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THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES: 
FROM METALEPSIS TO MISE EN ABYME

Irene J.F. de Jong

1. Introduction: Who creates the scenes on the Shield?

The Shield of Achilles (Iliad 18.478-608) can easily be qualified as ‘the mother’ of all ekphraseis, and scholarly interest in this passage has been massive.1 Scholars have mainly discussed three issues: the relation between the Shield and real shields;2 the relation between the scenes on the Shield and the Iliad;3 and the method of description.

In this article I will focus on the third point. As noted famously by Lessing, the description of the Shield is dynamic, both in the sense that we see Hephaestus making the shield and that the scenes depicted become stories, with characters speaking and thinking and events following one after the other. My central question is: who is responsible for these narrativised scenes, Hephaestus or the Homeric narrator? Or to put it more poignantly: who creates the scenes on the Shield? I note the following positions. It is the divine artist Hephaestus who either creates figures which (1a) can really move, like his tripods and handmaids: 18.376f., 418-20 (‘the figures are not merely lifelike, they really live!’),4 or (1b) at least suggest movement, a suggestion to be decoded by the narrator (‘the consistent transformations of gold into natural image, of image into action, give us to understand that the qualities of sound and movement and emotion come into being through the responsive participation of the spectator in the work’).

Or, it is the Homeric narrator who either (2a) cannot suppress a ‘youthful pleasure in animated narration’6 and himself narrates stories instead of describing the figures which Hephaestus makes, or (2b) subtly blends description and narration (‘a cycle of scenes wrought in metal—or in words? This description of the shield actually is a poem’).7

In my view position 1a is untenable: it might explain how the figures on the shield can move, but it does not account for the movement in time the scenes display. Laird’s solution (‘perhaps we might conceive of it as a kind of mosaic of little video scenes’) shows the difficulties this position runs into.8 Position 2a either underestimates Homer or is too radical, playing down the obvious elements of description and the vital role of Hephaestus.9 Positions 1b and 2b are close to each other: both talk about a form of collaboration between Hephaestus and the Homeric narrator. There is a difference in emphasis, however: position 1b puts the primacy with the divine artisan, position 2b with the mortal narrator. The position I am going to defend in this article is 2b. But before turning to it, I would like to pay some attention to the monograph devoted to the Shield by Andrew Becker,10 who takes up position 1b.
2. Becker: The Homeric narrator in admiration for Hephaestus (and visual art)

Becker introduces a very helpful set of four elements which play a role in any ekphrasis of a work of art: the res ipsae or events and characters represented, the opus ipsum or physical medium, the artifex or creator, and the animadversor or eyewitness who reacts to the work of art. Let me give an example of each category from the ekphrasis of Achilles’ Shield:

ἐν δὲ δύω ποίησιν πόλεις μερόπων ἐνθρόων
χαλάζ. ἐν τῇ μὲν ὤμε γάμοι τ’ ἔσαν εἰλασάναι τε.
(Iliad 18.490f.)

And on the Shield he made two cities of mortal men, beautiful. In one city there were marriages and feasts.

Here we may detect the artifex in ποίησις and the res ipsae in the clause ἐν τῇ ..., since the festivities are in the city rather than on the shield.

ἡ δὲ μελαίνετ’ ὀποθὲν, ὄρησμένη δὲ ἐώαθει
χρυσείη περ ἐοῦσα· τό δὲ περὶ θαῦμα τέτυκτο.
(Iliad 18.548f.)

The field darkened behind, and it looked like earth that is ploughed, though it was made in gold. And it was very much a wonder to behold.

Here we have the opus ipsum in χρυσείη περ ἐοῦσα and the animadversor in θαῦμα.

So much for the four elements. According to Becker, the most important element of all is the res ipsae. If we take for example

μυκηθμῷ δ’ ἀπὸ κόπρου ἐπεσσεύοντο νομόνδε
πάρ ποταμών κελάδοντα, παρὰ ἤδωνδαν δονακῆα.
χρύσειοι δὲ νομῆες άμοί ἐστιχόωντο βόεσσι...
(Iliad 18.575-77)

Mooing they [the cows] hurried from the farmyard to their pasture by a purling river, beside the beds of swaying reeds. Four herdsmen in gold walked along with the cows...

