

Contextualization of Anne Carson's Selected Poems

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* faw22h1003@uoanbar.edu.iq**KEYWORDS:** Anne Carson's poems, Contextualization, Semantic complexity.<https://doi.org/10.51345/v36i4.1184.g609>**ABSTRACT:**

Poetry, as a literary genre, is difficult to understand due to its distinctive features, including linguistic economy, sound devices, elliptical syntax, symbolism, metaphors, and intertextuality, which make its language unique. In most cases, understanding poetry relies on cultural and biographical contexts, which can make it challenging to comprehend without familiarity with these elements. In light of this, the current study is intended to contextualize selected poems by Anne Carson. It aims to demonstrate how contextualization enhances the understanding of the semantic complexity embedded in the complex language of Carson's poetry by placing her work within various contexts. The study is a qualitative research design utilizing documentation as an instrument for data collection. To achieve the objective of the study, two poems, "Nighthawks" and "Automat," have been selected from Carson (2000) collection *Men in the off Hours* using a purposeful sampling method. The study adopts Lawal's (2012) Aspect of Pragmatic Theory as a model for the analysis and it covers the types of contexts identified in this model including linguistic, situational, psychological, social, sociological, and cosmological contexts. The data obtained was analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method. The study reveals that Carson's Hopper-inspired poems encapsulate the American sociocultural and historical context of the early and mid-20th century. Furthermore, Carson's intentional manipulation of syntax, grammar, and punctuation often reflects uncertainty and disconnection, enhancing the themes of isolation, loss, alienation, and exploitation during war and industrialization. Finally, the cosmological context reveals that the themes of the poems go beyond personal experiences to tackle more significant questions about the nature of time, life, and the universe.

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Introduction:

Most linguists indicate the significant influence of context on the comprehension of any text. When speakers describe their thoughts in a complicated language, listeners should depend on the context, as it is key to understanding implicit meanings. Malinowski (1923) argues that the significance of any individual word is mainly dependent upon its context. He recognized the necessity of providing information about what was happening and the cultural background, as it is crucial for interpreting meaning. Correspondingly, Hymes (1962) contends that context can limit the potential interpretations of a text, selecting the most suitable understanding based on the interlocutors' backgrounds and prior experiences. Furthermore, Fillmore (1977) asserts that meanings can fluctuate across different contexts, which makes them not fixed, and that meanings are contingent upon context.

The language of poetry is difficult to understand due to its unique characteristics such as economy of vocabulary, sound devices, elliptical syntax, symbolism, metaphors and intertextuality which make its linguistic items dense in meaning (Brooks, 1947). In most cases, understanding poetry relies on cultural and biographical contexts which make it difficult to grasp the real meaning without being familiar with those elements (Frye, 1957). The language of poetry or what is called poetic language means the use of unusual, elevated language to convey a dense and strong image to readers. Poetic language often deviates from the rules and conventions of language in an attempt to create a particular effect, often appealing to a reader's senses or emotions (study.com, n.d.).

Understanding contemporary poetry requires context, particularly given its experimental and deviant nature. Contemporary poetry, in particular, is characterized by a deliberate departure from traditional literary conventions, mirroring the revolutionary spirit of its time (Kumar, 2025). Many poets of today depart from conventional forms, using unorthodox structures, disjointed narratives, and allusions to subvert cultural, political, and societal conventions. As a representative of them, the Canadian poet, author, and translator Anne Carson is well-known for her work that defies literary conventions (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025). Carson's deliberate manipulation of language, including her use of punctuation, mirrors the chaotic and fragmented nature of modern life (Miles, 2013). This distinctive style makes her poetry difficult to understand because of its deviant nature and unique blend of different genres which requires context to understand the linguistic ambiguity embedded in her poems.

One of Carson's most notable works is "Men in the off Hours" (2000), which is a collection of poetry, prose and essays and it is the main data source of the current study. Carson skillfully employs her distinctive blend of contrasts in this book. In this book, she juxtaposes classical and modern elements, movie and print besides narrative and verse in poetry and prose. Carson reintroduces figures like Oedipus,

Emily Dickinson and Audubon (Carson, 2000). A notable section within this book is "Hopper: Confessions," a series of poems inspired by the work of the American realist artist Edward Hopper. The current study explores two of these poems "Nighthawks" and "Automat". Each poem draws inspiration from one of Edward Hopper's paintings while actively engaging with St. Augustine's Confessions (397 A.D.) by integrating direct quotations at the end of each poem. Carson establishes a stimulating blending between Hopper's evocative imagery and Augustine's philosophical contemplations on time, memory, and existence through her unique style.

