

RESEARCH ARTICLE

In the Philostratus trap: an enactive and embodied perspective on the *Imagines* and their *enargeia*

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Abstract

In his *Imagines*, Philostratus the Elder stages a scintillating play with several levels of representation and suggests that his verbal account can give the reader access to the pictures described and even the scenes depicted in the pictures. But does Philostratus actually immerse us in the paintings? This is a claim often made by scholars; however, an embodied and enactive analysis of the *Imagines* alerts us to various features that, instead of immersing us, highlight Philostratus' rhetorical brilliance. The *Imagines* are not so much an ephrasis in the sense of the *Progymnasmata* (that is, defined by *enargeia*) as a meditation on their ephrastic practice. In general, the reference to another representation endows the ephrasis of artwork with a reflexivity that tends to push the goal of making the hearer see something in the background.

I. The reader's immersion, first fissures

Do not rush past us, hunters, and do not urge on your horses till we track down you, what you want and what you are hunting. For you say that you pursue a fierce wild boar, and I see what the animal has done: it has burrowed under the olive trees, cut down the vines, and has left neither fig tree nor apple tree nor apple blossom, but has torn them all out of the earth, partly by digging them up, partly by hurling itself upon them, partly by rubbing against them. I see the creature, its mane bristling, its eyes flashing fire, and its tusks are gnashing at you, gentlemen; for such wild animals are capable of hearing your noise from far away.¹

What, to the uninitiated, may seem to be direct speech stemming from a narration of an encounter of a man, or a woman, with hunters before ravaged fields and a wild boar is in fact an ephrasis, the beginning of one of the *Imagines* of Philostratus the Elder (1.28.1). Fully immersed in the painted scene, the speaker, a sophist explaining the pictures in a gallery to a boy and some adolescents, appears to believe that he sees the fields themselves and hears the grinding of the boar's tusks: he even addresses the hunters directly.²

¹ The translations in this article stem, with minor modifications, from Fairbanks (1931).

² The *Imagines* are narrated in the first person, which ancient readers will have identified with Philostratus. Since I do not believe that ancient readers will have read the *Imagines* as a factual report, I refer to their narrator as the 'rhetor' or 'speaker' in order to distinguish the author Philostratus from his narratorial persona. On Philostratus' narratorial persona in the *Imagines*, see, for example, Webb (2006) 117–19. For general introductions to Philostratus the Elder and his work, see Anderson (1986); Billault (2000); Bowie and Elsner (2009).

This illusion does not last long, however. After a series of questions directed at the hunters, the rhetor exclaims (1.28.2):

How I was deceived! I was deluded by the painting (γραφή), thinking that they were not painted (γεγράφθαι), but were real beings and actually moved and loved (I tease them as though they hear me, and I think that I hear some response) and you did not utter a single word to avert me from my mistake, overcome as much as I was, unable to free yourself from the deception and the slumber induced by it.

The sophist notes that what he sees is only a picture, his immersion dissolves and through the emerging distance he can start to elaborate on the painting and its quality. The rhetor's comment on his own deception illustrates that not only his response to the painting is at stake in this passage. It has become a staple of Philostratean scholarship that *graphē* and its cognates signify both painting and writing.³ Philostratus exploits this lexical ambiguity to align the sophist's description with the picture and the response of the sophist to the latter with our response to the former: 'Just as the speaker was fooled by the painted *graphē*, we readers are being continually hoodwinked, drawn in by the fiction of the mediating *graphē* of the text'.⁴ This alignment of Philostratus' readers with the internal viewers is encapsulated in another ambiguity, namely that of the second-person address. The speaker chides the boy and adolescents who form his audience for not alerting him to his delusion, but, as commentators have pointed out, the second person also reaches out to Philostratus' readers, who did not intervene (indeed, how could they?).⁵ Mere words, it seems, have the power to make us see a painting and access the scene depicted.

The beginning of *Hunters* showcases a pervasive tension in the *Imagines*. In a much-cited paper, Zahra Newby observes: 'In response to the enticing naturalism of the image, the viewer exerts his own erudition, undermining mimetic or wonderful effects by explaining them. Yet at other times he allows himself to be overcome by the image's power, lured in by images of erotic beauty, he is content simply to stand and stare ...'.⁶ Absorption, or what many scholars now call 'immersion',⁷ on the one hand, and, on the other, erudition, a highly sophisticated reflection on the mode of representation, form two poles between which the response of the speaker and, as suggested by the pun on *graphē*, Philostratus' readers oscillate.⁸

As intriguingly as this dynamics of reception is presented in the *Imagines*, its display in *Hunters* conflicts with a basic insight of phenomenology. The speaker is first fully immersed in the picture and then starts to meditate on its facture. However, when we see pictures, we see simultaneously the representation and the represented object. We may focus on the pictorial scene and neglect the carrier and the marks that constitute it, but in the process of 'seeing-in' pictures, to use the term introduced by Richard Wollheim, the representation and what it represents are concurrent in our consciousness.⁹ Even when we

³ See, for example, Lissarrague (1992); Squire (2013) 106–07.

⁴ Squire (2013) 114.

⁵ Elsner (1995) 35; Squire (2013) 115.

⁶ Newby (2009) 341. See also Webb (2006) 126–32; Baumann (2011) 32–33.

⁷ For the use of 'immersion', a term that entered narrative studies via media studies (see especially Ryan (2001)), in Classics, see, for example, Allan (2020).

⁸ For yet another pairing, see King (2017) 175–92, who explores the 'interplay between emotional and interpretive reactions' (179) in his analysis of pain in the *Imagines*.

⁹ Wollheim (1980) 205–26; (1987). For a summary and critical assessment of Wollheim's concept, see Grethlein (2017) 158–64, 192–248, where I argue that while there are important differences between ancient and modern 'regimes of vision', Wollheim's 'seeing-in' is also at work in the responses of ancient viewers to images.

are strongly absorbed and have the feeling that the picture comes alive, we keep a residual awareness of attending to a representation. Likewise, words may transport us to places and actions they describe, but we remain aware of their mediation. In our response to verbal as well as visual representations, immersion is balanced with reflection.

Philostratus is a master: his *Imagines* are a mesmerizing account of the engagement of a highly sophisticated teacher with pictures. Nonetheless, the phenomenological inconsistency just noted should caution us against taking his reflections on the dynamics of response at face value. Philostratus stages a scintillating game with visual and verbal representations and their reception. Scholars trained in poststructuralist theory delight in tracing the mimetic recessions from the text that we read into the speech the rhetor delivers and ultimately to the pictorial scenes he describes and the images embedded in them; several representations are nested one inside the other, the medial boundaries being simultaneously flagged and erased. Precisely because the *Imagines*' games with text and image are so brilliant and their hermeneutic operations so vertiginous, however, we should beware of the Philostratus trap and not mistake his rhetoric for an adequate description of the phenomenology of representation.

