

# "On the Statue of Narcissus" from Callistratus's *Descriptiones Statuarum* and the Question of Representation.

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This article centres on the work of Callistratus, a sophist writing during the third and fourth centuries AD under the Roman Empire about whom little else is known. He wrote a collection of ekphraseis, a genre of writing centred on vivid description of a person, object or event. Callistratus authored *Descriptiones Statuarum*, a group of fourteen descriptions of statues from around the Roman Empire. Callistratus addresses his listeners as “ὦ νεοί”, “young men” which suggests that he read them aloud as part of his role as a teacher of rhetoric<sup>1</sup>. The aim of this article is to investigate the recurrent themes throughout the genre of ekphrasis evident in Callistratus’s interpretation of a statue of Narcissus, one of the subjects of the *Descriptiones Statuarum*. Hence, the article investigates the way in which Callistratus uses his description of the statue of Narcissus to explore key ideas and themes within his own work, ekphrasis as a genre, as well as the relationship between representation and reality. This article will discuss, firstly, a discussion of the role of emotion, most specifically pleasure, in ekphrastic as well as artistic appreciation will be undertaken. Secondly, the article will explore the complicated relationship between word and image in the genre of ekphrasis. Thirdly, with respect to the Homeric model from which Callistratus was working, there will be an identification of material as a limitation to the verisimilitude of a piece of art. Fourthly, the significance of the mirror in relation to Plato’s philosophies in ekphraseis as well as specifically how it functions in the myth of Narcissus and the context of Callistratus’s performance. Finally, the sense of illusion that Callistratus creates and plays with throughout his ekphrasis of the statue of Narcissus will be explored. This will

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<sup>1</sup> Callistratus, ‘Descriptiones Statuarum’ 5.5, ed. M. Pantelia, in *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, <<https://www.tlg.uci.edu/>> [accessed 27<sup>nd</sup> April 2015]

highlight the degree to which this under-appreciated author was in fact pushing the boundaries of his genre, using his statue of Narcissus as a centre-piece.

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## Emotion and Pleasure

Callistratus's *Descriptiones Statuarum* was an epideictic form of ekphrasis, i.e. a speech given not in a law court, but one which would be delivered simply for pleasure and display for his students as part of his or their rhetorical training. Webb and Whitmarsh, in their identification of the different uses of ekphrasis, both name epideictic as speeches which would create a sense of pleasure in the audience.<sup>2</sup> The myth of Narcissus is one that revolves around pleasure, but, this pleasure is immediately impaired by the presence of skill in the artist. Callistratus blames technique/skill (τεχνη) for having brought out the grief (λυπη) in the statue's eyes.<sup>3</sup> Within the first section of his ekphrasis, Callistratus promptly blocks the feelings of 'unmixed exultation' (ακρατως γαυρον) and 'pure joy' (ιλαρον καθαρως) that the sight of Narcissus would normally invoke in the viewer.<sup>4</sup> Much like the character of Narcissus himself, the reader/listener<sup>5</sup> is invited to look upon the tempting vision of Narcissus and admire it, despite the fact, it can only lead to their ultimate pain in the frustration that they can never truly receive the pleasure that they seek in his form. It is in this sense that the pleasure that Narcissus invokes in the viewer is not pleasure at all, but frustration and pain. In the same way that the statue of Narcissus appears to be tempted by a vision of itself, only to be met with frustration, Callistratus's reader/listener is also tempted by the pleasure of viewing the beautiful statue. Similarly, however, they are also met with frustration in the form of the pathos apparently emanating from the statue's eyes. Instead of making his ekphrasis of Narcissus an entirely sweet and pleasurable affair, the author gives it a bittersweet tone in which there is no pleasure without want and frustration. The reader/listener is also frustrated by Callistratus's occlusion of a purely visual subject behind his veil of words.

Eros is also a figure mentioned within the description of the statue of Narcissus, and indeed the two characters converge as one. Eros is mentioned twice, and is shown to be identical to Narcissus in age and clothing in both

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<sup>2</sup> Ruth Webb, 'Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice', (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009) p.76; Whitmarsh, T. *The Second Sophistic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Callistratus, 'Descriptiones Statuarum', 5.1.

<sup>4</sup> Callistratus, 'Descriptiones Statuarum', 5.1.

