obras, como lo son la diáspora India, la inmigración y el trauma.

DESCRIPTORES

<PAISAJES INTERIORES> <MEMORIA> <TRAUMA> <HABLANTE LÍRICA>

<POEMA>

ABSTRACT

The present research examines in depth a selection of poems belonging to the three collections of the writer Rupi Kaur, *milk and honey* (2015), *the sun and her flowers* (2017) and *home body* (2020), approaching them from a perspective focused on the construction of interior landscapes from the experiences of the lyrical speaker. Through the poems, representations of inner landscapes inspired by both, natural and urban elements, are elucidated, which construct and affirm the interiority and subjectivity of the speaker, while other concepts that Kaur discusses in her works emerge, such as the Indian diaspora, immigration, and trauma.

KEY WORDS

<INNER LANDSCAPES> <MEMORY> <TRAUMA> <LYRIC SPEAKER>

<POEM>

Table of Contents

DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
RESUMEN	iv
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter I: Inner Landscapes: Building and shaping one within herself....	13
Chapter II: Landscape, Memory, and Migration: Autobiographical construction through remembrance.	24
Chapter III: Landscape, Love and Trauma: Healing through herself.....	38
CONCLUSIONS	50
REFERENCES	54

INTRODUCTION

As many other contemporary poets, Rupi Kaur (1992 -) has made her path in literature through social media. Belonging to the generation of “instapoets”, Kaur is recognized by her direct and transgressive language, as well as the feminist approach of her poetry, especially in some chapters of her collections that she dedicates to women empowerment and self-love. Nevertheless, this research intends to analyse other aspects of the poetic work of Rupi Kaur, with an emphasis on the importance she confers to the representation of landscapes and the different feelings they inspire throughout her poetry.

The present study intends to examine a new perspective of Kaur’s poetry work, apart from the ones already mentioned. The selection of poems which are going to be analysed advance a series of landscape representations, either Indian or Canadian, as well as allusions to the Indian Diaspora and the journey she has been into since her family moved to Canada. There are some questions that derive from this statement, such as if the experience of landscape can be associated to social or communal events, if the memories the poems inspire to the writer are intended to be linked to the representation of landscapes throughout her poetry, and how Kaur draws her position in the Contemporary English Literature.

The main topics that Kaur deals in her poetry are approaches to feminism, love declamations, her own family’s migration, her own traumatic experiences and friends’, and the process of healing through self-love. The combination of these issues has prompted many studies. However, the objects of study that will orient this research are going to be the representation of memory, both individual and collective, perception and emotion through the different types of landscapes created by the writer. In the light of the concepts previously mentioned, I am going to state how they perform individually in each of the selected poems, as well as I am going to establish a relationship among them and

how they interact with the representation of landscapes and memory in Kaur's poetry.

It seems relevant to mention that memory and landscape are a key part of Rupi Kaur's written work as both are deeply connected to her roots back in India, that is the reason why this investigation is of great significance, in order to demonstrate how Kaur is still attached and committed to share with her readers her mother culture, traditions and land, as she illustrates, not only with words, but also with her own drawings, different kinds of landscape representations coming from her very own experiences.

Most of the studies about Rupi Kaur are addressed from the generation she belongs to, called "instapoets", or about the main topics she talks about on her poetry: feminism and self-love, trauma, immigration, abuse, among a few more. Besides, all these investigations about the writer and her work are based on *milk and honey* (2015) and *the sun and her flowers* (2017), her two first collection of poems which were self-published online before being edited for publication, and which are characterized by dealing with the topics mentioned above.

Some works about Rupi Kaur's poetry talk about the way it stands out in the culture the writer is immersed in. Axelle Mariavale in his article "Rupi Kaur's poetry: Decolonial and transnational feminism in North American popular culture" (2019), supports the thesis that Rupi Kaur uses her poetry to speak out for women, white or colour, who are positioned at the margins of the western society, for their gender, race, ethnicity and/or religion (1). Throughout his article, Mariavale argues that Kaur's combination of feminism and her ethnicity brings cultural awareness into the feminist debate and into popular culture, and at the same time her work is accessible to anyone with a simple vocabulary and format (6). He focuses on the feminism and the impact Kaur's literature has provoked in this side of the world, coming from an Indo-Canadian woman, more than in any other subject.

Other approaches focus on the Indian Diaspora imagined in Kaur's first collection of poems *milk and honey*, such as the paper "Poetry as Resistance: Hybridity and the 'third Space' of Indian Diaspora" (2016) by Madhuri Prabhakar. Here, the writer exposes the characteristic of hybridity in the works of two poets: Daljit Nagra and Rupi Kaur, both with Indian roots living in The United Kingdom and Canada, respectively. On this essay, the writer discusses the struggle the poets have with the feeling of belonging neither to India nor to their current locations, and how they represent the Indian Diaspora through their poetry, with their own discursive tools. This study is going to be quite useful for the present research, as the Indian Diaspora and this hybridity mentioned in the essay, are directly connected with emotion, perception and, therefore, with the representation of landscapes in Rupi Kaur's poems.

Even though Rupi Kaur is a contemporary writer, not only for the generation she belongs to, but also for her age, there are some dissertations about her poetry and the topics she deals within it. Valerio Masini on his study "Rupi Kaur's poetry: Trauma and Healing" (2019) argues that these two concepts and main topics on Kaur's poetry, as well as in the paper mentioned before, support the fact that the writer stands out the urgency of gender equality and the importance of multicultural backgrounds of colour people around the world. Besides the fact Masini's study focuses on another aspects of literature, the dissertation does have some chapters which may be suitable for the present research, such as some sections of chapter I and II which are related to a post-memorial legacy of objects, traditions and places (32), post-colonialism and diaspora (56) and 20th century's Sikh diaspora (62) specifically. Chapters that may be useful in terms of stating the relation among Indian memory and diaspora with the representation of inner and collective landscapes.

Among the studies about Kaur's poetry, there are also some that address the writing tradition she keeps on her work. Deborah Pinto and Carolina Alves on their article "Rupi Kaur: Women's Writing Tradition in Translation" (2020) discuss the tradition of women writing based on the theory by Elaine Showalter.

More specifically from the third phase, which was mainly marked by self-discovery and women experience (47), in which Kaur's work is framed. The article also considers the translation and language in the writer's first collection of poems, as it has been translated to many different languages, and argues that there is a linguistic and cultural untranslability in her poetry, dealing specifically with the translation of some of her poems to the Portuguese language. As there are studies that explore and celebrate Kaur's culture, as her Punjabi writing tradition, there are others which are framed into the contemporary cultural studies. The essay "A Digital Project of Community and Identity: The Work of Rupi Kaur" by Kell Hagerman (2018) discusses Kaur's instapoetry and the manner she praises her own culture and people. Here, the concept of landscape is mentioned, but intended to refer to the cross-cultural upbringing experiences of colour women, to whom Kaur addresses her poetry.

Indeed, there are other investigations about Rupi Kaur and her poetry. Studies which focus on the generation she is immersed in, her culture, which is always present in her collection of poems, or the main topics on her work principally related to feminism and self-experiences of love, pain, and trauma. At the date, no dissertation have been found, nor article or investigation which comprises the topic of landscape representations in Kaur's written poetry, nor in her artistic or in her performative work. The reason why, might be ascribed to Rupi Kaur's contemporaneity and trajectory, as she is definitely a very young poet and performer. While, certainly, big part of the studies and research that have been done about her work are neatly related to the topics she claims to discuss and put in the spotlight.

Taking into account the revision of some studies on Kaur's work, and after confirming the marginal space given to landscapes in her poetry, this dissertation critically proposes that Rupi Kaur's written poetry is animated by a clear representation of inner landscapes, which can be translated as emotionally subjective perceptions of concrete, external landscapes linked to her motherland India, as well as to her current life in the western side of the world. These

representations are portrayed by a second persona built by Kaur: the lyric speaker, who sometimes is going to be her own reflection, and at times is going to be the voice of immigrants and abused women. From there, these landscapes will be pictured through memories, the Indian Diaspora felt and created by Kaur, and the inherent subjective perception of these inner landscapes shall be understood as an interior and lyric space resembling a map covering an intangible geography of emotions, sensations, and responses to everyday life in Kaur's poetic work.

The poetry collections that will be considered as the main corpus for this dissertation are *milk and honey*¹ (2015), *the sun and her flowers* (2017) and *home body* (2020). The poems have been carefully chosen in order to critically develop the proposal which leads this study; they are all linked to the representation of landscapes the writer creates and stands for. Therefore, all the poems are interconnected by at least one topic: Indian Diaspora, memory, journey, subjectivity, landscaping, as well as they might include all of them at the same time since the concepts mentioned before may be correlated to each other by nature.

In particular, the poems object of analysis will be “your mother is in the habit” (32), “did you think i was a city” (97), “you deserve to be” (167), “my issue with what they consider beautiful” (170), “grounded” (195) from her collection *milk and honey* (2015); “home” (68-73), “broken english” (149-151), “the sun and her flowers” (173), “i am of the earth” (206), from *the sun and her flowers* (2017); “where the depression came from” (8), “it feels like i’m watching my life happen” (20), “there are whole blackouts” (31), “awakening” (131), and “never forget 1984” (138) from her last collection of poems *home body* (2020).

