

THE FUNCTION OF PHOTOEKPHRASIS  
IN THE NOVEL *THE PHOTOGRAPH* BY PENELOPE LIVELY

As a cultural phenomenon, ekphrasis, which is the verbal representation of visual images, has a long history but as an object of scholarly research it is relatively new. Ekphrasis uses detailed, vivid verbal description of a work of visual art as a literary device which is aimed at accomplishing the writer's various aims.

One of the earliest and most commonly cited forms of ekphrasis occurs in the poem *The Iliad*, where Homer provides a long and discursive account of the elaborate scenes embossed on the shield of Achilles. There ekphrasis functions as a device to make a recreation of the shield in a reader's mind.

Another example of ekphrasis application in poetry is a 19<sup>th</sup> century poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn* by John Keats. It is a romantic ode, a dignified but highly lyrical poem in which Keats addresses the urn and the images on it.

Ekphrasis has begun to be widely used in contemporary literature, it witnesses the current literary trend for intermediality, that is interaction of the text with other media (painting, film, photography, music, etc.) Suffice it to mention such novels as Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* (1987) or Tracy Chevalier's *A Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1999) whose plots are centered round real or fictitious pictures, *What a Carve Up!* (1994) by Jonathan Coe built on parallels with a 1960s comedy horror film under the same title, or Tibor Fischer's *The Collector Collector* (1997) narrated by an ancient vase to see the productiveness of intermediality. Consequently the study of various kinds of ekphrasis is becoming more and more popular with researchers.

While most of previous research was centered round the study of interaction between a literary text and painting, the more recent fields deal with the links between literature and film, literature and music, literature and photography. Contemporary English writers frequently incorporate photo images, either real or fictitious ones, into their works. Among them are Graham Swift (*Out of this world*, 1988), Rachel Seiffert (*The Dark Room*, 2001) Jonathan Coe (*The Rain Before It Falls*, 2007) and others. Hence the relevance of photoekphrasis to the modern literary study is taking shape as an edging trend of literary or artistic research. There are many distinguished scholars and critics devoted to the study of photoekphrasis, including Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Julia Straub, Francois Brunet, Tatyana Poluektova, etc.

A notable manifestation of photoekphrasis is the novel *The Photograph* (2003) by the contemporary English writer Penelope Lively. In the novel an omniscient narrator unveils a gripping process of an investigation about an affair

and hidden personality and secrets of the protagonist Kath, narrating and depicting a photograph accidentally found by her husband. Glyn speculates on the relationship between his wife and his brother-in-law Nick, for both appeared holding each other's hand in an intimate way in the photograph. A few more photos and a painting of Kath are also discovered by Glyn, and they are playing crucial roles in the plot of the novel. They act as essential clues leading and pushing forward the plot in the uncovering process.