



Ain Shams University
Faculty of Al-Asun
Department of English Language

PhD Thesis

‘Ekphrasis’ in Selected Works by A. S. Byatt and Radwa Ashour: A Comparative Cultural Approach

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Summary

The study examines the manifestation of ekphrastic literary writing in the selected works of A.S. Byatt and Radwa Ashour. The selected works that make the basic material of the study are seven of Ashour's books, and nine of Byatt's short fiction. They are Byatt's three stories¹: "Medusa's Ankles", "Art Work", and "The Chinese Lobster" from *The Matisse Stories* (1993); the short story "The Glass Coffin" and the novella "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" from *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye* (1994); and "Christ in the House of Martha and Mary", "A Lamia in the Cévennes", "Crocodile Tears" from *Elementals: Stories of Fire and Ice* (1998) and "A Stone Woman" in *Little Black Book of Stories* (2003). The selections from Ashour's works include: *The Journey* (1983), *Specters* (1999) *Khadija and Sawsan* (1989)², *The Reports of Mrs R.* (2001), *A Piece of Europe* (2003), *Heavier than Radwa* (2013), and *The Scream* (2015). The study is a comparative cultural study that benefits from theories of culture, signs, semantics, semiotics, paratextuality, postcoloniality and others. It tackles the properties of rhetorical ekphrastic literary representation on three levels; artistic adaptation, historical reintroduction, and adaptation of personae. The thesis is thus made up of four chapters. The first one lays the theoretical foundation of the thesis. It is entitled "Ekphrastic Adaptation in Literary Theory". The second chapter that tackles ekphrastic adaptation from art is entitled "Rhetorical Ekphrastic Adaptation of Art". Chapter three is dedicated to the examination of the ekphrastic representation of history; it is entitled "Rhetorical Ekphrasis in the Reintroduction of History". The last chapter examines the literary representation of characters in the selected works and is entitled "The Rhetorical Ekphrastic Adaptation of Personae". Conclusion follows.

Abstract

Aya Mo'nes Mohmed Othman Helmi. 'Ekphrasis' in Selected Works by A. S. Byatt and Radwa Ashour: A Comparative Cultural Approach. PhD Thesis, Ain Shams University, Faculty of Al-Asun (Modern Languages), Department of English Language, 2018.

The thesis is an interdisciplinary comparative cultural study that presents a detailed analytical exploration of the literary ekphrastic representation of art, history and personae in the selected works of A.S. Byatt and Radwa Ashour. It examines the various layers and different types of rhetorical representation that manifest in the works of Byatt and Ashour.

Key Words: Comparative Cultural Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies, Ekphrasis, Rhetorical Adaptation, Signs and Semantics, Paratextuality, Intertextuality, A.S. Byatt, Radwa Ashour

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INTERODUCTON

INTRODUCTION

Ekphrastic literary writing is a form of verbal response to artifacts existing in specific cultural environments. It is the outcome of the examination of a work of art with the intention to write about it. This intention that directs the process of literary ekphrasis manifests in the thematic and ideological contents of the literary work. As a flexible tool of literary expression, ekphrasis allows a variety of representation of different topics, genres, and artifacts. Within the context of literary narration, it functions as an element of mental stimulation that targets the readers' imagination. Through its high descriptive faculties it can influence the readers' mind's eye and bring the described object to life.

Historically, ekphrasis used to be associated with the descriptive writings about art only; however literary writing in modern times proves otherwise. In the selected examples that the thesis explores, the range of ekphrastic literary writing extends to include architecture, photography, songs, videos, and persons. In addition to this, it is also no longer genre-specific as it used to be associated with poetry. It is rhetorically introduced on various levels of narration, and in different genres too. It is seen in novels, short stories, and literary reports as well. This renders ekphrastic literary writing rich and unbound.

The diverse definitions of ekphrasis reveal the development of the concept and its properties. Lexically ekphrasis is known as the act of "out speaking"; of creating a literary description of, or a commentary on, a visual work of art (Webster 'Ekphrasis'). The definition and meaning suggest the creation of verbal descriptions based on a visual work of art. This marks the early stage of restricting ekphrasis to art in its traditional form; having the ability to surpass the obvious meaning, and giving extra information and extra unseen details. The definition that Alfred de Armas introduces in his book *Ekphrasis in the Age of Cervantes* changes this