

FIGURE: EKPHRASIS*

Ekphrasis is a slippery topic. Although included in this volume as a rhetorical figure (or figure of speech), its uses and functions far exceed this single classification. Whether defined as a rhetorical exercise, a literary genre (or mode), a narrative digression, a species of description, or a poetic (even metapoetic or meta-representational) technique, the properties associated with ancient ekphrasis are not in doubt. First and foremost are the qualities of *enargeia* (vividness), *sapheneia* (clarity), and *phantasia* (mental image), which, taken together, aim to turn listeners (or readers) into viewers and to evoke an emotional response through an appeal to the immediacy of an imagined presence. Yet, beyond this brief definition, the word ‘ekphrasis’ immediately ushers us into a whole set of questions regarding its intermedial status in a potential contest between verbal and visual representations, the uses of mimesis with regard to verisimilitude (reality–illusion; truth–fiction), and its cognitive, psychological, and mnemonic values in the cultural expectations of its era. It would not be hyperbole to suggest that no other rhetorical term has aroused such interest in recent years among classicists and non-classicists alike, involving aesthetic considerations, theories of vision, modes of viewing, mental impressions, and the complex relationships between word and image.¹

But to begin at the beginning: formally, ekphrasis begins life as a technical term found in Greek rhetorical handbooks (of the second to fourth centuries CE), mainly for the training of orators and epideictic speech, under the label *progymnasmata* or preliminary exercises for students in the competitive culture of declamation:² ‘Ekphrasis is a descriptive speech that brings the thing shown vividly before the

* Many thanks to Michael Squire for astute commentary and invaluable discussion. Translations from Heliodorus are my own; other translations are indicated in the notes.

¹ Standard modern references are M. Krieger, *Ekphrasis. The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore, MD, 1992); J. A. Heffernan, *Museum of Words. The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago, IL, 1993); and W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology. Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago 1986) (among other works, both earlier and later). A proper list would fill pages.

² See, most recently, R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham, 2009).

eyes.³ Its final aim is persuasion, as it is meant to arouse the emotions, stimulate recollection (where appropriate), and generally charm an audience with a style appropriate to the subject. The standard topics in these handbooks include battles, landscapes, festivals, seasons, people, animals, and object. Only belatedly (or by implication) does ekphrasis include descriptions of works of art, the common usage today (a point to which I will return).

Nevertheless, the concept of ekphrasis, even if not explicitly named, clearly already had coinage in the Roman culture of the late Republic, with Hellenistic forebears, and broadly understood in the same terms. The author of *Ad herennium*, Either *Rhetorica ad Herennium* or *Ad Herennium* [Herennium is a proper name] Cicero, and Quintilian, among others, even if not systematic in their terminology, all address the virtues of vivid speech (e.g. *sub oculos subiectio*, ‘placing before the eyes’; *figurae in mente*, ‘imagined shapes and forms’) under a variety of names, and Quintilian clearly knows that the Greek word *phantasia* translates into Latin as *evidentia* (*Inst.* 8.3.61–4).⁴ A second point: although Ruth Webb has argued for a division between ancient and modern ideas of ekphrasis, the latter restricting the term to descriptions of works of art,⁵ others have now insisted that the *progymnasmata* constitute a very partial view of aesthetic criticism. In fact, Homer’s Shield of Achilles (*Il.* 18.483–608), mentioned in Theon but only in the context of the fabrication of objects, already constitutes the touchstone for artistic admiration (and emulation) in word as in image. ‘There is little doubt, as Elsner observes, ‘that Graeco-Roman writers and readers would have recognised the description of art as a paradigmatic example of ekphrasis with a significance relatively close to modern usage’.⁶ Moreover, however we evaluate the two most famous dicta on the relationship between word and image – Simonides’ ‘painting is silent poetry, and poetry a speaking picture’, reported by Plutarch (*De glor. Ath.* 3.346f), and Horace’s more

³ Theon, *Progymnasmata*, translation from S. Goldhill, ‘What is Ekphrasis for?’, *CPh* 102 (2007), 3.

⁴ See, e.g., B. Scholz, ‘“Sub oculos subiectio”: Quintilian on Ekphrasis and *Enargeia*’, in V. Robillard and Els Jongeneel (eds.), *Pictures into Words. Theoretical and Descriptive Approaches to Ekphrasis* (Amsterdam, 1998), 73–99; G. Zanker, ‘*Enargeia* in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry’, *RhM* 124 (1981), 287–311; and A. Vasaly, *Representations. Images of the World in Ciceronian Oratory* (Berkeley, CA, 1993).

