Reading Space:
A Re-examination of Apuleian *ekphrasis*

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In his seminal article entitled 'Narrate and Describe: The Problem of *ekphrasis*' Don Fowler dealt with the ways in which a literary *ekphrasis* interacts with the surrounding narrative.[1] One of the ways is through the various levels of focalization, in the sense that a work of art may represent the viewpoint of the artist, observer, author or other party, and of their respective audiences. In discussing the case of the pictures in Dido's temple he quotes, with regard to Aeneas, Eleanor Leach's observation that 'the order of presentation creates confusion between the visual image and Aeneas' thoughts'. I would like to re-phrase the problem as follows: is Aeneas describing the picture, telling a story or both? The boundaries between description and narrative are blurred not only in this *ekphrasis* but in all the major ekphrastic pieces of the *Aeneid*.[2]

Beginning with Homer's description of the Shield of Achilles and over the course of the development of literary *ekphrasis* in antiquity 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. Some studies treat *ekphrasis* as something fixed in time and unchanging[3] while others give this point partial and inadequate attention. I single out two of the most sensitive approaches to literary description, precisely in order to show the degree of scholarly awareness of the problem. Andrew Laird's distinction between 'obedient' and 'disobedient' *ekphrasis*, based on what can and what cannot be visually represented, has

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[1] Fowler 1991.
[2] Literature on *ekphrasis* in the *Aeneid* is vast; the most recent comprehensive treatment is Putnam 1998.
[3] Laird 1996; Laird 1997, 60 f.

the disadvantage of being static, i.e. it is not concerned with patterns of change and development.[4] Giovanni Ravenna's study of Latin poetic *ekphrasis* departs from the point that *ekphrasis* combines description and narrative. But he focuses almost exclusively on the internal temporal relation of scenes, in order to show how this relation gradually achieves, from Homer to Hellenistic poetry, greater unity and eventually true temporal sequence in Virgilian *ekphrasis*. As for his overall distinction between '*theoria* greca' and 'temporalità latina', this is hardly applicable, for instance, to Apuleius' Diana and Actaeon.[5]

Gotthold Lessing's famous *Laokoon: oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1766) provides the most important starting points for any theoretical discussion of *ekphrasis* in modern times.[6] Lessing argued that the visual arts can enter into what he called a 'suitable relation' only with 'bodies in space', while the verbal arts can do so only with 'actions in time'; the reverse in both domains can be done only by suggestion, and is something that Lessing regarded in any case as a transgression of boundaries and greatly disapproved of. Despite his axiomatic views on poetry and his censuring of Homer for attempting to describe the surface appearance of a work of art, Lessing's observations possess an inherent value in the sense that they raise the issue of spatial and temporal relations vis-à-vis artistic representation and its description. In a condensed form Lessing's distinction is found in Richard Heinze's classic statement that narrative deals with temporal relations ('das Nacheinander'), while description deals with spatial relations ('das Nebeneinander').[7]

In *Decoding the Ancient Novel* Shadi Bartsch discussed the role and significance of *ekphrasis* in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius against the backdrop of the rhetorical practices of the period of the Second Sophistic. In my opinion the impact of the professionalization of description during this period is best seen in the fact that the domains of describing and of visual art are clearly demarcated. Works of art, like paintings and statues, now have an existence of their own. The fact that they may be exhibited in (real or imaginary) art galleries is in essence emblematic of their autonomy. Writers of *progymnasmata* are quite clear on the distinction between *ekphrasis* and

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[4] Laird 1993.
[5] Ravenna 1974.
[6] Becker 1995, 9–22 offers a summary presentation of Lessing's work.
[7] Heinze 1915, 396 ff.

diêgêsis ('narration'): the former deals with *ta kata meros* ('particulars') and the latter with *ta katholou* ('universals').[8] The person who describes a work of art is concerned with placing scenes and objects firmly in space. In sophistic *ekphrasis* and its antecedents narrative is assigned two major roles, which usually allow little room for confusion in the mind of the reader between what *is* and what *is not* visually represented.

