

Ekphrasis is lexically known as “the literary description of, or commentary on, a visual work of art” (Webster ‘Ekphrasis’). It is also defined by Frederick Alfred De Armas in his book *Ekphrasis in the Age of Cervantes* as “the vivid description of a scene or a work of art. Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the “action” of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning.” (De Armas 12-3). An ekphrastic poem is "a vivid description of a scene or, more commonly, a work of art. Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the ‘action’ of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning". "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by John Keats is one of the notable examples of ekphrasis in English literature. (poetryfoundation.org).

Ekphrasis was generally understood as "a skilled way of describing art and other aesthetic objects after it was learned as a tool of rhetoric. Using the rhetoric successfully was a means of demonstrating prowess, as a scholar and writer and eventually ekphrasis became an art that described art." (Welsh, “Ekphrasis”) However, ekphrasis is not only a means of reintroducing a work of art by describing it in a way that would make it visible and present to the reader, but it is also a means of unleashing the writers' creativity and ability to create unique pieces of visual description. As Marjorie Munsterberg states in her analytical reading of "Ekphrasis":

The goal of this literary form is to make the reader envision the thing described as if it were physically present. In many cases, however, the subject never actually existed, making the ekphrastic description a demonstration of both the creative imagination and the skill of the writer. For most readers of famous Greek and Latin texts, it didn't matter whether the subject was actual or imagined."

(Munsterberg, "Ekphrasis". *Writing About Art.Org*)

According to Munsterberg, as ekphrasis - as a genre - developed along time, it acquired a specific kind of power of expression that enabled its verbal visualization to expand even larger than the limitations of actual visualization. That is because it has the ability to insert non visual elements like sound and movement. In addition, it has the ability to make visible to the reader details that might not be evident or visible in a specific way – with respect to how an artistic composition is built. It further enables writers to make whatever they describe *seem real* in the imagination of the reader; despite the fact that it *could not even exist* in the first place (Munsterberg, "Ekphrasis").

Although it is possible to dwell upon this literary phenomena as a whole thing, some theorists prefer to see it in more detail and thus start classifying its characteristics and dividing its manifestations accordingly into categories, types and subtypes. This shall be examined in the following two sections:

The Four Famous Types of Ekphrasis

In *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art*, John Hollander identifies four major types of ekphrasis. The first one is known as 'Actual Ekphrasis' and is identifiable, according to Hollander, when a piece of literature describes or comments on "a particular identifiable work of art". (Hollander 8). The second type is called 'Notional Ekphrasis'. It refers to the act of drawing literary inspiration from works of art in a way that "urges" a painter or sculptor to create the *described* qualities; to which Hollander refers to as "priorities". The third type of Ekphrasis in Hollander's *Gazer's Spirit* is known as 'Unassessable Actual Ekphrasis'. This type refers to the ekphrastic texts that describe real and actual works of art that were in existence at one time but now are "lost or untraceable".

The fourth and final type of ekphrasis, according to De Armes, is called "the Emblem" (i.e. Ekphrastic Emblems). This type is related to the use of emblems in which pictures are *accompanied* by the text that serves to connect a motto, proverb or something similar to it (13). It also refers to the *shaped and figured* poems in which pieces of words literally become the image that it describes. In addition to those types that Hollander includes in his book, De Armas also explores in his book, *Ekphrasis in the Age of Cervantes*, other additional various types and subtypes of ekphrasis providing definitions for each.

De Armas identifies numerous types of ekphrasis; however, we are here only concerned with specific types that evidence in the literary examples that we picked for analytical examination. It is noteworthy that some of the types and the subtypes that De Armas introduces in his book seem to fall under the umbrella of the four major subtypes that Hollander made. The types that meet with the concern of the research are three types: **Actual ekphrasis, Notional ekphrasis, and Unassessable ekphrasis**. They shall be explored in the following parts.

Ekphrasis and Cultural Studies: The Overlap

Ekphrasis as a method of writing and a meaningful tool of expression overlaps with the major characteristics and properties of culture studies as a field of human knowledge. *Cultural studies* is "an innovative interdisciplinary field of research" ("Cultural Studies". UNC). In this sense, ekphrasis overlaps with it because ekphrasis, as we know from its previous definitions, implies the descriptive linguistic imitation of any object; be it a work of art, a piece of architecture, an emblem, or an icon. In this sense, ekphrasis is a highly expressive and indicative flexible tool that can express and explore interdisciplinarity.

