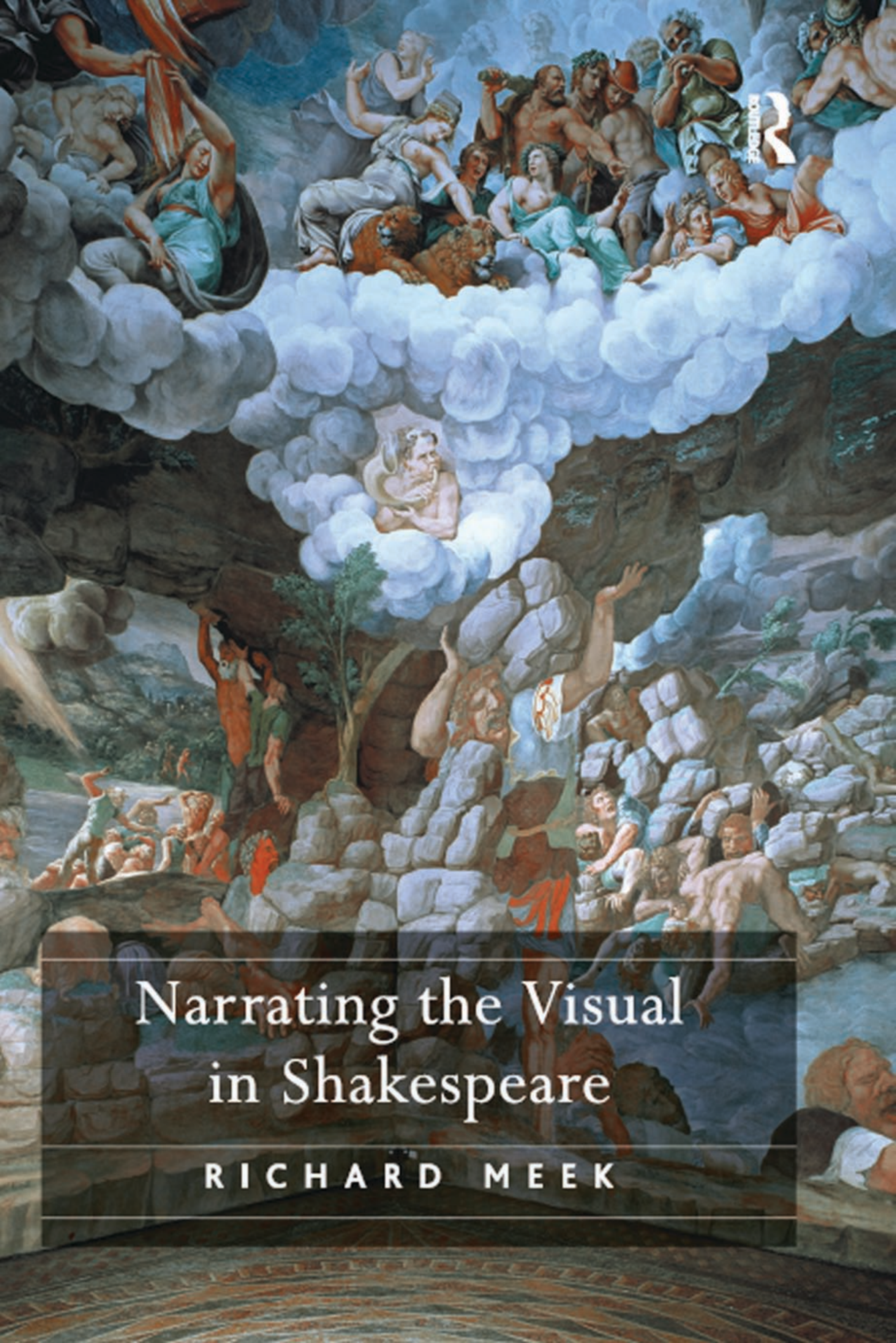

Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare

RICHARD MEEK

NARRATING THE VISUAL IN SHAKESPEARE

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Introduction

Shakespeare, Narrative and Art

In the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, a Lord and his servants perpetrate an elaborate confidence trick upon the hapless tinker Christopher Sly, in an attempt to make him believe that he, too, is a Lord. Part of this process of persuasion and seduction involves the description of several works of pictorial art:

> *2 Serv.* Dost thou love pictures? We will fetch thee straight
> Adonis painted by a running brook,
> And Cytherea all in sedges hid,
> Which seem to move and wanton with her breath,
> Even as the waving sedges play with wind.
> *Lord.* We'll show thee Io as she was a maid,
> And how she was beguiled and surpris'd,
> As lively painted as the deed was done.
> *3 Serv.* Or Daphne roaming through a thorny wood,
> Scratching her legs that one shall swear she bleeds,
> And at that sight shall sad Apollo weep,
> So workmanly the blood and tears are drawn.[1]

According to the Lord and his servingmen, these pictures are so realistic that one would be forgiven for mistaking them for the thing itself. The sedges or grasses in which Venus (Cytherea) hides 'seem to move' (52), while the painting of Io is said to be 'As lively painted as the deed was done' (56). Furthermore, the dense syntax of the passage means that it is unclear whether Apollo is a character depicted within the painting, weeping at the sight of Daphne herself, or an observer of this extraordinary picture, moved by the 'workmanly' (60) representation of her blood and tears. These descriptions seem designed, then, to blur the distinction between representation and reality, and between viewer and participant. It is worth emphasising, however, that these artworks are all kept offstage. The Lord and his men tantalise Sly with the promise of visual satisfaction, saying that they will 'fetch [him] straight' (49) the picture of Venus and Adonis, and will 'show [him] Io' (54), but this does not take place within the action of the play. Perhaps the Lord and his co-conspirators realise that it might be better if Sly *doesn't* see these absent artworks and instead imagines this extraordinary mode of verisimilitude. But of course Shakespeare's audience does not get to see these artworks either. Does Shakespeare implicitly suggest that such pictures are best left to the imagination? If so, is the deception that the Lord practises upon Sly markedly different from the ways in which Shakespeare's plays beguile us with vivid descriptions of things unseen?