Its first role is to function as a comment on, and interpretation of, the piece described. This is often achieved by engaging the viewer, an interlocutor or interlocutors, and the reader in the game of interpreting.[9] Its other role is to function as a discursive exposition of a work of art. Two famous instances of this latter case are the opening of Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, and Petronius' *Satyricon* 89. In the former the narrator claims that the story he will tell lies behind a painting he once saw in a grove of the Nymphs on the island of Lesbos, the scenes of which were explained to him by an *exêgêtês* ('explicator').[10] In the latter Eumolpus recites verses that presumably 'explain' (*uersibus pandere*) a painting representing the capture of Troy.[11] Eumolpus' poem is, of course, pure narrative that has nothing whatsoever to do with the *tabula* in question. Slater believes that 'the painting in the gallery is no more than an excuse for recital of the *Troiae halosis*'.[12] Irrespectively of Eumolpus' motives we end up with what might be seen, in Lessing's terms, as a statement on 'the Limits of Painting and Poetry'. A third instance is perhaps more illuminating: at the beginning of *Leucippe and Clitophon* the author gives a *description* of a painting of Zeus and Europa, which the narrator next uses as a point of departure to tell *his story* as *illustration* of the power of Eros (1.1–2).

To sum up, the game in the Second Sophistic is called 'Description and Interpretation'. A fundamental rule of the game is that you have to *identify* what *is* represented in a picture or sculpture, in order to be able to tell what is not represented or what is represented differently or what the meaning of the representation is. Sophistic description displays an enhanced awareness of spatial relations and describing becomes primarily a question of *reading*

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[8] Theon in Spengel 2.118–120; Nicolaus in Spengel 3.491–493 (Nicolaus is the only one who mentions artwork as the subject of *ekphrasis*).

[9] Bartsch 1989, Ch. 1.

[10] On the initial *ekphrasis* of *Daphnis and Chloe* see Hunter 1983, 38–52 with literature; Zeitlin 1990.

[11] Connors 1995; and for the context see Elsner 1993.

[12] Slater 1990, 97.

space. In the lengthy Zeus and Europa *ekphrasis* at the beginning of Achilles Tatius' novel there are more than four dozen spatial deictics (adverbs, prepositions and prefixes) and not a single temporal deictic. The rendering of time and aspect cannot, of course, be entirely eliminated. The imperfect of description is used copiously throughout to indicate not only static details but also action unfolding before the eyes of the viewer (as in *tauros enêcheto*, 'a bull was swimming'). The representation of duration is perhaps the most conspicuous instance where the limits between description and interpretation are (unavoidably) violated, in the sense that – to use Lessing's terms – the description renders simultaneously 'bodies in space' and 'actions in time'.

As we take a fresh look at the *ekphrasis* of Diana and Actaeon in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* 2.4,[13] we realize first that the person who describes is highly concerned with locating his description firmly in space. This is done with the help of deictics, which tell fairly accurately where each figure of the group and the background are placed within the *atrium* and in relation to one another. To the order in which the items of the sculptural group are presented I will come back later. My immediate task is to see how the *ekphrasis* deals with 'actions in time'. Under this label I include movement but also sound (specifically the barking of dogs understood as a durative or repetitive emission). Two interrelated issues should be considered here: first the rendering of temporal and aspectual relations and, secondly, the mechanisms through which the sculptural representation of Diana and Actaeon is perceived as a narrative sequence.

