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Subject: Advanced Contemporary Literary Criticism

A New Criticism on  
There is a girl inside by Lucille Clifton

There is a girl inside.  
She is randy as a wolf.  
She will not walk away and leave these bones  
to an old woman.

She is a green tree in a forest of kindling.  
She is a green girl in a used poet.

She has waited patient as a nun  
for the second coming,  
when she can break through gray hairs  
into blossom

and her lovers will harvest  
honey and thyme  
and the woods will be wild  
with the damn wonder of it.

The poem is about the youthfulness and sexuality hidden within an old woman. After a close reading, there are images, symbols, similes, and metaphors that gives meaning to the poem.

The persona of the poem is an old woman who still feels young and vital inside. The central tension in the poem is probably the tension between youth and age, between what the speaker feels like on the inside and what she looks like on the outside. This tension structures the poem as a whole through the alternation of the language of youthful vitality with the language of aging and decay. In the poem, the words "girl", "randy" means sexually free or assertive. The narrative dimension of the poem reveals an old woman dreaming about the miraculous transformation, the "second coming" of youth, despite her "bones" and "gray hairs". Thus, the theme of the poem probably involves the paradox of timeless youth. To discover the specific nature of the theme, and to understand how the poem establishes it, we need to closely examine the poem's formal elements.

The first thing we might notice is that the alternation of images of youth with images of age ends with the fourth line of the third stanza. The final five lines of the poem consist of images of youth, fertility, and sexuality, and they evoke the youthfulness the speaker believes can overpower age. There are total of five full stops in the first two stanzas, but there is only one comma in the third stanza and no punctuation at all in the final stanza until we get to the period that ends the poem. This dramatic decrease in punctuation or decrease in stops and pauses, suggests acceleration, excitement, and power reinforcing the emphasis on the victory of youth in the final stanza.

The speaker has used the powerful verbs in the active voice such as the girl inside "will not walk away", she "can break through", and "her lovers will harvest". These powerful, active verbs reinforce the idea that this girl is powerful and active, strong enough to get what she wants. The use of "has waited" in the third stanza reinforces the idea that the girl inside is ready to emerge. The simile "she

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**Julia Schneider**



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