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[1] *The Taming of the Shrew*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), Induction 2.49–60. Unless otherwise stated, all references to Shakespeare's works are taken from this edition, and cited by act, scene and line number.

This moment points towards an interest in narrating the visual that would persist throughout Shakespeare's career, and that appears across the different genres and media in which he wrote. For while Shakespeare may have been a man of the theatre – an actor and playwright who worked with both words and images – he was also a published poet, who seems to have been fascinated by the ability of words to *create* images. The description of artworks in *The Taming of the Shrew* thus opens up several wider issues that will be the focus of this book. The passage suggests Shakespeare's interest in pictorial art, but it also highlights the vividness and seductiveness of Shakespearean narrative, and hints at some of the ways in which these aspects of his work are related. At various moments in Shakespeare's plays the action breaks off in order for the characters to recount an offstage event, story or sight. Many of these narrative passages contain elaborate descriptions that allude to works of art, or compare the play's characters to works of art, recalling *The Rape of Lucrece*'s focus on 'a piece / Of skilful painting' (1366–7) that depicts the events of the fall of Troy.[2] There is Enobarbus' rapturous account of Cleopatra's barge in *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which Cleopatra is said to 'O'er-pictur[e]' a portrait of Venus 'where we see / The fancy outwork nature' (2.2.200–201). We have Jachimo's description of the decorations in Imogen's bedroom in *Cymbeline*, in which he describes the remarkably lifelike figures on the chimney-piece: 'Never saw I figures / So likely to report themselves' (2.4.82–3). There is also a suggestive narrative account in *Richard II*, when the Duke of York describes the absent scene of Bullingbrook's arrival in London, in which Bullingbrook is greeted by an admiring multitude. According to the Duke, one would have thought 'that all the walls / With painted imagery had said at once, / "Jesu preserve thee!

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[2] Leonard Barkan has remarked upon the relationship between visual art and Shakespearean representation in 'Making Pictures Speak: Renaissance Art, Elizabethan Literature, Modern Scholarship', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 48 (1995), 326–51. He offers brief considerations of *Lucrece*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *Hamlet*, and writes that 'the theater … enacts the millennial contests concerning the relative power of picture and word in capturing mimesis' (p. 342). As we shall see, however, I do not agree with Barkan that the 'Shakespearean answer' to these questions is 'a very simple one' (p. 342). For a detailed survey of Shakespeare's references to works of visual art see William S. Heckscher, 'Shakespeare in His Relationship to the Visual Arts: A Study in Paradox', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 13–14 (1970–71), 5–71. See also Stephen Orgel and Sean Keilen (eds), *Shakespeare and the Arts* (New York: Garland, 1999); Martha Ronk, 'Locating the Visual in *As You Like It*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 52 (2001), 255–76 (esp. pp. 256–9); and Mario Klarer, *Ekphrasis: Bildbeschreibung als Repräsentationstheorie bei Spenser, Sidney, Lyly und Shakespeare* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), pp. 138–81.

Welcome, Bullingbrook!''' (5.2.15–17). And, perhaps most intriguingly of all, there is the description of Hermione's statue in the penultimate scene of *The Winter's Tale*, in which the statue is said to be the work of the artist Giulio Romano: 'He so near to Hermione hath done Hermione that they say one would speak to her and stand in hope of answer' (5.2.100–102). In each of these examples we find descriptions of extraordinary paintings or statues that are as good as, or even better than, reality, and that appear to be on the verge of speech or movement. At the same time, however, these moments explore the ability of language to represent these works of art, and recall Philip Sidney's celebrated definition of poetry as a 'speaking picture'.[3] In other words, while such references to paintings and sculptures apparently indicate Shakespeare's interest in the visual arts, they also emphasise his interest in the art of narrative, in the relationship between different types of mimesis, and in the question of whether language can 'do what so many writers have wanted it to do: "to make us see"'.[4]

In a recent discussion of Shakespeare's references to the visual arts, Alison Thorne comments that, 'Existing only as a textual effect, these artefacts tend to function reflexively as a trope for Shakespeare's own rhetorical virtuosity, thereby instigating a running *paragone* between poet and painter. As comments on the mimetic process, his pictorial allusions are mostly unremarkable additions to the stock of Renaissance commonplaces on this theme.'[5] Thorne usefully draws our attention to the fact that these pictures tend to exist only as a 'textual effect', but the wider implications of Shakespeare's pictorial allusions warrant further discussion. Far from being 'unremarkable additions' to this Renaissance theme, these descriptions of pictorial art are repeatedly used by Shakespeare to intensify and complicate our suspension of disbelief. To take the example from *The Taming of the Shrew* with which we began: this moment is explicitly concerned with our engagement with works of art, and the extent to which we are taken in by fictions. For, immediately after this vivid catalogue of pictorial artworks, the Lord addresses Christopher Sly directly, and tries to fashion a new identity for him: 'Thou art a lord, and nothing but a lord' (Induction 2.61). The Lord explicitly asks Sly to enter into the fictional world that he has created. Yet it is almost as if the Lord and his cohorts have already initiated the process of the suspension of Sly's disbelief by describing the mimetic power of these offstage pictures.