As noted above, the rendering of duration is a critical test for determining the kind of *ekphrasis* we have before us, in the sense that it cannot be visually represented and is therefore inherently a question of interpretation. It cannot be eliminated but it can be drastically reduced in the description itself, while part of it can be transferred to the domain of interpretive comments. In the present *ekphrasis* this is achieved in a number of ways. First, the description focuses on completed action and privileges the use of adjectives, which are devoid of aspect and which the modern translator[14] is sometimes forced to render with present participles. Here is the description of the statue of Diana: *signum perfecte <u>luculentum</u>* (adj., 'an absolutely brilliant statue'), *ueste <u>reflatum</u>* (past participle, 'robe blowing in the wind'), *procursu <u>uegetum</u>* (adj., 'vividly running forward'), *introeuntibus <u>obvium</u>* (adj.,

'coming to meet you as you entered') *et maiestate numinum <u>uenerabile</u>* (adj., 'awesome with the sublimity of godhead'). Secondly, the person who describes uses verbs which suggest a static rather than dynamic representation, as in the description of the dogs: *aures rigent* ('their ears are stiff') and *nares hiant* ('their nostrils are wide open').

Thirdly, in the case of the barking of the dogs the narrator uses a neutral verb (*ora saeuiunt*, 'their mouths gape savagely'), which bypasses the emission of sound.[15] The fourth device is the viewer's interpretive comment at this point: 'so that if the sound of barking burst in from next door you would think it had come from the marble's jaws'. Taking advantage of the very target of *ekphrasis*, which is to 'bring the subject before our eyes with *enargeia*',[16] the person who describes steps in occasionally to manipulate the viewers' and readers' perception by channeling it in the direction of *interpretation*: 'you would think them to be in flight'; or 'if you bent down and looked in the pool, you would think that the bunches of grapes … possessed the quality of movement, among all other aspects of reality'. In this way the illusion of life, an inherent feature of *ekphrasis*, becomes a *foil* for coping with the rendering of sound and movement and ultimately of temporality. It should be noted that *enargeia* was in a number of ways (by etymology, by association with *energeia*, and, sometimes by definition) associated not just with visual vividness but also with action and movement.[17]

Strictly relevant is the fact that the person who describes turns the dynamic process of metamorphosis into an accomplished fact and hence into a static situation. *Iam in cervum ferinus* means that Actaeon 'has already taken the shape of a beast'.[18] In other words, *iam* here marks not a beginning but a completed action, which is in addition rendered not with a participle but with an adjective.[19] There are indeed representations of Actaeon beginning to turn into a stag *before* he commits the crime proper.[20] The choice of a synchronic

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[15] On *saeuiunt* see van Mal-Maeder 1998, 109.

[16] For rhetorical definitions of *ekphrasis* see Becker 1995, 24 ff.; Bartsch 1989; Dubel 1997. On *enargeia* see, among others, Zanker 1987 and Manieri 1998.

[17] Cf. Manieri 1998, 97 ff.

[18] For this interpretation see van Mal-Maeder 1998, 120; Robertson-Vallette 1940–1945, *ad loc*.

[19] For the syntax see Callebat 1968, 229 ff. Those who take *iam* as marking the beginning or the process of transformation (Hanson 1989: 'in the very act of changing into a stag') are apparently unhappy with the idea that transformation has already taken place *before* Diana steps into the bath.

[20] Schlam 1984, 95 ff.; van Mal-Maeder 1998, 120.

(descriptive) over a diachronic (narrative) version[21] is intended to render the visual text as faithfully as possible. Moreover, in the present *ekphrasis* artistic creation (*ars*) and metamorphosis are closely related. First in the description of Actaeon vis-à-vis the statue of Diana: *iam in cervum ferinus* picks up *lapis Parius in Dianam factus* ('a piece of Parian marble made into the likeness of Diana'); and next in the description of Actaeon himself: first comes 'a marble figure in the likeness of Actaeon' (*inter medias frondes lapidis Actaeon simulacrum*) and there follows 'Actaeon in the likeness of a beast' (*iam in cervum ferinus*). In both cases artistic creation (the statues of Diana and figure of Actaeon) and transformation (the metamorphosis of Actaeon) are perceived as accomplished facts and as having become 'bodies in space'.