Therefore, Carson's poetry was selected for this study because of her unique style of genre blending which provides a rich material for contextual study. Inspired by Edward Hopper's painting and incorporating with St. Augustine's Confessions, these poems enable the researcher to explore different types of contexts. Two selected poems namely: "Nighthawks" and "Automat" will be explored using Lawal's (2012) model of types of context including linguistic, situational, psychological, social, sociological and cosmological context.

This research is expected to have significant pedagogical implications for the fields of contemporary poetry, stylistics, and discourse analysis. One of these implication lies in demonstrating how the use of pragmatic tools by educators can effectively enrich student's reading experience. By teaching students to consider context and speaker's intended meaning, these tools can foster a deeper and more nuanced understanding of literary language, especially when dealing with complex literary text. This study is expected to contribute to the literature by offering a framework for understanding the semantic ambiguity in poetry as a dynamic medium that goes beyond the personal experience of its creators. This research connects form and function in Carson's poetry, highlighting the long-lasting significance of contextualization in literary studies.

Statement of the problem

Understanding poetry has always dragged humans into concern since the language of poetry often deviates from everyday speech and involves more than just ordinary expressions. It is not simply a vehicle for conveying information but a deliberate manipulation of language aimed at evoking emotional and intellectual responses (Leech, 1969). In contemporary poetry, this manipulation has grown more pronounced, making the language of contemporary poetry vague and difficult to understand. Anne Carson is one of the most prominent figures in contemporary experimental poetry whose poetry is characterized by its semantic ambiguity which often requires context in order to understand the complex ideas and emotional experiences embedded in its complex language. Reviewing the literature shows that Carson's works have been extensively studied from various literary and theoretical perspectives such as allusions, desire, intertextuality, gender, and stylistic elements, (McDowell, 2015; Wengstrom, 2018; Marie, 2020). However, the role of how contextualization enhances the understanding of the semantic complexity embedded in the complex language of Carson's poetry has gained little exploration. By placing her work within different contexts, one acquires a broader understanding of the complex layers of meaning that characterize her oeuvre. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature by contextualizing two selected poems "Nighthawks" and "Automat" chosen purposefully from Carson 2000 collection "Men in the Off Hours," by adopting the six types of context in Lawal's (2012) Aspects of Pragmatic theory as a model for the analysis.

The guided research question of the current study is "How do Anne Carson's unconventional stylistic techniques interact with various contextual dimensions to enhance the understanding of the semantic complexity in her poetry? In addressing this question, the results are anticipated to enhance the comprehension of poetry as a dynamic medium that goes beyond the personal experience of its creators. This research connects form and function in Carson's poetry, highlighting the long-lasting significance of contextualization in literary studies.

Theoretical background

Pragmatics is based on the premise that language exceeds mere grammatical principles, serving as a communicative instrument influenced by context, intent, and societal conventions. Accordingly, many academics and linguists have explored pragmatics as a notion. A fundamental issue related to the description, characterization, or explanation of acceptance is the lack of universality (Levinson, 2009). Pragmatics is defined as the study of language in action. For example, speakers might change the way others understand a phrase or their state of mind by just stating something new. The field known as "pragmatics" examines language users' goals, actions, and contexts (Levinson, 1983). Meanwhile, Wales (1989) defines pragmatics as examining language use that focuses on the more profound significance of expressions rather than on grammatically correct phrases or propositions.

Similarly, Yule (1996) asserts that pragmatics is the examination of how additional information is communicated beyond what is explicitly articulated. Language studies require a pragmatic dimension, whereas pragmatics offers an exploratory framework for investigation. Pragmatics examines meaning conveyed by a speaker (or writer) and understood by a listener (or reader). Thus, it pertains more to examining the meaning that individuals attribute to their statements than the inherent meanings of the individual expressions or phrases inside them. Additionally, Verschueren (1999) says that "pragmatic meaning does not seem as solid as linguistic forms. Contrarily, it is dynamically constructed when language is used" (p. 11)

Accordingly, pragmatics is the examination of meaning within context. Context is an essential concept for both analysis and interpretation. Meanings are messages conveyed by speakers in context, be it situational, cultural, or interpersonal, and directed to listeners who are aware of both textual and contextual elements that facilitate the interpretation of implicit meanings. Thus, the ability of receivers to interpret a speaker's meaning depends largely on context.