The centrepiece of this research is the representation of external and inner, natural, and urban landscapes through memory and culture in Rupī Kaur's

¹ The titles of her collections of poems, as well as all Rupī Kaur's written work use no capital letters. This arises as a desire to keep her Punjabi writing tradition, which considers the period as its only punctuation sign, intending to express equality not only among words, but amongst people as well.

written poetry work. Thus, the questions that arise from this statement are related to the fact that Kaur wanted to represent both, external and inner landscapes through her poetry and, therefore, the interrogation must be what discursive tools she used for it, as well as how the writer connects memories and the Indian Diaspora with landscape representations. Are both concepts, memory, and Indian diaspora, the same? Is one of them considered an inherent part of the other? How does Kaur allude to her own experience and created-imagined landscapes? Is memory inseparable from landscapes, or the concept of landscape may exist without memories? These are questions that must be acknowledged through this research.

First of all, we need to discuss and explain the main concepts that are going to lead the way of this research, as well as determining their particular aspects or orientations that will be considered in the context of this research. The first one is the concept of landscape which can be approached, from a physical and tangible perception, as a combination of ecology and population genetics to provide information about interactivity between its features and its processes (Holderegger and Wagner 793), but the conception of landscape which we are looking for must be related to the perception of the concept from a literary view. In his book, *El Paisaje en la Cultura Contemporánea* (2008), Joan Nogué describes the landscape as a dynamic phenomenon that:

Puede interpretarse como un dinámico código de símbolos que nos habla de la cultura de su pasado, de su presente y también de la de su futuro. La legibilidad semiótica del paisaje, esto es, el grado de descodificación de los símbolos, puede ser más o menos compleja, pero en cualquier caso está ligada a la cultura que los produce (11).

This means that the same symbols vary from one person to another, as not everyone is going to have the same conception of an image, it will always depend on the culture you are immersed in, or the experiences you have been through, that is one of the main reasons the writer states landscapes are a dynamic

phenomenon: they change and never remain or mean the same for everybody. Even though Nogu  describes landscapes as a more visual concept, from an artistic viewpoint, it fits perfectly well within the literary approach we need for this research, as poetry is a way of making art through words and the mental images they project. There are two sub-concepts that are part of it and describe three different types: inner, natural and urban landscapes. Inner landscapes are going to be understood as the personal representation, the subjective and interiorized interpretations of outer sensible spaces and surroundings. The image with the one the reader defines the space where he or she lives, based on emotion and culture. The Natural Landscapes are going to be linked to the perception of lands constituted by natural elements but, according to Stephen Siddall on the book *Landscape and Literature* (2009), when does land become landscape?

... the land had been arranged twice: firstly in the visitor's chosen viewpoint; secondly in the artist's response to the view. The artist does not supply a direct imitation because the view is filtered and adapted by a discerning eye. We should call it a presentation rather than a representation, because paint as a medium both gives freedom and imposes constraints: artists are free to express their feelings but have to accept that their artefacts are not the same as the view in front of them. Thus artists are bound to modify and re-express what they see. (8)

Hence, Natural Landscapes will be an expression, recreation and therefore, an interpretation of how the writer perceives an open natural scenery. Despite this definition, the term does not cease to be a contradiction, since landscapes are always going to be the result of artistic and cultural interventions. Consequently, the perception and interpretation someone can have from a space which includes natural elements, is going to vary from a subject that does not consider the same space as a natural one. Landscapes are not spontaneous generations of nature, but are the fruit of intellectual or conceptual work, either individual, or collective.

Meanwhile, urban landscapes are not only paved streets and skyscrapers, but they are going to be attributed to experiences or memories that arise in public places associated to urban routines and city-like atmospheres. Many cities begin with farming, mining, fishing or trading rather than manufacturing, and the people who carry out these jobs are “the earliest builders of the economic enterprise that eventually becomes a city” (Hayden 83), even though urban landscapes are not determined by the physical elements in it, but just as a natural landscapes, are experimented through the five senses: sight, as well as smell, taste, touch and sound, but also through imaginative, conceptual and cognitive means. Experiences that vary the elements, feelings and sensations depending on the landscape the writer and the interpreter are immersed.

The second conceptual milestone which needs to be discussed is what we are going to understand by Indian Diaspora. As stated by Madhuri Prabhakar in his essay “Poetry as Resistance: Hybridity and the ‘third Space’ of Indian Diaspora (2016), “At the heart of the concept of diaspora resides an imagery of a ‘remembered home’, a place of origin which stands afar at a distance both spatially and temporally” (1). Consequently, the Indian Diaspora will be the memory of the Indian immigrants who miss their lands, although the images they have and/or create about their ‘home’ might be unrealistic or rather, utopic.

According to Vijay Mishra in his book *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the diasporic imaginary* (2007), there are two phases of the Indian Diaspora, The Old and The New. The first one, basically linked to the early modernism, and the second one related to the late capitalism.

The subjects of the old (‘before the world was thoroughly consolidated as transnational’ [Spivak 1996: 245] occupy spaces in which they interact by and large with other colonized peoples with whom they have a complex relationship of power and privilege as in Fiji, South Africa, Malaysia, Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam; the subject of the new are people who

have entered metropolitan centres of Empire or other white settler countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA as part of a post-1960s pattern of global migration. (24).

This research is framed into the New Indian Diaspora, as Kaur's family has been settled in Canada since she was 3 years old.

As part of the same concept, memory arises as an inherent part of Indian Diaspora. Without memory, there would not be any remembrance, nor diaspora of any kind. According to Birgit Neumann on "The Literary Representation of Memory" (2008), the concept has always been important in literature, but she also points out the fact that "Such texts highlight that our memories are highly selective, and that the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the rememberer's present, his or her desire and denial, than about the actual past events" (333). Thereby, the concept might be acknowledged like an inner representation of events, real or not, rather than a memory itself, and that is precisely the memory issue that many writers and critics have brought into discussion. Nevertheless, Neumann's perspective will be of great help to link the different types of landscape representations Kaur makes through her poetry, and how bonded with her real past they are.

In contrast, Paul Ricoeur on the chapter "De la memoria y la reminiscencia" of his book *La memoria, la historia y el olvido* (2000), separates the concept of memory into two main questions: what is remembered, and whose memory we are talking about. According to the first question, he quotes Spinoza stating that "Si el cuerpo humano fue afectado una vez por dos o varios cuerpos simultáneamente, en cuanto el alma imagine más tarde uno de los dos, se acordará también de los otros" (21). Ricoeur says that images and memory are neatly related since people, or their souls, are able to remember one element, either physical or imaginary, then they will be able to bring the whole memory back, and therefore, make it their own, which answers the second question related to whom the memory would belong to.

Finally, the last concept is the one related to Subjectivity. The concept certainly takes us to question ourselves and to put in doubt what we are. Regenia Gagnier, on her book *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (1991), gives us an overview of the concept dividing it into four parts:

First, the subject is a subject to itself, and “I,” however difficult or even impossible it may be for others to understand this “I” from its own viewpoint, within its own experience. Simultaneously, the subject is a subject to, and of, others; in fact, it is often an “Other” to others, which also affects its sense of its own subjectivity.... Third, the subject is also a subject of knowledge, most familiarly perhaps of the discourse of social institutions that circumscribe its terms of being. Fourth, the subject is a body that is separate (except in the case of pregnant women) from other human bodies; and the body, and therefore the subject, is closely dependent upon its physical environment (8).

Just like Gagnier says, the subject, the body and its subjectivity are going to depend on where they are, referring to the culture, the landscape, scenario, or physical space where they are at the moment of speaking, or writing, as well as subjectivities may lie on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and so on.

On the other hand, the idea can also be understood as “a critical concept invites us to consider the question of how and from where identity arises, to what extent it is understandable, and to what degree it is something over which we have any measure of influence or control” (Hall 12, 13). Hence, subjectivity and identity are bonded concepts, as well as the one related to the feeling of otherness expressed by Maher Mahdi on his article “Triangle of Hatred: Sexism, Racism and Alienation in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*” (2015), referring to Kristeva’s concept of “foreignness”.

In the fascinated rejection that the foreigner arouses in us, there is a share of uncanny strangeness in the sense of depersonalization that Freud discovered in it, and which takes up again our infantile

desires and fears of the other- the other of death, the other of women, the other of uncontrollable drive. The foreign is within us.
(Mahdi 50)

This sense of being “the other”, “the foreigner” is neatly related to the person’s subjectivity in the society they are inserted. Both are associated concepts that affects each other and makes the subject feel and believe they do not belong there.

Thereby, the works that are going to lead this research are the chapter “Interpretation” of the book *How to Read Literature* by Terry Eagleton (2013), as it is going to give us clues on how to understand Kaur’s poetry, as well as how literature works in terms of perception and subjectivity. The essay by Antoni Marí “Paisaje y Literatura” in the chapter “Arte, Literatura y paisaje” on Joan Nogué’s book *El paisaje en la Cultura Contemporánea* (2008) will guide us through the conception of landscape and the idea of it we are going to have on this research. The essay “Poetry as Resistance: Hybridity and the ‘third Space’ of Indian Diaspora” by Madhuri Prabhakar (2016) where the writer compares the representation of the Indian Diaspora in two different Indian poets, which contributes to the perception of it in our study.

