



العدد السابع والثلاثون

الجزء الثاني / تشرين الثاني / ٢٠١٩

جامعة واسط

مجلة كلية التربية

Breaking the Spell of the Male Gaze in Selected Women's Ekphrastic Poems.

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Abstract

For centuries art and poetry have been inspiring each other and the relation between word and image constantly fascinates the poets. The literary world has given poems that tackle artwork the name: ekphrasis. Ekphrasis represents a rich hunting ground for references, allusions, and inspiration for poets. However, ekphrasis is powerfully gendered that privileged male gaze. Traditionally, the male is given the strong position as the gazer, while the woman is locked in her predetermined role that of the beautiful, silent, submissive, gazed upon.

Women poets refuse to adhere to the gendered ekphrastic tradition and the under-representation of women in ekphrastic poetry. They strongly challenged the ekphrasis tradition modifying it to create a distinctive feminist ekphrasis. Their poetry changes the male-dominated ekphrasis tradition that for centuries has pervaded the Western cultures. The work of the poets Louise Bogan, Carol Ann Duffy, Rita Dove, and Margaret Atwood is an excellent example of women's ekphrastic poetry that defies the tradition of patriarchal male gaze in an attempt to break the spell of the male gaze.

كسر تعويذة النظرة الذكورية في قصائد مختارة من قصائد الوصف التصويري للشاعرات

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الملخص

على مدى قرون ، كان الفن ملهماً للشعر وان العلاقة بين الكلمة والصورة اسرت على الدوام مخيلة الشعراء .ولقد اطلق على القصائد التي تتناول العمل الفني اسم: قصائد الوصف التصويري .يمثل الوصف التصويري أَرْضًا خصباً للمراجع والتلميحات والإلهام للشعراء . وبرغم اهميته الا انه كان متحيزة وبشدة للرجال وكان يمنح النظرة الذكورية مكانة متميزة و كذلك فان الناظر الذي هو عادة الرجل يتمتع بموقع قوة ، بينما تبقى المرأة عالقة في دورها المحدد مسبقاً وهو الدور الذي يفرض عليها ان تكون ذلك الكائن الجميل والصامت والخاضع.

رفضت الشاعرات التقيد بتقاليد الوصف التصويري الذي يميز بين الجنسين ويقدم تمثيلاً مجحفاً للنساء خصوصاً في شعر الوصف التصويري . لقد تحدثت الشاعرات هذا التقاليد بقوة ، حيث قاموا بتعديله وتغييره ليخلقوا شعر الوصف التصويري النسوي مميز .ولقد غير شعرهم وجه هذه التقاليد التي سيطر عليها الذكور والتي انتشرت على مدى قرون في الثقافات الغربية. يعد عمل الشعراء لويز بوغان وكارول آن دافي وريتا دوف ومارغريت أتوود مثلاً رائعاً على شعر النساء الذي يتسم بتحدي هذا التقليد في محاولة لكسر تعويذة النظرة الذكورية.

Art and poetry have been inspiring each other for a long time and consequently the literary world has given poems that tackle artwork the name: ekphrasis. Ekphrasis is an enduring and old tradition with a rich history from the works of Homer, Virgil and that of more recent poets; it has been around as long as literature itself. As a rhetorical device it simply meant to describe any object, natural or created, and to recreate the seen image in words. James Heffernan in his book *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbury*, defines ekphrasis as “the art of describing works of art, the verbal representation of visual representation, an exchange by which one medium is translated into the signs of another”¹. Also he suggests that ekphrasis is “dynamic and obstetric; it typically delivers from

the pregnant moment of visual art its embryonically narrative impulse, and thus makes explicit the story that visual art tells only by implication"². In short, ekphrasis turns images into words allowing the readers to see images when they read the clear and visually powerful description of a work of art. Through ekphrasis a silent image is empowered, a story that had been implied to in the work of art is retold vividly by using words.