In addition to this, amongst its semantic dimensions, culture includes the expressive and symbolic human activities as well as the distinctive qualities that characterize their ways of life, and link to their history,

present, and future too. In this context, Raymond Williams in his article “The Analysis of Culture” identifies three types of culture, two of which are related to documentation and social life –two of the aspects that are ekphrastically depicted in some instances.

According to Williams, culture has a ‘documentary’ value. In this case it is referred to as “the body of *intellectual and imaginative work* in which human thought and experience are ... recorded” (Williams, 48. Italics added). In other words, culture in this case is a “record” that combines details about the intellectual and aesthetic features of human experience at a certain place and time (Williams 48). These imaginative and intellectual aspects in this definition include the outstanding human creations in art and architecture along the time in any given human society.

Besides, the ‘social’ aspect of culture is seen, according to him, as a description of a particular way of life “which expresses certain meanings and values implicit and explicit in ... a particular culture” (Williams 48). Like the previous one, this approach to culture overlaps with historical criticism in their particular interest in relating intellectual and imaginative works to a particular tradition and/or society. Furthermore, this approach also includes the analysis of elements or works in the light of the social, intellectual and political nature of their time. Due to its interdisciplinarity, cultural studies benefit from various theoretical fields including sociology, history and communication studies. The selected instances of ekphrasis examined in this thesis relate in one way or another to art, history, and communicating meaningful messages through documentary and inspirational descriptive writing and through the use of paintings as thresholds. Thus, both of them work beyond the normal and ordinary boundaries of literary tools and literary criticism. Ekphrasis is one of the significant communication tools that fall within the concern of cultural studies because the latter is meant with developing new tools of reviewing and interpretation.

The Role of Signs

Semiotic signs exist and function on the external level of thresholds as well as within the literary texts. Therefore, the ideological framework of the literary piece is determined by several factors – amongst which are its semiotic elements. In his book *The Role of the Reader*(1979), Umberto Eco suggests that the literary work is open to multiple interpretations (35); however, its linguistic *signs control its directions* and consequently *the direction of the reading process* (i.e. *reception*) (36). It is understandable that signs refer to objects and ideas that could belong to a particular ideological, cultural, religious or aesthetic sphere within whose borders the literary text *happens*.

Accordingly, Eco considers signs *directional arrows* that start to *function* meaningfully *only* when they are inserted within a larger context (37). So, it is through these signs that the writer is able to meet the reader’s

‘horizon of expectation’, direct him along the reading process, and keep him guided through these *visual and verbal directional arrows* and at the same time highlight the ideas, norms, values that they wish to communicate; be it they real or imagined, historic or a-historic, cultural or Cultural. In other words, we may dwell upon signs as the bricks that build the bridge of communication on which the reader and the author meet and negotiate; i.e. *dialogue*.

In the works of the two authors it is noteworthy that the two of them employ verbal and nonverbal (visual) semiotic tools in those thresholds in order to attract the reader, declare the major characteristic of the literary content of their pieces, and thence pave the way for deeper communication. Byatt and Ashour do this more than once in the selected works here. This is evident in her books *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* and *The Matisse Stories* – especially the subtitles of her short stories within; like "Medusa's Ankle", and "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye". Similarly, Ashour deliberately chooses to pick up Munch's "The Scream" (1893) as a cover page for one of her books that carries the same name: *The Scream*, and assigning Rivera's "Two women and a Child" as the cover page to her *Heavier than Radwa* (2013).

Actual Ekphrasis of the "Rosy Nude"

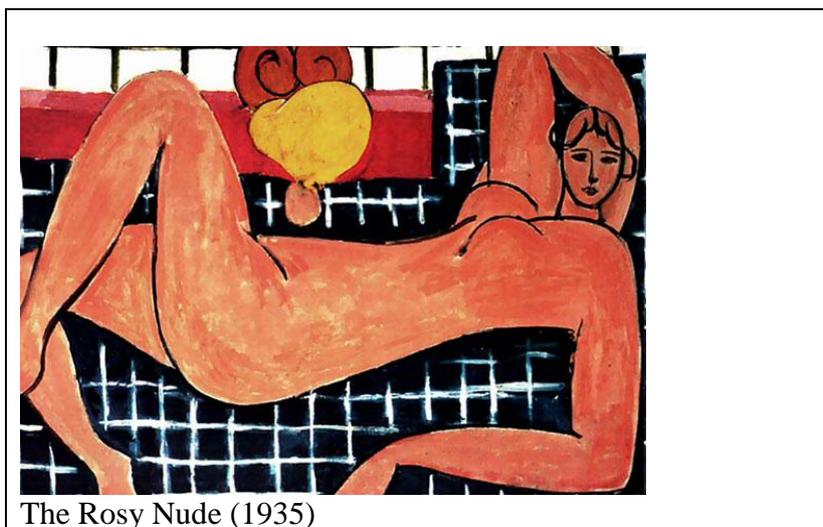
The first shared type is "**Actual/True Ekphrasis**". It is a kind of ekphrasis that is originally based on a real work of art (De Armas 22, Hollander 11). It provides detailed descriptions of its details and verbally re-visualizes it to readers. Instances of this kind of ekphrasis are numerous in the works of the two authors. They are notable in Byatt's detailed description of: "The Rosy Nude" in "Medusa's Ankle". It is also evident in Ashour's detailed description of Edvard Munch's "The Scream" in her book that carries the same title.