In this paper, I would like to challenge Philostratus' claim to immersiveness. This claim, mostly implicit in the *Imagines*, becomes explicit in scholarship. I have already quoted Michael Squire's claim that 'just as the speaker was fooled by the painted *graphē*, we readers are being continually hoodwinked, drawn in by the fiction of the mediating *graphē* of the text'. In his essay on ekphrasis in the *Oxford Handbook*, Squire notes along similar lines: 'The mimetic make-believe of the gallery's tableaux—so believable as to move, speak, smell, touch and even whet our appetites ...—serves to figure the simulation of Philostratus' own descriptive project'.¹⁰ Discussing the beginning of *Hunters*, Jas Elsner writes, with characteristic elegance: 'This remarkable passage begins by pole-vaulting us, whether viewers or readers, directly into the image ... The very rhetoric of description (all those questions directly addressed) is contrived to carry us into the image ...'.¹¹ In his monograph on Philostratus, Graeme Miles points out that 'the vividness (*enargeia*) which the sophist aims to convey by his ekphrasis is much more than simply a clear mental image. He attempts, rather, to convey the experience of the painting through words, inviting readers to enter into it emotively as he does himself'.¹²

While Elsner, Squire and Miles make explicit Philostratus' implicit claim to immersiveness without probing into it, Ruth Webb goes one step further; she not only states 'that we so often feel that we can perceive something of the painting is a tribute to the power of ekphrasis',¹³ but tries to identify the means employed by Philostratus: 'This power derives partly from the concentration of sensuous detail and partly from the sense of immediacy created by the casual sentence structure with its careful impression of spontaneity. A large contribution is also made by the presence of the internal audience: the Boy'.¹⁴ If we consider the points mentioned by Webb, a first important distinction emerges that tends to be elided in the recurring claims that Philostratus invites us to step into the paintings. Whereas the sensuous details qualify the scenes depicted in the painting, the casual sentence structure and addresses to the boy concern the narrative frame, the speaker's act of describing these scenes. The former may help us to immerse ourselves in the scenes of the paintings and the latter jolt us to the villa in Naples, where the speaker is explaining the pictures to his young audience. Even without further theoretical reflection, it is hard to imagine that a reader delves simultaneously into the speaker's conversation

¹⁰ Squire (2015) 18.

¹¹ Elsner (1995) 33–34.

¹² Miles (2018) 90.

¹³ Webb (2006) 119. See also Webb (2010) 23, 26.

¹⁴ Webb (2006) 123.

with the internal audience and into the scenes recounted by him. The immersion of the reader is not as easy as it appears at first sight.

More fundamentally, we have to ask: is it actually true that Philostratus makes us see the paintings and what they depict? The last few years have seen a growing interest in the question of what renders narratives immersive. Literary scholars have drawn on phenomenology and cognitive research to identify narrative features that trigger the imagination and instil in readers the feeling of witnessing what is narrated. Admittedly, the application of findings based on experiments with modern readers to ancient texts and their reception is open to challenge; such an approach, in fact, is likely to appear highly suspicious to classicists, who devote much energy to contextualizing their material. At the same time, it is, I think, not only justifiable for classicists to draw on the insights of cognitive studies, but it would also be unforgivable not to use this opportunity to gain sharper analytical tools than such notions as ‘sensuous details’ or unqualified claims about immersion. Cognition is certainly shaped by sociocultural factors, and yet it also relies on a physiological apparatus that seems very slow to change. Most importantly, the rich critical tradition in antiquity provides us with ample material to prove whether or not the results of cognitive studies may be applied to ancient readers.

In a first step, I will briefly introduce an embodied and enactive approach to literature and illustrate its heuristic value for the study of ecphrasis through a passage from the *urtext* of ecphrasis, the *Shield of Achilles* (section II). I will then draw on this approach to argue that, although Philostratus lays claim to *enargeia*, his *Imagines* contain various elements that make it hard for the reader to enter into the world of the paintings described (section III). While I will refer to different pieces from the *Imagines* to make this case, I finally return to *Hunters*. It is in fact the key *Imago* for Philostratus’ engagement with representation and immersion. In order to capture fully its significance, however, we cannot discuss solely the beginning, as most scholars have done, but need to consider the entire text and look particularly into its final part. My argument will point to a strong tension between the ecphrastic description of artworks and the idea of *enargeia* (section IV).

II. An embodied and enactive approach to ecphrasis

Edmund Husserl and his disciples scrutinized not only our perception of the world, but also our responses to representations. In the past few decades, their phenomenological meditations have been complemented by cognitive research. Cognitive scientists have used questionnaires and various physiological reactions to investigate the effects of texts and images on recipients. Literary scholars have started to use the results of these experiments to give substance to their discussions of reader response.¹⁵ This is not the place for a survey of this line of inquiry, but a brief look at the argument of an earlier contribution to *JHS*, my article with Luuk Huitink on ‘Homer’s vividness’, may help alleviate Classicists’ anxieties about cognitive approaches as well as introducing the theoretical framework of the present inquiry and a first test case.¹⁶

Ancient and modern critics have stressed how good Homer is at immersing his audiences and readers into the epic world. Homer’s vividness, however, is a conundrum: detailed descriptions are rare in his epics; how does he nonetheless succeed in transporting us to the battlefield of Troy and Odysseus’ palace? In our paper, Huitink and I argued that an enactive model of perception could help explain the immersive effect ascribed to Homeric narrative. Our perception, as this cognitive approach contends, is not photographic; instead, it concentrates on aspects that are relevant to actual and potential

¹⁵ See, for example, Bolens (2012); Kuzmičová (2012); Troscianko (2014); Cave (2016).

¹⁶ Grethlein and Huitink (2017).

interactions.¹⁷ When, for example, we see a hammer, we do not form a complete internal image of it, we attend to aspects that pertain to its use. Some of the same brain areas are activated as when we hold and use a hammer. Consequently, if our imagination works along similar lines to our perception, exhaustive descriptions of objects and situations are not cognitively realist and therefore unlikely to be immersive. The enactive model of perception and imagination suggests other features that render narrative immersive. The immersive features listed in the article on Homer's vividness can be summarized in two points:

1. Since our perception is closely tied to action, the account of **action** plays an important role in immersing readers. The narration of simple, intentional bodily movements in particular seems to have a strong echo in our sensorimotor system. The narration of actions should be dynamically veracious. This means that the time that a passage takes to read should be commensurate with the duration of the described action in the real world. While it is hard to pinpoint when exactly narrative time and narrated time fully coincide, except in direct speech, the notions of pause and summary illustrate *ex negativo* the salience of dynamic veracity.
2. **Descriptions** ought to be 'just in time', focus on affordances and appeal to the senses. Just as our perception attends to things that are relevant to possible interactions, a narrative should introduce objects as and when they become relevant and focus on affordances, that is on aspects of things that pertain to potential and actual ways of interacting with them. Likewise, references to features that appeal to our senses make the description resonate with our sensorimotor system.

Needless to say, ancient audiences and readers are not available for MRIs or other tests which could prove that they responded to these features as modern readers do. And yet, as a reading of the chariot race in *Iliad* 23 reveals, the immersive features identified by phenomenologists and cognitive scientists are prominent in Homer and provide at least a possible explanation for the enthralling effect flagged by ancient critics. What is more, many passages singled out as examples of *enargeia* in ancient criticism do not provide detailed pictorialist accounts but conform nicely to the enactive model.

