Ancient Greek ekphrasis: Between description and narration

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Citation for published version (APA):
1. Introduction: Ekphrasis, Narration, and Description

1.1 The ‘Problem’ of Ekphrasis: To Narrate or to Describe?

In book 18 of the *Iliad*, Hephaestus forges a new shield for Achilles, which is elaborately decorated. One of the decorations concerns a herd of oxen (18.573-83):

Ἐν δ’ ἀγέλην ποίησε βοῶν ὀρθοκραιράων·
αἱ δὲ βόες χρυσοῖο τετεύχατο κασσιτέρου τε,
575  μυκηθμῷ δ’ ἀπὸ κόπρου ἐπεσσεύοντο νομόνδε
πάρ ποταμών κελάδοντα, παρὰ ροδανὸν ὄνωπα.
χρύσειοι δὲ νομῆες ἃς ἐστιχόωντο βόεσσι
tέσσαρες, ἐννέα δὲ σφι κύνες πόδας ἀργοὶ ἔποντο.
580  σμερδαλέω δὲ λέοντε δύ’ ἐν πρώτῃσι βόεσσι
ταῦρον ἐρύγμηλον ἐχέτην· ὃ δὲ μακρὰ μεμυκὼς
ἕλκετο· τὸν δὲ κύνες μετεκίαθον ἠδ’ αἰζηοί.
τὼ μὲν ἀναρρήξαντε βοὸς μεγάλοι βοείην
ἔγκατα καὶ μέλαν αἷμα λαφύσσεν (...).

On it he made a herd of straight-horned cattle. And they, the cattle, had been made of gold and tin, and with lowing they were hurrying from the farmyard to the pasture beside the sounding river, beside the waving reed. Golden herdsmen were marching with the cattle, four in number, and nine swift-footed dogs were following them. Two fearsome lions among the foremost cattle (580) were grasping a loud-lowling bull: and he [the bull], bellowing mightily, was being dragged away; and the dogs and young men followed after him. And the two [lions], after having torn open the hide of the mighty bull, were devouring the innards and black blood.

The narrator first recounts how Hephaestus makes a herd of oxen on the shield (573). He next relates the metals of which the cattle are made, gold and tin (574). The cattle are made of precious metals, just as the shield itself. The herdsmen, too, are made of gold (577). The image on the shield is, however, no still life: something is happening. The cattle are said to be moving from the farmyard to the pasture, while lowing (575). They are followed by herdsmen and dogs (577-8). At the front of the herd, two lions are holding a bull and are dragging him away, while being pursued by dogs and youths (579-81). The narrator also recounts how both lions are devouring the bull’s carcass, after having mauled him (582-3).
These lines are part of the earliest ekphrasis in ancient Greek literature, the shield of Achilles. Due to their hybrid character ekphraseis are interesting passages. The narrator first narrates how Hephaestus creates a herd of oxen on the shield. He then describes the metal of which the cattle have been made. Thus, the narrator switches from the narration of an event (ποίησε, “he made”, 573) to the description of an object (αἳ δὲ βόες…τετεύχατο, “the cows...had been made”, 574). Yet in line 575, the narrator relates how the very same cows are speeding from one place to another. The two lions are first said to be holding a loud-lowing bull (579-80), but later to be devouring him (582-3). Should we continue to regard these lines as a description of the shield? Or should we rather conceive of these lines as a narration of what is happening in the images on the shield? In all ekphraseis that are concerned with objects that tell a story a certain tension exists between description and narration. It is herein that lies the problem – and the challenge – of ekphrasis.

The problem has been formulated before, but to date no satisfactory solution has been offered. In order to formulate an answer, a number of preliminary issues must first be addressed. First, the term ekphrasis requires definition (section 1.2). Second, I will reformulate the problem of ekphrasis by making use of the terminology introduced in section 1.2, and review current scholarly views on this problem (section 1.3). As we shall see, one of the reasons why the problem of ekphrasis has persisted is due to difficulties with the concepts of narration and description. Therefore, the next two sections will work towards definitions of narration (section 1.4) and description (section 1.5). In the next chapter, I will set forth a model that will be used throughout this study to tackle the problem of ekphrasis.

1.2 A Definition of Ekphrasis
There is no scholarly consensus on a definition of the concept of ekphrasis. Rather, ekphrasis can designate a variety of concepts. It seems therefore best to regard ekphrasis as an umbrella term which subsumes a whole range of related concepts. Most, though not all, of these concepts are concerned with various forms of interaction

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1 Throughout this study, I use the Greek spelling ekphrasis, and not the Latin ecphrasis (as in the OED).
2 For an overview of the history of the meaning of ekphrasis from antiquity to today, see Schaefer and Rentsch 2004.
3 I have borrowed the phrase “umbrella term” from Yacobi 1995: 600. Schaefer and Rentsch 2004: 156 speak of a “(... Spektrum, einem Von-Bis möglicher ekphraseischer Realisationsformen”.

between the verbal and the visual. As such, ekphrasis is a central concept in studies that deal with the relation between word and image, and between literature and art. Ekphrasis is thus a specific form of intermediality. It is in the light of ekphrasis as an intermedial phenomenon that its definition has been expanded: rather than referring to verbal-visual interaction only, ekphrasis has come to include any form of intermedial interaction, such as, for example, the interaction between music and painting.

The present study is concerned only with ekphrasis as a form of interaction between the verbal and the visual, more precisely with the rendering of the visual in a verbal text. Verbal-visual interaction is covered by two definitions of ekphrasis. On the one hand, there is the late-antique definition of ekphrasis, which is sometimes referred to as the broad definition of ekphrasis. On the other hand, there is the modern definition, sometimes referred to as the narrow definition of ekphrasis. The main difference between these two conceptions is that in the late-antique definition ekphrasis is characterised by its effect, whereas according to the modern definition it is the reference to an artefact that characterizes ekphrasis. The difference between the two conceptions of ekphrasis is thus one of the how versus the what.

In its late-antique sense, ekphrasis is found in the area of rhetoric. Ekphrasis can be defined as text that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes. The literature on ekphrasis is substantial. In general, I cite only those studies which are relevant for the research question of the present study. Comprehensive general overviews of the existing literature are Wagner 1996, Klarer 2001: 2-18, Wandhoff 2003: 2-12, and Schaefer and Rentsch 2004. Within the field of classics, extensive overviews are found in Fowler 1991 and Squire 2009: 139-46. See also the special issues of Ramus (2002, Vol. 31:1-2) and Classical Philology (2007, Vol. 102:1).

5 See Schaefer and Rentsch 2004: 134. Intermediality can be defined as “a particular relation (...) between conventionally distinct media of expression or communication” (Wolf 1999: 37). Intermediality has also been studied in the field of narratology, for which see Wolf 2005a. For some further reflections on the notion of medium, see section 1.3.1 below.

6 For the expansion of the definition of ekphrasis, see Sager Eidt 2008: 16-21.

7 Schaefer and Rentsch 2004: 137.


effect of vividness (ἐνάργεια) which characterises ekphrasis: “[w]hat distinguishes ekphrasis is its quality of vividness, enargeia, its impact on the mind’s eye of the listener who must (...) be almost made to see the subject.” The intended effect of an ekphrastic speech is, then, to bring about seeing through hearing – to turn the listener, as it were, into a viewer.” In intermedial terms, ekphrasis aims at reproducing the effect of one medium, the visual, by using another medium, the verbal. The nature of the subject matter only plays a secondary role in the antique concept of ekphrasis.

Whereas late-antique ekphrasis is situated in the field of rhetoric, ekphrasis in its modern sense is mostly found in the domain of literary studies. Modern ekphrasis is defined not by its effect, but by its subject matter, which usually concerns an object, and more specifically a work of art. One of the earliest definitions of ekphrasis in its modern sense was formulated by Spitzer in 1955, when he stated that Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” belongs “to the genre (...) of the ekphrasis, the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art, (...) the reproduction through the medium of words of sensuously perceptible objets d’art (at pictura poesis).” In Spitzer’s definition, ekphrasis is no longer a type of speech, but a genre. Whether ekphrasis as a genre of writing about works of art existed as such in antiquity is debated. According to Webb,

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"Webb 1999: 13. More recently, Webb has defined ekphrasis as “a type of speech that worked an immediate impact on the mind of the listener, sparking mental images of the subjects it ‘placed before the eyes’” (Webb 2009: 193).

"In the words of Pseudo-Hermogenes, one of the authors of the Progymnasmata: “the virtues of ekphrasis are, most of all, clarity (σαφήνεια) and vividness (ἐνάργεια): for the expression should almost (σχεδόν) bring about seeing through hearing” (ἀρεταὶ δὲ ἐκφράσεως μάλιστα μὲν σαφήνεια καὶ ἐνάργεια· δεῖ γὰρ τὴν ἑρμηνείαν διὰ τῆς ἁκοῆς σχεδόν τὴν ὄψιν μηχανᾶσθαι, Patillon 2008: 203).

"The Progymnasmata mention four categories of subject matter for ekphrasis: persons, places, times, and events, for which see Webb 2009: 61-86.

"For the difference between late-antique and modern ekphrasis, cf. Goehr 2010: 397: “[w]hereas modern ekphrasis, especially from the late nineteenth century on, focuses on artworks and their mediums, ancient ekphrasis focused on speech and written acts performed within a wide range of practices necessary for the education of citizens. Modern ekphrasis focuses on works that bring other works to aesthetic presence; ancient ekphrasis focused on speech acts that brought objects, scenes, or events to imaginary presence” (emphasis in the original).


"These are but two of the many possible identities of ekphrasis, for which see Scholz 1998: 73-6 and Zeitlin 2013: 17."
ekphrasis as a genre was more or less invented by Spitzer. Others, however, do argue for the existence in antiquity of a specific literary genre of describing works of art. Whether in antiquity ekphrasis was a genre or not, it is a fact that that many ancient texts refer to works of art. Ekphrasis in its modern sense has proven to be a fruitful concept to study these texts.

In this study, I adopt the following definition of ekphrasis: “ekphrasis is the verbal representation of visual representation.” This definition, formulated by Heffernan in 1993, has become very influential. I use Heffernan’s definition, and not that by Spitzer, for two reasons. Firstly, Heffernan uses the neutral phrase ‘verbal representation’ rather than description. This suits the purpose of this study, the aim of which is to find out whether such a verbal representation is description, or something else. Secondly, Heffernan’s definition limits ekphrasis to works of representational art. This means that the work of art represented in an ekphrastic passage must itself also represent something. As such, ekphrasis is a form of double representation. According to

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[16] Webb 1999: 10-11 (though the view that Spitzer first “reinvented” ekphrasis is controversial, for which see Schaefer and Rentsch 2004: 139-40). For Spitzer’s predecessors, see Koeb 2006: 1-5 and Webb 2009: 28-35; they have missed, however, the following reference in Headlam and Knox 1922: xliii: “Greek writers, from Homer and Hesiod down to Eumathius delighted to introduce ekphrases or descriptions of works of art” (italics in the original). Of Spitzer’s predecessors, Friedländer 1912: 1-103 has proven to be the most influential. Friedländer’s survey includes all major ekphrasis from Antiquity, in the sense of descriptions of works of art and architecture, which he called Kunstbeschreibungen. Friedländer did not define these descriptions as members of a single genre, and used the term ekphrasis but rarely (for which see Webb 2009: 31).


[18] As is clear from the large body of Greek and Latin text that refer to works of art in Friedländer 1912: 1-103. Palm 1965-6 contains an overview of Greek texts only.


[20] Heffernan 1993: 3; see also his earlier definition of ekphrasis as “the verbal representation of graphic representation” (Heffernan 1991: 299).


[22] In the words of Kafalenos 2012: 27: “ekphrasis (...) is the re-representation in words of a prior visual representation”. Similarly Webb 2009: 186, who while working with the broad concept of ekphrasis nevertheless speaks of meta-ekphrasis when it comes to descriptions of works of art:
Heffernan, William Carlos Williams’ poem “The Red Wheelbarrow” is not ekphrastic, since the wheelbarrow itself does not represent anything – it is simply a wheelbarrow. Heffernan’s restriction of ekphrasis to works of representational art has met with criticism. Be this as it may, Heffernan’s definition is pre-eminently suited for the purpose of this study, as the following section will make clear.

1.3.1 Ekphrasis: Description and/or Narration? Preliminaries

Ekphrasis, as a verbal representation of visual representation, is doubly mimetic. This means that an ekphrastic text embodies two layers of representation, each of a different medium: a primary verbal layer, and a secondary visual layer. It was Lessing, in his _Laokoon_ (1776), who firmly separated the verbal from the visual medium. While “[e]mphasising the differences between word and image, i.e. between time and space, Lessing attacked the idea that literature was ‘painting with words’ and painting ‘narration with colour’. He saw the two media as predisposed to the representation of different meanings: description for painting, narration for language, and he was sceptical of attempts by one medium to invade the territory of the other”. Poetry, according to Lessing, is a temporal art and should narrate, whereas painting as a spatial art should describe. The characterisation of poetry as a temporal and painting as a spatial art was, and still is, very influential. Even today, many scholars assume that Lessing’s distinction between the two media holds true. Yet there are many narrative paintings, and poetry is full of descriptive passages – Lessing himself admitted as much. Lessing’s distinction between poetry and painting has more to do with what

“[i]f all ekphrasis, of whatever subject, is like a painting or sculpture in its aim to ‘place before the eyes’ [cf. Webb in note 10 above], an ekphrasis of visual representation is doubly ekphrastic”.


See Schaefer and Rentsch 2004: 142-7, who refer, among others, to Clüver 1998: 45: “[t]here is no reason why the non-verbal texts re-presented in ‘re-written’ form must themselves be representations of the phenomenal world (examples: non-figurative sculpture, absolute music) (...)

Ekphrasis is thus as much a verbal as a visual phenomenon (Squire 2009: 145-6). I elaborate this point in section 1.3.3 below.

