

Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

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Ekfrase

(_litterær_praksis) “Ekphrasis” er en gresk retorisk term (tilsvarer det latinske “descriptio” i romersk retorikk) og står for en skrevet beskrivelse av et bilde, en transkripsjon av bilde til tekst. En litterær tekst som beskriver et kunstverk, eventuelt en levende beskrivelse skal kalle fram et bestemt visuelt bilde for lytterens eller leserens indre øye (verbal representasjon av visuell representasjon).

Antikke retorikere ga elever opplæring i “*descriptio* eller ekfrase, en øvelse som gikk ut på å beskrive noe detaljert og anskuelig, “å stille det fram for øynene på publikum” som det ofte heter – det være seg en person, et hendelsesforløp, et landskap, et lokale, eller en gjenstand.” (professor i klassisk filologi Øivind Andersen; 1998 s. 9)

“The goal of this literary form is to make the reader envision the thing described as if it were physically present. In many cases, however, the subject never actually existed, making the ekphrastic description a demonstration of both the creative imagination and the skill of the writer. For most readers of famous Greek and Latin texts, it did not matter whether the subject was actual or imagined. [...] Homer’s description of Achilles’ shield in Book 18 of the *Iliad* stands at the beginning of the ekphrastic tradition. Two things about it became central to the genre. First, the passage implicitly compares visual and verbal means of description, most dramatically by weaving elements that could not be part of a shield (like movement and sound) with things that could be (like physical material and visual details). This emphasizes the possibilities of the verbal and the limitations of the visual. Second, the thing being described comes to seem real in the imagination of the reader, despite the fact that it could not exist.” (Marjorie Munsterberg i <http://writingaboutart.org/pages/ekphrasis.html>; lesedato 28.09.16)

Evne til å bruke ekfrase ble ansett som et svennestykke blant retorikere. Noen talere gjorde det likevel lett for seg ved å beskrive, ikke imaginære, ordskapte bilder, men reelt eksisterende kunstverk. Dette er trolig grunnen til at ekfrase også kom til å betegne dikt skrevet som respons på bildekunst. Poeten skulle da overføre bildets stil og struktur, budskap og metaforikk til sitt verbalspråklige medium. Bildets essens ble “oversatt”, men skulle også gi ny innsikt i bildet.

En dikter som bruker ekfrase, kan prøve å gi inntrykk av at det beskrevne bildet selv snakker, at bildet har tatt ordet (Jean-Marie Montana i <http://babel.revues.org/1005>; lesedato 10.04.15).

En av de eldste kjente ekfrasene finnes i 18. sang i Homers *Iliaden*. Der smir guden Hefaistos nye våpen til Akillevs, blant annet et praktfullt skjold fullt av dekorasjoner. Den såkalte skjoldbeskrivelsen består av 130 verselinjer.

Gjennom store deler av Vestens kulturhistorie har maleri blitt oppfattet som “stum poesi” og poesi som “talende maleri” (Szyrocki 1968 s. 202).

Den tyske forfatteren Gotthold Ephraim Lessing skrev verket *Laokoon, eller om grensene mellom maleriet og poesien* (1766), der han bl.a. med utgangspunkt i en beskrivelse hos Homer og en skulptur trekker opp skillelinjer mellom billedkunst og diktning.

