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**SHUTTLE, NICHOLS, DUFFY, AND KREITER-
FORONDA: A REVISION IN EKPHRASTIC POETRY
OF CUBIST MALE PAINTERS' REPRESENTATION
OF THE FEMALE BODY**

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ÖZ

SHUTTLE, NICHOLS, DUFFY VE KREITER-FORONDA: EKFRASSTİK ŞİİRDE KÜBİST ERKEK RESSAMLARIN KADIN BEDENİNİ BETİMLEMELERİNE YENİ BİR BAKIŞ

GONCA ÖZMEN

Bu çalışma, Penelope Shuttle'ın “Yaşlı Kaşif”, Grace Nichols'ın “Ağlayan Kadın”, Carol Ann Duffy'nin “Ayakta Duran Çıplak Kadın” ve Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda'nın “Her Yönde Aşağı İnen Çıplak” adlı şiirlerinde, ekfrasis geleneğini kullanarak ortaya koydukları kadının ve bedeninin batının erkek egemen sanat tarihindeki temsil biçimlerini hem görsel hem de yazınsal alanda ideolojik olarak irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque ve Marcel Duchamp'ın tanınmış kübist tablolarına doğrudan bir yanıt olarak yazılan bu şiirlerde, çağdaş kadın şairler, sanat tarihindeki cinsiyete dayalı norm ve değer yargılarını görünür kılmak, yeniden değerlendirmek ve kadın bedenini özgürleştirmek için bu alandaki iktidar yapılarını ve temsil biçimlerini yeni baştan yazmaktadırlar. Ekfrasis geleneğini kullanan bu şairler, kültürel üretimde kadınların temsil edilme biçimlerini ve dahi erkek sanatçı mitini sorgulayıp yeni bir anlam üretmektedirler. Eril bir algıyla biçimlendirilen ve kontrol altında tutulan bu temsil kodlarına başkaldırarak sanat tarihindeki baskın değerlerden bir çıkış yolu aramaktadırlar. Kreiter-Foronda Duchamp'ın resmindeki kadın modelin temsilini irdelemek üzere üçüncü tekil şahıs anlatımı tercih ederken, diğer şairler bir portre ve iki nü resimdeki susturulmuş kadın modellere ses vererek sözde kontrolsüz ve tehditkâr bedenlerinin erkek ressam tarafından nasıl ehlileştirildiğini ve erkek bakışın bedenlerini nasıl tükettiği ve metalaştırdığını ortaya koymuşlar, bu bağlamda da kendi öykülerini anlatmaları için bir olanak sağlamışlardır. Kreiter-Foronda dışında Shuttle, Nichols ve Duffy kadın modelleri şiirlerinin özneleri yaparak güçlendirmişlerdir. Dört şair de modellerin itirazlarını dillendirerek bazılarının çerçevenin dışına çıkmalarını sağlamışlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şiir, Ekfrastik Şiir, Kadın Şairler, Kübizm, Kadın Bedeni

ABSTRACT

SHUTTLE, NICHOLS, DUFFY, AND KREITER-FORONDA: A REVISION IN EKPHRASTIC POETRY OF CUBIST MALE PAINTERS' REPRESENTATION OF THE FEMALE BODY

GONCA ÖZMEN

This study purports to trace in ekphrastic poems by contemporary women poets, Penelope Shuttle's "Old Explorer", Grace Nichols's "Weeping Woman", Carol Ann Duffy's "Standing Female Nude", and Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda's "Nude Descending in All Directions", the politics of the representation of the female (body) in visual and verbal western phallogocentric art/history. Directly responding to well-known Cubist paintings by Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque and Marcel Duchamp, these women poets rewrite the patterns of power and the value of representation in art/history in order to both expose and revise its gender-specific system of values and liberate the female body. Adapting ekphrastic technique, women poets have produced their own meanings in their works, challenging and disrupting the ways women are represented within mainstream cultural production, and deconstructing the myth of the male genius still in the hands of male-dominated institutions. They try to find a way out of the inscriptions of masculinity in art/history by reacting against these codes. While Kreiter-Foronda employs a different narrative voice to tell the story of Duchamp's regulation of the female sitter's body, the other poets give the passified female sitters in one portrait and two nudes back their voices in order to tell their own stories, how their supposedly unruly bodies were regulated by male painters, and consumed and commodified by the male gaze. Shuttle, Nichols, Duffy and Kreiter-Foronda thus empower the female sitters, the first three placing them in the role of persona and allowing them to talk back and some to walk out of the frame.

Keywords: Poetry, Ekphrastic Poetry, Women Poets, Cubism, The Female Body.

FOREWORD

This study involves a close analysis of four ekphrastic poems by Shuttle, Nichols, Duffy and Kreiter-Foronda, focusing on the representation of the female (body) in the paintings by Braque, Picasso and Duchamp. The specific claim I make is that these women poets use ekphrasis in order to propose a new perspective that will allow the female sitters to express themselves outside a phallogocentric discourse in art/history that frames their bodies and mind. The current attempt, by women, to rewrite and revise Cubist paintings by men is instrumental in empowering the female sitters by making them, except Duchamp's sitter, the speaking subjects. The poets situate their protagonists as agents rather than silent, passive objects. The sitters symbolically rebel in order to free their objectified and eroticized bodies from the artistic frame and by doing so they retrieve their bodies.

This dissertation falls into six chapters. After a brief introduction to what the present study aims to examine, I move to Chapter I which is devoted to the close analysis of Shuttle's poem, "Old Explorer". Chapter II is predicated upon the close reading of Nichols's poem, "Weeping Woman". In Chapter III, Duffy's poem, "Standing Female Nude" is analysed in detail and Chapter IV is devoted to Kreiter-Foronda's poem "Nude Descending in All Directions". Finally, the conclusion does not only provide a general assessment of the issues explored in the discussion of the poems, but also ponders the question whether these women poets do not impose on the female sitters yet another frame.

The greatest difficulty that was encountered during the writing process of this dissertation was accessing or finding ways to access the most recent publications of female poets using the technique of ekphrasis and secondary sources. The selection of poets and poems proved to be an equally challenging and long process.

It is a pleasure to thank to all the members of the English Language and Literature Department for their warm support and belief in me. I would like to thank

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Gonca ÖZMEN

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INTRODUCTION

“He painted simply
her awareness of being painted”

Pauline Stainer¹

“I’m not your muse, not that creature
in the painting, with the beautiful body,”

Paula Meehan²

Art, in particular literature and painting, holds the power of representation, and it is through representations that we know the world. In ekphrastic poetry, words and images come together as means of ideology, which is itself a system of representations. Concentrating on ekphrastic works by contemporary women poets, Penelope Shuttle, Grace Nichols, Carol Ann Duffy, and Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, the present study aims to discuss, explore and question the politics of the representation of the female, both in visual and verbal western phallogocentric art. Analysing how its political, social and cultural codes exercise power over the construction of femininity, I will try to show how the patterns of power and the value of representation in art/history are rewritten by women poets in order to both expose and redefine its gender-specific system of values and criteria of significance and liberate the female body.

Whitney Chadwick observes that:

“In the early 1970s, feminist artists, critics, and historians began to question the apparently systematic exclusion of women from mainstream art. They challenged the values of a masculinist history of heroic art which happened to be

¹ Pauline Stainer, “Lady with a squirrel”, **Crossing the Snowline**, Northumberland, Bloodaxe Books, 2008, p. 42.

² Paula Meehan, “Not Your Muse”, **Images of Women by Contemporary Women Poets**, Ed. by Myra Schneider and Dilys Wood, Durham, Arrowhead Press, 2006, p. 108.

produced by men and which had so powerfully transformed the image of woman into one of possession and consumption.”³

Since the 1970s, contemporary women poets have produced their own meanings in their works, challenging and disrupting the ways women are represented within mainstream cultural production, the power to determine what is ‘high’, ‘great’ or ‘significant’ art being, moreover, still in the hands of male-dominated institutions. They try to find a way out of the inscriptions of masculinity in art/history by reacting against these codes of representation dominated and controlled by men. In her important study **Twentieth-Century Poetry and the Visual Arts**, Elizabeth Bergman Loizeaux argues, “Feminist ekphrasis recognizes that a woman’s place as viewer is established within, beside, or in the face of a male-dominated culture, but that the patterns of power and value implicit in a tradition of male artists and viewers can be exposed, used, resisted and rewritten.”⁴ Contemporary women poets indeed criticize the male tradition and in their re-working of canonical paintings by men seek to empower the passified and muted female models in paintings.

The four ekphrastic poems in which the subject matter will be discussed are Penelope Shuttle’s “Old Explorer”, Grace Nichols’s “Weeping Woman”, Carol Ann Duffy’s “Standing Female Nude”, and Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda’s “Nude Descending in All Directions”. Shuttle’s poem enters into a subversive dialogue with Pablo Picasso’s painting *Nude Woman with Necklace*, Nichols’s poem with another work by Picasso called *Weeping Woman*, Duffy’s poem with Georges Braque’s painting called *Large Nude*, and Kreiter-Foronda’s poem with Marcel Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase*.

These women poets choose the paintings of ‘great male masters’, Braque, Picasso and Duchamp. All four paintings depicting female models are cubists, three of them nude paintings and one a portrait (*Weeping Woman*). In their ekphrastic

³ Whitney Chadwick, **Women, Art, and Society**, London, Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1996, p. 8.

⁴ Elizabeth Bergman Loizeaux, **Twentieth-Century Poetry and the Visual Arts**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 81.

poems, Shuttle, Nichols, and Duffy restore to the silent and passive female models their voices thus transforming them into speaking subjects. Foronda on the other hand employs in her poem an anonymous persona who contemplates both Duchamp and his nude model. W. J. T. Mitchell notes that “The ekphrastic poet typically stands in a middle position between the object described or addressed and a listening subject who (...) will be made to ‘see’ the object through the medium of the poet’s voice.”⁵ Thus, the women poets that will be discussed in this dissertation invite us, the readers, to become implicated in the process of recovering the stories of the muted female models, who talk back to the men who painted them.

The poets directly respond to well-known paintings by men as cultural intertexts and question the absolute authorities of these canonical works from feminist perspectives. They try to free themselves and the female (body) from the authority of both these great male masters, and the patriarchal tradition they represent, by adopting a subversive dialogic method. It can, of course, be said that paintings like literature are arbitrary and indeterminate in their meaning. The concept of intentional fallacy, moreover, tells us that it is impossible and also undesirable to reconstruct the intention of the writer/painter. The paintings under discussion might thus not only be said to contain contradictory ideas, but they can also be interpreted in many different ways. However, the female poets under discussion are certainly justified in their attempt to deconstruct what they interpret as male dominated codes of representing the female (body) in portrait and nude painting. Both traditions in painting have indeed been dominated by men and inevitably shaped to some extent at least, or as art historians tell us to quite an extent, by their codes.

These poets try to deconstruct the cultural hegemony of phallogentric ideologies in the field of art by returning to the canonical artworks of the past, rewriting them in order to displace the image of the silenced women. They regard the phallogentric art tradition as a force to be resisted and demand revisions in the

⁵ W. J. T. Mitchell, **Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation**, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 164.

interpretation and reconceptualization of art. What is a central concern in their poetry is the critique of the ideological male dominated representation of stereotypes of femininity as well as the deconstruction of the gendered hierarchy of art. Griselda Pollock notes that these women poets thus contribute “to the continuous production of provocative polyvocal feminist interventions in art’s histories. The driving force is desire for change, desire to find stories that will sustain those called or prepared to identify with women.”⁶ The women poets under discussion intervene in the male art tradition and insert a feminist perspective with the object of change in gender politics in both art and society.

The word ‘ekphrasis’ derives from the Greek ‘phrazien’, meaning ‘to tell, to pronounce, or to declare’. The prefix ‘ek-’ is Greek for ‘from, or out of’. Thus the word literally means ‘to speak out, to describe, to tell someone about something, to depict vividly’. Ekphrasis was first practiced by the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos. His words “poema picture loquens, picture poema silens,” were translated as “painting is mute poetry, and poetry a speaking picture.”⁷ Horace’s famous statement of “ut picture, poesis”⁸, a Latin phrase literally meaning “as is painting so is poetry” in his **Ars Poetica** became the motto emphasizing the bond between the verbal and the visual. Even though poetry and painting, which make us see and read respectively, are considered to be sister arts, they are also rivals. Poets rework this old tension between looking and reading, the urge to understand the relationship has continued since antiquity. Therefore, we can see a series of reverberations between verbal and visual material in nearly every century. Ekphrasis has strengthened its place in today’s literature as an established tradition because the question of the nature of representation dominates twentieth and twenty-first century philosophy and

⁶ Griselda Pollock, **Differencing The Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art’s Histories**, London and New York, Routledge, 1999, p. 36.

⁷ James A. W. Heffernan, **Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashberry**, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 49.

⁸ Horace, **Epistles, Book II and Epistle to the Pisones** (‘Ars Poetica’), Ed. by. Niall Rudd, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 70.

literary theory. Indeed it has become a tool of subverting hegemonic ideology and social structures.

The word ekphrasis has been variously used and defined for centuries according to different literary conventions and tendencies. Nevertheless, one of the most acknowledged definitions of ekphrasis belongs to James A. W. Heffernan, who defines the term as signifying "...the verbal representation of visual representation."⁹ in his influential study, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. This definition has been adopted by many critics who deal with ekphrasis. The practice of ekphrasis started as a male dominated tradition but today has become subversive. Ekphrasis in contemporary poetry and literature talks back to, indeed deconstructs, phallogocentrism, among others, and opens space for change.

Verbal engagement with paintings and painters via ekphrasis dates back to antiquity, Homer taking his place among its first practitioners. From Homer to Ovid and Virgil, from Chaucer, Milton to Shakespeare, from Marvell to Johnson, from Wordsworth to Rossetti and Auden ekphrasis can be traced within a clearly western male dominated literary tradition continuing for centuries. Urns, vases, goblets, chests, cloaks, weapons, armours, and architectural ornaments were the first literary objects of ekphrasis. The description of the Shield of Achilles in **The Iliad** has been regarded as the earliest ekphrastic example in western literature. Ovid's **Metamorphoses**, Dante's **Divine Comedy**, some parts of Chaucer's allegories from **The Canterbury Tales** are also important examples of ekphrasis. Ekphrasis was an important technique in poetry in England in the Renaissance, Restoration, the Romantic period, and the Augustan Age. During the Renaissance and afterwards there was a growing interest in ekphrastic poetry and among the important ekphrastic examples of the time one can count Shakespeare's "Rape of Lucrece", Spenser's **Faerie Queene**, George Herbert's "Easter Wings", "The Altar", Dryden's "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day, 1687". The opening of the public museums was also a

⁹ Heffernan, op. cit., p. 3.

milestone for the development of the interest in ekphrasis. The works of art became available to everyone and they were preserved in better conditions. Thus, ekphrasis was an established literary activity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. “My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning, “A Venetian Pastoral” and “Lilith” by D. G. Rossetti, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” by John Keats, and “On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery” by Percy B. Shelley, “In an Artist’s Studio” by Christina Rossetti are among well-known ekphrastic works of the period. In twentieth-century poetry, there was again an intense involvement with the visual arts and the ekphrastic tradition became rather popular among the poets. Bergman Loizeaux states that:

“The widespread presence of ekphrasis in twentieth-century poetry can be understood as both a response to and a participant in what W. J. T. Mitchell has called ‘the pictorial turn’ from a culture of words into a culture of images that began in the late nineteenth century with the advent of photography and then film, and has accelerated since the mid twentieth century with the invention of television and, now, digital media.”¹⁰

“In the Musée des Beaux Arts” by W. H. Auden, “Leda and the Swan”, “The Municipal Gallery Re-visited” and “Lapis Lazuli” by W. B. Yeats, “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus”, “Pictures from Brueghel” and “Portrait of a Lady” by William Carlos Williams, “Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror” by John Ashberry, “Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns” by Marianne Moore, “Mourning Picture” by Adrienne Rich, “The Starry Night” by Anne Sexton and “Agosta the Winged Man and Rasha the Black Dove” by Rita Dove are leading examples of twentieth-century ekphrastic poetry.

Ekphrasis has a noteworthy place in today’s literature as well. Among the many (post-)modern poets who turn to paintings and sculptures, including etchings and drawings, photographs, films, and, songs as subjects for their poems, are a group of women subverting the strong male dominant ekphrastic tradition. Isobel

¹⁰ Bergman Loizeaux, op. cit., p. 3.