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[3] See Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy* in *The Oxford Authors: Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 217. Plutarch had attributed the phrase – that poetry is a speaking picture and painting a silent poem – to Simonides of Ceos (*c*. 556–467 BC) in his *Moralia* (see Duncan-Jones, p. 374, note to p. 217, line 221). For further discussion of the 'sister arts' in the period see below.

[4] W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Ekphrasis and the Other', in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 151–81 (p. 152). The phrase is taken from Joseph Conrad's 'Preface' to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, ed. Cedric Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), in which Conrad commented that his 'task' as a writer was 'by the power of the written word … to make you *see*' (p. xlix). See also Mitchell's *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986).

[5] Alison Thorne, *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 73.

This strategy is remarkably effective as Sly no longer seems able to tell the difference between fantasy and reality: 'Upon my life, I am a lord indeed, / And not a tinker, nor Christopher Sly' (Induction 2.72–3). Sly demands to see the imaginary wife who has been described to him: 'Well, bring our lady hither to our sight, / And once again a pot o' th' smallest ale' (Induction 2.74–5). These 'wanton pictures' (Induction 1.47) thus seem to have created a desire for both visual and sexual satisfaction. The Lord describes this lady as 'far more beautiful / Than any woman in this waning age' (Induction 2.62–3). And yet this attractive lady is, of course, the Lord's young page, Bartholomew. What Sly 'sees' when Bartholomew finally appears is thus bound up with, first, these absent artworks, and, second, the Lord's description of the lady's extraordinary beauty. Clearly, then, these pictorial descriptions are more than simply figures for Shakespeare's rhetorical virtuosity. Sly's belief in the visual spectacle of Bartholomew's performance is in part *produced by* these descriptions, which subtly propose that works of art can be mistaken for reality. How might this relate to our experience of *The Taming of the Shrew*, or to Shakespeare's art more generally?

We might be tempted to ridicule Sly for being taken in by such an obvious act of con-trickery. And yet, as these imagined artworks fade into the background, having served their function by breaking down Sly's resistance to the fiction that the Lord has created, so too does the Induction of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Sly sits down with his fictional wife to 'hear a play' (134), a 'pleasant comedy' (130) that tells the story of the shrewish Katherina, a fictional character who – like Sly's imaginary wife – would have been played by a boy actor. As Sly himself says, 'Come, madam wife, sit by my side, and let the world slip' (142–3). The descriptions of artworks within the Induction thus serve an analogous mimetic function to the Induction itself. They help Sly to be 'taken in' by the deception that is being practised upon him and by the dramatic entertainment that he witnesses; at the same time, the Induction as a whole reminds us of – but may also distract us from – the ways in which we are 'taken in' by Shakespeare's play. Of course, the Induction can be read as an example of 'metadrama', in which Shakespeare audaciously exposes the workings of his dramatic art, and reveals the convention of cross-dressing boy-actors as a piece of deception. Even more significant, however, is the way in which the Lord exploits the relationship between several different modes of representation – narrative, dramatic, pictorial – in order to beguile Christopher Sly. For what the Lord does to his onstage audience is both analogous to and part of what Shakespeare does to us. This moment, then, not only highlights Shakespeare's interest in reflecting upon the visual arts and the conventions of theatre but also suggests ways in which his plays often derive their sense of immediacy from a sly appropriation of, and comparison with, other modes of art.

Shakespeare's representations of pictorial art thus open up wider questions regarding the trickiness and seductiveness of mimetic representation; and this makes the term *ekphrasis*, which is itself shifting and unstable, particularly suggestive. Recent critics and theorists have defined ekphrasis as 'the verbal representation of visual representation'.[6] Yet Ruth Webb has noted that the term, despite its classical-sounding name, is 'essentially a modern coinage', and points out that it is only in recent years that ekphrasis has come to refer to the description of works of sculpture and visual art within literary works.[7] In classical rhetoric, ekphrasis could refer to virtually any extended description: the word literally means 'to speak out' or 'to tell in full'.[8] As Murray Krieger has written, 'The early meaning given "ekphrasis" in Hellenistic rhetoric … was totally unrestricted: it referred, most broadly, to a verbal description of something, almost anything, in life or art'.[9] But even then ekphrasis had a specific rhetorical function: as Webb has noted, 'What distinguishes *ekphrasis* is its quality of vividness, *enargeia*, its impact upon the mind's eye of the listener who must, in Theon's words, be almost made to see the subject … *Enargeia* is at the heart of *ekphrasis*'.[10] By conceiving of ekphrasis not only as the verbal representation of works of art – that is, in the narrower, more modern sense of the term – but also as a subset or more specific type of *enargeia*, or vivid narration, the present book uses the term to examine the complex relationship between the visual and the narrated in Shakespeare's works. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, Shakespeare's narrative poems often seem to borrow the uncanny verisimilitude of pictures that are themselves the product of Shakespeare's language. Shakespeare's plays similarly contain various allusions to works of pictorial art; yet they also explore another aesthetic *paragone* – the relationship between narrative and drama. They often hint at drama's superiority to narrative as a mode of representation, while at the same time exposing drama's reliance upon and affinity with narrative. This book argues that Shakespeare's artistry – whether he is writing poetry or plays – is characterised by a fascination with mimetic interplay and exchange, and with the possibility that such interplay can create what Krieger has called 'the illusion of the natural sign'.