⁵ R. Webb, ‘Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre’, *Word and Image*, 15 (1999), 7–18.

⁶ J. Elsner, ‘The Genres of Ekphrasis’, *Ramus* 31 (2002), 2; see also M. Squire, ‘Ekphrasis at the Forge and the Forging of Ekphrasis: The “Shield of Achilles” in Graeco-Roman Word and Image’, *Word and Image* 32 (2012), forthcoming.

oblique *ut pictura poiesis* ('as is painting, so is poetry', *Ars P.* 361) – it would seem a natural conclusion that *ekphrasis* could include (and justify) the frequent interventive set-pieces of such works of art that we find in both Greek and Roman literature before the era of the Empire. One has only to think of pseudo-Hesiod, *Aspis*, dramatic works (e.g., Euripides, *Ion*), epic (Apollonius Rhodius: Jason's cloak, *Argon.* 1.730–68), idyll (Theocritus: cup, *Id.* 1.27–56), epyllion (Moschus: Europa's basket, *Eur.* 43–62), and mime (Herod. 2 and 3) to recognize that art as a subject for description can already be understood as a genre all its own.⁷

Once we move in this direction, there are numerous possibilities to consider beyond those of the declamatory type in the resort to the pictorial imagination: Fredrik De Armas, in his study of Cervantes, proposes a list that is worth quoting in full:

In terms of form and function, ekphrasis can be *allegorical, emblematic, decorative, or veiled*; and it can serve as a *rhetorical or mnemonic device* (or both). . . . In terms of pictorial models and how these are used, ekphrasis can be *notional* (based on an imagined work of art), or *actual or true* (based on a real work of art.) It can also be *combinatory* (combining two or more works of art), *transformative* (changing some elements in the art work into others that can be connected to the original ones), *metadescriptive* (based on a textual description of a work of art which may or may not exist), or *fragmented* (using parts of a work). Ekphrasis can conform to the pause in the narrative to describe an object (*descriptive* ekphrasis), or it can tell the story depicted in the art work – and even expand on the incidents (*narrative* ekphrasis).⁸

Accordingly, in the remainder of this article I will focus on a few instances mainly in Greek literature under the Empire, with reference in particular to the genre of ancient prose texts, a time when rhetorical flamboyance was at its height. But first let me set the stage. References to works of art are a commonplace in the ancient novel and elsewhere, both Greek and Roman, and in the period of the Second Sophistic as a whole, in keeping with the heightened significance of the visual arts from the Hellenistic period on. This cultural development entails a growing familiarity with famous specimens of aesthetic production, as well as with a repertory of well-known mythic images, along with the pleasures of rhetorical display in the skilful management of vivid

⁷ On the Latin side, too, recall, e.g., Catull. 64, Virgil's numerous ekphrases (such as the wall paintings in the temple in Carthage, the gates of Cumae, Aeneas' shield), and those in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (to name only a few).

⁸ F. De Armas, 'Simple Magic: Ekphrasis from Antiquity to the Age of Cervantes', in F. De Armas (ed.), *Ekphrasis in the Age of Cervantes* (Lewisburg, PA, 2005), 21–2, emphasis in original.

description. These references fulfil a variety of functions. They range in length from brief epigrams on notable objects (now immensely enhanced by the discovery of Posidippus' epigrams on gemstones and statues), to stand-alone examples of fully realized scenes, such as in Philostratus' *Imagines* (an apparently new genre of its own).⁹ Descriptions of characters may elicit comparisons with works of art to articulate the image of their outstanding beauty, sometimes alluding to famous exemplars as the touchstone of excellence (a point to which I will return). Alternatively, specific objects, such as cups, gems, coverlets, cloaks, belts, statues, and temple metopes (to name only a few), may elicit an author's interest in representing their images for play and profit, giving evidence as well for a culture of enviable luxury and display. Ekphrases may also be embedded in a longer literary work, as previously mentioned, often with subtle complexity in their relation to the main narrative. From the beginning with Homer, however, ekphrastic discourse is incorporated into a larger text as an attention-arresting device where it may function in a variety of overlapping roles – as symbol, allegory, divinatory sign, enigmatic riddle, emotional intensifier, mythic paradigm, or metatextual emblem of the work itself, or, for those less sympathetic to it, as a contrived pause in the narrative, an unnecessary and ornamental digression, or a self-indulgent showing-off in a display of rhetorical skills. The novel of Achilles Tatius, for example, may be taken as the prime example for its optical obsessions and wealth of description.