Of course, thinking about painting and poetry goes right back to antiquity, as witness the famous phrase _ut pictura poesis_ (for which see e.g. Squire 2009: 146-9).

Baetsens 2005: 236.

For which see Squire 2009: 104-6.

each medium should do, rather than with any limits imposed by nature on either medium.39

This is not to deny, however, that there are real differences between verbal and visual media, between a representation by a text and by an image. This difference does not so much lie in what each medium represents, but rather how it does so.39 Verbal and visual media share an ability to narrate, and to describe, but each medium does so in its own particular way.39 If visual and verbal representations can be narrative as well as descriptive, the representation of the visual in the verbal – i.e. ekphrasis – can a priori have the following forms.33

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30 Lessing is thus making an ideological and political distinction (Mitchell 1984; for a summary of this article see Squire 2009: 105-6).

31 Mitchell 1994: 161: “(...) there is, semantically speaking (that is, in the pragmatics of communication, symbolic behavior, expression, signification) no essential difference between texts and images; the other lesson is that there are important differences between visual and verbal media at the level of sign-types, forms, materials of representation, and institutional traditions” (emphasis in the original). The idea that the verbal and the visual are both mimetic arts, but differ in their means of expression, was recognised in antiquity too, as witness both Plato and Aristotle (for a short overview on mimesis see Lucas [1968] 1972: 258-72). The thought is succinctly expressed by Aristotle at the beginning of his Poetics: ώσπερ γὰρ καὶ χρώμασι καὶ σχῆμασι πολλὰ μιμοῦνται τινες ἁπεικάζοντες (οἱ μὲν διὰ τέχνης οἱ δὲ διὰ συνηθείας), ἐπεροὶ δὲ διὰ τῆς φωνῆς (...) “some people, whether by art or by practice, can represent things by imitating their shapes and colours [visual medium], and others do so by the use of the voice [verbal medium]” (1447a18-20, translation by Dorsch and Murray [1965] 2000: 57). For a discussion of this passage that includes notion of medium, see Ryan 2004: 22-3.

32 See Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999: 10. I deal with the differences between verbal and visual narrative below in 1.4-3.

33 For a narrative visual image, we may think of any visual representation that depicts a story – such as the image on the shield of Achilles in section 1.1 above, or Michelangelo’s Last Judgement. A descriptive visual image, on the contrary, does not depict a story – we may think of a landscape or still life.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of the visual representation (image)</th>
<th>Nature of the verbal representation (text)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) narrative</td>
<td>(a) narrative</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(b) descriptive</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) descriptive</td>
<td>(a) narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) descriptive</td>
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Table 1.1

In this study, I want to explore the nature of the verbal representation in the case of a narrative visual representation. In other words, when a text (the primary, verbal layer) refers to a narrative image (the secondary, visual layer), does that text automatically become narrative, too (1a)? Or are we dealing with a descriptive text of a narrative image (1b)? Or should we think of a mixed type, and can a text be both narrative and descriptive at the same time (1a and b)? In the case of a narrative text (1a), does such an ekphrastic narrative text differ from other, non-ekphrastic narrative texts? Is it at all possible to make a distinction between a text that is narrative and an image that is narrative, seeing that it is through the verbal text that the visual image is evoked?

Before I review current scholarly views on some of these questions, three preliminary issues must be addressed. First, the ekphraseis that have been selected for this study are not representations of objects that still exist, or have ever existed. The represented objects are imaginary, and do not have a separate existence outside the text. At the same time, ekphrastic passages are often so powerful that the object is released, or so it seems, from the text and acquires an independence of its own. Scholars speak of “the shield of Achilles” as if it were a tangible object – as if the shield was lying somewhere in a museum in Greece. Throughout this study, I will frequently refer to ekphrastic objects, though in the full awareness that such objects are textual and hence fictional.

Second, ekphrasis as an intermedial phenomenon is the representation of one medium in another medium. This means that the narrator of an ekphrastic passage

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34 Ekphrastic texts may have forms other than narration or description. See further section 5.3.2.
35 These ekphraseis are called *notional*: “the verbal representation of a purely fictional work of art” (Hollander 1995: 4, see also Hollander 1988: 209). The idea of notional ekphrasis has been criticised (e.g. Mitchell 1994: 157-8, note 19) and defended (e.g. Schaefer and Rentsch 2004: 145-6, note 81).
must overcome the differences between visual and verbal media. He has to solve the problem of "how to represent something that exists, or might exist, in an order different from that of the medium of representation".37 This is not a problem of ekphrasis only, but of representing the visual in a text tout court. Scholars speak of the linearization problem: when wanting to represent a visual scene, the narrator must decide the order in which he will represent the visual details in the text.38 This is not to say that a narrator, in the case of a sequence of events (a fabula), must not also decide on the order in which to present these events (a story).39 The point is that a sequence of events can be presented in a seemingly natural order: the first event forms the beginning, and the last event the end of the sequence.40 Yet the representation of an object in a text – e.g. a house – has no such natural order: the narrator may choose to mention the door first, or the roof, or a window. In other words, "[t]here is no neutral, zero-focalized way of linearizing a visual scene: a point of view is necessarily inscribed".41

Seeing that a narrator always imposes a point of view on an object represented in a text, it follows that ekphrasis is necessarily interpretation.42 Since the object has no existence of its own outside the text, we should rather say that in an ekphrastic passage the object is always represented through an interpretation of a narrator.43 This interpretation is always partial (in both senses of the word): an ekphrastic text can never present an object in its totality. Of course, the presence of the narrator as

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37 Bal 2004: 368, emphasis mine. As Bal notes, this is a "general problem inherent in description as such" (ibid).
38 Levelt 1981: 305: "[w]henever a speaker wants to express anything more than the most simple assertions, requests, commands, etc., he or she has to solve what I shall call the linearization problem: the speaker will have to decide on what to say first, what to say next, and so on" (emphasis in the original). I owe this reference to Fowler 1991: 29.
39 For the terminology employed here, see note 206 below.
40 This order is iconic, and therefore less conspicuous or marked. See further Bal 1982: 102 and Wolf 2008: 205.
41 Fowler 1991: 29. In the case of ekphrasis, the presence of another level of representation complicates the matter: visual art may also inscribe a point view, especially when it has a narrative character (see ibid.: 30-1).
42 For the view that ekphrasis necessarily entails interpretation, see e.g. Cheeke 2008: 19 ("the act of describing art is always an act of interpretation") and Kafalenos 2012: 29 ("ekphrasis is an interpretation").
43 In a similar vein, Becker 2003: 8 has proposed to view ekphrasis as "(...) an experience of viewing an actual or imagined work of art" (emphasis in the original). Cf. also Zanker 2004: 7-16.
interpreter can be more or less conspicuous. What is important for now, however, is that one must not create a false antithesis between interpretation on the one hand, and description or narration on the other. What I mean to say is that in an ekphrasis one cannot distinguish between interpretation and description, since ekphrasis is by definition interpretation.

Third, scholars often conceive of ekphrasis as a struggle between the visual and the verbal arts. In the words of Heffernan: “(...) the most promising line of inquiry in the field of sister art studies is the one drawn by W.J.T. Mitchell's *Iconology*, which treats the relation between literature and the visual arts as essentially *paragonal*, a struggle for dominance between the image and the word”. The conception of ekphrasis as a struggle for dominance between the image and word has become very influential. In this study, I will not regard ekphrasis as a struggle between the verbal and the visual. I find such a single view on a phenomenon that stretches from antiquity until today too limited. Rather, in many ancient ekphraseis the verbal and the visual can be seen in a complementary relationship.

1.3.2 Ekphrasis: Description and/or Narration? State of the Art

In 1991, Fowler published an article titled “Narrate and Describe: The Problem of Ekphrasis”. Soon, however, the problem of ekphrasis turns out to be the problem of

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44 I quote here *exempli gratia* Gow [1950] 1952: 9 on the ekphrasis of the goatherd's cup in Theocritus' *Idyll* I: “[Theocritus] is interpreting rather than describing, since a work of art can only suggest, not depict, successive action (...).” See also Laird 1993: 22: “(...) Gow begs the question of what the difference is between description and interpretation”.

45 Heffernan 1993: 1 (emphasis in the original), see also ibid.: 1-8. Klarer 2001: 21 rightly draws attention to the fact that distinctions between the visual and the verbal are culturally and historically dependent. On the concept of *paragone*, see further e.g. Squire 2009: 104.


47 Cf. Squire 2009: 190: “[w]here modern orthodoxy has tended to privilege text over image, often assuming a bipartite separation between the two media, ancient artists and writers tended towards a more playful, less rigid, and more engaged attitude towards visual and verbal relations, exploring and exploiting the many ways in which an image might take up, embellish and even change outright the meaning of a text, and, conversely, the ways in which a text might do the same with an image”.

48 To my mind, Becker 2003: 3 has convincingly demonstrated that in antiquity “the visual and the verbal arts can be considered in a complementary relation, in concert not contest”. Similarly, Belsey 2012: 190 argues that in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* the “two modes work together”.

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description. Fowler, on account of his definition of description, assumes that ekphrasis is description, and then goes on to investigate the relation between ekphrasis/description and the surrounding narrative. This also explains the title “to narrate and to describe”: ekphrasis/description is inserted into the narrative, which means that both phenomena are mutually exclusive.

Indeed, the basic assumption of most classical scholars seems to be that ekphrasis results in a descriptive text (option b in table 1.1): the narrator interrupts the flow of the narrative and describes an object. It would seem that the definition of ekphrasis as a verbal representation of a visual representation renders the term ‘description’ superfluous. Nevertheless, scholars often assume that ekphrasis is description. Others work from the premise that ekphrasis should be description. For example, Laird's

49 Fowler 1991: 26, 27: “[b]ut I want to go on talking of the problem of description (...)” and “(...) we can attempt to deal with the problem of description (...)” (emphasis mine). Fowler is, however, not unaware of the fact that there exists a tension between narration and description within every ekphrasis, since he speaks of “(...) an underlying narrative element in the visual representation [which is] being described” (ibid.: 31). Cf. also Paschalis 2002: 132, who writes that “(...) the ‘tension’ between description and narrative has existed not only in relation to the surrounding narrative but also within the ekphrasis. This last point has not received proper attention” (emphasis in the original).

50 This is argued by Schaefer and Rentsch 2004: 152-3: “[g]rundsätzlich scheint in weiten Teilen der Forschung stillschweigendes Einvernehmen darüber zu herrschen, dass sich der heutige Ekphrasis-Begriff insofern von der antiken descriptio-Tradition losgelöst hat, als Beschreibung nur noch als mögliche, nicht mehr als notwendige Realisationsform von Ekphrasis gilt. Ein Grund für diese Entwicklung könnte darin liegen, dass das Kriterium der doppelten Repräsentation so stark an Einfluss gewonnen hat: Wendet man nämlich dieses Kriterium an, erübrigt sich eine Definition über den Deskriptionsbegriff”.

51 These are mostly classical scholars; I give some examples (emphasis mine): Barchiesi 1997: 271 (“[i]n modern criticism the term ‘ecphrasis’ (‘description’) is used specifically to refer to a literary description of a work of art”), Zanker 2003: 59 (“[e]kphrasis’ is now the standard term for ‘a description of a work of art’”), Chinn 2007: 265 (“[n]owadays the word ekphrasis is frequently used to denote the rhetorical or literary description of works of visual art”), Francis 2009: 1 (“the modern definition of ekphrasis, i.e., the literary description of a work of visual art”), Faber 2012: 417 (“ekphrasis, that is, a literary description of a building, weapon, or work of art”), Brown 2013: 53 (“[t]he poetic ekphrasis (...) is typically a digressive (though thematically integrated) description of a work of art”). Outside the field of classics, ekphrasis has ceased to be viewed as description, though there are exceptions (such as Sabor 1996: 215, on which see Schaefer and Rentsch 2004: 153).
distinction between obedient and disobedient only makes sense if one assumes that ekphrasis is obedient when it conforms to the rules of description, and disobedient when it tries to break free from those rules. Because most classical scholars assume that ekphrasis is description – presumably since ekphrasis involves an object, and objects are usually described – they refrain from giving reasons why this should be the case. Ekphrasis as description must largely do without theoretical foundation.

The view that ekphrasis results in a purely narrative text (option a in table 1.1) is not held by many scholars. As far as I know, only Heffernan holds this position. He writes that "[f]rom Homer’s time to our own, ekphrastic literature reveals again and again this narrative response to pictorial stasis, this storytelling impulse that language by its very nature seems to release and stimulate". Ekphrasis converts the action which is only implied in an image into a sequence of events, into a narrative. However, Heffernan’s definition also suggests that language is narrative by its very

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52 Cf. Becker 2003: 6-8. For the terminology, see Laird 1993: 19: “[o]bedient ekphrasis limits itself to the description of what can be consistently visualized. (…) Disobedient ekphrasis, on the other hand, breaks free from the discipline of the imagined object and offers less opportunity for it to be consistently visualized or translated adequately into an actual work of visual art” (emphasis in the original).

53 Cf. Belsey 2012: 192 on the ekphrasis in *The Rape of Lucrece*: “(…) Shakespeare describes a narrative picture that includes separate episodes within a single frame”. While acknowledging the narrative nature of the picture – Belsey thus holds position 1b in table 1.1 – she does not elaborate on this statement.

54 Some theoretical reflections on why the shield ekphrasis in *Iliad* 18 can be regarded as description are found in Byre 1992. For discussion of this article, see section 3.2.


56 Heffernan 1993: 4-5: he also states that “ekphrasis is dynamic and obstetric; it typically delivers from the pregnant moment of visual art its embryonically narrative impulse, and thus makes explicit the story that visual art tells only by implication” (ibid.: 5, emphasis in the original). Similarly Heffernan 1991: 304: “[t]raditionally (…) ekphrasis is narrational and prosopopoieial; it releases the narrative impulse that graphic art typically checks, and it enables the silent figures of graphic art to speak”.