I boka *Poesi og bildekunst* (2011), redigert av Ole Karlsen, forklares først fenomenet ekfrase og deretter sammenstilles et bilde og et dikt parvis. Diktene er skrevet “til og om kunst”. I forordet skriver Karlsen: “Ekfrasen kan spores tilbake til saga- og skaldediktningen i nordisk litteratur – sammenlignbart med beskrivelsen av Akilles’ skjold i Bok 18 av *Iliaden*, “alle ekfrasers mor” i den europeiske diktningen ellers. Fra norrøn diktning med beskrivelser av kunstferdige sverd og kapper kan utviklingen av ekfrasen forfølges, først og fremst som innslag i vers og prosa frem til da utviklingen av denne formen skyter fart tidlig på 1800-tallet – i romantikken. Tidspunktet er neppe tilfeldig. For det første utløste Lessings grensedragnin mellom romkunst (bildekunst) og tidkunst (diktekunst) i andre halvdel av 1700-tallet vedvarende estetikkhistoriske bølger ut i det påfølgende hundreåret [...] og Johan Ludvig Heibergs *Om Malerkunsten i dens Forhold til de andre skjønnne Kunster* (1838), der poesien – ordkunsten – gis forrang fremfor maleriet, ga ny ammunisjon til striden mellom ord og bildekunst (paragone).” (2011 s. 17) “Paragone” (italiensk for “sammenligning”) brukes om en diskusjon i renessansen som bl.a. Leonardo da Vinci deltok i. Diskusjonen gjaldt om det skulle stilles opp hierarkier mellom kunstartene, slik at f.eks. arkitektur stod over diktekunsten.

“A famous 19th-century example of ekphrastic poetry is John Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” written in 1819. Like Homer [i beskrivelsen av Akillevs’ skjold i 18. sang i *Iliaden*], Keats mixed descriptions of things that could have been visible on a Greek vase with things that could not have been. Unlike Homer, Keats made himself and his own experience of viewing the vase an important part of the poem. This shift in emphasis reflects a transformation in the genre of ekphrasis, which increasingly came to include the reaction of a particular viewer as part of the description of an object.” (Marjorie Munsterberg i <http://writingaboutart.org/pages/ekphrasis.html>; lesedato 28.09.16)

“Initially, ekphrasis was a rhetorical term like many others taught to Greek students. Teachers of rhetoric taught ekphrasis as a way of bringing the experience of an object to a listener or reader through highly detailed descriptive writing. Ekphrasis was one of the last rhetorical exercises students were taught and the challenge was to bring the experience of a person, a place, or a thing to an audience. The true use of ekphrasis was not to simply provide astute details of an object, but to share the emotional experience and content with someone who had never encountered the work in question. The student of ekphrasis was encouraged to lend their attention not only to the qualities immediately available in an object, but to make efforts to embody qualities beyond the physical aspects of the work they were observing.” (Ryan Welsh i <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mitchell/glossary2004/ekphrasis.htm>; lesedato 06.09.11)

“Ekphrasis was generally understood as a skilled way of describing art and other aesthetic objects after it was learned as a tool of rhetoric. Using the rhetoric successfully was a means of demonstrating prowess, as a scholar and writer and eventually ekphrasis became an art that described art. [...] [Peter Wagner skriver i boka *Icons-Text-Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediary*, 1996:] “Ekphrasis, then, has a Janus face: as a form of mimesis, it stages a paradoxical performance, promising to give voice to the allegedly silent image even while attempting to overcome the power of the image by transforming and inscribing it.” Even as a part of its early history, ekphrasis occupies a strange place between the realms of the visual and the linguistic. Despite all of the changes the word has undergone and no matter the argument making use of the term, the apparent conflict between image and word is central to the concept.” (Ryan Welsh i <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mitchell/glossary2004/ekphrasis.htm>; lesedato 06.09.11)

“Another ancient reference to the complication of words and images in ekphrasis comes in its relation to the famous quote by Horace, ‘ut pictura poesis’. There is some discussion about the translation of this phrase, but there is agreement that it does bear on the conversation about the relation of words and images in art.” (Ryan Welsh i <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mitchell/glossary2004/ekphrasis.htm>; lesedato 06.09.11) “The Latin phrase *Ut pictura poesis* is an analogy that Horace introduced in his *Ars Poetica* to tentatively compare the art of painting with that of poetry. Translated literally, “as is painting, so is poetry,” the ensuing centuries have yielded many varied theories focused around this argument [...] Charles-Alphonse du Fresnoy’s poem, *De arte graphica* (1668), proved seminal in expanding the discussion of *Ut pictura poesis* beyond Italy. His opening passage, “*Ut pictura poesis erit; similisque poesi/sit pictura...*” [“As a painting so a poem will be, and likewise let a painting be as poetry.”] inspired both arguments and commentary as well as new avenues of exploration. English poet John Dryden translated the poem into English in 1695, with an introductory essay “A parallel betwixt painting and poetry.”” (Judith Harvey i <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mitchell/glossary2004/utpicturapoesis.htm>; lesedato 07.09.11)