The reaction of an internal spectator to these ekphrases varies according to the context: at times, there is a connoisseurship of quality (as in the proem to Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* or in Lucian's *De domo*) that may emphasize the skill of the artist in the use, for example, of colour, line, and scenic details, or the success of his mimetic effects. Sometimes they may elicit responses that hover between astonished absorption in what is being viewed and erudite commentary on the subject portrayed.¹⁰ At other times, there is a personal identification with what is viewed (and described), generally in an erotic context, such as Encolpius' reactions to the paintings that he sees in Petronius' gallery of art (*Sat.* 83), or the responses of both the first narrator and the hero,

⁹ De Armas (n. 8), 23, calls these 'collectionist ekphrases, constituting a gallery or museum within a text'.

¹⁰ See Z. Newby, 'Testing the Boundaries of Ekphrasis: Lucian "On the Hall"', *Ramus* 31 (2002), 126–35; *eadem*, 'Absorption and Erudition in Philostratus' *Imagines*', in E. Bowie and J. Elsner (eds.), *Philostratus* (Cambridge, 2009) 322–43.

Clitophon, to the painting of Europa and the bull at the outset of Achilles Tatius' text (1.2–3). Viewing a work of art may also serve a premonitory function as a proleptic sign of a future event, and, as such, is endowed with special symbolic value (*ibid.*, 5.4).¹¹ Finally, whether signalled explicitly as such or not, embedded ekphrases call forth interpretation in broader terms of the relationship between word and image, as between content and context, and they inevitably raise issues of representation, with all the ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions that the notion entails.¹² As James Francis remarks: 'The relationship between word and image in ancient ekphrasis is, from its beginning, complex and interdependent, presenting sophisticated reflection on the conception and process of both verbal and visual representation.'¹³ Elsewhere, I have pointed out in reference to the rampant visual quality of life under Graeco-Roman culture that 'its great common denominator was precisely the availability of spectacle and every sort of visual display for the delectation (and enlightenment) of an entire public as a shared code of communication across economic, linguistic, and regional boundaries'.¹⁴ Concerning the visually inflected texts I have in mind, however, the watchword is *paideia*, a sophisticated Hellenism of the elite – of an author and of his audience that could appreciate the verbal pyrotechnics as well as draw upon a sophisticated cultural literacy.

In the space remaining, I will focus very briefly on the question of likeness with regard to portraiture, taking as my three examples the description of Callirhoe in Chariton, the portrait of Panthea in Lucian's paired dialogues *Eikones* and *Huper tôn eikonôn*, and the image of Andromeda in Heliodorus as the model itself for the girl Charicleia.¹⁵ This is a paradoxical – even perverse – move, perhaps, because, in a sense, these are not strictly ekphrases at all but rather

¹¹ 'Interpreters of signs (*symbola*) say that if we encounter paintings as we set off to do something, we should ponder the myths narrated there, and conclude that the outcome for us will be comparable to the story they tell.' Translation from T. Whitmarsh, *Achilles Tatius. Leucippe and Clitophon* (Oxford, 2001), 78.

¹² S. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel* (Princeton, NJ, 1989), is the standard reference.

¹³ J. Francis, 'Metal Maidens, Achilles' Shield, and Pandora: The Beginnings of "Ekphrasis"', *AJPh* 130 (2009), 3.

¹⁴ F. I. Zeitlin, 'Visions and Revisions of Homer in the Second Sophistic', in S. Goldhill (ed.), *Being Greek Under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (Cambridge, 2001), 211.

¹⁵ To be fair, only Lucian would fit, strictly speaking, into the period known as the Second Sophistic. Chariton is earlier and Heliodorus later. But, for all their differences, each, in his own way, addresses similar issues.

are dependent on audience recognition of an inherited storehouse of images and texts. De Armas speaks of ‘allusive’ ekphrases: that is,

the work of art is not described, nor is a narrative created from its images. Instead, the author simply refers to a painter, a work of art, or even to a feature that may apply to a work of art. This becomes an ekphrasis only in the mind of the reader/spectator who can view the work in his/her memory and imagination.¹⁶

It should also come as no surprise in our context that the stake in each case is the ineffable (or charismatic) beauty of a woman, whose description, from Homer on, resorts to different strategies of representation.¹⁷ While I have treated each of these three examples elsewhere in greater depth and in different contexts,¹⁸ I will now put them together, in descending order, as it were, starting from the most tangible to arrive at an inversion of the very idea of a mimetic likeness in the relationship between person and image. Note, however, that the first (Chariton) appeals to statuary, the second (Lucian) to a combination of sculpture and painting, and the third (Heliodorus) to an unusual painted portrait. The first two examples examine the urgent problems of anthropomorphization when it comes to divinities and their representations. The last, while invoking a mythological heroine, goes in an entirely different direction with regard to the primacy of copy over model.

