

“WE REFUSED TO BE CORDIAL”: GIRLHOOD AND ANGER IN DIZZ TATE’S *BRUTES* (2023)¹

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Abstract: In 2018, Sarah Banet-Weiser wrote that: “The #MeToo movement has forced all of us to confront female rage – a rage at the injury of being harassed and assaulted, a rage at not being believed, at being called hysterical and out of control.” #MeToo flooded social media with anger-filled testimonies, which soon started circulating into popular forms of fiction. Considering “anger” as a socialized emotion, “rage” as an intensified emotional state, and “affect” as a relational category, this paper explores the representation of girlhood anger in Dizz Tate’s *Brutes* (2023). I contend that the novel reframes girls’ anger as a socially learned and structurally conditioned affect crucial to their development, rather than an individual emotional excess. Drawing from Sarah Ahmed’s feminist affect theory and Soraya Chemaly’s contemporary analysis of female anger, I show the “coming-of-age” factor of the novel as defined by the evolution of the protagonists’ uses of anger — from a form of norm-defiance and agency-claiming to a collective response to sexual violence and systemic harm. Through close reading, I demonstrate how the novel locates anger within broader mechanisms of resistance against sexual violence. In doing so, *Brutes* resonates with the affective dynamics surrounding the #MeToo movement, foregrounding anger as a mode of solidarity and political recognition among girls.

Keywords: Anger; emotion studies; gender studies; girlhood; #MeToo movement; young-adult literature

“NOS NEGAMOS A SER CORDIALES”: NIÑEZ E IRA EN *BRUTES* (2023) DE DIZZ TATE

Resumen: En 2018, Sarah Banet-Weiser escribió que: “El movimiento #MeToo nos ha obligado a todos a enfrentarnos a la ira femenina – una ira ante la herida de ser acosada y agredida, una ira ante no ser creída, a ser llamada histérica y fuera de control”. #MeToo

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inundó las redes sociales con testimonios llenos de ira, que pronto comenzaron a influenciar formas de ficción. Considerando la “ira” como una emoción social, la “rabia” como un estado emocional intensificado, y el “afecto” como categoría relacional, este artículo explora la representación de la ira en la niñez femenina en *Brutes* (2023) de Dizz Tate. Defiendo que la novela replantea la ira de las niñas como un afecto aprendido socialmente y condicionado estructuralmente crucial para su crecimiento, y no como un exceso emocional individual. A partir de la teoría afectiva feminista de Sarah Ahmed y la teoría sobre la ira de Soraya Chemaly, demuestro que la transición a la adultez en la novela está definida por la evolución de los usos de la ira de las protagonistas — de una forma de romper las normas y de reclamar su agencia a una respuesta colectiva a la violencia sexual y sistémica. Señalo como la novela sitúa la ira dentro de un conjunto más amplio de mecanismos de resistencia contra la violencia sexual. De esta forma, *Brutes* hace eco de las dinámicas afectivas del movimiento #MeToo, situando a la ira como un modelo de solidaridad y reconocimiento político entre niñas.

Keywords: Ira; estudios de las emociones; estudios de género; niñez; movimiento #MeToo; literatura juvenil

1. INTRODUCTION: THE RISE OF FEMALE ANGER IN CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES

In 2018, Laura Bates was one of the first critics to point out the “plethora of furious female on-screen heroines, from tough-walking survivor Jessica Jones to rebel handmaid Offred.” She was not the only one to call it. Emily Pine, Robin Bahr, Gaby Hinsliff, and Gemma Hudson all wrote about the growing presence of overt demonstrations of female anger in popular forms of storytelling media. In literary fiction, the publication of novels that featured angry or enraged female main characters became such that dominant media outlets like the *New York Times* (Donner), as well as influential literary stops like Penguin Random House or platform Good Reads, began making their own “female rage” reading lists. Dizz Tate’s *Brutes* (2023) is among this wave of angry publications, with its focus being, specifically, on the uses of female anger in girlhood.