57 Cf. Schaefer and Rentsch 2004: 154, who further refer to Heffernan 1991: 301 (“turning the picture of a single moment into a narrative of successive actions (…)”).
nature. In my view, Heffernan attaches too much importance to the narrative nature of the verbal medium, but too little importance to the narrative properties of the visual medium.

The two foregoing views are problematic, firstly, because they take insufficient account of the fact that ekphrasis is doubly mimetic. Those who see ekphrasis as a descriptive text (b, table 1.1) make light of the fact that the visual image is narrative (1, table 1.1). Heffernan assumes that a narrative image (1, table 1.1) automatically leads to a narrative text (1a, table 1.1), but this is by no means necessarily the case. Since the narrative image is depicted on an object, the narrator can also describe that object, narrative included. Secondly, the assumption that all ekphraseis are either narrative or descriptive takes no account of the variation that may exist between different ekphrastic passages. Thirdly, variation between narration and description may also occur within one and the same ekphrastic passage.

The view that ekphrasis results in a narrative and descriptive text (1a and 1b) seems to be the most promising line of enquiry. It allows for the fact that ekphrasis is concerned with objects (a priori associated with description) that tell a story (a priori associated with narration). Many scholars adopt this view, but it is not without problems. Firstly, the concepts of narration and description are in themselves not unproblematic. Scholars writing on ekphrasis usually leave narration and description undefined or have views on these concepts that are out of date. Secondly, most scholars are still working with a Lessingesque opposition between the visual and the verbal, which usually means that they overlook or even deny the narrative potentiality of the secondary visual layer.

Scholars who hold the position that ekphrasis is narrative and descriptive often start from the idea that ekphrasis is essentially description into which a number of narrative elements are inserted. In such cases, they regard as descriptive those

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58 For criticism of this position, see Yacobi 1995: 613, note 10 and Schaefer and Rentsch 2004: 154-5.
59 He is well aware of the fact that pictures can be narrative, for which see Heffernan 1993: 193, note 13.
60 Other forms may also be envisaged (see e.g. Yacobi 1995: 618). Such forms are rare in the corpus of this study; see sections 5.3.2 and 6.2.2.
61 See also Schaefer and Rentsch 2004: 153-5.
62 E.g. Ravenna 1974: 6-7 ("che l'ekphrasis quasi per sua natura ammette l'impiego di componenti estrane alla logica descrittiva stricto sensu (...)", emphasis mine), and Bartsch and Elsner 2007: ii
elements that are characteristic for pictorial art, i.e. elements which are visible and representable. Elements which are alien to pictorial art, i.e. those which are non-visible and cannot be represented by pictorial art, are regarded as narrative. As such, sounds, feelings, and movements are often regarded as narrative elements. This position, however, fails to take into account the following points. First of all, ekphrasis is not a scientific account of a pictorial work of art, but an imaginative response or interpretation of that work of art by a narrator, as I have stated in section 1.3.1 above. I shall give an example from the shield of Achilles (quoted in section 1.1 above) to clarify this point. The narrator relates that “two fearsome lions (...) were grasping a loud-lowing bull; / and he, bellowing mightily, was being dragged away” (18.579-81). The narrator includes sound (ἐρύγμηλον, “loud-lowing”; μακρὰ μεμυκώς, “bellowing mightily”, 580) and movement (ἔλκετο, “he was being dragged away”, 581). Of course, the bull is depicted on a shield and thus cannot low or move. Yet the visual representation on the shield suggests sound and movement, and it is precisely this on which the narrator focuses. In other words, the narrator is interested in what the work of art represents, rather than merely registering its physical qualities or properties.

This important observation holds true for almost every ancient ekphrasis: the narrator focuses mainly, though not solely, on what the images on the object represent. Becker, who distinguishes four elements which play a role in ekphrasis, speaks in such cases of a focus on the res ipsae, the events and characters represented. The other elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical elements on which the narrator may focus are the opus ipsum (the physical

65 This point has often been made. For example, in connection with the shield of Achilles, Palm 1965-6: 119 remarks that the narrator does not describe things, but events or happenings (“(...) überall ereignet sich etwas, mehr Vorkommnisse als Dinge sind beschrieben”); similarly Byre 1976: 38, who states that the poet will “describe the representations as representations” (emphasis in the original).
medium of the object), the artifex (creator) and the animadversor (the eyewitness who reacts to the object). The narrator can focus on any of these elements in an ekphrasis, as the example cited in section 1.1 above makes clear. In 573, for example, the narrator focuses on the artifex (“he made”), in 574 on the opus ipsum (“the cattle had been made of gold and of tin”), and in 575-6 on the res ipsae (“and with lowing they were hurrying from the farmyard to the pasture / beside the sounding river, beside the waving reed”).

When the narrator includes sound, movement, or feeling – or in other cases when the narrator focuses on the res ipsae – it does not automatically follow that the text becomes narrative. This misunderstanding perhaps arises (1) from equating the non-pictorial with narration, (2) from failing to recognise that a visual narrative layer can be represented in a descriptive textual layer, or (3) failing to recognise the possibility of a narrative visual layer in the first place. At any rate, I shall demonstrate in sections 1.4 and 1.5 below that whether a text is regarded as narrative or descriptive does not depend on the nature of its subject. Sound and movement, for example, are found in both description and narration.

Another narrative element in ekphrasis is time. It is perhaps the most conspicuous narrative element in ekphrasis and can have various forms. For the purpose of my argument, one issue must be discussed here, the representation of different moments of time. First, it can be the work of art itself – the secondary visual layer – on which different moments of time are represented. A famous example from the Aeneid is the temple ekphrasis in 1.453-93, where Aeneas looks at various phases from Trojan war. Second, the primary verbal layer may also contain different moments of time, even when the work of art represents only one moment of time. This is the case when the narrator refers to events which are not depicted, but which are prior or subsequent to depicted moment. This begs the question, however, how to distinguish between what is depicted and what is not depicted, i.e. whether an event is only part of the primary

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67 Other approaches to time in ekphrasis can be found in Goldhill 2012 and Guez 2012.

68 Ravenna 1974: 7 (“riferire fatti non rappresentati (antefatti e/o conseguenze) (...”) ). Similarly, Kafalenos 2012: 31-3 argues that an ekphrastic scene is narrativized when the narrator supplies events prior and subsequent to the event depicted. Cf. also Hühn 2007: 43-61, who has investigated the ways in which lyric poems can either narrativize a visual scene or resist its narrative impulse (although the question whether lyric poems can be regarded as narrative is contested).
textual layer, and not of the secondary visual layer – if it possible to make such a
distinction at all.69 I will return to this problem in the chapter on the shield of Achilles.70

1.3.3 Ekphrasis: Description and/or Narration? Concluding Remarks
It has been demonstrated that most classical scholars assume that ekphrasis is
description, but that thorough reflection on this position is lacking. Heffernan alone
regards ekphrasis as pure narration, a position that is untenable. Seeing ekphrasis a
priori as a mixture of narration and description appears to be the most promising line
of enquiry, though in this case, too, solid theoretical reflection is missing. A reason for
the lack of theorisation could be that narration and description are concepts that are
thought to be self-evident, and therefore not in need of definition or explanation. Yet it
is precisely because of the many possible meanings of these concepts that ekphrasis
cannot be easily classified as narration and/or description. This problem is further
complicated by ekphrasis’ doubly mimetic nature. What is required, then, to tackle the
problem of ekphrasis is a precise demarcation of both narration and description. In
other words, one must clearly define what it means for a text (and a picture, for that
matter) to be narrative and/or descriptive. The following sections contain such a
definition of narration and description (sections 1.4 and 1.5).

I briefly want to dwell on why the problem of ekphrasis merits attention at all.
What does it mean for an ekphrasis to be narration, description, or a combination of
both? The exploration of an ekphrastic passage from this point of view will provide
insight in how such a passage works, i.e. which techniques a narrator uses to render the
visual in the verbal. Furthermore, it will provide material to compare different
ekphrastic passages, not only with each other but also with non-ekphrastic passages. In
addition, by addressing the problem of ekphrasis one can shed light on a number of
other issues, too. For example, I hope that this study will also contribute to further our
understanding of the relation between the visual and the verbal in antiquity.

I should also make clear that this study assumes that ekphrasis is as much a visual
as a verbal phenomenon. Since the strict Lessingesque opposition between the verbal

69 This is no problem for Kafalenos (see previous note), who works with novels that juxtapose
ekphrasis and image. For classical examples of ekphraseis that are attached to an artwork, see
Squire 2009: 197-293.
70 The narrator can explicitly express these temporal relationships in a text by using temporal
adverbs, for which see Ravenna 1974: 7, 26-8.
and the visual is alien to antiquity, this might have been the way ekphrasis was approached in antiquity, too. Thus, Squire suggests:

that part of the preconditioning that ancient readers brought to their reading of texts, especially ekphrastic ones, derived from their visual experiences. Within the collaboration and competition between words and images, ekphrasis forced its readers to contemplate the verbal evocation of a typified picture in parallel with a visual tradition of images; indeed, it was partly by applying that visual tradition to the text at hand that readers could shed light on the focalising lens through which an ekphrastic description was cast.71

It follows from Squire’s words that the reader of an ekphrastic passage must turn the text back into an image – he must create a mental image of the work of art by using the verbal cues in the text.72 I am thus not following Heffernan, when he denies that the shield of Achilles is visualizable: “[a]ll we can see – all that really exists in this passage – is Homer’s language, which not only rivals but actually displaces the work of art it ostensibly describes and salutes”.73 I want to counter such views, and demonstrate that objects in ekphraseis can be visualized, and that this is, actually, the very point of ekphrasis. Just as the narrator has done his very best to render the visual in the verbal, the reader must translate the verbal back into the visual.

1.4.1 Narration: Introduction

Narration and description are subjects that are studied in the field of narratology. It is thus to narratology, “the science of narrative”, that one has to turn for theories of narration and description.74 In informal usage, as well as now and then in narratological

71 Squire 2009: 146.
72 Just as “[t]he describer acts (...) as sympathetic audience, willing to respond to the images both with engagement and with a more detached appreciation” (Becker 2003: 6), the narratee must be a sympathetic audience too, and willing to (re)create the images by using the text.
73 Heffernan 1993: 14; cf. also ibid.: 13: “[t]he picture or pictures said to be wrought on the shield at this point [Il. 18.497-508] have been turned so thoroughly into narrative that we can hardly see a picture through Homer’s words”.
74 This is the definition of narratology adopted by Prince 2003: 1, after Todorov 1969: 10 (“la science du récit”). For a brief history and overview of narratology, see Meister 2009. For an overview of narratological studies in the field of classics, see Grethlein and Rengakos 2009: 1-2. Important, too, is the series Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative (SAGN), which have appeared
studies, narration and narrative are used indiscriminately. In this loose sense, narration and narrative are synonyms, and refer to things that are narrated or recounted, such as stories (oral or textual). In most narratological studies, on the other hand, narration and narrative designate different concepts. Usually, narration is regarded as the production of narrative. Thus, in order to understand narration one must define the concept of narrative. In this section, I will work towards a definition of narrative that will be used throughout this study.

1.4.2 Narration, Narrative and Narrativity

In 1969, Genette defined narrative as follows: “If one agrees, following convention, to confine oneself to the domain of literary expression, one will define narrative without difficulty as the representation of an event or sequence of events, real or fictitious, by means of language and, more particularly, by means of written language”. Forty years later, Prince stated that “an object is a narrative if it is taken to be the logically consistent representation of at least two asynchronous events that do not presuppose or imply each other”. Although there are many differences between these definitions, they have one element in common, the event. The occurrence of at least one event –
something must be happening – is a basic requisite for narrative in almost all definitions.80

According to the definition by Prince, an object either is or is not a narrative. Only
when an object fulfils all six criteria of his definition – in other words, it is the (1)
logically consistent (2) representation of (3) two (4) asynchronous (5) events (6) that do
not presuppose or imply each other – Prince regards that object as a narrative.81 From
this perspective, narrative is a binary predicate: something either is or is not a narrative.
Scholars speak of narrativehood, a term which concerns those properties necessary
for an object to qualify as a narrative.82 Narrativehood can be contrasted with narrativity, a
scalar predicate which refers to those properties by which something is more or less
readily processed as a narrative.83 As such, narrativehood is a matter of kind, but
narrativity is a matter of degree.84 Whereas narrativehood differentiates between the
narrative and the non-narrative, narrativity identifies whether a certain object is more
or less narrative in comparison with another object.85

In this study, I will not use the concept of narrativehood. In practice, it is often very
difficult, if not impossible, to decide whether an object is a narrative or not. It is more
productive to work with the concept of narrativity, the more so because narrativity can
fruitfully be combined with a prototype approach. Narrativity is defined by Herman as
“[t]hat which makes a story a story; a property that a text or discourse will have in
greater proportion the more readily it lends itself to being interpreted as a narrative,

80 Some theories of narrative do away even with this requirement (see e.g. Fludernik in note 128
below). Essential overviews of narrative are Ryan 2003b, Herman 2007, Ryan 2007, Prince 2008,
81 See Prince 2008: 20-1.
82 I follow the terminology in Herman 2002: 90-1. Prince 2008: 20 uses slightly different
terminology.
83 I again follow Herman; Prince 2008: 20 uses different terminology. I further explain the
concept of narrativity below.
84 Page 2003: 45. Cf. also Herman 2002: 91: “[n]arrativehood can thus be conveniently paired with
narrativity to suggest the contrast between, on the one hand, the minimal conditions for
narrative sequences and, on the other, the factors that allow narrative sequences to be more or
less readily processed as narratives”.
85 The flexibility and convenience of this approach is demonstrated by Abbott 2009: 310 (adapted
from Ryan 2007: 30): “if we ask ‘Does Finnegans Wake have more or less narrativity than Little
Red Riding Hood?’ we will get much broader agreement than if we ask ‘Is Finnegans Wake a
narrative?’.”
i.e., the more prototypically narrative it is. Herman follows a prototype approach towards narrative. A prototypical approach is based on the assumption that narrative texts form a fuzzy set that allows for variable degrees of membership, but which is centred on prototypical cases which are easily recognisable as narratives. Herman speaks of prototype effects, which concern the relationship among categories. Firstly, instances of the same category may be more or less prototypical examples of that category. For example, robins and sparrows are prototypical examples of birds, but emus or penguins are not. Similarly, a given narrative may be a more or less prototypical example of the category narrative. Secondly, the boundaries between categories are permeable, so that less standard cases of neighbouring categories can be situated only with difficulty in either one or the other category. Herman provides the example of certain non-prototypical instances of the category tree versus exemplars of the category shrub. Similarly, non-prototypical examples of the category narrative may share certain features with exemplars of the category description, argumentation or explanation.

