

Introduction: On description

This volume results from the international interdisciplinary colloquium *On Description* (Institute of Czech Literature, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague, November 2013) which provided an opportunity for scholarly discussions among representatives of various disciplines: literary theory and history, analytic philosophy and fictionality theory, linguistics and classical philology, art history and intermedia studies. Some of the scholars involved have previously been co-operating in related fields of research: Hei-drun Führer, Bernadette Banaszkiewicz and Emma Tornborg in exploring ekphrasis, Zdeněk Hrbata, Stanislava Fedrová and Alice Jedličková inquiring into the historical poetics of intermedia landscape representations, Marián Zouhar and Petr Koťátko sharing issues in semantic theories etc. Hence the volume presents more than just conference proceedings: some of the authors decided to employ the incentives of the discussion in extended versions of their papers that encompass a significant part of their research.

The introductory paper by linguist Jana Hoffmannová (Czech Language Institute, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague) “The absent description: compensating for its evocative and identifying function” focuses on a specific kind of description which may be observed in everyday spoken communication, particularly in face-to-face dialogues. As evidenced in her illuminating and amusing exemplifications from empirical research, descriptive passages often lack explicit attribution of qualities, which are replaced by various reference devices such as indefinite or quasi-demonstrative pronouns. Nevertheless, it is the shared experience and knowledge as

well as non-verbal communicational strategies of the participants that make it possible for the description to fulfil its function.

In his contribution “The semantics of definite descriptions and identification”, Marián Zouhar (Institute of Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovak Republic) demonstrates the usage of various modes of descriptive identification as based in logical calculus, taking into account the background of individual semantic theories. Another paper taking its starting point in the field of analytic philosophy and discussing the principles of possible worlds theory, “Identificatory functions of the description in a fictional text” (by Petr Kořátko, Institute of Philosophy, ASCR, Prague) aims at explaining the relationship between the identity of fictional characters and their literary description.

In the context of modern literary theory and interart studies, ekphrasis is often defined as a particular type of description presenting a work of art in a vivid manner. In tracing the history of ekphrasis back to its ancient rhetoric roots (and thus suggesting “The trajectory of ekphrasis”), Heidrun Fühner and Bernadette Banaszekiewicz (Lunds universitet, Sweden, Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany) challenge this comprehension by emphasizing the evocative power of ekphrasis and its communicative interaction with the recipient, embraced in the notion of *enargeia*. Following the idea of suggesting an alternative approach to the frequently discussed genre of ekphrasis, Emma Tornborg (Linnéuniversitetet, Kalmar/Växjö, Sweden) takes her nodal point in current intermedia studies, and focuses on the “interartial ekphrasis” exploring it as a transformation of static visual media products into verbal representations. The title of her paper, “Time is of the essence: temporal transformation in ekphrasis” reveals that her intention is to question the traditional dichotomy between spatial (“static”) visual art and temporal (“dynamic”) verbal representation. Ekphrastic texts interpreted here provide a particular zone where the temporal aspects of visual and verbal representations seem to meet our experience of time (or of “timelessness”). A different perspective on ekphrasis is suggested by Stanislava Fedrová (Institute of Czech Literature, ASCR, Prague) in her paper “Description and its subject: through the eyes of the observer”, challenging another traditional view, the assumed “objectivity” or noninterpretative character of description by displaying a variety of observer’s perspectives in ekphrastic descrip-

tions, ranging from mere record of sensory data to rivalling methods of sophisticated interpretation.

Various forms and functions of descriptivity are explored in Zdeněk Hrbata's (Institute of Czech Literature, ASCR, Prague) contribution, its title bearing a reference to the crucial motif of "The chariot of Thespis" featuring Gautier's famous novel *Captain Fracasse*. The analysis is governed by principles of historical poetics, i.e. by taking into account the presence of generic and discursive models or their elements distributed in the novel's structure (such as *roman comique* and theatricality, novel of adventure and the journey topos). The inverse approach, which employs description not as a subject, but as a tool of historical poetics, is introduced in the study by Ivana Taranenková (Institute of Slovak Literature, SAS, Bratislava), "Towards an adequate storyworld and expression: description in slovak realist fiction". The way descriptions are structured and the presence or absence of their symbolic meanings in realist novels provides the author with subtle criteria enabling her to discern between two divergent lines of development in the realist method in Slovak 19th century fiction, and to grasp their particular qualities at the same time.

In asking "Experientiality: does it divide or link description and narration?", Alice Jedličková provides another contribution to the ongoing discussion on the narratological opposition "narrative vs. description" (questioned also in Heidrun Führer's and Bernadette Banaszekiewicz's survey). In spite of the fact that experientiality is attributed mainly to narrative as one of its crucial features, Jedličková puts Werner Wolf's claim to the test that description may also be characterized by a particular experiential (mainly sensorial) quality, and suggests that we should pay attention to the individual literary devices rendering it. Consequently, the final text retraces one of the crucial aspects introduced by the first, linguistic one: how description relates to our experience.

Alice Jedličková