

## REVIEWS

CHEURFA, HAYEM. *Contemporary Arab Women's Life Writing and the Politics of Resistance*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023. 267 pp. £85.00. ISBN 978-1-4744-8968-3 [hardback]. This monograph examines the role of contemporary Arab women's life writing as a crucial component of revolutionary, postcolonial cultures. Cheurfa adeptly integrates feminist, postcolonial and sociocultural approaches to investigate how the unconventional autobiographical discourses of contemporary Arab women create spaces of resistance that challenge patriarchal, racial and colonial authority. The author focuses on 'life writing' instead of 'autobiography' as a literary genre, with the corpus of the study spanning memoirs, literary auto-portraits, diaries, testimonies and blogs which cannot be strictly classified as autobiographies in the modern Western view of the concept.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of Arab women's autobiographical writings in the twentieth century, with a particular emphasis on works published in the last two decades. The author explores the motivations behind Arab women's use of the autobiographical genre to engage with issues related to colonialism/postcolonialism, national movements and struggles for independence. In the second chapter, the author examines Radwa Ashour's *Atyaf* [*Specters*] and Maissa Bey's *L'une et l'autre* [*The One and the Other*] as exemplary models of autobiographical texts from the post-independence period. These works resist not only their socio-political, cultural and gendered contexts but also the conventional patterns of autobiographical writing which typically present a cohesive and unaltered narrative of a person's life journey.

Chapter 3 examines testimonial life writing by contemporary Arab women as a means of resistance and as sites of asserting historical and public engagement. The author focuses on two writers, Samar Yazbek from Syria and Suad Amiry from Palestine, who emphasize the significance of literary testimony in uncovering concealed narratives of violence, social inequality and subjugation. Both authors show a high consciousness of the ability of women writers to challenge the forced marginalization of women in historical accounts of war. In the fourth chapter, Cheurfa revisits Amiry in her testimonial diary *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries* (2006) to examine the strategic functions of humour in recording national struggles and addressing issues of gender. Mona Prince's diary *Revolution is My Name: An Egyptian Woman's Diary from Eighteen Days in Tahrir* (2014) is also scrutinized to demonstrate how humorous diary writing about national conflicts can challenge the conventional image of women as passive victims of war.

Chapter 5 examines the emerging significance of social media platforms and their growing role in enabling and organizing popular resistance movements, and in advocating for social justice and democratic changes in the region. This radical shift from traditional writing tools to digital platforms marks a new face and space for social, political and literary resistance within the contemporary Arab world. Cheurfa uses Lina Ben Mhenni's blog *Tunisian Girl* as a noteworthy example to illustrate how the internet enables women to explore novel avenues for self-expression and representation, which are closely linked to their involvement in public discourse and active participation in national resistance movements.

Overall, this book is a valuable contribution to the documentation of narrative writings by contemporary Arab women, particularly those related to autobiography. It highlights the importance of these writings in raising cultural awareness among Arab societies about the positive and influential role that Arab women can play in resisting injustice, tyranny and colonialism. Although the author acknowledges that limited research prevented her from covering inspiring writing experiences in major regions of the Arab world, such as Iraq, the Gulf states and Yemen, the monograph has paved

the way for researchers to continue studying this field and conveying the voice of creative and resistant Arab women to the world. [<https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqae069>]  
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MATORE, DANIEL. *The Graphics of Verse: Experimental Typography in Twentieth-Century Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. 239 pp. £65.00. ISBN 978-0-19-285721-7 [hardback]. At first glance, this incisive and well-written book seems to promise more than it actually delivers. Anyone expecting a wide-ranging discussion of typographical poetry will be surprised to discover that it focuses on just three poets: Ezra Pound, E. E. Cummings and Charles Olson. Only one of these can properly be called a typographical poet, moreover, while the other two demonstrate little interest in verbo-visual hijinks. Nevertheless, as the Oxford English Dictionary points out, typography refers not just to the letters' appearance but also to the page's 'layout, and the use of white space'. The author casts a wide net accordingly, one that encompasses poetry by the individuals in question and by modern poets in general. How, he asks, does the appearance of twentieth-century poetry differ from that of the previous century? Why do modern poems look different, what does this mean and why does it matter? As he demonstrates in impressive detail, many, if not most, twentieth-century poets consider typography to be 'a part of versification' (p. xii).

Seeking to explain how poetry and printing became intermingled in Anglo-American poetry, Matore first traces the development of modern visual poetry by Stéphane Mallarmé and Guillaume Apollinaire in France and by F. T. Marinetti in Italy. Typographical experiments in English, he concludes, are reserved primarily for lyric poetry. Although they can be daring and adventurous, they are relatively constricted. By contrast, the European poems are more unrestrained but too long and 'generically ambivalent' to be classified as lyric (p. 14).

Each of the next three chapters is devoted to one of the poets writing in English. All three chapters are informed by extensive archival research that allows Matore to retrace the development of the typographical experiments in question. The first chapter examines the uneasiness that characterizes many of Ezra Pound's discussions of typography, his anxiety in the face of poetry's increasingly graphic dimension and the question of why he continued to engage in typographical experiments throughout his life. The second chapter investigates E. E. Cummings's use of typewriter language and its advantages and limitations. In his quest for the tiniest typographical nuance, Matore concludes, Cummings seeks to record 'the volatility native to human perception [and] to fashion a language worthy of it' (p. 141). The smaller the amount of unique irreducible experience, the greater its intrinsic value. The third chapter discusses Charles Olson, the inventor of 'Projective Verse' and a kind of breathy prosody. The spaces between the words on the page are meant to reflect poetry's basic orality. They record the poet's hesitations, suspensions and reprises as he gives voice to the poem. Eventually, however, Olson's view of typography evolves in other directions, such as in *The Maximus Poems*, which focus on a particular person and a particular place.

The last chapter in the book is devoted both to modern typography and to typography in general. It discusses the advantages and disadvantages that accompany poetic attempts to translate thoughts into words on the page. As Matore notes, typography is essentially a utilitarian invention. Its fundamental purpose is to convey information from one person to another. In this role, it stubbornly resists any attempt to distort its rectilinear format, to wrest it from the traditional conventions of linearity and quadrature. Complicating the experiments even further, neither modern printers nor modern poets were trained as typographers. Despite these and other drawbacks, typography was transformed into poetry in the twentieth century, while poetry threatened to become typography. Readers were transformed into viewers who were able to 'see through the dutiful transparency of print and ask what its shape [was] for' (p. 222). Concentrating on a few key poets but broad-ranging in scope, this book will appeal to anyone who is interested in modern poetry. [<https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqae072>]

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