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Écriture Fèminie in Carol Ann Duffy's Selected Poems

A B S T R U C T

Écriture féminine, or "feminine writing," refers to a distinctively feminine writing style characterised by textual disturbances such as gaps, silences, puns, new images and so on. Écriture feminine depicts a specific feminine style that is different from the typical male one. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the concept of écriture féminine in a collection of poems by Carol Ann Duffy, the first woman poet laureate of the United Kingdom. The poet brilliantly covers a wide range of stereotypical feminine qualities and identities. Duffy's poetry challenges patriarchal oppression of women and advocates for equal representation in all aspects of society.

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الكتابة النسوية في قصائد مختارة للشاعرة كارول آن دافي

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الخلاصة:

تشير "الكتابة النسوية" أو "Écriture féminine" إلى أسلوب كتابة أنثوي مميز يتميز باضطرابات نصية مثل الفجوات والصمت والتورية والصور الجديدة وما إلى ذلك. تصور الكتابة النسوية أسلوباً أنثوياً محدداً يختلف عن النمط الذكري. الغرض من هذا البحث هو تسليط الضوء على مفهوم الكتابة النسوية في مجموعة قصائد لكارول آن دافي ، أول شاعرة تحصل على لقب شاعرة البلاط بالمملكة المتحدة. تغطي الشاعرة ببراعة مجموعة واسعة من الصفات والهويات الأنثوية النمطية. يتحدى شعر دافي الاضطهاد الأبوي للمرأة ويدعو إلى التمثيل المتساوي في جميع جوانب المجتمع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتابة النسوية ، كارول آن دافي ، الأبوية ، "أنثى عارية" ، "قبة حمراء صغيرة" ، "يورديس".

The term "*écriture féminine*," is first proposed by Hélène Cixous, a French literary theorist and feminist, in the essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" which she wrote in 1975. Cixous wants to create a new genre of literary writing that is distinct from the conventionally masculine styles of writing and that investigates the connection between the cultural and psychological imprinting of the female body and the female-specific differences in language and text. *Écriture féminine* refers to a manner of talking about women's writing that affirms the significance of the feminine and identifies feminist criticism's theoretical purpose as the examination of difference (Showalter, 1981, pp.185,186). According to Abigail Bray (2004,pp.70-71), *écriture féminine* is an "avant-garde textual practice which challenges and moves beyond the constraints of phallogocentric thought [.....] a path towards thought through the body."

Écriture féminine, or feminine language, is a practise associated with French feminism and a discourse based on subjectivity, sexuality, and language. Its concepts are heavily influenced by deconstruction and post-Freudian psychoanalysis. According to these theories, all systems of representation, particularly language, always position femininity outside of symbolisation, as if it is either above or defying representation under patriarchal laws (Lebihan, 2004). *Écriture féminine* is a feminist response to the binary thinking that underpins Western culture. People, particularly women, who live in a society that adheres to this duality find themselves unable to connect with their bodies as a result of the alienation of the body that occurs under a capitalist system (Rodgers 2017,p.29).

French feminist critics Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva are concerned with how the masculine-dominated language system seeks to marginalise or erase women's voices. According to these critics, women can rebel through *écriture féminine*, which is a type of language based only on female subjectivity, physical impulses, and physiology. The French feminists reject the concept of an ultimate meaning as well as the concept of an author-god and his message, and hence any fixed meaning. According to French feminism, the pleasures (jouissance) of living in and writing out of a female body through the mother's body and voice are associated with the *écriture féminine* (Hoeveler, 2003).

Dani Cavallaro elaborate on the theory of *écriture féminine* in *French Feminist Theory* (2008), stating that Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva encourage women to experiment with writing styles that harmonise with their experience of difference. Cixous,

Irigaray, and Kristeva's metaphors are attempts to devise techniques for changing women's perceptions of writing as stereotypically connected with inferiority (Cavallaro, 2008).