Herman 2009a: 190; cf. also Ryan 2007: 347 (= Ryan 2006: 10-11), who conceives of the difference between narrative and narrativity in cognitive terms: “[t]he property of ‘being’ a narrative can be predicated of any semiotic object, whatever the medium, produced with the intent to create a response involving the construction of a story. More precisely, it is the receiver’s recognition of this intent that leads to the judgment that a given semiotic object is a narrative (…), even though we can never be sure if sender and receiver have the same story in mind. ‘Possessing narrativity’, on the other hand, means being able to inspire a narrative response, whether or not the text, if there is one, was intended to be processed that way, and whether or not an author designs the stimuli”. For the concept of narrativity, see further Audet 2007: 24-7, Pier and García Landa 2008, and Abbott 2009.


Herman 2007: 28.


Of course, what is regarded as prototypical varies across different contexts and cultures (see Herman 2009a: 6).

Herman 2009a: 81. These prototype effects are called centrality gradience (“the idea that members (or subcategories) which are clearly within the category boundaries may still be more or less central”) and membership gradience (“the idea that at least some categories have degrees of membership and no clear boundaries”, Lakoff 1987: 12, quoted in Herman 2009a: 85).
The advantages of a prototype approach are as follows. Firstly, it allows for degrees of narrativity, which means that some stories can be regarded as more narrative than other stories. This, in turn, means that narratives can be compared with each other qua narrativity. Second, it better accommodates the fact that there are different kinds or types of texts, such as narrative, descriptive, or argumentative texts. For this study, it is important to note that some texts can be easily classified as narrative or descriptive – they are prototypical examples of their category – but that for other texts it can be difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to decide whether they are descriptive or narrative. In such cases, it is more productive to investigate which features prototypically associated with either category are present in the text under scrutiny.

In this study, I follow Herman in his 2009 *Basic Elements of Narrative* in distinguishing four basic elements of narrative. Herman defines these basic elements as follows:

A prototypical narrative can be characterized as:

(i) A representation that is situated in – must be interpreted in light of – a specific discourse context or occasion for telling.

(ii) The representation, furthermore, cues interpreters to draw inferences about a structured time-course of particularized events.

(iii) In turn, these events are such that they introduce some sort of disruption or disequilibrium into a storyworld involving human or human-like agents, whether that world is perceived as actual or fictional, realistic or fantastic, remembered or dreamed, etc.

(iv) The representation also conveys the experience of living through this storyworld-in-flux, highlighting the pressure of events on real or imagined consciousnesses affected by the occurrences at issue (...).}

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92 Ryan 2006: 10 and 232, note 4. For such a comparison, see Ryan 1992.
93 The prototypical features of description will be discussed in section 1.5 below.
94 Another approach that I find appealing, too, is Ryan 2006: 6-9 (= Ryan 2007: 28-31), who distinguishes eight conditions of narrativity and organizes them into three semantic dimensions (a spatial, a temporal, and a mental dimension), and one formal and pragmatic dimension. I make use of Herman’s *Basic Elements of Narrative*, because his approach is more wieldable, and better suited for the purposes of this study. Nevertheless, the conditions for narrativity which both studies stipulate seem to be, to a large extent, similar. For an assessment of the usefulness of Herman’s approach, see Hyvärinen 2012: 26-7.
Herman abbreviates these elements as (i) situatedness, (ii) event sequencing, (iii) worldmaking and/or world disruption, and (iv) what it’s like. In what follows, I shall discuss each element separately.

Herman’s first element, situatedness, concerns the relationship between narrative texts and their communicative contexts. With this first element, Herman draws attention to the fact that it is impossible to understand a narrative text without taking its context into consideration. Context refers to both the communicative environment in which a narrative text is interpreted, and the environment in which a narrative text is produced. In oral storytelling, for example, the recognition of the fact that a speaker is telling a narrative (and is not explaining how something works, or describing what something looks like), is crucial for understanding that narrative by the listener. As for narrative texts, narratological theory has developed a model for the process of narrative communication. This model conceives of narration as the communication of a narrative message by a narrator to a narratee. In this study, the element of situatedness will not be used. The reason for this is that all ekphraseis of this study are part of larger texts that are situated in a narrative context. In other words, these texts have been created to convey a story.

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95 Herman 2009a: 1, emphasis in the original. Storyworld is the world evoked by a narrative (see ibid.: 193).
96 Herman has drawn on a large body of previous scholarship, which I cannot reproduce here; I therefore refer to Herman’s chapters dealing with the elements in question.
97 Herman 2009a: 17: “(... insofar narratives are also communicatively situated representations, making sense of them requires attending to how they are geared to particular communicative contexts. In other words, interpreters seeking to use textual cues to reconstruct a storyworld must also draw inferences about the communicative goals that have structured the specific occasion of the telling (...)* (emphasis in the original).
98 Herman 2009a: 39: “narrative occasions (...) as communicative environments shaping how acts of narration are to be interpreted and, reciprocally, as contexts shaped by storytelling practices themselves (...)*.
99 Herman 2009a: 64-5: “[i]n the narratological framework, narration can be conceived as a communicative process in which information about the story level is conveyed by a particular kind of narrator to a particular kind of narratee”. For an overview of these terms, see de Jong 2004.
100 We may compare Odyssey 5.242-60, when Odysseus builds his boat. The narratee will assume that this episode forms part of a larger narrative, and will interpret it as such. If the narratee
Herman’s second element of narrative, *event sequencing*, has traditionally been regarded as the hallmark of narrative. Event sequencing forms the core of the definitions by Genette and Prince quoted above. Yet whereas Genette is content with merely stating that narrative is a representation of an event or sequence of events, Prince stipulates a number of conditions for a sequence of events to be narrative: the events must be at least two in number, they must be asynchronous, and they must not imply or presuppose each other. Thus, it has been recognised even in the field of structural narratology that the representation of a sequence of events *only* is not enough for a text to be called narrative.

Herman, by distinguishing four different basic elements of narrative, explicitly acknowledges that a mere sequence of events is not prototypical for narrative representations. Moreover, Herman also further qualifies his second element of narrative. He defines it as “a structured time-course of particularized events”. With this definition, he sets off narrative from explanation (particularity) and description (structured time-course), two other text types. Both description and explanation may also feature a sequence of events. Yet prototypical instances of narration have a specific mode of event sequencing that is not found in prototypical instances of description and explanation. Herman distinguishes two features in which prototypically narrative representations of events differ from representations of events in explanation and description: particularity, and the presence of a structured time-course of events. As for particularity, “the degree to which represented events are particularized provides a parameter along which narratives can be distinguished from explanations. Whereas stories are prototypically concerned with particular situations and events, it can be argued that explanations by their nature concern themselves with ways in which, in

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101 Genette requires only one event; Prince requires at least two. See for a brief discussion of this issue Schmid [2003] 2010: 2-3.

102 Cf. Rudrum 2005: 198: “(...) it seems that the representation of a series or sequence of events is not, in and of itself, enough to provide a full definition of narrative. Perhaps such a representation is a necessary condition for narrative, but it does not appear to be a sufficient one. Something more is needed to make a text a narrative”.

103 A text type is “a kind of text” (Herman 2009a: 194). I briefly revisit the notion of text type in section 2.2.2.
general, the world tends to be". In other words, narrative representations focus on what happened to particular people in particular situations; explanation focuses on general patterns and trends.

Description forms an indispensable part of narrative texts. Prototypical passages of description are easily separated from prototypical passages of narration – because these lack a sequence of events – but this is not the case in less prototypical passages, which is mainly due to the fact that descriptive passages may also feature a (particularized) sequence of events. This has led some scholars to question the validity of the distinction between narration and description. Yet here the advantages of a prototype approach are apparent: rather than arguing that there exists no essential difference between narration and description, it is more productive to view the boundary between description and narration "as porous and variable, rather than as impermeable and fixed".

Herman finds the difference between narrative and descriptive sequences of events in narrative’s distinctive method of sequencing events. He makes this clear with the following example: "Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I have toast for breakfast, but on Tuesdays and Thursdays I have cereal". Prince would regard this small passage as a narrative, because it is the logically consistent representation of two asynchronous events that do not presuppose or imply each other. For my part, I consider it to be a description of someone’s breakfast habits. It is not a narrative sequence of events, because a narrative sequence of events "(…) traces paths taken by particularized individuals faced with decision points at one or more temporal junctures in a

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104 Herman 2009a: 92. Herman also notes that "[p]articularity is (…) a scalar, more-or-less notion, with context determining whether a text or discourse counts as more or less particularistic" (ibid.).

105 I discuss this issue below in 1.5.2.

106 Herman 2009a: 91. Similarly Beaujour 1981: 33 (who speaks of "description’s seemingly uncheckable tendency to turn into micro-narratives"), Cobley 1986: 397 ("[a] clear distinction between narration and description is of course untenable (…)") and Mosher 1991: 426, and passim (who already distinguished between mixed modes, which he called descriptivized narration and narrativized description; for the sake of euphony, Herman 2009a: 197, note 12 adds an extra syllable and speaks of descriptivized narration and narrativized description), Schmid [2003] 2010: 5 ("the boundaries between them are fluid"), and de Jong 2012: 6.

107 Herman 2009a: 92-3.

108 Prince’s definition could also apply to, for example, a recipe (Wolf 2011: 162), which is clearly not narrative.
storyworld; those paths lead to consequences that take shape against a larger backdrop of consequences in which other possible paths might have eventuated, but did not.\footnote{Herman 2009a: 96. Herman does not refer to causality here, although this seems to be implied when he speaks of consequences. Causality is an important concept in narrative theory (see the overview in Richardson 2005) and sometimes stipulated as a necessary condition for narrativity (some scholars who do so are listed in Abbott [2002] 2008: 13).}

Narrative, then, has a time-course which is structured in the sense that events that have happened earlier in a narrative make the occurrence of later events both possible as well as impossible – in other words, the temporal order in which the events happen is significant.\footnote{This concerns, of course, the level of the fabula (in Bal’s terminology, for which see note 206), not that of the story (events can, after all, be related in an arbitrary order).} This is evidently not the case with the example at the beginning of this paragraph – if one were to eat cereal on Mondays, this has no consequences whatsoever for what one can or cannot eat on the other days.\footnote{Herman 2009a: 94-6 also discusses Sternberg’s narrative universals, viz. suspense, curiosity, and surprise (Sternberg 2001: 117), which are particularly associated with narrative, but not with description or explanation. See also Kittay 1981: 232-3 and Chatman 1990: 32.}

Herman’s third element of narrative actually consists of two slightly different elements, world making and world disruption, the latter of which is closely related to event sequencing, as I will make clear below. To my mind, the element of world making functions on a higher level than world disruption, and refers to the fact that narrative texts evoke storyworlds.\footnote{See Herman 2002: 9-22, Herman 2005: 569-70, and Herman 2009a: 105-8. This is also Ryan’s first condition, namely that “[n]arrative must be about a world populated by individuated existents (Ryan 2006: 8 = Ryan 2007: 29).} Narrative worlds are usually populated by humans who are able to act intentionally. Storyworlds do not only have a temporal, but also a spatial dimension.\footnote{See e.g Herman 2009a: 128-32.} As such, world making applies to a narrative as a whole. It would seem, furthermore, that descriptive passages contribute to a large extent in creating a picture of what a storyworld looks like – for example, when a character is described, or the location in which the events take place. As such, I conceive of world making as applying to a narrative text in its entirety.

World disruption, however, can be situated on the same level as event sequencing. It is, in fact, a further specification of what constitutes a prototypical sequence of events, namely one that introduces some sort of disruption or disequilibrium into a
storyworld. In the words of Herman, "stories place an accent on unexpected or noncanonical events – events that disrupt the normal order of things for human or human-like agents engaged in goal-directed activities and projects within a given world (...)". This is also a reason why the example quoted on the previous page is not a prototypical narrative, because it lacks world disruption. It rather describes the storyworld as it is.

Herman draws attention to the fact that "that what counts as normal or canonical will vary from world to world, narrative to narrative – as will, therefore, what counts as disruptive, disequilibrium-causing, noncanonical". Herman refers to Bruner's notion of canonicity and breach: in order for a narrative "to be worth telling, a tale must be about how an implicit canonical script has been breached, violated, or deviated from in a manner to do violence to (...) the ‘legitimacy’ of the canonical script". The concept of script, mainly used in the field of cognitive narratology, can help us to understand what counts as disruptive or noncanonical. A script is conceived of as a type of schema.

Schemata, in turn, can be defined as cognitive structures which represent general knowledge. They are used by readers to make sense of events and descriptions by providing default background information for understanding a text. Texts do not need to spell everything out in order to be understood; if details are omitted, schemata can compensate for any gaps in the text. Schemata are usually subdivided into frames and scripts. Frames are mental representations of objects, settings, and situations, and are static. Scripts, on the other hand, are dynamic, and refer to stereotypical sequences of events. For example, a restaurant frame contains information about what a restaurant

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114 Herman 2009a: 133. Hühn 2009: 90 draws attention to the fact that "we must distinguish the expectations of protagonists from the scripts of author and reader. What for a hero is an unpredictable event can for the reader be a central part of a genre’s script".