Becker (n.10 above, 139) gives the following analysis:

These lines, now focusing on res ipsae, have moved from naming to interpretation... Here attention to the status of these images qua images
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does nothing to detract from their referential value: despite attention to
the medium, the line [577] accepts, recognizes, and interprets the world
suggested by the image: golden herdsmen move and golden cows bel-
low...the description does not suggest that the metal cowherds actually
move along the surface of the shield as Achilles goes into battle; it does
not ask us to imagine that these are gold and tin robots that can move
and moo. They are wonderful images that are given a response that
honors their wonder; the art of Hephaestus, we are asked to imagine, el-
icits this reaction from the describer [my italics].

From this and other passages in his book it becomes clear that Becker is an a-
derent of position (1b): the narrator/describer interprets the images made by
Hephaestus, but the primacy lies with the god. Thus, in his view, the ekphrasis
of the Shield first and foremost is a celebration of the visual arts: ‘the focus on
res ipsae can be read as respect for the illusionistic qualities or the evocative
powers of the work of visual art’ (152).

I largely agree with Becker’s analysis and his conclusion that in the Shield
the res ipsae are central. I only part company with him as regards the evalu-
ation of this conclusion. Does Homer really insert the Shield as a celebration of
Hephaestus and the visual arts? Or, as Marg puts it: ‘Does the poet want to il-
lustrate what the art of iron-working was capable of or could produce? Cer-
tainly not.’ Might it not be that via a celebration of Hephaestus’ visual art he
wants to say something about his own art? In order to answer this question it is
necessary first to take a closer, narratological look at the presentation of the
ekphrasis.

3. The presentation of ekphraseis

While the presentation of narrative events involves the interaction of a narr-
ator and narratees, in the case of an ekphrasis more parties play a role, as has
been set out clearly by Don Fowler: apart from narrator and narratees, there are
the artist and—usually—a watching character. Taking as an example the
Shield of Aeneas in Virgil Aeneid 8. 617-731, we have (1) the narrator Virgil,
(2) the artist Vulcan, (3) the viewer Aeneas, and (4) the narratees, all of whom
may be highlighted in the text:

(617f.) ille [Aeneas] ...
expleri nequit atque oculos per singula uoluit (3)...
(630) fecerat [Vulcanus] (2) et uiridi fetum Mavortis in antro
procubuisse lupam...
(642f.) haud procul inde citae Mettum in diuersa quadrigae
distulerant (at tu dictis, Albane, maneres! (1))...
(649f.) illum indignanti similem similemque minanti
aspiceres (4)...

He [Aeneas] could not be sated and turned his eyes from piece to piece...
He [Vulcan] had fashioned, too, the mother-wolf outstretched
in the green cave of Mars...
Not far thence speedy four-horse carts had torn
Mettus apart (but you, Alban, should have stood by your words!...)
Him you might have seen resembling an angry one, resembling
a threatening one..

The crucial question is of course who is responsible for what: is an aspect of a
scene depicted to be ascribed to the artist, the narrator, or the viewing charac-
ter? Who is it that calls the rape of the Sabines sine more, ‘lawless’? Who is it
that fills in the names of the figures, who chisels, interprets, or even projects
Roman history? Different ekphraseis give priority to different parties in the
coming about of the work of art, and it would be worthwhile to write a history
of ekphrasis from this perspective.

Returning to the first ekphrasis of all it is highly relevant to note—and this
has not been stressed enough so far—that of the four possible parties Homer
includes only two: the artist and the narrator. Though elsewhere he does intro-
duce the narratees into his text (e.g. ἔνθ’ οὐκ ἂν βρίζοντα ἰδοὺς Ἀγαμέ-
nον δῖον, ‘there you would not have seen godlike Agamemnon slumbering’,
Il. 4.223), he does not do so in the Shield-episode.