The abundance of female anger in mainstream media that critics began noticing in 2018 did not arise spontaneously². It is difficult to ignore that the year this tendency started, 2017, was not so coincidentally the year in which the #MeToo movement erupted on Twitter and quickly took over the media. The movement began with the tweet that actress Alyssa Milano posted calling others to respond “me too” to her post to achieve a

² Other media outlets like Gallup Inc. conveyed in 2017 through their “Annual Global Emotions Report” that women that year had stated feeling anger more than they had the previous year. This tendency would continue during the following years, to the point that, in 2022, BBC would use this report to state that women “were angrier than ever” (Hegarty).

visual representation of the pervasiveness of sexual violence. Her tweet was based on Tarana Burke's project "me too" born in 2006; an initiative which, in origin, was focused on offering a network of support for black and brown women and girls who had survived sexual assault by sharing testimony and based on mutual aid and empathy (Burke 13). The #MeToo movement retained some of the tenets of Burke's work: its focus on testimony, ideas of mutual support, and reassurance that the survivor is not alone in exposing the endemic quality of sexual violence. However, it differed from Burke's initiative in some other aspects. It deviated from the focus on the intersectional approach that Burke had taken and instead, oftentimes, privileged the testimony of white celebrities (Philipps 9). In this sense, #MeToo steered away from Burke's original project of mutual support, and became more centered in *who* was denouncing *whom* (Rottenberg, n.p.). Its focus on celebrities led to a project that seemed to be more concerned with unmasking sexual predators in high social spheres rather than focusing on affective solidarity among survivors; this is what some detractors of the movement have deemed the "bad apple" (Kay 40) approach. By taking this outlook, #MeToo was also centered on individual stories rather than on collectivity.

What #MeToo succeeded at was achieving a lasting and influential sociocultural momentum. The movement spread from Twitter to all other social media platforms and to traditional forms of media coverage. In 2017 and 2018, many media outlets and public discourse strongly revolved around sexual violence, its ubiquity, its impunity, and its traumatic aftermath on survivors. Testimonies placed special relevance on ideas of pain because of both trauma and the impunity of the assailant. Within feminist affective spheres, this reading of pain triggered by injustice often leads to feelings of anger, as several feminist theorists pointed out in the past (Lorde, Ahmed, Banet-Weiser, Traister, Kay). This was the case of #MeToo. Soon after its inception, many testimonies and responses began showcasing feelings of anger at one's own abuse as well as that of others, and the patriarchal system that enabled sexual violence to reach such an endemic status. The rise of anger in the affective economy of #MeToo, in turn, also sparked a dialogue about women's anger. The discourse around it assumes that anger, historically, has been denied, demonized, and dismissed in women. The socialization of emotions agrees with dominant gender norms, which for girls and women are typically and traditionally based on ideas of emotional submission, conciliation, and compliance. #MeToo's discourse on anger began to be shaped around the conjecture that, while women have been prevented

from feeling or appearing angry, now, considering all of the stories that were coming out, there was no other option *but* to be angry. The blinding light that had been shined on the pervasiveness of sexual violence caused a general sense that the anger that they were feeling and exteriorizing was *attributed* anger: it was not only valid to express this anger, but rightful. Sarah Benet-Weiser insisted on the focus that #MeToo had put in anger:

The #MeToo movement has forced all of us to confront female rage – a rage at the injury of being harassed and assaulted, a rage at not being believed, at being called hysterical and out of control. Women’s anger has been explained away for so many years as an inappropriate emotion, as evidence of our inferiority and overwhelming corporeality. But in the current moment, women are insisting that their rage and anger be taken seriously and dealt with. Our rage and anger are spilling over. (Benet-Weiser)

Thus, female anger has become a powerful affective force for mainstream literature in the 2020s. Angry female writers and their angry female protagonists have been taking over best-selling lists at a fast pace. Chelsea G. Summers’s *A Certain Hunger* (2019), Eliza Clarke’s *Boy Parts* (2020), Rachel Yoder’s *Nightbitch* (2021), or Lisa Taddeo’s *Animal* (2021) are only among the most mentioned titles. The success of anger as a creative force in literature has led to its appearance in young-adult fiction also, with titles like Amy Reed’s *The Nowhere Girls* (2017), Courtney Summer’s *Sadie* (2018), Laura Bates’s *The Burning* (2020), or Dizz Tate’s *Brutes* (2023). These novels depict teenage girls’ anger, often in the context of their anger being suppressed or demonized and usually in response to ongoing sexual violence. *Brutes* is written as a coming-of-age story with an important focus on emotion. The characters’ growth is marked by their coming into contact with the pervasiveness of sexual violence and the consequential shift in the anger that they experience, changing from a form of expressing agency to a response to pain. Drawing from Sarah Ahmed’s affective model and Soraya Chemaly’s anger analysis, this paper frames anger as a driving force for change in girlhood at two different levels. First, anger is the affective impulse of the girls’ coming-of-age: the evolution in the ways in which they feel, express, and use their anger marks a shifting point in their maturity. Second, anger is framed as an impulsive force for societal change, as the girls exercise this anger as impulse to unmask the pervasiveness of sexual violence in their town. In this sense, this paper intends to make a contribution to the field of Girlhood Studies by challenging and redefining traditional notions about anger in girlhood, steering away from stereotypes about girls’ emotionality, and leaning into the conceptualization of anger as a powerful affective force for the development of agency