In "The Laugh of the Medusa" Hélène Cixous addresses women, "...Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (Cixous 1976, p.880). Cixous refutes Freud's reading of the Medusa myth as one of many "theories anchored in the dogma of castration" and the notion of woman as "the dark continent" (Cixous, 1976,p.885). Cixous encourages women to reclaim the Medusa and she proclaims that: "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly, She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Cixous, 1976,p. 885). Cixous challenges women to write themselves out of the world males have imposed on them. Women are encouraged to use body language as a means of expressing themselves (Tong and Botts ,2017).

In recent years, much theorising has centred on the body, challenging classical dualism's subordination of the body to the intellect. Rather, the body is seen as the essential object through which power relations are created and challenged. Such arguments are taken up by feminist theorists, who argue that examining the body is especially important for women because they are traditionally linked with it. Men celebrate the apparently "superior" category of mind, whereas women's bodies are distinguished by biological processes such as menstruation and pregnancy (Gamble,2006, p.95). The subject of *écriture féminine* presents a chance for transformation. Women are encouraged to express themselves in writing and to break the boundaries of masculine norms. Subjectivity is reconfigured in unexpected ways through writing that follows the rhythms of the body and infuses life into the text (Verma,1997).

Great male writers can never properly express what it is like to be a woman, so their character portrayals are almost certainly influenced by social codes of the time as well as their own masculine perspective on women. As a result, male and female literature have quite distinct attitudes and viewpoints; male poetry speaks an entirely different language than feminine poetry. Women's writing helps create a language for talking about women's experiences and makes people more aware of the issues raised by women's work. Carol Ann Duffy, the first woman poet Laureate of United Kingdom, brilliantly depicts a range of stereotyped female characteristics and identities.

Carol Ann Duffy is a poet who has made a significant contribution to the literature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. For more than three decades, she continues to be considered as one of her generation's brilliant, relevant, and varied poets. She was born on December 23, 1955, in Lennoxton, Glasgow, Scotland, and her family relocated to Stafford, England, when she was six years old. She received her Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the University of Liverpool in 1977. Duffy relocated to Manchester in 1996, where she currently resides. At Manchester Metropolitan University, she was named as a lecturer and later as a professor of contemporary poetry. At the university, she also works as the Creative Director of the Writing School. In 2009, Carol Ann Duffy was appointed the UK's Poet Laureate. She is the first woman and the first person who is openly bisexual to be given the honour in the 400-year history of the award. The laureateship encouraged her to work even harder to elevate the status of poetry in contemporary culture (Dowson ,2016,pp.1,2,6,7).

Duffy takes advantage of the dramatic monologue's ability to speak directly to the reader and so elicit sympathy in unexpected places. She is fascinated by the role of language in enslaving or emancipating people. There are also delicate love poems strewn throughout her volumes, which adapt the old structure to a genuinely contemporary setting (Persoon and Watson, 2009 ,pp.137-138) .

Duffy's poetic had to be carefully created (whether consciously or unconsciously) in order to overcome a wide range of preconceptions about women's poetry and women's roles that were popular in the mid-1980s when she first began publishing. Duffy does not ignore the relevance of women's experience, the challenges of women's life, and the difficulties that patriarchy brings to them as she moves beyond a straightforwardly feminist poetry. She has also opened up many interesting and vital doors by refusing to conform to any stereotypical notion of femininity, feminism, or women's poetry. She has opened up a wide range of new and vital possibilities for poetry and its audience, examining problems of gender, identity, sexuality, alienation, desire, and grief in a way that highlights the limitations of communication, objectivity, and truth(Rees-Jones ,2010,p.3).

Duffy's poems are taught in schools and appeal to people who would not normally read poetry. Her poetry is at once accessible and beautifully unique and subtle. She writes about life in all of its pain – existence. Duffy's experience stems from a time when women gained new

status and established their rights via constructive action, and she believes that she can speak for people who are typically quiet. She writes a significant portion of her poetry in the language and voice of those who are marginalised in society—immigrants, women, Scots, gays, the impoverished, and the insane—and she exploits this to create strong, evocative poems (Allen,1999, p.13). Duffy frequently places her characters in modern settings and has them converse with one another. Her poetry has a more plain tone because she works in free verse and in a less elevated language. This adds to the impression that her speakers are real people telling real events (Brown, 2020, pp.280-281).