“The ancient doctrine of ekphrasis, according to Andrew Laird, “denoted any poetic or rhetorical description, including descriptions of landscape, buildings, battles and storms.” The term is now defined by modern scholars as simply a description of a work of visual art. They approach the form in different ways. For example, one scholar frames it as a contest between verbal and visual representation. Others believe “that the visual and verbal arts can be considered in a complementary relation, in concert not contest.” [...] Andrew Laird created two categories for defining ekphrasis as either “obedient” or “disobedient.” An obedient description allows the viewer consistently to visualize the static images on a solid object, or work of art. A disobedient description breaks free of the object and provides less opportunity for visualizing. [...] In Homer’s Iliad, there is the extremely brief ekphrasis of Helen’s robe, where the physical object is described, along with the images it depicts. “She was weaving a great web, a red folding robe, and working into it the numerous struggles of Trojans, breakers of horses, and bronze-armoured Achaians.” Despite its brevity, we can easily imagine the colorful robe and the figures of men Helen depicts. The robe is an example of Laird’s definition of “obedient” ekphrasis. The ekphrasis only describes a physical object which can be consistently visualized by the audience.” (Darin Peachee i <http://honors.usf.edu/documents/thesis/u52096453.pdf>; lesedato 14.10.15)

“Catullus 64 provides an extreme example of a “disobedient” ekphrasis, where the ekphrasis describes the surface of the work of art, takes off from it and never refers back to the physical object. “Disobedient” ekphrasis, according to Laird, “breaks free from the discipline of the imagined object and offers less opportunity for it to be consistently visualized or translated adequately into an actual work of visual art.” The description of Catullus’s tapestry would be impossible to render visually on a static object. “And there, in the middle, inlaid with Indian tooth and quilted with arras, the divan of the small goddess, the arras ochred with rock-lichen & tintured with stain of rose shell-fish. This quilt is pricked with figures of gods & men, sketches of antiquity in *petit point!*” The ekphrasis launches into a long narrative that, by its end, has led the reader to forget that this was an ekphrasis to begin with. A significant way this tapestry deviates from obedient ekphrasis is in its extensive use of direct speech. Ariadne alone is given seventy verses.” (Darin Peachee i <http://honors.usf.edu/documents/thesis/u52096453.pdf>; lesedato 14.10.15)

“Over the course of history numerous scholars have taken up ekphrasis as part of their study, particularly in terms of literature, art history, and in all studies surrounding media. [...] Many scholars make use of James Heffernan’s [i boka *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, 1993] general conception of ekphrasis as “the verbal representation of visual representation.” This definition still relates to even the earliest Greek origins of the word and encapsulates the more modern use of the term. However, even as this definition opens the term up to a broader utility there comes the difficulty of somehow still

restraining what constitutes ekphrasis. [...] If ekphrasis is “the verbal representation of visual representation,” a definition most experts now seem to accept, the first part of that definition can only mean: all verbal commentary/ writing (poems, critical assessments, art historical accounts) on images. All such writing is essentially ekphrastic: the difference between the critical and the literary versions is one of degree, not one of mode or kind.” [Peter] Wagner is mindful of the need to broaden and restrict the usage of the word ekphrasis. All of the meanings the word has gathered since its inception are still operable definitions and more nuances in the character of ekphrasis are continuing to be drawn out.” (Ryan Welsh i <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mitchell/glossary2004/ekphrasis.htm>; lesedato 06.09.11)