We are going to analyse the work of the Contemporary Rupi Kaur, and so her work is enclosed into the post-modernist English literature. Accordingly, the literary approach to be used in this dissertation will be New Criticism, a formalist movement in literature which dominated American literary criticism in the middle decades of the 20th century. This approach emphasized on the Close Reading strategy. Merging in the 1920’s in Britain with the work of Ivor Armstrong Richards (1893 – 1979), close reading is going to be understood as the interpretation of passages, either in narrative or poetic works, which tries to emphasize particular aspects of it, rather than the general, paying close attention to individual words, order of the sentences and ideas, the syntax, and formal structures of the text, in this case, of the poems themselves. “The intensive study

of the words on the page, the careful examination of the poem in itself, which was the theory and practice that the New Criticism described and promoted" (Cain 11).

This research is going to focus on a qualitative analysis, as we are going to be making statements out of poems that do not stick to any previous structure or rule of lyric texts more than expressing feelings and emotions through landscapes. Sometimes, the poems are not going to be divided into stanzas, nor using punctuation marks or capitals. Therefore, I am going to be using an inductive methodology since Kaur's poetry needs to be analysed and observed in order to make associations, establish patterns with the Indian Diaspora writers and the representation of landscapes, to finally get to a conclusion.

Chapter I: Inner Landscapes: Building and shaping one within herself.

An aspect I believe is crucial to state about Rupi Kaur's written poetry on representation of landscapes is that she constructs them from the inside, so she projects them to the outside. Most of the landscapes created within her poetry have their origins inside of herself, her mind, inside of a room, a house, among other physical limited spaces rather than open ones. The majority of her poems, despite speaking of natural and urban elements, which could be considered as representations of such types of landscapes, usually start with her ability to become a landscape herself, or to compare the lyric speaker with elements that the reader may find in these types of landscapes.

Another particularity I consider salient to state about Kaur's poetry is that sometimes, not in all, but most of them, the figures of writer and lyric speaker become one. From time to time, it is hard to distinguish who is talking, since her written work is leaded by a strong biographical component, which makes the readers hesitate about who is expressing her feelings, emotions, or thoughts. This is going to be valid to this chapter, as well as to the following ones, due to the fact this dissertation deals with landscapes, memory, and trauma. Topics to which the writer makes reference through her own experiences for the compositions.

On the poem "did you think i was a city" (97) from *milk and honey* (2015), Kaur illustrates the statement made before, creating a sort of inner landscape linked to urban elements, comparing the lyric speaker with a city and elements that can be found in one.

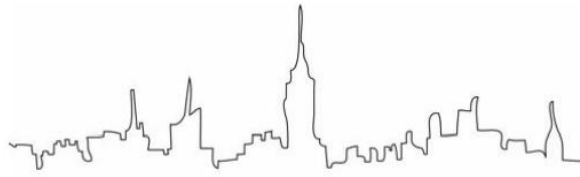
...there are no neon lights here
no skyscrapers or statues
but there is thunder

for i make bridges tremble
i am not street meat i am homemade jam
thick enough to cut the sweetest
thing your lips will touch
i am not police sirens
i am the crackle of a fireplace
i'd burn you and you still
couldn't take your eyes off me
cause i'd look so beautiful doing it
you'd blush
i am not a hotel room i am home
i am not the whiskey you want
i am the water you need
don't come here with expectations
and try to make a vacation out of me (97).

In this piece, the inner representation of landscape that arises from the inside of the lyric speaker is clear. Kaur uses the urban elements to construct the atmosphere of a being which has been taken for granted by someone else, therefore the lyric speaker compares herself with city components like neon lights, skyscrapers and police sirens setting the readers in an urban landscape. Taking into consideration landscapes are perceived differently from one person to another, the landscape created by Kaur in this poem can be felt, seen, heard, and probably smelled, as everybody has ever experienced the city through their senses, and may have an idea of how it is understood.

The landscape created by the lyric speaker is built from the inside of her being, more specifically, from her own mind. She herself becomes those city-like elements, as well as she is none of them physically. The atmosphere the writer intended to create is linked to the feeling of being considered as something temporary in someone's life, or in the world itself, just like police sirens or a shot of whiskey that will stop existing or sounding in a short period of time. What the lyric speaker is trying to represent on this poem by making these comparisons between her and the elements that can be found in an urban landscape, is that she is not someone to play with, but someone who is much more important, something you will find in the most personal and vital actions or parts of a life. For instance, when the lyric speaker mentions that there is thunder, she is stating she is much bigger than a city, something you cannot control or put in a jar. Another great image is when she claims to be "the water you need", the lyric speaker is referring to herself as something vital for the addressed person. Something on which their lives depend.

Apart from writing poetry, Rupi Kaur also illustrates the cover of her own collections and poems, as well as her poetry itself. I believe the fact her drawings look like unfinished sketches is giving the readers hints about the intentions or directions of the poems themselves. For "did you think i was a city" (97), she drew a one-line silhouette of a city which seems to be New York, for the skyscrapers and buildings we can distinguish. This sketch gives us the perspective of a huge city, the one which the lyric speaker was being compared to. But through the poem, we could realize she was something greater than that, she is the town surrounding the city therefore, something greater than a one-line silhouette of a city.



2

On the same collection of poems, Kaur presents another inner landscape representation, but this time related to the feeling of being found or considering ourselves part of the landscape.

you deserve to be
completely found
in your surroundings
not lost within them (167)

The poem “you deserve to be” features the idea that human beings may be part of the landscape, not only the ones who perceive them through senses and interpret them, but also a constitutive feature of them. As in “did you think i was a city” (97), here the lyric speaker sets herself in the middle of the landscape as one more element of it to be interpreted, specifically when she expresses the idea of being completely found in your surroundings. Her intention is to make the reader feel part of a place, to share the feeling of belonging with a space which can be inferred as the reader’s life or home, even the world, since when it comes to surroundings, we tend to visualize an open space. Therefore, the landscape representation would not be considered as such if it were not for the lyric speaker’s intention. This landscape arises from the writer’s own imagination and perception of the space she sets the lyric speaker in. In other words, it becomes a landscape because it comes from the inner conception of a landscape the own writer, and therefore, the lyric speaker has.

² Illustration of the poem “did you think i was a city” (97) from the collection *milk and honey* (2014) written and illustrated by Rupi Kaur.

This poem can be interpreted in many varied ways since it does not settle the reader into a specific area. The fact that this piece only mentions surroundings and it does not give more information to tell if we are talking about a natural or urban landscape, just leaves the door open to the imagination of everyone who decides to read it and feel identified with it. In the introduction of *The Poetics of Space* (1994), Gastón Bachelard states that readers of poems are not asked to interpret an image as an object, on the contrary, it is necessary that they capture its specific reality (xix), the real essence of the images created by the lyric speaker rather than trying to link them with physical objects, and that is what Kaur makes here, since she does not specify what surroundings she was referring to, giving the opportunity to every reader to take the poem to their own reality, either inner or physical, it is going to depend on the analysis each reader makes about the poem.

Inner representations can be found on Rupi Kaur's second collection of poems as well. "i am of the earth" (206) from *the sun and her flowers* (2017) is another clear example of what has been stated before, the lyric speaker being part of the landscape herself when becoming or being compared to natural elements such as the earth, life and death.

i am of the earth
and to the earth i shall return once more
life and death are old friends
and i am the conversation between them
i am their late-night chatter
their laughter and tears
what is there to be afraid of
if i am the gift they give to each other
this place never belonged to me anyway

i have always been theirs (206)

When the lyric speaker expresses, she belongs to the earth, is showing life is ephemeral, transitory, and at the same time is converting herself into part of the landscape which joins life and death. Similar to what she did on the previous analysed poem, but this time she creates a natural landscape representation while she transforms herself into one more element of it represented by this momentary journey through the earth. The lyric speaker grows life and death themselves when she claims to be what they give to each other as a gift, she is what they talk about. In other words, she is the principal component of this landscape that has been separated into light and darkness.

Just like in “you deserve to be” (167) and “did you think i was a city” (97) from *milk and honey* (2015), this piece magnifies the importance and the role of the lyric speaker in a poem by making her one more detail to be interpreted within the landscape, and not merely the interpreter. She loses omniscency over the interpretation of space, and she herself becomes a landmark of space and landscape, therefore she is part of them. She ceases to be a witness to turn into an essential part of the landscape itself.

In contrast, there is another sort of inner landscape represented through Kaur’s poems. This one is related with the self-perception women have about themselves in contrast with what the society imposed as beauty standards. In the poem “a never-ending search” (84) from *the sun and her flowers* (2017), the lyric speaker makes us realise how difficult could be for women in general accomplish to look like how the rest expects us to look, the personal struggle each woman goes through within their own bodies.

From the beginning of the poem when the lyric speaker expresses “my eyes / make mirrors out of / every reflective surface they pass / searching for something beautiful looking back” is showing us that she is looking for social approval, trying to fit in, but even more than that, she is looking for self-approval. “searching for something beautiful looking back” is the lyric speaker expecting to feel beautiful, to look at the reflection and find herself enough.