‘Like a goddess’: Chariton’s Callirhoe

The notion that the Greeks saw something divine in beauty has a long history, from Homer on, to express the idea of a glamorous radiance.¹⁹ The erotic novel takes full rhetorical advantage of the popular notion that beauty itself may be taken as evidence of divinity. The mere sight of it is a memorable visual experience bordering on epiphany, whether in the first reciprocal gaze of the lovers or for others, whether

¹⁶ De Armas (n. 8), 22.

¹⁷ The detail of Achilles Tatius’ description of Leucippe is the only example I know in ancient prose fiction that attempts to specify what constitutes physical beauty. But see S. Dubel, ‘La beauté dans le roman grec, ou le refus du portrait’, in B. Pouderon (ed.), *Les personnages du roman grec* (Lyon, 2001), 29–58.

¹⁸ On Chariton, see F. I. Zeitlin, ‘Living Bodies and Sculpted Portraits in Chariton’s Theater of Romance’, in S. Panayotakis, M. Zimmerman, and W. Keulen (eds.), *The Ancient Novel and Beyond*, (Leiden 2003), 71–84; on Lucian, see *eadem* (above n. 14), 224–33; on Heliodorus, see *eadem*, ‘Retour au pays du Soleil: en hommage à Jean-Pierre Vernant’, *L’Europe* 964–5 (2009), 140–66.

¹⁹ See, especially, K. Jax, *Die weibliche Schönheit in der griechischen Dichtung* (Innsbruck, 1933).

they be future rivals or merely spectators, who behold one or the other of the couple (usually the heroine) with wonderment and awe. In Callirhoe's case, we can be more specific. Although compared to divinity from the very beginning, it is only when she crosses the seas to Ionia that she truly becomes the 'living portrait' of Aphrodite, and this in two ways: as an apparent epiphany of the goddess to the onlookers and through her image as a portrait statue erected in Aphrodite's temple. There is a certain zone of confusion between the two that is mediated through descriptions that recall famous works of art. Even in the earliest periods, there was no pressing need, when speaking of a divinity, to specify whether the god or the statue of the god was meant. By Chariton's time, the figuration of divinity takes on an even more prestigious role, especially when the image is one of the famed aesthetic models of the past that have attained the status of ideal perfection. To dream of a god or the statue of a god is the same thing, declares Artemidorus (*Oneirocritica*, 2.35, 37; 4.31); if a statue, the communion between dreamer and statue is one way of animating it and bringing it to movement, speech, and life.²⁰

Chariton exploits this border crossing between epiphany and cult statue with both serious and ironic intent, and, at the same time, profits from the well-known features of artistic masterpieces that would be recognized by the audience. Hence, in the first instance, we may detect an allusion to the famed Aphrodite of Knidos in the description of her emergence from the bath ('Her skin gleamed white, sparkling just like some shining substance; her flesh was so soft that you were afraid even the touch of a finger would cause a bad wound', 2.2.2).²¹ But, even more to the point, there is a confusion between Aphrodite's cult statue in the nearby shrine and the golden statue of Callirhoe erected there in the same place by her would-be lover (and subsequent husband), Dionysius. All three zones converge in these scenes that depend on and yet blur the relationship between the likeness of the woman with her own image and the image of the goddess. When Dionysius first goes to the temple and sees Callirhoe, he already imagines in astonishment that he is in the presence of a real epiphany of Aphrodite in the

²⁰ C. Brillante, 'Metamorfosi di un'immagine: le statue animate e il sogno', in G. Guidorizzi (ed.), *Il sogno in Grecia* (Rome and Bari, 1988), 17–33.