The exploration of context has increasingly gained prominence in recent years, both within linguistics and across various interdisciplinary fields such as semantics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. Nevertheless, context theories have not developed overnight. The development process has taken a long way, incorporating contributions from comparative linguistics, structural linguistics, and transformational-generative linguistics to establish the theoretical foundations of context theories. Chomsky's treatment of language and language users as abstract entities has contributed to the rise in interest in how language is used in everyday contexts and what people mean when they use its meaning potential (Chomsky, 1965). It has come to light that questions about how language is actually used can only be addressed by broadening the scope of linguistics and taking into account the context in which language is used.

Many linguists attempted to define context from various viewpoints to address inquiries relevant to their professions and to substantiate their concepts and theories. Context is defined in disciplines like semiotics, linguistics, sociology, and anthropology as the external circumstances or components that influence a major communication event. It serves as a structural framework that aids and directs how meaning is interpreted within that particular event (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992). Although perceived from various viewpoints for distinct objectives, all definitions share a significant commonality. They all agreed that it has a crucial role and a significant function in understanding the intended meaning.

For example, Cook (1999) considered context while examining the relationship between discourse and literature. According to his definition, context constitutes a sort of worldly knowledge, and the term context can be employed in both a broad and restricted sense. In a restricted meaning, it pertains to the awareness of elements outside of the text in question. In the broader sense, it relates to the understanding of these elements and other components of the text being analyzed. On the other hand, George Yule (2000) considered "context" in his examination of reference and inference. He offered a relatively broader definition: "Context is the physical environment in which a word is used" (p. 128). This environment may be social, conceptual, cultural, historical, or political, or it may be a combination of them.

Although similar to the previous definitions, H. G. Widdowson (2000), in his examination of language meaning, defined "context" as the elements of the circumstances surrounding actual language

use that are deemed essential to meaning. He emphasized that context is a schematic construct; achieving pragmatic meaning involves aligning the linguistic components of the code with the schematic elements of the context. Unlike the previous definitions, Leech (1983) emphasizes the significance of background in interpreting utterances, defining 'context' as "any background knowledge assumed to be shared by speaker and hearer that contributes to the interpretation of what the speaker means by a given utterance." (p. 13)

Furthermore, Fillmore (1977) asserts that meanings can fluctuate across different contexts, which makes them not fixed, and that meanings are contingent upon context. Thus, when context shifts, meanings consequently change. He states, "I observe that whenever I encounter sentences within a context, I immediately find myself asking what the effect would have been if the context had been slightly different." (p.119)

Thus, the context of an utterance is essential because it constitutes a specific segment of the shared knowledge between speaker and listener, encompassing details regarding the subject matter of the conversation and the circumstances surrounding the dialogue. The precise context of any utterance can never be defined with absolute certainty. The concept of "context is highly adaptable, if not somewhat ambiguous" (Hurford and Heasley, 1983, pp. 68-69).

Contextualization in linguistics refers to the verbal and non-verbal clues in spoken, written and body language which indicate communicative values including clues to who is speaking, the relationship between the interlocutors, where the conversation occurs and much more. (Anderson and Risor, 2014).

Literature Review:

Exploring literary works pragmatically has attracted many researchers especially in recent years, offering a deep insight of how context help understand complex language in poetry. For example, Sinha (2021) offers a detailed account of pragmatics and explores the role it plays in different literary genres. The paper, also tries to shed light on the relationship between pragmatics and literature to unmask the commonalities that they share. Moreover, the study aims to explore how pragmatics and context can help find meanings. The study reveals that pragmatics appears to be a recent and well organized approach to contextualize language. It explains meanings that are not found in the plain sense of linguistic items and structures. Pragmatics deals with aspects of meaning that semantics has not previously accounted for, thus offering new strategies for writing, teaching and understanding language in general and literature in particular. This review shows that this study does not tackle Anne Carson's works which denote a gap that needs to be filled.

Hussein (2006) asserts that novels are best understood using Speech Act Theory because they are a reflection of the real world using real speech. Therefore, readers can be considered as part of the context and consequently part of the interpretation of the utterances. Readers, in fact, perceive the intention of the writer who aims to achieve a certain act within a certain context. The study also attempts to explore whether Speech Act Theory can be applied to literature successfully. The study concludes that the distinction between literary and no-literary works is not clear since both have communicative purposes. It also argues that literary works have two realities: psycho-socio-physical reality and the fictional reality which constitute the world of the text, therefore it is called a multi-layered construct of reality. The character, narrator and the reader should involve to achieve a successful communicative interaction. Similar to the previous study, Hussein's study does not examine Anne Carson's works denoting a gap in the data.