The majority of Duffy's poems focus on how masculinity has controlled history, fiction, and myth by ignoring femininity, or how femininity has been created and defined by masculine voices. According to her, the relationship between genders and sexes is not characterized by a hierarchical power structure, giving the idea that males are always oppressors and women are their helpless victims. In her poetry, patriarchy, power, and the dominance of one partner over the other are often discussed. While working on these issues, Duffy talks about a lot of the ways that society treats women that make them want to change the institutions that control their lives (Michelis and Rowland,2003,p.25).

Standing Female Nude is Duffy's first full-length collection. It was published in 1985 by Anvil. This book illustrates her transition from the personal and Romantic lyric to a dramatic one. The title poem, *Standing Female Nude*, presents a monologue by an artist's model, and outlines the themes of the book as a whole: power, male-female interactions, and the challenge of mediating experience and portraying the world in language and via art(Rees-Jones,2010,p.14).

In this poem, *Standing Female Nude* (Duffy,2009), Duffy explores the role of the model in an artist's studio where she is seen only as a means to an end by the painter. The silent image of the model is objective and looked at while the eloquent man/artist is the subject and the gazer. So Duffy is challenging binary oppositions by giving her voice not to the man but rather to his female model. Duffy uses a marginalized woman's internal monologue to deconstruct the opposition between the artist and its model. The nude model stands for six hours, obliged by the painter not to move or speak. Despite the fact that she will be depicted as a still object on the

painter's canvas, she reminds the reader that she is not an object, but rather has her own life (Uzundemir, 2013, p. 166).

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. (ll. 1-4)

Brown (2020, p. 274) clarifies that the model then gives a fragmentary description of herself, giving the impression that the artist will simply reduce her to a jumble of body parts: "Belly nipple arse in the window light" (l. 2). The tone in which the word 'arse' is used implies that she is belittling the art world, and her point of view on the whole affair becomes clear by the end of the first stanza. She concludes, "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" (ll. 5–7). The model is subjected to another sort of ruthless look that is of the bourgeoisie. The exhibit in the "great museum" will be scrutinized and judged according to her representation, her two-dimensional image. Viewers can label her a "river-whore," rejecting her as a person, while praising male artists' depictions of her as "great art" (Al-Wattar, 2019, p. 688). So as a person she will be degraded and shunned, but as a painting, she will be praised and valued. The artist will immortalize her image, concealing her true identity as a struggling streetwalker.

When Georges said "You're getting thin, / Madame, this is not good," (ll. 9–10) he shames the model for not embodying his sense of the ideal, temporarily reversing the order of transference from matter to form. The model claims that her motivation for posing stems from a concern about her upcoming meal "I with the next meal" (l. 9). She is skinny because she is unable to eat. Despite the fact that she grounds Georges' assessment in a practical reason before he makes it, she appears to be disturbed by his remark. "My breasts hang / slightly low, she says" (ll. 10–11), internalizing and even extending his criticism of her flaws. The standard of beauty that the nude exemplifies may be unattainable by definition, but she becomes self-conscious about falling short of it as she considers Georges's scrutinizing gaze. Duffy emphasizes the model's objectification by keeping her nameless throughout the poem while pointing out a gap between theory and practice. In theory, the artist shapes raw material into form, but Duffy

demonstrates how men can use their own aesthetics to degrade and dominate actual female bodies (Brown,2020,p.275).