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[6] Mitchell, 'Ekphrasis and the Other', p. 152. James A.W. Heffernan defines ekphrasis as 'the verbal representation of graphic representation', in 'Ekphrasis and Representation', *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), 297–316 (p. 299). See also Heffernan's book-length study *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Grant F. Scott, *The Sculpted Word: Keats, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1994); and Stephen Cheeke, *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

[7] Ruth Webb, '*Ekphrasis* Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre', *Word and Image*, 15 (1999), 7–18 (p. 14).

[8] See Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 18n34.

[9] Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 7.

[10] Webb, '*Ekphrasis* Ancient and Modern', p. 13.

In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes touches upon the issue of mimetic interplay during a discussion of the relationship between literature and painting. After suggesting that 'Every literary description is a *view*', Barthes describes the ways in which literary writers 'frame' the scenes that they describe by employing conventions and codes borrowed from the visual arts.[11] He suggests, in other words, that it is easier to create a sense of 'realism' – a term that Barthes himself regards as problematic – by representing *other* modes of representation than it is to represent the 'real'. Intriguingly, Barthes's definition of 'realism' could also serve as a definition of ekphrasis itself: 'Thus, realism (badly named, at any rate often badly interpreted) consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy of the real: this famous *reality*, as though suffering from a fearfulness which keeps it from being touched directly, is *set farther away*, postponed, or at least captured through the pictorial matrix in which it has been steeped before being put into words: code upon code, known as realism' (p. 55). For Barthes, literary 'realism' is something of a misnomer, given that what is being represented is, in fact, a series of codes and conventions drawn from other types of representation. Rather than exposing the trick, however, Barthes argues that this succession of clichés and conventions creates the illusion of reality, an illusion that matches our expectations of what we think the world to be like.[12] As Barthes writes, 'This is why realism cannot be designated a "copier" but rather a "pasticher" (through secondary mimesis, it copies what is already a copy)' (p. 55). Barthes's comments raise the possibility that, far from being an obscure literary genre, or a rhetorical exercise, ekphrasis highlights and crystallises something of the paradoxical nature, even duplicity, of literary description more generally. Perhaps, then, the fascination of ekphrasis derives from the fact that it is an extreme – or at any rate more explicit – example of what all representation tries to achieve. In the case of Shakespeare, the issue is further complicated by the fact that his descriptions of visual art tend to be based on other works of ekphrastic literature rather than actual paintings. By imitating other verbal representations of visual art, Shakespeare's ekphrases effectively employ a third level of mimesis; to adapt Barthes, they copy what is already a copy of a copy. Such ekphrastic descriptions may not necessarily create the 'reality effect' that Barthes describes; nonetheless, the various levels of representation that Shakespeare presents us with might inhibit our ability to distinguish between all of these different levels at the same time.

Such questions of mimesis and aesthetics have not, we might note, been the primary focus of most Shakespeare scholars in the last twenty-five years or so. As Lorna Hutson has recently observed, a consideration of the 'narrative elements' in the drama of the English Renaissance appears to have 'dropped somewhere below the current critical radar'.[13] Hutson suggests that the reason for this may be the prevalence of cultural-historical approaches to Shakespeare, and reminds us that new historicist critics – Stephen Greenblatt in particular – are less interested in rhetorical figures such as *energia* and *enargeia* than in the ways in which literary texts are part of a larger circulation of 'social energy'.[14] Certainly new historicism has been beneficial in putting history back on the critical agenda, and in prompting us to rethink and interrogate the relationship between 'text' and 'context'.[15] There are, however, signs that the 'first phase' of new historicist and cultural materialist criticism is coming to an end, while some commentators have pointed to the emergence of a new formalism, and even a new aestheticism.[16] As Mark Robson has commented, 'The aesthetic as a category has been through a period of renunciation, but is now returning to the critical forefront'.[17] Even Greenblatt himself, in his *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001), has acknowledged – even lamented – the fact that a concern with the aesthetic dimension of literary works has become, if not quite unspeakable, then certainly unfashionable. After commenting upon the 'magical intensity' of *Hamlet*, Greenblatt glosses this comment with a tone reminiscent of the wistfully nostalgic Harold Bloom: 'It seems a bit absurd to bear witness to the intensity of *Hamlet*; but my profession has become so oddly diffident and even phobic about literary power, so suspicious and tense, that it risks losing sight of – or at least failing to articulate – the whole reason anyone bothers with the enterprise in the first place.'[18]

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[11] See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), pp. 54–6, quotation on p. 54. See also Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', in Tzvetan Todorov (ed.), *French Literary Theory Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 11–17.

[12] See Matthew Potolsky, *Mimesis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 110.

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[13] Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 108.

[14] See Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 5–6.

[15] In *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt defend new historicist practice by implying that it is more politically active than other more 'traditional' methodologies. They write: 'Where traditional "close readings" tended to build towards an intensified sense of wondering admiration, linked to the celebration of genius, new historicist readings are more often skeptical, wary, demystifying, critical, and even adversarial' (p. 9). For an incisive critique of such arguments see Russ McDonald's 'Introduction' to *Shakespeare Reread: The Texts in New Contexts* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 8–9.