Walia (2014) explores the ongoing debate in literary theories regarding the connection between texts and context. It focuses on the views of various critical schools of thought from different eras regarding the relationship between literature and context. Using examples from Indian literature, the study aims at highlighting the importance of different contexts in understanding literary works. The study argues that historical, social and political contexts play pivotal role in shaping and understanding meanings. The study concluded that the meaning of any text cannot be fully understood without

considering the context in which it was produced. It also concluded that despite the argument about its role in offering interpretations of literary works, context remains an important factor in understanding the real meaning and that it effects both the author intention and the reader's perception. Like the previous studies, this study focuses on examples from the Indian poetry leaving Anne Carson's poems unexplored.

Abbas (2012) explores how pragmatic theories such as Conversational Analysis and Speech Act Theory can be integrated in teaching literature by bridging the gap between linguistic and literary analysis. Basically, the study deals with learners of English as a foreign and second language (EFL), (ESL) in order to improve their comprehension skills and help them engage with literature more profoundly. In addition, it aims to show the importance of using pragmatic analysis beside literary analysis in teaching literature. Moreover, it encourages teacher to teach literature as a communicative skill by making it more similar to every day real communication. The study reveals that applying pragmatic analysis in the teaching of literature help learners better understand the text by focusing on how meaning is constructed and communicated in context, thus improving the pragmatic competence of students in EFL/ESL classes. The study also calls to make adjustments in curriculum through the inclusion of pragmatic analysis in the teaching of language to enrich the quality of foreign language teaching. This study focuses on pragmatic analysis in the teaching of literature which leaves Anne Carson works unexplored.

The following reviews are related to Anne Carson works. Her works have been explored from various perspectives and reviewing them will further highlights the gap in the literature. For example, McDowell (2015) examines the use and abuse of lyric form by Anne Carson to elucidate how Carson uses the power of sublime to reinvigorate the lyric poem. This study contextualizes Carson's synthetic approach to poetry among the significant work of her peers such as Ezra Pound, Halida Doolittle, Phyllis Webb and P. K. Page. The study adopts a textual analysis approach and comparative literature methods to explore Carson's poetry critically. The study argues that Carson's contribution to the Canadian poetry is in her recursive questioning of the connection between poetry and knowledge leading her to challenge the poetic traditions. In addition, it reveals that Carson invigorates her lyrics with the sublime, an aesthetic value which can be traced back to early Greek lyrics. Despite the fact that the study explores Anne Carson's unique and experimental style, it does not explore how context help understand the complex language in her Hopper-inspired poems. Carson's Hopper inspired poems remain unexplored forming a problem that can be examined.

Wengström (2018) aims at exploring the concept of desire in Anne Carson's novel in verse "Autobiography of red" by utilizing the philosophical ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. The study reveals that desire in "Autobiography of Red" acts as a transformative force in constructing the self and that desire is the main dynamic force that animate and shape the entire text. Thus, challenging the conventional ways of expressing identity and offering a new understanding of the narrative. While Carson's style is unconventional and innovative in this novel, the thesis focuses on desire through a philosophical lens leaving context as an issue that needs to be tackled in Anne Carson's poetry.

Regan (2018) explores the intersection of critical and creative writing by placing Carson's works in dialogue with classical texts. In addition, it aims to show how genres and texts from different eras can be brought together in order to create new interpretations and compel readers to engage more profoundly with texts. The study utilizes a comparative approach to pair Carson's works with medieval texts. The study reveals that Carson's works defies and critiques the rigid traditional genre boundaries, proposing instead a more fluid approach to invite readers to engage with texts in new dynamic ways. Although this study is focusing on Carson's style, it does not explore the role of context in her poetry which forms a gap that can be explored through a pragmatic lens.

Thus, these reviews show that no previous study has been carried out to explore Anne Carson's poetry, especially "Hopper: Confessions," focusing on the role of context in understanding the semantic ambiguity in her poetry which encouraged the researcher to continue the current study to fill the existing gap in the literature.

Methodology:

In order to meet the objectives of the study, a qualitative research design was adopted to explore how contextualizing Anne Carson's selected poems enhances the understanding of the semantic complexity embedded in the complex language of her poetry.

Sampling

In alignment with the nature and objectives of the present investigation, a purposeful sampling method, a subset of non-random sampling, was employed. Purposeful sampling is extensively employed in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich examples pertinent to the phenomenon under investigation. Maxwell (1997) describes purposeful sampling as selecting places, people, or events for their valuable information that cannot be obtained from other sources. Accordingly, two poems were selected from Carson's (2000) "Men in the Off Hours" namely: "Nighthawks" and "Automat." These poems were chosen because they showcase Carson's use of Hopper's painting and St. Augustine's philosophy to reflect different contexts.