Ekphrasis represents for poets a rich hunting ground for references, allusions, and inspiration. They inherited a rich tradition of ekphrasis that is traced back to the time of Homer, when the great works of art of the Greek sculptors and artists inspired poets. Poets muse on the major art masterpieces, recreating these works using their words, trying to tell the stories that had been drawn in these silent artworks. There has been productive use of ekphrasis in countless poems, Heffernan argues that the " production of ekphrastic poetry has become nothing less than a boom...ekphrasis in modern and post-modern poetry becomes still more striking when we consider that at least one poem about a work of visual art has come from almost every major poet of our time". He continues "whenever we turn in contemporary poetry, we find poems incited by works of visual art".³

It is worth mentioning that for centuries the tradition of ekphrasis that pervaded the Western culture is often "powerfully gendered"⁴ that blatantly privileged male gaze, and until the Renaissance ekphrasis is predominantly male- or masculine.⁵ The treatment of the ekphrastic image as a female and the poet as male is "inherent tendency" of ekphrasis that conceives "aesthetic relations between the poet and the *objet d'art* in terms of gender and sex role."⁶ Subsequently the female clearly likened to the visual, silent, and gazed upon object (like painting or sculptor) while the male, the gazer, becomes the active eloquent verbal (just like poetry).

Hence the general idea dictated until the twentieth century is that the female is regarded as the weaker sex who is locked up in her predetermined role that of the beautiful, silent, submissive, gazed upon thing that is created only for the gratification of males' eyes and desires. Adding to that male's dominating gaze that objectifies and subjects women turns to be one form of

practicing male's power over females in the patriarchal societies. The gaze is a reckoned power as the person who is gazing, usually the male, is traditionally in the stronger position than the gazed upon, typically the female.

Realizing such empowering process of ekphrasis , women poets firmly resolve to challenge the inherited gendered tradition of ekphrasis by resisting , modifying, and rewriting ekphrastic poetry. A myriad of women poets across cultures and centuries engaged in writing ekphrastic poetry, but their approaches vary as their ends. However, the most intriguing approach for breaking the spell of the male gaze is challenging and modifying the ekphrasis tradition by rewriting, responding, talking back and giving the mute feminized object in art a voice as in “talking back to and looking back at the male viewer, the images envoiced by ekphrasis challenge at once the controlling authority of the male gaze and the power of the male word”.⁷ Moreover, by rewriting the artworks, women poets through their ekphrastic poems, breathe words into the mute artwork and question, in the process, the existed and long accepted notion about women's abilities, roles, and value.

Ekphrasis is not too inviting and supposedly a hostile environment for women poets due to the apparently inherent "gendered antagonism"⁸ yet women poets have found in it a rich field for exploring, recreating, and hence presenting different meanings, beliefs and values to the world. Ekphrasis "has provided women poets with a genre alive with possibilities and not at all burdened with the historical prerogatives of male perception"⁹ ,despite the fact that women poets persistently demonstrating an acute self-awareness about their writing across different times and cultures. According to Jo Gill, "women's poetry in general ... has tended to be markedly self-conscious, their poems often concerned with ,their own authority, their own status, their own place in a cultural context which has, historically, tended to find them aberrant"¹⁰ however, they manage to write some of their finest ekphrastic poems depending on someone else's artwork .As Jane Hedley puts it in her book *In the Frame: Women's Ekphrastic Poetry from Marianne Moore to Susan Wheeler*, while a woman ekphrastic poet is "writing about someone

else's art, she is engaged simultaneously and self-consciously in creation and interpretation, making and viewing, seeing and saying." ¹¹

Women ekphrastic poetry has been largely and deliberately overlooked, but to consider the history of women ekphrasis, it is "clear [that] women have practiced it all along, from Greeks... and especially in the twentieth century" and the "way of beginning to sketch out a tradition of female ekphrasis, is to turn to that strain of modern ekphrasis by women who recognize sexually charged male tradition of looking and challenge its gendered dynamics," ¹². Indeed, this attitude has frame what has come to be called feminist ekphrasis.