But far more striking is his explicit exclusion of the potential viewer Thetis:
Hephaestus leaves her behind in the megaron or wherever she was received by
Charis and goes (back) to his forge to make the armour (18.468);13 only at the
end of the episode, when he has finished making the armour, does the god re-
turn to her (18.615). Characters will look at the shield, but only later: at 19.14-
18 the Myrmidons react with ‘fear’, Achilles with ‘delight’ at its sight. It may
be noted in passing here that later artists did not always follow Homer’s model.
There are vase-paintings which show Thetis next to Hephaestus while he is
making the armour (though many more show him handing it over to her, which
might represent the moment described by Homer at 18.615 and hence need not
imply her watching him at work).14 And there is of course the beautiful but
haunting poem The Shield of Achilles by W.H. Auden, which starts ‘She looked
over his shoulder/For vines and olive trees...’.

What Homer does, however,—and this is vital for my argument—is turn the
narrator into the viewer, or in Becker’s terminology, the animadversor. Indeed,
the narrator, a mortal, is the first admirer of Hephaestus’ Shield (cf. 18.549: τὸ
δὲ πεὶ θαυμά τέτυκτο, ‘and it was very much a wonder to behold’), thus
fulfilling the god’s promise to Thetis that the armour will be such ‘that all the
many men who see it will marvel (θαυμάσσεται) at it’ (18.466f.). Throughout
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the *Iliad* the narrator, though living long after the events recounted, is turned into an eyewitness of these events as a result of his collaboration with the Muses, who are eyewitnesses of all that happens in history (2.485: ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεάι ἔστε, πάντα, 'for you are goddesses, are present, and know everything as witnesses'). In the case of the Shield, he is the only one witnessing Hephaestus. It is his position of single eyewitness of a divine act of creation that gives him very special powers. It allows him to share in the creative process of Hephaestus: he can combine and blend description of what the god makes with his own narration. Indeed, and this is my defence of position 2b (rather than 1b), the extent of narration is high, as the next section will show.

4. Extent and forms of narration in the ekphrasis on the Shield


A second form of narration is the use of indirect speech—εὐχετο πάντ’ ὕποδον (‘he claimed to have paid all’, 499), ἀναίνετο μηδὲν ἐλέόθαι (‘he denied to have received anything’, 500)—and of embedded focalisation: ‘both were eager to take a decision’ (501), ‘two different plans were supported, to destroy the city or to agree with the inhabitants to divide up their property’ (510-12), ‘two scouts were posted to wait for the sight of the sheep and cattle’ (524), ‘the herdsmen did not expect an ambush’ (526), [the ploughmen] were eager to reach the headland again’ (547), ‘the potter tries his wheel, to see if it will spin smoothly’ (601).

A third form of narration is the introduction of comparisons: 591f., 600f.

A fourth form of narration is the reference to the real-life properties (res ipsae) of the entities depicted rather than to the precious metals of which they are made: ξιστοῦιοι λίθοις (‘polished stone’, 504), κηρύγκοιον...μεροφόννων (‘loud-voiced heralds’, 505), ἀργεννέων οἰῶν, ‘white-woolled sheep’, 529, 588), εἴμαι...δυσφόννων (‘a deep-red cloak’, 538), νεόν καλακήν (‘a field of soft fallow’, 541), πείρουν ἄρουραν (‘rich ploughland’, 541), τρίπολον (‘trip-le-tilled’, 542), μελιθεός οἴνου (‘honey-sweet wine’, 545), οξείας δηστικά-νας (‘sharp sickles’, 551), λεύκῃ ἄλφιτα (‘white barley’, 560), μελιθεός καρπῶν (‘honey-sweet crop’, 568), φόρμιγγι λαγητῆ (‘clear-sounding lyre’, 569), κίννας πόδας ἄργοι (‘quick-footed dogs’, 578), ταχέας κύνας (‘quick dogs’, 584), κατηρεφέας...σμηνοὺς (‘covered huts’, 589), λεπτὰς ὀθόνας...
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('dresses of fine linen', 595), χιτῶνας...ἐϋννήτους ('closely-woven tunics', 595f.).