²¹ R. L. Hunter, 'History and Historicity in the Romance of Chariton', *ANRW* 2.34.2 (1994), 1074–5. Translations from Chariton are drawn from B. P. Reardon (trans.), 'Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirhoe*', in B. P. Reardon (ed.), *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley, CA, 1989), with my revisions in each case.

flesh (2.3.5). However, the climactic moment of this interchange between mortal, goddess, and statue occurs later, when Chaereas, her Syracusan husband, now in Ionia, turns up at the temple after praying to Aphrodite to ‘give me back the woman you granted me’. Catching sight now of Callirhoe’s golden statue, dedicated by Dionysius, he collapses in a faint. The servant, reviving him, thinks that he means Aphrodite, and reassures him: ‘Take courage, the goddess has struck many others besides you. For she is *epiphanês* and shows herself *enargôs*’ (3.5.3–4). Epiphany and statuary seem to amount to the same thing. The text here refuses to distinguish between the full divine presence of the goddess (Aphrodite, ‘in person’ and in image) and mere representation or uncanny replica (Callirhoe). Yet the confusion remains: when Callirhoe still later enters the temple to weep over Chaereas’ supposed death (‘seen’ in her dream), the priestess comforts her:

Why are you crying, child, when you have such good fortune. Why, foreigners are actually worshipping you as a goddess now. The other day two handsome young men sailed by here, and one of them almost fainted when he gazed at your portrait (*eikôn*). You see how Aphrodite has made you a veritable apparition (*epiphanês*). (3.9.1)

It is Callirhoe’s external appearance, of course, as she is seen through the eyes of others, that gives rise to ideas of divine epiphany, works of art, and the obsessive visions produced by the *phantasia* of an imaginative lover. She herself is far from mystified. She replies bitterly to Dionysius, when he first takes her for Aphrodite and then on learning of her identity still insists, with an apt quote from Homer that ‘gods may take the shape of strangers from other lands’. ‘Stop mocking me,’ she says. ‘Stop calling me a goddess – I’m not even a happy mortal’ (2.3.7). The knowing reader sides, of course, with Callirhoe, but the author’s play with aesthetic representation engages the larger and more compelling issues of the time in exploring the limits of verisimilitude, involving epiphany, cult statues, and divinity, along with look-alike doubles.²²

Woman as a work of art: Lucian’s *Eikones* and *Huper tôn eikonôn*

Unlike Chariton’s engagement with the confusion between woman, statue, and representation, Lucian stages a far more elaborate (and

²² T. Hägg, ‘Epiphany in the Greek Novels: The Emplotment of a Metaphor’, *Eranos* 100 (2002), 51–61. He accepts, however, Chariton’s connection with popular belief.

sustained) confrontation between word and image in creating the portrait of a woman that one of the interlocutors has never seen. If Chariton only allusively summons up a famous prototype of a divinity, Lucian gives full voice (and homage) to the acknowledged masters of the past in both sculpture and painting (the former with reference to their depictions of the divine, *Im.* 6).²³

The operative conceit in these twinned dialogues is the effort by one friend (Lycinus) to describe to another (Polystratus) an unknown woman of ravishing beauty (whose name tellingly turns out to be Panthea).²⁴ At stake here is the larger epistemological question of likeness and difference in the use of simile and metaphor, along with general issues of mimesis and representation in which both the merits of words and images are debated in the context of the relation between a divinity and the confusion in identity between a statue and its original model, as between art and reality (cf. Chariton). Or better, as the speaker puts it: 'it is not the same thing to praise what is manifest to all and to reveal in word what is invisible' (*Im.* 12).²⁵ In the first instance, this is a recurrent theme in discussions of representational art. First, what constitutes beauty? And second, to what extent can a figure, sculpted or painted, embody as well those interior traits of personality – emotions and states of mind – as well as evidence of virtues or defects?

Lucian is concerned with the larger definition of verisimilitude and its projection, its illusion of lifelikeness, which would guarantee the authentic resemblance of a copy to the model. At the same time, in this context, the dialogues call into question the very foundation of anthropomorphic representations of divinity. In the process, the word *eikôn* takes on its full range of meanings: portrait, image, statue, likeness, and, finally, simile in this exercise, which asks readers to assemble a fictitious work of art in their imagination by combining features of a

²³ Sculptors: Praxiteles, Alcamenes, Pheidias, and Calamis; painters: Polygnotus, Euphranor, Apelles, and Action. Sculpture remains the flashpoint for representations of divinity.