In the following stanzas, she makes visible that the lyric speaker craves for compliments and feels the desperate urge that those beauty procedures and magic creams worth the investment. Once again, Kaur sets the lyric speaker at the centre and as the main voice of the poem by making her tell her experience and feelings from an urban landscape, but also representing an inner one. It is from this emotional space that she relates herself to the elements found in these landscapes, natural and urban. The lyric speaker is the natural landscape, her own body becomes the created landscape since it is the most natural and sacred space that she has. Therefore, her body, this landscape interacts and sees itself immersed in urban landscapes that make the lyric speaker feel the necessity to accepted by others.

The desperate urge to find approval in the eyes of everybody, just confirms the fact the lyric speaker's emotional state is being projected as insecurities and complexes, when the real origin of these is inside of the lyric speaker herself. Once again, the voice is no longer in absolute control of itself, or the events it describes and takes part in the landscape created in the poem, represented by the deepest need to feel attractive in the eyes of others. The elements the lyric speaker mentions in order to make us part of her desires are components that may be found, mostly, in more urban-like landscapes, such as clinics, department stores, lasers and places where people go to get facial treatments. All of them related, in one way or the other, to the conception of keeping or modifying the physical appearance of an individual with the aim of fitting into the society. This poem is, indeed, a criticism against beauty standards in postmodern societies and how they make women doubt about their worth and bodies to match what has been imposed as 'acceptable'.

Kaur's third collection of poems also has important pieces that are relevant in terms of inner representation of landscapes. The poem "it feels like i'm watching my life happen" (20) from *home body* (2020) deals with inner landscapes evoked by her own expectations about her life, as well as memory, love and trauma.

it feels like i'm watching my life happen through a fuzzy television screen. i feel far away from this world. almost foreign in this body. as if every happy memory has been wiped clean from the bowl of my mind. i close my eyes and i can't remember what happy feels like. my chest collapses into my stomach knowing that i have to get up in the morning and pretend i'm not fading away all over again. i want to reach out and touch things. i want to feel them touch me back. i want to live. i want the vitality of my life back. (20)

The lyric speaker questions herself about her very own life being meaningless and about her inability to feel or remember anything. She claiming to feel foreign in her own body might be a sign of feeling outcast in the country and society where she lives, due to her ethnicity. Nonetheless, it is not physical foreignness what she is expressing, but rather something deeper more related to her inwardness. The images the lyric speaker evokes in this piece are not a mere coincidence. From the beginning of the poem, the image of comparing her life with a fuzzy television makes us sympathize with its unpredictability and unclear visual images. The fact she makes this, and no other comparison fits into the lyric speaker's subjectivity and uncertainty about herself and what she is going to do with her life, since it seems she is not whole. Afterwards, the image of comparing her mind with an ordinary object as a bowl echoes the feeling expressed in the poem "home" (68-73) from the collection *the sun and her flowers* (2017) discussed later, about being one more disposable object in someone's life, something you can use and discard in a short period of time. Something unanimated, that sometimes is full of things, and sometimes completely empty.

When the lyric speaker expresses "my chest collapses into my stomach" makes us realize that, even though she is thirst for liberation and craves to know what has happened to her and her memories, her feelings and emotions condense inside of her own, creating this inner landscape representation full of darkness and having to pretend everything is fine in the outside. Then, the image

previously used when comparing her mind with a bowl makes more sense here, since she is feeling like an object that carries or maintains others in her. Just like her body keeping her emotions, exploding and collapsing inside of her, not letting anything going out. Even though this landscape representation may be clearly related to the lyric speaker inner self, it is linked with the landscape that inspired her to adopt the role of an object as well. This landscape could be the society the lyric speaker is immersed in, an urban area full of prejudices about how the people, especially women, that exteriorize their feelings and emotions are treated like hysterical and mentally ill. As a consequence, the lyric speaker suppresses her intensity and rather prefers to be seen and treated like an object: emotionless, reserved, unanimated and controlled, even though everything is happening inside of her, like a sort of galaxy containing thousands of other little elements having their own break downs, but being unable to feel anything.

In this regard, what Terry Eagleton reflexes in his book *After Theory* (2003) has relevance around this poem. “There is always a kind of ‘outside’ to my body, which I can only ever squint at sideways. The body is my way of being present to others in ways which are bound in part to elude me” (167). So forth, the lyric speaker looks for these objects to believe she is in the present, even though she is unable to feel the touch of anything that is around her. The ephemeral way she perceives her body is the reason because she is constantly considering herself as objects, as if being one could give her the sensations she craves to feel.

A piece that is undoubtedly inspired by a natural landscape is “the sun and her flowers” (173), which is the poem that gives the name to Kaur’s collection published in 2017.

what is it with you and sunflowers he asks

i point to the field of yellow outside

sunflowers worship the sun i tell him

only when it arrives do they rise

when the sun leaves

they bow their heads in mourning

that is what the sun does to those flowers

it's what you do to me (173)

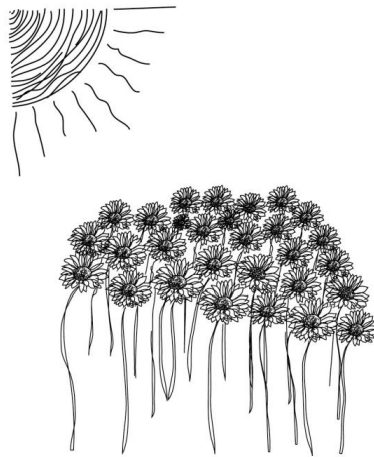
In this poem, the lyric speaker seems to have a conversation with her lover, about how she perceives these flowers' behaviour. It is certain that she gets inspired by this natural landscape to build an inner representation from it. The lyric speaker starts the poem with a question of her lover about why she likes sunflowers so much, so she points out the specific natural landscape that inspires her representation.

As in the previous poems analysed, the lyric speaker compares herself, once again, to these natural elements, the sunflowers, and how they behave when they are in presence of the sun. She claims her conduct is the same as the flowers, meaning that being around her lover makes her behave as the sunflowers do when they face the sun. She becomes, then, a kind of servant of this almighty sun, since she declares to worship him, and she only exists when he is around. She is not whole by herself, maybe because she does not feel enough, or believes that she needs this lover in order to survive, like sunflowers need the sun light. This being the case, she would be also comparing her lover to the sun, like being a sort of God that can make her do whatever he wants, whenever he wants just for having the power to be who he is, and being, apparently, everything she needs to pull through.

As the poem continues, the lyric speaker mentions what these flowers do when the sun is gone: "*they bow their heads in mourning*" (173), similar to the feeling when someone has passed away, draining the will to live from their loved ones, just like the lover makes her feel when he leaves, or he is not around. She finally ends the poem by stating that every single thing these flowers do for the sun, are the same things she does for her lover. In this respect, the fact she compares herself and acts with sunflowers makes her look fragile and dependent of others' actions and conditions to carry on, as do sunflowers with the sun. The

complex relationship these two natural elements have is the same expressed by the lyric speaker. A one-side relationship where she is completely devoted and willing to give everything for her lover when he requires it, but he barely does the minimum for her, not realising that is all she needs to be complete.

As well as many other poems by Rupi Kaur, “the sun and her flowers” (173) is accompanied by an illustration made by the writer. Unsurprisingly, this one shows a doodled quarter of sun at the left top of it, along with a field of very detailed drawn sunflowers. It is strongly believed that both natural components of the illustration, the sun and the flowers, were not drawn that way by mere coincidence.



3

The reason why Kaur decided to draw only a quarter of the image of a sun, and that the sunflowers have such detail and outnumber the sun, might concern the fact that, even though the lyric speaker worships and adores her lover, she knows she is greater than him, in all possible ways. She is a complex woman, full of feelings and emotions, strong, intelligent, and capable to overcome the toughest tasks in life, while he is only a quarter of what her life means to her. Quite paradoxical with what she intended to explain to her lover in the very own poem,

³ Illustration of the poem “the sun and her flowers” (173) from the collection *the sun and her flowers* (2017) written and illustrated by Rupi Kaur.

but this also may concern the lyric speaker's inner landscape representation, and how a natural stimulus can be interpreted in so many varied ways.

Chapter II: Landscape, Memory, and Migration: Autobiographical construction through remembrance.

It is crucial to state from the beginning of the chapter that this is going to be conducted by the poem "broken english (149-151) from the collection *the sun and her flowers* (2017) by Rupi Kaur, which I believe is the most relevant and remarkable piece she has written around the topics of memory and migration together. Nevertheless, other poems will be referred to and discussed in order to prompt an intertextual and thematic dialogue between them, always putting the emphasis on this big and important work.