<sup>5</sup> For ease of comprehension, I will refer to the audience as the reader or listener interchangeably.

cases.<sup>6</sup> The statue of Narcissus is disguised as Eros, representing the deceptive love that he develops for himself. But the audience know that they cannot trust and take pleasure from this form of Eros as it is only a disguise and thus the statue's eyes reveal the reader's fate as well as its own. This raises the question whether the reader is meant to take pleasure from this ekphrasis? It has been asserted by the author that no pure pleasure came from the statue or the subject of the statue itself. Are the reader and Callistratus's *neoi*, as educated people with the benefits of *sophos* and *paideia*, intended to take more than pleasure from the ekphrasis, perhaps *katharsis*? Are they expected to realise instead, that it is the audience's own knowledge of Narcissus' story that brings them pain? Thus, Webb was not entirely correct to assert that epideictic ekphraseis are designed pleasure for the audience. This is due to the very didactic nature of ekphraseis by sophists such as Philostratus and Callistratus: they offer the audience not only pleasure, but also a lesson. Hence, Callistratus is using the myth of Narcissus to suggest to his reader/listeners that the very genre of ekphrasis is a deception in which one should not allow oneself to be caught. By thinking that words alone can give the same pleasure of appreciating art, the reader/listener is making the same mistake as Narcissus' appreciation of himself through a reflection, both of which are doomed to failure and frustration. Thus, Callistratus invites the reader to question the validity and truth of ekphrasis.

### Word and Image

This is also evident in the relationship between word and image that Callistratus's description of the statue of Narcissus provokes. As Cheeke notes in his work *Writing for Art*,

*'The first point to make then is that writing for art exists and thrives under the knowledge of failure, indeed [it] seems to be spurred on by that certainty that there is something hopeless in what it is attempting to do.'*<sup>7</sup>

It is arguable that this is due to the different dimensions in which the verbal and visual signs function, that is, time and space respectively. Lessing, for instance, argues that words are a medium for portraying events and narrative, occurrences happening over time, whereas the visual arts function within space, only able to express things in regard to form, style and colour.<sup>8</sup> It appears that this is an anachronistic theory to apply to ancient Greek art. It is wrong to think of art as exclusively acting in space, in a world in which art

<sup>6</sup> Callistratus, 'Descriptiones Statuarum' 5.1; 5.2.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Cheeke, 'Writing for Art', (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008) p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 'Laokoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry' (London: Routledge, 1850) from Internet Archive Internet Archive, ed. A. Rossi-  
<<https://archive.org/>> [accessed 27<sup>nd</sup> April 2015].

was strongly tied up with the idea of memory and memorialisation. Krieger states that art in general is a mnemonic device meant to reproduce an absent reality<sup>9</sup>, which is particularly apt with regard to the myth of Narcissus, as it is about the absent reality of Narcissus's reflection in the spring. Furthermore, Callistratus writes one of his descriptions about a statue of Paean.<sup>10</sup> As a song of praise or celebration of victory, it was directly linked with memorialisation and time. Callistratus specifically chose to write a verbal description of a visual manifestation of a verbal description of someone's accomplishments. Here Callistratus is directly emphasising that both the verbal and visual arts are valid in representing the passage of events and actions. Similarly, in his description of the statue of Paean, the narrator offers to the statue *μνημης εγγονων*, 'the offspring of memory', eliding the visual and verbal media and their similar abilities to invoke memory, a way of truncating the representation of time and narrative.<sup>11</sup>

Callistratus's choice of the word *αγαλμα* is also significant, according to Platt's differentiation between the terms *agalma* and *eikon*. Platt argues that *eikon* is a word used for 'portraits and suggests a mimetic "likeness"' whereas *agalma* refers to a statue with a ritual function, such as a representative of the divine or mythological, which ultimately represents the unrepresentable.<sup>12</sup> Callistratus titles each of his subjects an *agalma*, with the notable exceptions of *Εισ Σατυρον*, 'On the Satyr' and *Εισ την του Αθαμαντος Εικονα*, 'On the Likeness of Athamas' which are interestingly the first and last of his extant ekphraseis. Through his use of the word *agalma*, Callistratus is evoking a status for this statue beyond a simple likeness. Instead, he is giving it a semi-divine status, comparable with that of a cult statue. Like Aeneas with the *penates*, Callistratus brings home his divinity- a copy of the statue of Narcissus, transplanting it into the Hall of the Muses.