[16] See Hugh Grady, 'Shakespeare Studies, 2005: A Situated Overview', *Shakespeare*, 1 (2005), 102–20 (esp. p. 113). On the new aestheticism see, for example, John J. Joughin, 'Shakespeare, Modernity and the Aesthetic: Art, Truth and Judgement in *The Winter's Tale*', in Hugh Grady (ed.), *Shakespeare and Modernity: Early Modern to Millennium* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 61–84; Joughin and Simon Malpas (eds), *The New Aestheticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); and Richard Chamberlain, *Radical Spenser: Pastoral, Politics and the New Aestheticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

[17] Mark Robson, *The Sense of Early Modern Writing: Rhetoric, Politics, Aesthetics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 5. Robson's discussion of Greenblatt's relation to the aesthetic is also relevant here (see pp. 40–43).

The present book does not offer an explicit critique of new historicist or politicised readings of Shakespeare, but it does share Russ McDonald's sense that 'aural and other rhetorical pleasures have been slighted in recent years', and that the politicising and historicising tenor of Shakespeare criticism has 'necessarily diverted attention from the formal and material attributes of words'.[19] Clearly the ability of language to seduce and to persuade has political implications – one needs only to read *Julius Caesar* to be reminded of this – but the primary concern of the present book is to consider Shakespeare's works in their literary and rhetorical contexts.[20] In the chapters that follow, I argue that a large part of the 'magical intensity' that Greenblatt refers to derives from the ways in which Shakespeare repeatedly reflects upon the power of narrative and the ability of art to deceive his audiences and readers. Many critics have, of course, explored the metadramatic aspects of Shakespeare's works.[21] Yet fewer critics have explored Shakespeare's preoccupation with the relationship between different types of mimesis in his plays and his poems, and the wider aesthetic and philosophical issues that this raises. Such questions are also relevant to current debates in Shakespeare studies concerning his status as a 'literary' dramatist – a topic that I shall return to in more detail below. This book, then, is a contribution to a genre of criticism that focuses on Shakespeare's literariness and self-reflexivity, and it argues that ekphrasis represents a particularly suggestive example of – or even a metaphor for – the seductive effects of Shakespearean mimesis.

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[18] Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 4. For Harold Bloom's position see *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (London: Macmillan, 1995), and *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999).

[19] Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 3–4.

[20] For a recent collection of essays that explores the political aspects of rhetoric in the early modern period see Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne (eds), *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007). Richards and Thorne suggest that a wider understanding of 'rhetoric' might offer a way of revealing the effectiveness – and political significance – of female speech: 'Eloquence is a crucial term for us because it provides a vocabulary and a way of thinking that brings into view the often untutored persuasiveness of women's speech and its capacity for critical engagement with received ideas and structures of authority' (p. 10).

[21] See, for example, Anne Righter [Barton], *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962); James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), and *Metadrama in Shakespeare's 'Henriad': 'Richard II' to 'Henry V'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Robert Egan, *Drama Within Drama: Shakespeare's Sense of His Art in 'King Lear', 'The Winter's Tale', and 'The Tempest'* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975); Graham Bradshaw, *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), esp. ch. 2; Robert Knapp, *Shakespeare: The Theatre and the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

One important explanation for Shakespeare's interest in the vividness of language is the rhetorical culture that he inhabited.[22] Classical rhetoricians such as Quintilian – whose *Institutio Oratoria* was widely read in the early modern period – instructed their readers in how to employ devices such as *hypotyposis* and *enargeia* to create a vivid description of an object or event. Quintilian writes that 'There are certain experiences which the Greeks call *φαντάσιαι*, and the Romans *visions*, whereby things absent are presented to our imagination with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be there before our very eyes'.[23] He goes on to refer to *enargeia*, 'which makes us seem not so much to narrate as to exhibit the actual scene, while our emotions will be no less actively stirred than if we were present at the actual occurrence' (6.2.32). Quintilian, then, not only suggests that *enargeia* offers pictorial vividness but also points to the affective power of such descriptions, suggesting that the listener's emotions will be moved as if they had seen the actual events themselves. This emphasis upon descriptive vividness is also found in the rhetorical textbooks that Shakespeare would have encountered at grammar school.[24] Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata* was a graded sequence of fourteen writing exercises used for the purpose of practising composition. Aphthonius' treatise was written in the fourth century AD, and was still being used in England in the late sixteenth century in a Latin adaptation by Rudolph Agricola and Reinhard

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[22] For further discussion of rhetoric in the Renaissance see, for example, Sister Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947); Brian Vickers, 'Shakespeare's Use of Rhetoric', in Kenneth Muir and S. Schoenbaum (eds), *A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 83–98, and *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987); Neil Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992); Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); McDonald, *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language*; Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Robson, *The Sense of Early Modern Writing*, esp. ch. 2. For a useful overview of the topic see Jennifer Richards, *Rhetoric* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

[23] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler, 4 vols (London: Wm Heinemann, 1921), vol. 2, pp. 433–5 (6.2.29).

[24] T.W. Baldwin has argued that Shakespeare would have been familiar with Quintilian, writing that, 'Along with Cicero, Quintilian was *the Rhetorician*, at the pinnacle of grammar school', in *William Shakspere's Smalle Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), vol. 2, p. 197. Ronald Knowles, in contrast, has suggested that the *Institutio* would have been too cumbersome and expensive for use in grammar schools, and that students would have been more likely to discover ekphrasis via Aphthonius (private communication). But see also McDonald, who suggests that the important point is not 'whether [Shakespeare] knew this or that rhetorical handbook' but, rather, his 'absorption in and fascination with the discipline' (*Shakespeare and the Arts of Language*, p. 37).