At least two points, however, need to be added to complement the enactive features that Huitink and I introduced:¹⁸

1. A prerequisite for the reader's immersion in the narrated world is **transparency**. An overtly present narrator and strong self-referential elements highlight the act of mediation. Only an unobtrusive narrator and the absence of self-reference make it possible for the reader to focus on and, potentially, immerse themselves in the represented scene.
2. A shift of the **deictic centre** to the narrated scene can reinforce the reader's immersion. Supported by adverbs (e.g. 'now' and 'here'), tenses, prefixes and prepositions create temporally and spatially an internal viewpoint that helps to transport the reader. In focalization, this viewpoint is even tied to a specific character.

¹⁷ For example, Noë (2004); (2009); Gallagher (2005). Kosslyn (1980) is an example of the pictorialist model.

¹⁸ See also Grethlein (2021) 57–58. A still broader model can be found in Allan (2020); however, Allan is ultimately more concerned with the direction of attention to the narrated world instead of the text, and not the perceptual quality of the narrative.

The degree of immersion in a specific text will of course vary from reader to reader. Whether or not a reader gets absorbed in a narrative depends on many factors, such as their own willingness to engage with the narrated world, its appeal to their interests and expectations, and also on their current mood and the specific circumstances of the reception.¹⁹ It has also been noted that ‘for immersion to retain its intensity, it needs a contrast of narrative modes, a constantly renegotiated distance from the narrative scene, a profile made of peaks and valleys’.²⁰ We cannot therefore expect immersion to be a constant state throughout the reading of a text; it rather goes up and down and, even at its strongest, is balanced by a residual awareness of the representation.

A brief look at a passage from the Homeric *Shield of Achilles* may illustrate how an embodied and enactive approach to narrative can be made fruitful for the interpretation of ecphrasis.²¹ Though it stands at the beginning of the history of ecphrasis, the *Shield of Achilles* is quite complex in its entwinement of different levels that command the audience’s attention. As emphasized by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Homer describes the making of the shield.²² The description of the individual scenes on the shield is marked off by references to Hephaestus forging it. There are also references to the material of the shield, some of them straightforward, others ambiguously blending together the representation with the represented. In the account of the shield and its production, Homer is, on the whole, a covert narrator, and yet his presence can be felt in comparisons and evaluations, when, for example, he calls Hephaestus’ work a *thauma* (*Il.* 18.549).²³

Although Homer does not conceal his narratorial mediation and highlights the production as well as the material of the shield, several passages of his ecphrasis are designed to immerse the reader in the depicted scenes. To give a random example (*Il.* 18.550–60):

Ἐν δ’ ἐτίθει τέμενος βασιλῆϊον· ἔνθα δ’ ἔριθοι
ἦμων ὄξειας δρεπάνας ἐν χερσὶν ἔχοντες.
δράγματα δ’ ἄλλα μετ’ ὄγμον ἐπήτριμα πίπτον ἔραζε,
ἄλλα δ’ ἀμαλλοδετῆρες ἐν ἔλλεδανοῖσι δέοντο.
τρῆεις δ’ ἄρ’ ἀμαλλοδετῆρες ἐφέστασαν· αὐτὰρ ὀπισθε
παῖδες δραγμαεύοντες ἐν ἀγκαλίδεσσι φέροντες
ἄσπερχές ἀρεχον· βασιλεὺς δ’ ἐν τοῖσι σιωπῇ
κῆπτρον ἔχων ἐστήκει ἐπ’ ὄγμου γηθόσυνος κῆρ.
κῆρυκες δ’ ἀπάνευθεν ὑπὸ δρυῖ δαῖτα πένοντο,
βοῦν δ’ ἱερεύσαντες μέγαν ἄμφεπον· αἶ δὲ γοναῖκες
δεῖπνον ἐρίθοισιν λεύκ’ ἄλφιτα πολλὰ πάλυνον.

He made on it the precinct of a king, where the labourers
were reaping with the sharp reaping hooks in their hands. Of the cut swathes
some fell along the lines of reaping, one after another,
while the sheaf-binders caught up others and tied them with bind-ropes.
There were three sheaf-binders who stood by, and behind them
were children picking up the cut swathes, filling their arms with them;
and they continuously passed them on; and by them the king in silence

¹⁹ On the significance of external circumstances to our response to art and literature, see Felski (2020).

²⁰ Ryan (2001) 137; see also Kuzmičová (2012) 43.

²¹ The literature on the *Shield of Achilles* is vast. See the list in Squire (2013) 157 n.1, who himself discusses its influence on the history of ecphrasis.

²² Lessing (1788), on which see now Lifschitz and Squire (2017).

²³ Cf. Becker (1990) 145–48. In addition to the levels mentioned above, Becker also adduces ‘the creator’, Hephaestus (140).

and holding his staff stood near the line of the reapers, happily.
 And apart and under a tree the heralds made a feast ready
 and trimmed a great ox they had slaughtered. Meanwhile the women
 scattered, for the workmen to eat, abundant white barley.

After the introductory verse, neither the production nor the material of the shield is mentioned; Homer gives his audience direct access to the depicted scene. The passage abounds in actions, which echo in the recipient's sensorimotor system and thereby draw them in. The mention of the body parts engaged in these actions reinforces this resonance: the hands hold the sickles, the arms carry the 'handfuls' (δράγματα) of sheaves. Objects such as the sickles, the band and the sceptre are not mentioned for their own sake, but as and when they are used. The imperfect tense of most verbs qualifies the actions as unfinished and thereby creates an internal viewpoint. The deictic centre is also spatially anchored in the scene through prefixes and prepositions that carefully locate the individual actions: the sheaves fall next to each other, the children stand behind the binder of sheaves, the king stands among them, the heralds are far away under an oak tree. The description appeals not only to the sense of sight, but also to haptic perception (the sickles held in the hands are sharp) and acoustic perception (the king is silent).

While the passage concentrates on action, describes only things deployed by agents and firmly plants the deictic centre in the scene, it is more difficult to make a case for dynamic veracity. In other parts of the *Shield*, Homer freely narrates sequences of action, but in the account of the royal precinct he confines himself to a description of parallel scenes that could be represented in a mono-phase picture. However, the immersive appeal of the account is increased by the offer of a specific anthropocentric viewpoint. Both the position of the king (he stands amidst the men and children working) and his reflexive attitude (he is silent and joyful), suggest that not only the distance of the heralds refers to his position, but that the entire scene may be focalized through him. Affording a specific lens, the internal audience of the king makes it easier for the Homeric audience to relocate themselves in the narrated world.