Data collection Instrument

The current study employed a documentation instrument to gather qualitative data from a single primary source, Anne Carson's (2000) "Men in the Off Hours". The data collection method involved a close textual analysis, allowing for an in-depth look at the motif, cues and ideas corresponding to different contexts in the poem.

Theoretical Framework

The current study adopted Lawal's (2012) Aspects of Pragmatic Theory as a model in order to meet its objectives. The analysis will be limited to the six types of context identified in this model. These types are not entirely independent of one another, rather, the facts in one context are connected with those in other contexts. The model introduces six types of context arranged in a hierarchical order. They are:

Linguistic Context refers to the immediate linguistic environment surrounding a word, phrase, or sentence. The word's meaning is determined not solely by its definition but also by its location within the sentence and its relationships with other words in that sentence (Harris, 1951).

Situational Context includes the participants, activities, location, and timing of a speech event. The location of the speech is a significant factor as it correlates with the physical environment, influencing language usage, style, and several other discourse characteristics (Osinsanwo, 2008).

Psychological Context means the mental state of the participants. A speaker may express certain statements not out of genuine intent but rather as a reflection of their psychological condition. The mood of the person will dictate his linguistic style.

Social Context refers to the interpersonal relationships that exist between the interlocutors. The roles, connections, and social dynamics that exist between the communicators are the focus of this type of context.

Sociological Context refers to the political, cultural, economic, and environmental situations that affect the events during a specific time. According to Osinsanwo (2008), speech events that are based on social and cultural factors require a reliance on adequate interpretation.

Cosmological Context refers to the general view of the natural world, the universe, and the philosophical or metaphysical frameworks that persons act within. It is the worldview or cosmology that people adhere to, which may be molded by religion or philosophy.

The data obtained was analyzed using a content analysis method, a research tool used to identify certain cues, words, themes or concept within a qualitative data, to show how interpreting the various types of context enhances the comprehension of the semantic complexity in Anne Carson's selected poems. This research connects form and function in Carson's poetry, highlighting the long-lasting significance of contextualization in literary studies.

Data Analysis

Analysis of "Nighthawks"

"Nighthawks" is a poem written by Anne Carson. The poem is inspired by Edward Hopper's iconic painting, (Figure 1), which has the same title. In the painting, a scene of a quiet, late-night dinner is depicted where a woman and two men sit in isolation of each other's. The painting reflects themes of urban alienation and loneliness. Carson's poem redefines this scene by weaving it with a philosophical epigraph adopted from St. Augustine's Confessions Book XI about the nature of time at the end of the poem.



Figure 1 "Nighthawks" by Edward Hopper, 1942.

The following is the text of the poem.

Nighthawks

I wanted to run away with you tonight
but you are a difficult woman
the rules of you—

Past and future circle round us
now we know more now less
in the institute of shadows.

On a street black as widows
with nothing to confess
our distances found us

the rules of you—
so difficult a woman
I wanted to run away with you tonight.

Yet I say boldly that I know that if nothing passed away, time past were not. And if nothing were coming, time future were not. And if nothing were, time present were not.

(Augustine, Confessions XI)

"Nighthawks" from (Carson, 2000, Men in the off hours, p. 50)

Types of Contexts.

Linguistic Context

The linguistic foundation of this poem is defined by Carson's intentional choice of words, grammatical structure, and auditory features that amplify the poem's emotional and intellectual impact. Using exact words with both literal and metaphorical connotations, Carson employs terms like "difficult," "rules," "past," "future," and "shadows" in her lexical selections. Struggle, distance, and time are all conjured up by these phrases. As an example, "institute of shadows" has a more philosophical and abstract tone,

whereas, through repetition, "the rules of you" emphasizes the complexity of a relationship. The poem's syntax is disjointed and fragmented because of the speaker's internal turmoil and lack of clarity. Using elliptical construction, Carson conveys a feeling of impending separation in the phrase "our distances found us" while leaving much unsaid. The message is purposefully unclear, prompting the reader to derive profound emotional or philosophical associations. It may elicit themes of loss, yearning, or uncertainty America's everyday life during WWII.

Physical (Situational) Context

The first line indicates the speaker's wish 'I wanted to run away with you tonight'. The mentioning of "tonight" indicates a specific temporal period for potential occurrence, although the characterization of the individual complicates the scenario as "difficult." The phrase 'on a street black as widow' lines with the scene of Hopper's painting 'Nighthawks.' The painting shows three persons sitting at dinner late at night. The well-lit dinner is at an intersection of two dim streets. The painting shows no interaction between the people in the painting, indicating isolation and disconnection despite their sitting in the same place. 'in the institute of shadows,' the word institute refers to a physical place. However, the expression conjures an atmosphere of uncertainty, obscurity, or ambiguity. The "institute" may metaphorically denote an inner conflict in which the speaker perceives imprisonment. The physical environment is not literal, yet it metaphorically creates a sense of confusion and emotional depth.