Armstrong remarks that “female poets [are] constantly testing themselves against masculine traditions and texts, redefining these for themselves.”¹¹ Feminist ekphrasis examines a range of issues: the complex relations between word and image; between (male) artist and (female) model; the work of art and viewer; perception and representation; self and otherness; the issues of artistic possessiveness and the politics of identity. Ekphrasis practiced from a feminist perspective thus in particular calls into question the representation of the female body, frozen and regulated within a frame, and seeks to empower it. Feminist poets mostly use ekphrasis in order to point out the issue of female objectification in the western visual art/history. They mainly enter into a dialogue with portraits and nudes of women within their poetry and try to deconstruct the phallogocentric culture embedded in the visual art. Apart from the poems under discussion, Vicki Feaver’s “Oi yoi yoi” and “Naked Girl with Egg”, Barbara Guest’s “The Poetess”, “Dora Maar” and “The Nude”, Alison Fell’s “Rodin’s Muse”, Edward Lucie-Smith’s “Rubens to Hélène Fourment”, Judith Wright’s “Naked Girl and Mirror”, U. A. Fanthorpe’s “Not my Best Side”, Lisel Mueller’s “A Nude by Edward Hopper”, Paula Meehan’s “Not Your Muse”, Fleur Adcock’s “Composition for Words and Paint”, Penelope Shuttle’s “Nude Study”, Pascale Petit’s “Woman-Bottle” are among powerful examples of the feminist ekphrasis.¹²

This postmodern understanding of a subversive ekphrasis overlaps with the use of postmodern intertextuality, which is equally deconstructive. Linda Hutcheon observes that “Julie Kristeva’s (1969) reworking of the Bakhtinian notions of polyphony, dialogism, and heteroglossia”, these notions referring to “the multiple voicings of a text”¹³, presents intertextuality as a dialogue between the past and the

¹¹ Isobel Armstrong, “Preface”, *Contemporary Women’s Poetry Reading / Writing / Practice*, Ed. by. Alison Mark and Deryn Rees-Jones, London and New York, Macmillan Press, 2000, p. xix.

¹² Other examples are Elaine Feinstein’s “The Convalescent”, Liz Lochhead’s “Warpaint and Womanflesh”, Ruth Fainlight’s “Like Manet’s ‘Olympe’”, Alison Fell’s “Figure in Space, by Giacometti”, Jackie Kay’s “A Woman Sleeping at a Table”, Ruth Padel’s “Girl with Bare Shoulders”.

¹³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, New York and London: Routledge, 1988, p. 126.

present. Hutcheon goes on to say that “Intertextual parody of canonical American and European classics is one mode of appropriating and reformulating -with significant change- the dominant white, male, middle class, heterosexual, Euro-centric culture.”¹⁴ The women poets under discussion, too, rewrite ekphrastic poetry in order to deconstruct a strong male tradition in poetry and painting. Both ekphrasis and intertextuality are part of the struggle to make a place for women in male-oriented domains by rewriting texts, paintings, which tell their stories, and history from a feminist perspective.

The development of the dramatic monologue in poetry participates in twentieth century ekphrasis. The poet chooses to adopt the voice of another individual, and to speak as a figure in works of art. This technique not only comprises irony, disguise, and humour but also helps to explore the relativity of perspective and get out of the boundaries of Romantic lyric subjectivity. Dramatic monologue, by definition, is a type of lyric poem. According to M. H. Abrams,

“the dramatic monologue has the following features: (1) A single person, who is patently not the poet, utters the entire poem in a specific situation at a critical moment: (...) (2) This person addresses and interacts with one or more other people; but we know of the auditors’ presence and what they say and do only from clues in the discourse of the single speaker. (3) The principle controlling the poet’s selection and organization of what the lyric speaker says is the speaker’s unintentional revelation of his or her temperament and character.”¹⁵

The technique of the inhabiting of another voice is an alternative way to construct the poetic self as multiple, which corresponds to postmodernism. Dramatic monologue, mixing third person and first person voices, is also another way to challenge the predominance of male voices in poetry. It can thus be considered to be indispensable for women’s poetry in the (post)modernist era.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 130.

¹⁵ M. H. Abrams, **A Glossary of Literary Terms**, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc, 1988, p. 46.

Women poets engaging with and rewriting ekphrastic poems draw attention not only to the role of the image as other to the word but also women's role as the other that must be regulated by and in words. As W. J. T. Mitchell stresses, "The central goal of ekphrastic hope might be called 'the overcoming of otherness.'" ¹⁶ The poet's process of reading visual codes of paintings and transforming them into poems is, in a sense, a kind of struggle for the dominance of the word over the image. Thus it can be argued that ekphrastic texts disclose a rivalry, a struggle for power.

"Ekphrastic poetry is the genre in which texts encounter their own semiotic 'others,' those rival, alien modes of representation called the visual, graphic, plastic, or 'spatial' arts. The 'scientific' terms of this otherness are the familiar oppositions of semiotics: symbolic and iconic representation; conventional and natural signs; temporal and spatial modes; visual and aural media." ¹⁷

In ekphrastic poetry, the image is the other of the word, indeed is in a sense appropriated and translated into it. The female (body) is another other in the male dominated ekphrastic tradition. Indeed, it has to be stressed that the power struggle at the heart of ekphrasis "is often powerfully gendered: the expression of a duel between male and female gazes, the voice of a male speech striving to control a female image that is both alluring and threatening, of male narrative striving to overcome the beauty poised in space." ¹⁸ Three of the four women poets under discussion explore this power struggle and the male gaze's attempt to regulate and control the female (body) by contemplating canonical nude paintings. In these paintings, the naked female body traditionally depicted by a male painter seems to signify the essence of a femininity which is both alluring and threatening. The male gaze thus seeks to convert the female body, an overpowering physical presence, into a framed, frozen and hence less threatening object.

¹⁶ Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁸ Heffernan, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

The women poets under discussion are clearly influenced by French feminism's bringing back in the 1980s the unspeakable in the western tradition, the (female) body. The body is an important element in the struggle for self-definition and self-representation. Feminists such as Hélène Cixous, Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Susan Bordo, and, Julia Kristeva concentrate on the inscription of phallogocentric culture on gendered bodies that is how male dominated political and cultural codings exercise power over the social construction of bodies and often erase the female body from the public realm. Cixous pointed to the social construction of woman as the other to the male and the (female) body, a site of unruly passions and hence a threat, to the (male) intellect. Irigaray, exposing matricide in western culture, suggests that we must resume the bodily encounter with the mother, which insides in male civilization "anxiety, phobia, disgust, a haunting fear of castration."¹⁹ It is almost in response to Cixous's words that "only the poets, not the novelists, allies of representationalism", can cause "a radical mutation of things" and inscribe the female body in the cultural texts²⁰ that the women poets under discussion deconstruct canonical works in order to open up space for a new representation of the female (body).

The three poems which are rewritings of canonical nude paintings, Shuttle's "Old Explorer", Duffy's "Standing Female Nude", Kreiter-Foronda's "Nude Descending in All Directions" and Nichols's "Weeping Woman", which is a rewriting of a portrait painting, all question the entire male tradition of painting and writing. The female model is, then, under the gaze of the artist and the viewer, both identified traditionally as male. In cinema studies the spectator is defined as male and the object of his gaze as the female spectacle that is regulated and consumed by him. Laura Mulvey stresses that:

¹⁹ Luce Irigaray, "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother", **The Irigaray Reader**, Ed. by. Margaret Whitford, Cambridge and Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers, 1991, p. 41.

²⁰ Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", **The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism**, Ed. by. Vincent B. Leitch, William E. Cain, Laurie Finke, Barbara Johnson, John McGowan, and Jeffrey J. Williams, New York and London, W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 2001, p. 2043.

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.”²¹

As part of the creative process, the model poses for the male artist. While posing, they are expected to remain motionless, and silent. Berger, explicating this traditional idea of a female being looked at, or gazed upon, states similarly to Mulvey that:

“*men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.”²²

The gaze, then, grants authority to the male viewer, the act of looking thus involving mastery and possession of the object, the female body. However, in order to gain absolute control, the gaze of the male painter must turn the female body, apprehended as an unruly, thus a threat to male civilization, into a painting, often a portrait or nude painting.

The tradition of portrait painting, as exemplified by Picasso’s *Weeping Woman*, which is reconsidered by Nichols in “Weeping Woman”, gained momentum in the Renaissance when the human being began to occupy the centre of the universe. There emerged the tradition of painting individual portraits within this period that described the sitters’ worldly position, identity, wealth and social standing. Portrait painters traditionally aimed to depict not only the physical appearance of the sitters but also their inner lives. However, female sitters, wearing costly jewellery or lace and conveying an expression of submissiveness by their gaze and bodily posture,

²¹ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” p.47-48, **The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader**, Ed. by. Amelia Jones, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 47-48.

²² John Berger, **Ways of Seeing**, London, Penguin Books, 1972, p. 47.

were often also meant to signify the economic and political power of their fathers and husbands. But the male painter's struggle to control the female body and force it into submission is much more evident in nude paintings.

“The representation in a portrait of certain types of clothes, like damask or cloth of gold, and of precious embroidery and gems, was therefore charged with meaning. Renaissance culture was a ‘display culture’, where authority, respect and moral and political influence were gained through the visibility of those signs which spoke of nobility and *magnificenza*, and therefore of virtue. (...) Women’s clothes and jewels were one of the means through which the family’s wealth was made public (...) This was also one of the few ways available to women to show their status, especially on formal public occasions (...) Their luxurious clothes spoke of their dignity and pride, and the representation of these clothes in formal portaiture fixes and codifies the signs of their rank.”²³

The female nude has always been popular in male dominated art/history. Painters of the female nude were traditionally men since, in the past women painters, whose numbers were limited, were excluded from studies of naked models, male and female, on the ground of social decorum. Nude models were first used in Ancient Greece, only to disappear from western art during the prim Middle Ages. They reappeared with the Renaissance, which put the human (body) in the centre, and the rediscovery of classical antiquity. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock note that “Until the late eighteenth century, the painting of the nude was based predominantly on the male figure, but after this date the painting of the nude became increasingly the painting of the female nude.”²⁴ However, socially underprivileged women modelled privately for painters already before the 19th century. John Berger observes:

“In the art-form of the European nude the painters and spectator-owners were usually men and the persons treated as objects, usually women. This unequal relationship is so deeply embedded in our culture that it still structures the consciousness of many women. They do to themselves what men do to them. They survey, like men, their own femininity.”²⁵

²³ Paola Tinagli, **Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation and Identity**, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1997, p. 51.

²⁴ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, **Old Mistresses: Woman, Art and Ideology**, London and New York, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013, p. 115-116.

²⁵ Berger, op. cit., p. 63.

Lynda Nead similarly remarks:

“Anyone who examines the history of western art must be struck by the prevalence of images of the female body. More than any other subject, the female nude connotes ‘Art’. The framed image of a female body, hung on the wall of an art gallery, is shorthand for art more generally; it is an icon of western culture, a symbol of civilization and accomplishment.”²⁶

Although the image of the female body within a frame became a symbol of civilization as Nead observes, this body was disempowered and vilified. Servants, prostitutes and poor women were chosen as nude models. Since posing as such was considered disrespectful, it was only these women at the bottom of society that were ready to serve as nude models for usually little pay or in the case of many servant girls no extra pay at all. To be depicted as naked rendered them even more powerless. As they were deprived of their clothes, which are markers of social status and identity, they were deprived also of their classes, their identities, and their subjectivities. These models were usually the anonymous unacknowledged subjects of paintings.

The female body, indeed the body per se, was moreover vilified in western culture. Beginning with Descartes, the thinking subject was thought to be disembodied in western ideology. Christian and Cartesian thought rejected the body as signifying a void, nothingness, even worse, a fallen state, deception, dirt, and sin. There was a constant denial of corporeality and an elevation of mind or spirit. The body occupied the place of the excluded other. Nead states “Thus in western metaphysics, form (the male) is preferred over matter (the female); mind and spirit are privileged over body and substance and the only way to give meaning and order to the body in nature is through the imposition of technique and style – to give it a defining frame.”²⁷ Parker and Pollock moreover comment on the vilification of the female body. They remark that “As female nude, woman is body, is nature opposed

²⁶ Lynda Nead, **The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality**, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p.1.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 23.

to male culture, which, in turn, is represented by the very act of transforming nature, that is, the female model or motif, into the ordered forms and colour of a cultural artefact, a work of art.”²⁸ This transformation signifies control and domination of the naked female body.

However, as Kenneth Clark states, in order to assume absolute mastery, the male painter must turn the naked body into a nude painting.²⁹ Clark, commenting on the differentiation on the naked and the nude, argues that the nude is the elevated body in representation, the body produced by culture, a form of art contrary to the naked body without clothes that is linked with dirt and the disorder of formlessness.

³⁰ Nead explains the supposed need to transform the female body into art as follows:

“If the male signifies culture, order, geometry (given visual form in Vitruvian Man), then the female stands for nature and physicality. Woman is both mater (mother) and materia (matter), biologically determined and potentially wayward. Now, if art is defined as the conversion of matter into form, imagine how much greater the triumph for art if it is the female body that is thus transformed – pure nature transmuted, through the forms of art, into pure culture.”³¹

Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price point to the male’s construction of “the female body [as] ... intrinsically unpredictable, leaky and disruptive” and therefore as “... out of control, beyond, and set against, the force of reason” and “contaminat[ing] and engulf[ing]”³² As Nead points out above the female body must thus be transformed into an aesthetically pleasing artistic image. The naked female body is in a sense dressed. In **Ways of Seeing**, John Berger indeed remarks that “Nudity is a form of dress.”; rather than seeing it as a dress that conceals the supposedly vile naked body, he speaks of nudity as a dress objectifying and thus

²⁸ Parker and Pollock, op. cit., p. 119.

²⁹ Kenneth Clark, **The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form**, New York, Pantheon Books, 1956, p.70.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 70.

³¹ Nead, op. cit., p. 18.

³² Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price, “Openings on the Body: A Critical Introduction”, **Feminist Theory and The Body: A Reader**, Ed. by. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, Edinburg, Edinburg University Press, 1999, p. 2-3.

rendering the naked figure visible in culture ³³, however, at the price of forcing her body into submission.

The painters struggle to assert mastery over the female also involves sexual possession. Anna C. Chave states that “Conventionally, both the act of painting and that of viewing have been described as phallic acts, acts of penetration performed on that passive receptacle, the blank field of the canvas.” ³⁴ The artist’s obsession with transforming the naked female figure into a regulated art object is inseparable from the physical attraction he feels towards her, as if the sexual relationship between a male artist and a female model were a condition. Actually Martin Postle observes that in “Victorian England, (...) the female model was synonymous with prostitution.” ³⁵ It strengthens the idea that to initiate the artistic enterprise, the object must first be sexually possessed, the brush of the male painter being also his penis. What Gilbert and Gubar assert about the male writer as also applicable to the male painter:

“Male sexuality is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power. The poet’s pen –in this context his stick- is in some sense a penis. (...) In patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text’s author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. The notion of ownership or possession is embedded in the metaphor of paternity. Thus because he is an author, a man of letters is simultaneously, like his divine counterpart, a father, a master or ruler, and an owner: the spiritual type of a patriarch, as we understand that term in Western society.” ³⁶

The male painters’s sexual possession of his female model is an act signifying the colonisation and exploitation of the female body, thus inviting the idea of an

³³ Berger, op. cit., p. 54.

³⁴ Anna C. Chave, “New Encounters with *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*: Gender, Race, and the Origins of Cubism”, **Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History**, Ed. by. Kymberly N. Pinder, New York and London, Routledge, 2002, p. 266.

³⁵ Martin Postle, “Pygmalion, Painted Flesh, and the Female Body”, **The Body and the Arts**, Ed. by. Corinne Saunders, Ulrika Maude and Jane Macnaughton, Hampshire and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.176.

³⁶ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, **The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 4-6.

ideological battlefield. He is the one who controls the brush, colours, perspective and the female body. This analogy between artistic creativity and male sexuality also evokes the notion of the artist as a male genius.

The paintings under discussion are Cubist portrait and nude paintings. Although Cubism is said to deconstruct prevalent power structures and offered a radically new way of looking at the world, it is also said to continue the attempt to regulate and force the female body into submission. Robert Williams notes that “Cubism quickly came to mean all sort of things to different people, and it was developed in all sorts of directions.”³⁷ He also points out that “The acknowledged leaders of the movement, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, were not given to explaining themselves.”³⁸ A twentieth century avant-garde art movement, Cubism’s influence and revolt against the limitations of realistic painting continue to linger in art. Both the invention of photography and the preoccupation with African art played a prominent role in the birth and development of Cubism, which changed the Renaissance conception of painting and suggested that reality has many definitions, and therefore objects in space have no fixed or absolute form. The Cubists did thus not want to imitate form, but to distort it and depict it from a multitude of viewpoints. Berger says “For the Cubists the visible was no longer what confronted the single eye, but the totality of possible views taken from points all round the object (or person) being depicted.”³⁹ Hence the use of deconstruction in Cubist works: objects are broken up, analyzed and reassembled in an abstracted form. They represented the objects as groups of geometrical forms, and the transformed simplified objects into broken, intersecting planes.