115 Herman 2009a: 133; similarly Hühn 2009: 90: "[t]he extent to which a change in the narrated world qualifies as significant, unpredictable, momentous, or irreversible depends on the established system of norms, the conventional ideas about the nature of society and reality, current in any given case, but also on literary, e.g. genre-specific, conventions, and can therefore vary historically between different mentalities and cultures". Thus, what counts as disruptive in the twenty-first century may not have been perceived as such in ancient Greece.

116 Bruner 1991: 11, emphasis mine. For a summary of Bruner’s main points, see Hühn 2009: 89.

117 For cognitive narratology see section 1.4.3 below.

looks like and the kind of objects that are found in a restaurant. A restaurant script contains knowledge about the actions and sequence of entering the restaurant, ordering food, paying the bill, etc. Whereas frames are relevant for the study of descriptions (when a narrator describes a restaurant, he need not specify every detail, because a reader already knows what a restaurant looks like), scripts are useful for the understanding of narrative.

A text which contains a narrative that follows a script – i.e. a story with a fixed order – is low in narrativity, because it contains no disruptive or noncanonical events. Such a text would make a rather boring story. A narrative which deviates from a script – i.e. a story in which something unexpected or out-of-the-ordinary occurs – has more narrativity, i.e. is more prototypically narrative-like. It is at the same time more interesting to listen to or to read. World disruption is a crucial element in distinguishing between a narrative and descriptive sequence of events.

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120 Within the field of classics, Minchin 2001: 32-72 combines the notion of script and Homeric type scenes; see also Allan 2010: 215-7. Minchin 2001: 39 argues that typical scenes can be regarded as expressions of scripts: “(...) I submit that Homer’s narrative patterns, namely those typical scenes or themes noted by Parry and Lord (which replay in more or less detail everyday situations, procedures, and speech acts), may be identified as the expressions of cognitive scripts”. This does not mean that the Iliad or Odyssey is low in narrativity: the narrator constantly varies his type scenes by selection and elaboration of elements (see Edwards 1980: 1-3). In section 2.4, I discuss the narrativity of a type scene.
121 See also Hühn 2009: 93.
122 Cf. Minchin 2001: 18-9: “(...) we do not make stories of everyday happenings which follow the predictable course. Such stories contain no surprises; they are not interesting to us. We expect a story to include events which interfere with the normal, or, in cognitive terms, the scripted, course of events. We expect to hear about an individual who cannot attain his or her goals simply by following a script, or individuals whose goals are in conflict, or everyday sequences which have been disrupted by an unexpected and therefore remarkable event”.
123 Herman 2009a: 135: “(...) the degree to which a representation foregrounds a more or less marked (and thus noteworthy or tellable) disruption of the canonical or expected order of events is itself one of the factors or properties explaining how readily the representation can be interpreted as an instance of the text-type category narrative, versus (...) description” (emphasis in the original).
disruption as the most important feature which distinguishes narration from description.\textsuperscript{124}

Herman’s fourth and last element of narrative, ‘what-it’s-like’, indicates that narrative is concerned with \textit{what it is like} for someone to experience the events of the storyworld. Herman argues that narrative is, too, “a mode of representation tailor-made for gauging the felt quality of lived experiences”.\textsuperscript{125} As such, “the less a given representation registers the pressure of an experienced world on one or more human or humanlike consciousnesses, the less central or prototypical an instance of the category ‘narrative’ that representation will be – all other things being equal”.\textsuperscript{126} When the element of ‘what-it’s-like’ is pushed to the background, the passage under scrutiny will be bordering between narration and description – Herman refers to a chronicle or report.\textsuperscript{127} Fludernik, for her part, has even argued that it is experientiality, and not a sequence of events (of whatever form) that defines narrativity.\textsuperscript{128}

So far, I have discussed narrativity by referring to verbal texts. Narrativity is, however, not confined to the verbal medium only: a film, a play, or a painting may possess narrativity, too. In the following section, I will discuss the differences between verbal and visual narrative representations. A correct understanding of visual narrative is called for, since ekphrasis is a verbal and a visual phenomenon. Seeing that visual

\textsuperscript{124} Cf. Ryan’s second condition for narrativity: a narrative world “must be situated in time and undergo \textit{significant transformations}” (Ryan 2006: 8 = Ryan 2007: 29, emphasis mine). Important, too, are Hühn 2009: 80-98 (who distinguishes between a mere event (which he calls \textit{event I}) and an event which satisfies certain additional conditions (\textit{event II})) and Schmid [2003] 2010: 8-12.

\textsuperscript{125} Herman 2009a: 137-8. In similar vein Grethlein 2010: 319 notes that narratives not only represent experience, but also lead to experience – in his words, that “narratives are crucial to letting us re-experience the past (...)” (ibid: 315).

\textsuperscript{126} Herman 2009a: 138. Cf. also Ryan’s fourth condition of narrativity: “[s]ome of the participants in the events must be intelligent agents who have a \textit{mental life} and \textit{react emotionally} to the states of the world” (Ryan 2006: 8 = Ryan 2007: 29, emphasis mine).

\textsuperscript{127} Herman 2009a: 138.

narratives have their own way of narrating, the question arises if – and if so, how –

1.4.3 Verbal and Visual Narrative

For the most part, classical narratology has been concerned with verbal narrativity. Recent developments in narratological theory have made the investigation of visual narrativity possible, too. Two approaches are particularly relevant: (1) cognitive narratology, and (2) transmedial narratology. Cognitive narratology is based on the assumption that narrative is a form of mental representation, a cognitive construct. This means that any object that evokes a story to the mind can be investigated. Another important insight in cognitive narratology is that narrative can be fruitfully comprehended by making use of a prototype approach. Such an approach works especially well in the case of visual narrativity. Visual narratives lack features that have long been viewed as obligatory for narrative. Consequently, they were often not regarded as narrative, even though other narrative features are present. A prototype approach allows for the fact that even though certain narrative features may be absent from a picture, that picture can still be regarded as narrative on account of the presence

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129 For this section, I have made extensive use of Wolf 2005b and Ryan 2009. The latter presents an extensive overview of different media and their narrative potential. Wolf 2011, though mainly discussing the potential narrativity of sculpture, touches upon many issues that are important for any consideration of narrativity outside the verbal medium.

130 Cf. Fludernik and Olson 2011: 3: “[i]n cognitive approaches, the emphasis has moved away from the categorization of aspects and functions of narratives in verbal and particularly literary prose texts to the tracing or uncovering of mental processes by which narratives are evoked and detected. This leads to an extension of the type of questions narratology once asked. Rather than inquiring into written work and theorizing about the functions of its narrative elements, cognitive narratology directly questions the mind and its functions, using narrative as a mode of mental access”. For overviews of cognitive narratology, see Jahn 2005, Herman 2009b, and Fludernik and Olson 2011: 8-10. The cognitive approach has also been criticised, for which see e.g. Sternberg 2009.

of other narrative features. Thus, the “prototypical and cognitive reconceptualization of narrativity” is essential for the understanding of visual narrativity.\footnote{132 Wolf 2011: 164, who investigates the narrativity of the \textit{Laokoon}, continues: “[t]his reconception allows us to determine more about a work such as ‘Laokoon’ than whether or not it is narrative; it permits us to assess the sculpture’s degree of narrativity (…), for instance, in comparison to verbal narratives (but also to other media); and it also enables us to account for missing elements that may nevertheless be provided through the recipient’s mental activity as soon as he or she activates the cognitive frame ‘narrative.’ Above all, this cognitive and prototypical reconceptualization opens narratology to a transmedial application of its findings without right from the start excluding what might seem to be non- or less narrative” (ibid.: 164-5).}

Transmedial narratology is, in turn, indebted to this prototypical and cognitive reconceptualization of narrativity.\footnote{133 Wolf 2002: 36-7, Abbott 2009: 310 and Herman 2009c: 85.} As the name indicates, transmedial narratology investigates narratives and narrativity across different media.\footnote{134 In this study, I approach medium as a semiotic category: “a medium is characterized by the codes and sensory channels upon which it relies” (Ryan 2009: 268; for a more elaborate definition of medium see Wolf 2011: 166). The semiotic approach distinguishes three broad media families: verbal, visual, and aural. This grouping corresponds to three different art types, namely literature, painting and music (Ryan 2009: 268).} An important insight of transmedial narratology is that although representations in all media can possess narrativity, the possibilities and constraints of a given medium influence the degree of narrativity that a representation in a given medium can have.\footnote{135 In the words of Herman 2009c: 85: “[t]ransmedial narratology is premised on the assumption that, although narrative practices in different media share common features insofar as they are all instances of the narrative text type, stories are nonetheless inflected by the constraints and affordances associated with a given medium (e. g., print texts, film, comics and graphic novels, etc.).”} In other words, “different media have different capabilities for transmitting as well as shaping narratives”.\footnote{136 Wolf 2011: 166, following Ryan 2005a: 268.} In this section, I will discuss the capability to transmit narrative of the visual medium, especially in comparison with the verbal medium.\footnote{137 I investigate only static visual images, such as paintings; I exclude film since it is not relevant for the study of ancient ekphrasis.}

For a major difference between visual and verbal media, we may return to Lessing, who wrote that “bodies with their visible properties form the proper subject of
painting”, but that “actions form the proper subjects of poetry”.138 While the ideological dimension (“proper subject”) must be rejected, Lessing nevertheless makes an important observation: painting is a spatial, poetry a temporal art. Furthermore, painting speaks to the sense of sight, and poetry to the imagination. According to Lessing, painting is in essence a descriptive medium, and poetry a narrative one.139 To a certain extant this is true: paintings are static compositions which are spatially organized, while poetry is dynamic and temporally organized.140 If narrative is a “basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change”, it is clear that poetry – in fact, all verbal media – is best equipped to convey narrative.141

Indeed, scholars are agreed that the verbal medium is the narrative medium par excellence.142 However, if we look at the four basic elements of narrative, we see that the verbal medium is not superior at realizing all four elements. Element (1), situatedness, applies in equal measure to the visual and the verbal medium: the viewer or reader of a narrative representation must approach that representation as narrative (and not as argumentative, for example), whether that representation is of a visual or verbal nature.143 Visual media are stronger in realizing element (3a), worldmaking: “images are more efficient than words at representing a world populated by existents because of the

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139 Ryan 2009: 265.
140 Cf. further Hühn 2007: 43-4, who enumerates some of the classic oppositions between the two media: “[p]oetry and visual art belong to different semiotic systems constituted by digital vs analogue signs; they extend in the dimensions of time vs space; accordingly, their existence is defined by successivity vs simultaneity, movement vs stasis, change vs changelessness; and they usually present development vs matter”.
141 Quotation from Herman 2009a: 2.
143 Cf. Stansbury-O’Donnell 1999: 15 (“[a]n image (...) only becomes a narrative (...) through the viewer’s interaction with the object”) and 17 (“[t]he character of narrative art is a much broader result of the culture that produces it, of the means and medium available to an artist, of the contexts in which one finds narrative, of the relationship between artist, object, and viewer, and of the purpose of narrative altogether”).
spatial extension and visual appearance of concrete objects”. When it comes to showing how a storyworld looks, a picture is “worth a thousand words”.

The verbal medium is superior in realising (2) event sequencing – and thus also (3a) world disruption – and (4) ‘what-it’s-like’. With Lessing, we may observe that language, on account of its temporality, is naturally suited to represent events that succeed each other in time. World disruption (3a), seeing it involves temporality and change, is thus also best represented by language. Furthermore, only language can make (causal) relationships between events explicit, and represent events that did not happen. Pictures have found various strategies to deal with temporality, which will be discussed below. It is, however, in (4) ‘what-it’s-like’ – what Ryan calls the mental dimension of narrative – that language reigns as the supreme narrative medium, since it is only language which can directly represent thought and, perhaps more important, dialogue. Lastly, language can easily evaluate what it narrates, and pass judgements

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144 Ryan 2009: 270; see also Ryan 2006: 19, who writes that language can only with difficulty “represent spatial relations and induce the reader to create a precise cognitive map of the storyworld”, and that it cannot “show what characters of setting look like; display beauty (language can only tell the reader that a character is beautiful; the reader cannot judge for herself and must believe the narrator)”. Images, on the other hand, can easily “immerse spectator in space. Map storyworld. Represent visual appearance of characters and setting (…) Represent beauty”.


146 Although many pictures depict a disruptive event (which is often the pregnant moment). I return to this point below.

147 Cf. Herman 2009a: 96, who states that a narrative sequence of events “(…) traces paths taken by particularized individuals faced with decision points at one or more temporal junctures in a storyworld; those paths lead to consequences that take shape against a larger backdrop of consequences in which other possible paths might have eventuated, but did not” (emphasis mine; see further 1.4.2). See also Ryan 2006: 19: language can easily “represent the difference between actuality and virtuality or counterfactuality”.

148 Ryan 2009: 271: “[i]n language, we can express emotions and intents unambiguously (…). Language can dwell at length on the mental life of characters, on their considerations of multiple possible courses of actions, on their philosophy of life, on their hopes and fears, on their daydreams and fantasies, because mental life can be represented as a kind of inner discourse, structured in the same way as language. Cognitive science may tell us that not all thinking is verbal, but the translation of private thought into language is one of the most powerful and widespread narrative devices. Most importantly, only language can represent the
on characters. In short, representations in the verbal medium have the highest potential for the highest degree of narrativity. This also means that prototypical examples of narrative are usually verbal narrative representations.

Visual narratives have various degrees of narrativity. In order to achieve narrativity in the first place, “pictures must capture the temporal unfolding of a story through a static frame”. Different types of pictures do so in different ways. Following Wolf, it is useful to distinguish between (1) single pictures, and (2) picture series. Single pictures can be distinguished in (a) monophase and (b) polyphase, referring to a picture which contains one moment or phase from a story, or more than one moment or phase from a story. Picture series, for their part, can be further divided into in (a) mono-strand or (b) poly-strand, designating either a picture series containing only one story, or several stories – in other words, a series that is either focused on one main story, or on a main story and several secondary stories. Every type of picture has its own way of capturing the temporal unfolding of a story, and it on this temporal aspect that the following discussion will focus.