Den engelske romantiske poeten Percy Bysshe Shelleys dikt “On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery” (1819) [...] belongs to the same genre as Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and Byron’s description of the Dying Gladiator in Canto IV of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* – that of ekphrasis, or the poetic description of a work of art. Formally speaking, ekphrasis is any description which brings a person, place, or thing vividly before the mind’s eye. [...] For our purposes, ekphrasis can be understood as a means of citing one work of art within another, in Leo Spitzer’s terms a way of reproducing “through the medium of words [...] sensuously perceptible *objets d’art*”. In *The Sister Arts* [utgitt 1958], still one of the best introductions to literary pictorialism, Jean Hagstrum offers yet another, perhaps more empathetic definition: ekphrasis “refer[s] to that special quality of giving voice and language to the otherwise mute art object”. Although ekphrasis as a genre had been largely dormant since the early fourth and fifth centuries, when Christian writers had used it as a way of celebrating the elaborate architecture of Byzantine churches, it underwent a revival in the eighteenth century. The writings of Winckelmann and Lessing, combined with the excavations (some would say pilferings) of Lord Elgin helped to stimulate a resurgent interest in sculpture as well as in the visual arts generally. Starting with Matthew Prior’s “Picture of Seneca Dying in a Bath: By Jordain” (1720), the period witnessed a steady industry in ekphrasis. Among the better known pieces were John Dyer’s “Epistle to a Famous Painter”, Edward Young’s “On Michael Angelo’s Famous Piece of the Crucifixion”, John Byrom’s “Verses written under a Print, representing the Salutation of the Blessed Virgin”, and Henry Hart Milman’s “The Apollo Belvedere” ” (Grant F. Scott i <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/shelley/medusa/gscott.html>; lesedato 06.09.11)

“Travelers and would-be travelers provided a growing public eager for vivid descriptions of works of art. Without any way of publishing accurate reproductions, appearances had to be conveyed through words alone. William Hazlitt, John Ruskin, and Walter Pater, to name three great 19th-century writers in English, published grand set-pieces of ekphrasis about older as well as contemporary art. For them, the fact that the object existed mattered a great deal. The goal of these Victorian writers was to make the reader feel like a participant in the visual

experience. The more convincingly this was done, the more effective the writing was judged to be. John Ruskin (1819-1900) was the most influential Victorian writer about art, famous for his impassioned defense of the painter J.M.W. Turner and his brilliant ekphrastic passages. In one of them, published in *Modern Painters* in 1843, he described Turner's *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon Coming On*, also known as *The Slave Ship* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Like Homer and Keats, Ruskin mixed specific visual details of the picture with allusions to movement and sound in his description of what the painting looked like. Unlike them, his goal was to persuade readers to believe in his imaginative understanding of an actual work of art. [Ruskin skriver:]

“It is a sunset on the Atlantic after prolonged storm; but the storm is partially lulled, and the torn and streaming rain clouds are moving in scarlet lines to lose themselves in the hollow of the night. The whole surface of the sea included in the picture is divided into two ridges of enormous swell, not high, nor local, but a low, broad heaving of the whole ocean, like the lifting of its bosom by deep-drawn breath after the torture of the storm. Between these two ridges, the fire of the sunset falls along the trough of the sea, dyeing it with an awful but glorious light, the intense and lurid splendour which burns like gold and bathes like blood. Along this fiery path and valley, the tossing waves by which the swell of the sea is restlessly divided, lift themselves in dark, indefinite, fantastic forms, each casting a faint and ghastly shadow behind it along the illumined foam. They do not rise everywhere, but three or four together in wild groups, fitfully and furiously, as the under strength of the swell compels or permits them; leaving between them treacherous spaces of level and whirling water, now lighted with green and lamp-like fire, now flashing back the gold of the declining sun, now fearfully dyed from above with the indistinguishable images of the burning clouds, which fall upon them in flakes of crimson and scarlet, and give to the reckless waves the added motion of their own fiery flying. Purple and blue, the lurid shadows of the hollow breakers are cast upon the mist of the night, which gathers cold and low, advancing like the shadow of death upon the guilty* ship as it labors amidst the lightning of the sea, its thin masts written upon the sky in lines of blood, girded with condemnation in that fearful hue which signs the sky with horror, and mixes its flaming flood with the sunlight, – and cast far along the desolate heave of the sepulchral waves, incarnadines the multitudinous sea.”