Although, feminist ekphrasis is an old term, it is only in the twentieth century feminist ekphrasis begins to make a significant change by replacing the prevailed modes of rewriting the artwork, and directly confronting the gendered ekphrasis tradition. Modern women's ekphrasis "breaks the gendering that typifies the verbal and the visual arts, where the poem was classically understood to be male, expressive and persuasive, and the painting or sculpture female, mute and a thing of beauty"¹³ women ekphrastic poets even go a step further by presenting the unusual perspective of a woman as the viewer, the speaker, and creator of meaning. Their poetry changes the face of the male-dominated ekphrasis tradition that for centuries has pervaded the Western cultures.

They have modified the conventions of ekphrasis and challenged its traditional gender relations to suit their own need for self-determination. The work of the poets Louise Bogan, Carol Ann Duffy, Rita Dove, and Margaret Atwood is an excellent example of women's ekphrastic poetry that defies the tradition of patriarchal male gaze in an attempt to break the spell of the male gaze.

The poetry of Louise Bogan, the accomplished American fourth Poet Laureate from 1945 – 46, is "underwritten by her speakers' response to the threat of violation, dramatizing and finally dismissing the alternatives of submission or silence."¹⁴In her 1923 ekphrastic poem "Statue and Birds" the

object of the gaze is a marble statue of a girl placed in a garden. The girl is not talking herself, but the poet describes the statue saying:

Here, in the withered arbor, like the arrested wind,
Straight sides, carven knees,
Stands the statue, with hands flung out in alarm
Or remonstrances.(BE. p.14)¹⁵

It goes without saying that the sculptor is a male, while the girl who is trapped immobilized in the sculpture deprived from her volition, vitality and her voice, is a symbol for all women, their objectification, isolation, as well as the conditions that restrict women in a patriarchal society.

Bogan's persona "mind and exterior", like many of the poet's personae, are "grotesquely at odds. She is a type familiar from myth, a young girl transformed into a tree, a stone, or constellation to escape the violence of men or gods; her violation is prevented, but so, too, is her escape, and a panicked, vital consciousness lives on imprisoned."¹⁶ The male gaze of the sculptor objectified the girl into art, a marble statue. However, in the poem there is another kind of gaze that is of the poet herself. She is taking over the role that has been traditionally ascribed to male, the gazing. The poet is looking at the sculpture of the girl describing her through woman's eyes attempting to "undo this objectification and reclaim her subjectivity by entering imaginatively into the mind of the marble girl and trying to ascribe meaning and volition to her gestures."¹⁷

The poem is the poet's response to male transgression and objectification of women; through the lines of the poem, the poet implies that the male sculptor was unable to fully objectified the girl, her silent gestures represent a protest since the girl's hands are " flung out in alarm/ Or remonstrances.", and her " ... heel is lifted,—she would flee,—the whistle of the birds Fails on her breast." The girl is apparently resisting the sculptor's attempts and though she has already lost her volition and silenced, she is remonstrating with him. Adding to that, her lifted heel is an indication that she is trying to escape from the captivity of the statue and from the gaze of the male sculptor who has fixated her the way he desires. Though girl is

trapped in the marble statue, yet her silent gestures reveal what lies deeply inside her; she is teemed with life, vitality, and desire.

Moreover, the lifted heel and the young girl's attempt to flee are reminiscing of another marginalized female that is Daphne. The poet hints at the myth of Daphne by the mentioning of the trees and woods and as "like the girl in the poem, Daphne in her attempt to escape Apollo, as cultural authority and male law, she was rendered mute and immobile."¹⁸ The male gaze in the two objectified the girl into a statue and Daphne into a tree. The entrapment of the girl, her suppression and the obstruction of her desire to escape as well as the confiscation of her power of movement and speech, all allude to the general condition of the traditionally circumscribed women in the patriarchal society

The poet is not simply describing the statue of the girl, but she is trying to restore what the girl has lost at the sculptor's hands. Being a statue she is deprived of the ability to act or will, stripped of her volition, speech and vitality, and being a women she is trapped and even imprisoned in a sexual-social role. She confirms that though the marble girl is petrified in the statue, her silent inner protest reveal the failure of the male sculptor to control her entirely.