There is also quite a large number of expressions which suit both description and narration, opus ipsum as well as res ipsae: πόλεις...καλάς ('beautiful cities', 490f.), δαΐδων...λαμπομενάων ('glittering torches', 492), χρυσοῖο τάλαντα ('talents of gold', 507), ταύρων...καλὰς ('beautiful garlands', 597), μαχαίρας...χρυσείας ('golden knives', 597f.), ἀργυρέων τελαμώνων ('belts of silver', 598).

A methodological point to be made here is that most expressions of this fourth category are formulaic and occur elsewhere in the narrative parts of the Iliad. One might therefore argue that the narrator simply had no choice but to describe certain entities in terms of res ipsae rather than opus ipsum. However, here I would counter in the first place that there is abundant scholarship on Homeric epithets which shows that a singer did not need to insert an epithet. In the second place a coinage like κυανέην κάπετον ('a ditch of dark glass', 564), instead of a 'deep ditch' (καπέτοιο βαθείης, 15.356) or a 'hollow ditch' (κοίλην κάπετον, 24.797), shows the narrator very well able to make new epithets suited for description rather than narration.

The fifth and perhaps most important form of narration is the representation of different moments of time. For instance in the scene of the dispute between two men (497-508), we get the men pleading their case, the reaction of the excited bystanders, the litigants’ deferral of the case to the elders acting as arbitrators, and the elders voicing their opinion. Now in this case it could, perhaps, still be argued that Hephaestus is employing what art historians call the ‘synoptic’ method, whereby several successive actions are compressed into one scene. However, when we turn to the scene of the ambush (18.516-40), I draw attention to the abundance of adverbs of time: the spies await the arrival of the animals; they ‘soon’ (τάχα, 525) show up; unsuspecting herdsmen follow; the attackers ‘quickly’ (ὦ κα, 527) surround the herds and kill the herdsmen. The people in town hearing the noise ‘immediately’ (αὐτίκα, 531) jump on their chariots and ‘quickly’ (αἶψα, 532) arrive. Here we are dealing not merely with a succession of actions but with a speedy succession of actions, and to express such speed is a property of a narrative not of a picture.

There is one final aspect of the Shield passage which merits discussion in this context: the tenses of the verbs. We may observe the following structure:

imperfect: heads off the scene of Hephaestus making the shield as a whole (ποίει, ‘he made’, 478, 482; βάλλε, ‘he threw’, 479)
aorists and imperfects: announce the individual scenes on the Shield
(ποίησε, 'he made', 490, 573, 587; ἔτευξε, 'he made', 483; ἔτιθει, 'he put on', 541, 550, 561, 607; ποικίλλε, 'he wrought [in the style of a frieze?]', 590)
imperfects: describe/narrate the scenes (ἔσαν, 'there were', 491; ἤγινεν, 'they led', 493; etc.)

My analysis of this structure would be as follows. The imperfect ποίει at the opening creates a framework, with the aorists expressing a series of actions undertaken within that framework. The imperfects which describe/narrate the scenes are either scenic or they 'could represent the necessary incompleteness of a depicted action that is frozen in a metallic representation'. In other words, they suit both description and narration. Only at 525-30 and 544-47 do we find aorists, which in particular fit the extreme narrativisation of the first scene with its many adverbs of time, as discussed above.

Worth mentioning, finally, are the two pluperfects τέτυκτο ('was' ['had been made'], 549) and τετεύχατο ('were' ['had been made'], 574): the use of this tense seems due to the passive (cf. active ἔτευξε, 'he made', 483) and at 549 perhaps also suggests that the narrator evaluates the finished work of art. Anyway, the tense belongs to description rather than narration. Such pluperfects will become a hallmark of ekphraseis: cf. e.g. Ps.-Hes. Scutum 154, 208 (τέτυκτο, ‘was [made]’); A.R. Arg. 1.742 (ἐρυθρός, ‘was’ ['had been made in elaborate fashion']), 752 (πεπονήσατο, ‘were’ ['had been made with care']), 759 (ἐτέτυκτο); Mosch. Eur. 43 (τετεύχατο), 44 (τετυγνένη), 47 (ἐτέτυκτο); Virg. Aen. 8.628 (fecerat, ‘he had made’), 637 (addiderat, ‘he had added’).