Lorich.[25] The twelfth exercise is 'ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ', used in its broader sense to mean description, the purpose of which is to make the reader see: 'Description is a form of expository speech, according to which narration the subject is placed, as it were, firmly before the eyes'.[26] And in Susenbrotus' *Epitome Troporum ac Schematum* (*c*. 1541), another popular grammar school textbook, we find the following description of the figure *pragmatographia* – a specific type of vivid description or *hypotyposis* – the description of an event or action: 'when we graphically depict in all its colors what is either happening or has already happened, so as to transport the auditor or reader outside himself, as in a theatre, and thus to divert him'.[27]

In this last example, Susenbrotus suggests that the figure of *pragmatographia* can affect the mind of an auditor or a reader; in other words, this mode of description is effective both on the page and as oral performance. Moreover, it seems especially striking that he holds up the theatre as the epitome of representational vividness and immediacy. In *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham goes even further by suggesting that dramatic representations can represent the 'action of many persons, or by many voyces liuely represented to the eare and eye, so as a man might thinke it were euen now a doing'.[28] In both cases, Susenbrotus and Puttenham suggest that drama, which affects both the aural and visual faculties, is better than a poem or a mere narrative in presenting us with a 'liuely' image of real life. Yet the situation is more complex than these writers suggest. After all, Shakespeare's dramatic works are themselves full of instances of the kind of vivid description that Susenbrotus describes. Why would a playwright fill his plays with long narrative descriptions that have the capacity to make an audience think they were at the theatre when they were already at the theatre? Surely such acts of narration would be redundant, given drama's ability to place things before the eyes of an audience and – in the words of Quintilian – 'exhibit the actual scene'?

For some critics, this phenomenon is explicable in terms of the material conditions of the early modern stage.[29] Certainly at public playhouses such as the Globe, where scenic staging was kept to a minimum, the audience's ability to listen and to imagine was as important, if not more important, than what they saw. As critics are often keen to point out, plays in the Renaissance are 'heard' as much as 'seen'.[30] Indeed the word *audience* refers to 'The persons within hearing; an assembly of listeners, an auditory' (*OED*, 7a), and derives from the Latin *audire*, 'to hear'. In addition, as R.A. Foakes has reminded us, 'Shakespeare's plays were written for an audience that obtained much of its news, instruction (in sermons, for example) and entertainment through the ear; many people were illiterate, and there were no newspapers. It is hard now in our increasingly visual culture to imagine the excitement of listening to eloquent poetry and prose in stage dialogue, a pleasure that drew thousands to the theatres of London.'[31] Perhaps, then, the oral culture of early modern England – together with the fact that many people were trained in the arts of rhetoric – would have meant that theatre audiences might not have objected to what Alastair Fowler has called the 'digressive variety' of the dramatic works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.[32]

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[25] See Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric*, pp. 27–9.

[26] *Aphthonii Sophistae Progymnasmata ... cum luculentis & vtilibus in eadem Scholijs Reinhardi Lorichii Hadamarii* (London: Thomas Marsh, 1583), sig. Z5v ('Descriptio est oratio expositiua, que narratione id quod propositum est, diligenter velut oculis subijcit'). I am grateful to John Roe for his help with translating this passage.

[27] Quoted from Joseph X. Brennan, 'The *Epitome Troporum ac Schematum* of Joannes Susenbrotus: Text, Translation, and Commentary' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, 1953), p. 84.

[28] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 31.

[29] See Anthony Brennan, *Onstage and Offstage Worlds in Shakespeare's Plays* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989). Brennan does acknowledge 'the power of poetry' in Shakespeare's narrative reports, yet he suggests that the function of this poetry is to save money on expensive scenery and stage properties, 'making by an alchemical process gold out of dross, scenery which never has to be accounted for in a production budget' (p. 12). See also Francis Berry, *The Shakespeare Inset: Word and Picture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965).

Yet Shakespeare's interest in the art of narrative, I would suggest, goes beyond both the rhetorical culture of the Renaissance and the plays' immediate theatrical context. As we shall see throughout this book, Shakespeare takes an aesthetic, even philosophical, interest in the ability of language to persuade his audiences – and perhaps also his readers – that they are in the presence of the things being described. There are various events throughout Shakespeare's plays that he chooses to represent in narrative form, moments that he could have staged, including the death of Falstaff; Ophelia's encounter with Hamlet with his doublet 'all unbraced'; Gloucester's death in *King Lear*; and the reunion of Polixenes, Perdita and Leontes in the penultimate scene of *The Winter's Tale*. These moments reveal a playwright particularly interested in gaps and absences, and in the audience's ability to visualise these scenes in their imagination. For while Shakespeare's works at times demonstrate the persuasiveness of what we see, implying a pro-theatrical bias, they also point to the problems and limitations of visual representation, and the capacity of narrative descriptions to make us 'see' what drama cannot. In *Henry V*, for example, the Chorus explicitly suggests that the language of the play will be so vivid that the audience will see the things being described: 'Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them, / Printing their proud hoofs i' th' receiving earth' (Prologue, 26–7). Explicitly using the figure of *enargeia*, and with a suggestive reference to 'Printing', the Chorus raises the possibility that verbal descriptions can bring forth images to what Hamlet calls the 'mind's eye' (1.2.184), or what Renaissance commentators on rhetoric referred to as the *oculi mentis*.[33]

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[30] In *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), Stephen Orgel writes that theatre in the early seventeenth century 'was assumed to be a verbal medium', and that 'acting ... was a form of oratory' (pp. 16–17). More recently, however, Gabriel Egan has argued that there are many more references to *seeing* a play in the period than there are to *hearing* a play; see his 'Hearing or Seeing a Play?: Evidence of Early Modern Theatrical Terminology', *Ben Jonson Journal*, 8 (2001), 327–47.