Another objectified, socially marginalized and gazed upon woman is the model in Carol Ann Duffy's well-known ekphrastic poem "Standing Female Nude", the title poem of her 1985 collection. This feminist ekphrastic poem powerfully challenges the patriarchy and directly criticising the painter and society, questioning at the same time the values of art determined by the "bourgeoisie".

The poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy defies "what had become a 'normalized' gendered practice" of the objectification of women in art as "traditionally the female 'nude' in art was the passive object of the 'active' male gaze."¹⁹ The poet presents a nude model, presumably a prostitute, giving her voice to tell her own point of view and subvert the tradition where the woman is gazed upon but not allowed to speak or be heard.

The poem is a dramatic monologue of the struggling model who describes her suffering as she spent six hours posing in a cold studio for a few francs. She sketches a realistic image of herself showing how the painter, who is in position of power, is gazing at her, scrutinising her and attempting to turn her to the image that he aspires , to turn her to utterly still object on the canvas:

Six hours like this for a few francs.
Belly nipple arse in the window light,
he drains the color from me. Further to the right,
Madame. And do try to be still. (SF, p.46)²⁰

Being poor and in need for money to survive, the model is really powerless and the male painter callously exploits her. Having her working for long hours, he sucks the vitality and life out of the model, he literally "drains the color" from her. Furthermore, he reduces the model to the physical parts which prove worthy to him: "Belly nipple arse", dehumanising her and eliminating her true distinctive identity in the process of turning her to a representation of the idealistic woman he aspired.

The shocking image the model sketches is developed in the following lines:

I shall be represented analytically and hung
in great museums. The bourgeoisie will coo
at such an image of a river-whore. They call it Art. (SF, p.46)

The model is subject to another ruthless kind of gazing that is of the bourgeoisie. Her representation, the two-dimensional image portrayed and hung in "great museum", is going to be gazed upon analytically and judgmentally. She asserts that gazers have the power to decide that she is a "river-whore", rejecting her as a person while at the same time they will embrace her representation drawn by male artist as great "Art".

However, what is fascinating is that in this very moment when the model apparently is in her utmost point of weakness, she was able to enhance

her power. Using the voice endows with by the poet Carol Anne Duffy, the model cynically and bitterly criticises the bourgeoisie and their values of art as well as the male authority to decide who could be considered talented and even "genius" artist and what the great "Art" is. By giving the model a voice, the poet who "regards herself as a second-generation feminist",²¹ is bravely defying the traditional patriarchal representation of female model, and women in general through art history that silenced and suppressed women, seeking at the same time to attain equality in art and society.

In the third stanza the shift in power becomes clearly evident. It starts with the model stating, with clear ironic tone, that the painter name is "Georges." and "They tell me he is a "genius" (this might be an indication that the painter in question is Georges Braque (1882-1963) and the painting that inspired the poet Carol Ann Duffy is his "Large Nude" 1908.) Then she mercilessly criticizes him asserting that:

There are times he does not concentrate
and stiffens for my warmth.
He possesses me on canvas as he dips the brush
repeatedly into the paint. Little man,
you've not the money for the arts I sell.(SF, p.46)

Though he is deemed to be a "Genius", the male painter was easily distracted by the model. Besides, through the above lines it is evident that the model is acutely scrutinising him, anticipating his thoughts and revealing his weakness. By doing so, the objectified and powerless model manages to turn the table on the traditionally empowered male painter/gazer, as she now becomes the gazer herself.