Pictures cannot explicitly create a sequence of events. Even in the case of a picture series – which may depict several events – it is the viewer who must make the
connections between the separate pictures. Thus, in the case of visual narrative the viewer must actively construct that narrative. Yet this narrative response to pictures is a natural one, and comes easily to human beings.

A monophase single picture (1a) "presents the greatest narrative challenge because it must compress the entire narrative arc into a single scene". As an example of a narrative monophase picture, one may think of Caravaggio’s *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598-9). In order to suggest change or temporality, monophase pictures may represent a frozen moment of a dynamic action. In the words of Lessing, "painting can (...) only represent a single moment of an action and must therefore select the most pregnant moment which best allows us to infer what has gone before and what follows". The representation of a pregnant moment is an effective way of suggesting change and temporality, because it plays upon the tendency of humans to interpret narratively almost everything they see. This can be illustrated by an example furnished by Lessing, which concerns a statue group, not a picture. When looking at the *Laocoon* statue group which is now in the Vatican Museums, it is impossible not to interpret those three statues as representing a narrative.

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156 Wolf 2005b: 434: "(...) the pictorial medium has problems with narrativity and requires a ‘reader’ who is much more active in (re-)constructing a narrative than would be necessary in verbal texts. This is even true of the apparently most natural narrative form of painting, the picture series".

157 See e.g. Abbott [2002] 2008: 6-7, who writes that “[n]arrative is so much a part of the way we apprehend the world in time that it is virtually built in to the way we see. (...) Even when we look at something as static and completely spatial as a picture, narrative consciousness comes into play. (...) [T]he human tendency to insert narrative time into static, immobile scenes seems almost automatic, like a reflex action". See also Kafalenos 2001: 138-9, and passim.


159 Again, it should be stressed that what is depicted in a picture “is not an actual change of a situation and thus a temporal event as is typical of narratives, but only the suggestion of a change which the viewer is required to infer” (Wolf 2005b: 432, emphasis in the original).


161 Shen and Biberman have investigated in an experiment whether people use a narrative schema to organize visual information in single pictures that represent a pregnant moment. Their findings “support the hypothesis that observers use elaborated narrative organization that goes beyond mere temporal and causal organization” (Shen and Biberman 2010: 177).
A distinction must be made between monophase pictures that refer to well-known (verbal) stories, or those that do not. If a monophase picture contains a snapshot from a myth, the viewer who knows that myth will be able to supply what has happened before and what will come after. Such pictures do not, however, tell a new story, but are dependent on stories that are derived from, in most cases, the verbal medium. Ryan calls such monophase narrative pictures "illustrative". It may seem that the narrativity of such illustrative monophase pictures is wholly dependent on something that lies outside these pictures – on stories in the verbal medium. Wolf, however, argues that such pictures may also possess genuinely pictorial means of creating narrativity.

What is more, even if one were unfamiliar with the story of Laocoön (either from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, or from another tradition), the statue group still contains elements which trigger a narrative response. In general, it can be observed that monophase pictures may tell stories with which the viewer is not previously acquainted. In such cases, the viewer uses his world knowledge to supplement the represented pregnant moment. The notion of script (introduced in section 1.4.2) is useful here: if a picture represents an action from a well-known script, that script will be activated and the viewer will thus be able to supplement the other actions of that script. However, if a

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162 Wolf 2005b: 431-2: “[t]here are single monophase pictures whose narrativity seems indisputable because they contain intermedial references to, or even detailed transpositions of, scenes of well-known (verbal) narratives”.


165 See Wolf 2011: 152-3, who draws attention, for example, to the three contorted bodies which are represented in a moment of physical movement which suggests pain and anxiety; the bodies suggest changes in space and time; the snakes are shown attacking three people and will thus be regarded as causing the pain.

166 That pictures can be autonomously narrative is also argued by Varga 1990: 365 (“[s]o erhebt sich zuletzt die Frage nach der Möglichkeit einer autonomen visuellen narratio. Die Frage muß zweifelsohne bejahend beantwortet werden (…)”), and Kafalenos 1996: 57 (“[t]o interpret a fixed image by constructing a fabula, perceivers may remember stories they know; they may also imagine new stories that the scene before their eyes inspires”; see also Kafalenos 2001: 141-2). Cf. Giuliani 2003: 16.

167 For the importance of scripts in interpreting a visual scene, see also Sonesson 1997: 244-5 (whose terminology is also used by Kafalenos 2012: 40), Wolf 2002: 68, Wolf 2003: 193 (who discusses a cultural script, viz. the ‘Saint Nicholas’ Feast’ script, in connection with the
painting relies entirely on a familiar script for its interpretation, that painting would be low in narrativity. Of course, a picture may also represent a deviation from a script, but in order to understand that deviation the viewer still needs to be acquainted with the relevant script.

In polyphase single pictures (1b), “the narrative arc is much more determinate because it is plotted through several distinct scenes within the same global frame”. In such cases, a single picture represents one and the same character engaged in different actions. A recurrent subject triggers a narrative response: since a person cannot be in two places at the same time, the viewer assumes that different moments of time are represented. Often this interpretation is facilitated because the painter has separated different scenes by architectural features, as in Benozzo Gozzoli’s painting *The Dance of Salome and the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* (1461-2). Nevertheless, the viewer must determine the order in which the events happen.

Another category should be added to account for what I regard as a variety of polyphase single pictures. A single picture may also represent several scenes within the same space, but without the repetition of characters. Scholars speaks of simultaneous interpretation of Jan Steen’s *Het Sint Nicolaasfeest*), and Kafalenos 2006: 174 (who discusses the *Laocoon* group).

Ryan 2009: 272, who continues: “[a] truly narrative image must depict one-of-a-kind events that cause a significant change of state for the participants: not baking bread but stealing a loaf; not hunting animals for food, but killing a dragon to save a princess; not making music as a group, but secretly fondling a fellow musician”.

Ryan 2009: 274.

See Steiner 1988: 17: “[f]or in reality a person cannot be in two places at the same time, and therefore if a figure appears more than once in a painting we automatically assume that it is shown at various distinct moments”. A. Steiner 2007: 94-128 studies how repetition not only of characters but also of props "plays a crucial role in many prominent systems [that] vase-painters use to tell stories" (ibid.: 94).

This painting also seems to be known as *The Feast of Herod and the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* (now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington). It is discussed briefly by Chatman 1978: 34. Steiner 1988: 28-41 discusses its narrativity and concludes that “Benozzo’s painting fulfills in virtually every respect the requirements, not only of narrative, but of a strong narrative” (ibid.: 41).

Polyphase single pictures were rarely made after the Renaissance, because they are unrealistic. See further Steiner 1988: 23-8, briefly summarized by Wolf 2003: 190.
or synoptic narration. A viewer detects certain contradictions in a picture which can only be resolved by assuming that the picture presents different moments of time.

A series of pictures has the highest potential for narrativity. An example often referred to is *A Rake’s Progress* (1733) by William Hogarth. Picture series use the convention of reading spatial juxtaposition as an index of chronological sequence. This is a crucial narrative feature. Whereas in polyphase single pictures the *order* of the sequence of events must usually be determined by the viewer, a picture series can dictate this order. This, in turn, facilitates the inference of (causal) relations between the different pictures that make up the series. Hogarth’s picture series has, in fact, a high degree of narrativity. If we survey the degree of narrativity that visual narratives can *a priori* have, picture series have the highest narrative potential (and come

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173 Steiner 2007: 95: “[a] ‘synoptic’ composition will not ordinarily rely on repetition, either, because it includes no repeated characters and compresses several moments into one space by the use of characters, props, or setting elements that are proleptic and/or analeptic”. See also Snodgrass 1982: 5-21.

174 However, as Stansbury-O’Donnell 1999: 3 indicates, sometimes one can only detect contradictions if one ceases to regard the picture as illustrative.

175 Ryan 2009: 274: “[i]t takes a series of pictures to tell a story that is both reasonably determinate and new to the reader”.

176 See on this series Wolf 2002: 58-70 and more briefly Ryan 2009: 274 (“[n]arrative content is suggested on the level of the individual images by their reliance on familiar scripts, such as the gambling-house or the prison script, and on the global level by the recurrence of the same character (identified by constant visual features), as well as by the chronological sequence indicated by the spatial arrangement of the pictures”).

177 Wolf 2005b: 433: “(...) the picture series by far surpasses single pictures in its ability to represent an action that unfolds in time and points to preceding causes and future developments. The inference of causal relations is facilitated here by the Western convention of ‘reading’ individual as well as subsequent pictures from left to right”.

178 Wolf 2005b: 434 speaks of “the strong narrativity of *A Rake’s Progress*”. It should be noted, however, that “historical developments have made strongly narrative paintings extremely rare” (Steiner 1988: 9).
relatively close to prototypical narratives), followed by polyphase single pictures (1b); monophase single pictures (1a) come last.\footnote{Wolf 2005b: 434 states that “the limitations of the pictorial medium do not prevent it from realising various degrees of narrativity: it comes relatively close to typical narratives in picture series, some of which can be called genuinely narrative, while a single picture can at best be called indexically narrative”.

\footnote{Giuliani 2003: 36: “[d]ie grundsätzliche Dichotomie der Darstellungsmodi wollen wir beibehalten: Eine Darstellung kann nicht anders, als entweder erzählend oder beschreibend zu verfahren”. However, as Wolf 2007: 45 has noted, Giuliani speaks of the overall effect of a picture, which can, according to Giuliani, only be either narrative or descriptive, on account of the occurrence of certain narrative elements. Giuliani 2003: 285 himself writes that an image cannot solely consist of narrative elements. Whereas an image can be wholly descriptive and non-narrative, it cannot be totally narrative without a certain amount of description: “[d]as Verhältnis zwischen narrativen und deskriptiven Bildern ist demnach ein asymmetrisches. Bilder können ganz und gar deskriptiv sein, aber den umgekehrten Fall eines ausschließlich narrativen Bildes gibt es nicht, kann es gar nicht geben. Auch narrative Bilder verweisen, noch bevor sie sich auf eine bestimmte Erzählung beziehen, auf die Welt: genauer, auf das, was wir von der Welt zu kennen glauben”.

\footnote{Giuliani 2003: 35-6, emphasis mine.}

\footnote{Giuliani 2003: 54.} }

Scholars working within the field of classics have investigated visual narrativity, too. Two scholars merit discussion here. Giuliani (2003) has investigated the differences between narrative and descriptive images in visual art. He works with the concept of narrativehood, which means that he regards an object as either narrative or not.\footnote{Giuliani 2003: 52.} He defines a narrative representation as follows:

Als narrativ werden wir eine Darstellung dann und nur dann bezeichnen, wenn in ihr handelnde Subjekte als Protagonisten auftreten und den Gang der Ereignisse bestimmen; die Ereignisfolge muß auf plausible Weise begrenzt sein durch eine Anfang und Ende; notwendiger Bestandteil des Anfangs ist ein Spannungsmoment, das die Handlung auslost und am Laufen hält; zum Ende gehört umgekehrt die – glückliche oder unglückliche – Auflösung der Spannung.\footnote{Giuliani 2003: 35-6, emphasis mine.}

As an additional condition, Giuliani stipulates that the characters must not be anonymous, but nameable – the viewer must, for example, be able to recognise Heracles or Achilles.\footnote{Giuliani 2003: 52.} Giuliani has a very restricted view of what constitutes a narrative
image. For Giuliani, only images that have a high degree of narrativity qualify as narrative.

That anonymous figures do not preclude a narrative interpretation was already stated by Stansbury-O’Donnell (1999). Stansbury-O’Donnell rightly notes that if one demands that the figures are known, “[i]n essence what is being done is to define pictorial narrative not on the basis of its ability to convey a sequence of actions to the viewer, but on the basis of the kind of story and figures that it represents”. It thus comes as no surprise that Stansbury-O’Donnell allows for degrees of narrativity. While discussing a particular amphora, he notes that:

(...) there is a measure of specificity and discreteness that contributes to the degree of the work’s narrativity. The elements of a narrative – specificity, discreteness, and wholeness (a more complete representation of a story with clear beginning, middle, and end) – are important, but they determine the quality of the narrative, not its existence.

The advantages of Stansbury-O’Donnell’s approach are evident. For example, Stansbury-O’Donnell makes a narrative interpretation of Geometric vases possible. Many Geometric vases represent anonymous figures engaged in actions, often in combat. In such cases, Stansbury-O’Donnell speaks of generic narrative. We may rephrase his remark and say that such narrative images rely on familiar scripts the viewer knows.

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183 Stansbury-O’Donnell approaches narrative through the structuralist paradigm of Roland Barthes, which he adapts for the interpretation of narrative images (for which see Stansbury-O’Donnell 1999: 13-6).
185 This approach is also approved of by A. Steiner 2007: 268, note 14, who writes that such an approach is “a more productive model for creating a taxonomy of stories told in vase-paintings than trying to develop a simple up-or-down test that will establish whether a particular image does or does not represent narrative”. However, she also states that nonspecific, generic events are not “proper narratives” even though they often link two events in a time sequence (ibid.: 96).
187 Stansbury-O’Donnell 1999: 48 (who is indebted to Snodgrass 1980: 51-2). For Giuliani, such images are descriptive.
I sum up. It is uncontested that visual images may possess narrativity. In comparison with verbal narratives, visual narratives must overcome a number of difficulties. The most important of these difficulties is the inability to create an explicit sequence of events. It is the viewer who must reconstruct this sequence. Thus, in comparison with verbal narrative, visual narrative requires a viewer that is much more active in teasing out the narrative content. Nevertheless, visual narrative images have various means at their disposal to steer the viewer towards a narrative interpretation. Some images do this so well that they are able to realise a high degree of narrativity.