As noted above, Cubist painters, like the women poets under discussion, made and continue to make use of deconstruction as a liberating device. However, they are also accused in the poems under discussion of fragmenting their female

³⁷ Robert Williams, **Art Theory: An Historical Introduction**, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004, p. 174.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 174.

³⁹ Berger, op. cit., p. 18.

models' bodies and identities. What remains of them is distorted, disturbed, fragmented images of themselves. Chadwick also observes that "Reduced to flesh, the female subject [in Cubist paintings] is rendered powerless before the artist/viewer".⁴⁰ Williams, moreover, concerning Picasso's painting entitled *The Ladies of Avignon (Les Demoiselles d'Avignon)*, which was painted in 1906-7 and shows two men's visit of a brothel, suggests that "Picasso gradually concentrated its entire expressive charge into a shocking treatment of the female figures alone. Shattered into blade-like facets" they might, he continues to say, reveal "the deepest psychic sources of male ambivalence toward women"⁴¹ Wendy Steiner furthermore observes that "Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, translates the nude into a system of lines and planes in motion", which, she continues to say is "suggesting the modern fetish of the machine."⁴² The nude being transformed into a machine suggests dehumanization. Steiner also suggests that the female object was erased from modern painting altogether. She finds it "interesting that at the very moment when art was being reconceived as a self-referential, self-contained, self-valuable object, the perennial symbol of such narcissism and fetishistic allure -woman- was rejected from it. This was the situation, at least, in elite art."⁴³ She also comments on Picasso's reduction of the female subject as a means of exhibiting his genius. Steiner says "Picasso, like other modern painters, transformed the allure of the female subject into the formal beauty of line and volume, and in the process transferred our response from admiration of her beauty to admiration of his virtuosity."⁴⁴

The women poets under discussion, Duffy, Nichols, Shuttle, and Foronda, then, reread, subvert and rewrite phallogentric Cubist portrait and nude paintings. They adopt deconstructive strategies in their ekphrastic poems in order to dismantle these paintings and their representation of the female (body) as a mute, passive,

⁴⁰ Chadwick, op. cit., p. 280.

⁴¹ Williams, op. cit., p. 175.

⁴² Wendy Steiner, **Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in Twentieth-Century Art**, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 53.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 55.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 50.

fragmented object. They thus open up space for new representations, giving voice to these female models who are thus entitled to author themselves and declare their emancipation or, in Kreiter-Foronda's case, introducing a persona who contemplates the nude.



CHAPTER 1

PENELOPE SHUTTLE'S "OLD EXPLORER" AND PABLO PICASSO'S *NUDE WOMAN WITH NECKLACE*: THE NUDE MODEL THREATENS TO WALK OUT OF THE FRAME

"Not my best side, I'm afraid.
The artist didn't give me a chance to
Pose properly, and as you can see,
Poor chap, he had this obsession with
Triangles, so he left off two of my
Feet. I didn't comment at the time
(What, after all, are two feet
To a monster?) but afterwards
I was sorry for the bad publicity."

U. A. Fanthorpe¹

Penelope Shuttle's poem "Old Explorer" in her tenth collection, called **Sandgrain and Hourglass**, which was published in 2010, engages specifically with the subversive dynamics of ekphrasis in order to reread and rewrite Picasso's nude painting of an anonymous sitter, called *Femme Nue au Collier* (*Nude Woman with Necklace*), dated 1968. Shuttle, from a feminist perspective, critically reviews the male-dominated tradition of nude painting in western culture and calls into question the traditional representation of the body, the dominant site of identity, of the female sitter. She presents the male painter's act of painting as reminiscent of a power struggle, indeed, an explorer's attempt to map and thereby regulate and control unbound 'feminine' nature. The painter's gaze is presented as another means of regulating and also consuming the female spectacle. Shuttle's deconstruction of the tradition of nude painting and cult of the male genius, then, opens up space for the female model to tell her own story and thereby emancipate herself from the control of the painter, who deems himself her maker.

¹ U. A. Fanthorpe, "Not my Best Side", **Side Effects**, Calstock, Cornwall, Peterloo Poets, 1978, p. 6.

1.1. Penelope Shuttle, the Women's Liberation Movement and Feminist Ekphrastic Poetry Deconstructing the Phallo-Centric Nude Tradition

Shuttle, born in 1947 in Middlesex, is one of the acknowledged contemporary female poets who began publishing in the early 1970s. Within the climate of liberalization which characterized the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Women's Liberation Movement developed as a political movement, its slogan being "our bodies our selves", and an important strand in Second-Wave Feminism. This politicisation of gender issues of the period, the shared idea of freedom, women's increasing psychological and economic independence, and the growth of publishing initiatives animated women's poetry and, as a result, growing numbers of women poets emerged. Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle stress that:

"In general, the poetry discovers the postwar woman equivocally between public and private spheres. The impinging of the gendered exterior world on female experience and imagination is countered by the examinations of female subjectivity which register the enfranchising force of poetic utterance politically, spiritually and/or aesthetically. Amid ideological debates and artistic controversy, perhaps the most exciting evidence of women poets' refusing of the cultural status quo lies in the lyric experiments being practiced out of the sight of mainstream."²

Like some of her contemporaries, Shuttle, too, experimented and continues to experiment with ekphrastic poetry as a means of reviewing phallo-centric representation of women, in particular in (art) culture, and of rewriting it from a feminist angle. She views gender issues as closely related to the question of how identity is ideologically constructed by the male gaze, the construction of subjectivity, self-perception, the bodily experience and creativity. Her work is characterized by an innovative, humorous, imaginative, playful tone and a fluid symbolism. It is generally described as "heady, audacious, sustained and coherent, compellingly sensuous, mysterious, erotic, fluid, slippery and refreshing as a spring,

² Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle, **A History of Twentieth-Century British Women's Poetry**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 106.

buoyant and graceful, intuitive.” Dowson and Entwistle, moreover, comment on her attempt to turn the power-struggle between men and women into a dialogue:

“Shuttle wins interest for mapping the creative dreamworld of the female psyche against the biological imperatives of sexual function in an intensively personal way. Writing candidly about menstruation, pregnancy and maternity, she explores the fluidity of gender difference and the interdependence of male-female relations, turning sexual difference into ‘dialogue’.”³

Ekphrastic poetry affords the feminist poet the opportunity to enter into dialogue with a male tradition. In Shuttle’s poem, the female model in Picasso’s *Nude Woman with Necklace* talks back to him, yet the monologue she delivers is also a dialogue of sorts.

One of the fascinating examples of the feminist ekphrastic poem, Shuttle’s “Old Explorer”, offers a critical perspective from which to review the nude tradition that objectifies the female body. The female nude is a significant motif within western art and aesthetics and the procedures and conventions of this high art are one way of controlling the female body and placing it within the secure boundaries of aesthetic discourse. The act of painting the female nude, which is a cultural commodity, signifies the regulation of the supposedly unruly and irrational female body, which is then exposed to the gaze of other spectators, traditionally defined as male. Roland Penrose accentuates the importance of control for Picasso, “Never in the work of Picasso do we find that the expression of emotion overwhelms formal considerations. Never does it become uncontrolled expressionism.”⁴ This seems to suggest that Picasso also desired to impose control on the female body, which is traditionally considered the site of unruly emotions. Elizabeth Bergman Loizeaux observes, then, that “Not surprisingly, many feminist ekphrases take as object portraits and nudes of women, and thereby explicitly address the issue of female

³ Ibid, p. 105.

⁴ Roland Penrose, **Great Artists Collection: Picasso**, London, Phaidon Press Limited, 1971, p. 10.

objectification” and subjection.⁵ Shuttle’s poem is the result of this resistance to the objectification of the female (body) in a male-dominated culture.

1.2. Picasso, a Master of the Nude Tradition, and His Relationship with Jacqueline Roque, his Second Wife and Model

Shuttle’s choice to reread and rewrite a painting by Picasso, just like Grace Nichols, is not surprising, since throughout his life, Picasso worked on the theme of the female nude. One of the most influential artists of the twentieth century and powerful representatives of what is traditionally acknowledged as high art, he is renowned in art history for his female nudes, whom he painted, among others, in the Cubist style, he also being known as the founder of Cubism. He is, furthermore, known as a famous ‘womaniser’; therefore, he holds the art world and ‘ordinary’ people’s interest as a god-like, powerful artist figure, a genius of the century. John Berger notes that “The image of [Picasso’s] genius is wild, iconoclastic, extreme, insatiable, free.”⁶ and as revealed in Shuttle’s poem also injurious to the female.

The anonymous female model in *Nude Woman with Necklace* is identified, also in Shuttle’s poem, as Picasso’s second wife, Jacqueline Roque. The model says: “hey, Pablo, this is me, remember / your young spouse Jacqueline” (l. 29-30). There is very little information about Jacqueline Roque. Their personal story began in 1953 when Picasso saw her at the Madoura Pottery where she worked. She was twenty-seven years old, divorced and had a daughter. He showed his love to her by drawing a dove on her house in chalk and bringing her a rose each day for six months until she accepted him. After his first wife died, they married in 1961, when Picasso was seventy-nine. Their marriage lasted eleven years until his death. He made more than 400 portraits of her. She was not only his wife but also his muse. He was said to have been very much inspired by her beauty.

⁵ Elizabeth Bergman Loizeaux, **Twentieth-Century Poetry and the Visual Arts**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 81.

⁶ John Berger, **The Success and Failure of Picasso**, Harmondsworth and Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1965, p. 130.

1.3. Picasso's *Nude Woman with Necklace*: A Feminist Reading

Picasso's *Nude Woman with Necklace* portrays, in an abstract style and with Cubist brushstrokes, a young naked female wearing a necklace. The model is laid out on a bed, as typical of the reclining female nude tradition. The colours white, blue, red and black make a powerful contrast in their interpenetration. It can be said that the painting has a savage vitality in its distortion of the female body. Penrose observes about Picasso that "There seems to be no limit to the distortions he can invent for the human body."⁷ While "The neck [traditionally] symbolizes the communication of soul with body"⁸, the chain around it suggests domination, domestication and violation. Chevalier and Gheerbrant observe that:

"The symbolism of the necklace also includes that of chains of office and the collars of civil and military orders of chivalry as well as the collars put round the necks of prisoners, slaves and domestic animals. In general terms the necklace or collar symbolizes a bond between the wearer and whoever has given it to or forced it upon him or her. In this context it becomes an obligation or link, sometimes with erotic overtones."⁹

The reclining female is then, as the chain around her neck signifies, regulated and mastered by the painter. If we think of the young model as Picasso's second wife, Jacqueline Roque, then the necklace symbolizes the chain of marriage which is given to the wife by the husband. As Lynda Nead observes, "Artists and lovers, paintings and sex" and we might add, love and domination, "are collapsed into each other."¹⁰

The classic reclining pose, moreover, turns the model into a passive figure, for the experience of high-art should be static and, we might add, it is also suggestive of the attempt in phallo-centric and culture to 'contain' the supposedly lawless

⁷ Penrose, op. cit., p. 4.

⁸ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, **The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols**, Trans. by. John Buchanan-Brown, London, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 697.

⁹ Ibid, p. 697.

¹⁰ Lynda Nead, **The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality**, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p.58.

female body. By painting her asshole, though it is actually impossible and absurd because of the angle, and showing her fart and urinate, Picasso repeats the image of the female body as undisciplined and out of control. The stylistic distortions and abstractions of the female body in Cubist art can, then, be read as a form of the cultural subjugation of women by men, an act of fragmenting her body and soul. The painting can thus be read as showing how the naked female body functions as a sign of the male artist's mastery, authority and stature. Nead indeed speaks of "The projection of the female nude as one of the primary aesthetic traditions within western culture [which] works as an ordering device" and places Picasso, at the end of a long line of males, "Giorgione, Titian, Rubens, Boucher, Ingres, Manet, Renoir, Degas"¹¹, who all used their powers of representation to regulate their female nudes. Nevertheless, Picasso's female nude's passivity has a power in itself, especially when one concentrates on her contemplating face. The face of the model is indeed very striking. She does not look directly at the viewer. She is not here, she is far away, transcending an order that seeks to 'contain' her, and even she is lifted out of her own self, as if in search of another world. She has a threatening force in her being far away as if she were going to rise and break the frame in a second.

1.4. Shuttle's Poem "Old Explorer": The Ekphrastic Poem as Dramatic Monologue

In Shuttle's poem we read how the model indeed rebels against this patriarchal attitude in art and her culture. The speaking persona of the poem deconstructs the power of the male artist who emerges as a genius, lover, husband, judge, and coloniser. The poem also tries to emphasize how the images of women are encoded, how the body is gendered and sexualized through particular poses, gestures and settings. The ekphrastic poem is an example of dramatic monologue, "in which an identified character, or persona, is the sole speaker, that is the voice in the poem is 'playing' a role as in drama."¹² This technique is frequently used by the poets as a

¹¹ Ibid, p. 44.

¹² Jeffrey Wainwright, **Poetry: The Basics**, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 220.

means of investigating aspects of representation and as a way of giving voice to the disadvantaged other. In Shuttle's poem, it becomes instrumental in her feminist intervention subverting dominant, patriarchal culture.

1.5. The Model Jacqueline Talks Back to Picasso: The Painter Exploring, Colonising and Raping His Female Model

The female model, now endowed with speech, in the opening line of "Old Explorer" directly addresses the painter Picasso as "You". The manner of her speaking is very open and she is very sure of herself. The tone is self-confident, critical, subversive, ironic, humorous, resentful and even hostile. She levels her accusation against him thus: "You fling me on the canvas, / beating off old age / in angry brush strokes, // (...) not asking me // if I want / this vulgar river / spouting from my sex, // or even more rude, / to be depicted nude". (l. 4-6, 9-14) It can be said that the directness of her language somehow baffles Picasso, an implied presence, and the reader. She accuses Picasso of having maltreated her with his angry brush and undressed her against her will with the aim of beating old age and being celebrated as an immortal genius. Already in the title, Picasso is, moreover, called "old explorer". The idea of the painter as an explorer invites the idea of the female body as a land to be colonized and exploited. We indeed observe in the poem the identification of the female body with "*a living landscape*" (l. 22). Picasso's being old is also emphasized in contrast to the youth of Jacqueline, which turns her into the symbol of the New World as virginal territory to be conquered by the colonizer, an older, authoritarian bridegroom of sorts. In terms of sexual and colonial ideologies, the symbolic violation of the female body, fragmented by Cubist brushstrokes, thus refers to the violation of her identity by the colonizing power of the artist. This colonization of the female body is also related with the idea of cannibalism: the old male artist feeding on the young flesh of the female. His cannibalistic is also emphasized in the following lines: "You strip me bare, / subject me to your lust for life" (l. 73-74). For the old artist, Picasso being eighty-seven years old when painting

Nude Woman with Necklace, depicting a nude is, as the model suggests, a way of showing that he is still creative and full of life both artistically and sexually.

The model continues to address him as an “old soul-snatcher” (l. 3), “*bad old man of the forest*” (l. 41), “Zeus in a cloud, // Zeus in a shower of gold, / my ancient and annihilating lover,” (l. 51-53) and “enraged Immortal” (l. 66). Through her association of the painter with male figures tricking and hurting women, she presents him as a sexist, colonialist, rapist, powerful immortal who desires to dominate and possess women with his conquering, colonizing brush.

The “soul-snatcher” (l. 3) is here both the devil and the painter who snatches the soul and body of his model. The “*bad old man of the forest*” (l. 41) is the big, bad wolf who tries to seduce and eat Little Red Riding Hood. The reference to Zeus, father of gods and men, who rules the Olympians of Mount Olympus, strengthens the association of the male artist with the god-like figure who holds the authority and power and who is the paternalistic ruler of the artistic world he has created. “Zeus in a cloud / Zeus in a shower of gold” (l. 51-52) refer to two different mythic stories of Zeus involving Io and Danaë respectively. Both of them are stories of rape, which will be reviewed in due course. By associating herself both with Io and Danaë, Jacqueline, then, experiences the situation of being painted as being raped. This presentation of the artist as a rapist is a recurrent image in contemporary poetry written by women and reminiscent of the metaphor of penis-as-brush. Elizabeth Bergman Loizeaux observes that “relations between beholder and beheld are so often described in terms of sex and rape: (male) viewer and (female) viewed, word and image, poet and artist, artist and subject.”¹³ Jacqueline, reiterating Shuttle, however, turns the story of her victimisation and rape by the body and soul snatching older male painter into a story of her empowerment.

¹³ Elizabeth Bergman Loizeaux, *Twentieth-Century Poetry and the Visual Arts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 87.