Interestingly, by depreciating him the model proves to be a defiant woman who resists the painter constant attempts to objectify and dominate her. She did not simply resign to the role of the passive, male-defined woman but declared that he can only possess her on canvas. Furthermore, she powerfully asserts her dominance and even her superiority by revealing the contrast between her life and that of the painter:

Both poor, we make our living how we can.
I ask him Why do you do this? Because
I have to. There's no choice. Don't talk.
My smile confuses him. These artists
take themselves too seriously. At night I fill myself
with wine and dance around the bars. (SF, p.46)

Though both are poor and struggling to survive, she creates a clear distinction between him and herself. She directly mocks him and his lifestyle as for her he is taking his art too seriously. And though she tries to communicate with him but her attempt was met with a sharp rebuff. Yet the painter's words "there's no choice" reveals a lot about painter's as well as the poet's frustration with the injustice of society that confiscates the right of a person to choose and control his/her own fate. The model feels superior to the painter as she is able to control her own life and fate, while for the male painter he has to work to please the bourgeois, the freedom to choose or the power to make a choice is a luxury that he cannot afford if he wants to survive.

The poem ends with further assertion of the model's power over the painter as she is capable of forming an opinion about his work and saying it right away, as in the lines:

When it's finished
he shows me proudly, lights a cigarette. I say
Twelve francs and get my shawl. It does not look like me. (SF, p.46)

She ruthlessly and carelessly belittles the value of his achievement taking away the sense of triumph he feels when he finishes the painting and smugly shows her the painting. The model's reaction is to indifferently ask for her money, put her shawl and coldly comment "It does not look like me."

The model reveals that the painter fails to capture her essence on the canvas. She has a different perspective on the painting and on art in general as they cannot truly capture who she is or her distinctive personality. Being in the conventional position of power as the gazer, the painter frames the model

according to how he wants her to be represented and seen depending on the stereotypical image already created for women. However, in the process he turns her into an unidentifiable image; the model cannot recognize herself in the painter's representation. Yet she proves her independence and frees herself from his or patriarchal representation in general, using the power the poet endowed her with, that is the voice and speaking out loud her opinion. She resentfully answers the bragging painter taking her money and leaving the studio to continue living her own life the way she desires. Linda Kinnahan in her "Looking for the Doing Words': Carol Ann Duffy and Questions of Convention", considers the last line of the poem "as a triumph for the speaker, and an assertion of a self, a 'me' that the artist and the system cannot assimilate and possess, a 'me' that escapes the tyranny of representation, a 'me' that is essentially unique and coherent and cannot be replicated."²²

Another triumph could be found in Rita Dove's poem "Venus of Willendorf", (1999). The poet in this poem challenges the ekphrastic tradition that had for centuries asserted patriarchal mastery over the representation of the female image and the patriarchal gaze. The poem presents what could be the earliest example of a sculptor's objectification of women. The Venus of Willendorf is an eleven centimeter tall statuette of a nude, plump woman carved in limestone. It was discovered in Austria in 1908 and it is dated from around 24,000 and 22,000 BCE of the Paleolithic era.²³ As Rita Dove states in her introduction to Natasha Trethewey's *Domestic Work*, the poet's challenge is "to bear witness and give a face to the legions of nameless men and women...." (Natasha D. Trethewey, xi) In the poem she gives a voice to a black female student to tell her story. Rita Dove's persona is a victim of the patriarchal gaze, lack of female subjectivity and misrepresentation of women.

The poem begins with an epigraph from Paul Celan's poem "Double-Shape":

Let your eye be a candle in a chamber,
your gaze a knife;
let me be blind enough
to ignite it. (BRP, p.48)²⁴

The effect of the patriarchal gaze is clearly stated from the very beginning as the poet criticizes male gaze as a knife that wounds and hurts women, who are typically the victims of the gaze. The epigraph also "foreshadows the subject matter of female subjectivity and the gaze by criticizing the lack of free will in the speaker's unwitting ("blind") provocation of the gaze"²⁵

The poem tells the story of one of the victims, an unnamed black female student, describing her first day in Willendorf when:

...., she was taken straight from train to tavern
To see the village miracle, unearthed
not five kilometers from this garden shed:

the legendary Venus of Willendorf.
Just a replica, naturlich,
A handful of primitive stone
Entombed in a glass display (BRP, p.48)

On arriving to the village, the student is first introduced to the village's miracle, the "legendary Venus of Willendorf". In the tavern the innkeeper is so proud of the statuette, though the centre of his attention turns to be not the artistic or historical value of it; rather it is the way the woman is represented, her physical features. Venus, the symbol of beauty, in this statuette is reduced to gigantic and exaggerated female body parts "sprawling buttocks and barbarous thighs, / breasts heaped up in her arms/ to keep from spilling."(BRP, p.48)The figurine has neither face nor distinctive features it is simply objectified as mere representation of male desire.