Some verses in the *Shield* seem to gesture knowingly to the immersion of readers through the blending together of distinct representational levels. Material and colour in particular highlight the mediating artwork but, if they characterize the represented object as well as the representation, they can also blur the boundary between them. The black colouring of the soil overturned by the plough, for example, simultaneously describes the colour of the material to which the following verse draws attention: 'The earth darkened behind them and looked like earth that has been ploughed / though it was gold. Such was the wonder of the shield's forging' (ἦ δὲ μελαίνετ' ὄπισθεν, ἀρηρομένη δὲ ἔφκει | χρυσεῖη περ ἑοῦσα· τὸ δὲ περὶ θαῦμα τέτυκτο, *Il.* 18.548–49). As Becker puts it: 'The physical similarity between depiction and depicted serves to enhance the audience's respect for the ability of the visual image to reproduce significant aspects of the world'.²⁴ Here, the *Shield of Achilles* anticipates some of the reflexive games with representation that we find in Imperial authors.

As the brief look at the precinct of the king in the *Shield* has shown, an embodied and enactive approach can help us assess the claim to immersion that inheres in the ecphrastic erasure of medial boundaries. Before we return to Philostratus, however, a possible objection to my approach needs to be considered. In the introductory section, I touched on the question of whether a model of cognition based on experiments conducted today also holds true for ancient audiences. More pointedly, we have to ask: does the emphasis on vision in ancient philosophy, criticism and literature not indicate that cognition in

²⁴ Becker (1990) 144. See also Squire (2013) 159–60.

antiquity was pictorialist and that texts with detailed descriptions were in fact cognitively realist?²⁵ After all, the key term for narrative and rhetorical vividness, *enargeia*, was frequently defined as the ability to make an audience see through mere words.²⁶

To start with, the salience of the pictorialist model among laypeople today demonstrates that widely held views can conflict with cognitive realities. Most of the people who participate in the studies on which the embodied and enactive view of cognition is based would claim that they fully ‘picture’ narrated worlds and that immersive accounts require detailed descriptions. Just as their self-description is wrong, pictorialist models in ancient texts need not reflect the actual workings of cognition. Moreover, a closer look at ancient discussions reveals that *enargeia* is defined not only as the ability to transform listeners into viewers, but encompasses a wide range of devices, including *onomatopoeia* and the temporal organization of narrative. Its effects are described not solely in visual but also in multimodal sensory, cognitive and emotional terms.²⁷ Strikingly, numerous passages singled out and praised for their *enargeia* by ancient critics are not pictorialist, but conform to an embodied and enactive model of cognition. In fact, if cognition in antiquity had been pictorialist, how is it that the poet who received the most lavish praise for his vividness, Homer, fails to provide detailed descriptions?²⁸

III. *Enargeia* of the *Imagines*?

The idea that the reader is enabled to see the paintings and the scenes they depict is vital to the intermedial rollercoaster ride on which the *Imagines* take us. The claim of direct access is thrown into relief by references to multiple instances of mediation. Philostratus’ exploitation of the lexical ambiguity of *graphē* is only one of numerous ways in which this claim is pronounced, sometimes straightforwardly, sometimes in sophisticated ways that seem to enact the claim. In the last sentence of the proem, Philostratus unabashedly marshals a key term of ecphrastic theory when he asks the adolescents to ask questions ‘if anything I say is not clear’ (εἴ τι μὴ σαφῶς φράζοιμι).²⁹ The second prominent term of ecphrastic theory besides *saphēneia*, *enargeia*, is invoked in several *Imagines*.³⁰ In a characteristic inversion, it is applied to the paintings: ‘Critical languages for theorizing ekphrastic vision are here projected into the very gallery described: the trope of purportedly visualizing through verbalization is itself said to have been visualized, ready for Philostratus to verbalize in turn’.³¹ The application to pictures of a term that praises the representational capacity of words drives home the idea that the reader gains direct access to the painted scenes through Philostratus’ descriptions.

In a metaleptic address to Olympus, the speaker even boasts that his verbal description trumps the image of Olympus in the water: ‘If it is beauty you are investigating, pay no heed to the water; for we are better able to tell all your charms’ (εἰ δὲ τὸ κάλλος ἀνακρίνεις, τοῦ ὕδατος ἀμέλει· ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἰκανώτεροι λέξει τὰ ἐν σοὶ ἅπαντα, 1.21.1).³² Just as the sophist effortlessly interacts with the painted figures, it is implied, his descriptions, despite being verbal, let us see these figures, too. Words, at least those strung together by

²⁵ On the central role of vision in various realms in antiquity, see Squire (2016). Zanker (1987; 2004) makes a case for a strongly pictorialist aesthetics in Hellenistic poetry.

²⁶ The bibliography on *enargeia* is vast. See, for example, Zanker (1981); Manieri (1998); Otto (2009); Webb (2009) 87–130.

²⁷ See Huitink (2019).

²⁸ Cf. Grethlein and Huitink (2017) 20–22.

²⁹ *Saphēneia* is associated with ecphrasis, for example, by Hermog. *Prog.* 10.49.

³⁰ For example, *Imag.* 1.16.2, 1.16.3, 2.13.3, 2.14.2.

³¹ Squire (2013) 107.

³² Cf. Manieri (1999) 121; Schirren (2009) 138–39.

the rhetor, not only seem to outshine visual representations in their capacity to make us see something; at the beginning of the *Erotes Imago*, the rhetor even boasts that his words are able to conjure up smell: ‘Did you catch any of the fragrance hovering over the garden, or is this slow [in reaching] you? But listen carefully, for along with my description the fragrance of the apples also will come to you’ (μῶν ἐπήσθου τι τῆς ἀνά τὸν κῆπον εὐωδίας ἢ βραδύνει σοι τοῦτο; ἀλλὰ προθύμως ἄκουε· προσβαλεῖ γάρ σε μετὰ τοῦ λόγου καὶ τὰ μῆλα, 1.6.1).

At first sight, it may seem that the *Imagines* are in fact geared to deliver on their mimetic claims. To the frustration of earlier scholarship that turned to the *Imagines* chiefly for insights into the nature of Imperial tableaux,³³ Philostratus says little about painterly technique. An important source of disruption of the reader’s immersion is thus minimized.³⁴ Moreover, it has been noted that at least some of the paintings described are ‘unmögliche Bilder’.³⁵ The multisensory impressions figuring in the rhetor’s descriptions exceed the representational capacity of paintings and are able to intensify the effect on the reader.³⁶ Perhaps even more importantly, the sequences of action recounted by the rhetor would be impossible to represent in mono-phase pictures; at the same time, the narration of action can be a powerful means of transporting readers to represented worlds. The ecphrastic liberties that Philostratus takes and his neglect of painterly technique are both conducive to the immersion of the reader.