From the beginning of the poem, we can perceive this family's struggle to get ahead, and how difficult it was, especially for the parents.

i think about the way my father
pulled the family out of poverty
without knowing what a vowel was
and my mother raised four children
without being able to construct
a perfect sentence in english
a discombobulated couple
who landed in the new world with hopes

that left the bitter taste of rejection in their mouths (149)

The poem commences with a memory, with the lyric speaker thinking about her father's effort to take them out of poverty, referring to their homeland India, and drove them to the new world, suggesting Canada. Both, mother and father, have troubles with the language but hopeful to find stability and happiness for their children, and themselves. One of the verses of this first part of the poem is of particular interest for the purposes of this discussion: "a discombobulated couple". The fact the lyric speaker remembers her parents as such, may be taken as a clear sign of the effort and struggle they experienced and therefore, they were not able to hide, not even from their children. They were not only confused, nor only disconcerted, but they were both at the same time. They were expectant for their future, but worried about it as well, about what they were going to find out there and what their children were going to be faced to. As the poem follows, this gets clearer and more specified

no family

no friends

just man and wife

two university degrees that meant nothing

one mother tongue that was broken now

one swollen belly with a baby inside

a father worrying about jobs and rent

cause no matter what this baby was coming (149)

The family was alone against the world, no one to count on but each other. The parents' careers were interrupted since they decided to move seeking an improvement in their quality of life, always thinking on their children. This mother tongue that is worthless and becomes unhelpful to communicate in this new country. When the lyric speaker mentions the swollen belly with a baby inside and

the truth that no matter what her parents do, the baby was coming, represents the pressure they were experiencing back then for giving their children a roof, and not only that, but a place which all can call home since the one they used to know as one, was left in the past, in another country, another continent. The image stands for the representation of an inner landscape of the lyric speaker that reminds her and make her cherish her roots and what her people has had to do to get her where she is now.

As it is evident, the poem continues to deal with the concepts of memory and migration. There are some verses which refer to immigrants themselves, linked with the concept of hatred, and how this western and full of stereotypes society they are suddenly immersed in would look at them.

they turned a suitcase full of clothes into a life
and regular paychecks
to make sure the children of immigrants
wouldn't hate them for being the children of immigrants
they worked too hard
you can tell by their hands
their eyes are begging for sleep
but our mouths were begging to be fed (150)

When the lyric speaker points out what her parents were doing to avoid this feeling of hatred towards her and her siblings, demonstrates they always wanted the best for their children, they did not want them to look or feel different from the rest of their classmates, friends, especially nor the society.

As the lyric speaker goes on, she refers to the magnificent labour her parents had done for her and her siblings, so great she cannot even find the words, "only to realize there are some things / in the world so infinite / they could never use a full stop" (151). Throughout her poetry, Kaur uses the period as her

only punctuation sign in order to keep her Punjabi writing tradition, which tries to show equality among people, and therefore, among words. Consequently, when the lyric speaker refers to punctuation, she is comparing her parents' actions, unconditional love, and support with a full point. Something endless, unlimited and wholehearted like her parents' dedication and desire to get ahead in life would never be described in a complete manner, since there would never be enough words and expressions to do it.

With this reflection on her parents' deed, the lyric speaker demonstrates she sees and remembers her family's migration and her parents' effort with such admiration, especially the one made by her mother, since she is the one who stayed home with her and her siblings while her father was out for work and provide. And that is when she confronts the readers by stating:

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 of home (151)

She highlights how difficult it was for her mother to move from India to Canada, where they have other traditions, own another culture, and the language they speak is completely different from her mother tongue, so of course she is going to mispronounce it. The voice brings images related to an inner landscape when she refers to shame, splitting through countries and hold her mother's accent, as

well as she mentions elements we could find in a natural landscape such as shorelines and honey.

When the lyric speaker refers to the concept of shame, what she is actually addressing is the feeling many of immigrants' children have felt about having other nationalities, about coming from another country or continent. She is embracing these children, and why not, immigrant adults that have felt ashamed about their parents trying to fit in a culture they do not belong to, with a language that is not theirs.

When it comes to memory and remembrance of what the lyric speaker's people have been through, the poem "never forget 1984" (138) from *home body* (2020) pictures perfectly what she is intended to keep alive and raise awareness about. It is well known that Indian people have been murdered and assassinated for decades, which is a clear example of racism and discrimination that others and Indians themselves took to another level. In this poem, Kaur brings back memories about her community, how the world, and even her own people try to cover their long and harsh history through urban landscape representations associated with elements that are found in cities, and that generate different emotions in the lyric speaker, building a more complex inner landscape for herself and, no matter what, linked to the Indian diaspora felt by Rupi Kaur.

i have a very complicated relationship
with the country i was born in
our men were
slaughtered in those streets
our women were raped
while thousand were tortured
and disappeared by police
the indian state denies what they did

but no amount of yoga or bollywood
can make us forget the
sikh genocide they orchestrated (138)

More than the voice of a lyric speaker, what can be inferred is that the very own Rupī Kaur is telling her ancestors' story, she is making visible the awful moments her people went through. She submerges us into this sort of dark urban landscape where streets are associated with men murderers, women's space violation and missing beloved ones in hands of their own people. The lyric speaker starts the poem by expressing her "complicated relationship" with her mother land because, even though she loves her culture and everything which being an Indian woman carries, her own people have betrayed them, and there is nothing they can do to let the memory go, no matter how many entertaining and relaxation activities her culture has spread around the world, which is a severe critic to us as well, since we are the ones who associate the country with these.

Regarding memory, in the book *La memoria, la historia y el olvido* (2000) by Paul Ricoeur, the writer states that memory is considered as singular, that my memories are not the ones from the rest of people since they are untransferable and private property (128) but, what happen with the memory Kaur expresses in the compositions related to India? In that case, Ricoeur implies the concept of collective memory, which is considered as a selection of traces left by events that have affected the course of the history of the groups concerned (156). In relation to Kaur, most of the creations that address memory and inspire the Indian diaspora felt by the lyric speaker, are associated with the concept of collective memory. In "never forget 1984" (138), the speaker is alluding to what her people in Punjab had to go through, but not her in the first person. She is expressing how these series of events that directly affected a specific number of people, have the power to remain in the Indian collective memory, and raise the community mourning for the departed unjustifiably.

Both poems, “never forget 1984” (138) and “broken english” (149-151), are written around the concept of remembrance and Indian diaspora. The first one with a rather bitter memory, the one related with resentment of a culture which has been summarised into these two iconic things that people instantly associate with Indians, the ones they use like a green screen, rather than actually show or even think about the struggle they have taken for years. While “broken english” (149-151) gives the reader a more melancholiac feeling of memory, the one related to treasure family moments and actions for the lyric speaker’s own good.

In both pieces, the Indian diaspora makes itself present in different ways. In “broken english” (149-151) it is stated while the lyric speaker talks about the mother tongue not being useful anymore, how she and her family had to leave everything behind in order to pursue a better quality of life, how her mother had to deal with everything by her own because her husband was constantly on the road making money to provide and maintain his family. Whereas in “never forget 1984” (138) the Indian diaspora marks its presence through the crude events lodged in the collective memory of the Indians, and the relationship the lyric speaker maintains with her motherland.

These are images the lyric speaker applies in order to immerse the readers into the inner landscapes she builds out of her individual and collective memories: after seeing how her town people were slaughtered in the streets, discriminated and the inequity they had had to deal with. She projects them through very personal memories from her family, her environment, her culture, when what she truly wants to show is her real self and how these elements wake up the homeland remembrance which lives and sometimes torments her.

The poem “where the depression came from” (8) from the *home body* (2020) collection also embodies what was previously mentioned, concerning individual and collective memory.

maybe i walked out of the womb with it

is it possible to be born

with such a melancholy spirit
maybe it met me at the airport
slid into my passport
and remained with me
long after we landed in
a country that did not want us
maybe it was on my father's face
when he met us in baggage claim
and i had no idea who he was
maybe the rapist left it behind
or was it that criminal i called a boyfriend
maybe he beat it into me
maybe i met the one
and lost him
maybe it was the love
of my life's parting gift
or maybe
it was all of those things at once (8)

This piece is a constant questioning of the lyric speaker about her own sadness and what has produced it, wondering around the topic of immigration, and related to the love and trauma she has been through, topics discussed in the next chapter, but that are an important subject of this poem as well.

"where the depression came from" (8) is mainly leaded by the anaphora "maybe" at the beginning of some of its lines. This adverb is the one which makes

the lyric speaker question herself about the reason of her depression from the very beginning of the composition. The lyric speaker starts the poem by blaming herself as one of the reasons of her condition, referring to herself as one of the culprits, as well as she discusses her ethnicity and her condition of immigrant in Canada that might have triggered this feeling in her, the feeling of being rejected by the country to which she went in search of refuge and better life expectations.

As the poem goes by, the lyric speaker's uncertainty only grows and grows, blaming her life decisions and her relationship choices, when what she is actually doing is accusing herself of falling into depression. She definitely does not consider any of the things she mentions after the adverb "maybe" as real reasons of her psychiatric condition, rather she knows it might have been one of them, all of them mixed together, as it could have been none at all.

Here, the lyric speaker implements a metaphor to pretend the depression is a sort of being, more like a parasite that gets into people, poisons them with sadness and takes away their will to live. This being seems to be so tiny and sneaky that can fit inside a mother's womb, into a passport, in the lyric speaker's father face, or something as malleable as air that can be inserted inside of someone in a breath, and do not leave it under any circumstance. The idea of using this metaphor about depression is to show that it is not easy to heal it, there is not a globally known recipe or cure for it, especially when the lyric speaker has to live with the inevitable "guilt" of being a foreigner and be treated as one since there is nothing she can do with her complexion and physical appearance to fit in the society she sees herself inserted in, making reference to the Indian collective memory and history of being discriminated and segregated by their varied skin tones, accent, among others.