As the poem progresses, the protagonist realizes the innkeeper's gaze resembles the gaze of the villagers as she finds herself an object under male's scrutiny gaze which resembles the gaze directed to the Venus of Willendorf:

Have you seen her? they asked,
comparing her to their Venus
until she could feel her own breasts
settle and the ripening
predicament of hip and thigh. (BRP, p.49)

The female student feels uncomfortable under their gaze and that makes her feel insecure about herself and her body shape yet the villagers' gaze as that of the innkeeper enables her to understand the patriarchal gaze and its importance in forming or shaping people's notion. Then almost about the end of the poem the narrator proclaims that:

... suddenly she understands what made
the Venus beautiful
was how the carver's hand had loved her,
that visible caress.(BRP, p.50)

The female student's realization of the importance of the patriarchal gaze and how it objectifies women and misrepresents their images helps her to take a decision to defy patriarchal gaze and to confront women's misrepresentation by shaping her own image refusing to become a mere object of desire. The gaze literally sets her free as she "refuses to support the male bias and instead chooses to judge things by her own standards and ideas. After several incidents of encountering the patriarchal gaze, she realizes that a change must be made if she is no longer to be the object of the gaze." Through "self-reflection" the female students becomes "a subject who demands freedom and equality."²⁶

At the end of the poem, the poem's persona resolves to make a change as she is not a "ghost" like Venus. She is free to express her thoughts, feelings and desires demanding for freedom and equality. She derives power from within and manages to turn the gaze into a source of power that enables her to attain her own freedom and create her own self-image. It is worth mentioning that the poem appeared in *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (1999), a collection of poems dedicated to the very public heroine of American Civil Rights Movement Rosa Parks, a symbol of strong woman who resists and fights for her rights as well as the rights of all women.

The effort of assuming power and freeing oneself from the molded image created to fit patriarchal expectations proves far from being easy. However, the re-painting of the artworks by using words helps the poets to free the women from the stereotypical representation of women in art. Also, the ekphrastic poem tells something that has been held back by the silent artworks.

Margaret Atwood's postmodernist ekphrastic poems reveal an interest in how women are represented in the visual art. As Natasha Tretheway, one contemporary author of feminist ekphrasis has put it historically, "women's roles in the service of art is [sic] clear in how mad people were at Victorine Meurant, who was the model who posed for Manet's 'Olympia.' Rather than really getting mad at Manet, people got mad at her because she was this brazen hussy who dared stare out of Manet's painting".²⁷ Margaret Atwood utilizes ekphrasis to criticize the traditionally gendered construction of women's image as object for male gaze. The most obvious example is her poem inspired by Édouard Manet's 1863 infamous painting Olympia titled "Manet's Olympia", from her collection *Morning in the Burned House* (1995). The poem is a clever critique of the painting with a "tinge of black humor"²⁸. The painting itself is unconventional, it "shocked viewers at the Salon of 1865 because instead of a rosy, complaisant nymph rising from the waves surrounded by cherubs, it showed a pale, self-assured prostitute lying on her unmade bed"²⁹

In her poem, Margaret Atwood uses ekphrasis to re-portray the same picture using words, telling the story from her own perspective and that of the model, Olympia. The poem begins with a portrayal of a rather arrogant young prostitute reclining in a somewhat uncomfortable artificial pose:

She reclines, more or less.
Try that posture, it's hardly languor.
Her right arm sharp angles.
With her left she conceals her ambush. (MBH, p.24)³⁰

The way she is posing clearly suggests her inner strength and impassivity. She is fully in control of her own body and image, but as the description continues Olympia's immorality and notoriety are emphasized:

The windows (if any) are shut.
This is indoor sin.
Above the head of the (clothed) maid
is an invisible voice balloon: Slut. (MBH, p.24)

The addition of the invisible voice balloon is a postmodernist device used by Atwood to add language to the painting. This device in addition to the judgmental speaker and maid contribute to the creation of Olympia's image.