I conclude that narration plays a major role in the presentation of the Shield. Yet unlike the scholars mentioned earlier as taking position 2a, I would not contend that the ekphrasis is pure narration. It is a highly subtle combination and blending of narration and description. The next question is, of course, how to evaluate this phenomenon. It is here that the notion of metalepsis mentioned in my title—finally—makes its entrance.

5. The ekphrasis on the Shield as metalepsis

Metalepsis, literally ‘sharing’, is a term of ancient rhetoric which was given a new narratological meaning by Genette in his Discours du récit from 1972. He introduces the term in order to describe a situation where the boundaries between narrative universes are violated or the hierarchy between narratological levels subverted. Normally a narrator belongs to a different narrative universe than the characters, since his narration takes place at a different time and often a different place than those of the events recounted. Sometimes, however, the two universes merge, and the narrator enters ('shares') the world of his
characters or the characters enter the world of the narrator. Let me give two examples:

You shall see them, reader. Step into this neat garden-house on the skirts of Whinbury, walk forward into the little parlour—there they are at dinner.... You and I will join the party, see what is to be seen, and hear what is to be heard. At present, however, they are only eating; and while they eat we will talk aside.  

(Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, ch. 1)

Here a narrator enters, together with her narratees, the world of the characters.

He eyed them [his legs] with obvious dissatisfaction. After examining them he spoke out aloud: ‘Holy God! Wot are these den? Eh?’ He looked around for an answer. ‘Wot are dey?’ he repeated angrily. ‘Legs.’ ‘Legs? LEGS? Whose legs?’ ‘Yours.’ ‘Mine? And who are you?’ ‘The Author.’ ‘Author? Author? Did you write these legs?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Well, I don’t like dem. I don’t like ’em at all at all...’  

(Spike Milligan, *Puckoon*, ch. 1)

Here a character enters the world of the narrator.

In a recent article I have discussed various forms of metalepsis in ancient Greek literature and argued that the device is less modern or post-modern than scholars who, in the wake of Genette, have worked on metalepsis have suggested. Interestingly enough, Genette himself, in his monograph devoted entirely to metalepsis, also came up with an example from antiquity: the Shield of Achilles. He compares what happens in the Shield passage, with the figures moving and talking, to a film like Woody Allen’s *Purple Rose of Cairo*, where a character from the film leaves his own world and enters the world of a person watching the film.

Though I would also call the Shield of Achilles an instance of metalepsis, I would analyse it somewhat differently from Genette: although the figures on the Shield are depicted as talking, they do not address the narrator, as happens in *Puckoon*, or one of the characters in the story, as happens in *Purple Rose of Cairo*. I would rather connect the Shield to one of the other ancient forms of metalepsis which I discussed in my article and which consists of ‘the blending of narrative voices’. A clear and for my present discussion highly relevant example is provided by the songs of Demodocus. In *Odyssey* 8 the Homeric narrator three times represents a song of the singer Demodocus. Rather than turning Demodocus into a secondary narrator by quoting his words in direct speech, as he does in the case of the story-teller Odysseus in Books 9-12, the narrator presents those words in indirect speech. However, the dependent indirect speech construction is quickly given up in favour of the independent one:
Playing the lyre he started to sing beautifully about the love-affair of Ares and Aphrodite,
how they mingled in love for the first time in Hephaestus' house in secret. And he [Ares] gave many things...

From line 269 (πολλά δ’ ἔδωκε) onwards the Homeric narrator more or less takes over the narration, and it is only at the very end of the song that we are reminded that the song was Demodocus’ after all: ταῦτα ἄρ’ ἄοιδὸς ἀείδε περικλυτός (‘those things the famous singer sang’, 367). The metalepsis consists in the blending of the voices of the Homeric narrator and Demodocus.

Returning to the Shield of Achilles, I suggest that we here find a very similar metaleptic blending, this time not of narrative voices but of creative forces: Hephaestus makes a shield, the Homeric narrator an ekphrasis. Scholars have so far tended to compare the ekphrasis of the Shield with other descriptive passages in Homer, and rightly so, but I think the comparison with the songs of Demodocus is just as relevant. While in Odyssey 8 the Homeric narrator makes his own voice merge with that of the famous singer from the heroic past, in Iliad 18 he pulls off perhaps an even greater trick, since he merges his own creative activity with that of the divine artisan Hephaestus. As Marg puts it: ‘Like shield and poem, the creators, smith and poet, stand close to each other, so close that they almost merge together. The one speaks and creates for the other.’