Another piece that makes its statement about the lyric speaker's culture, but also represents how she worships her women is "my issue with what they consider beautiful" (170) from the *milk and honey* (2015) collection. This poem is, just like "a never-ending search" (84) from *the sun and her flowers* (2017), a critique to society's established standards of beauty, but this time, noting the

differences related to the physical appearance of Indian women, and the discrimination suffered by them as a result of what is commonly considered “pretty”.

my issue with what they consider beautiful
is their concept of beauty
centers around excluding people
i find hair beautiful
when a woman wears it
like a garden on her skin
that is the definition of beauty
big hooked noses
pointing upward to the sky
like they're rising
to the occasion
skin the color of earth
my ancestors planted crops on
to feed a lineage of women with
thighs thick as tree trunks
eyes like almonds
deeply hooded with conviction
the rivers of punjab
flow through my bloodstream so
don't tell me my women

aren't as beautiful
as the ones in
your country (170)

This poem, as well as a critique, is telling the very own lyric speaker's story and the writer's experience of being a woman in nowadays society. In the first lines, the lyric speaker makes her statement about the wrong way of considering something, or someone, beautiful, which centres on discriminating every physical trait and everyone who do not fit into the established standards.

As the poem advances, the lyric speaker mentions "i find hair beautiful / when a woman wears it / like a garden on her skin" (170). Here, she is comparing women body hair with a natural landscape where we can find flora. The allusion she makes is related to the fact hair grows naturally on everybody's body, as well as plants and flowers in the ground, but in both cases, body and plants need to be nourished and taken care of in order to grow. The inner landscape representation the lyric speaker is creating here is clearly inspired by the growth of vegetation. Just like in the poem "grounded" (195) from the collection *milk and honey* (2015), where the lyric speaker meant to be like a wither flower that sinks into the ground. In "my issue with what they consider beautiful" (170), the lyric speaker compares women's skin to be like the soil, rich enough to grow beautiful flowers and plants and wear them with pride.

Later, when the lyric speaker mentions her women's noses shape and the image they are rising for the occasion, she is starting to describe a sort of ritual or ceremony celebrating her women inspired by a natural landscape which, at the same time, is projected as an inner representation of how she sees her own women's culture, heritage, and bodies. Once she mentions these "big hooked noses" are rising for the occasion, mean that the worship ceremony is taking off, just like in a Catholic mass when every believer stands up to receive God.

As the poem continues, the lyric speaker keeps on recalling images that make the readers feel they are inserted in a natural landscape. She mentions the

color of her women's skin, to compare it to the color of the earth where her ancestors planted crops to feed their people, and specially, her female clan, of which she keeps on comparing their body parts to elements found in natural landscapes. All these metaphors strengthen the idea that the lyric speaker creates this inner landscape inspired by a natural one, where her women's bodies remind her these elements which can be found in a natural area such as gardens, earth, crops, tree trunks, almonds, and rivers, intending to make a statement and ensure that women's bodies are nature themselves. They are the earth where things grow, and everything that comes from it, every single thing human beings need to survive: they are the water you drink, the earth you step on, the air you breathe, the food you eat. Similar to what the lyric speaker claimed to be at the end of the composition "did you think i was a city" (97) from the collection *milk and honey* (2015), when she declares she is the water that her lover needs to live. In that line, the speaker expresses a similar idea that the one presented on "my issue with what they consider beautiful" (170), but with the difference that in the last one the lyric speaker is considering all the Indian women, while in the other piece she is referring to herself.

The poem does not use any rhetorical device, but as well as "broken english" (149-151), honours the writer's roots. At the very end of the poem, the lyric speaker rebukes the reader, and not only the reader, but also the society she sees herself immersed in by supporting her hard-work, strong lineage of women and protesting they are as beautiful as the ones found anywhere.

Another piece that is directly related to what the lyric speaker states in "broken english" (149-151), is "your mother is in the habit" (32) from the collection *milk and honey* (2015). This poem, apart from being connected to the memory and Indian diaspora felt by the lyric speaker, might be linked, as well, to the pain, love, and trauma she has been through because of her condition of immigrant, and therefore, connected to the concept of collective memory.

your mother

is in the habit of

offering more love

than you can carry

your father is absent

you are a war

the border between two countries

the collateral damage

the paradox that joins the two

but also splits them apart (32)

In this poem, the lyric speaker is rebuking herself as being the cause of a breakdown. It starts by the most important image she has: her mother, and how she perceives she always gives more than she should for others, instead of worrying or taking care of herself. The lyric speaker makes a statement about how she recognizes the roles of her parents in her life. Her mother, always present and caring, giving everything she has to give and more, while her father is not even there, and does not mention anything else about him. In the last stanza, even though she seems to be addressing the reader by making use of the pronoun “you”, what she is really doing is reproaching her own existence and how she is the culprit of these things to happen.

The images she is recalling in this stanza have no further specification if they belong to urban or natural landscapes. What is clear, is that they refer to her condition of immigrant since she claims to be the border of both countries, addressing India and Canada. Therefore, it can be inferred that according to Javier Maderuelo and his description of such in his article “The urban landscape” (2010), this image is taken out from a cultural urban landscape, since they are mentally built from feelings, sensations, and perceptions of natural or urban

landscapes (575), creating an inner representation to the lyric speaker. The fact she feels how she describes at the end of the poem, makes us assume she is dealing with an internal struggle, that makes her feel she does not belong anywhere and that everything she causes is trouble and partition between her both “homes”.

A very strong image of it is when she refers to her own as a war, inspiring this inner landscape by an urban one, where two countries decide to fight each other for territories. The internal conflict she deals with because of her feeling of detachment, and that she does not belong to either place, since she migrated from her motherland India when she was a child, and in Canada people look at her like a foreigner because of her physical appearance and accent. In this war, as the lyric speaker claims to be, there are no winners or losers, since she is the one who would defeat herself if one of these surrendered. She is a sort of God, similar to what the lyric speaker claims to be in “i am of the earth” (206) from *the sun and her flowers* (2017) discussed earlier, where she assures to be what life and death talk about. She is the centre of the poem, the focus, and from there builds her guilt about not being good enough for any of both territories she considers and remembers as own.

Notwithstanding it has been already studied that Rupi Kaur does take into consideration the representation of landscapes building them from her inner self, demonstrating her subjectivity and allowing the readers to be part and sympathise with her personal experiences, and memories in her written poetry work, there are other topics she deals in depth with as well. Besides the feminist approach and autobiographical connotation her collections of poems have, there are other salient topics she discusses quite frequently, and those are the ones related to love, in all its possible forms and ways, and trauma, as well as how she, and the lyric speaker, have weathered and overcome.

Chapter III: Landscape, Love and Trauma: Healing through herself

The first poem which I think is important to examine in this chapter is “home” (68-73) from Kaur’s second collection of poems *the sun and her flowers* (2017). From the title of the poem, the writer is giving us clear notions of what the topic is about, yet she is not referring exactly to a physical space, nor a representation of her mother land India. The home she is representing through this poem is her own body and how her perception of it changed after suffering from abuse. The landscape represented in this poem, grows from the inside of the lyric speaker, becoming an inner landscape representation that arises from the deepest parts and thoughts of her being, always led, in this case, by the memory of a traumatic event. The atmosphere the lyric speaker creates tries to fool the readers by making them think they are faced to tangible spaces and objects such as tables, beds and curtains, but in the end, she only uses these resources to set us inside of her mind and make us share her grief. Gaston Bachelard in his book *The Poetics of Space* (1994) explains

It is often this *inner immensity* that gives their real meaning to certain expressions concerning the visible world. To take a precise example, we might make a detailed examination of what is meant by the *immensity of the forest*. For this “immensity” originates in a body of impressions which, in

reality, have little connection with geographical information.
(185)

In other words, Bachelard states that it is not necessary to be within a forest or physical space to understand the expression or action of going deeper into something or somewhere. The reader does not need to be inside of the lyric speaker's head or body to feel what she feels, nor to see what she sees. This inner immensity the writer exposes about, has to do with all the complexity and diverse people can feel and perceive different environments, therefore, create and interpret landscapes.

At the beginning of the poem, the lyric speaker describes an ordinary day in her life, "i remember it exactly / climbing out of bed / making coffee to the sound of children playing outside / putting music on / loading the dishwasher" (68). The atmosphere the lyric speaker creates in the first stanza of the composition is a common day in a normal person's life, describing things most of us do when we are about to start a new day. Describing how the sun kissed the lyric speaker's eyelids gives us the idea of a placid atmosphere, it makes us feel she is content with waking up to have a new start. The fact she describes children playing as a sound, and not as noise may be considered as a positive perspective of life, even though she is just starting the day which changed her.

As the work continues, the lyric speaker starts to create a completely different atmosphere, not bright and peaceful anymore, but rather dim and foreboding. On the third stanza, the lyric speaker is going through a traumatic experience, she falls into a sort of depression for the abuse suffered, thereby, she shuts in as a coping mechanism. "all the different parts in me / turned the lights off / shut the blinds / locked the doors" (69). When the speaker expressed that all the components of herself had this deprivation, she is clearly depicting us the breakup her life had, the before and after that situation which make her feel like the rapist turned her breasts into bruised fruit (69).