In Greek mythology, Zeus raped Danaë in the guise of “a shower of gold” (l. 52). Robert Graves resumes the story as follows:

“Acrisius, who was married to Aganippe, had no sons, but only this one daughter Danaë (...); and, when he asked an oracle how to produce a male heir, was told: ‘You will have no sons, and your grandson must kill you.’ To forestall this fate, Acrisius imprisoned Danaë in a dungeon with brazen doors, guarded by savage dogs; but, despite these precautions, Zeus came upon her in a shower of gold, and she bore him a son called Perseus.”¹⁴

Io “was an orgiastic nymph-goddess”¹⁵. When Zeus saw and fell in love with her, he raped her in the disguise of a cloud. Sexuality also dominates Picasso’s representation of his nude model, whose spoken lines “I lie on a painted divan, / you hover over me,” (l. 49-50) suggest sexual intercourse within the imagery of a rape scene. The fact that she addresses him as “my ancient and annihilating lover,” (l. 53) stresses the tradition of associating the artist with the lover and the myth of the artist-model relationship as a love relationship. Nead observes that “According to the mythology, the artist’s female model is also his mistress and the intensity of the artistic process is mirrored only by the intensity of their sexual relationship. This sexual fantasy has been so prevalent in the narrativization of the lives of male artists (...).”¹⁶ However here, the model, speaking subject, experiences this love as rape and annihilation and fights it.

1.6. The Model Rewrites the Story of Her Victimisation into the Story of Her Empowerment

By resisting the male objectification of the female, she fights male desire seeking gratification by framing the object of his lust. The male artist tries to prove both his sexual and artistic powers which are thought to be inextricable with his penis-like brush as an instrument of his generative power. Nead states that “This representation of artistic production supports the dominant stereotype of the male

¹⁴ Robert Graves, **The Greek Myths**, London, Penguin Books, 1992, p. 238.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 42.

¹⁶ Nead, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

artist as productive, active, controlling, a man whose sexuality is channelled through his brush; who finds expression and satisfaction through the act of painting.”¹⁷ Yet Jacqueline reworks the story of her rape by Picasso into a story of female empowerment and emancipation. Feminist ekphrasis, her words rendering impotent his penis-like brush.

It is through the image of Io that the model rewrites her own story as one of secret power. Zeus’s wife, Hera, learnt of his infidelity and turned Io into a cow, around whom grows up “the cult image of the Cow-goddess”¹⁸ As milk-producers and birth-givers, cows are fertility symbols and sacred mother figures. Indeed, in Nordic mythology, the cow gives birth to humankind. In Shuttle’s poem, Io in her role as cow goddess bearing the gift of fertility, emerges as a prototype of the female artist, here represented by Jacqueline, who is narrating her own story. An artist in her own right, she even emerges as a rival challenging the old master of art, her words deconstructing his visual representation of her.

Yet the female artist who tells her own story, thereby undermining patriarchal art and culture, is thought to be frightening, castrating and witch-like by it. In the poem Jacqueline repeats Picasso’s accusation that she is indeed a witch. She says to Picasso that “You say I am // terrible and splendid / as the Witch-Queen of Sheba,” (l. 33-35). The Queen of Sheba was known as the follower of Lucifer, Satan and, according to the Testament of Solomon, a witch. As it is known, “in patriarchal culture, female speech and female ‘presumption’ – that is, angry revolt against male domination – are inextricably linked and inevitably daemonic.”¹⁹ The female artist is thought to be a rebel, a monster or a witch, all figures that feminist writers endorse. Helen McDonald states that:

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 56.

¹⁸ Graves, op. cit., p. 223.

¹⁹ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, **The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination**, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 35.

“By the 1970s and 1980s, early second-wave feminist research had unearthed a great number of stereotypes in the history of art that were based on a binary system of desirable and undesirable forms of femininity. These stereotypes, which ranged from the ‘civilised’ virgin, mother and muse to the ‘uncivilised’ whore, monster and witch, were shown to serve as role models for women.”²⁰

Again, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note that:

“To mention witches (...) is to be reminded once again of the traditional (patriarchally defined) association between creative women and monsters. (...) the witch-monster-mad-woman becomes so crucial an avatar of the writer’s own self. From a male point of view, women who reject the submissive silences of domesticity have been seen as terrible objects –Gorgons, Sirens, Scyllas, serpent-Lamias, Mothers of Death or Goddesses of Night. But from a female point of view the monster woman is simply a woman who seeks the power of self-articulation.”²¹

It is thus her exercise of her right desire to self-articulation that makes Jacqueline a witch. He concedes to her further power, indeed unlimited power, when also depicting her as a nature goddess, goddess of fertility, rebirth, and the weaving of cosmic time and fate. The nude model says, “Thanks a lot, Pablo, // for seeing me as a nature goddess / *lounging flatulently* / on cushions of red and gold –”. (l. 45-48) She thanks him as she views the nature goddess, he might fear as unruly, as an empowering union of what McDonald calls “the Classical ideal of the female body with a positive, feminist ideal”.²² This union, she continues to say, produces “images of the archaic goddess whose maternal body was tied spiritually and essentially to Nature and the Earth.”²³ Romanticized female nature, then, emerges as the source of ultimate goodness and faithfulness, inspiring the minds and actions feminist females. While Jacqueline sees her representation as an earth goddess as empowering, he might be very much intrigued by this ancient goddess in her, but also fear her and hence seek to control her. We are reminded of Kenneth Clark’s differentiation of the nude from the naked, as discussed in the introduction. To briefly resume, he argues

²⁰ Helen McDonald, **Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art**, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 15.

²¹ Gilbert and Gubar, op. cit., p. 79.

²² McDonald, op. cit., p. 2.

²³ Ibid, p. 2.

that the nude is the elevated body in representation, the body produced by culture, contrary to the naked body, in its natural state, which is linked with external nature, dirt, disorder and formlessness.²⁴ According to him, the naked body is liberated from cultural intervention. Thus the control and regulation of nature, physicality and matter within the patriarchal conventions of western society involves the framing of the female body.

Picasso, thus, demonstrates an ambivalent attitude towards women, who are horrible witches as well as lovers, wives and mothers at the same time. As noted above, the model says to Picasso, “You say I am // terrible and splendid” (l. 33-35). This is the duplicity of patriarchal ideology: it can damn women if they want to assert their identities or it can bless you if you are satisfied with what they give to you and do not ask for more.

However, Shuttle’s persona is criticizing both Picasso and the whole tradition of art that silences the female. The poem, for this reason, becomes a feminist analysis of the female body in visual representation within nude tradition. The female body, associated with nature as opposed to male culture, is transformed into a work of art. Thus, from a feminist perspective, male artistic creation is depicted in negative terms. The model accuses Picasso of having turned her into “*a raw sexualised / arrangement of orifices – / breasts, / and cumbersome limbs –*” (l. 77-80), however regulated within a frame, for the pleasure of the male gaze. To be painted as a nude is to be totally made public, “You reveal me to the core, / leave me nothing to conceal, / utterly *nue*,” (l. 73-75) Thus, we have the repetition of the idea of rage and fury within the poem. The persona not only articulates her anger at victimisation as well as rewrites it into a story of rebellion and declaration of self-emancipation, but, thereby, also undermines Picasso’s reputation in art history and culture as a genius. In fact, she threatens to destroy his artwork and thus his fame.

²⁴ Kenneth Clark, **The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form**, New York, Pantheon Books, 1956, p. 70.

1.7. The Model Threatens to Undo the Genius and Walk out of His Painting

The model tells us that her portrait hangs in a gallery, which suggests not only its high status in the art world, but also the reliance of the genius, who is supposedly ahead and independent of society, its tastes, appreciation and money, on the gallery, an institution of art, which will advertise his paintings and guarantee their commercial success. Bergman Loizeaux speaks of museums as suggestive of “Institutionalization (which) meant visibility and the power of resources to advertise and so bring the work to the attention of a public.”²⁵ The nude within the frame and Picasso’s artwork are both gazed at by “any casual spectator” (l. 63), as she deplors; while consuming her, the spectator might acknowledge Picasso’s reputation as a great master of high art. The more-than-mortal Picasso, the genius, is however, exposed by Jacqueline as an ordinary being who is not free from institutions, society or monetary concerns. She threatens him moreover, with eternal imprisonment in the gallery, while she might any moment walk out of his painting, thus destroying it, crush him and his reputation, and venture out into the wide world to come into her own:

“I slip from your controlling hand
into my own being –
Beware – should I care to, I’ll rise

from your canvas,
crush you beneath my massive careless heel,
like Time herself,

prisoning you
forever
in the world’s endless gallery.” (l. 87-95)

²⁵ Bergman Loizeaux, op. cit, p. 33.

In fact, Jacqueline likens herself to “Time herself”, an avenging goddess that will doom him and his reputation to die, while she will just have begun to live.

Shuttle, then, puts the power into the hands of the formerly passified and silenced model. The model threatens to shatter the frame of the picture in the last lines of the poem. She refuses to belong in this image within a frame constructed by Picasso. She does not want the controlling power of the male gaze to define who she is and thus narrates her own story of victimisation and empowerment and aspires to mobility in the world outside the frame. She is raising her voice and desiring to walk out of the frame.

CHAPTER 2

GRACE NICHOLS'S POEM "WEEPING WOMAN" AND PABLO PICASSO'S PORTRAIT *WEEPING WOMAN*: DORA MAAR TALKS BACK TO PICASSO

"The light
drains me of what I might be,
a man's dream
of heat and softness;
or a painter's
-breasts cozy pigeons,
arms gently curved
by a temperate noon."

Lisel Mueller¹

In her ekphrastic poem "Weeping Woman", Grace Nichols, a Guyanese poet who arrived in the UK in 1977, critically engages with and rewrites Picasso's portrait painting of the same name, showing the face of an anonymous woman who is identified as Dora Maar.² His painting, in fact, functions as a starting point for the entire sequence of poems in Nichols's sixth poetry collection, **Picasso, I Want My Face Back**, which was published in 2009. A verbal representation of a visual representation, the poem in particular explores how the body, identity and subjectivity of the female sitter are constructed, distorted and fragmented by male-dominated social, political cultural and artistic codes. Nichols thus tries to subvert the ideology behind the process of female portrait-making, indeed, reconsiders the male tradition of western painting by exploring it as a form of power struggle, in which the male painter seeks to subject the female sitter, and aligns it with colonial

¹ Lisel Mueller, "A Nude by Edward Hopper", **Poetry**, Chicago, The Poetry Foundation, July 1967, p. 226.

² For further reading, see Barbara Guest's ekphrastic poem "Dora Maar" based on Picasso's six portraits of Maar and Irving Feldman's poem called as "Who is Dora? What is She?" which engages with Picasso's painting *Dora Maar Seated*.

politics. She thereby opens up space in “Weeping Woman” for Dora Maar to author herself as she tells her own story in her own voice and talks to us and most, importantly back to Picasso.

2.1. Grace Nichols, Black British Women Poets and Feminist Ekphrastic Tendencies in Portrait Painting

Grace Nichols’s “work in general is a celebration of body, magic, sexuality, power, resistance. It is the kind of self-celebratory poetry.”³ She is interested in the themes of estrangement, ethnicity, independence, cultural dislocation, language loss, anxieties about class, race, gender and struggles for recognition and equality. She challenges socio-cultural power relations in her poetry. Jahan Ramazani states that “Stereoscopically conjoining the British metropolis and the West Indian experience, Nichols often uses translocal conjunctures to contrastive effect.”⁴ As a native of Guyana, now living in England, Nichols is very much influenced by the oral traditions, rhythms and culture of Caribbean folklore, as well as those of African and Amerindian folklore. The issue of language loss is, as noted above, one of her basic concerns. She is best known for her ability to intertwine Standard English and Creole. According to Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle “Grace Nichols tends (...) to disempower the colonising assumptions of English by crossfertilising oral and literary traditions.”⁵ The poems of Black British women poets

“often addressed themselves to that sense of exclusion on grounds of gender and race perpetrated by black men as well as by white men and white women. Silenced or unheard because they were women and not white, black women

³ Carole Boyce Davies, **Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the subject**, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 110.

⁴ Jahan Ramazani, “Black British poetry and the translocal”, **The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry**, Ed. by. Neil Corcoran, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 209.

⁵ Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle, **A History of Twentieth-Century British Women’s Poetry**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 225.

demanded a hearing and spoke from the authority of bodily and personal experience and appearance.”⁶ (Innes, 1996: 316)

This can be seen in the poem “Weeping Woman”. An Afro-Guyanese woman is speaking in the voice of a European woman because both are outsiders, both are othered. Her poem achieves subjectivity in her awareness of the problems of female representation. She takes into account problematic representations of women and subverts these representations in her ekphrastic poetry.

In “Weeping Woman”, Nichols aims to subvert the male gaze and reacts against the notion that a woman’s image exists only for the pleasure of the male spectator. In the preface, Nichols herself states, “The painting with its haggard fractured features and clash of colours (executed in Picasso’s famous Cubist style) made me want to give that face a voice.”⁷ She makes the mute, feminized art object speak.

John Berger observes about Picasso that:

“The majority of his paintings are of women. There are surprisingly few men. A number of the women are portrayed as themselves. Others are idealizations. But most of them are composite creatures – themselves and he together. In a sense these paintings might be called self-portraits – not portraits of himself alone and untransformed, but self-portraits of the creature he and the woman became as they sensed one another. (...) Picasso finds himself in women – and the fact that he has otherwise been so isolated must have increased this need. Through himself, found in woman, he then tries to say things as an artist.”⁸

Dora Maar was apparently one of the women through whom Picasso found himself, but an artist herself, a rival, a source of intellectual stimulation and an unconventional woman, she was in the process also appropriated and reduced to an assistant of sorts to the male painter.

⁶ C. L. Innes, “Accent and Identity: Women Poets of Many Parts”, **Contemporary British Poetry Essays in Theory and Criticism**, Ed. by. James Acheson and Romana Huk, New York, State University of New York Press, 1996.

⁷ Grace Nichols, **Picasso, I Want My Face Back**, Northumberland, Bloodaxe Books, 2009, p. 8.

⁸ John Berger, **The Success and Failure of Picasso**, Harmondsworth and Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1965, p. 162.

2.2. Picasso and His Relationship with Dora Maar, his Muse and Mistress

In the preface, Nichols summarizing the story of Picasso and Maar, states that it was, to some extent, at least, the story of the female artist who is colonized and exploited by the male artist. Although she was a French photographer, poet and painter, Maar is best known for being one of Picasso's many lovers and muses. They met in January 1936, at the terrace of the *Cafè Les Deux Magots* in Paris, when she was twenty-nine years old and he fifty-four. She was then working as a professional photographer. Patrick O'Brian tells that:

“Picasso, the Eluards, and many other friends often met at the Deux Magots, and one evening Picasso was there with Sabartes – the Eluards were elsewhere that day- when he saw a young woman take off her elegant embroidered gloves, lay her hand on the table with its fingers spread, and stab between them with a pointed knife: her aim was imperfect, and every miss was marked with blood.”⁹

Maar was apparently drawn to danger and so was Picasso. He is said to have kept this bloodied glove among his many mementoes. The glove is suggestive of a shell and hence of concealment and secrecy. Putting off the glove, in Maar's case, suggests exposing her secrecy, her covering, her shell and, when also taking into account the blood stains on it, deflowering. As the owner of the glove, Picasso would possibly place himself in the role of the male who extracts from woman her secret, thus mastering her. However, her knife, a phallic symbolism, also seems to foreshadow the power struggle between them, indeed it makes her a rival for mastery. Chevalier and Gheerbrant note that “The symbolism of knives is often associated with notions of judicial execution, of death, vengeance”, however also “of sacrifice.”¹⁰ Maar and Picasso's meeting, as pictured in the above scene, then, symbolically echoes the erotic, violent, and challenging aspects of a love

⁹ Patrick O'Brian, **Pablo Ruiz Picasso: A Biography**, G.P. New York, Putnam's Sons, 1976, p. 309.

¹⁰ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, **The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols**, Trans. by. John Buchanan- Brown, London, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 537.

relationship. It includes love, admiration, passion, artistic creativity and rivalry, unhappiness, damage, and the artist's anxiety of influence.

Maar became Picasso's muse, his help-mate. In fact, an intellectual, creative, critical woman, she shared her intellectual and artistic ideas with him, which led to an intellectual conversation between them, each a stimulus to the other. She thus not only inspired but also influenced and even appraised his art. We might, then, speak of a collaboration between the two. However, Picasso both encouraged and discouraged her. He not only acknowledged her intellectual and artistic power but also tried to get a grasp on her body and her art. Huffington observes that "He tormented her at the same time that he was proud of her intelligence, her talents and her strength."¹¹ She hence turned into the stereotype of the female artist who sacrificed her art when falling in love with a male artist. In his portrait of Dora Maar, Picasso not only objectifies her face, but erases any trace of her identity as an artist in her own right thus asserting his mastery over his potential rival. She does not hold in her hand a camera or a brush or a pen, but a handkerchief apparently moistened by the tears running down her cheeks, which identify her as a female spectacle. The Dora Maar in Nichols's poem, however, complains of her portrait, rejecting it as a misogynistic representation of the female (body).