and their ability to make readings of justice. *Brutes* adds to a body of literature that challenges the conventional stereotypes of girlhood, either casting girls as passive and submissive or as hypersexualized figures shaped by post-feminist discourse (Gornick; Chaplin & Aldao; Borst).

2. READING GIRLS' ANGER FROM GENDER AND EMOTION STUDIES

Several academics from the fields of psychology and emotion studies have researched the gendering of emotions and their socialization in childhood and young adulthood. A turning point in the study of gender and anger is J.R. Averill's publication of *Anger and Aggression: An Essay on Emotion*. In this study, Averill rebukes popular stereotypes and classic clinical literature claims that relied on an essentialist perspective to affirm that men feel anger more often and with more intensity than women. Averill, in turn, stated that occurrences of self-reported anger were not subjected to gender differences in terms of rate, strength, or duration. Since his original claim, Averill's affirmation has been ratified by other researchers (Smith et al, Kring, Archer, Simon and Lively). What was found in some of these analyses, however, were differences in terms of aggression and expression of anger across genders. The differences in expression of anger are deeply rooted in how gender models of correct emotional behavior are instilled and socialized in subjects from childhood into adulthood. Feminist authors that work with emotion studies (Morrissey, Brody) propose an approach grounded on studying how societal beliefs about gender and emotion are produced, rather than focusing on innate emotional gender differences.

The rise of discourses on female anger since the #MeToo movement can be effectively explained through Sara Ahmed's model for the sociality of emotions. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Ahmed developed a model to explain how emotions come to be, how are they are socialized, and how are they shaped culturally. She contemplates two prior models: the psychological model and the sociological model, Durkheim's specifically (Ahmed 9-10). While she finds virtues in both, she also identifies certain deficiencies. Where the psychological proposal takes an "inside out" approach – emotions originate inside of subjects and then move outside of them into social relations – the sociological one takes an "outside in" approach – emotions originate socially and collectively and then come into the subjects. Ahmed finds a main flaw with both models, which is that they both assume that emotions are something that we "have." Her own take

on emotion is informed by both, although leaning more towards sociology. She sustains emotions originate out of social relations and contact between subjects, and are thus shaped by history, culture, and power structures. She states that “emotions are not simply something that ‘I’ or ‘we’ have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others (...) that the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are shaped” (10). Ahmed contends that emotions are not inside or outside but instead originate through contact between subjects and objects and then circulate between them. In this circulation, they may “stick” and “saturate with affect” some of those subjects and objects (11).

Ahmed’s model and her contributions are productive to understand the intensification of the discourses surrounding female anger as well as their introduction into fiction. Ahmed has defined anger as an emotion which can originate in feminist spaces through contact between subjects who share testimonies of pain (172). When subjects make a reading of these testimonies unjust, their reading of pain turns into anger at the structures that sustain this injustice. #MeToo served as an amplification of these testimonies of pain, and thus the circulation of anger also grew. As the circulation of affect increases, Ahmed states in “Affective Economies” that it accumulates affective value (123), which may cause it to appear more often in popular forms of culture like literature or film.