The final question is of course what the narrator intends to achieve by this trick.

6. The ekphrasis on the Shield as mise en abyme

Since metalepsis involves the blurring of boundaries and the merging of worlds, its effect also seems to be of a double nature. Thus in the case of the songs of Demodocus I would suggest that the Homeric narrator very shrewdly has his cake and eats it: by merging his own voice with that of the divine singer from the heroic past he both leans on the prestige and authority of his illustrious predecessor and demonstrates his self-esteem and confidence as Demodocus’ present-day successor.

In the same way I would suggest that merging description and narration in his ekphrasis of the Shield of Achilles the Homeric narrator both leans on the prestige of the divine artist and confidently takes his share in the divine process.
of creation. Participating in the creative process of making a Shield together with Hephaestus is a sign of the self-esteem of the Homeric narrator.

Pursuing this idea a little further I would like to suggest that we can read the ekphrasis of the Shield as a (poetological) mise en abyme: a work within another work which in one way or another resembles the outer work (or part of it). The concept of mise en abyme was coined by the novelist Gide and introduced into literary theory by Dällenbach. Several scholars have pointed at the last scene on the shield, depicting artists, the architect Daedalus, a potter, and, perhaps, a singer, as in some way referring to Homer himself and hence as a mise en abyme. Becker looks at the entire Shield as a mise en abyme and reasons as follows: the Shield gives us the bard’s response to visual art which is the model for our own response to Homer’s verbal art. I would prefer to telescope the two arts and responses: portraying himself as working together with a visual artist like Hephaestus allows the Homeric narrator to make clear to us an important aspect of his own verbal art: its *enargeia*/*energeia*, its ability to put events ‘before the eyes’ of the narratees (*πρὸ οὐμάτων ποιεῖν*, Arist. *Rh*. 1410b27-36). This quality of Homer’s narrative has been discussed in detail by Ford in his book *Homer: The Poetry of the Past*. He writes:

> Though epic is by definition poetry of the past, it is poetry that claims to transport us to an *au delà*, not a beyond buried in the vault of recollection but a place as present as our own, though elsewhere. According to Homeric eschatology, after death the heroes’ bodies are destroyed in one way or another, and their souls fly off to Hades, the realm of the unseen. The fundamental promise of his poetry is the paradox of restoring through mere voice these vanished heroes and rarely appearing gods to visibility.

Aligning himself with a visual artist like Hephaestus but showing at the same time how it is his narration which makes the figures on the Shield come alive, speak, move and think, the narrator exemplifies the way in which his narrative style manages to make the people from the past come to life.

In this connection I would like to draw attention to the word *θαῦμα* at 549. In a very rich discussion Hunzinger argues that this word is used in Homer and Hesiod to indicate aesthetic pleasure at the sight of works of art (next to marvel at the sight of a beautiful person or scenery). This aesthetic pleasure does not reside in *mimesis*, the exact reproduction by art of life, but in the capacity of art to suggest life: ‘animate the inanimate, produce life in lifeless material’. Although it is clear that *thauma*, with its obvious connection to *θεάομαι*, ‘behold’, belongs to the aesthetics of visual art, I would like to contend that Homer in the ekphrasis of the Shield with its conspicuous blurring of boundaries between narration and description is not only celebrating Hephaestus’ ‘marvellous’ visual art but at the same time his own ‘marvellous’ narrative art, which presents people and events in an ‘energetic’/*energetic* way.
7. Conclusion

In this article I have discussed the presentation of the ekphrasis of the Shield. Looking at this passage in terms of metalepsis and mise en abyme helps us to see the typically Homeric ways of implicit self-advertisement and poetics reflection: via cooperation with a god (metalepsis) and via the presentation of a work of art within his own poem (mise en abyme). The quality of his narrative art that he wishes to bring to the fore is its enargeia/energeia: its ability to bring people and events from the past alive and put them ‘before the eyes’ of the narratees. After Homer poets will become openly self-conscious and explicitly start to reflect on their own poetic art. A poet like Pindar springs to mind here, who without any qualms advertises the grace and immortalising power of his poetry. The conventions of his genre forbade the Homeric narrator any such explicit self-advertisement, but self-consciously joining forces with Hephaestus in creating a work of art is his way of achieving much the same effect.