[31] *King Lear*, ed. R.A. Foakes (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1997), p. 6.

[32] See Alastair Fowler, *Renaissance Realism: Narrative Images in Literature and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 33. He writes: 'Although condensed insets were common in seventeenth-century literature generally, they abound most in the drama … To an audience trained in rhetoric, this seems to have been acceptable, despite the risk such undramatic speech always carries' (p. 33). Indeed the notion that narrative insets are 'undramatic' is, I would suggest, explored and questioned throughout Shakespeare's plays, in particular *Hamlet*; see Chapter 3, below.

This fascination with the capacity of language to make us see – and the specific nature of Shakespearean ekphrasis – may be further illuminated by examining Renaissance attitudes towards the relationship between literature and the visual arts. In his classic study of literary pictorialism, *The Sister Arts* (1958), Jean H. Hagstrum has charted the Renaissance preoccupation with the ancient tradition of *ut pictura poesis* – and the *paragone* between poetry and painting – and writes: 'So frequently was Horace's dictum repeated that a literary historian has said that *ut pictura poesis* may be considered "almost the keynote of Renaissance criticism".'[34] Perhaps the appeal of Horace's dictum – which can be translated as 'Poetry is like painting' – was that it corresponded to the period's sense that rhetorical description should aspire towards pictorial vividness.[35] What, after all, could be more visually immediate than a painting? The clearest expression of this idea appears in Erasmus' well-known definition of *enargeia* in *De Copia* (1513): 'We use [*enargeia*] whenever … we do not explain a thing simply, but display it to be looked at as if it were expressed in colour in a picture, so that it may seem that we have painted, not narrated, and that the reader has seen, not read.'[36] Here Erasmus employs the metaphor of painting as a means of expressing the visuality of *enargeia*. He implies, in other words, that narration should aspire to the qualities of visual art, and suggests that seeing is somehow superior to, or at least more immediate than, hearing or reading. Erasmus' definition is echoed in the 'Argument' to the February eclogue in Spenser's *The Shepherd's Calendar*, in which E.K. likens an old man's tale to a work of visual art: 'the old man telleth a tale of the Oak and the Brier so lively and so feelingly as, if the thing were set forth in some picture before our eyes, more plainly could not appear'.[37] In both of these examples, the visual immediacy of pictorial art is held up as an ideal for orators and writers to aspire to. This may go some way towards explaining the close affinity between ekphrasis and *enargeia*, and is arguably one of the reasons why literary artists offering a 'set-piece' description were often drawn to describing works of visual art.

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[33] Michael Bath has shown that the idea of the *oculi mentis* – the 'eye of the understanding' – was a key concept in Renaissance rhetoric, and was closely associated with the figure of *enargeia*. See his *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture* (London: Longman, 1994), p. 253. For a wide-ranging discussion of *enargeia* in early modern literature see Adam McKeown's '*Enargeia* and the English Literary Renaissance' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 2000). Quotations from *Hamlet* are taken from Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor's Arden 3 edition (London: Thomson Learning, 2006).

[34] Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts*, pp. 61–2, quoting Joel E. Spingarn, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* (New York, 1920), p. 42. See also Lucy Gent, *Picture and Poetry 1560–1620: Relations between Literature and the Visual Arts in the English Renaissance* (Leamington Spa: James Hall, 1981); David Evett, *Literature and the Visual Arts in Tudor England* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1990); Clark Hulse, *The Rule of Art: Literature and Painting in the Renaissance* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990); Judith Dundas, *Pencils Rhetorique: Renaissance Poets and the Art of Painting* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press 1993); Christopher Braider, *Refiguring the Real: Picture and Modernity in Word and Image, 1400–1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Norman E. Land, *The Viewer as Poet: The Renaissance Response to Art* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); and Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (eds), *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

[35] See Horace, *The Art of Poetry*, in D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (eds), *Classical Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 107.

Behind the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*, then, lay several related assumptions about visual and verbal art. As Christopher Braider has suggested, at the core of the doctrine was the idea that 'The most immediately persuasive and forceful (if not necessarily the most uplifting) form of imitation is painting … It is to this that painting owes its *enargeia*: its capacity to realize the rhetorical ideal of creating an overwhelming sense of direct physical presence carrying both the matter and the inner meaning of the actions it portrays into the spectator's very soul.'[38] Given the championing of the power of visual art in the period, it is unsurprising that Renaissance writers were captivated by the tale of Pygmalion's statue (recounted in book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), and by descriptions of the legendary works of art of antiquity, such as Praxiteles' marble statue of Venus, or Zeuxis' painted grapes.[39] While poets have to use language, the theory goes, which consists of conventional verbal signs, painters deploy ‘natural signs’ – that is, visual images of the things being represented – that closely resemble reality, might be mistaken for reality or even, in the case of Pygmalion’s statue, might actually *become* real.[40] Such assumptions about the superiority of pictorial verisimilitude arguably persist today. As W.J.T. Mitchell has written, describing what he calls ‘ekphrastic indifference’, we tend to think that a literary work ‘cannot represent – that is, make present – its object in the same way a visual representation can. It may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do.’[41]

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[36] Erasmus, *De Copia*, in *Omnia Opera*, 9 vols (Basle: Froben, 1540), vol. 1, p. 66; the translation is taken from Terence Cave, '*Enargeia*: Erasmus and the Rhetoric of Presence in the Sixteenth Century', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 16 (1976), 5–19 (p. 7). See also Cave's *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

[37] Edmund Spenser, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, in *Shorter Poems: A Selection*, ed. John Lee (London: Everyman, 1998), p. 20.