After expressing pain and trauma, the lyric speaker creates an atmosphere based on her own inner landscape. How she perceives her "home" now is distinct

to how she used to. The speaker claims she cannot even feel her own body like hers again, cries the fact she is incapable of having a relationship without the memory of the abusive event come to her. Even though the conception of memory it was decided to use throughout this study was the one related to the Indian Diaspora of immigrants missing or remembering their lands, this passage of the poem fits into the feeling of melancholy, as she misses the conception she had of her body before being raped. But, on the last stanza, she lyric speaker experiences an epiphany

it takes a complete. whole. perfectly designed person to
survive it

it takes monsters to steal souls

and fighters to reclaim them

this home is what i came into this world with

was the first home

will be the last home

you can't take it

there is no space for you

no welcome mat

no extra bedrooms (71-72)

With this revelation, even after suffering the traumatic experience, the lyric speaker stands up and notices she is strong enough to overcome the situation. Without denying she has been through very bad moments for a long time, she finally opens all the windows, loads the dishwasher with all of her thoughts, just as at the beginning of the poem, and plans to wash yesterday out of her hair with a bath (72), telling us she is recovered now, or on her way to. She is aware of her strength now, even though it is important to state this is just one step towards recovery and acceptance; she is a fighter who would do anything to make this

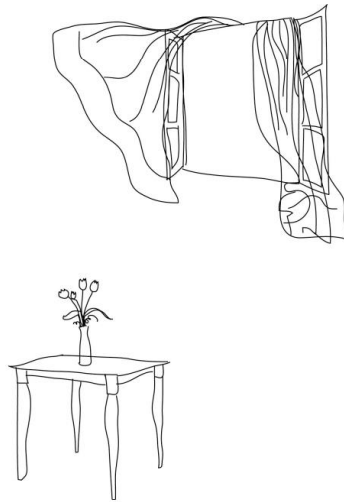
home, her home hers again. The lyric speaker boosts her confidence based on self-love to deal with the trauma and get over it, even though it will always live in her memory, which is going to remind her what made her become the strong woman she is now.

The representations of landscapes along the poem are varied: quotidian, when the lyric speaker describes a daily routine at her house. Dim and dark, when the rapist took over her home, as well as bright, when the lyric speaker finally seems to have overcome the traumatic situation and to have recovered her body, her home as her own once more. The atmospheres and images presented always stick to the subjectivity of the lyric speaker, describing feelings and emotions, the conception of her own body after the traumatic event, and how this memory hunted her even when it was consented. Here the landscape that is represented by Kaur, is directly connected to how she perceived the situation through the one the lyric speaker went through, how she created this imagery, making use of this common daily routine to express how something that might seem harmless to some people, can change someone's life so drastically. In the chapter "Intimate Immensity" of the book *The Poetics of Space* (1994), Gaston Bachelard discusses and exemplifies the strategy of giving an object poetic space. He declares that endowing an object with poetic space is to give it more space than it has objectivity. In other words, to expand its intimate space (Bachelard 202), and that is exactly what the lyric speaker is doing by bringing up these quotidian objects to the scene. They stop being beds, necklaces, bathtubs, doors, windows, and four-wall rooms, and start to convert into the lyric speaker's own inner landscape.

It would seem, then, that it is through their "immensity" that these two kinds of space – the space of intimacy and world space – blend. When human solitude deepens, then the two immensities touch and become identical. (203)

That is to say, the immensity of the lyric speaker's inner representation of landscape, collides with the immensity of real world's objects to become one. That is why the illustration which accompanies this poem makes so much sense. A

vase with apparently living flowers on a coffee table, next to a wide-open window, through which the wind is blowing, thus blowing the curtains that seem to be wildly alive. Just like her, just like the lyric speaker after this healing journey, and the collision of these two immensities: the most intimate representation of it, with the outer world's one.



4

Related to the inner landscape the lyric speaker creates out of darkness in the previous piece, the poem “awakening” (131), the first one from the chapter “awake” on Kaur’s third collection of poems *home body* (2020), can be considered as a sort of liberation of the lyric speaker, becoming aware of the rights she has and what she is capable of. “i’m waking up / from the longest night of my life / it’s been years since i’ve seen the sun” (131). The images the lyric speaker implies in this poem are the ones related to the act of waking up, to open her eyes, apparently, after a very long time having them closed, and the image related to the sun and the fact of not being visualized.

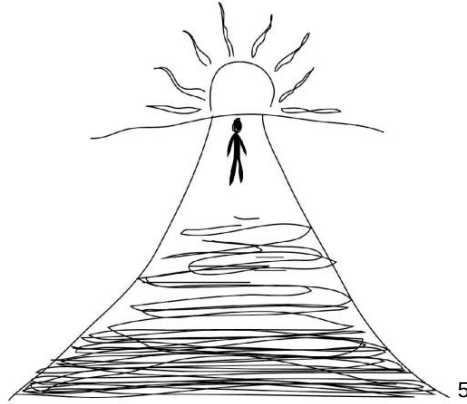
The images of the sun and the act of waking up are completely associated in this poem. The role of the sun could be taken from an enlightening perspective, maybe linked to the lyric speaker’s culture, or to a personal realisation about her inner being after opening her eyes, just like the act of waking up. Both, image and

⁴ Illustration of the poem “home” (68-73) from the collection *the sun and her flowers* (2017) written and illustrated by Rupī Kaur.

action in the poem, are intending to make us realize the lyric speaker has been sleeping or with her eyes shut for a long time, referring to “the longest night of my life”, which could be related to a stormy relationship, or depressive period of her life, since it mentions there have been years since she has seen the sunlight.

The representation here might be based on the lyric speaker’s experience which is unknown by the reader. One of the approaches Rupī Kaur implements along her three collection of poems is this one. She writes some poems without giving more explanation about them so everyone who reads it can interpret them on their own manner. On that account, she creates a landscape for the lyric speaker that may talk about varied topics, at the same time it does not specify or deepen any. This landscape becomes an inner representation when the lyric speaker associates the act of waking up, opening her eyes and glimpse the sun in all its glory with the moment in which one sees the light at birth. Her realisation would be, in this case, the act of rebirth into her life.

Concerning the structure and length of this creation, we may highlight it since it is an extremely short poem, more like a confession or liberation from this dimness associated with the night. Nevertheless, the illustration accompanying this poem might be alluding something more spiritual, since we can appreciate a human-like silhouette half-way on a path towards the sun in the horizon. It is not an accident that the beginning of this path is darker at the bottom and clearer as it gets closer to the human-like silhouette as a symbol she has been dealing with something little by little. This person, addressing the lyric speaker, is getting out of this obscure night that has deprived her from life and light for years.



On the other hand, the poem “grounded” (195) from Rupri Kaur’s first collection of poems *milk and honey* (2015) embodies the opposite of the poem analysed before but remains in the track of landscape representations. The lyric speaker expresses her desire to go downwards the earth, to be absorbed as a metaphor of her sadness and aspiration to disappear.

i want to remain so
rooted to the ground
these tears
these hands
these feet
sink in (195)

The fact she implies the image of remaining rooted to the ground, might be referring to what a plant or a flower does. Always staying in the same place nourishing itself, growing and learning how to survive, putting down roots. It also may be referring to the desire of not feeling she is always floating around without a purpose, as well as it may be addressing her desire to go back to her motherland India as a sign of the Indian diaspora felt by the lyric speaker. The wish of being

⁵ Illustration of the poem “awakening” (131) from the collection *home body* (2020) written and illustrated by Rupri Kaur.

absorbed by her original culture in order to finally feel she belongs somewhere she is accepted in.

In the introduction of his book *The Poetics of Space* (1994), Gastón Bachelard assures

The poetic image is not subject to an inner thrust. It is not an echo of the past. On the contrary: through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depth these echoes will reverberate and die away. Because of its novelty and its action, the poetic image has an entity and a dynamism of its own; it is referable to a direct *ontology*. (xvi)

In this respect, the images implied by the lyric speaker to express her inner being may, as well as may not be guided by past experiences. In his introduction, Bachelard states that poets impulse their writing not necessarily by their inner selves, nor by past experiences in their lives. But it is the image mentioned, seen or felt in the present that brings back memories from the past and creates an inner landscape represented through the poem.

“grounded” (195), as it was mentioned before, is a metaphor about the lyric speaker’s sadness and desire to disappear, to be swallowed by the earth. Readers are not aware of the space or image that motivated this inner landscape representation, but it is presumably it came from a natural scenery, more specifically, a natural space with growing vegetation. That being the case, the lyric speaker is considering herself to be a plant that craves to be stuck to the ground, growing. But, the moment she makes use of the anaphora “these” referring to her tears, hands and feet which, by the way, go in order from the top to the bottom of her body, to sink in the ground, she is making a reference to die. Following the process of dead flora, which gradually withers away from the top of it starting by its petals, until it is reabsorbed by the soil to, eventually, bloom again. And maybe that is what the lyric speaker is looking for, to restart her life in order to have the opportunity to succeed in any field. The metaphor implied in this poem it is quite

similar to the one utilized in “awakening” (131). The lyric speaker seems to be looking for a fresh start, either because she has gone through a stormy period in her life, triggered by traumatic events, or because of her depression, which torments her in various ways. In both pieces, the images of waking up and sink in to the ground are synonyms with rebirth or rediscovery, both personal and of the world or culture in which she is immersed.