Notes


4. F. Müller, Darstellung und poetische Funktion der Gegenstände in der Odyssee (diss. Marburg 1968), 19 (my translation). And cf. S. Bassett, The Poetry of Homer (Berkeley 1938), 95 (‘the poet has carefully prepared his hearers for accepting the divine artificer’s power to give life and movement to objects of metal’), F. Frontis-Ducroux, Dédale: mythologie de l’artisan en Grèce ancienne (Paris 1975), 136 (‘la description “cinétique” du décor cisélé par Héphaïstos’), R. Friedrich, Stilwandel im homerischen Epos (Heidelberg 1975), 51 (‘Hephaestos bereits erzählt: was er in Bildern erzählt hat, wird vom Dichter nur in Worten nacherzählt’); and A. Laird, ‘Sounding out Ekphrasis: Art and Text in Catullus 64’, JRS 83 (1993), 18-30, at 20 (‘The Shield of Achilles in the end inclines towards obedience—we could just about visualize how it would be. And the notion that it is a magic shield might help us imagine it, even if there is some sequence and movement in the scenes it contains—perhaps we might conceive of it as a kind of mosaic of little video scenes.’).

6. P. Friedländer, Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silenticius: Kunstbeschreibungen Justiniusscher Zeit (Berlin 1912), 2 (‘der Dichter ist einfach nicht imstande, eine bildmässige Vorstellung, von der er ausgeht...dauernd festzuhalten, sondern er wird von einer durchaus jugendliche Freude an belebter Erzählung beherrscht’). E. Minchin, ‘Describing and Narrating in Homer’s Iliad’, in E.A. Mackay (ed.), Signs of Orality (Leiden 1998), 49-64, argues that narration is easier for an oral poet than description; Cf. also J.A.W. Heffernan, Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbee (Chicago 1993), 12f. (‘the picture or pictures said to be wrought on the shield... have been turned so thoroughly into narrative that we can hardly see a picture through Homer’s words’).

7. Marg (n.3 above), 26. And cf. Reinhardt (n.3 above), 404, and G.E. Lessing, Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie (1766), XIX.

8. See n.4 above.

9. That the Shield passage is not pure narration becomes also clear from the fact that, as scholars have pointed out, the stories depicted in the scenes do not come to an end but are frozen before there is resolution. Thus, to give an example, we do not know who wins the contest. Cf. section 4 below, on the use of the imperfect.


13. On account of 18.388, where Thetis is ‘led forward’ by Charis from the forge (πρόκουρον θήραν), 392, where Charis calls Hephæustus to come here (Ἡρακλέος, παύμολ’ ἔδει), and 416, where he cleans himself and leaves his forge (ὅτι δὲ θύραζε κείς), it seems plausible that the room where Thetis is received and the forge are separate places.


15. Becker (n.10 above) also connects the animadversor to the bard, e.g. pp. 43, 108, but is not radical enough in the implications which this connection has.

16. Not everybody has noted the extent of the narration. Cf. e.g. M. Edwards, The Iliad: A Commentary V, Books 17-20 (Cambridge 1991), 207: ‘sometimes he [the poet] looks beyond the materials employed, and mentions the stone seats of the elders... and the soft, finely spun clothing of the dancers... (my italics).

17. As Heffernan (n.6 above), 13, aptly points out, Homer might have opted for a gesture which could have visualised the refusal or promise but instead he inserts a reference to the speech act itself. In other ekphrases the issue will be raised more than once that the figures depicted cannot speak (e.g. A.R. Arg. 1.765f., or Shakespeare The Rape of Lucrece 1457-67). In Hellenistic epi-

grams and Catullus 64 the figures in the ekphrasis do speak in oratio recta; see Laird (n.4 above).