It is the person who describes that steps in to *interpret* and transform a visual text representing bodies in space into a verbal text representing actions in time. The entire Actaeon section consists of a single sentence with one finite verb: *uisitur* ('is seen'). Several of the things that we are told about him are the projection of the viewer's gaze and hence they are a question of interpretation. Just as earlier the person describing provided various comments in order to render the realism of artistic representation, so here he interprets Actaeon's gaze as 'inquisitive' (*curioso optutu*) and conjectures that the hero is 'waiting for Diana to step into the bath' (*loturam Dianam opperiens*). The statue itself represents only Diana's robe 'blowing in the wind' (*ueste reflatum*); it is the viewer who provides the motive of voyeurism. In broader terms, it is the viewer that creates a narrative sequence out of bodies arranged in space, and it is also he who creates a single narrative out of two separate artistic traditions (the striding Diana and Diana's bath).[22]

Apuleius' acute awareness of spatiality and temporality and of the different possibilities of representation is evident in Ch. 14 of the *Apology*, recently discussed by Niall Slater and Yun Lee Too.[23] A statue or a painting, he says, fails to register the motion and change of the individual it represents, which thus displays the rigidity of a corpse; by contrast, a mirror image is far superior, because it registers every motion and change in the person it reflects. By 'motion' and 'change' he means such things as a nod, a change of expression, and the biological changes brought about by the advance of years. Had Lessing been interested in mirror reflections, he would

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[21] See van Mal-Maeder 1998, 120; cf. Sharrock 1996, 106.
[22] Schlam 1984; Slater 1998; Heath 1992, 123.
[23] Too 1996; Slater 1998, 41 ff.

undoubtedly have said that mirrors are capable of rendering both 'bodies in space' and 'actions in time'.

Reflections (in the pool) of the grapes and of the marble figure of Actaeon function as yet another means to render temporality and specifically motion and change. To be precise, reflections complement the viewer's interpretive comment, and they suggest the dimension of time by engaging the viewer: 'if you looked into the water, you would think that the bunches of grapes … possessed the quality of movement'. This is quite different from movement being *actually* represented and also allows the person who describes to stimulate the viewer's imagination. This way of looking at things would, I think, answer the questions raised by Slater, such as the difficulty of representing a reflection in three-dimensional art or of picking out a reflection on the moving surface of the pool.[24]

We can now look at the order in which the items of the sculptural group are presented. Heath claims that Lucius describes Byrrhena's courtyard 'as objects meet his eye'.[25] This is not accurate. Spatial deictics make the statue of Diana the very center of the arrangement and the very focus of attention. The four statues of Isis-Victoria-Fortuna[26] stand at the four corners of the *atrium*. The statue of Diana, singled out with the introductory *ecce*, occupies in balance the center of the whole area: the visitor relates directly to it as he enters, the dogs are placed at its flanks, the cave with its vegetation is placed behind the goddess' back, the marble statue's brilliance glistens in the interior of the cave, the pool runs along by (or from under) the goddess' feet and Actaeon is leaning towards the goddess waiting for her to step into the bath.

What Heath says would be true not of the present *ekphrasis* but of Ch. 1 of book 2, where Lucius casts his eyes around with impatient and passionate curiosity giving a random description of nature (rocks, birds, trees and fountains), which he perceives as transformed human beings. Apparently, this Lucius, who reads space exclusively on the basis of his own desire, has nothing to do with the Lucius who describes the *atrium* of Byrrhena's house with a formality which strikes the reader from the very beginning. This other Lucius of Ch. 4 of book 2 is a professional, a sophist (to use the title of Stephen Harrison's recent book) versed in describing works of art and simi-

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[24] Slater 1998.
[25] Heath 1992, 123.
[26] Peden 1985.

lar.[27] The contrast with Ch. 2.1 is even more pronounced, considering the relative affinity of the subject-matter in the two passages.

