

Title: The Grammar of Ekphrasis, or How to Make Pictures out of Words
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From antiquity to the present day, ekphrasis, a verbal description of a visual work of art, has remained an important and popular literary device, even though it has lost its status as an independent genre. The cause of such an intense constant demand for ekphrasis lies precisely in its “centauric” nature: it uses specificities of literature and the fine arts in order to overcome the limitations of each of them and thus to create an ideal model of art. Besides this, the introduction of visual language into a literary text allows one to organize it structurally and ideologically by establishing a hierarchy of codes.

How, then, can the visual be imitated with words? The answer to this question will be based on the analysis of Russian *Künstlerromans* of the early twentieth century: Shmelev’s “Inexhaustible Cup,” Bunin’s “The Mad Artist,” Babel’s “Pan Apolek,” Lavrenev’s “The Woodblock,” and Kaverin’s “Unknown Artist.” Besides such self-evident means as artistic terminology, optical images and references to actual art works, grammar is also employed. Since literature, according to Lessing, is a temporal art, in order to approximate the fine arts, which are spatial by nature, it has to reduce its temporality and to gain as much spatiality as possible. The former is done by consistently cutting down the number of verbs, giving preference to the compound nominal predicate and primary use of imperfective tenses. In its turn, the latter is achieved, ironically, by emphasizing what traditional pictures try to hide – the limitations of two-dimensionality and the materials. For example, in ekphrasis, adverbs and prepositions describing the relative position of objects on the flat (“above,” “below,” “to the right/left”) prevail over those describing position in space (“behind” or “in the recess”).

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