18. For references to the opus ipsum, cf. 517, 549, 562, 574, 577 (gold); 565, 574 (tin); 564 (glass), 519 (size), 539 (lifelikeness).

19. For details see Edwards (n.16 above), ad locc.

20. Cf. also the frequency of ἔπειτο (‘threepont’) in the whole Shield passage: 506, 523, 527, 545. Cf. also ὡστε (‘whenever’), 544, ὡτε (‘at times’)... (‘at others’, 599-602), and the iterative forms in 546 and 566.

21. The pluperfects ὀριείσες (‘arose’) at 493 and 498 equal imperfects. Becker (n.10 above), 109, 111, in my view incorrectly, interprets them as ’had arisen’ and suggests that for a brief moment we are transported back in time.

22. Cf. A. Rijksbaron, The Syntax and Semantics of the Greek Verb (Amsterdam 2002, first ed. 1984), 11: ‘Often one or more states of affairs expressed in the aorist indicative are located within a framework given by the imperfect.’ The imperfects in this series seem due to metrical factors: ποιεῖται is a hapax, even δὲ ὡτε does not scan.

23. Cf. Rijksbaron (n. 22 above), 12: ‘We also find series of imperfects, describing a number of more or less simultaneous states of affairs; a “scene is painted” so to speak.’

THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES


27. E.g. Friedländer (n.6 above), Müller (n.4 above), and Becker (n.10 above).


30. This suggestion puts a slightly different spin on the idea already advocated by the scholia that Homer has created an image of himself in Demodocus. See e.g. B. Graziosi, Inventing Homer: The Early Reception of Epic (Cambridge 2002), 138-46.

31. Genette in his book on metalepsis (n.25 above), 82, is remarkably cautious at this point, suggesting that the metalepsis might be simply conventional rather than significant: ‘Il est difficile de savoir quelle est ici l’intention de l’aède, qui laisse peut-être simplement couvrir un topos descriptif déjà conventionnel sans plus se soucier de son prétèxtè plastique.’

32. Hubbard (n.28 above), 35 (‘Although seldom treated as a focal point of Homer’s poetic self-conceptualization, the Shield must be read/heard/seen as a pivotal moment of self-awareness for both the poet’s hero and its creator’). In general on Homer’s self-consciousness, see I.J.F. de Jong ‘The Homeric Narrator and his own kleos’, Mnemosyne 59 (2006), 188-207.


34. Lines 604b-605a, in which a singer is mentioned, are not in the MSS. Wolf advocated to put them in the text, believing Atheneus 180d-181d that Aristarchus had removed them from here and inserted them at Od. 4.17b-18a. Modern editors, notably Allen and West, do not consider the story about Aristarchus plausible and keep the lines out of their texts.


36. Becker (n.10 above), 139-41.

37. Cf. Marg (n.3 above), 20 (‘die Selbstaussage über Dichtung’); Reinhardt (n.3 above), 411 (‘so ist doch nicht zu leugnen, dass das gedichtete Kunstwerk auf das Dichten selbst zurückweist, eingegeben und beschwingt durch die geheime Sympathie des Dichters mit dem wunderwirkenden Gott’).

38. For the confusion between enargeia and energeia, see N. Otto, Enargeia: Untersuchung zur Charakteristik Alexandrinischer Dichtung (Stuttgart 2009), 71-76.


40. Cf. Hubbard (n.28 above), 17 (‘there is a sense in which the divine artisan Hephaestus stands as a figure for the poet as he sees himself’) and Lonsdale (n.35 above), 12 (‘the poet implicitly compares himself to a visual artist, whose creation, while it may be narrative in content, can be visually apprehended in a glance. The finely worked creation of the artist is a metaphor or analogy for poetic devices such as simile and ecphrasis with which the poet displays his ability to
ornament the narrative’). I would not restrict the analogy to simile and ekphrasis but extend it to Homer’s narrative style as a whole.


42. Hunzinger (n. 41 above), 14 (‘rendre vivant l’inanimé, produire de la vie dans la matière inerte’).