The nude model recognizes that she stands to gain nothing from this other than money, so she rejects the artist's invitation to have sexual relations with him:

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.
Both poor, we make our living how we can.(ll.18-21)

Dowson (2016, p.131) claims that the model both confirms and mocks Freud's concept of the Oedipus complex by claiming the artist relates her to his mother and dips his brush into the paint to "possess" her. The painter's brush, like the writer's pen, represents the masculine organ, which has power over the woman. She empowers him by addressing him as "little man" and portraying him as a socially disadvantaged counterpart to her because they both "make our living how we can." She also restricts his abilities to phallogocentric scopophilia: "There are times he does not concentrate/ and stiffens for my warmth"(ll.16-17)

Rees-Jones (2010,p.16) concludes that the poem's final line, "It does not look like me," spoken by the model as she walks away, can be interpreted as both redemptive and pitiful. This line foreshadows many of Duffy's later poems, in which her characters look in mirrors but do not recognize themselves. The theme of self-recognition and representation failure, as alluded to in the final lines of "Sanding Female Nude," runs unresolved throughout the book, whether through painting, film, photography, or language representation.

According to Michael Woods (2003,pp.183-184), "Standing Female Nude's" persona acts as a translator or interpreter of experiences. The model dismisses "Georges," the artist who "possesses" her "on canvas," calling him a "little man". He is portrayed as self centered and a woman objectifier. Duffy subverts the man's appropriation of the model as an object by giving her voice and making her the subject. The model's dismissive assessment of the man's painting, "It doesn't look like me,"(l.28) as well as the contemptuous "They call it art,"(l.7) can be read as manifesto statements indicating the relationship between art, society, and sexual politics. While seeking equality in art and society, Duffy challenges patriarchal representations of female

models and women in general throughout art history. Her poem defies patriarchal oppression of women and attempts to achieve equal voice in all aspects of society.

Giving voice to the voiceless is one of Duffy's themes, which are depicted artistically in the collection *The World's Wife*. The collection's first poem, "Little Red Cap," can be described as a feminist retelling of "Little Red Riding Hood." The Brothers Grimm's original story "The Little Red Cap" is a representation of male dominion over women, according to Duffy, and its symbolism indicates sexual oppression toward its protagonist. However, Duffy's poem completely changes the original story to focus on issues of female empowerment as opposed to female subjugation. Duffy can present her female characters as significant in this poem, defying male authority in patriarchal society (Tisha and Rahman,2021,p.31).

Women were stereotypically described as always being weak, ignorant, and incapable in the original version. To begin with, the "Little Red Cap" was portrayed as a child. A foolish young child who made the mistake of talking to the wolf and was devoured as a result. Second, her grandmother was portrayed as a sickly, elderly woman incapable of caring for herself. Finally, at the conclusion of the story, a hunter appeared, bravely rescuing them from the wolf, and deftly laying a trap for the wolf. Duffy's version, on the other hand, kept the original story lines but changed a lot of the messages. Duffy appropriates this story, which psychologically convinces women of their insignificance and keeps them enslaved. She proposes a different scenario by reversing the fates of the wolf and the Red Cap. In the last line of the first stanza, "It was there that I first clapped eyes on the wolf," Duffy makes the little red cap the first person. As the first person, little red cap will narrate what she has witnessed. Meanwhile, the wolf is described as a "wolf-poet" who Li was enticed by the girl's youth and charm and purchased a drink for her (Zeng and Li,2018,p.375).

Duffy deftly hides her own voice as she expresses her feelings and experiences through Eurydice's monologue in the poem "Eurydice" (Duffy, 1999,p.58). In this poem Duffy celebrates the story of Orpheus, the great musician whose music entices even the lifeless stone, "even the mute, sullen stones at his feet/ wept wee, silver tears" (ll.43-44), and his wife Eurydice. Eurydice, according to legend, dies from a snake bite and is resurrected in Hades, the Underworld. Orpheus persuades the Gods to return Eurydice to him on the condition that he not look back and walk in front of Eurydice on their return to Earth. Unfortunately, Orpheus

succumbed to his temptation and turned back to face his wife, forever losing her. The poet remoulds the traditional tale of Orpheus in Duffy's poem "Eurydice," by having Eurydice speak about her plight to follow her husband back to earth. Eurydice claims that she was happy in Hades and that she tried everything she could to get her husband to turn around and look at her by saying, "My voice shook when I spoke -/ Orpheus, your poem's a masterpiece./ I'd love to hear it again..." (ll.102-104) and thus bid her husband farewell for all time. Duffy also subverts the myth's idea of Eurydice as a passive woman content to be the object of a man's whims and desires.