(Ruskin's note) *She is a slaver, throwing her slaves overboard. The near sea is encumbered with corpses.

Ruskin's description is overwhelming. The weather, the light, the movement of the sea, the ship seen against the sky, are made vivid by his rich use of adjectives. Ruskin drew upon an immense vocabulary, using many words that are unfamiliar today. Even his Victorian contemporaries regarded his style of writing as exceptional. It shows the influence of the King James translation of the Bible and, in this particular passage, Shakespeare. These are references that Ruskin assumed

his audience would understand, although any modern reader needs a dictionary and specialized knowledge to follow them.

It is hard to imagine that anything important has been left out of Ruskin's description. A review of the painting when it was exhibited in London in 1840, however, written by the novelist William Thackeray, makes it clear how much Ruskin ignored:

“The slaver throwing its cargo overboard is the most tremendous piece of colour that ever was seen; it sets the corner of the room in which it hangs into flame. . . . Rocks of gamboge are marked down upon the canvas; flakes of white laid on with a trowel; bladders of vermilion madly spirited here and there. Yonder is the slaver rocking in the midst of a flashing foam of white-lead. The sun glares down upon a horrible sea of emerald and purple, into which chocolate-coloured slaves are plunged, and chains that will not sink; and round these are floundering such a race of fishes as never was seen since the saeculum Pyrrhae; gasping dolphins redder than the reddest herrings; horrid spreading polypi, like huge, slimy, poached eggs, in which hapless [black slaves] plunge and disappear. Ye gods, what a ‘middle passage’!”

Thackeray's account is as vivid and detailed as Ruskin's, but sarcastic in the style of some art criticism of the period. The excesses of the language are not only entertaining, but they convey something of what certainly appeared to many like the excesses of Turner's painting. “The sun glares down upon the horrible sea of emerald and purple,” for example, suggests how extraordinary the colors seemed. “Flakes of white laid on with a trowel” combines information about color and surface with a sense of making. In fact, although Ruskin did not mention it, Turner's handling of paint and the colors he used are dramatic, remarkable aspects of the work. Mention of the “Middle Passage,” a reference to the Atlantic slave trade, directly relates Turner's picture to a contentious political issue of the time. Ruskin, by contrast, only included a note with the information that the picture showed a slave ship. In these respects, Thackeray's review is more informative than Ruskin's, even if it lacks the extraordinary imaginative reach and literary ambition of the set-piece from *Modern Painters*.

Modern writers about art have neither the number of readers nor the amount of space that Ruskin and Thackeray could assume. Furthermore, the ability to reproduce works of art in sumptuous color plates has reduced the importance of ekphrastic writing.” (Marjorie Munsterberg i <http://writingaboutart.org/pages/ekphrasis.html>; lesedato 28.09.16)

Den franske dikteren Guillaume Apollinaire skrev diktet *Vinduene* (1913) etter inspirasjon fra sin venn maleren Robert Delaunays bildeserie *Vinduene* (1912) (Cabanne 1982 s. 117). Diktet ble publisert i begynnelsen av utstillingskatalogen til

Delaunays maleriutstilling i Berlin i 1913. Apollinaire prøver å skape en verbal simultaneffekt som skal ligne virkemidlene i det eksperimentelle bildet.