1.4.4 Narration: Concluding Remarks
This study approaches narrative through the concept of narrativity. This means that I will not establish whether an object is a narrative, or is not. Rather, I want to investigate which prototypically narrative elements are present or absent in ekphraseis.

This section has established the prototypical elements of narrative that will be used throughout this study: (1) event sequencing, (2) world disruption, and (3) ‘what-it’s-like’. It has also investigated how these elements are realised by verbal and visual media. A major difference is the way in which verbal and visual media sequence events, explicitly versus implicitly. As we shall see, this distinction is of central importance for the understanding of ekphrasis.

1.5.1 Description: Introduction
Narratology, as the science of narrative, has mainly focused on narrativity, on the defining qualities of narrative. Elements which do not directly contribute to the narrativity of a story, such as description, have for a long time been little studied by narratologists.\(^{188}\) Passages of description were, and often still are, regarded as non-narrative (non-diegetic), because nothing happens while the narrator describes an object, character or landscape.\(^{189}\) Description is, furthermore, in comparison with narration a phenomenon that is harder to define and classify. Whereas narrative has been viewed as possessing a logic of its own – a sequence of events – description

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\(^{188}\) See Wolf 2007: 3-4, and recently Fludernik [2006] 2009: 117: “[a]nother largely underexplored area in narratological research is description in novels (…)”.

\(^{189}\) Fludernik [2006] 2009: 117. This is the view of structuralist narratology, for which see table 1 in Bal 1982: 106-7 (under ‘narratology’).
seemed to possess no logic at all. This made description a difficult subject for structuralist narratology.

In this section, I will work towards a list of prototypical features of description. Just as one can speak of narrativity, one can also speak of descriptivity. Taking my cue from Herman’s definition of narrativity, I define descriptivity as ‘that which makes a description a description; a property that a text will have in greater proportion the more readily it lends itself to being interpreted as a description, i.e., the more prototypically descriptive it is’. It should be noted here straightaway that one and the same text can possess both narrativity and descriptivity at the same time. Whereas prototypical instances of description will possess zero narrativity, and prototypical instances of narrative will possess zero descriptivity, less clear examples of either category may possess properties belonging to both narration and description.

1.5.2 Description and Descriptivity

Before dealing with the prototypical features of description, the opposition between narration and description merits a brief discussion. Due to its non-diegetic nature, description has always been defined by scholars in opposition to narration.

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190 See e.g. Hamon 1982: 147, who writes that description “can be freely inserted into a narration”, “lacks any specific signs or marks”, and “is subject to no a priori constraints” (italics in the original), Lopes 1995: 5: “(...) descriptions prove to be far more pliable and versatile than narrations, since, unlike the latter, they are free from the constraints of logic and narrative grammar”, and Minchin 2001: 104 (who claims that “in our Western literary tradition, the descriptive genre is relatively unconstrained: it could be characterized by its lack of guiding principles or what we might call rules”).

191 In the words of Lopes 1995: 11-2: “one could conclude that structuralists (...) tended to focus almost exclusively on aspects of narration, discarding the descriptive elements that seemed to get in the way of storytelling” (emphasis mine).


193 Whereas ‘narrative’ is both a noun (a narrative) and an adjective, ‘descriptive’ is an adjective only (see also Wolf 2007: 9).

194 Cobley 1986: 396.
words, scholars were interested in description because it was *non-narrative*, not because it was descriptive.\(^{195}\) The question is whether this opposition is warranted by the reality of textual practices, or whether it is a theoretical construct, as Ronen has argued: "[t]he theoretical distinction between description and narrative (...) appears arbitrary and technical when applied to concrete examples. The descriptive is just a variety of textual phenomena which are practically indistinguishable from narrative".\(^{196}\) However, there are several reasons for rejecting this position.\(^{197}\) Firstly, the verbs ‘to narrate’ and ‘to describe’ refer to different activities – activities which people are able to distinguish.\(^{198}\) Secondly, even though in some cases it may not be easy to decide whether a concrete example is either descriptive or narrative, this does not mean that the concepts are therefore invalid. By following a prototypical approach one may account for hybrid examples. Thirdly, whereas in the verbal medium the opposition between narration and description may sometimes present difficulties, it may cause other media less problems.\(^{199}\) For example, a still life can easily be qualified as descriptive, and non-narrative.

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\(^{195}\) Cf. e.g. Genette [1969] 1982: 127-8: "[t]hat falsely naive question ‘why narrative?’ could at least encourage us to seek, or more simply to recognize, what might be called the negative limits of narrative, to consider the principle sets of oppositions through which narrative is defined, and constitutes itself over against the various forms of the non-narrative"; the original runs as follows: "[c]ette question faussement naïve; pourquoi le récit? – pourrait au moins nous inciter à rechercher, ou plus simplement à reconnaître les limites en quelque sorte négatives du récit, à considérer les principaux jeux d’oppositions à travers lesquels le récit se définit, se constitue en face des diverses formes du non-récit" (Genette 1969: 49-50). Similarly Chatman 1990: 6: "I have come to realize that Narrative, like most things, is best understood in contrast to what it is not".\(^{196}\) Ronen 1997: 279. Genette [1969] 1982: 137 draws a similar conclusion (for criticism of Genette’s position, see Chatman 1990: 16).

\(^{197}\) As has been argued by Wolf 2007: 8-9.

\(^{198}\) Cf. Chatman 1990: 16: ‘[b]ut surely ‘to describe’ is different from ‘to narrate,’ and if we were asked for the typical verb for representing Description [i.e. as text type], we would cite the copula (or its equivalent) rather than a more active kind of verb. We would say that the subject *was* so-and-so, not that it *did* so-and-so’ (emphasis in the original). In fact, as Wolf 2007: 9 has argued, Ronen herself has a notion of what description is, because she uses the concept throughout her article, and discusses it in comparison to narrative.

\(^{199}\) Wolf 2007: 9: ‘[f]rom a transmedial point of view, the usefulness of the distinction ‘narrative vs. descriptive’ presents much fewer problems: thus, for instance, home-videos representing
Definitions of description are still in a tentative phase. Scholars have noted that whereas descriptions are easily recognised, they are hard to define: “[a] reader recognizes and identifies a description without hesitation: it stands out against the narrative background, the story ‘comes to a standstill’ (...). Nevertheless, the reader is not able to define it as a specific unit, using precise formal and/or functional criteria (...).” Hence, sometimes scholars provide no explicit definition of description, even though they study description extensively. According to Dennerlein, this is due to the fact that these scholars have an implicit conception (implizite Vorstellung) of what description entails, namely the furnishing of information (Informationsvergabe) regarding elements of the storyworld. It can indeed be said that providing information about the storyworld is one of the most important functions of description. It often causes the story to come “to a standstill”. These two elements – providing information, and the halting of the story – play a major role in almost every discussion of description.

Structuralists regard the halting of the story as the defining criterion of description vis-à-vis narration. Genette, for example, writes that “narration is concerned with actions or events considered as pure processes, and by that very fact stresses the temporal, dramatic aspect of the narrative; description, on the other hand, because it lingers on objects and beings considered in their simultaneity (...) seems to suspend the landscapes (...) can clearly be classified as descriptive and at the same time as non-narrative (...)”.

Nünning 2007: 124, note 24 approvingly quotes Cobley 1986: 395, who writes that “[d]iscussions of description are still in a tentative phase, and no exhaustive or completely satisfactory theory has been advanced”. For existing states of the art, see Bal 1982: 100-5, Lopes 1995: 8-19, Mayr 2001: 13-29, Kullmann 2004: 1-18, and Dennerlein 2009: 136-40. The work of the French scholar Hamon has been very influential; see his Introduction à l’Analyse du Descriptif (1981, the third edition is called Du Descriptif (1993); the first chapter of the first edition has been translated into English, for which see Hamon 1981). An earlier article (“Qu’est-ce qu’une Description?”, Hamon 1972) has also been translated into English (Hamon 1982). For some shortcomings in Hamon’s theory, see Mayr 2001: 40-1 and Kullmann 2004: 20-2. For modern narratological research, the most important study is Wolf 2007, who defines description from an intermedial point of view (for a brief overview of which see Wolf 2008: 199-206).

Hamon 1982: 147. For the idea that descriptions are easily recognised, see also Bal 1982: 100, Nünning 2007: 91, and Dennerlein 2009: 134.


course of time (…). Chatman uses precisely this criterion to distinguish narration from description: narrative is “chrono-logic”, because it entails advancement in time on both the fabula and the story level. In other words, when a narrator narrates, both story time and fabula time advance. When the narrator describes a character or object, however, nothing happens on the level of the fabula, and hence only story time advances. This leads to what narratologists call a pause. Description, then, interrupts the sequence of events that is typical of narrative.

This formal criterion seems useful, but even structuralist narratologists have found it insufficient. They also designate passages as descriptive that do feature a sequence of events, that are chrono-logic, and that do thus not constitute a pause. Scholars have come up with various, though unsatisfactory, solutions to this problem. Chatman introduces the notion of function. For example, when the Homeric narrator relates how Agamemnon dresses for battle (Il. 11.15-46), Chatman notes that “this mini-narrative, the process of dressing, works at the service of [i.e. functions as] the description of Agamemnon’s armor”. Why its function is descriptive, however, is nowhere defined.

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207 This is often the view of classical scholars, too. See e.g. Thiel 1993: 12 (“Die Handlung stockt”; Thiel follows Heinze 1915: 396, on whom see further Paschalis 2002: 133) and Tietze Larson 1994: 14.


209 Chatman 1990: 33. For the notion of function, see ibid.: 10-11. I discuss this passage in section 2.4.

210 In my opinion, the notion of a descriptive function is a doubtful criterion for descriptivity, unless one defines clearly (1) what one understands a descriptive function to mean, and more
It would seem that the mere fact that a passage deals with a physical object leads critics to label that passage as descriptive, even if that passage features a sequence of events. In a similar vein, Hamon argues that narrators do not want to interrupt the flow of the fabula. Therefore, they will disguise or naturalise a description by integrating it into the fabula, either by having a character look at an object, speak of an object, or act on an object. The description thereby becomes diegetic and the narrator avoids creating a pause.

Any definition of description, however, that is only based on the content of the text, and not on the properties of the text itself, is problematic. As Wolf has argued, this is due to the fact that description is much more content-indifferent than narrative. In order for a text to possess narrativity, at least one character is required who is involved in an event. If a text is to qualify as descriptive, no specific subject is required: although description prototypically features objects, characters, or places, it may also feature events. In the words of Wolf, description "seems to be much less a matter of content

importantly, (2) the consequences of this descriptive function for the internal or structural organization of a text. Otherwise, we are bound to vague statements such as "(...) it is easily possible to identify a passage according to its predominantly narrative or descriptive function" (Cobley 1986: 398, emphasis mine). Schmid [2003] 2010: 5, who also works with the notion of a descriptive function, at least acknowledges that it is a matter of interpretation.

Hamon 1982: 149-56. In the words of Ronen 1997: 278-9: "[t]hat is, since description is opposed to narrative both historically and theoretically, it follows that as a textual type it should also be thus distinguished. Yet in order to show how the opposition works on the textual level, Hamon, somewhat paradoxically, surveys ways by which authors dissimulate descriptions by integrating them into the narrative. (...) why does Hamon hold to the opposition when it can only be sustained when formal or semi-formal indicators are interpreted as efficient disguises of the presence of descriptions in the narrative body?".

Wolf 2007: 28, following Bal 1982: 101: "[t]he most important objection is that the criteria are based on a classification of the objects of the text and not on the texts themselves".

This, in turn, follows from the fact that narrative is much more complex than description: "[a] further major difference between narrativity and descriptivity emerges from this consideration: stories depend on the combination of certain constitutive content elements, and narrative is therefore a complex frame; there is no narrativity without at least one character, nor without events and at least an implied spatial and temporal setting. Description, on the contrary, is a less complex frame, as it can use each of these constitutive ‘building blocks’ of narratives individually: settings, the physiognomies of characters, and details of actions and happenings –
than a matter of presentation and transmission, in narratological terms: a matter of
discursivation".214 Before investigating the typical presentation of descriptions, two
other issues must first be addressed that are indispensable for a correct understanding
of description, viz. the functions of descriptions, and the prototypical content of
description.

Wolf distinguishes three basic functions of description in literature and other
media.215 The first function is the referential function, which means that descriptions
refer to phenomena and permit their identification. Description may either refer to
phenomena in the real world, but may also construct fictitious ones. Both tasks are
achieved by attributing qualities to these phenomena so that they can be identified or
imagined.216 The second function is the representational and experiential function:
descriptions provide representations so that a phenomenon may be imaged or
experienced. Put differently, descriptions vividly represent phenomena which may lead
to experientiality.217 The third function of description is the pseudo-objectivizing and
interpretive function: first, descriptions create an aura of objectivity – what Barthes has
called the reality effect (effet de réel).218 In other words, descriptions help to suggest that
the storyworld of a narrative is real. Second, descriptions contribute to the construction
of meaning of a text, i.e. they guide the interpretation of a text as a whole.219

214 Wolf 2007: 28, who speaks however of descriptiveness, whereas I speak of description.
216 We may compare the definition of description in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative
Theory: “[d]escription is a text-type which identifies the properties of places, objects, or persons
(…)” (Pflugmacher 2005: 101); Herman 2009a: 90 expands Pflugmacher’s definition and states
that “representations and discourses that are central instances of this text-type category [i.e.
description] entail the ascription of properties to entities within a mental model of the world
(…)”.
217 Wolf 2007: 16 compares the rhetorical notions of enargeia and energeia. This function of
description is similar to that of ekphrasis in its antique sense (for which see section 1.2 above).
Furthermore, it is in its focus on the appearance and quality of a phenomenon that description
differs from explanation (Wolf 2007: 15). It should further be noted that for some scholars
experientiality is central to narrativity (see e.g. Fludernik, discussed in note 128 above).
218 Barthes 1968: 88, and passim; for a translation of this article, see Barthes [1968] 2006.
219 Wolf 2007: 17 refers to Riffaterre 1981: 125, who argues that the primary purpose of description
is “to dictate an interpretation”.

all of these can in fact become in fact objects of a description” (Wolf 2007: 28, emphasis in the
original).