²⁴ The name itself ('All-goddess') is itself an intertextual allusion to a heroine of the same name in Xenophon's *Cyropaideia*, 'the most beautiful woman in Asia', whose tragic devotion to her husband, Abradatas, furnishes a continuing romantic motif in the biography of the Persian king (4.3.2–16, 4.6.11, 5.1.2–18, 6.1.33–51, 6.4.2–11). Her predecessor is almost as vivid to Lycinus as the woman he has just seen in the flesh: 'It makes me feel as if I saw her when I reach that place in my reading; I can almost hear her say what she is described as saying, and see how she armed her husband and what she was like when she sent him off to battle' (Luc. *Im.* 10). This is a second ekphrasis, as it were: an instantiation of *phantasia* in which, through vivid description, the reader can visualize in his or her mind the scenes depicted in the work.

²⁵ Translations of Lucian are from A. M. Harmon, *Lucian*, vol. iv (Cambridge, MA, 1925).

number of well-known masterpieces.²⁶ Hence, the turn to sculptors for the body and painters for colour to give the full dimension of life, with the result, says the speaker that:

If you are willing, let us put our portraits together, the statue you modelled of her body and the picture I painted of her soul; let us blend them all into one, put it down in a book, and give it to all mankind to admire, not only to those now alive, but to those that shall live hereafter. It would at least prove more enduring than the works of Apelles, Parrhasius, Polygnotus, and far more pleasing to the lady herself than anything of that kind inasmuch as it is not made of wood and wax and colours, but portrayed with intelligence (*epinoia*) from the Muses. (*Im.* 23)²⁷

But in the dialogue that follows, which gives voice to Panthea herself, the argument turns on two major points: the *hybris* of comparing a woman to a goddess and the rejoinder that it was not the divinities themselves who were invoked but rather the masterpieces of good craftsmen in stone or bronze or ivory. The solution is finally a literary one and the Sophist gains the upper hand, both in metaphors that compare his craft to that of the artist and in the meta-literary turn to verbal examples.

Comparisons of gods and mortals are reduced to a mere *façon de parler*, a convention of poetry (of epithets such as the Homeric *theoieidês* and *theoikelos*, both meaning ‘godlike’), even as statues are the work of mere artisans, however gifted these craftsmen may be. What is more, the lady’s name, Panthea, is no different from the names of other ordinary men called Dionysus or Hermes or even Zeus. Lucian’s reasoning never resolves the weighty problem of *why* the gods should be represented in human form in the first place, and, if they are, what relation the representation bears to its archetypal essence. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to find another specimen of Greek literature that addresses all these problems of art and text, word and image, in such a wittily sophisticated way.

²⁶ Recessively, there is a precedent in the famous story of Zeuxis and his portrait of Helen, combining the different features of five beautiful girls (in Croton) to form a composite whole (Cic. *Inv. Rhet.* 2.1.1–3; Plin. *HN* 35.64; Dion. Hal. *De imit.* fr. 6.1).

²⁷ To delineate Panthea’s soul requires another composite of anterior examples, ‘so the several virtues of her soul shall be portrayed each by itself in a single picture that is a true copy of the model (*archetypon mimêmene*)’ (*Im.* 15). Lucian’s examples are mythical and historical forebears, although these are recalled in the artistic lexicon: ‘For all that poets have set forth with the embellishment of metre or orators with the might of eloquence, all that historians have related or philosophers recommended shall give beauty to our picture, *not simply to the extent of tinting its surface, but staining it all deeply with indelible colours until it will take no more*’ (*Im.* 16).

Portraits and likeness: Heliodorus' Charicleia – model or copy?

Finally, in Heliodorus, there is no detailed description of an image at all, but rather a still more recessive allusiveness to an audience's recognition of earlier specimens in both artistic and literary realms. We have reached the climax of the novel in the tenth book, and the crucial question of Charicleia's identity is at stake to prove her lineage (and rescue her from the sacrifice to which she has been condemned). Daughter of black Ethiopian parents, rulers of the realm, she is nevertheless white. How could that be? The answer is that her mother, Persinna, 'absorbed certain images (*eidôla*) and visual forms (*phantasiai*) of resemblance (*homoiôtes*) from the painting of Andromeda that she looked at while in her husband's embrace'. The proof, we are told, is the public exhibition of the painting itself. Here

'you have the model (*archetypon*) at your disposal: look at the figure of Andromeda that is shown in the painting and you will see the girl's features faithfully reproduced.' The painting (*eikôn*) was brought out and put beside Charicleia... Everyone present was amazed at the perfect resemblance (*homoiôtês*). (Heliod. *Aeth.* 10.14.7–15.1)