However, there are striking elements in the *Imagines* that are non-immersive. The rhetor is fond of explications that permit him to parade his erudition but lead away from the scene he describes. In the *Imago* of Hermes’ birth, for example, the mention of the place, Mount Olympus, is a welcome opportunity for the sophist to expound on its remoteness with the help of a reference to Homer (1.26.1). The programmatic first ecphrasis prominently introduces the key role of literary references in the *Imagines*, as the rhetor starts by asking the boy ‘to turn your eyes away from the painting itself so as to look only at the events on which it is based’ (σὺ δὲ ἀπόβλεψον αὐτῶν, ὅσον ἐκεῖνα ἰδεῖν, ἀφ’ ὧν ἢ γραφή, 1.1.1.) and first discusses a passage from the *Iliad*.³⁷ However, not all the literary references are as explicit as this one, and not all digressions are based on literary sources. In the ecphrasis subsequent to Hermes’ birth, the two-horse chariot used by Amphiarus prompts the rhetor to explain that ‘the four-horse chariot was not yet in use by the heroes except by Hector the Bold’ (τὸ γὰρ ἐπὶ τεττάρων οὐπω τοῖς ἥρωσι διὰ χειρὸς ἦν, εἰ μὴ ἄρα Ἑκτορι τῷ θρασεῖ, 1.27.1). Homer does in fact have Hector use a four-horse chariot, but the rhetor does not mention Homer, let alone quote his work. When the rhetor comments on the origin of the Centaurs (2.3.1), it is doubtful that he refers to a specific text, and yet, like the quotations from literature, this and other explanations direct the reader’s attention away from the scenes represented in the pictures.

These digressions are in tune with the sophist’s announcements in the proem. There he emphasizes that he will teach his young audience how to ‘interpret’ paintings (ἐρμηνεύσουσι, 3; cf. 5). The professed goal of his descriptions is hermeneutic instruction.³⁸ That being said, digressions do not rule out readerly immersion. As briefly mentioned above, immersive passages gain force from alternating with less experiential passages. It is, however, difficult to find descriptions in the *Imagines* that are embodied and enactive.

³³ See Lehmann-Hartleben (1941); Fuchs (1987).

³⁴ Cf. Baumann (2011) 17–18; Miles (2018) 87.

³⁵ Giuliani (2007); see also Manieri (1999) 117.

³⁶ On multisensory perception in the *Imagines*, besides Manieri (1999) see also Leach (2000) 248–50; Webb (2006) 121; Baumann (2011) 20; Squire (2013) 112–13.

³⁷ Cf. Squire and Elsner (2016).

³⁸ Miles (2018) 81–120 emphasizes the prominence of interpretation in the *Imagines*. On the proem, see especially Primavesi and Giuliani (2012).

There is, for sure, no scarcity of descriptions. Time and again, Philostratus depicts characters, settings and objects in painstaking detail. To give an example, he devotes considerable attention to the dress and appearance of Rhodogune (2.5.2–5):³⁹

And Rhodogune is resplendent with scarlet raiment, all except her face; she wears a charming girdle which permits her robe to fall only to her knee, and charming trousers on which designs are woven; her chiton is fastened with brooches set at intervals from shoulder to elbow, the arm showing between the fastenings, though the shoulder is covered; the dress is not that of an Amazon. One should also admire the shield, of moderate size but large enough to cover the breast. And at this point one should examine carefully the effectiveness of the painting; for the left hand extends beyond the handle of the shield and grasps the spear, holding the shield away from the breast; and though the rim is held out straight, the outside of the shield is also visible (is it not resplendent and as it were animate with life?) while the inside, where the arm is, is of a purple hue and the forearm shines against this background. It seems, my boy, that you have a feeling for the beauty in this figure and desire to hear something on this point also, so listen. Rhodogune is pouring a libation for her victory over the Armenians, and the artist's conception is of a woman praying. She prays to conquer men, even as she has now conquered them; for I do not think she loves to be loved. The part of her hair that is fastened up is arranged with a modesty that tempers her high spirit, while that which hangs loose gives her vigour and the look of a bacchante. Yellow, even yellower than gold, is her disarranged hair; while the hair on the other side differs also somewhat in hue because of its orderly arrangement. The way her eyebrows begin at the same point and rise together from the nose is charming; but more charming still is the curve they make; for the brows ought not only to be set above the eyes but should also be set in an arch around them. As for the cheek, it receives the yearning that emanates from the eyes, yet it delights in merriment, for it is mostly in the cheek that mirth is shown, and the colour of the eyes varies from grey to black; the joy they show is due to the occasion, their beauty is a gift of nature, while their haughtiness arises from her authority as a ruler. The mouth is delicately formed and filled with 'love's harvest', most sweet to kiss, most difficult to describe. But you may observe, my boy, all you need to be told: the lips are full of colour and even the mouth is well proportioned and utters its prayer before the trophy of victory; if we care to listen attentively, perhaps it will speak in Greek.

We learn that the pressure of the brooches makes Rhodogune's upper arm rise slightly, that her left hand extends beyond the handle of the shield, that part of her hair is dishevelled and part fastened and that her brows emerge from the root of her nose.⁴⁰ In their elaboration on details, the descriptions in the *Imagines* easily stand up to comparison with the Hellenistic ephraseis analysed by Graham Zanker.⁴¹ Zanker is certainly right to emphasize the pictorial dimension of many Hellenistic descriptions of artwork. However, 'visual richness' in itself does not render descriptions 'vivid and immediate to us'.⁴² 'The attention to precise, minute and even insignificant detail'⁴³ is not cognitively realist. As pointed out above, our perception does not produce photo-like pictures of our

³⁹ For a different assessment of the description of Rhodogune, see Newby (2009) 335–36. Similar descriptions can be found in *Imag.* 1.10.3 (Amphion), 1.23.4 (Narcissus), 2.2.2 (Achilles).

⁴⁰ One of the journal's anonymous readers made the intriguing suggestion that 'the way that the passage brings the face and body of R. in and out of view' contributes to its erotics, which ultimately may help immerse the (male?) reader.

⁴¹ Zanker (1987); (2004).

⁴² Zanker (1987) 17.

⁴³ Zanker (1987) 5.

environment; instead, it selectively attends to aspects that are relevant to actual and potential interaction. Like most of Zanker's Hellenistic material, the pictorialist descriptions of the *Imagines* hardly immerse readers in the scenes described.

The portrayal of Rhodogune features other aspects besides an excessive amount of detail that are an obstacle to the reader's immersion in the depicted world. The address to the boy alerts us to the fact that we are attending to a description of a painting. The speaker's presence is also felt when he tells his audience what to admire. Some of his descriptions have an interpretive dimension that is hard to ignore, for example when he derives conclusions about Rhodogune's character from her physical features. The speaker's desire to interact with Rhodogune and notably his expectation that he may hear her speak Greek indicate his own absorption in the picture, but, together with the pictorialist description, the highlighting of his mediating instance powerfully prevents the reader from sharing in his experience.