Taking everything into account, I would suggest that the person who describes the Diana and Actaeon group is Lucius-*auctor* (the retrospective narrator of action)[28] and not Lucius-*actor* (the currently acting protagonist). Lucius-*actor* is inserted rather abruptly immediately after the formal description: 'I was staring again and again at the statuary enjoying myself enormously, when Byrrhena spoke'. The enormous pleasure Lucius-*actor* takes in looking at it means that he does not absorb the warning; but he cannot be held responsible and accused of 'blindness' on account of the brevity of the description or of focusing on 'details,[29] because this is the domain of the other Lucius, the retrospective narrator. In addition, the narrative provides in the person of Byrrhena the typical interpreter figure (*exêgêtês*). She performs this function not merely by uttering the cryptic phrase '*tua sunt … cuncta quae uides*'[30] but also by using the description as a point of departure in order to talk of Pamphile's powers and warn Lucius of them. This latter feature is reminiscent of a technique discussed above, namely the relation between description and narrative in the case of the Zeus and Europa *ekphrasis* at the beginning of Achilles Tatius' novel.

What was said above applies more or less to other descriptions in the *Metamorphoses*. I mean the *ekphrasis* of the palace of Cupid in 5.1, the robber's cave in 4.6.1–4 and the cliff in 6.14.2–4. Worthy of consideration is also the longest *ekphrasis* in the novel, the pantomime performance on the subject of the judgment of Paris in 10.30–32.[31] The case is, of course, different because a performance involves temporal relations as well, and specifically movement and change of scenes. But even here there are striking similarities with the Diana and Actaeon *ekphrasis*. The person who describes does not easily yield to the temptation of narrating instead of describing. Hardly any temporal adverbs are employed to indicate transitions and the entrance of characters. The introduction of characters is rendered paratacti-

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[27] Harrison 2000, 74, 103, 114, 221, and all of Ch. 2: 'A Sophist's novel: The *Metamorphoses*'.

[28] Correctly so van Mal-Maeder 1997, 192.

[29] Van Mal-Maeder 1998, 117 speaks of 'aveuglement', which she explains in these terms.

[30] Slater 1998, 36 n. 23 believes that this statement portrays Byrrhena as a 'parody' of the interpreter figure.

[31] Recent literature on this *ekphrasis* includes Fick 1990; Finkelpearl 1991; Zimmerman 1993 and 2000.

cally and in a way that brings to mind a series of tableaux: *adest* ('There appeared'), *insequitur* ('Next came'), *irrupit alia* ('On came another girl'), *super has introcessit alia* ('After these another girl made her entrance'), *Venus ecce …constitit* (Now Venus … took her position')*, Et influunt* ('Then in streamed'), etc. With astonishing awareness of the function of temporality the person who describes accumulates temporal indicators in the climactic scene, when Venus comes before Paris and receives the prize (32).[32]

All in all, in the *Metamorphoses* we are far removed from the *ekphrasis* of Dido's temple pictures (*Aen*. 1.456–493), where one cannot tell between the 'visual image and Aeneas' thoughts' and where Aeneas may be narrating events of the Trojan war instead of describing scenes on the walls. The person who describes is now well trained to distinguish between what *is* and what *is not* visually represented. His job is to render spatial relations ('bodies in space') as accurately as possible so that he can supply himself the non-representable elements and comment upon the meaning of the representation.

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[32] I mean the use of *iam* for the beginning of flute playing; the use of a present participle to synchronize the playing of charming melodies (*quibus spectatorum pectora suaue mulcentibus*, 'while these tunes were delightfully charming the spectators') with the moment Venus starts to move towards the judge; the use of a temporal clause to indicate the moment when Venus 'arrives in sight of the judge' (*Haec ut primum ante iudicis conspectum facta est*); and the use of *tunc* ('then') for the moment when Paris hands Venus the apple.

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