2.3. Picasso's Weeping Woman, its Artistic Interpretation and A Feminist Reading

In Picasso's *Weeping Woman*, the absurd hat with a flower on top, the face of Maar, her hands and the handkerchief she bites, which underscores her grief, are rendered, in the typical Cubist style, in a complex and angular structure, in the colours white, red, green, yellow, blue, mauve, black and grey. Before discussing Nichols's feminist reading and rewriting of Maar's portrait by Picasso, it seems appropriate at this stage to consider art critics' interpretations of it. The portrait is

¹¹ Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington, *Picasso: Creator and Destroyer*, New York, Avon Books, 1989, p. 238.

considered by some as a thematic continuation of the tragedy depicted in Picasso's famous *Guernica*, in which there is a weeping woman figure holding her dead baby. Picasso indeed followed *Guernica* with his series of *Weeping Woman*. Picasso's portrait of Maar is, then, one of "The images of suffering, exposed heroines –slaves, murder victims, women in terror, under attack, betrayed, in chains, abandoned or abducted"¹² - that we often see in the visual arts. Huffington, however, considering the portrait from a quasi feminist perspective, detects a more sadistic treatment of the female sitter by Picasso. He quotes Picasso who said "'For years I gave her a tortured appearance, not out of sadism, and without any pleasure on my part, but in obedience to a vision that had imposed itself upon me.'" ¹³ Huffington, however, does suggest the opposite:

"It was, in fact, a vision that he had, at least partially, im/posed upon Dora. Although there was in Dora something of the archetypal modern intellectual, racked with anxiety and disquiet, Picasso focused on, encouraged and brought out all that was most tormented in her personality. And his distraught portraits of her, mirrors of disintegration, became like negative affirmations," ¹⁴

In Nichols's poem, the object of Picasso's painting, Maar, wants to take her identity back. She rebels against her 'creator' by saying, "Picasso, I want my face back / the unbroken photography of it" (14., l. 1-2) She needs to be made whole and acknowledged as an artist in her own right.

As noted above, Nichols speaks of Maar's face in the painting as characterised by "haggard fractured features" and a "clash of colours"¹⁵, which invoked in her the desire to redeem it by restoring to her a voice. Ekphrasis as a poetic mode gives voice to a mute art object. The ekphrastic poet in a sense transforms the passive (female) object into a speaking subject. Yet making Dora Maar the persona, the "I" of her poem, Nichols appears to refine herself out of

¹² Carol Duncan, *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 110-111.

¹³ Huffington, op. cit., p. 237-238

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 237-238.

¹⁵ Nichols, op. cit., p. 8.

existence. In her poem “Weeping Woman” Maar indeed emerges as the persona whose voice is ever-present, reassembling her identity and (life-)story. A sequence, the poem consists of twenty interlocked monologues, which, at times, modulate into a conversation with Picasso and the reader. Depicting many angles and sides of the female subject’s emotional and intellectual life, the poem actually echoes the Cubist manner of painting, which is obsessed with the representation of an object from multiple angles. This already suggests that Maar’s attempt at emancipating herself from the man who painted her, a Cubist, is fraught with difficulties. However, the poem opens with an accusation she levels against him: “They say that instead of a brush / he used a knife on me- / a savage geometry.” (1., l. 1-3) Although she attributes what is basically an accusation to other people, rather than voicing it directly herself, he, that is Pablo Picasso, is accused of inflicting violence upon his female sitter. Chevalier and Gheerbrant observe that:

“The face is the most vital part of the body and the most sensitive since in it are located the organs of sense. Whether we like it or not, it is the part of oneself which one reveals to the world at large. It is the ego laid bare in part and far more revealing than the rest of the body. (...) To understand a face requires deliberation, patience, respect, and with them, love. To study a face without loving it is to debase it, to destroy it, to murder it and to subject it to vivisection. The face is the symbol of the divinity in each human being, a divinity erased or manifest, lost or rediscovered.”¹⁶

According to Nichols’s Maar, Picasso subjected her face to a vivisection which broke it up into geometric, or angular planes and thus also deconstructed her identity not only as a woman, but also as a human being. The paintbrush, which is, as Duncan notes, identified with the penis and thus “insists that to create is to possess, to dominate, and to be quintessentially male”¹⁷, is replaced with an even more overtly aggressive weapon, a knife. The knife which Maar held in her hand when she and Picasso met for the first time and which she directed against herself, rather than another person, is, in a sense, wrested away from her and used by Picasso against

¹⁶ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, p. 367.

¹⁷ Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

her. The male dominated tradition of painting a female's portrait, in particular, in the Cubist style, which breaks up the (female) body, is thus presented as an act of aggression and violation. Maar says that she is but "a broken / piece of crockery" (2., l. 17-18), that is not only fragmented, but also relegated to the kitchen, which is supposed to be a woman's proper place. The 'savage' brushstrokes of Cubism can, then, be thought as the inscription of phallogocentric western culture, or the law of the Father, on female bodies. Duncan remarks that:

"In fact, the defense of male supremacy must be recognized as a central theme in modern art. Gauguin, Munch, Rodin, Matisse, Picasso and scores of other artists, consciously or unconsciously, identified some aspect of the sexist cause with all or part of their own artistic missions."¹⁸

The words which are used for Picasso in "Weeping Woman" such as 'Midas, Conquistador, stallion, bull, genius, prick' invoke a sexist, colonialist, greedy, male figure who wants to possess and subject everything in the world to his supposedly God-like power.

2.4. The Female Model/Muse as a Rival to the Male Artist

Maar might be said to have been perceived by Picasso as a threat that must be conquered, turned into a framed image and subjected to his power for at least two reasons. She is not only a multi-talented artist and hence a rival, but, as his presentation of her as a weeping woman suggests, also a body accommodating unruly, excessive emotions and hence threatening the intellect and rational civilisation, at large, both culturally considered male. In fact, so irritated is he by Maar's ability to weep tears, that he perceives her and all other women as "suffering machines" (5., l. 18), that is, weeping and suffering seem to be automatic reactions inbuilt in them. He appears to belittle what he secretly fears, her tears. Luce Irigaray indeed asks: "isn't there a fluidity, some flood, that could shake this [patriarchal]

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 112.

social order?”¹⁹ Emotion, as representative of the feminine principle, patriarch fears, will overflow the boundaries of their rational civilisation. On the other hand, Maar’s role as a rival artist is accentuated by her reference in the poem to some of her photographs.

Maar, the “Guernica witness” (16., l. 13), as she is called in the poem, in real life photographed Picasso and his painting called Guernica at various stages of its composition. It might be said that she used her art to render him and his art work immortal. Her role as help-mate to the male is reaffirmed by her allusion to Greek mythology. Calling Picasso “my bull” (7., l. 4) and associating the people who look at her portrait, because of their consuming gaze, with “The Minotaur”, (12., l. 6) she alludes to the story of Ariadne and Theseus and the minotaur, a monster with a man’s body and a bull’s head, feeding on human beings. Falling in love with Theseus, Ariadne gave him a ball of thread, which helped him to find his way into the labyrinth, where he killed the Minotaur. The thread also helped him find his way out and escape from Crete together with the other people who were to be sacrificed to the Minotaur and Ariadne. Maar is, then, a contemporary Ariadne, the thread symbolising their narrative skills, and in Maar’s case, more specifically, her poetry, photography and painting. Yet Ariadne/Maar put the ball of thread, or their art, in the service of a male. They sacrifice themselves, their time, life and art and, in Maar’s case, also body to the male, who thus overshadows them. On the other hand, we might say that Maar, immortalising Picasso and his Guernica in her photographs of them, also profited from this as it was her turn to use her power of representation and frame him.

The “floating foetuses” (16., l. 15) is an allusion to one of Maar’s most celebrated surrealist photos, *Père Ubu*, depicting an embryo of an armadillo. The armadillo is known for its armoured shell and this can be regarded as Maar’s self-

¹⁹ Luce Irigaray, “Women-Mothers, The Silent Substratum of the Social Order”, **The Irigaray Reader**, Ed. by. Margaret Whitford, Cambridge and Massachusetts, Blackwell Publishers, 1991, p. 47.

defense and self-protection against Picasso. With their claws, armadillos dig under the surface and this symbolically represents Maar's investigating into the surface of her questions in order to create for herself an identity alternative to the one produced by patriarchy, and to find whatever is hidden in her relationship with Picasso. Another one is her portrait of "A blind man sitting / with his white cane in the sun- / his remming eyes / dreaming their inner visions." (16., l. 8-11) It might be argued that, although male, the sitter in the portrait actually alludes to Maar's role as both Picasso's model and an artist in her own right. The sitter is the spectacle regulated and controlled by the male gaze and hence blind; he or she does not see, but is seen. Maar, in fact, accuses Picasso of having rendered her, the female sitter, blind: "What has happened / to the pupils / of my eyes, Picasso? // Why do I deserve / such deformity?" (2, l. 10-14) On the other hand though, the blindness of the male sitter in Maar's photograph is also suggestive of a romantic disregard for the materialist external world, which renders him able to free his imagination and dream and have visions of, presumably, a world of art. Dora's portrait of the blind man is thus also a self-portrait that reveals her rebellion against and submission to patriarchal culture.

2.5. The Power Struggle Between the Female Model and the Male Artist in terms of Colonialism

The power struggle between Picasso and Maar is also presented in terms of colonialism. Vicki Bertram notes that "Nichols literalises colonial metaphors, exploiting the tradition whereby heterosexual relations and colonisation share vocabularies".²⁰ As a native of Guyana, now living in England, Nichols is obviously familiar, indeed marked, by colonial history, that is, that of the Caribbean folklore, Africa and England. Dora Maar invokes the discourse of colonialism, which links the colonized land and the colonized female body. Conceiving of herself in her relationship with Picasso as a land to be colonized, she seems to readily submit to her conqueror: "Conquistador / of the flesh / my stallion / my bull / my Cortez / invade

²⁰ Vicki Bertram, **Gendering Poetry Contemporary Women and Men Poets**, London, Pandora Press, 2005, p. 123.

me now / with the sperm / of your colours (...) I am your / New World / your Malinche / assisting you in / your conquest". (7. l. 1-8, 12-18) A whole set of associations is evoked in these few lines, which reinforce the idea that Maar and Picasso's relationship was a most complicated one, characterized by rivalry and submission.

The designation The New World, was used by European explorers for the Western Hemisphere, specifically America. It alludes to the colonial period, the voyages of Christopher Columbus and the Spanish conquest of Yucatan and other places. Again, Hernando Cortez, who is, like Columbus, associated in the quotation above with Picasso, was a Spanish Conquistador who defeated and conquered the Aztec Empire. Both colonizers are, furthermore, associated with the bull, a symbol of male power, violence, sexuality and fertility. Chevalier and Gheerbrandt remark that:

"...bulls arouse visions of irresistible strength and vitality In Greek mythology, bulls symbolized the unleashing of uncontrolled violence. They were animals sacred to POSEIDON, god of sea and storms, and to Dionysos, god of male fertility." 21

Maar, who places herself in the role of the colonized New World and Aztec Empire, appears to both censure the violence the male painter inflicts on his female sitter and celebrate his artistic power and creative fertility. She also identifies with La Malinche, a Nahua woman from the Mexican Gulf Coast who was one of the twenty women servants given to the Spaniards by the natives of Tabasco in 1519. She played a role in the Spanish conquest of Mexico, acting as interpreter, advisor, and lover of Cortez, which, then, reinforces Maar's ready submission to Picasso. In Mexico, La Malinche's reputation has been altered over the years according to changing social and political perspectives. She is reflected in different and often conflicting ways, as the embodiment of treachery, the quintessential victim, or as the symbolic mother of the new Mexican people. Maar is similarly depicted in different roles. She is painted by Picasso in different guises, being transformed "from lioness

²¹ Chevalier and Gheerbrandt, op. cit., p. 131.

to goddess / from goddess to doormat / from eagle, raven, swan / into a silly duck” (4. l. 3-6), that is, as a disempowered and empowered woman. Again, she presents herself in Nichols’s poem as a woman who both rebels against and is complicit with phallo-centric art and culture.

2.6. The Model Reclaims her Self-respect and Walks out of the Frame

Despite her ambivalence towards Picasso, she deals a deadly blow against the celebration of the male artist in western culture as a genius -who is, in patriarchal culture, by definition male- as an intellectual and creative force, divorced from the material external world, a self-autonomous figure. Larry Shiner, in relation to the cult of the genius, observes that:

“many artists tended to see themselves as belonging to a special subculture, with its own institutions, coteries, and conventions, a singular world of beauty and spiritual value within an uncomprehending, commercial society.”²²

What Maar does is expose the commercial side of his art. She says that “Everything he touches / with his Midas-hands / turns, of course, into a fortune.” (5. l. 1-3) In Greek mythology, King Midas is known for his ability to turn everything he touched into gold. It is called as the Golden touch, or the Midas touch. However, according to the myth, he died of hunger, because each food he touched was turned into gold. Each of Picasso’s paintings was sold for big amounts of money. As a famous, accepted artistic figure of his time, he could turn, as Maar says, her tears and suffering into “big rolling diamonds.” (3., l. 17) He could turn “A bicycle saddle / with handle inverted-” (5., l. 5-6) into a work of art that one could buy a house with it. Even Picasso, the genius, is, then, dependent on the economic market, or the consumer politics in the art world, and very much craving material comfort. In order

²² Larry Shiner, **The Invention of Art: A Cultural History**, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 199.

to achieve it, he commodifies the female body in the form of an art object to be sold and bought on the market, which stresses the cannibalistic side of the (male) artist.

Dora Maar's story is, then, to some extent, one of colonisation and exploitation in which her face and identity were 'taken over' and used for another's purposes, albeit, at times, at least, with her consent. In the poem she embarks on a journey on which she assembles the pieces of her face, fragmented by the male painter, which signifies the act of reassembling her story as told by herself, of reclaiming her sense of identity and self-respect. She refuses to allow the colonization of her body, the traditional site of identity, at the end of the poem by stating that "'Picasso's art is Picasso's art. / Not one is Dora Maar.'" (19., l. 23-24) She is able to separate herself from Picasso's distorting vision of her. She also renders herself free from the gaze of the viewers, the "people / with their gowns and lights / leaning towards me / with their whispering insights" (12., l. 1-4), whom she associates with the "The Minotaur" (12., l. 6), who consumes human flesh. She liberates herself from the boundaries of Picasso canvas and, in a dramatic gesture of emancipation, walks out of the frame.

"I am no longer there
trapped in that chrysalis
that distorts
my cherished mirror images
I am no longer framed
imprisoned in that cocoon
that winds up
the silk of my spirit
I'm beginning to feel
Dora Maar is beginning to feel-" (17., l. 1-10)

She walks out of the distorting frame, which advances on a larger scale to a phallo-centric way of seeing and representing the female (body). Thus liberated, Maar continues in her journey of authoring herself. The chrysalis she invokes is suggestive of her -former- imprisonment and metamorphosis, as it conjures the idea of an insect that will transform into a butterfly that can fly away, or again into a

silkworm. Maar indeed speaks in the above quotation of “the silk of my spirit”, alluding to herself as a silkworm producing silk, as metaphoric of creative production. We are reminded of the association of the artist with a spider spinning a net, or a tale, with its thread. It is then also her identity as an artist that Maar reaffirms at the conclusion of the poem. The chrysalis obviously also alludes to rewriting, which helps female characters tell their own stories. Her reference to her spirit and immediately after that to her regaining her ability to feel again, moreover, suggests the union of the severed body, the traditional site of emotions, and spirit. Speaking of herself as “Dora Maar”, she redeems herself from the anonymity to which Picasso doomed her, when calling his picture *Weeping Woman*, and reasserts herself, her identity, her story.

CHAPTER 3

CAROL ANN DUFFY'S "STANDING FEMALE NUDE" AND GEORGES BRAQUE'S LARGE NUDE: DECONSTRUCTING PATRIARCHY'S IMAGE OF THE FEMALE BODY

"The figure is a nominal reminder that existence
is not pantomime as relieved by the artist,

The body of the model, the lift of her torso
the extension of limbs, fold of skin

Express reality beyond tenure of the brush,
shell or escapist sail,

A severe distance is established between her realism
and his anxious attempt to define it."