Psychological Context.

The speaker's psychological struggle is evident in the first line 'I wanted to run away with you tonight.' There exists a yearning for escape, yet the challenging disposition of the interlocutor induces emotional stress. The speaker experiences frustration, yearning for liberation, yet is ensnared by the complex rules of the women. 'now we know more now less'; this sentence implies a lack of clarity, not knowing what to do, or being confused about the situation. The statement reflects a psychological condition of uncertainty or emotional instability, emphasizing the fluctuation between knowing and not knowing.' Our distances found us' here; the speaker appears resigned to the emotional detachment that prevails, whether physical or psychological. The statement suggests that, regardless of their efforts or aspirations, the emotional barrier between them is unavoidable and has been acknowledged or recognized. This context supports the key themes of alienation and disconnection.

Social Context

'I wanted to run away with you tonight', this sentence implies a possible romantic or intimate relationship that is being discussed. Even though the woman is difficult, there might be issues within that social dynamic suggest closeness or having experienced something together. 'but you are a difficult woman.' This expression indicates a social power dynamic in which the speaker is likely trying to manage a complicated or challenging connection. "difficult woman" signifies a particular power disparity or social conflict. The speaker's frustration suggests they occupy a low position, are in an inequitable relationship, or may feel misinterpreted.

Sociological Context.

"Nighthawks" was painted in 1942, among the turbulent events of World War II. The painting provides a window into the everyday life of ordinary Americans during that challenging period. The metaphor "black as widows" encompasses significant cultural implications. In numerous cultures, widows frequently embody themes of mourning, loss, and emotional somberness. This encapsulates the individual and the collective dimensions of grief, separation, and mourning.

Cosmological Context

'Past and future circle round us/ now we know more now less/ in the institute of shadows.' These statements imply a cyclical perspective on time, perpetually existing and perhaps beyond complete comprehension. The exploration of time in this context, drawing from Augustine's reflections on the past, present, and future, connects the poem to a broader inquiry into the essence of existence and the cosmos. The expression "in the institute of shadows" implies a cosmic and metaphysical realm characterized by

the elusive nature of meaning and time. This view aligns with the Hopper painting's pervasive feelings of disconnection and contemplation.

Analysis of "Automat"

Anne Carson's "Automat" links to Edward Hopper's famous painting of the same title (Figure 2). Hopper's artwork portrays a solitary woman seated in a café, contemplating her coffee cup, enveloped in gentle, isolating lighting. This visual acts as a setting for Carson's examination of themes including isolation, urban alienation, femininity, exploitation and the transient nature of human relationships.



Figure 2: "Automat" by Edward Hopper, 1927.

The following is the text of the poem.

Automat

Night work
neon milk
powdered
silk
Girl de luxe

Girl work
plate glass love
lone
glove
Night de luxe

Girl work
smell of black
down
the back
Night de luxe

Night work
clamo
adte
Domine
Girl de luxe

Let us see then, thou human soul, whether present time can be long: for to thee is it given to see and to measure length of time.

(Augustine, Confessions XI)

"Automat" from (Carson, 2000, Men in the off hours, p. 51)

Types of Context

Linguistic Context

Automat exhibits a fragmented linguistic structure characterized by discontinuous sentences and sparse vocabulary that necessitates interpretive analysis. Carson's language employs minimalism, generating tension and ambiguity that amplify the poem's mechanization, repetition, and objectification themes. Carson uses the familiarity of the Western readers with the painting and the philosophy of St. Augustine to use the minimum number of words and leave spaces of meaning for the readers to fill in. The phrase "girl de luxe" suggests a rich, elegant, superior, quality girl that lines with the woman in the painting. Her polished clothing and cosmetics suggest she may be on her way to or returning from a job where personal appearance has significance. The term "Girl work" serves as a specialized linguistic choice that emphasizes a submissive position for women. The brevity of each sentence emulates the mechanical redundancy of labour, a central motif of the poem. The selection of language significantly influences the portrayal of the woman's objectification and the mechanization of her existence. The minimalist aesthetic implies a sense of remoteness and mechanical functions rather than human feelings.