Den britiske forfatteren Antonia Susan Byatts roman *The Children's Book* (2009) inneholder mange eksempler: "Særlig påfallende er den enorme mengden av såkalte *ekfraser* (kunstverkbeskrivelser)." (*Morgenbladet* 29. april – 5. mai 2011 s. 34) Den engelske forfatteren Hilary Mantels historiske roman *Wolf Hall: Fourth Estate* (2009, på norsk 2010) inneholder en nøye beskrivelse av Hans Holbeins maleri den engelske renessansepolitikeren Thomas Cromwell.

Den kroatiske forfatteren Slavenka Drakulićs bok *Frida: Et selvmords anatomi* (på norsk 2009) handler om den meksikanske maleren Frida Kahlo, og "beskriver Kahlos lidelser gjennom hennes 47 år lange liv. [...] det fortelles om Fridas liv, innskutte, kursiverte ekfraser som beskriver og tolker enkeltmalerier inn i den livsfortellingen romanen bygger opp" (*Morgenbladet* 17. – 23. juli 2009 s. 31).

Noen norske eksempler: En av den norske romantikkens mest kjente ekfraser var "Andreas Munchs "Brudéfærden" skrevet til Tidemand og Gudes motiv "Brudéfærden i Hardanger" og fremført til musikk av Halfdan Kjerulf som "aftenunderholdning" i Kunstnerforeningen i Christiania i 1849 [...]. [...] Selve hovedverket i norsk efrastikk er også et hovedverk i europeisk romantikk, Henrik Wergelands "Jan van Huysums Blomstestykke" (1840), kunne derfor bli til fordi Wergelands venn, amtmann de Thygeson på Nordre Skøyen Hovedgård, hadde dette stillebenet i sitt eie. [...] Den intime forbindelsen mellom kunstinstitusjonene og ekfrasen tegner seg tydelig allerede i tittelen i Henrik Ibsens episk-lyriske diktsekvens "I Billedgalleriet" (1859), der den kvinnelige hovedpersonen vandrer fra rom til rom i Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister i Dresden. Et av bildene hun stanser opp ved, er Correggios "Natten" [...] Kunstmuseets betydning kan kanskje best illustreres med tilblivelseshistorien til Paal-Helge Haugens *Meditasjoner over Georges de La Tour* (1990). På et opphørssalg i en bokhandel i Kristiansand i 1979 kom Haugen over et bind med La Tour-reproduksjoner, og det førte ham så til ulike museer rundt om i verden der Georges de La Tour er representert. Slik er bakgrunnen for Haugens meditative ekfraser" (Ole Karlsen i Karlsen 2011 s. 17-19).

"Den modernistiske lyrikken kjennetegnes nettopp ved selvrefleksivitet og metapoetisitet, en forholdningsmåte som lener seg mot ekfrasen som form og kunsten som motiv og tematikk." (Ole Karlsen i Karlsen 2011 s. 19)

Det finnes eksempler på ekfraser basert på abstrakte bilder, f.eks. Harald Sverdrups "Abstrakt maleri" om ett av Gunnar S. Gundersens nonfigurative bilder og Arnljot Eggen om Jan Groths billedvev *Streken* (eksempler gitt av Gunnar Danbolt i Karlsen 2011 s. 197).

Dannie og Joan Abse redigerte i 1986 verket *Voices in the Gallery: Poems & Pictures*.

En komponist kan skape et tonemaleri (“musikalsk ekfrase”) som lar vakre naturscener oppstå for lytternes indre blikk. “Composers using musical figures to represent non-musical objects and concepts employ a great variety of mimetic, descriptive, suggestive, allusive, and symbolic means. Single components (motifs or musical formulas) along with their syntactic organization, vertical texture, horizontal structure, tonal organization, and timbral coloring, are invested with communicative value.” (Siglind Brun i <http://www.eunomios.org/contrib/bruhn1/bruhn1.html>; lesedato 11.05.15)

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