Amidst the rise of the discourse on female anger, Soraya Chemaly published *Rage Becomes Her* (2018), a comprehensive volume on the socialization of anger in different life stages of women, including childhood, the workplace, heteronormative couplings, or motherhood. Chemaly begins her exploration of how conceptions about female anger are born by delving into how emotional norms are taught different to boys and girls. She contends that parents and authority figures in childhood tend to forego faults on emotion regulation more often boys than on girls, justifying the bias on ideas of innatism and biological difference; that is, the so commonly heard “boys will be boys.” Chemaly’s claim is appropriately backed by several psychological and sociological studies based on parents’ perception of children’s behaviors and children’s gendered responses to frustration. In 1976, John and Sandra Condry published their study “Sex Differences: A Study of the Eye of the Beholder,” in which adults were asked to describe babies’ emotional states. The Condrys found that responses to the same emotional state varied depending on the gender of the baby. If the crying baby was a boy, they were more likely to define it as irritable or angry, whereas if it was a girl, responses leaned more to describe

the emotion as fear or sadness (816). Decades later, the gender bias held true. In 2012, Danielle Hagood gave a lecture on children's display of emotions, and stated that, while the feeling of emotions had very few differences in boys and girls, there was a significant difference in how their emotions were treated. In 2014, Ana Aznar and Harriet Tenenbaum released a study on the ways that parents spoke to their children about emotional behavior and regulation. They found that, while they spoke with daughters about emotion more often and in a more nuanced and complex way, they spoke with sons more about anger and “negative” feelings (153).

This socialization of anger as a gendered emotion from early developmental stages shows its consequences quickly. By the time they leave toddlerhood, girls are more likely to express anger and aggression less openly than boys (Chemaly 25). By preschool, children tend to already associate anger with masculinity, and by primary school, they think of assertiveness and disruptive behaviors as “linguistic markers of masculinity, acceptable for boys but not for girls” (26). Chemaly contends that girls are “admonished to use ‘nicer’ voices three times more often than boys are, [and] learn to prioritize the needs and feelings of people around them” which often translates into “ignoring their own discomfort, resentment, or anger” (26).

This submissiveness begins to change, often, in puberty, when girls begin to express negative emotions like anger more frequently (Chemaly 27). By puberty, however, girls have learned and integrated societal beliefs of women's “relative cultural irrelevance, powerlessness, and comparative worthlessness. Images and words conveying disdain for girls, women, and femininity come at children fast and furiously” (27). This general undermining of girls' sense of worth is tied with the “denial, disparagement, and diversion of their anger” (32). It is not uncommon for adults to poke fun at girls' expressions of anger. When a little girl is angry, they might be labelled “cheeky,” and as they grow up, they become “drama queens” (32).

While their anger is downplayed or directly reprimanded, girls still retain it. Because girls are often punished when expressing it through arguing or discussing, psychologists and educators like Rachel Simmons have found that teenage girls will find other outlets to let out their anger. This often translates into them channeling their anger through destructive behaviors against themselves or others, through practices such as

gossiping, rumor spreading, or general cruelties against others (Simmons 16). Chemaly reasons that anger in teenage girls is a “treacherous” emotion:

Any displays of emotions, vulnerability, and passivity – “traditional feminine” characteristics – signal weakness. But implicit-bias studies show that girls who are assertive, don’t hedge their speech, actively claim verbal space, and, yes, maybe say they are mad, are considered rude, confrontational, uncooperative, and transgressive by adults. . . . For working-class and black girls, who also feel that anger is shameful and know that the expression of anger is frowned on, anger is particularly complicated and risky, because it is also often a valuable and necessary self-defense. (Chemaly 34)

Thus, girls in adolescence exist in a conflicting area when it comes to their anger. They experience feelings of anger and aggression, knowing that authority figures in their lives will disapprove of them and that they are out of line with femininity, but also being aware that anger is an emotion associated with power and assertiveness. This dissonance may lead, as Chemaly points out, to passive aggressiveness or similar outlets to let this belligerence out (37). What is more, considering the intersection between gender, ethnicity, and class, Chemaly deems anger for girls in marginalized communities even more problematic, as they are aware that their anger will be even more demonized, while simultaneously holding the knowledge that anger is “often a valuable and necessary self-defense” (34).

Dizz Tate’s debut novel *Brutes* is largely based upon the conflictive area on the expressions of anger of teenage girls from low-income families. Through a close reading of the text, and specifically its depictions of teenage female anger, it is seen how Tate aims to capture the anger of teenage girls as something that “spills” out of them. Tate also depicts a shift in the girls’ anger throughout the novel. Whereas in most of the narrative the anger of the girls aligns with what has been discussed – displays of anger or rage against themselves or others in forms of mischief or passive aggressiveness – it changes towards the end of the narrative, when one of the girls is sexually assaulted. After this, this girl’s anger is no longer targeted towards herself or her friends, but towards making people see what has happened to her.