Barbara Guest ¹

The poet-persona in Carol Ann Duffy's poem "Standing Female Nude", the title poem of her first full-length collection which was published in 1985, fundamentally reacts against the male painter by posing questions about art, identity, sexuality, body and class distinctions. Entering into a dialogue with Georges Braque's Cubist painting called *Large Nude*, the poet exemplifies the tension between art, artist, model, work of art, and viewer and tries to understand how the male artist reshapes the body of his female nude model by turning it into an art object. The model is fully aware of the deficiency of self-representation and misrepresentation of the female (body) in phallogocentric discourses. She challenges the established notion of the female as object and the male as viewer. Though she is the object that the painter is depicting in his painting, the nude model obtains agency through her words and thoughts.

¹ Barbara Guest, "The Nude", **The Collected Poems of Barbara Guest**, Ed. by. Hadley Haden Guest, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2008, p. 239-240.

3.1. Carol Ann Duffy, Feminist Ekphrasis and Dramatic Monologue

As one of the pioneers of twentieth century British poetry, Duffy mainly deals with how cultural coding, to be more precise, coding in the field of painting, dominated by phallogentric values, exercises political power over the construction and representation of the female (body). Linda Kinnahan stresses that “Within Duffy’s poetry, the meaning of art is also a construction and is shown to be produced in relationship to economics, the discourse of the body, and the regulatory structures of gender, race, and class.”² Art, then, becomes a tool in the clashes between the genders. The culture of art imposes its discourse, conventions and norms on women’s identities, and their bodies, a main site of identity. In “Standing Female Nude”, Duffy explores the relationship between the male painter and the female sitter, he inscribing phallogentric culture on her passified gendered body. Femininity is constructed mainly in relation to the physical body which is re-formed again and again by cultural coding and patriarchal representations.

Duffy, like other contemporary women poets, uses ekphrasis in order to underline how phallogentric art, invested with ideological power, and social decorum shape the subjectivity of the female in terms of the established constructions of the binary oppositions in the western thought system. Dealing with the problem of how identities are constructed socially through culture (and language), she discusses in depth this construction’s influences both on masculine and feminine sexuality. Similar to the other women poets under discussion, Duffy adopts feminist ekphrasis in order to reflect how the female (body) is artistically and historically framed in sexist terms, and she tries to widen that frame by giving a disruptive voice to the silent female model in her poem. The poem highlights not only the objectification of the female (body) by the male (artist), but also the seeming difference in class. The

² Linda Kinnahan, “Carol Ann Duffy and Questions of Convention”, **Contemporary British Poetry Essays in Theory and Criticism**, Ed. by. James Acheson and Romana Huk, New York, State University of New York Press, 1996, p. 256.

female model, a prostitute, is placed on the bottom of society, while the painter considers himself to be superior to her, while actually, the model signals, he too is a poor and underprivileged element in society. The sitter, thus, challenges not only his attempt to regulate her body and subject her to his power of representation, but also his pretention to the position, indeed the myth, of male genius.

The poem in which the female model emerges as the persona is a dramatic monologue. Duffy is famous for her creative use of this narrative technique. By adopting and dramatizing different voices, she explores linguistic devices of poetic language, construction of the self, aspects of representation, and plurality. She also breaks free from the constraints of Romantic first-person lyricism by adopting other voices. Writing dramatic monologues in the voice of imaginary persons is also a kind of intertextuality, allowing her sitter to express her own thoughts and thus deconstruct Braque's representation of her. Deryn Rees-Jones observes that "Duffy's use of the dramatic monologue, while posing questions about the nature of self-representation and the fallibility of language, is also a genuine attempt to highlight and give voice to the plight of a disadvantaged other."³ The 'disadvantaged other' in this poem is the nameless female who is objectified and commodified both as a model and a prostitute. By giving her a voice, the marginal becomes central within the poem. The female model discloses in her own voice her story, her psychology and motives.

3.2. Georges Braque's Cubist Painting: *Large Nude*

The fact that in "Standing Female Nude", the artist's first name is Georges suggests that the poet and the sitter respond to is Georges Braque, one of the pioneers of Cubism. The use of the words "analytically" (l. 5), "volume, space." (l. 8), which are suggestive of (French) Cubism, reinforces this assumption. In Cubist paintings objects, including the female body, are broken up, analyzed and reassembled in an abstracted form. Instead of depicting objects from one point of view, Cubists choose

³ Deryn Rees-Jones, **Carol Ann Duffy**, Devon, Northcote House Publishers Ltd., 2001, p. 3.

to depict them from a multitude of viewpoints. The world they live in is a complex modern world in which there is no longer one truth or one valid perspective. However, feminists like Duffy, conceive of the female body in Cubist paintings as a violated body, rather than one that is represented in its complexity. Even Anne Ganteführer-Trier's largely neutral description of the female body in Braque's *Large Nude* is suggestive of distortion and awkwardness. Ganteführer-Trier observes that

“one of his few female nudes, the picture *Large Nude (Grand nu)* of 1907/08, which with its 140x100-centimetre dimensions –thus comparable to Picasso's large painting *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)* –counts as one of Braque's larger paintings. In Braque's nude, viewers are also faced with distorted female body forms equipped with over-proportioned muscles, and even the correlation of the extremities to one another is fictitiously laid out. Musculature and body mass are greatly emphasized by means of a few clearly placed lines, such as in the region of the buttocks and the right calf. The female nude seems a little awkward in front of an angular, rigidly draped cloth. Both the cloth, with which the woman seems to conceal herself from the background, and the bordering colour surrounding the cloth, which fluctuates from red through ochre to yellow, are reminiscent of Paul Cézanne's *Bathers (Baigneuses)* and Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)*. Comparable to Picasso's work from the early phase of Cubism, Georges Braque also uses colour as an aid in shaping and organizing light and dark. The colour is no longer realistically bound to the object being represented”.⁴

As noted above, the female body is distorted, over-proportioned, and highly muscled by the Cubist brushstrokes of Braque, who was known to be under the impact of Cézanne and Picasso. David Cottington, moreover, criticizes “*Large Nude* [which] was his first ambitious figure painting.”⁵ as amateurish. He argues that

“Less successful than the drawing in accommodating the radical flatness and figural distortions of the *Femmes d'Alger*, Braque's painting appears tentative, its startling composition of views of the figure's front and back juxtaposed unconvincingly with more or less conventional space in which the figure is set.”⁶

Braque's nude painting has thus met with criticism, both from a feminist and a neutral perspective.

⁴ Anne Ganteführer-Trier, *Cubism*, Ed. by. Uta Grosenick, Taschen, 2015, p. 12.

⁵ David Cottington, *Cubism: Movements in Modern Art*, London, Tate Publishing, 1998, p. 22.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 21.

The naked (female) body has been the central subject for centuries in the tradition of western art. As an art form invented by the Greeks in the fifth century, the nude is used as the means of expression in painting, sculpture and photography. Even though the male nude was common in antiquity and later periods, the female nude body became even more popular in modern art. A work of art that takes the naked human form as its dominant subject reflects the urge to reshape the body. The nude tradition more specifically signals the regulation of the female body and female sexuality in visual representations and culture. However, Duffy gives the female sitter back her voice so that she can undo this regulation.

Traditionally the male artist is thought to be a translator of matter into form and the female model becomes the silent object to be reformed. So the male artist who will turn this supposedly filthy matter into form holds the power. As Lynda Nead claims, “The transformation of the female body into the female nude is thus an act of regulation: of the female body and of the potentially wayward viewer whose wandering eye is disciplined by the conventions and protocols of art.”⁷ In other words, male artist transforms matter into form, nature into culture. By adopting feminist ekphrasis, Duffy aims to deconstruct the patriarchal hegemony in art/history and liberate the female body.

3.3. “Standing Female Nude”: Art as a Tool to Exploit the Female Body

“Standing Female Nude” is set in France, most probably in Paris. Its first line, “Six hours like this for a few francs.” (l. 1) alludes to the model’s posing to be painted for six hours without a rest only for a few francs. This line grants the model a sarcastic voice in the world of representation. She comments on the experience of posing for a male painter in order to earn money, but her side job is very tiring and not very profitable. The speaker, who also calls herself as “a river-whore” (l. 7)

⁷ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 6.

belongs to the lower class. She is underprivileged in the social order both by her profession and her modelling. As it is noted in the introduction, in particular in the past, models were often selected from the lower classes; they were mostly prostitutes, servants, and mistresses of the painters. The equation between the female model and the prostitute has been established since ancient times. Prostitutes were frequently employed privately by professional artists, and the love between the model and the artist is the archetypal artist-model relationship of the western tradition. Elizabeth Bishop also notes that:

“In 19th-century Europe, models were increasingly associated with prostitutes for several reasons: the professionalization of the art business made payment to models a focal point of the activity –posing became, like prostitution, an unofficial “job”; a network of models, actresses, and prostitutes formed and some women did move between the professions; as public urban space emerged as a modern concern and as the rise of urbanization caused an increase in prostitution in cities such as Paris and London, an unwed and self-supporting woman was inevitably labelled a prostitute. Prostitutes and models roamed the streets. The latter were sought by artists at “model markets,” squares where male and female models congregated and waited for work. In addition, models were often from the lower classes, and this lead many to wilfully or unconsciously confuse them with prostitutes. The issue of nudity is an oft-cited link between the professions: both life models and prostitutes are paid to remove their clothes. The association of nudity and money sealed the association of the model and prostitute in the bourgeois public’s mind.”⁸

Like the prostitute, the model is also a symbol of the exploitation of lower-class women by the bourgeoisie. Both the model and the prostitute are on the edge of society and the poem reflects the interaction between these two professions. Art becomes a cover and a tool for the exploitation and the objectification of the female (body) both as a model and a prostitute.

The function of art in contemporary society is associated with capitalistic urges. The female model’s body is colonized, used and sold as a literal and artistic commodity. Yet she is also in the role of worker, as she works by selling her body for money to survive. However, society condemns her for selling herself while

⁸ Elizabeth Bishop, “Artists’ Models”, **Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work, Volume I, A-N**, Ed. by. Melissa Hope Ditmore, London, Greenwood Press, 2006, p. 47.

celebrating the artist for selling it. As a result of society's desire to control the model/prostitute's body, "the marketing of women is institutionalized –in this stance, through art."⁹ The self of the female is shaped by economic systems of exchange, and the self-representation of the female is forced to occur within socio-economic forces. The speaking subject is aware of these socio-economic and artistic discourses and can thus critique them.

The second line, "Belly nipple arse in the window light," (l. 2) destabilizes the persona. The poet does not use commas and the line is also not a full sentence. It is as if her body parts are not separated though the painter is dividing her body into cubes in his painting. Her body is dismembered and modified by the male artist. The body parts will be translated into a work of art. She seems to be in a weaker position than the male artist who gazes upon her and dismembers her in the typical Cubist style. However, the consciousness of being watched leads her to self-recognition, although the painter traditionally expects the model to vacate her mind. Thus it can be stated that the poem dramatizes the creation of femininity through the performance of the body, for the body is her capital; however, it is at the disposal of and distorted by the male painter.

From the third line, "he drains the colour from me." (l. 3) it is seen that she is aware of the cannibalistic side of the male artist. He 'feeds on' the naked female body. It is the principal attraction, object of the male gaze which actually constructs it. He seems to possess a complete authority and a great power over her body. But she is not satisfied with being painted. She is actually feeling degraded and frozen into an art object as her colour is being drained from her.

In the next lines, the artist speaks in commanding and criticizing terms: "Further to the right, / Madame. And do try to be still." (l. 3-4) and "You're getting thin, / Madame, this is not good." (l. 9-10), "Don't talk." (l. 23). Although he would certainly know her name, he chooses to address her as 'Madame', a polite title for

⁹ Kinnahan, op. cit., p. 259.

women. However, he is not really showing her respect since he, as noted above, commands and criticizes her. The male artist's directions allude to a kind of servant-master relationship between them. Indeed, Parker and Pollock draw attention to power of the painter and powerless status of the model:

“The images reproduce on the ideological level of art the relations of power between men and women. Woman is present as an image but with the specific connotations of body and nature, that is passive, available, possessable, powerless. Man is absent from the image but it is his speech, his view, his position of dominance which the images signify. The individual artist does not simply express himself but is rather the privileged user of the language of his culture which pre-exists him as a series of historically reinforced codes, signs and meanings which he manipulates or even transforms but can never exist outside of.”¹⁰

The dominant gender holds cultural and artistic discourse in its hands. He adopts the voice of a master, not being interested in her name, and the identity it gives her. He just wants to turn her into a “volume” (l. 8), a “space” (l. 8), which in the Cubist context, means to reduce the model to a relatively abstract yet recognizable human shape. The female is thus trapped in a distorted body. This representation and commodification of the female body is, as noted above, related with the idea of cannibalism.

The male painter's control of the female sitter is also linked to sexual possession. Sexual overtones are quite obvious in the process of painting as depicted in the poem: “There are times he does not concentrate / and stiffens for my warmth.” (l. 16-17) The artist has a sexual desire for the model. She can read him as a text: She knows that he is looking at her as a kind of sexual object. The artistic gaze is indeed related with metaphorical sexual intercourse. The model also says that “He possesses me on canvas as he dips the brush / repeatedly into the paint.” (l. 18-19) Just like the pen, the brush is a phallic symbol which denotes the sexual power of the male. The

¹⁰ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, **Old Mistresses: Woman, Art and Ideology**, London and New York, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013, p. 116.

line figuratively refers to an act of rape. The artist is depicted as a rapist and the model as his victim. However, she also takes back control.

3.4. The Female Model Sarcastically Tells Her Own Story

Even though the female model is disempowered by the male artist, she recovers power by telling her own story and thus by authoring herself. This means that she is no longer the creature of his own making. Duffy creates a verbal freedom for this ex-centric female for her to voice her own ideas and use her voice in order to subvert the notions of the passivity of the female. Dowson and Entwistle observe that “Duffy frequently employs heteroglossia, that is, the war of social differences maintained by language, to legitimise the speech of the underclasses or any individual who is positioned as the underdog.”¹¹ Though actually harsh and derogative, the painter’s language appears to be polite and respectful as indicative of his seemingly superior social position. The model’s language on the other hand is sarcastic and vengeful, as suggestive of the bitterness of the exploited lower class and attempt to restore a sense of power.

The model possesses the power of observation and experience. She is the interpreter. Traditionally the female is the source of inspiration; however, in this poem the female is the source of value judgements, insights and meaning. The model reveals the consumer politics in the art world. She is alluding to her future as an art object “in great museums” (l. 6) to be watched, analysed and discussed by the upper classes: “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” (l. 5-7) Her body will be objectified, translated into a “volume” (l. 8). It will be made public by artistic representation as it is bought, sold, possessed as a commodity by patriarchal economic structures. She is aware of this cultural category imposed upon her. Her awareness of her own complex cultural situation causes her to label herself as other,

¹¹ Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle, **A History of Twentieth-Century British Women’s Poetry**, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 214.

that is, a river-whore. Art is supposed to turn her body into a “Magnificent” (l. 13) shape which is however going to be possessed by the male gaze. She will be elevated from the base condition of her life to the world of high “Art” at the price of being reduced to a commodity.

She is fully aware of the pettiness of the bourgeoisie. Her image of the Queen of England who is gazing at her “shape” (l. 13) underlines the contradiction between her social status and her representation: “In the tea-leaves / I can see the Queen of England gazing / on my shape. Magnificent, she murmurs, / moving on. It makes me laugh.” (l. 11-14) She compares the two worlds, that of the river-whore and the Queen. There are hints of both jealousy and contempt. Linda Kinnahan states that:

“The tea-leaves also suggest, in a more literal fashion, that the Queen herself becomes such a shape within the milieu of popular culture. The Queen’s image is customarily reproduced on the inside bottom of tea-cups and is mass-marketed as a souvenir. (...) In these lines we also see the collapsing of high and popular art, for the painting becomes an object for the marketplace, just as the cup has been. The myth of the individual genius and the unique creation (“they tell me he’s a genius”) helps to keep the boundary between the high and low intact, but the poem illuminates the illusoriness of this boundary by suggesting its participation in bourgeois institutions.”¹²

For the capitalist institutions, everything can be objectified, commodified, bought and sold, even the image of the Queen of England.

Though there is a gap between her world of prostitution and the bourgeois perspective of the artist, the model belittles the artist by referring to him as “Little man” (l. 19). She is dismissive of the cult of the male artist. “They tell me he’s a genius.” (l. 15) but she does not care about it. She has a deprecatory and questioning attitude towards art and the male artist. The romantic conceptualisation of art as elevating, exalting, immortalising or reviving and the myth of the male artist as unique, ingenious, or great is questioned and negated by the model. According to her, artists are neither morally superior nor intellectually distinguished, but self-obsessed.

¹² Kinnahan, op. cit., p. 259.

Her tone is very critical and sarcastic, helping her to bring him low and thereby establish equality with her or even her superiority over him.

