**Response #1 - Sheldon Roberts**

The relationship between Audre Lorde’s “Poetry is Not a Luxury” and Dionne Brand’s “A Nomenclature of Everything”

Audre Lorde’s essay, “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” is an analysis of what poetry should be and the purpose it serves. There are many parallels between Lorde and Brand’s use of poetry to scrutinize society to invoke change. Dionne Brand’s “A Nomenclature of Everything” attempts to tear down the facade put up by authorities in the media and cast light onto the unpleasant realities hiding in the darkness. Both authors make use of pronouns to create a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Brand’s repeated use of the word ‘they’ refers to the majority and those in positions of power and privilege. It is “*their* wonderful smiles” and what “*they* saw on the periphery.” (Brand) Lorde mentions this same metaphorical figure as “the white fathers.” (Lorde 372) In the poem’s context, she was likely referring to police and politicians whose actions have been in the spotlight in 2020. A transition is signified when she pleas, “I am actually dying.” (Brand) The third person introduction had “beautiful innocence” and “sweet delight”, whereas the first person transition contains “ugliness” and “distress.” (Brand) Her voice, and the voices of many others, are being drowned out by “intractable narrations.” (Brand) Brand’s poem creates a visual which scrutinizes society through an emotional perspective. Lorde describes this use of emotion and feelings to depict our reality as our “distillation of experience.” (Lorde 371)

“A Nomenclature of Everything” is not an active call for change, but rather, an examination and critique of the world’s state. It’s loose structure mimics the unfiltered thoughts within her mind. The first three stanzas all allude to chemistry. Chemistry is symbolic of change and the formation of new substances. Brand implies that society is going through a chemical change in an attempt to form something new. Social changes fueled not by “propylene” (Brand) but by protests and activist movements such as Black Lives Matter. These movements that were once tossed to the side are now “in the tetravalence in any specific region.” (Brand) The issues of minorities are now the center of focus, like a tetravalent carbon in the center of a molecule. She reiterates the endlessness and abstraction of time throughout the poem. Abuses of authority by those in positions of power is not unique to this year. The reality is that this “year was endless” (Brand); there is always an abuse of power, black people have always been discriminated against. She does not “believe in time” (Brand) because the issues currently in the spotlight exist beyond the scope of the current times.

Brand’s writing is quintessential of poetry as illumination. She illustrates a visual depiction of the world from her eyes. The poem shines a light on the situation; it’s up to the reader to see it. As is described in “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” the poem effectively used feelings as a vehicle to share new ideas in a way that is resistant to the “structures defined by profit [and] linear power.” (Lorde 373)