The Orphic tradition is challenged in "Eurydice," which also plays on the feminist stereotype of a talented female poet in the shadow of a great bard. "Girls, I was dead and down,"(l.1) the speaker says in the first lines of this overtly performative monologue. She tells the story of Orpheus' journey to Hades and his pact with the gods to grant Eurydice a return to the living world, as well as the pact's subsequent violation. In line with many of the other "wife" poems, Duffy's subversion of the myth is not simply a change in the sequence of events as they appear in *Metamorphoses*, but a reversal of intention (Holownia,2013,p.71). Duffy's Eurydice refuses to be Orpheus' muse, preferring to be dead: "I'd rather speak for myself / than be Dearest, Beloved, Dark Lady, White Goddess, etc., etc." (ll.48-49). Eurydice claims that her version of the story is the true one: she would rather be a dead subject in Hades' Underworld than a living object. Her death provided a safe haven from a stalker. Eurydice was imprisoned by Orpheus within his "images, metaphors, similes, octaves and sextets, quatrains and couplets, elegies, limericks, villanelles, / histories, myths..." (ll.63-66) and he even began his journey to Hades in order to bring her back to life, she was just a "prize" to him (284). As a result, she admits, "I did everything in my power / to make him look back" (ll.80-81). Eurydice gets her freedom from Orpheus: death. Even if she was already dead, she then had the chance to go back to the world of the living, yet she refuses such option in order to prove that she is not a passive object (Nori,2021,p.76).

In a circular fashion, the poem's final lines bring the poem to a close. "The dead are so talented/the The living walk by the edge of a vast lake/ near the wise, drowned silence of the dead"(ll.110-112). Silent dead are wise and talented. Orpheus' language has no power in Eurydice's world. She can be herself, happy to be dead and free. Being dead represents freedom. Death represents a new state of being without men, in a world free of their demands; death is the

place where women can develop themselves as they want, without being anyone's wife or poet's muse. In this poem, Duffy addresses the nature of language as well as the identity of the female writer. Eurydice felt trapped in her poet husband's masculine language—"trapped in his images, metaphors, similes, /... histories, myths," (ll.64-67) but the underworld is "a place where language stopped, /... where words had to come to an end" (ll.4,6). It is also necessary for Eurydice to break free from being theorised, confined, and encoded by a masculine language that is incapable of accounting for feminine experiences and viewpoints in order to be liberated from her tyrannical husband's psychological confinement (Pypec´,2013,p.101).

This approach to language reflects the work of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, who regard language as a masculine construct incapable of accommodating female experience as a result of detrimental hierarchical ties within western society in the areas of philosophy, mythology, and psychoanalysis. Cixous advocates for a female-liberating writing practice free of the phallogocentric tradition in her 1975 essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa". To express herself in language, Eurydice must find "small gaps" in masculine language, as Cixous says: "Writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures"(Cixous,1976,p.879).

Conclusion

French feminism has a significant influence on altering the traditional gender roles that prevailed in patriarchal countries. It is now an essential element of feminist writing to argue that the female body may be a source of inspiration for the creation of new language. As a consequence of this, they are interested in a feminine writing style, which Cixous refers to as "*écriture féminine*." The dominance of patriarchal ideology has reduced female biology to a select few characteristics. In Freud and Lacan's "phallogocentric" language, the phallus is used as a metaphor for masculinity. In "*écriture féminine*," on the other hand, the female body is used as a source of meaning. The selected poems of Duffy are presented from the perspective of a female speaker in order to attack the stereotypical portrayal of women and give voice to the silenced majority.

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