She draws a striking fellowship between herself and the artist by stating that “Both poor, we make our living how we can” (l. 21). His studio is also “cold” (l. 11). Both the model and the artist who is poor and not yet established in the art world belong to the lower class. Art is supposed to elevate the artist, but the double-meaning of the word “art” introduces an ironic perspective to this assumption. Duffy wants to remind the reader that “The English word “art” is derived from the Latin *ars* and Greek *techne*, which meant any human skill.”¹³ rather than ingenious creativity. The belief of the highness of art is criticized both by the model and Duffy. Capitalized “Art” in the first stanza is, moreover, likened to her art as a whore, making sex, “you’ve not the money for the arts I sell.” (l. 20)

The poem attributes to the model and the artist a similar creativity. The artist has imaginative power, artistic appreciation, and aesthetic sensibility and she, by presenting her own story, too possesses the gift of creativity, and her incoherent yet significant train of thoughts re-present the art world. She also re-interprets the governing politics of art and recreates the artist’s self by commenting on him. As evident in the lines “At night I fill myself / with wine and dance around the bars.” (l. 25-26), her dance is an alternative way of narrating and wine “is the beverage of life or immortality.”¹⁴ Both wine and dance are alternative languages for her. Dance in a religious context symbolizes “a manifestation of the Spirit of Life. Often explosive, its aim is to throw off every vestige of the dual nature of temporal things to rediscover at a bound the primeval Oneness. Then the body and soul, creator and creation, visible and invisible meet and anneal timelessly in a unique ecstasy.”¹⁵ The model’s dance may not involve a religious feeling, however, she too might wish to

¹³ Larry Shiner, **The Invention of Art: A Cultural History**, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 5.

¹⁴ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, **The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols**, Trans. by. John Buchanan- Brown, London, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 1113.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 273.

throw off what is imposed upon her dismembered body and thus retrieve her 'primeval' oneness. Her body becomes the centre of her own dance, own story.

3.5. The Female Model as a Rival to the Male Artist in Her Act of Self-representation

She complains at the end of the poem by saying that "It does not look like me" (l. 28). The female body becomes unidentifiable by the dismembering brushstrokes of Cubism. The model thus disclaims the nude as a representation of her, and also implicitly judges the artist as unsuccessful. Angelica Michelis and Anthony Rowland assert that "Duffy's poem can be interpreted as an investigation into the ensuing gap between the model and work of autonomous art."¹⁶ They continue to argue that "Braque openly admitted the lack of referentiality in his paintings of women: "I couldn't portray a woman in all her natural loveliness. I haven't the skill. No one has. I must, therefore, create a new sort of beauty that appears to me in terms of volume, of line, of mass, of weight."¹⁷ However, this creation of a new sort of female body is seen as a form of distortion. A painting, of course, does not necessarily accord with reality, the relativity of which is, moreover, emphasized in a postmodern world. It is the painter's interpretation of the model. Art represents through the artist, who translates the female body into a visual image. In Duffy's poem, the painter thus participates in the formation of the speaker's feminine identity. However, what the speaking subject alludes to is the power of art to distort. The model does not recognize herself in the object of the painting. She sees herself as a misrepresented stranger in the world of art, and resists the artist's distortion of her. The encounter with her own framed, limited image reminds her of the illusion of representation. Kinnahan regards the final line, "It does not look like me" (l. 28), as a triumph for the model, because for her this line is "an assertion of a self, a 'me' that the artist and the system cannot assimilate and possess, a 'me' that escapes the

¹⁶ Angelica Michelis and Anthony Rowland, "Introduction", **The Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy: 'Choosing tough words'**, Ed. by. Angelica Michelis and Anthony Rowland, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 14.

tyranny of representation, a ‘me’ that is essentially unique and coherent and cannot be replicated.”¹⁸ This is one of the fundamental criticisms levelled by feminists against male painters.

Hence the model deconstructs the Romantic notion of the artist as a unique, imaginative, authoritative individual who creates an ingenious work of art. This line of deconstruction continues as she functions as the artist’s muse, his help-mate in the production of his art, which is therefore not autonomous. She shares her body, and evaluation of his art with him, indeed behaves like an art critic for Braque. She thus inspires and influences his art. There emerges a sort of collaboration between painter and female model. Yet there is also a rivalry and hostility between them.


“Standing Female Nude”, as an example of ekphrastic poetry, is a self-reflective poem, engaging with a work of art. Even though “The lineage and language of the ekphrastic poem reaffirm the sense of the women as objects and men as their conspiratorial audience.”¹⁹, Duffy reshapes the ekphrastic genre for her own end. The model here is not a passive, silent, motionless model, but rather a critic and a rival to the male artist and engages with her self-representation. Duffy thus subverts traditional attitudes in her poem, which manifests unexpected turns and twists. Here the woman who is gazed at is not flattering the artist. On the contrary she belittles, criticizes, and mocks him. Duffy structures her poem as the critical, cynical and ironic response of the female model to the male artist who is painting her. The male artist is reinterpreted and disempowered by the discourse of the model, who also fashions her own image, thus emerging as the creator and creature of her own making.

¹⁸ Kinnahan, op. cit., p. 260.

¹⁹ William May, “Verbal and visual art in twentieth-century British women’s poetry”, **The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century British and Irish Women’s Poetry**, Ed. by Jane Dowson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 43.

CHAPTER 4

CAROLYN KREITER-FORONDA'S "NUDE DESCENDING IN ALL DIRECTIONS" AND MARCEL DUCHAMP'S *NUDE DESCENDING A STAIRCASE (NO. 2)*: UNMAPPING THE FEMALE BODY



because the flesh can be
tortured
because the flesh can be
raped
because the flesh can be
mutilated
because the flesh can be
burned
because the flesh can be
scorned
because the flesh can be
corsetted within the skin
because the rage can be
held in
the flesh must be painted.

Liz Lohead¹

Another ekphrastic poem, Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda's "Nude Descending in All Directions" critically engages with Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*.² She explicates some of the most contentious issues of our century such as the representation, regulation, colonisation and exploitation of the female (body), or female nude, by the male gaze. Unlike the other poets under discussion, Kreiter-Foronda, however, does not give the nude model back her voice for her to tell her own story, possibly as signifying her wish not to appropriate and impose a

¹ Liz Lohead, "Warpaint and Womanflesh", *The Colour of Black and White: Poems 1984-2003*, Edinburg, Birlinn Ltd., 2003, p. 97.

² For further reading, see X. J. Kennedy's poem "Nude Descending a Staircase".

story upon her. At the same time, the, most likely, female, persona, speaking in a sarcastic, imperious and inquisitorial tone, is contemptuous towards both the male artist and, not the model, but what he has made her into: a means of advertising his understanding of his, among others, Cubist and Dadaist art, which she, using the Dadaist style herself, makes fun of. The female nude has, she implies, been sacrificed to his nonsense art.

4.1. Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda and her Interest in Painting and Ekphrastic Poetry

Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda, the author of six poetry collections and co-editor of two poetry anthologies is also a visual artist, whose paintings and sculptures have been widely exhibited. She furthermore served as Poet Laureate of Virginia from 2006-2008 and presently works as an educator giving lectures and organizing workshops on ekphrastic poetry. Her main interest being on paintings, painters and their models, she deals with the tension between art, the artist, the model and the work of art. She re-examines a male-dominated aesthetic that has structured the representation of the female body in western art since antiquity. She questions the male tradition of nude painting and its symbolic importance within the western tradition of high art in terms of the power relations between the genders. Her aim is “to expose the social structure of representation as an activity and a relationship of power/knowledge/desire – representation as something done to something, with something, by someone, for someone.”³ She tries to free the female (body) from this representational bondage.

4.2. Marcel Duchamp and His Cubist, Dadaist and Surrealist Art

As one of the most influential and controversial artists of the twentieth-century, Marcel Duchamp radically contributed to the revolutionary developments in

³ W. J. T. Mitchell, **Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation**, Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 180.

the plastic arts, painting and sculpture by experimenting with the classical techniques and established styles of Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Cubism and Fauvism and making contributions to artistic movements such as Dada, Surrealism, Pop art, Minimalism, Conceptualism, Op and Performance art. His ability to question and playfully ridicule existing norms and to provoke the audience to rethink what art is, what it is for and what artists do led him to create diverse projects and controversial works such as *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), the *Large Glass* (1915-23), *Fountain* (1917), and *Etant donnés* (1946-66).⁴ Gavin Parkinson states that:

“in the face of the primacy given to the experience of *vision* or the *eye* in art (particularly so in the case of painting, which would have epitomized his derogatory category ‘retinal art’), Duchamp had always sought to make art a thing of the *mind*. (...) Relocating art from the sphere of the emotions and senses, (...) to that of the intellect, where the work of art contained ideas, artists who followed his lead were able to discover new objectives, materials, subjects and themes for art.”⁵

Larry Shiner also observes that “Duchamp’s dialectic of art and anti-art infected his response to most of the central components of the modern system of art. He attacked the idea of art as a separate realm and entity”.⁶ In “Nude Descending in All Directions” Kreiter-Foronda suggests that despite his deconstruction of traditional art and thought, Duchamp demonstrated a typical male attitude towards nude models and the female (body) in general.

4.3. Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase (No.2)*

Nude Descending a Staircase (No.2), an influential painting of Duchamp, is dated to January 1912.⁷ The first version, *Nude Descending a Staircase (No.1)* was

⁴ Duchamp is also famous for his readymades such as *Bicycle Wheel*, *Bottle Rack*, *Prelude to a Broken Arm*, *In Advance of the Broken Arm* which were objects he chose and presented as art. His aim was to question the notion of art and the value of it by pointing to Dada’s emphasis on chance.

⁵ Gavin Parkinson, **The Duchamp Book**, London, Tate Publishing, 2008, p. 6.

⁶ Larry Shiner, **The Invention of Art: A Cultural History**, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2001, p. 290.

⁷ This painting still haunts the imagination of contemporary artists. One of them, Shigeo Kubota (b. 1937) produced a version of *Nude Descending a Staircase* from a female perspective by using

painted in December 1911. Duchamp's nude is an unrecognisable, machine-like figure in an abstract movement. He was directly inspired by the photographic motion sequences of Eadweard Muybridge besides the fragmentation and synthesis of the Cubists. He used repetitive imagery in order to create an impression of motion. Interested in depicting the fourth dimension, he also used the movement technique of the Futurists. By depicting the mechanistic motion of a nude, he aimed to create a composition of various positions taken by a form in movement. Dalia Judovitz states that:

*“Nude... No.2 presents a clash of nominal and visual expectations that are the expression of the history and conventions of painting. Instead of reclining passively, Duchamp's fractured nude is actively descending a staircase. The scandal surrounding the exhibition of *Nude... No.2* thus reflects the destruction of the nude as traditional subject matter of painting. (...) Moving away from figuration into abstraction, Duchamp's *Nude... No.2* further challenges this congruence of visual, nominal, and generic expectations.”*⁸

For these reasons, the painting caused a great clamour among the artists, critics and the audience. The Cubist Salon des Indépendants asked Duchamp to alter the painting or to rename it in order to make it seem less strange, and he withdrew it. Though the painting was exhibited in two Cubist exhibitions later that year, it caused a great controversy at the Armory Show, held in New York in March 1913. The critics and public satirized and ridiculed the painting. It now is exhibited at the Louis and Walter Arensberg Collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in Philadelphia and it has become one of the masterpieces of avant-garde art.

shifting camera angles and image processing techniques. (See Whitney Chadwick, **Women, Art, and Society**, London, Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1996, p. 339.)

⁸ Dalia Judovitz, **Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit**, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1998, p. 28.

4.4. Kreiter-Foronda's "Nude Descending in All Directions"

4.4.1. Kreiter-Foronda Distances Herself from Duchamp

Re-examining Duchamp's famous painting, Kreiter-Foronda rewrites it from a feminist perspective and in a different medium, ekphrastic poetry. According to her reading of the painting, the nude is violated. Some critics, however, believe that Duchamp himself was actually mocking the Cubist and other styles and by extension the representation of the female body in these styles. Parkinson observes that "Wildly out of context (not reclining or posed classically), this nude seemed to combine Cubism, Futurism, chronophotography and film, while mocking all of them through its sheer absurdity."⁹ However, Duchamp himself does not seem to have expressed any intention of mockery.

Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2), the title of the painting is changed by Kreiter-Foronda to "Nude Descending in All Directions", as if to suggest that, despite her unrecognizable state, the model is all over the place. The change in the title is also reminiscent of Harold Bloom's theory, in **The Anxiety of Influence**, that in order to find their own voice a later generation of (male) writers must figuratively kill off eminent ones by deliberately misreading their works. Kreiter-Foronda's changing his title is thus meant as a challenge. After the title, the reader reads, "*After Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*". The choice of the word "after" is interesting. The poet does not choose to say "inspired by", but again implies her independence. She seems to also imply her intention to ponder the question of what is left of the nude "after Marcel Duchamp".

4.4.2. The Exposure of the Nude in Duchamp's Painting to the Gaze of the Male Painter/Spectator

Kreiter-Foronda's poem, which resumes the ongoing debate about women in art, has a conversational and, as noted above, sarcastic and imperious tone. It is

⁹ Parkinson, op. cit., p. 24.

constructed as a conversation between the persona and Duchamp about his nude model and his art. She comments on the painting as well as states her ideas about the model, the painting and the painter. The persona starts to speak by censuring the painter: “Strip her bare. / Swirl her four dimensions / down those stairs stark.” (l. 1-3) She alludes to the power struggle between the creator and his creation, or the male painter and his nude model. She is stark naked and sent down the stairs as if suggesting that she occupies a low status or none at all. The first line of the poem, then, alludes to the typical male artist who strips away his model’s identity and place in society, clothing being one of the markers of social status and identity. Benstock, Ferris and Woods note that “Clothing makes the body culturally visible.”¹⁰ Thus it can be argued that the naked girl is invisible within that culture. The persona in fact accentuates the nakedness of the model by saying to Duchamp: “You stripped / your nude bare for this?” (l. 50-51) The nude is naked by definition, which means that the persona did not have to add “bare”, but did so with the object of emphasising her nudity. However, her nakedness, although her body is actually not recognisable in the painting and only affirmed in the title, also renders her -in theory- all too visible. She is reduced to only a physical materiality, to fragments that are unidentifiable, and exposed to the male gaze.

The persona alludes to the whole phallo-centric tradition of painting nudes in art history. She speaks of “blue nudes [who] wiggle their dreams loose,” (l. 26). These *Blue Nudes* refer to a series of gouaches découpées by Henri Matisse, painted in 1952. They represent female nudes either seated or standing and were inspired by Matisse’s collection of African sculpture. Picasso also has a painting called *Blue Nude*, which he created in 1902. It portrays a nude embracing her knees as if she is in search of security and comfort or wishes to be less exposed to the male gaze appraising her body. The attack on the female body has thus, the persona accentuates, a long history.

¹⁰ Shari Benstock, Suzanne Ferris, and Susanne Woods., **A Handbook of Literary Feminisms**, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 213.

Duchamp's nude is, then, also sexualized by the male gaze. The persona calls the model "just another sex cylinder / up [the painter's] sleeve" (l. 4-5), as if Duchamp were a cheap trickster drawing a bunny, slang for women, out of his hat, and "Another blown / fuse in [the painter's] paints" (l. 5-6), which phonetically invites us to read this latter line as "a flusie in his pants". Mieke Bal suggests that the female body is "caught up in a viewing tradition that has the female nude as its favoured subject, [and] voyeurism as its dominant semiotic mode, and the body as the sheet on which writing on art is done".¹¹ The silence and exposure of the naked female body give authority and legitimacy to the male artistic gaze. She is thus disempowered by him.

Thus Duchamp is associated with the typical male artist who is attracted to, feeds on, consumes, but also fears the female (body). She is reduced to her body, but because of its supposed irrationality, threatening male reason, it is then turned into an art object, that is, a civilised, regulated object, a nude, rather than a naked model, and framed. Lynda Nead observes that, "Through the procedures of art, woman can become culture; seen through the screen, she is framed, she becomes image and the wanton matter of the female body and female sexuality may be regulated and contained."¹² Yet the persona does not dwell for long on Duchamp's ambiguous attitude towards the female body, an object of attraction and fear; she attacks him from another angle.

4.4.3. The Persona's Attack on Duchamp's Dadaist Art

The persona not only accuses him of stripping his model bare to sell his art and ideology to the people, but exposes in particular his Dadaism as not intentionally nonsensical, as a reaction to a meaningless war, but as downright nonsense,

¹¹ Mieke Bal, **Looking In: The Art of Viewing**, Amsterdam, The Gordon and Breach Publishing Group, 2001, p. 80.