Situational Context

The poem's physical context is not explicitly identified. However, it may be understood from the poem's title, "Automat," which is similar to the title of the painting it describes. A lady is depicted in the picture as she sits alone in an Automat, looking into a cup of coffee. The frequent reference to "Night de luxe" and the expression "smell of black" evoke a picture of a nighttime environment. The city's physical landscape serves as a metaphor for the exploitation of women, reflecting the mechanized processes of labour and urban alienation.

Psychological Context

The speaker in the poem appears to be psychologically ensnared in a condition of disconnection and alienation. The recurring phrase "Girl deluxe" is used ironically to mirror an internal psychological struggle. The psychological setting encapsulates the alienation frequently linked to contemporary urban existence. The lone lady in the illuminated café, contrasted with the desolate street beyond, reflects the alienation and self-reflection of individuals in an impersonal world. Her averted look and reflective stance indicate a profound inner life marked by thinking or sorrow, emphasizing themes of alienation, existential isolation, and the subtle challenges of contemporary existence.

Social Context

The poem's social background illustrates the new objectification of women throughout society. The woman is consistently called "Girl de luxe," positioning her inside a social function dictated by external forces, especially in the new urban society where women are appreciated only through their body look and hard work. The absence of clear communication or engagement with others underscores the deficiency of true interpersonal ties, which, in turn, enhances the theme of urban alienation as a key theme in the poem. The phrase "Girl work" denotes a societal obligation imposed on women in their new urban way of living. It implies a gendered role wherein women turn into objects of desire and are relegated to serving others without autonomy or personal choice.

Sociological (Sociocultural) Context

The painting "Automat" refers to women's increased employment and visibility in public areas throughout the 1920s, which was unfamiliar, resulting from changes in employment and social dynamics. It examines emotional alienation and existential reflection. The poem condemns cultural exploitation, particularly that of women. "Girl de luxe" signifies a sociocultural perception of the female body as a marketable commodity, mainly within consumer society. The phrase "plate glass love" suggests the shallow nature of contemporary relationships, especially those influenced by materialism. The affection alluded to appears closer to commodities exchange than an authentic emotional bond. This is a societal critique of the cultural perception and objectification of women. It reflects the sociocultural framework in which women's worth is frequently linked to their body looks and marketability rather than their inner humanity. Women in the 1920s were portrayed as symbols of beauty in urban nightlife, yet frequently endured the burden of sustaining this appearance, highlighting commodification and objectification.

Thus, Carson's poetry evolves as socio-historical critique to the economic and psychological burdens of urban alienation and gender role in the new industrial communities.

Cosmological Context

The cosmological framework of *Automat* is significantly shaped by the philosophical exploration exemplified by the epigraph from St. Augustine's confessions, book XI about the nature of time and existence. The epigraph's philosophical reflections on time interrogate the essence of human life, and Carson employs this as a framework to explore the divergent experiences of time inside the mechanized world of the poem. Augustine enquires, "Let us see then, thou human soul, whether present time can be long," which questions the notion of time and whether humans can measure it. With its mechanical and repetitious language, Carson's poem reflects this inquiry. Time in *Automat* is perceived as a cyclical repetition, with each iteration mirroring endless, immutable labour. Augustine explores the human comprehension of time, precisely the essence of the "present," wondering if it may be genuinely lasting or is only a transient interval between the past and future. The cosmological view is shown through Carson's technique, primarily via fragmented grammar, which implies a restricted life in the physical world.

Discussing the findings

The study reveals that Carson's poem *Nighthawks*, inspired by Edward Hopper's painting of the same title, captures the mid-20th century American sociocultural setting. Created in 1942, the painting captures the existential loneliness people experience during World War II, and Carson's approach in the poem captures this too. The use of disjointed language helps the study to show how literature can be a mirror of the larger sociocultural and psychological environment. These stylistic decisions are not only artistic preferences but also deliberate means to convey the theme of solitude and alienation that dominated the social and psychological landscape of the time. The stillness captured in Hopper's painting, showing individuals separated despite being in close proximity, reflects the emotional isolation in Carson's writing. These findings align with Khan M. Y. Khattak N. J. (2023) findings, "Fragments of Despair: Myth and Allusion as reflections of post-war disillusionment in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*." The study shows that T.S. Eliot uses allusion, myth, and fragmented style to highlight the frustration and hopelessness of the post-war period. Published in 1922, *The Waste Land* rises from the aftermath of World War I, reflecting a period marked by profound spiritual and cultural state of chaos.