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218 Barthes 1968: 88, and passim; for a translation of this article, see Barthes [1968] 2006.
219 Wolf 2007: 17 refers to Riffaterre 1981: 125, who argues that the primary purpose of description
is “to dictate an interpretation”.
Wolf next discusses the prototypical contents or objects of descriptions. First, objects in descriptions can be real or fictional. Second, descriptions – just like narratives – focus on concrete phenomena rather than on abstract notions. Third, prototypically a description deals with objects, characters, and places, elements which are spatial and static. Wolf speaks of existential phenomena. Narrative, on the other hand, focuses on events, which are temporal and dynamic. However, as has been indicated above, this distinction only works in prototypical cases of description and narration. In the case of a passage which features a sequence of events, it is the presence or absence of other prototypical elements of narrative which determine whether such a sequence is perceived as narrative or descriptive. On this point, Wolf’s ideas are similar to those of Herman. Wolf notes that the typical suggestion of narrative is that “something happened because of something else and led to a certain end”, but the typical suggestion of description is simply that “something is there and like that”. Lastly, the prototypically sensory quality of objects in descriptions is visual, rather than acoustic, olfactory, or tactile. As far as the prototypical content of description is concerned, it can be concluded that “there is a tendency (but no more than that) to privilege certain objects of description as typical, namely concrete, static and spatial objects of outer reality that can be visualized (...).”

It has been argued above that description is more content-indifferent than narrative. As theoretically anything can become the object of a description, the way a

221 Wolf 2007: 23 has based this distinction on Chatman’s distinction between static existents (characters and setting) and dynamic events (actions and happenings), for which see Chatman 1978: 19.
222 This is emphasized by Wolf 2007: 23: “[s]tatic, spatial existents as the ‘proper stuff of description’ is at best a formula to account for the most frequent and to that extent prototypical cases in some media, in particular literature (where narrative is an alternative frame that covers most of [the] dynamic, temporal events) and the pictorial medium (whose static signifiers unfolding in space rather than in time privilege static, spatial existents as their signifieds and referents)” (emphasis in the original).
223 Wolf 2007: 24 characterizes the core elements of typical narratives as follows: “motivated actions that involve anthropomorphic agents, [which] are interrelated not only by chronology but also by causality and teleology and lead to, or are consequences of, conscious acts or decisions, frequently as results of conflicts”. See for Herman’s views section 1.4.2 above.
224 Wolf 2007: 34.
225 Wolf 2007: 27.
given object is presented in a text is of great importance to establish whether that text possesses descriptivity. What remains to be investigated, then, is the manner of presentation or discursivation typical for description.\textsuperscript{226} According to Wolf, it is the emphasis on sensory appearances and impressions in the qualities attributed to the objects of description – a focus on the \textit{surface} of these objects – that is the most typical mode of descriptive presentation.\textsuperscript{227} The emphasis on surface appearances – on what something looks like – contributes strongly to the descriptivity of a passage.

Whether this typical mode of descriptive presentation also allows for the formulation of formal criteria by which a descriptive passage can be identified is difficult to decide.\textsuperscript{228} Description does not seem to have a single, specific mode of internal organization. Nevertheless, prototypical examples of description do share a number of formal features. Wolf notes that the principal semantic operation of description is \textit{attribution}, and that thus "any representation in which linking qualities to objects is dominant and, for instance, more important than constructing objects as agents or patients of action, should qualify as description".\textsuperscript{229} Wolf also notes that on account of the representational and experiential function of description, descriptive passages may contain many details that seem superfluous from the perspective of narrative relevance.\textsuperscript{230} Furthermore, details in a description belong more or less to the

\textsuperscript{226} I follow Wolf 2007: 28-31.

\textsuperscript{227} That description is mainly concerned with surfaces is adapted by Wolf 2007: 24-5 from Kittay 1981: 228, and passim. See for further discussion Chatman 1990: 31-2.

\textsuperscript{228} Wolf 2007: 29: "[o]ne of the most difficult questions concerning the discursive transmission of descriptions refers to the possibility of identifying a descriptive discourse or representation formally, owing in particular to specific modes of internal organization" (emphasis in the original).

\textsuperscript{229} Wolf 2007: 29, following Bal [1985] 1997: 36, who defines a description as "a textual fragment in which features are attributed to objects".

\textsuperscript{230} Wolf 2007: 29-30; these details are superfluous or irrelevant in that they do not contribute to the advancement of the action. Nünning 2007: 99 distinguishes between descriptions that contain a multitude of details, and those that do not: "[t]he type designated as \textit{bottom-up, data-driven} description is characterized by a plenitude of details and descriptive elements about the object in question. By contrast, \textit{top-down, frame-driven} descriptions rely much more heavily on the metonymic logic of descriptive systems and contextual frames, merely cueing readers to activate the appropriate contextual frames by providing only so much information about the phenomenon in question as to enable readers to identify the respective real-life object" (emphasis mine).
same semantic class, and can thus be characterised as predictable. For instance, when the narrator starts to describe a house, the narratee expects this house to have a door, a roof, windows, etc.\footnote{In cognitive terms, as soon as the narrator mentions a house, the frame 'house' is activated; this frame contains all the elements which one associates with a house (see further section 1.4.2 above).} Following Hamon, we may say that descriptions obey the law of lexical predictability.\footnote{This in contrast to the logical predictability of narrative; for this distinction see Hamon 1982: 158-9. Bal 1982: 104 summarizes Hamon’s point as follows: “[b]y lexical predictability, Hamon means that description consists of an enumeration of the components of the object described. In principle, this enumeration is exhaustive, and it is complete when the lexicon is exhausted. For example, the description of a character would be finished after all the parts of the human body had been enumerated”.}

Since descriptions obey the law of lexical predictability, it follows that in prototypical cases descriptions are free from the constraints of narrative logic. Descriptive passages prototypically lack the ‘chronology’ of narrative – they are non-diegetic – and must therefore be organized differently.\footnote{In narrative texts, both the fabula and the story advance temporally; there is thus an iconic or natural correspondence between both levels. In descriptive texts, only the story advances temporally, because an object has no temporal dimension. An object imposes no natural or inherent order on its verbal representation on the level of the story (Cobley 1986: 398-9; we may confer Levelt’s linearization problem quoted in note 38 above). In the words of Sternberg 1981: 61: “[w]hat distinguishes verbal or nonpictorial description is thus the asymmetry between the spatiality of its object and the temporality of its presentation (...) Not that description must be disordered, but that its linear progress is intrinsically unordered” (emphasis mine). For a brief overview of the various possible organizational principles of description, see Wolf 2007: 52-4.} Structuralists speak of a paradigmatic, i.e. a vertical and hierarchical organization, as opposed to the syntagmatic, i.e. the horizontal and nonhierarchical organization of narrative.\footnote{Wolf 2007: 30-1.} This means that descriptions contain themes and subthemes (e.g. a house, and doors and windows), and attribute various qualities to these themes (e.g. the house was red, the door had a brass doorknob).\footnote{Pflugmacher 2005: 101. Scholars sometimes characterise the relation between these various descriptive elements (i.e. between themes and subthemes) as metonymic (see ibid., and Chatman 1990: 24).}
1.5.3 Description and Descriptivity: Concluding Remarks

Descriptivity is a phenomenon that is harder to characterise than narrativity. Nevertheless, by starting from the functions of descriptions within a larger narrative text, a number of prototypical elements have been formulated.\textsuperscript{236} The presence of these elements increases the descriptivity of a passage. If we were to isolate one essential function of description, we might say that description provides an idea of \textit{what the storyworld looks like}. Thus, description focuses prototypically on the concrete elements of a storyworld – on its characters, objects, and places. Put differently, description deals with existential phenomena, especially with spatial and static ones; important, too, is that these objects can be visualized.

Descriptivity is, however, not so much a matter of content, as it is a matter of presentation. The typical mode of descriptive presentation consists of an emphasis on sensory appearances and impressions – in other words, of an emphasis on what the elements of a storyworld look like. In order to create an image of the storyworld, a description links qualities to these elements. Thus, the principal semantic operation of description is attribution. Seeing that many qualities can be attributed to objects, descriptions often contain many details. As for the internal organization of descriptions, this can be qualified as paradigmatic. Prototypically, descriptions constitute a pause, which means that a descriptive passage must be structured differently than a narrative one: whereas a narrative passage consists of a sequence of events, a description consists of a number of themes and subthemes. One event follows after another – a syntagmatic, horizontal organization – but the themes and subthemes of a description are usually organized hierarchically – a paradigmatic, vertical organization.

1.5.4 Verbal and Visual Description\textsuperscript{237}

It may seem obvious that description is most easily realised by the visual medium.\textsuperscript{238} Lessing, indeed, characterised painting as an essentially descriptive medium; thus, a

\textsuperscript{236} For a summary, see Wolf 2007: 32. He also offers “a tentative definition of description” (ibid.: 34–5).
\textsuperscript{237} The descriptive potential of pictures, narrative fiction, and music (corresponding to the three major media families) is discussed by Wolf 2007: 37–76, on which the overview in this section is based.
\textsuperscript{238} Cf. 1.4.3 above. In the following discussion, I refer only to static visual images, such as paintings.
discussion of visual description seems gratuitous. Nevertheless, some brief reflections on this issue are warranted. To start with, pictures do, strictly speaking, not describe but only *depict*. However, since paintings share many features with verbal description, it seems justified to use the term description in the case of visual representations, too.

At first sight, it would seem that painting has the highest potential for descriptivity on account of the semiotic nature of pictorial signs. Figurative paintings typically consist of iconic visual signs that are usually referential. These signs are, in addition, static. Seeing that descriptions prototypically deal with static and spatial objects, which usually appeal to the sight of vision, it comes as no surprise that painting appears to have the highest descriptive potential. In addition, “the iconic quality of the overwhelming majority of pictorial signs with their reference to form and colour seems to create a natural closeness to a maximum of possible objects” – i.e. of static and spatial objects. In fact, when looking at a picture, one may imagine to see reality itself rather than a representation of reality. As a consequence, it seems that the pictorial medium requires little effort from the viewer to perceive the depicted objects, since the viewer can experience these objects in a way that is much closer to real-life perception than in verbal media.

However, the fact that painting is a spatial, visual medium also limits the range of objects it can describe. Any object that is not visual, spatial, or that is in movement, can be depicted only with difficulty. Paintings cannot describe emotions, language or other acoustic phenomena. When it comes to describing these phenomena, the verbal medium is superior. Although the nature of the verbal medium (temporal and dynamic; non-iconic but symbolic) makes it less suited to describe concrete spatial and visual phenomena, it has an advantage over the pictorial medium in its greater referential flexibility. In the words of Wolf, “there is in fact hardly a conceivable phenomenon that cannot be referred to in language, and there are virtually no concrete objects, including artefacts and works of art, that cannot be described to some extent with words”. In conclusion, we may say that the pictorial medium excels in describing visual

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242 Wolf 2007: 39, who speaks of “only a relatively low degree of recipients’ share in the concretization of depicted objects” (emphasis in the original).
243 Wolf 2007: 42.
244 Wolf 2007: 49.
phenomena that are spatial and static – i.e. painting has a specific area of descriptive strength or excellence. However, the potential objects of verbal description are theoretically unlimited – i.e. the verbal media have a greater scope of describable phenomena.\textsuperscript{245}

1.6 Ekphrasis, Narration, and Description: Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used modern narratological theory to come to an understanding of ekphrasis, narration and description. Ekphrasis in the narrow sense, as the verbal representation of visual representation, is doubly mimetic: it represents in words something which itself also represents something. An ekphrastic text thus embodies two layers of representation, of a different kind: a primary, textual layer and a secondary, visual layer. This study aims at investigating the way an object with a narrative on it is represented in a text. Scholars often assume that in an ekphrasis the narrator describes such an object, but others see ekphrasis as narration.

This study will not establish whether ekphrasis is narration or description, but rather aims at identifying elements in an ekphrasis that are prototypically associated with narration and that are prototypically associated with description. The prototypical elements of narration and description that will be used throughout this study are summarised in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prototypical features of NARRATION</th>
<th>Prototypical features of DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- event sequencing</td>
<td>- attribution of qualities to persons, objects, or places (existential phenomena)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- world disruption</td>
<td>- a multiplicity of details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ‘what-it’s-like’</td>
<td>- focus on sensory appearances and impressions (surfaces)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Table 1.2: Prototypical Features of Narration and Description}

\textsuperscript{245} I borrow the terms ‘scope of describable phenomena’ and ‘specific areas of descriptive strength or excellence’ from Wolf 2007: 76. In his conclusion, Wolf 2007: 77 notes that “(...) we ought perhaps to [...] attribute the maximum of descriptive capability not to the pictorial medium but to the verbal one”. At the same time, however, Wolf emphasizes that “the undoubted representational faculty of the pictorial medium with its static visual signifiers is best employed when depicting static spatial objects. This is a field in which verbal literature cannot compete with pictures” (ibid.); see further figure 2 in Wolf 2007: 78.
By following a prototype approach, one may allow for hybrid forms: an ekphrasis may contain prototypical narrative elements and at the same time prototypical descriptive elements. This seems to be the most fruitful approach to tackle the problem of ekphrasis, since it allows for its extraordinary nature – ekphraseis being passages which deal with objects (prototypically associated with description) on which a narrative representation (prototypically associated with narration) is depicted.

In the following chapter, I will draw up a model for the analysis of ekphrastic passages, based on the prototypical elements of description and narration. The chapter also establishes the corpus of ekphraseis for this study.