3. “WE WERE BORN FROM RAGE:” ANGER AND GIRLHOOD IN *BRUTES*

In 2023, six years after #MeToo and five years after Julie Brown’s exposé piece on Jeffrey Epstein in the *Miami Herald*, Dizz Tate published her debut novel *Brutes*, a

magic realist narrative in first-person plural by a group of thirteen-year-olds: Leila, Jody, Britney, Christian,³ Isabel, and Hazel. The girls become invested in the disappearance of the preacher's daughter, Sammy, and begin trying to piece together what her life was like before her vanishing, including her relationship with her best friend Mia and their association with a showbusiness mogul named Stone who lives in their small Florida town. Tate paints a vivid and claustrophobic portrait of a Florida very reminiscent of the testimonies of the girls who were part of Jeffrey Epstein's underage sex trafficking ring in the early 2000s in Palm Springs, Florida. Between 2001 and 2006, magnate Jeffrey Epstein contacted local teenage girls and hired them, for around two hundred dollars, to go to his house and massage him, only to sexually assault them at his property. Epstein often picked girls from working-class and low-income families and afterwards offered to pay them more if they recruited other girls (Robson). *Brutes* mimics this situation almost exactly, including the class dynamics at play by portraying the pronounced economic gap between the girls' families, who live in "the apartments," most likely referring to the common Floridian apartments in multi-family complexes (Aurand 677, U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development), and Stone's house, which is situated at a luxurious gated community. The novel takes a magic realist approach to coming of age, marked by the dangers that threaten this group of young girls from working-class families. Through the looming presence of a lake monster that haunts them as manifestation of Stone's preying on them, Tate builds a claustrophobic atmosphere of what it is to grow up with this kind of danger just outside one's door.

One of the most notable aspects of their coming-of-age process, which will be the focus of this analysis, is the shift in their anger. From the start of the novel, the "brutes" are presented to the reader as angry and somewhat violent. In chapter two, the plural narrative voice introduces readers to all of the mischief and misdemeanor that the girls have been getting into for years, presenting it as a reaction against their parents and as an externalization of a rage within them:

Isabel, the last one of us with a dad, learned that her parents were getting divorced. We hated the whole process. They held hands when they told her, there was no fighting, just a love gone listless, and they still all got together at Thanksgiving without a voice raised. It was only Isabel who screamed appropriately and tipped over the sweet potatoes. We

³ While Christian identifies as a boy, the girls and himself understand him as one of their own.

refused to be cordial. We would not be born out of sweetness, we were born out of rage, we felt it in our bones. (Tate 27)

Because the girls share one narrative voice as a representation of their extremely tight-knit group, they share feelings continuously. If one of the girls is feeling anger, they are all feeling it; not only for her, but as if they *were* her. Researchers on the socio-emotional development of teenagers Kessler, McLeod, and Wethington have found that there may be some emotional “costs of caring” (491) in relation with deep emotional connection with friends, particularly prominent in groups of teenage girls, when it comes to a strong empathetic engagement with the distressful life events of others. This is what Smith and Rose named “empathetic distress,” a construct that refers “to emotional involvement in the problems and distressed feelings of a relationship partner, to the point of taking on the partner’s emotional distress and experiencing it as one’s own” (1792). Because of “female’s strong interpersonal orientation and stressors associated with close relationships,” Smith and Rose state that women and girls present a higher tendency towards empathetic distress, which also leads them to suffering “costs of caring,” that is, “vicarious distress when faced with the stress of loved ones or close others” (1793). These ideas feature strongly in *Brutes*. The girls have such a strong bond that they share one narrative voice, internalizing the events that one of them endures as a collective experience. However, their strong empathetic bond does not stop them from oftentimes hurting each other through gossiping or even isolation, displaying the passive aggressiveness that Chemaly elaborated on in her reflection on teenage anger:

We were scared of being alone. Sometimes we’d pick one of us and play a game. We taunted her, showed her how easily she could be left behind. We’d forget to invite her to the grocery store or the mall or the pool, and then we’d talk about it after, look at her and say ‘Oops!’ If she cried, we left her. If she said, ‘Fuck you!’ we let her stay. (Tate 26)