Furthermore, the study shows that Carson's investigation of universal themes including individualism, alienation, and gender roles connects with the changing social dynamics of the early 20th century. The result about *Automat* (1927) is especially important in supporting this goal since it shows the shifting roles of women during the 1920s and 1930s. Carson's portrayal of a single woman in an *automat* becomes an influential symbol of modernism, freedom, and the difficulties women encountered as they negotiated new social roles. The conflict between the woman's newfound freedoms and the enduring social expectations of the era is reflected in the feeling of exploitation and alienation that comes with her independence. This analysis supports the study's goal by showing how Carson's literary works address these cultural changes and provide a critique of the complexities and contradictions that emerged as women made their initial steps into the public sphere. This finding is similar to Salman. finding in her (2024) study "Challenging Boundaries: Gender and Identity in Modernist Poetry". This study explores how modernist poets examine themes like identity, sexuality and women's role in the early 20th century. The findings show that poets use innovative techniques to emphasize the changing roles of women in the changing new world.

Finally, the incorporation of St. Augustine's epigraphs, which connect the fluidity of time with the ambiguity of meaning, helps to clarify the semantic ambiguity in Carson's poems. Augustine's thoughts on the elusive nature of time are reminiscent of the poem's ambiguous language, which has shifting and unresolved meaning. This link enhances the study's examination of existential alienation by demonstrating how Carson's writing's ambiguity reflects the jumble and fragmentation of time itself, thereby reiterating the emotional and intellectual detachment that is at the heart of the study's goal.

Conclusions:

The current study aims to demonstrate how contextualization enhances the understanding of the semantic complexity embedded in the complex language of Carson's selected poems "Nighthawks" and "Automat." Based on the analysis of the poems, the following conclusions were obtained: first, Carson's intentional manipulation of syntax, grammar, and punctuation may appear illogical, but contextualization assists readers in overcoming superficial confusion to comprehend the profound artistic intent of the poems. Second, historical and sociocultural contexts explain why the poems often explore loneliness and disconnection, reflecting isolation, loss, and human fragility during war and industrialization. Third, the cosmological context reveals that the themes of the poems go beyond personal experiences to tackle more significant questions about the nature of time, life, and the universe. Finally, Carson uses the Western reader's familiarity with Hopper's works and St. Augustine's thoughts to reduce her lexical input creating multiple interpretations for different contexts.

Recommendations for further studies include studying the linguistic deviation in Anne Carson's works and their interpretive meanings.

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دراسة سياقية لمختارات من قصائد آن كارسن

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المستخلص:

يعد الشعر، بوصفه نوعاً أدبياً، من الأنواع التي يصعب فهمها نظراً لخصائصه المميزة، والتي تشمل الاقتصاد اللغوي، والأدوات الصوتية، والبنية النحوية الحذفية، والرمزية، والاستعارات، والتناص، وهي سمات تمنح لغته فِرادَةً وتميزاً. وفي الغالب، يعتمد فهم الشعر على السياقات الثقافية والسيرة الذاتية، مما قد يجعل استيعابه أمراً معقداً دون الإلمام بهذه العناصر. وفي هذا الإطار، تُهدف هذه الدراسة إلى وضع مختارات من قصائد آن كارسون ضمن سياقاتها المختلفة، من أجل بيان كيف تسهم هذه السياقات في تعميق فهم التعقيد الدلالي الكامن في لغة كارسون الشعرية المعقدة. الدراسة هي تصميم بحث نوعي يستخدم التوثيق كأداة لجمع البيانات. ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة، تم اختيار قصيدتين، "صقور الليل" و"الآلة"، من مجموعة كارسون (2000) "رجال في ساعات الفراغ" باستخدام أسلوب أخذ العينات الهادف. تبني الدراسة جانب لاول (2012) من النظرية البراغماتية كموذج للتحليل وتغطي أنواع السياقات المحددة في هذا النموذج بما في ذلك السياقات اللغوية والظرفية والنفسية والاجتماعية والسوسولوجية والكونية. تم تحليل البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها باستخدام أسلوب تحليل المحتوى النوعي. تكشف الدراسة أن قصائد كارسون المستوحاة من هوبر تجسد السياق الاجتماعي والثقافي والتاريخي الأمريكي في أوائل ومنتصف القرن العشرين. علاوة على ذلك، غالباً ما يعكس التلاعب المتعمد لكارسون في بناء الجملة والقواعد وعلامات الترقيم عدم اليقين والانفصال، مما يعزز موضوعات العزلة والخسارة والاعتراب والاستغلال أثناء الحرب والتصنيع. أخيراً، يكشف السياق الكوني أن موضوعات القصائد تتجاوز التجارب الشخصية لمعالجة أسئلة أكثر أهمية حول طبيعة الزمن والحياة والكون.