In the first type of ekphrasis, i.e. Actual Ekphrasis, Byatt's reception of the painting is *almost* subjective. This is in the sense that even if she provides *seemingly* unbiased detailed description of how the painting looks like, her mouthpiece pronounces Byatt's perspective of processing the thematic content of the painting through the impressionistic details and comments that her heroine speaks:

That was odd, she thought, to have that *lavish and complex creature* stretched voluptuously above the coat rack, where one might have expected the stare, silver and supercilious or jetty and frenzied, of the model girl. They were all girls now, not women. The rosy nude was *pure flat colour*, but *suggested mass*. She had *huge baunches and a monumental*

knee, lazily propped high. She had round breasts, contemplations of the circle, reflections on flesh and its fall. (*The Matisse Stories*, "Medusa's Ankles", EPUB file, 2, italics added)

In the previous part, Byatt provides a descriptive reading of the painting in a way that presents the way she managed to re-introduce it. Her description reveals her impression toward the artistic composition, and her *expectations* too – when she states: "where one might have expected the stare".



She comments as well on the nature of coloring and texture describing the color of the "Rosy Nude" as "pure and *flat*". However, Byatt uses this actual description as a cornerstone. From its indications she moves toward setting the psychological atmosphere in which the heroine's dilemma occurs. Her focus on the "immenseness" of the model's body foreshadows, and at the same time paves the way for, the psychological and moral conflict that the heroine goes through.

Actual ekphrasis of "The Scream"

Another evident instance of actual ekphrasis, and at the same time direct adaptation of an art work, both thematically and semantically, on the level of thresholds and narration manifests in her book *The Scream*. She names this book after Edvard Munch's painting "The Scream" (1893). She even adopts it visually by employing it as a cover to the book. Those two semantic signs, the verbal and the visual, primarily communicate to the reader that there is a link between the theme of the book, its emotional content and this painting. The book explores saddening and painful passages, situations and stories related to the author's illness and her emotional and ideological link to the Egyptian revolution. Those two elements too make it normal, acceptable, and even predictable to the reader

to find a long narrative piece of literary description assigned to this art work.

This actually happens. In the front pages of her literary narrative in *The Scream*, she introduces Edvard Munch's art work. In these long lines about it, she tells the reader that she selected it to be her book cover. She further expresses her hopes that the publisher would *really* assign this painting as a cover to this book; for this will give the readers, as she states to them, the time and chance to examine the art work long enough, and thus "make up for her *imperfect* description of it" (*The Scream*, 13. Researcher's translation.). She even asks the readers to find its versions on the internet, and spend a long time examining them.

She refers to its four manifestations: the three colored ones, and the back-and-white lithographic one; which she prefers, as she states (*The Scream*, 13). Afterwards, she starts describing it. She analyzes its artistic composition as follows:

The main figure in this painting is a person whose gender is not clearly identifiable. This person is standing on a bridge that overlooks the loughs of the city. He is inhibited by enormous terror. His jaw is pulled down as a reaction to the horrifying terror he is witnessing or hearing. That open mouth suggests he is either reacting to a terrifying sound that has just struck him, or is himself screaming out of terror. His big round eyes are widely open in horror. His hands are bracketing the face; covering the ears to protect them from the terrifying sound – whose source is not identifiable. The body is void of details. It is just a bulk, or a dark spot colored in black, slightly leaning toward the right... There is no sun in the sky to reveal or indicate a sunrise, or a sunset. It is rather full of interwoven dark wavy lines in the drawing, and intense fiery red ones in the painted version. They are spreading over the water of the loughs, which in turn has a reddish blue tone that look like violent whirlpools emerging from an underworld.

(*The Scream*, 13 – 14. Researcher's translation.)