This excerpt illustrates that the girls value the ability of others to become angry, which resonates with Chemaly’s take on what anger entails for working-class girls. Throughout their childhood and friendship, their anger is of high importance to them and to their identities. They see their acts of anger as defiance to norms, which makes them feel empowered. In one of the most important sections of the novel, the girls enumerate a long list of reasons why their mothers call them “brutes:” “Our mothers call us brutes then they want us to feel bad. It is what they call men they do not like, like our dads” (Tate 99). The list comprises all types of behaviors, from actual displays of anger: “They called us brutes when we told them their boyfriends were perverts, which they were” (99); passing

through challenges to authority: “They called us brutes when we told Christian he shouldn’t be afraid to wear Britney’s skirt to school in sixth grade” (97); violent deeds: “They called us brutes the summer we got obsessed with lizards and they found the bodies beneath our beds” (99); to general mischief: “They called us brutes when we got salmonella after we ate a whole bowl of raw brownie mix” (99). While the degrees of danger and moral reprobation vary widely across these conducts, they are all equally punished by their mothers, to the point where the brutes become aware that what is being punished is truly their lack of submission and traditional femininity: “[W]e knew our mother’s idea of goodness was not measured by morals but by how much noise we made. And we quickly grew tired of trying to be good in their way” (100). In this sense, the brutes are utilizing their anger and aggression as a form of reassuring their own agency and identity as separate from their mothers’ morals. In her study of girlhood and anger, Chemaly placed a particular relevance in the relationship between girls’ anger and confidence. She holds the thesis that by undermining and punishing the anger of girls, adults may be causing a diminishment of their confidence: by stating that their anger is either unimportant or reprehensible, girls understand that they have a lack of power to make assertions about what they find just and unjust (Chemaly 32). By understanding that their mothers’ morals are based on ideas of submissiveness and traditional femininity, the brutes make the active decision to disregard their mothers’ reprisals and continue being “brutal” and displaying these behaviors as the “refusal to be cordial” that they announce early in the novel.

While the initial presentation of the brutes’ anger aligns with Chemaly’s description of anger in early girlhood as not entirely articulated, not targeted against a specific objective, and mainly based on displaying aggressive behaviors against oneself or others, the forms of anger in the narrative do not remain stagnant and evolve as the girls grow up. Towards the end of the novel, the girls are taken to Stone’s house by Sammy’s best friend, Mia, as they are trying to find out more about Sammy’s life before her disappearance. Mia informs the girls that if they go into a room with Stone and massage his shoulders, he will give them two hundred dollars. The girls, although scared, do not want to appear cowardly and accept Mia’s proposal. However, at a certain point as they are massaging him one by one, all the girls begin leaving the room and Jody is left alone with Stone. This episode marks a pivotal moment in *Brutes*. Up to this point, the chapters of the novel that are set in the brutes’ childhoods are narrated exclusively

from a distinct first-person plural voice. This type of narration achieves an effect of claustrophobia and unease, while simultaneously holding a feeling of togetherness and protection. By the time Jody is left behind with Stone, the plural voice has already been interiorized, which causes the shift to the singular voice to be all that more isolating:

We imagine ourselves in reverse, moving backward from the room, backward through the doors and the trees and under the fence, back to our mothers, moving their way through the light, ready to take our hands and move us through the light, too. But we cannot reach our mothers in the light because we are in the dark. Even in our thoughts, they are too far, the house too large, and we cannot remember where the door is. We know clocks cannot turn back, anyway. After a while, I look around and realise the others have left me. I am alone and he turns to me. It is not a look I like. (Tate 172)

From this point forward, Jody becomes the narrator of the chapters set in the main timeline. The shift in the voice marks a moment of rupture in the story, in the friend group, and in their girlhood. There is a palpable change both in the general tone and feel of the story as well as in the displays of anger. Where the anger of Jody and the other girls before could be read as a form of recalling agency and a claim of identity separate from their parents, the anger that Jody expresses after she is raped is different and very much aligns with the anger that #MeToo put into circulation. As she leaves the room, Jody appears to be somewhat numb to her emotions and coming to terms with what happened to her. The immediate chapter after the attack is a short contemplation on the irreversible change that has occurred to her through the imagery of a bowl of water being conclusively contaminated. When she enters the living room, where all the brutes are watching TV with Mia and another teenage girl who was living in the house, Jody bonds with the unnamed girl:

“These are your friends?” she says.