This image prescribed by the poet of a brazen, self-confident prostitute is challenged right in the next stanza when she forces the readers to reconsider their first impression of Olympia, saying:

But . Consider the body,
unfragile, defiant, the pale nipples
staring you right in the bull's-eye. (MBH, p.24)

Strikingly what is unconventional about the woman is not only her posture or imperfect body, but more importantly is her direct eye contact with the gazer. The power of the model lays in her looking directly at the male gazer, resisting the patriarchal gaze. She is definitely not one of the cliché idealized women in classic paintings who are beautiful, timid and subjugated.

Moreover, the poet draws the readers' attention to another important thing, is under "the black ribbon around the neck." :

Consider also the black ribbon
around the neck. What's under it?
A fine red threadline, where the head
was taken off and glued back on.
The body's on offer,
but the neck's as far as it goes.(MBH, p.24)

In the real painting there is only the black ribbon, but Atwood uses this ribbon to draw the attention to an imaginary red threadline underneath it. The black ribbon exceeds its aesthetic function as it turns in Margaret Atwood's hands into a symbol of the disconnection of the body from the head. The invented red threadline tells the story of Olympia 's resistance of submission. Olympia is a force to be reckoned as she is not only controlling her pose, her image but more importantly her mind, she is not allowing anybody to affect her thoughts or desires. She boldly challenges the traditionally accepted

notion that the process of thinking is taken for granted as the territory of men, while women are doll-like controlled and marginalized. Working as a prostitute, the body is on offer, but the head is gruesomely taken off and disconnected from the body then glued back as it cannot be touched or possessed by men, it is" as far as it goes" .

Unquestionably, the "most important feature of Atwood's postmodernist all-over painting is the fine red threadline under Olympia's black ribbon". The "glued on" head "has the final word, addressing its feminist critique to the hypocritical "Monsieur Voyeur"³¹:

I, the head, am the only subject
of this picture.
You, Sir, are furniture.
Get stuffed. (MBH, p.25)

The poet empowers Olympia by giving the silent objectified woman a voice to address, challenge, and confront patriarchal gaze .She determinedly objectifies the voyeur, who is traditionally unseen, transforming him from gazer into the gaze object. Initially the male gazer has the power but the empowered Olympia is strong enough to withstand male gaze and ultimately conquer. She asserts herself as active subject who manages to reverse the gender roles and break free from the traditional stereotypes representation of women. By calling the voyeur "furniture.", and commanding him to "Get stuffed." , Olympia's ends the poem in humorous yet poignant way as she objectifies the gazer and turning the judgment onto him.

Hence the ekphrastic poem "*Manet'sOlympia*"is clearly not a description of the painting but goes beyond that to criticize the patriarchal ideology and to empower women. It is evident that the painting and the poem are competing versions of reality, which neither mirrors exactly. One could argue that in post-modern ekphrasis, the goal of the writer is not mimesis, or to describe the painting faithfully, but to point out that the painting itself is

but one interpretation of a reality which cannot be completely captured in image or text.³²

The poems presented articulate women's eagerness and entitlement to freedom and to break the spell of the male gaze that hindered their creativity and self-defined subjectivity. The effort of assuming power and freeing women from the molded image created to fit patriarchal expectations proves to be not so easy. However, the re-painting of the artworks by using words helps the poets to free the women from the stereotypical representation in art. Those poets work hard to create representations of women that breaks away from the traditionally male-defined ones. In so doing their s symbolize a real shift of power that helps to set the women free from the male gaze, and the male voice that seeks to control their images.