Beyond the particular words that Callistratus chooses to describe his visual subject, it is also of note that he uses words at all. When there is a perfectly good copy of the statue itself in the Hall of Muses, whose authenticity Callistratus himself can guarantee, why describe it at all? If the purpose of ekphrasis was to bring forth a picture vividly before the eyes, as Theon writes in his *Progymnasmata*, 118,<sup>13</sup> why do it when one can simply put the statue before their eyes, a vision that is reality rather than verbal artifice? If Cheeke's earlier assertion is right, that ekphrasis does function under the knowledge of its own failure, Callistratus's mentioning of his copy of the statue was to

<sup>9</sup> Murray Krieger, 'Ekphrasis' (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) p.14.

<sup>10</sup> Callistratus, 'Descriptiones Statuarum' 10.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the mix of the visual and verbal through ekphrasis, see Michael Squire, 'Image and Text in Greco-Roman Antiquity' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Verity Platt, 'Facing the Gods', (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p.189.

<sup>13</sup> Theon, 'Progymnasmata', 118, ed. M. Pantelia from *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*.

highlight the implied weaknesses and frustrations that ekphrasis holds as a genre, the verbal's ultimate failure to truly capture the visual. Again, Callistratus is purposefully drawing an analogy between the reader/listener and Narcissus. Narcissus's frustration with the visual is also the listener's frustration with the verbal, as neither audience receives what is required of their medium. Narcissus cannot attain the reciprocated love that he longs for, and the reader cannot truly behold his image through words, mirroring the very issue with ekphrasis.<sup>14</sup>

The absence of the character of Echo in the description of Narcissus is also of note, considering that, since Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, she had become a common character in the depiction of Narcissus.<sup>15</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Callistratus would have been familiar with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, including his new version of the Narcissus myth, the most notable invention being that of the bitter love triangle between Echo, Narcissus and himself. Echo, however, is mentioned as a character in the descriptions of the Satyr and Memnon. In his first description, Callistratus puts Echo in a particularly erotic setting, cowering in the embrace of Pan, 'μή τινα φθόγγον ἔμμουσον ὁ αὐλὸς κινήσας ἀντηγεῖν ἀναπέιση τῷ Σατύρῳ τὴν Νύμφην', 'in case the flute set in motion some musical throng and induce the nymph to echo a reply back to the Satyr'.<sup>16</sup> The satyr, being a mythical creature known from Classical Greece onwards as sexually aggressive and lewd, is something Callistratus would have known from satyr plays and exploits. Thus Callistratus places Echo within a highly eroticised context in the presence of a satyr, which is in direct contrast to her presence in the description of Memnon in his ninth description. Here Memnon's identity is asserted as him being a son of Tithonus, a lover of Eos, who suffered a near identical fate to Ovid's Echo. Here, she acts as she did in *Metamorphoses*, only able to repeat back what is said to her, but this time with the statue of Memnon, merely repeating his mournful or happy cries with her own.<sup>17</sup> However, Echo does not feature in Callistratus's description of Narcissus, and it is thus arguable that, as a character, she is un-representable in the plastic arts, but of course, she features in the statue group of which the satyr is a part. So why does Callistratus exclude her? One could infer that Echo is indeed present, in the form of Callistratus's very ekphrasis. Callistratus verbally echoed the visual in his ekphrasis of the statue and aligning himself with her character would also further involve the reader/listener to assume the role of Echo themselves. By making her absent, the identity of Echo becomes ambiguous; Callistratus can assume the role of Echo as he both admires the image of Narcissus whilst also verbally echoing it. Similarly, the audience can

<sup>14</sup> Jas Elsner, 'Roman Eyes' (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) p.68.

<sup>15</sup> For more on representations of Narcissus in the post-Ovidian period, see Elsner 'Roman Eyes', p.132-176.

<sup>16</sup> Callistratus, 'Descriptiones Statuarum' 1.5.

<sup>17</sup> Callistratus, 'Descriptiones Statuarum' 9.3.

identify with Echo, again as admirers of the image of Narcissus as well as future rhetoricians who will, in turn, echo the works of Callistratus. Alternatively, Echo could represent the absence of words in an image. Echo's fate was to disintegrate, like Tithonus's, to the point where she was nothing but her voice, existing purely in verbal media, whereas Narcissus became a mute flower, an object with only a visual presence, incapable of verbal expression. This is in stark contrast to the treatment of the Statue of Orpheus, whose lyre, though made of bronze, is able to produce each individual note on its strings, thus becoming vocal.<sup>18</sup> Within his discussion of the statue of Narcissus, Callistratus dramatises the distance between word and image, questioning the nature of ekphrasis as a genre. I have shown that Callistratus acknowledges the power of the image to affect time and memorialisation through his treatment and analysis of the statue of Paeon, arguing that the dichotomy put forward by Lessing cannot be applied here.