The representational boundaries are not elided, as Philostratus suggests and scholars continue to assume; rather the attention that the rhetor directs to himself hinders the reader's immersion in the scenes depicted. Even accounts that avoid effusive descriptions and instead concentrate on action tend to be punctured by comments and references that put the spotlight on the sophist. In the Arrichion *Imago*, for example, he postpones a description of the scene in order to 'view the deed of Arrichion before it is finished' (τὸ δὲ ἔργον τοῦ Ἀρριχίου, πρὶν ἢ παύσασθαι αὐτό, σκοπῶμεν, 2.6.2). The rhetor seems to deliver on his promise of immediacy when he first turns to the audience at Olympia (2.6.2):

For he seems to have conquered, not his antagonist alone, but also all the Greeks; at any rate the spectators jump up from their seats and shout, some wave their hands, some their garments, some leap from the ground, and some grapple with their neighbours for joy; for these really amazing deeds make it impossible for the spectators to contain themselves. Is anyone so without feeling as not to applaud this athlete? For after he had already achieved a great deed by winning two victories in the Olympic games, a yet greater deed is here depicted, in that, having won this victory at the cost of his life, he is being conducted to the realms of the blessed with the very dust of victory still upon him. Let not this be regarded as mere chance, since he planned most shrewdly for the victory.

The internal audience helps the reader to relocate themselves at the spot of the action, and the account of their response is enactive and likely to resonate in the reader's sensorimotor system. That being said, not only do the final meditation on Arrichion's previous successes and his preparation lead us out of the depicted scene, but the account of the scene is also interrupted by the reflection on the strong effect of spectacles. While the narration of the reactions of the internal audience works towards drawing the reader in, the general reflection forcefully reminds them of the mediating instance.

In other cases, it is not so much the speaker's reflection as his comments on the image that establish a barrier between the reader and the scene described. The Amphiarus *Imago* contains a description of horses that is enactive rather than pictorialist (1.27.2):

His horses are white, the whirling of his chariot wheels shows urgent haste, the panting breath of the horses issues from every nostril, the earth is bespattered with foam, the horses' manes are all awry, and fine dust settling on their bodies wet with sweat makes them less beautiful but more true to life.

The rhetor describes the horses as they run. The movement is likely to trigger a sensorimotor echo in the reader, and yet the claim that the dust makes the horses look less beautiful and more truthful puts the spotlight on the painting and its mediation.

Philostratus does not forego the opportunity that massacres offer for a display of rhetorical brilliance. His *Cassandra* and *Heracles furens* lavishly depict scenes of carnage. Even if the sophist presents the result of the massacre rather than the fighting itself, verbs in the perfect tense evoke the action and spatial markers establish a deictic centre in the scene. At the same time, the descriptions are punctured by references that flag the speaker's mediation, as here in *Cassandra* (2.10.3):

As for the positions of those who have fallen, one has had his throat cut mid-swallow, another stands decapitated over the mixing bowl, another has had his hand lopped off as it carried a beaker, another drags the table after him, as he tumbles from his couch, another has fallen 'headfirst', as a poet would say (ποιητῆς ἄν φαίη κύμβαχος), upon his shoulders and head; one has no inkling of his imminent death, and another lacks the strength to flee since drunkenness like a fetter has enchained him. Nor is any one of the fallen pallid of hue, since when men die in their cups the flush does not immediately leave their faces.

Together with the explanation of why the dead are not pale, the learned mention of the poetic expression distances the reader from the scene described.

In the *Imago* of *Heracles furens*, the qualification 'evidently' (ὡς δῆλα) and the generalizing comment on children's tears, addressed to the boy in the second person, prevent the reader from moving more fully into the scene described (2.23.2):

One has been hit in the neck and the arrow has gone through the delicate throat, the second lies stretched out full upon his breast and the barbs of the arrow have torn through the middle of the spine, the missile having evidently (ὡς δῆλα) been shot into his side. Their cheeks are drenched with tears, and you should not wonder that they wept beyond the due measure of tears; for tears flow easily with children, whether what they fear be small or great.

The subsequent account of the slaves' attempts to overpower Heracles is vivid, but the rhetor again addresses the boy in the second person when he points out that the Erinyes cannot be seen because she has entered Heracles. In addition, the tragic intertexts that Elsner detects in both *Cassandra* and *Hercules furens* alert the reader to the artful composition.⁴⁴

Less obviously, but nonetheless effectively, the rhetor's highly wrought style undermines the immersive tug of his descriptions. Consider for example a sentence from the *Menoiceus*: 'There is strength both in the promise of his shoulders and in his supple neck; he has long hair also, but not the long hair of luxury' (ἔρρωται καὶ ὤμων ἐπαγγελία καὶ οὐκ ἀτρέπτῳ τένοντι, μετέχει δὲ καὶ κόμης, ὅσον μὴ κομᾶν, 1.4.3). ὤμων ἐπαγγελία is a striking periphrasis; together with the litotes οὐκ ἀτρέπτῳ τένοντι, it directs our attention to the rhetorical flourish instead of channelling it to the object described. In order to be immersive, language must be as transparent as possible.⁴⁵ The less attention the mediation commands, the easier it is for the reader to delve into what is mediated. The exclamations, questions and anacolutha that make the rhetor's mode of expression look so casual also draw our attention away from the paintings and onto the sophist's speech act or Philostratus' brilliance. When the form of the representation attracts the reader's attention, their immersion in the scene described is necessarily diminished.

⁴⁴ Elsner (2007) 324–35.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Ryan (2001) 56–58, 118–19; Wolf (2004) 340–43.

The μή κομᾶν illustrates Philostratus' general fondness for negations in the *Imagines* (2.7.4):

τὸν Ἀχιλλεῖα μὴ ἀπὸ τῆς κόμης—οἴχεται γὰρ τοῦτο αὐτῷ μετὰ τὸν Πάτροκλον—ἀλλὰ τὸ εἶδος αὐτὸν ἐνδεικνύτω καὶ τὸ μέγεθος καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ μὴ κομᾶν.

You are not to recognize Achilles by his long hair, for that is gone since the death of Patroclus, but let his beauty make him known to you, and his stature, aye, and the very fact that he does not wear long hair.

Poseidon 'is painted, not dark blue nor yet as a god of the sea, but as a god of the mainland' (γέγραπται δὲ οὐ κυάνεος οὐδὲ θαλάττιος, ἀλλ' ἠπειρώτης, 2.14.2). Evadne 'has determined to die for love of him (i.e., Capaneus), not by drawing a knife against her throat nor by hanging herself from a noose, modes of death often chosen by women in honour of their husbands, but she throws herself into the fire itself' (Εὐάδνη γὰρ ἢ γυνὴ ἀποθανεῖν ἐπ' αὐτῷ ὄρμηκεν οὔτε ξίφος τι ἐπὶ τὴν δέρην ἔλκουσα οὔτε βρόχου τινὸς ἑαυτὴν ἀπαρτῶσα, οἷα ἠσπάσαντο γυναῖκες ἐπ' ἀνδράσιν, ἀλλ' ἐς αὐτὸ τὸ πῦρ ἵεται, 2.30.2). Here, as in other cases, the rhetor uses negations to gesture to other modes of presentation, mythical traditions and narrative possibilities. In reminding the reader of alternative representational options, this 'side-shadowing' spotlights the level of mediation and undercuts the reader's absorption.