Notes

1. James. Heffernan, *The Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press 1992),p.2.
2. Ibid, p. 5.
3. Ibid, pp. 135-136.
4. Ibid, p. 1.
5. Ibid, p. 46.
6. Ibid, p.108.
7. Ibid, p 7.
8. Ibid.
9. Karl Kirchwey, "To Really See the Dragon", in *the Frame: Women's Ekphrastic Poetry from Marianne Moore to Susan Wheeler*. Edited by Jane Hedley, Nick Halpern, and Willard Spiegelman,(Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009),p.105.
10. NausheenNazEusuf, "The EkphrasticParagone in Louise Bogan and Marianne Moore", MA Thesis the University of Georgia, 2011,p.3.
11. Jane Hedley, "Introduction", in *the Frame: Women's Ekphrastic Poetry from Marianne Moore to Susan Wheeler*. Edited by Jane Hedley, Nick Halpern, and Willard Spiegelman, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009),p. 15.



12. Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux "Women Looking: The Feminist Ekphrasis of Marianne Moore and Adrienne Rich", in *the Frame: Women's Ekphrastic Poetry from Marianne Moore to Susan Wheeler*. Edited by Jane Hedley, Nick Halpern, and Willard Spiegelman, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), pp.121-122
13. Melissa Gronlund, "Short History of Ekphrasis and its Demanding Audience" ,in *Sketches of Universal History Compiled from Several Authors by Sarah Pierce*. Edited by Rike Frank, (London :Book Works, 2013),p.32.
14. Lee Upton "Violent Practices: The Poetry of Louise Bogan" *Phoebe: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Feminist Scholarship, Theory, and Aesthetics*, Vol. 2, No.2 (1990) , p.65.
15. Louise Bogan, *The Blue Estuaries: Poems 1923-1968*, (NY:Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1968), p.14. All quotations from Louise Bogan's work are from this edition, and will be indicated by BE, and only page number will appear in parentheses.
16. Deborah Pope, *A Separate Vision: Isolation in Contemporary Women's Poetry*(Baton Rouge :Louisiana State University Press,1984),P.32
17. Nausheen , p.12.
18. Ibid,p.13.
19. Pam Thompson, "Equinoctial: an Investigation of 'the holographic' for Developing a New Collection of Ekphrastic Poetry", PhD thesis, De Montfort University , 2016,p.158.
20. Carol Ann Duffy,*Standing female nude*, (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1985),p.46. All quotations from Duffy 's work are from this edition, and will be indicated by SF, and only page number will appear in parentheses.
21. Angelica Michelis and Antony Rowland(eds.)'*Choosing Tough Words': The Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy*(Manchester: Manchester University Press,2003),p.17.
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23. Yi-Hsuan Tso "The Gaze and Female Subjectivity in Rita Dove's Poetry" *Feminist Studies in English Literature* ,Vol. 19, No. 1 (2011), p.151.
24. Rita Dove, *On the Bus with Rosa Parks*,(New York: W.W. Norton, 1999),48. All quotations from this volume, and will be indicated by BRP, and only page number will appear in parentheses.



25. Yi-Hsuan Tso,p.159.
26. Ibid,p.170.
27. David Haney, "A Conversation with Natasha Trethewey" ,*Cold Mountain Review*, Vol.33, No.1 (2004),p.28.
28. Reingard M. Nischik(ed.), *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact* (NY: Camden House, 2000), p.115.
29. Anne Keefe "Wordimage: Lyric Ekphrasis and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century", PhD thesis , The State University of New Jersey, 2012,p.29.
30. Margaret Atwood, *Morning in the Burned House*,(Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company,1995).p 24 . All quotations from this edition, and will be indicated by MBH, and only page number will appear in parentheses.
31. Nischik, p.115.
32. Emily Petermann, "Re-Painting the Painting: Margaret Atwood and the Bildgedicht".*Appeared in Margaret Atwood Studies* ,Vol.1,No.2 (. 2007),p.13.

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