I don’t look at the other girls. I shrug. I look at her and with my look I try to communicate that we know the same things and are the same. She turns away. She reaches out with one long arm to where Hazel sits on the rug, crying quietly. She hits Hazel beneath the chin.

“Ouch!” says Christian. (Tate 172)

Jody’s closeness with the girl and her acceptance of the violence against the brutes further reinforce her disconnect with the rest of the group as well as her anger towards them. As they are watching TV, they see that Sammy’s house is on fire, and they hurry to the scene. It is revealed that the brutes were the ones who were helping Sammy flee the town, so they go to the place where they know she is hiding. When they arrive, Sammy

is experiencing an extreme stomachache and “births” a small stone. At the sight of it, Jody understands that Sammy too has been raped by Stone and this is a consequence. However, she becomes angered at seeing the stone as “nothing special” (Tate 186). Jody at this moment is seeking meaning in what happened to both her and Sammy but comes to terms with the fact that all this pain that they have endured only serves one purpose: the pleasure that men like Stone will get at their expense. From this point onward to the end of the novel, Jody’s anger begins to grow.

To give Sammy time to escape, the brutes tell her parents that Sammy has been seen swimming in the lake with the monster. Thus, a fleet of boats arrive at the lake and men begin descending with “tools, fishing rods and long spikes baited with chicken carcasses” (Tate 188). The entire town gathers around the lake to watch as Jody is increasingly angered. She looks through a window through which she sees a couple sleeping, “oblivious, roofless and exposed to the elements” and she “resent[s] their lack of shame” (189).

The men in their boats continue their hunt, and eventually their nets catch something, and they begin to pull it out, which causes commotion in the townspeople. However, Jody notes, it is not what they all would have expected: “I watch the monster rise out of the water, the lake falling from around its body. It is no monster. It is a small and oil-dark creature, with growths all along its skin that look like tumours” (Tate 191). The narrative, in light of the events that occurred in Stone’s house, invites a metaphorical reading of the figure of the monster as manifestation of sexual violence and danger. This creature, which the girls had been warned about since early childhood, stands for the dangers of men like Stone preying on the girls. It is noteworthy that, from the beginning of the novel, the girls are warned against going near the lake by their mothers, making ultimately their responsibility to not get hurt. Although hidden, the monster swims in the lake freely, just like Stone harms all of these girls secretly but is able to carry on with his life, protected by a system of silence. All of the adults are aware that this lake, which lies at the heart of their town, is polluted by a dangerous monster, and yet there are no efforts to seize it until they believe it has taken one of the girls, until it is too late.

While Jody notes that “the creature is far too small to contain a girl” (Tate 191), all of the spectators and authorities quickly decide to assume that this is the creature that must have eaten Sammy, and the man who captured it opens its stomach, but it apparently

is not dead yet. The man continues stabbing it until “he looks embarrassed, like he does not know what to do with the knife. Eventually, he drops it” (191). As they leave the creature for dead, mothers begin leading their children home, telling them that the monster is now sleeping. Jody stays behind and refuses to leave and move her eyes from the lake. She grows increasingly restless and altered:

I watch the water move.

No one else seems to see.

The mothers retreat, the little girls and boys retreat.

They drift past me. They talk about dinner, drinks, sleep, babies, money.

I cannot stand it.

I cannot let them leave.

“It isn’t sleeping!” I scream.

And then the lake bursts into flame.

They all turn back to watch.

Curtains of fire rise from the mud that wraps around the lake’s edges. The smell of burning fertiliser is unbearable. We hold our shirts over our noses. No one speaks or screams or even breathes. The flames skate across the sticky surface of the lake. Smoke rises into the air and hovers above the water. It seems like it could blow in any direction, towards us or away, but I am not afraid of the lake anymore.

Sometimes the world deserves a burning. (Tate 172)

In this final scene, Jody’s anger aligns the most with the anger that #MeToo put into circulation, and the entire scene can be read as an allegory of the movement itself. In *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of the #MeToo Movement* (2020), Catherine A. MacKinnon, feminist legal scholar and activist, characterized #MeToo because of the faulty system of carceral punishment. MacKinnon contended that incarcerating perpetrators of sexual violence had no real significant repercussions in the structure of patriarchal violence. By punishing some of the assaulters (of the already few who have been prosecuted) with traditional carceral justice, the endemic value of sexual violence is not even contained, let alone solved (41). In *Brutes*, this issue is addressed through the man who captures the monster and stabs it relentlessly. He is not sure if the creature is alive or dead, or even if it is the culprit of Sammy’s disappearance, and still he continues stabbing it until he randomly decides that the creature is dead, leaving the matter for

solved. As the man drops the knife, the townspeople accept that the monster is dead and that justice has been restored.