Numerous other examples could be adduced; however, the above should suffice to illustrate that the rhetor makes his presence strongly felt through his rhetorical artistry as well as through his explanations, interpretations and evaluations. Even in accounts that avoid pictorialist description and focus on action, the visibility of the sophist directs the reader's consciousness away from the scene described and onto the process of mediation. The claim that, just as the speaker and his audience are absorbed in the paintings, their ecphrastic description allows us as readers to see the paintings and to step into their scenes is just that, a claim. Not least, the emphasis on the immersion of the sophist and his audience directs the reader's attention to the framing narrative and work against their immersion in the painted scenes. Put provocatively, Philostratus is too busy showcasing his rhetorical brilliance and reflecting on the immersive capacities of verbal and visual presentation to deliver ecphrases that are actually immersive. This need not be a flaw; I consciously avoid the conclusion that Philostratus 'fails to' draw us into the world represented. His project is, I believe, a different one, as we will see more clearly now as we return to the *Imago* with which my argument started, *Hunters*.

IV. *Hunters*, encore

Not unjustifiably considered a 'Gipfelpunkt in den *Eikones*', *Hunters* is a key reference in most discussions of Philostratean ecphrasis and immersion.⁴⁶ However, these discussions tend to be confined to the first two paragraphs, the sophist's illusion of being part of the scene and its subsequent correction. Admittedly, the beginning of *Hunters* is arresting, and yet only an exploration of the piece in its entirety will allow us to grasp fully its

⁴⁶ See Conan (1987) 163; Elsner (1995) 33–35; (2004) 171–74; Boeder (1996) 167–69; Newby (2009) 340–41; Webb (2010) 361–62; Squire (2013) 113–15; Grethlein (2017) 19–21. Baumann (2011) 59–76 is a noteworthy exception. While his discussion contains some interesting observations, his framework of fragmentation vs totalization seems not to be ideal for an analysis of *Hunters*. Baumann considers both the juxtaposition of absorption and reflection at the beginning and the sequence of description and narration in §§ 3–8 as a manifestation of the dichotomy of fragmentation vs totalization, but it is hard to see how either of them maps onto this dichotomy.

engagement with immersion and help us characterize Philostratean ecphrasis more sharply.

Hunters consists of four different parts of various length. The first part sets out the rhetor's immersion (§ 1), the second his reflection (§ 2). Introduced by 'So let us look at the details of the painting; for it is a painting before which we stand' (σκοπῶμεν οὖν τὰ γεγραμμένα· γραφῆ γὰρ παρεστήκαμεν, 1.28.2), the sophist describes the painting (§§ 3–6): first the hunters (§ 3), then the boy (§ 4), followed by the equipment and dogs (§ 5) and a temple to Artemis (§6). The fourth and final part narrates the hunting of the boar and its killing by the boy (§§ 7–8).

While the second and third are clearly marked off from the preceding parts, the transition into the final part, the narration, is less conspicuous. The description of the temple to Artemis that concludes the third part starts to dynamize the ecphrasis temporally; its beginning gestures towards a sequence of action and thereby prepares the narration that is to follow: 'And the hunters as they advance will hymn Artemis Agrotera ... After a prayer the hunters continue the hunt' (καὶ τὴν Ἀγροτέραν προΐοντες ἄσσονται ... ἔχονται μετὰ τὴν εὐχὴν τῆς θήρας, 1.28.6). Likewise, at the end of the *Imago* the narration of the hunt discreetly returns to the static scene of the painting. After the hunting and killing of the boar and the response of the other hunters are recounted in the present tense, the perfect tense of 'one is thrown from his horse which he excited beyond control instead of holding it in check' (καὶ πέπτωκέ τις ἀπὸ τοῦ ἵππου μὴ κατασχών, ἀλλ' ἐκθορυβήσας τὸν ἵππον, 1.28.8) lays the ground for the frozen scene of the final sentence: 'The lad is still in the pool, still in the pose in which he hurled his javelin, while the youths stand in astonishment and gaze at him as though he were a picture' (ἔτι ἐν τῇ λίμνῃ τὸ μεϊράκιον, ἔτι ἐπὶ τοῦ σχήματος, ᾧ τὸ παλτὸν ἀφῆκεν, οἱ δὲ ἐκπεπλήγασι καὶ θεωροῦσιν αὐτὸ οἷον γραφέν, 1.28.8). Nonetheless, although it commences and fades out less abruptly than the others, the final part is markedly different from the one preceding; it replaces the static description of the details of the painting with a narration of action that brings together the individual groups previously described separately.

If we contemplate the four parts of *Hunters*, we note that they form two corresponding pairs. The description of part 3 and the narration of part 4 form a dichotomy just as the immersion of part 1 is juxtaposed with the reflection of part 2. The first pair brings together two different modes of response, the second two different modes of presentation. While not fully mapping onto each other, the two pairs are linked, more specifically part 3 to part 2 and part 4 to part 1: the awareness of having a painting in front of him leads the sophist to its description. The narration of the action is highly immersive and thus harks back to the beginning of the ecphrasis.

Let us take a closer look at the final part and its correspondence with the first. The closing remark that 'the youths stand in astonishment and gaze at him as though he were a picture' (1.28.8) takes up and inverts the initial immersion of the sophist: just as he treats a painting as if it were reality, the hunters regard a real person as if he were only painted.⁴⁷ However, this time it is not the sophist who is immersed, it is Philostratus' readers who are invited to step into the world represented. In the account of the hunt, the sophist refrains from reflections and comments on the painting; he directly accesses the scene, which he renders as an account of sequential events: the boar 'leaps from the thicket, then rushes at the horsemen' (ἐκπηδᾷ τῆς λόχμης, εἶτα ἐμπίπτει τοῖς ἵππεῦσι, 1.28.7); the hunters fail to hit the boar lethally and wound it only superficially. Weakened by this wound, however, the boar 'runs through the woods till it finds refuge in a deep marsh and a pool adjoining the marsh' (φεύγει διὰ τῆς ὕλης, ἐκδέχεται δὲ αὐτὸν ἔλος βαθὺ καὶ λίμνη πρὸς τῷ ἔλει, 1.28.7). The hunters follow it, but only the youth rides into the water: 'the creature tries to wound his horse, but bending well over on his horse and leaning to the right he delivers

⁴⁷ Cf. Boeder (1996) 168–69; Newby (2009) 340.

with the full force of his arm a blow that hits the boar just where the shoulder blade joins the neck' (καὶ τὸ μὲν θηρίον ἵεται τρῶσαι τὸν ἵππον, ἀπονεῦσαν δὲ τοῦ ἵππου τὸ μειράκιον καὶ ἐς τὰ δεξιὰ μετακλίναν ἀφήρισι τῆ χειρὶ πάση καὶ βάλλει τὸν σὺν κατ' αὐτὸ μάλιστα τὸ συνάπτον τὴν πλάτην τῆ δέρη, 1.28.8). The dogs carry the boar to the bank; the onlookers shout at the top of their lungs.