As the ekphrastic piece above reveals, it is an Actual detailed Ekphrasis. It is clear from these details that she focuses on all the components of the art work: the human figure (his face, gestures, and even position in the composition), the setting, and the type of lines, their intensity and their colors too. She moves further to assigning connotations to the colors she notices and the types of colors and details she examines. She links the total atmosphere of confusion and horror to the blue vagueness and horrors of an underworld that is totally violent and horrifying.

In addition to this description, she projects a number of views about the painting and its connotations. She mentions, for example, that amongst the interpretations given about the painting are: the suggestion that it was set somewhere close to a slaughterhouse and that the horrifying sound is that of the slaughtered animals; and that the place where that figure stands is close to a mental health facility where Munch's brother received treatment, and the screams were those of the patients burdened by their mental and psychological troubles and pains.

In the end of this exploration of the art work, Ashour adds her own comment that summarizes her view of the painting, and implicitly declaring the reason why she chose it as a cover for this book with all its painful stories:

"Regardless of whatever has been said or written about it, this painting exceeds any personal interpretations; for it is able to indicatively represent the feelings a person can go through when he/she suddenly realizes how much terrifying, horrifying, dreary, and brutal existence is. That is when one trembles with panic and overwhelmed with fear not knowing whether to release an inner scream, or respond to an already existing one striking him/her."

(*The Scream*, 14. Researcher's translation).

Notional ekphrasis of Haghia Sophia

In *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, the reader is taken through a historic tour with the heroine. Amongst the historic landmarks explored in this story "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye", there is a detailed description of Haghia Sophia; that comprehensively rich historic spot in Turkey. In her description of this place, Byatt writes:

Haghia Sophia is a *confusing place*, echoing and *empty*, hugely domed and *architecturally uncertain*, despite its vast and imposing space; it has been church and mosque and modern museum; it has minarets and patches, *ghosts*, of *ruined* gold mosaics of Byzantine emperors and the Christian mother and child. The emperor Justinian built it from eclectic materials, collecting pillars and ornaments from temples in Greece and Egypt, including pillars from temple of the Goddess of Ephesus. It could feel – Gillian had expected it to feel – like a meeting-place of cultures, of east and west, the Christian Church and Islam, but it did not. It felt like *an empty exhausted barn, exhausted by battle and pillage and religious rage*.

("The Djinn in the Nightengale's Eye", *The Djinn in the Nightengale's Eye*, EPUB, 28. Italics added.)

This descriptive piece reveals an Actual Ekphrasis of the place that includes the insertion of historic pieces of information, and personal impressions too.

The Actual Ekphrasis manifests in the description of the particular details of mosaic, materials and pillars. It reflects upon the nature of the architectural nature of the place. This too is enhanced by the historic details and pieces of information that Byatt adds to her description.

Beside all of this, this actual ekphrasis is impressionistic too. That is because, in this piece of description Byatt inserts impressionistic comments that communicate to the reader Gillian's opinion; an opinion that may be taken as hers too. This is explicit in the choice of some indicative words like "confusing", "empty", "an empty exhausted barn", "exhausted by battle...etc.". It is noteworthy that she repeats "empty" and "exhausted" twice. This in itself is a linguistic act that is meant to highlight and at the same time stress particular thoughts, impressions, and personal beliefs about this historic piece of architecture.

This is a part of Byatt's subjective reception, perception and ekphrastic reintroduction of the museum. This subjectivity is directly linked to the context of her threshold; a spiritual/supernatural context. Within this spiritual/supernatural context, the author subjectively reintroduces this landmark – more in a conceptual non-materialistic way than being an accurate detail-oriented description of the place. Within a broader context, this highlights Byatt's tendency to reproduce what is available to her in an aesthetic and ideological way that is most definite to her nature of her literary texts.

Unassessable ekphrasis of Orabi's House

In *Heavier than Radwa*, the writer describes the exact location where the house of the famous Egyptian historic figure Ahmed Orabi used to be. It is a detailed *actual* description that includes the current names of streets and their directions asking the reader to memorize them after her (265). Afterwards, she notes that it was later pulled down, and in its exact place an English hospital was built. She cites an English magazine that published a photo of the hospital and details about its location in 1882.

In her presentation and reintroduction of that hospital, she both states her own personal impression about the whole incident directly, and also about the photos associated with the new building. Ashour highlights the description assigned to the English occupation to Egypt as "the 1882 incidents" by the "Illustrated London News" magazine. She criticizes the description stating: "This is how they refer to the English occupation" (266, Researcher's translation). Then she refers to the illustrations published with the article, and further mentions that the article was published 3 months after Orabi's defeat in Al-Tall Al-Kabir battle.