Jody, in this scene, is presented as the embodiment of the women who began #MeToo online. While the rest of the world accepts that this issue is contained, she stays behind and sees that even if this one monster has been killed, the lake still moves. Either the monster is not dead yet or, more likely, there are others out there. The issue was not solely the one monster captured, but the polluted lake that is at the heart of their town. Jody keeps looking at the moving lake while everyone turns away with a false sense of tranquility, thinking that the threat is over. It is in this moment when her angered scream “it is not sleeping!” (Tate 193) sets the lake on fire. The fire makes it impossible for people not to look. Wherever they are, the aftermath of Jody’s scream reaches them, and she feels now emboldened, claiming that the world did indeed deserve this burning for what they were allowing to happen. This mirrors the beginnings of #MeToo. Where sexual violence had been dealt with traditionally through carceral justice, women took to online platforms to denounce that the incarceration of individuals did not equal the solution to the pervasiveness of sexual violence. The lake is filled with monsters, and #MeToo was made up from angered women like Jody who spoke so loudly on the matter that it was not possible to look away, to the point that it transcended social media into traditional forms of media.

In this way, *Brutes* portrays how Jody transitions from an anger that aligns with that of her friends that is not truly targeted against anything, and whose main purpose is to establish a separate identity from figures of authority as well as to challenge them. The displays of anger that the girls carry out in the novel prior to Jody’s rape serve as their way of reaffirming that they reject the forms of socialization that their mothers intend to impose on them, based on traditional models of femininity. In this sense, their anger, although useful for them to retain a sense of personhood and rebellion, is very much limited to forms of gaining individuality. Jody’s anger shifts after her rape, which, for her, means an extremely traumatic coming of age. After she experiences it, she begins bonding with the girls who have also been through it and thus starts seeing the issue as more than just about her. Sara Ahmed understands anger in these contexts as a reading of the pain of one’s own and of others (172). Thus, Jody’s anger shifts from a claim of individuality and independence to a project that intends to dismantle a system of silence covering an injustice. This project continues into Jody’s adulthood. While *Brutes* does

not include a chapter narrated by adult Jody, the reader meets her again through the eyes of her little sister Hazel. In adulthood, Jody has developed an obsession with finding and hunting the monster in lake, also claiming that she is always “pissed off” (Tate 59). Following Ahmed’s model, it could be said that Jody and her reading of pain put anger into circulation to force those around her to acknowledge the pervasiveness of sexual assault, which is so clearly represented by the monster/s in the polluted lake.

4. CONCLUSION

Girlhood Studies, from their interdisciplinary approach, are turning the theoretical gaze towards subjects previously neglected by scholarly attention. They are transforming and reframing traditional notions about passivity, vulnerability, or homogeneity that had been priorly attributed to girlhood, broadening and nuancing the category “girl.” This paper contributes to this already established tradition of questioning and redefining our knowledge about girlhood, by close-reading Dizz Tate’s *Brutes* from a theoretic prism that looks at affect through Girlhood Studies. Anger in these developmental stages has before been linked to childish tantrums or looked at from an overly biological perspective. Here, these notions are rejected, and anger is proposed to be a crucially important affective force in the building of agency, self-esteem, and sense of justice of girls. Supported by Soraya Chemaly’s contemporary examination of anger, this analysis has shown that anger is a fundamental affect for girls’ self-definition as agents who are able to make assertions about what they find just and unjust. Their uses of anger evolve, going from a form of identity-claiming in early girlhood, to an affective force that pushes them to move against injustice after they first endure the pervasiveness and harm of sexual violence. Both *Brutes* and this paper frame girls’ anger not as a form of paralyzing resentment, but as the engine for change that Sara Ahmed’s emotional theory also understands it as. In doing so, the narrative’s anger is framed within the larger effort against the proliferation of unpunished sexual violence that the #MeToo movement forwarded. Dizz Tate thus manages to reposition and reconceptualize stale notions about girls and their anger, adequately representing their “refusal to be cordial” as so much more than a tantrum.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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