We note the technical vocabulary of the status of the image: that is, the key terms such as resemblance, imitation, faux-semblant, and the mimetic relations between appearance and reality, illusion and truth, and copy and model. From this more typical perspective, the power of the image resided in its verisimilitude, its lifelikeness, its deceptive, sometimes uncanny, imitation of the real. This mimetic realism in a work of art, in fact, is the quality that, according to Greek aesthetics, most elicits a sense of wonder (*thauma*) and astonishment (*ekplêxis*) from the viewer, but, in Heliodorus' case, the terms are reversed. Amazement now consists in the recognition that the painting is the true model (*archetypon*) and the girl is merely the copy. Art seems to triumph over biology in this fantastic tale that accounts for the mismatch between child and parent and challenges our notions of the relations between nature and artifice.

This is a bold and unprecedented step that goes so far as to make an 'artwork the origin of the narrative itself within the economy of the text'.²⁸ But Andromeda's unusual appearance is attested elsewhere. On the verbal side, we can point to three examples of ekphrases (dating

²⁸ T. Whitmarsh, 'The Birth of a Prodigy: Heliodorus and the Genealogy of Hellenism', in R. Hunter (ed.), *Studies in Heliodorus* (Cambridge, 1999), 110.

from the second and third centuries CE), all of which seem to imagine a pale-faced heroine. One is in the Sophist Lucian's discourse on the paintings in a beautiful hall (*De domo*, 22); another is in the romance of Achilles Tatius at a temple in Egypt (3.6–8); and the third appears as one of the paintings described in Philostratus' *Imagines* (1.29).²⁹ Each in its own way is a brilliant specimen of the Sophist's rhetorical skill in bringing the scene to life before the reader's eye; together, they also attest to the popularity of this highly dramatic story as a subject for art, whose iconography may be taken as a cue to a widely shared visual repertoire.

In fact, 'the Rescue of Andromeda... was among the most frequently depicted myths in antiquity'.³⁰ Although known from vase-paintings dating from as early as the late archaic period, but generally clustering around Attic red-figure and South Italian pottery of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, the majority of these representations are found in around two dozen Roman and Campanian wall paintings that date from the closing years of the first century BCE to 79 CE. To these can be added mosaics, reliefs, murals, coins, gems, and other artefacts that continued to be produced throughout the Imperial period.³¹ In all these representations, whether verbal or visual, Andromeda is endowed with a white complexion. Only Philostratus seems to notice the anomaly, when he states explicitly that 'the maiden is charming in that she is fair of skin, *although in Ethiopia*', where in the painting she is surrounded by Ethiopians 'with their strange colouring, most of whom look alike' (*Imag.* 1.29.25). Hence, if the narrator does not actually describe the painting,³² but merely names its mythological subject as 'Perseus liberating Andromeda from her chains', it is tempting to imagine actual paintings (or their descriptions) as the initial inspiration behind Heliodorus' own conception of his work to devise a narrative intrigue of riddling identity. From this perspective, the image of a fair-skinned

²⁹ Cf. the Latin epyllion of Manil. *Astron.* 5.540–618 and, previously, *Ov. Met.* 4.663–752.

³⁰ E. Harlan, 'The Description of Paintings as a Literary Device and its Application in Achilles Tatius' (unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1965), 113.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 113–20; K. Schauenburg, *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums* (Bonn, 1960); K. Phillips, 'Perseus and Andromeda', *AJA* 72 (1986), 1–23; *LIMC*, vol. 1 (Zurich, 1981), s.v. Andromeda, 774–90. The scene remains a favorite theme in later Western art. See, for examples, the works of Titian, Rubens, Ingres, Delacroix, Redon, Doré, Chassériau, Moreau, Burne-Jones, Dali, and Di Chirico, to name only a few of the best-known artists.

³² Earlier (Heliod. *Aeth.* 4.8.5) we learned merely that Andromeda was depicted stark naked, just as Perseus was in the very act of releasing her from the rocks, and had unfortunately shaped the embryo to the picture's exact likeness (*homoioeides*).

Andromeda might indeed rightfully be the original and, accordingly, Charicleia can only be the copy of what is already embedded in collective memory. This turnabout may beg the question, but for experienced readers (and viewers) it would be yet another cunning (and more extreme) challenge to the issues that we have raised about the relations in this article between word and image, illusion and reality, in the context of ekphrastic description.