The last poem object of study in this chapter is one that belongs to the last collection of Kaur *home body* (2020). In the piece “there are whole blackouts” (31) the lyric speaker deals with trauma and how her body perceives it.

there are whole blackouts
in some of the years i have lived
my therapist says our minds erase trauma
to help us move on
but every experience i’ve had
is memorized in my flesh
even if my mind forgets
my body remembers
my body is the map of my life
my body wears what it’s been through
my body signals the alarms when
it thinks danger is coming [...] (31)

The poem starts by the lyric speaker declaring she does not remember some periods of her life at all, according to her therapist, as a coping mechanism for the experienced trauma, but then is when the lyric speaker clarifies that the remembrance she was talking about, was the one directly related to the mind,

because every traumatic situation she has been faced along her life is remembered by her home body.

Anew, the lyric speaker makes use of the rhetorical device anaphora to let readers comprehend her body is being taken as a sort of map, on which each traumatic event that has happened to her has left indelible traces that not even therapy has been able to heal. The speaker intends to make this comparison between her body, and all its components, and this kind of plan where everything is written down so as to confirm that, even when the memory is fragile, her body will always make sure she does not forget the pain she has been through to get where she is, to become the woman she is today.

This comparison between her body and a map or plan, is similar to the one made in the poem “it feels like i’m watching my life happen” (20) from the same collection, where the lyric speaker compares her mind with a bowl. Again, she is comparing herself, in this case, her earthly being, with an unanimated object. But even though a map and a plan are unanimated objects, she brings them to life through the sense of feeling and remember, such as she does in the poem mentioned before.

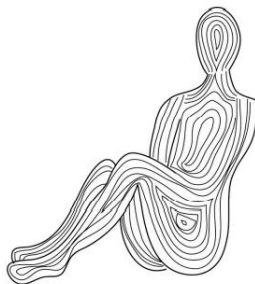
Continuing with the poem, the lyric speaker describes how these memories her own body makes her remember, her own skin and flesh brings back, become little demons personified from her past to do not let her forget anything that has happened, more like a threat.

[...] and suddenly
the hungry little demons from my past
come raging out of my flesh
screaming
don't you forget us
don't you ever try to

leave us behind again (31)

In this regard, it can be inferred that these “hungry little demons” that furiously come out her flesh, apart from being the memories she has from traumatic situations in her life, are being created by the very own lyric speaker. This inner landscape representation is being inspired by a natural one, motivated by the nature of female body, from which creatures are born. The point that the lyric speaker expresses that these memories come out in the shape of little demons through her flesh, simulate the birth of a baby coming out of its mother. Hence, these human-like memories the lyric speaker denominates demons, would be products of her own, creatures she herself has fed and nourished over the years, until they became insufferably dependant of her sadness and trauma they would do the impossible to keep on tormenting her, and even threat her when the slightest possibility of forgetting them arises.

Rupi Kaur illustrated “there are whole blackouts” (31) as well as some other poems previously studied. In this one, it can be seen a human-like shape, in a seated position that is, presumably, herself.



6

The reason that the human figure is seated on the ground, almost in a foetal position, may demonstrate that the lyric speaker is trying to protect herself from these memories she describes as demons coming out of her. The lines that go around, up and down her body portray the traumatic remembrances that torment and threat with never leave her alone. The lines are shaped like a

⁶ Illustration of the poem “there are whole blackouts” (31) from the collection *home body* (2020) written and illustrated by Rupi Kaur.

fingerprint all over her body, something that is unique and unrepeatable, but also something that marks you for life, just as she describes these hungry demons. The traumatic situations she has been through along her life only affect her and, no matter how much therapy she goes to, how many times she asks for help, nor how many therapists tell her our minds erase trauma, she will never be able to free herself from a mark such as that one.

CONCLUSIONS

It is quite evident that Rupi Kaur's written poetry is inherently connected to her roots and Indian diaspora which brings her memories about the motherland she can barely remember, and consequently, tends to idealize. Except for the fact that, in most of her poems inspired by the Indian landscapes and memories, she does the opposite of idealizing what India means to her. She criticizes most of the decisions the government has made, the way her people treat their land and each other, the lack of rights for women, and the misogyny they have had to deal with since always. Even though she has some poems related to this, most of the ones that were considered to be analysed in this dissertation were the ones related to the more sentimental Indian diaspora she felt, more linked to the subjectivity of the lyric speaker and what her family was forced to do in order to improve her and her siblings' quality of life.

It has been proven through the testimony of the writer, that the experiences of landscapes created by the lyrical speaker were mainly motivated by both, social and communal events. Social, because in many of Kaur's poems that were object of study, the lyric speaker sees herself confronted with a prejudiced society that sets standards impossible for someone like her to meet, especially beauty standards that discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, skin color, body hair, among others, where the lyric speaker feels absolutely segregated for being and having all of these features. As well as communal events, such as the poems referred to her motherland India, and more specific, the ones inspired by the Punjab people and the Sikh genocides on hands of the very own Indian police.

Throughout Rupi Kaur's written poetry, it may be clearly evidenced that she did not intend to link every single poem to the representation of landscapes itself, at least not on purpose. However, after the analysis of this selection of poems of her three collections, is well known the relationship that her poetry has with landscapes, whether natural or urban, which inspire most, if not all, of her poems. Yet, Kaur takes this inspiration provoked by landscapes and makes them her own,

makes them interior, and many times, as we saw in some poems, she herself becomes a landscape through objects and components of one that varies among the natural, the urban, and the cultural, which the writer never leaves aside, since it is an essential part of her being.

The lyric speaker, apart from personifying the very own Rupi Kaur and her personal life experiences, creates these subject landscapes, building them within and from the interiority of the lyrical speaker, which makes them, consequently, subjective as they are inner and cultural interpretations of an individual who perceives natural, urban, and cultural landscapes differently. The subjective landscapes created by the speaker are of great importance to this dissertation, since they emphasize the feelings and emotions that inspired and motivated her to write such pieces where she intends to transmit the way she conceived these spaces and give them a more personal approach.

As a further result of the foregoing, it can be assured that the writer has drawn her position in the Contemporary English literature through her strong, moving, and relatable poetry, as well as her deep-rooted Indian culture and the means she employs so that is spread all over the world using a variety of rhetorical devices and discursive tools that break with the traditional poetic paradigm by not following any rule, nor punctuation marks due to her desire to maintain at least that small tradition, of not using any punctuation rule more than a period from her Punjab culture.

In connection with the above, I think it is paramount to emphasize the strong relations with the interculturalism Kaur projects and states through her work. Mixing her eastern roots with the western society she is faced everyday in order to display the world a broader vision of how she perceives us, as well as how she feels we perceive her in return. The manner in which the writer blends both cultures and creates these compositions makes us not only witnesses of the interculturality expressed and constructed from the subjectivity of the writer, but also makes of readers active participants in it, since this interculturalism is one

more element belonging to the cultural landscapes Kaur creates based on her subject personal experiences.

In this dissertation, it was possible to corroborate that the poems which are part of the corpus were animated by unquestionable representations of landscapes that the lyric speaker transformed into inner ones, converting them into subject representations readers are able to relate, since she deals with topics many people have had to, such as feeling like an outsider anywhere you are, falling into depression because of trauma or love disappointments, and discovering no one more than oneself is capable to ask for help and finally heal. The greatest number of times, these representations are not just coming from the lyric speaker, but from the very own Rupi Kaur passing on her own life experiences.

In Chapter II of the introduction of his book *The Poetics of Space* (1994), Gastón Bachelard states that “In my opinion, soul and mind are indispensable for studying the phenomena of the poetic image in their various nuances, above all, for following the evolution of poetic images from the original state of reverie to that execution” (XXI). In this regard, the images provided by Kaur in her poems are a direct projection of her soul, memory, and life experiences, although these poetic images can be misinterpreted in different manners by readers, and they would lose the original essence of the writer’s soul. Wherefore, she tries to clarify and support her authentic feelings and intentions by illustrating some of her poems with drawings that attempt to keep the reader around what the writer really wants to transmit through the piece of poetry. These pictures are part of a strategy the writer adopts intending to correlate the verbal images and visual images, so her original feeling and emotion is transmitted as truthfully as possible. Both, the written composition and the visual illustration, work collaboratively to support each other on what Kaur wants to convey.

Finally, in light of the academic projections of this research, it is noteworthy that during the process of building the state of art of this dissertation, there were not any investigations which approached the topic of landscapes in Rupi Kaur’s

literature, but rather there were articles and essays on the topics of depression, trauma, love, and feminism, which did not fail to stand out in the present dissertation, because Kaur's written work is developed around them. Thus, I strongly believe that this research can be an entry point to what might be investigated in the future regarding inner, natural, urban, and cultural landscape representations in the poetry of Rupi Kaur, since certainly she is going to keep on sharing and capturing her thoughts and most intimate experiences over the years.

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