Obviously, the narration of the hunt is highly enactive and embodied. The sophist steps back and refrains from explanations and rhetorical epideixis. He disappears behind his narrative, which concentrates on simple actions and movements, most of them intentional and therefore particularly strong triggers of the reader's sensorimotor system. Prepositions and prefixes shift the deictic centre of the account to the scene. The setting is described as and when it becomes relevant to the action; the marsh and pool are only mentioned when the boar runs into them. Unlike the pictorialist descriptions of part 3, this description is cognitively realist in that it does justice to the entanglement of our perception with action. It is notoriously difficult to evaluate dynamic veracity, but the simple chronological narration of the hunt leaves the reader with the impression that the verbal rendering closely follows the sequence of action.

If we look for a passage that 'is contrived to carry us into the image', that is 'pole-vaulting us ... directly into the image',⁴⁸ then we find it here. It is not the striking first paragraph but the final narration of the hunt that cues the reader to step into the painted scene.⁴⁹ The beginning spectacularly showcases the power of representations to draw their recipients in, but it does not throw the reader into the scene of the painting. Contrary to what many scholars believe, there is no seamless recession of representational levels that allows the reader to enter the scene of the painting together with the sophist. The focus on the absorption of the sophist channels the reader's attention to the scene in the villa at Naples instead of the painted scene. The hyperbolic nature of the sophist's response and the Homeric allusion in χλοῦνην σὺν even make it unlikely that the reader is transported to the villa.⁵⁰ The ending, on the other hand, elides the mediation of the rhetor and gives a highly experiential account of what is pictorially represented. Here, transparency is not boasted but generated.

Considering the *Imago* as a whole, not only its beginning, we can have another go at its significance. As my reading shows, *Hunters* offers a highly dissective analysis of representation and response: Philostratus first focuses on the response of the sophist, then on the representation. He has him separately describe the painting and narrate the action it represents, just as he balances an instance of reflection against a moment of immersion. Thereby Philostratus neatly breaks down something that itself is closely entwined. Whereas the sophist starts with the effect of the painting on the viewer and then moves on to its description, it is the features of the painting that elicit the viewer's response. The immersion and reflection that Philostratus has follow upon each other are concomitant in our response. By the same token, our comprehension of the action behind the represented scene is not dissolved by our perception of the painting, as it appears in *Hunters*.

Hunters is unique in its precise anatomy of pictorial representation and its effect on viewers, and yet similar tendencies can be noted in other *Imagines*. In *Gyraean Rocks*, for example, the sophist first narrates the shipwreck of Ajax and then explains the painting: 'Such is the story of the painting, but what is shown to the eye is this' (ὁ μὲν δὴ λόγος τῆς γραφῆς οὗτος, τὸ δὲ ἐναργές, 2.13.2). In *Cassandra*, the sophist deploys a similar juxtaposition to score a point in the paragone with the arguably most famous presentation

⁴⁸ Elsner (1995) 33–34.

⁴⁹ I thus disagree with Baumann (2011) 34, who claims that the detailed description of colour in part 3 achieves the highest degree of 'unmittelbarer Anschaulichkeit' in *Hunters*.

⁵⁰ Elsner (1995) 34 notes the allusion: 'The hunters claim (*phate*) to be pursuing a wild boar—but that boar is a text from Homer (*chlounen syn, Iliad* 9.539)'.

of the scene in another medium: 'If we examine this scene as a drama, my boy, a great tragedy has been enacted in a brief space of time, but if as a painting, you will see more in it than a drama' (καὶ εἰ μὲν ὡς δρᾶμα ἐξετάζομεν, ὃ παῖ, ταῦτα, τετραγῶδηται μεγάλα ἐν σμικρῷ, εἰ δ' ὡς γραφήν, πλείω ἐν αὐτοῖς ὄψει, 2.10.1). As in *Hunters*, the description of the painted scene and the narration of the depicted action are separated. Likewise, as Newby has demonstrated, the shifting from moments of immersion to cool and detached reflection is characteristic of Philostratean ecphrasis. The sharp juxtaposition of immersion with reflection at the beginning of *Hunters* exacerbates a tension that pervades the *Imagines* more broadly.

Hunters, I contend, crystallizes the general character of the *Imagines*. Its anatomy of representation and response, which carefully dissects concurrent aspects and dimensions, is emblematic of the reflexivity that is at the heart of Philostratus' ecphrastic work. The *Imagines* are not so much an ecphrasis in the sense of the *Progymnasmata*: Philostratus does not primarily try to make his readers see the scenes that he describes. Rather, he engages in a meditation on the ecphrastic practice described in the *Progymnasmata*. The *Imagines* offer, to use a term coined by Elsner, 'meta-literary ekphrastic reflections'.⁵¹ These reflections are alluring, in fact so alluring that scholars have fully accepted them. Webb is representative of a larger corpus of scholarship when she states: 'il s'agit d'un texte qui se sert de l'idée de l'art non seulement pour réfléchir sur la nature de l'immersion fictionnelle mais aussi pour faire vivre cette immersion au lecteur, qui est ainsi invité à réagir aux scènes mythologiques comme si elles se passaient réellement sous ces yeux, et aussi à entrer dans le monde fictif de la galerie'.⁵² However, an embodied and enactive reading of the *Imagines* cautions us against stepping into the Philostratus trap and mistaking the reflection on and claim to transparency with transparency itself.

This does not mean that we should deny the *Imagines* the label of ecphrasis. To limit ecphrasis to attempts to actually make the reader see artworks (in addition to all sorts of other objects), would be a cruel mutilation. Philostratus takes up and lifts to a new level a rich Hellenistic and Imperial tradition of ecphrastic epigrams that stage responses to art rather than describe it.⁵³ The epigrams on Myron's cow, for instance, tell us little if anything about the statue's features; instead, they praise its lifelikeness and the *technē* that makes this possible. Michael Squire has brilliantly teased out the intriguing reflection on verbal and visual representation encapsulated in these epigrams.⁵⁴ This reflexive dimension of ecphrasis is already present in the *Shield of Achilles*, which playfully blends together different levels of presentation. Ultimately, it is the reference to another representation that endows the ecphrasis of artwork with a reflexivity that quickly pushes the goal of making the hearer see something into the background. If, as in the *Imagines*, the immersive capacity of the artwork is illustrated by the response of a speaker or internal audience, then the attention drawn to their immersion goes against the immersion of the reader in the scene represented by the artwork. It is perhaps not incidental that in our records artworks are not mentioned explicitly as the object of ecphrasis until the fifth century CE.⁵⁵ Beginning with Homer and masterfully exploited by Imperial authors, above all Philostratus, the reflexive dimension of representing representations grinds against the simple goal of transforming an audience into witnesses.

⁵¹ Elsner (2005) 462.

⁵² Webb (2010) 26.

⁵³ Cf. Männlein-Robert (2007) 37–38. Against the argument of Zanker (2003) 61–62 and (2004) 184–85 that such epigrams ought not to be called ecphrastic because they do not describe their objects, see Squire (2010) 592 n.15 with further literature.

⁵⁴ Squire (2010). Goldhill (1994) offers a seminal exploration of the reflexive character of Hellenistic ecphrasis.

⁵⁵ The only *Progymnasmata* to mention 'statues, paintings and the like' as subjects of ecphrastic description are the ones by Nicolaus. Cf. Felten (1913) 69.

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