According to Ashour, the illustrations show a noble white-man face that serves and takes care of third-world patients. In other words, they introduce the reader to "the white man's burden and his noble missions of

civilizing the colonized countries" (267). In this part, Ashour's personal as well as national viewpoints and impressions are clearly and directly stated. Thus bringing such example to focus highlights her powerful and ongoing tendency to write about history, and criticize the way it is being reproduced and reintroduced by the colonizer. This descriptive instance draws the reader's attention to significant historic details.

As the study reveals, ekphrasis is a substantial tool of expression that shows expandability and flexibility. It is open for multiple levels of descriptive presentation. This in turn makes it a fertile tool that allows multiple acts of expression, re-presentation and reintroduction; of the self, the historic, the present, and the future. It thus becomes a tool of documentation, edification, self-statement, dialogistic co-creation and inspiration. It is highly fertile too in the sense that it can inspire parallel future possibilities of artistic co-creation, and recreation. That also makes it justifiable and reasonable why Cultural Studies is the critical field that can offer the best tools for the examination and evaluation of the full potentials that ekphrastic creative writing can actually offer.

المخلص:
المحاكاة الأدبية للفن في مختارات من أعمال
أنتونيا سوزان بايات ورضوى عاشور
دراسة ثقافية مقارنة
أيه مؤنس

تهدف هذه الدراسة الثقافية البينية المقارنة إلى تتبع ظاهرة المحاكاة الأدبية للفن في مختارات من أعمال الروائية الانجليزية أنتونيا سوزان بايات والروائية المصرية رضوى عاشور، ولما كان تعريف ظاهرة المحاكاة الأدبية للفن ('Ekphrasis') يشير إلى أنها "تقنية الوصف الحي والدقيق لتفاصيل مشهد أو عمل فني ما يعتمد الكاتب على وصفها لإبراز قيم فنية وثقافية معينة ترتبط ارتباطاً وثيقاً بما يصف" (دي أرميس 12-3). تتضمن الدراسة تفصي حالات المحاكاة الأدبية للظواهر الفنية المختلفة من أعمال فنية شهيرة، وأبنية معمارية تاريخية معروفة، وأعمال فنية مندرجة وأماكن تاريخية لم تعد موجودة.

تعنى الدراسة بتسليط الضوء على القيم الثقافية والتاريخية المختلفة التي ترسخها هذه الظاهرة في أعمال كلتا الكاتبتين وأهداف كل منهما وذلك من خلال الإفادة من نظريات الدراسات الثقافية المقارنة التي تسمح انفتاحها النظري باستكشاف أدوات التعبير ومستويات المحاكاة المختلفة التي تتخلل ظاهرة المحاكاة الأدبية للفن.

تأتي أهمية هذا البحث من دراسته لظاهرة أدبية تؤدي أكثر من دور في وقت واحد؛ فالمحاكاة الأدبية للفن تفي بغرض إمتاع القارئ وإثراء خياله إضافة إلى إثرائها الفني للنص الأدبي، وهي إلى جانب هذا كله قادرة بذاتها على التوثيق لحضور بعض الأعمال الفنية في أماكن بعينها، وقادرة أيضاً على استحضار ملامح فنية مطموسة أو غائبة أو مُنحاة جانباً بفعل الزمن أو الظروف الثقافية أو السياسية، وهو ما يؤكد على أحد أدوار الأدب بصفته سجلاً إنسانياً يحفظ الآثار التاريخية والفنية المهمة ويمررها للأجيال المتعاقبة.

تتعدد جوانب ظاهرة المحاكاة الأدبية للفن كما تتباين في أنواعها ومستوياتها، وفي هذا الإطار يهدف البحث إلى دراسة طرق وأساليب محاكاة النصوص الأدبية للفن بمجالاته المختلفة، وتسليط الضوء على الجوانب المتعددة لظاهرة المحاكاة الأدبية فضلاً عن أنواعها ومستوياتها المختلفة، مع الاهتمام بدراسة القيمة الإنسانية والثقافية لهذه النصوص والكشف عن القيمة التاريخية التي تمثلها هذه الظاهرة وعن دورها في تحويل النص الأدبي لوثيقة تاريخية تحفظ مفردات إنسانية وتاريخية مهمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المحاكاة الأدبية، الدراسات الثقافية المقارنة، رضوى عاشور، أنتونيا سوزان بايات.

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