¹² Lynda Nead, **The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality**, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 11.

pretentious and a failure. So her following question is actually a scathing judgement passed on his art: “You stripped / your nude bare for this?” (l.50-51)

Beginning from line 15 to 22 the persona refers to, indeed makes fun of and belittles Duchamp’s Dadaism. Robert Williams observes that “The most complex and influential figure associated with Dada was Marcel Duchamp.”¹³ His Dadaist art and thought has been called, she says, “anti-art” (l. 17) and “revolutionary” (l. 7) and “anti-bourgeois” (l. 12). Duchamp’s most influential artwork was *Fountain*, a urinal he signed as R. Mutt and exhibited in 1917, shocked the art world and spectators. Traditionally twentieth-century Dadaism is considered to represent a rejection of the traditional ‘meaning’ of art as well as attitudes to and techniques of it. It has a tendency to negate the controlling role of the artist. The role of chance and the irrational in the creation of the work of art, produced in a world disrupted by a mad or irrational war, became an important strategy and is one of the most important legacies of Dada. Yet the persona reduces Duchamp’s Dadaist art and approach to utter futile nonsense.

The persona demonstrates her great familiarity with Duchamp’s works and art in general, as also implied by her parodying of the Dadaist style.¹⁴ She says that “Dada’s another chef d’oeuvre / that’s hung around forty years, / waiting for an exhibit / on the moon.” (l. 46-49), apparently alluding to Dadaists’ including Duchamp’s difficulty in finding access to exhibitions because of the (supposed) meaninglessness of their art. She, too, agrees that it is meaningless: “Dada’s *gadji beri bimba glandridi*” (l. 37), “Dada’s twittering / bird talk” (l. 42-43). “*Gadji beri bimba glandridi*” (l. 37) is a Dada poem by a German poet, Hugo Ball. The author of

¹³ Robert Williams, **Art Theory: An Historical Introduction**, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004, p. 177.

¹⁴ Referring to “the promised land of Arp” (l. 18) and “Arp eggs” (l. 19) the persona alludes to Jean (Hans) Arp who is a poet, visual artist and a founding member of the Zurich and Cologne Dada groups. The persona reminds the reader of one of Arp’s important works, *The Egg Board* (1922), a farcical game. Verbal and visual ideas fertilized each other in this game which is again a reinterpretation. The poet is also engaged with the process of reinterpretation by writing a poem on a particular art work.

the 1916 Dada Manifesto, and founder of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Ball declared that his aim was “to remind the world that there are people of independent minds – beyond war and nationalism – who live for different ideals.”¹⁵ His poem is a well-known example of “verses without words”, of sound poetry, like “bird talk”. (l. 43), which, the persona, however, implies, is unintelligible to human ears.

Duchamp, thus, does not escape the persona’s derision. The persona also alludes to his short-lived magazine, “a single issue of *Rongwrong*” (l. 20), which again suggests the failure of Dada and also his art. He intended the title of the magazine to be Wrongwrong, but a printing error transformed it into Rongwrong. Duchamp also designed the cover, which included a photograph of a matchbook with a picture of two dogs in the front. Only one issue was ever published. The persona, then, accuses him of reducing his nude to a means of selling his Dadaist nonsense to the art world and the ‘ordinary’ people. The persona calls both his nude and implicitly his art, which she embodies, “balmy” (l. 31). She, moreover, derisively calls the nude in the frame the embodiment of his “cause célèbre” (l. 8-9), but his “rolling her frame” (l. 8), as he depicts her descending down a staircase, and her “wiggling” (l. 16) rather seem to aim at sexual titillation. In fact, his whole anti-bourgeois, revolutionary stance is, the persona implies, fake. She calls his nude “just another dame gone completely anti-bourgeois” (l. 11), as suggestive of Duchamp’s upper-middle class origin and (supposed) pretence to a revolutionary frame of mind. The persona thus portrays the renowned Duchamp as a charlatan and a trickster and his art as meaningless, a hilarious pretence. His nude is thus sacrificed to the male gaze for nothing, yet the persona’s exposure of Duchamp renders him equally naked to the reader’s eyes.

¹⁵ Paul Poplawski, “Dada”, **Encyclopedia of Literary Modernism**, Ed. by. Paul Poplawski, Westport, Connecticut and London, Greenwood Press, 2003, p. 67.

4.4.4. An Unresolved Ambiguity: Does Dadaism Liberate the Female?

Yet there remains an ambiguity, which alludes to the possibility that Dadaism does liberate the female. The persona refers to “a land where everything’s / pataphysics to bruitism,” (l. 24) Pataphysics is a philosophy dedicated to studying what lies beyond the realm of metaphysics. Duchamp was a member of the society called the *Collège de 'Pataphysique*, founded in 1948 in Paris. Bruitism is a form of Dadaist art, the art of noise poetry. In this land beyond the realm of metaphysics, the persona says, the “blue nudes” referred to above, “wiggle their dreams loose,” (l. 26) and “Mona Lisa giggles / and exits from the wall”. (l. 27-28) ¹⁶ Does this, then, not suggest that female nudes, who are stripped bare and made an empty vessel, can now retrieve and indulge in their own dreams and aspirations? Mona Lisa, in fact, retrieving mysterious powers, emerges from the frame Leonardo DaVinci put her in and even exits from the wall. The Latin motto of the *Collège de 'Pataphysique* is: *Eadem mutata resurgo*, meaning “I arise again the same though changed”. Does Dadaland not become the site where these female models frozen into a silent image can return to life? Intentional fallacy tells us that we cannot reconstruct the intention of (either Duchamp or) Kreiter-Foronda: does she present to us a divided persona, a persona who both derides Dadaism as distorting the female body and conceives of it as liberating it? It is all in the eye of the beholder, or in the mind of the reader.

¹⁶ One of the best known works of art, the *Mona Lisa* was also parodied by Marcel Duchamp. His work was entitled L.H.O.O.Q., which pronounced letter by letter in French, means “She’s a hot ass.” and this implies that the woman in the painting is in a state of sexual excitement. Duchamp repainted Mona Lisa with a moustache and goatee. While Duchamp is mocking the classical style, Kreiter-Foronda is mocking Duchamp by making his Mona Lisa giggle at him.

CONCLUSION

“That woman lying naked on the bed,
for instance, stops
brooding over her weakness of will
and admires her thighs.
(...)

though behind both paint and gallery
you can see some old city
is thinning to dissolution.
(...)

brokenhearts, hangovers, torn sheets,
yards of mattress stuffing, bottles,
cigarette butts, used newspapers.”

Anne Stevenson¹

“(...) Put what space
you like around the ones you fix on,
and gloat. Art multiplies itself.
Art’s whatever you choose to frame.”

Fleur Adcock²

The present conclusion aims to present a review of the discussion of feminist ekphrastic poems in the previous chapters. It concludes with a brief discussion of the question whether the women poets under discussion who accuse male painters of regulating and framing the female body do justice to the ambiguity in their intentions and paintings. There also arises the question whether the poets can, in their poems, actually step out of western discourse and thus liberate the models.

Postmodern and feminist theory challenges the notion of autonomous male authorship and originality as well as conventional representations of women as the

¹ Anne Stevenson, “The Exhibition”, *Poems:1955-2005*, Northumberland, Bloodaxe Books, 2004, p. 297.

² Fleur Adcock, “Leaving the Tate”, *The Incident Book*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 3.

passive object of the male gaze. Both use deconstructive strategies as a means of exposing the assumptions underlying cultural constructions of gender and sexuality. In the present dissertation it has been shown that the women poets under discussion make use of ekphrasis to articulate a feminist reaction to and deconstruct the objectification of the female (body) in paintings by male painters. As Elizabeth Bergman Loizeaux observes: “the history of ekphrasis encompasses more than a century of poems that subvert, rewrite and use for feminist ends the idea of a mastering gaze and a feminized work of art.”³ Penelope Shuttle’s “Old Explorer”, Grace Nichols’s “Weeping Woman”, Carol Ann Duffy’s “Standing Female Nude” and Carolyn Kreiter-Foronda’s “Nude Descending in All Directions” have each been explored in individual chapters in terms of the feminist interrogation of dominant representations and stereotyping of the female (body) in phallo-centric art/history. The models in their poems resist the eroticized victimization of the female body and revolt against the male gaze that strives to regulate, control and consume it. The poets thus release the models from the bondage of art/history, largely controlled by men, and raise questions about the representation of the nude which has for so long haunted the tradition.

As has been discussed, the challenging responses of these women poets to the canonical paintings by Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp stimulate subversive questions in the reader/spectator. Their rewriting is an act of revolting against the masculine dominance and superiority in the visual arts that produces and perpetuates images of women. They try to deconstruct the cultural myths of the supposedly ingenious male artist as the maker, creator and the discoverer of the female (body). Working over well-known representations of the female (body) and shifting their meanings, these poets also aim to dig into the collective memory. Their dialogue with the works of great masters turns into a harsh criticism of the urge to silence the female as objects produced and represented in the

³ Elizabeth Bergman Loizeaux, *Twentieth-Century Poetry and the Visual Arts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 108.

patriarchal art tradition. This critical attempt of the female poets stems from their need to create alternatives. Their motives for revision of masterpieces by male artists lie in their experience of oppression as inflected by their gender.

Throughout this study, I have tried to stress that one of the ways contemporary women poets use to question and challenge the male-dominated artistic tradition is to use the ekphrastic approach, a subversive poetic technique of addressing a work of art directly and re-reading it. As a framed painting hanging in a museum, the art work of the past is a vital force in the present and, more specifically, in the construction of gender politics and the representation of the female body. Our perception of the art of the present perpetuating images of femininity is conditioned by that of the past. An art work is the subject of a complex process of rediscovery, critique and revision that mirrors changing values. Ekphrasis, then, enables women poets to enter into a dialogue with the living past. The past persists within the poets' mind as well as the present and future. A thousand-year-old tradition, ekphrasis, nowadays functions as an important means of feminist argumentation and intervention in women's poetry. It gives voice to a different construction of the female (body), the passive object of male desire. As a way of re-reading, re-viewing, and re-discovering, feminist ekphrasis is a challenge to and a revolt against the canon, which is a structure of subordination and domination that marginalises the female (body).

Women have been traditionally denied the right to create their own images of femininity. Although this situation has greatly changed since the 60s, they are still expected to some extent to conform to the patriarchal construction of the female. However, three poems under discussion allow the models to talk back, while Kreiter-Foronda employs another persona critical of visual representations of women by men. They can be read as outbursts of the silenced female that liberate their minds and bodies. Three of the models claim the position of speaking subjects and thus pass from the status of objects to that of subjects. They refuse silence and producing their

own liberating texts author themselves. They also give their own account of the experience of being captured on canvas and demand that their story be heard. The poets try to release the female models from the experience of being captured on canvas and from a position of enforced passivity, stillness and silence.

When the female models are confronted with their distorted Cubist images on canvas, they react against the painters because they experience a sense of alienation from their own bodies and, of course, identities. Even though Cubism's fracturing of the singular perspective into multiple ones and its translation of the female body into a multi-faceted form can be considered as a way of liberation from the traditional ideal of female beauty, the female models reject this interpretation. They also challenge the assumption that "Exhausted, repelled, or disillusioned, the great majority of modernists replaced the beauty of woman with the beauty of form."⁴ They equate Cubist fragmentation to the fragmentation of the female in art. The female sitters do not recognize themselves in these Cubist images; rather they see themselves as cubed, mechanized, formalized, stylized, and unrecognizable bodies in modern art.

There is again the equation of male artistic creativity with sexual virility and sexual power over female bodies. Whitney Chadwick stresses that:

"the major paintings –and sometimes sculptures– associated with the development of modern art wrest their formal and stylistic innovations from an erotically based assault on female form: Manet's and Picasso's prostitutes, Gauguin's "primitives", Matisse's nudes, Surrealism's objects. Modern artist from Renoir ("I paint with my prick") to Picasso ("Painting, that is actual lovemaking") have collaborated in fusing the sexual and the artistic by equating artistic creation with male sexual energy, presenting women as powerless and sexually subjugated."⁵

The female bodies are supposed to exist merely to satisfy the male painter's and viewer's lust. As has been discussed, the nude in art is a form of taming the

⁴ Wendy Steiner, **Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in Twentieth- Century Art**, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2001, p.44.

⁵ Whitney Chadwick, **Women, Art, and Society**, London, Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1996, p. 279.

(supposedly) unreliable, unpredictable, disruptive, and terrifying female body by turning it into a work of art for the sexual pleasure of the male gaze.

“The subject of the nude in art brings together discourses of representation, morality, and female sexuality, but the persistent presentation of the nude female body as a site of male viewing pleasure, a commodified image of exchange, and a fetishized defense against the fear of castration has left little place for explorations of female subjectivity, knowledge, and experience. The difficulty of distinguishing between overtly sexualized (i.e., voyeurism, fetishism, and scopophilia) and other forms of looking, the issue of female subjectivity, and the identification of the female body with nature, generation, and the instinctual life have become important areas of investigation for contemporary feminism.” (Chadwick: 281-282)

Castration anxiety or fear of the loss of masculine power and autonomy explains the hostility towards the female body and the need to tame it by its representation as an object of male desire. Lynda Nead observes that “Through the procedures of art, woman can become culture; seen through the screen, she is framed, she becomes image and the wanton matter of the female body and female sexuality may be regulated and contained.”⁶ Examination of this conflict-ridden relationship between the painter and the painted image draws attention to the power struggle between a perceiving subject and an object of perception.

Erotically charged nude paintings, photographs or drawings are mostly created for the male gaze. Alfred C. Kinsey remarks that:

“Photographs of female nudes and magazines exhibiting nude or near nude females are produced primarily for the consumption of males. There are, however, photographs and magazines portraying nude and near nude males – but these are also produced for the consumption of males. There are almost no male or female nudes which are produced for the consumption of the females. The failure of nearly all females to find erotic arousal in such portrayals is so well known to the distributors of nude photographs and nude magazines that they

⁶ Lynda Nead, **The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality**, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p.11.

have considered that it would not be financially profitable to produce such material for a primarily female audience.”⁷

The silence, passivity and exposure of the naked female body seem to give authority and legitimacy to the male artistic gaze which is, however, deconstructed by the women poets under discussion.

In their poems the female gaze is associated with a different perception. The transformative power of these poets gives us an opportunity of looking out from the male canvas. This feminist power within the poems gives rise to the subjectification of the female. Thus, paintings by men are deconstructed. As John Berger notes: “The art of the past no longer exists as it once did. Its authority is lost. In its place there is a language of images. What matters now is who uses that language for what purpose.”⁸

Despite the intentional fallacy, the intention of the poets under discussion seems clear: feminist subversion of the construction of women by male painters. However, there arises the question of the intention of the male painters under discussion. As noted above, Cubism painters’ presentation of the female body as a multi-faceted form can be considered as an attempt to emancipate their cultures from the traditional ideal of female beauty, rather than an attack on femininity. Or again, if we adopt the post-modern notion of the subject as a fragmented, multiple self, then we would have to assume that it entertains multiple and possibly conflicting intentions. Nevertheless, it remains a truth that nude painting has for many centuries been dominated, or almost exclusively controlled, by men. Each has thus found the opportunity to impose his probably conflicting intentions onto his representation of the female body, which must, then, be interrogated in a feminist spirit. However, there arises another question or series of questions: Can the women poets under discussion really liberate the female body and female identity in their

⁷ Alfred C. Kinsey, **Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female**, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1998, p. 653.

⁸ John Berger, **Ways of Seeing**, London, Penguin Books, 1972, p. 33.

poems? Can they erase the inscription of phallogentric, dualistic culture on gendered bodies and deconstruct these stereotyping within the western societies? Can they free themselves from the patriarchal culture and its discourse in which they write? Can they articulate their ideas, feelings and sensibility independently from masculine codes? Are they able to break to pieces the barbed wire of the cage of the language itself? Just like the paintings by male artists, are not their poems also objectifying and framing the female (body)?

Beginning with Saussure, structuralism proposes that language constructs us, language creates reality, and language gives shape to everything. In the poems under discussion identities, subjectivities, and ideas are also created and shaped by language, an arbitrary construction. We are the products of the discourses which are socially constructed. We are made by language, so by texts. We have to ask with Mary Ann Caws: “For how could we possibly think that a seeing woman writing about women being touched with the brush, perfectly *captured* in paint, or accurately shot by a camera’s eye, about these artistically ogled and consumed beings, would have an “objective” point of view?”⁹ The gaze of the women poets is, first of all, not unmediated by the male gaze; on the contrary, it is in dialogue with male painters that they reinterpret the female body. Again, does a poem or a portrait or a nude painting reveal or does it confer identity? Thus we have to admit that the above question cannot be answered, at least, without modification, in the positive. Ekphrasis, a form of rewriting, both resurrects the past and seeks to liberate the present and future from it. This is a paradox that lies at its heart. And yet it has been instrumental in the revision of the representation of the female body.

⁹ Mary Ann Caws, “Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art”, **The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives**, Ed. by. Susan Rubin Suleiman, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 263.

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ÖZGEÇMİŞ

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