[38] Christopher Braider, 'The Paradoxical Sisterhood: "Ut Pictura Poesis"', in Glyn P. Norton (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 3: The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 168–75 (p. 169).

[39] See François Rigolot, 'The Rhetoric of Presence: Art, Literature, and Illusion', in Norton (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 3*, pp. 161–7 (p. 162). For some suggestive comments on the Pygmalion myth see Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 22–5.

Yet the relationship between visual and verbal art is far more complex and ambiguous than such assumptions allow. And indeed something of this ambivalence can be located in the work of Shakespeare. His most explicit reference to the *paragone* appears in the first scene of *Timon of Athens*, in which we find a suggestive encounter between a Poet and a Painter.[42] This is a scene that – ostensibly at least – prioritises the power and immediacy of visual art above poetry. The Painter modestly suggests that his artistic effort is merely ‘Indifferent’ (1.1.30), but the Poet will not have it so:

> Admirable! How this grace
> Speaks his own standing! What a mental power
> The eye shoots forth! How big imagination
> Moves in this lip! To th’ dumbness of the gesture
> One might interpret. (1.1.30–34)

The Poet seems to admire the painter’s artistic skill, and notes the ‘imagination’ that the work engenders.[43] But is this an implicit suggestion that even visual artworks not only provoke but also rely upon the ‘imagination’ of the observer? The Poet also notes the ‘dumbness’ of the picture that ‘One might interpret’, suggesting that the picture demands narration, and requires an observer to give voice to it. The Painter describes his painting in terms that anticipate the description of Hermione’s statue at the end of *The Winter’s Tale*: ‘It is a pretty mocking of the life. / Here is a touch; is’t good?’ (1.1.35–6). And the Poet concurs: ‘I will say of it, / It tutors nature. Artificial strife / Lives in these touches, livelier than life’ (1.1.36–8). According to the Poet at least, this painting ‘tutors’ nature and is even more lifelike than life itself. Perhaps, then, we might say that the Poet –

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[40] See Braider, ‘The Paradoxical Sisterhood’, p. 169.

[41] Mitchell, ‘Ekphrasis and the Other’, p. 152.

[42] See Antony Blunt, ‘An Echo of the “Paragone” in Shakespeare’, *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 2 (1939), 260–62; W.M. Merchant, ‘*Timon* and the Conceit of Art’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 6 (1955), 249–57; and John Dixon Hunt, ‘Shakespeare and the *Paragone*: A Reading of *Timon of Athens*’, in Werner Habicht, D.J. Palmer and Roger Pringle (eds), *Images of Shakespeare: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the International Shakespeare Association, 1986* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), pp. 47–63.

[43] John Jowett glosses the word *imagination* here as ‘the painted subject’s power to form ideas and concepts’ in his Oxford edition of *Timon of Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), note to Scene 1, line 32.

like many Renaissance writers – would like his poetic art to achieve something of the extraordinary vividness and verisimilitude of this painting. But what, one might wonder, does this picture actually look like? When we read this scene, this painting is absent, and exists in the mind's eye of the reader. And, in performance, even if something approximating this extraordinary picture were brought onstage, it seems unlikely that the entire theatre audience would have been able to see it, whatever its artistic merits.

The Painter goes on to suggest that his preferred mode of representation is superior to language, not least in its ability to depict the sufferings of others:

> A thousand moral paintings I can show
> That shall demonstrate these quick blows of Fortune's
> More pregnantly than words. (1.1.90–92)

This apparently unequivocal comment might suggest that Shakespeare thought that visual art, or visual experience more generally, is superior to hearing or reading. And yet in a debate between visual and verbal modes of representation, it is perhaps unsurprising that a Painter would offer an endorsement of his own paintings. Moreover, as with other poetic examples of the *paragone* that praise visual art, the form and content of this passage are in tension with one another. As John Dixon Hunt puts it, 'All visual descriptions in poetry ambiguously honor their own medium as much as that of the visual art they offer to represent'.[44] Like the Lord and his servingmen in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the Painter says that he '*can* show' a thousand 'moral paintings' (90), but we have to take his word for it. In addition, we might suggest that the richly metaphorical phrase 'More pregnantly than words' (92) is itself a testament to the power of language. Paradoxically, the Painter is thus using words to persuade the Poet (and indeed audiences and readers of this scene) of the superiority of visual art. We might also wonder how one is to express one's preferences *vis-à-vis* pictures and poetry other than in language. Shakespeare's playful exploration of the *paragone* thus not only implies the superiority of poetry over painting but also demonstrates the extent to which drama – even when it seemingly praises the visual – often reveals its reliance upon language and the audience's imagination.

This scene, then, emphasises the fact that ekphrasis is as much about the power of literary art as it is about visual art. As several commentators have pointed out, the pictorial culture of early modern England was relatively underdeveloped compared to the rest of Europe, and writers and poets were more likely to have formed their views about painting and sculpture 'on quite theoretical grounds', rather than by studying actual pictures.[45] Even the supposedly pictorial images

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[44] Hunt, 'Shakespeare and the *Paragone*', p. 50.

[45] Gent, *Picture and Poetry*, p. 39. Barkan comments that 'Ekphrasis – however influenced by art works or influential upon them – is passed on in an inheritance more from Homer, Ovid, and Petrarch than from Zeuxis, the Domus Aurea, and Botticelli' ('Making Pictures Speak', p. 332). But see also Hulse's discussion of the relationship between Philip Sidney and Nicholas Hilliard in *The Rule of Art*, ch. 5.