Conclusion

These three examples demonstrate, I think, without a doubt, the sophisticated flexibility with which authors under the Roman Empire could manipulate the standard categories of pictorial description in suggestive and highly self-conscious ways. A recent article by Helen Morales drives home the point still further in her subtle analysis of the figure of Phryne, the famous concubine (fourth century BCE), who created a notorious scandal by baring her breast to the onlookers at her trial for impiety (*asebeia*), and whose beauty was such that she was the model for Aphrodite in both painting and sculpture by two of the most renowned practitioners of their art: Apelles' Aphrodite Anadyomene, and Praxiteles' Aphrodite of Knidos. In fact, Praxiteles went further, Athenaeus reports, and 'dedicated a statue of Eros to Phryne', while the local people commissioned Praxiteles to sculpt a statue of Phryne herself, a golden statue, which they displayed at Delphi (*Deipn.* 13.590f–591b). The scandal of a *hetaira* (and one accused of *asebeia*, no less) as model for the divine, along with the purported representations of Phryne herself, introduces numerous unresolved issues – not only aesthetic but also ethical and social – for the artist, subject, model, and other viewers, when it comes to making and describing naturalistic art, especially that which represents the gods.³³ Aphrodite's own promiscuously erotic status compromises the association of her image with one of the elite, as in the case of Chariton's Callirhoe (compared obliquely to the very same statue and painting: *Chariton*, 2.2.2, 8.6.11), to offer a still more complex approach to the project of verbal and visual representation. More could be said, of course, not only in pursuing Morales' intricate arguments in greater detail, but also in

³³ H. Morales, 'Fantasising Phryne: The Psychology and Ethics of *Ekphrasis*', *Cambridge Classical Journal* 57 (2011), 71–104.

parsing the seemingly inexhaustible permutations of the ekphrastic mode and its many interpreters.

It may be noted, in closing, that I have avoided the question of art's representation of female beauty as emblematic – as a literal rendition – of the relationship between the gazer (presumed male) and the object (a female). A modern trend in the interpretation of ekphrasis has explicitly formulated the issue more generally as 'a struggle for mastery between word and image as repeatedly gendered'.³⁴ That is, the object described is a silent submissive female, the spectator–author an aggressive male, and the art of describing is a desire equivalent, as one reviewer put it, to 'lusting for the natural sign'.³⁵ It is but a short step from this idea to the further statement that 'ekphrastic poetry as a verbal conjuring up of the female image has overtones of pornographic writing and masturbatory fantasy'.³⁶

The heavy-breathing prose I have just quoted is only a further instantiation of the spell that the topic of ekphrasis often seems to cast over at least some of its votaries. Its effect does not only tempt the ekphrastist into flights of symbol and allegory, as we have just seen, or to the issuing of grand pronouncements on word and image as universal categories outside time and history. More importantly, it also seems to stimulate that same psychological projection (or introjection) of emotion, imagination, fantasy, empathy, desire, and subjective responsiveness that was in fact the task of ekphrasis proper to arouse in its listeners in the first place. Yet, in our brief survey of ekphrastic moments – now in actual rather than figurative terms – it seems fair to say that the visual seductions of ekphrases may justifiably contribute to the general seductive contexts that I have outlined, in which matters of gender, the body, desire, and sexuality predominate, where the gaze does in fact initiate the desire to breach the boundary between one self and another in the eager hopes of mastery and possession.

At the same time, we find the other side of the coin in our texts; that is, the enthrallment of the viewer (or would-be viewer), as Lycinus in Lucian's *Eikones* declares at the outset, when he refers to the Gorgon as model: 'I was struck stiff with amazement (*thauma*) at the sight of this perfectly beautiful woman and came within an ace of being turned into stone' (1). For Mitchell,

³⁴ Heffernan (n. 1), 7.

³⁵ The title of A. Heffernan's review of Krieger (n. 1), *Semiotica* 98 (1994), 219–28.

³⁶ W. T. J. Mitchell, 'Ekphrasis and the Other', in *Picture Theory* (Chicago, IL, 1994), 169.

these two responses express the ambivalence of the male viewer to the typical image (viewed as female): an image that excites both 'ekphrastic hope' – the desire for union – and the 'ekphrastic fear' of being silenced, petrified, and thus unmanned by the Medusan 'other'.³⁷

The figure of ekphrasis in its variety of uses obviously exceeds such eroticization, but antiquity, at any rate, demonstrates its suggestiveness in the cases that we have explored throughout this essay.

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³⁷ Heffernan (n. 1), 108, reporting on Mitchell's theory of 'otherness'.