## Material

A statue or painting cannot be a man or a battle because it is made of marble and pigment, but in every other respect artifice may be treated as reality. This is suggested by the ekphraseis of Homer, later to be used again by Callistratus. Homer's most famous ekphrasis, the Shield of Achilles, an exemplum which authors such as Virgil and Catullus would later emulate, depicts a scene encompassing many subjects and themes. One is of an agricultural scene, a farmer ploughing his field:

ἦ δὲ μελαίνετ' ὄπισθεν, ἀρηρομένη δὲ ἐώκει,  
χρυσείη περ εὐῶσα: τὸ δὴ περὶ θαῦμα τέτυκτο<sup>19</sup>

*'And behind [the field] darkened, as if it had really been ploughed,  
despite being gold; such was the wonder of its crafting.'*<sup>20</sup>

The issue of material limiting imitation is mentioned, not only in the Iliad, but also in the Odyssey. Homer's ekphrastic divergence onto the subject of Odysseus's brooch also identifies its material as a limiting factor on its effectiveness to represent reality:

χλαῖναν πορφυρέην οὔλην ἔχε δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς,  
διπλῆν: αὐτὰρ οἱ περόνη χρυσοῖο τέτυκτο  
αὐλοῖσιν διδύμοισι: πάροιθε δὲ δαίδαλον ἦεν:

<sup>18</sup> Callistratus, 'Descriptiones Statuarum' 7.2

<sup>19</sup> Homer, 'Iliad', 18.548/9, ed. G.R.Crane, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920) from *Perseus Digital Library 4.0*, ed. G.R. Crane- <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>> Accessed 27<sup>nd</sup> April 2015

<sup>20</sup> Own translation.

ἐν προτέροισι πόδεσσι κύων ἔχε ποικίλον ἔλλον,  
 ἀσπαίροντα λάων: τὸ δὲ θαυμάζεσκον ἅπαντες,  
**ὡς οἱ χρύσειοι ἐόντες** ὁ μὲν λάε νεβρὸν ἀπάγχων,  
 αὐτὰρ ὁ ἐκφυγέειν μεμαῶς ἤσπαιρε πόδεσσι.<sup>21</sup>

*'Godly Odysseus was wearing a double-ply, purple woolly cloak  
 but the brooch was wrought of gold with a double clasp  
 and on the front it was detailed: in his front paws a dog  
 held a spotted fawn, gripping it as it struggled.  
 Everyone marvelled at it, and **although it was golden,**  
 it held the fawn, strangling it as it struggled with its feet,  
 eagerly trying to escape.'*<sup>22</sup>

Homer seems intent on breaking the illusion of his subject matter's verisimilitude by mentioning its artificial nature through the identification of its material. However, in both cases he does this to highlight the quality of the craftsmanship and overall effect of the art: 'such was the wonder of its crafting' that 'everyone marvelled at it.' Homer asserts the material of the object, only to strengthen the appeal and sense of wonder one should feel for it. It is known that Callistratus was influenced by the Shield of Achilles as in his ekphrasis of the statue of Orpheus, and indeed he makes direct allusion to it by referencing the Bear star, which has no share in the baths of Ocean.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly to Homer, Callistratus only mentions the material of the statue when it would have the most effect on the listener in their appreciation of its beauty. The first mention of the statue of Narcissus's material ('λίθος' stone, normally translated as marble) is in the first sentence:

Ἄλσος ἦν καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ κρήνη πάγκαλος ἐκ  
 μάλα καθαροῦ τε καὶ διαυγοῦς ὕδατος, εἰστήκει δὲ  
 ἐπ' αὐτῇ Νάρκισσος ἐκ λίθου πεποιημένος<sup>24</sup>

*'There was a grove in which there was an exceedingly beautiful spring,  
 with especially pure and translucent water, and by this had been set up a  
 Narcissus made out of marble.'*<sup>25</sup>

Here, Callistratus simultaneously asserts the statue's identity as *a* Narcissus - as opposed to a statue *of* Narcissus- and the artificiality of the statue through

<sup>21</sup> Homer, 'Odyssey', 19.225-231, ed. Murray, (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1919) from *Perseus Digital Library 4.0*.

<sup>22</sup> Own translation.

<sup>23</sup> Callistratus, 'Descriptiones Statuarum' 7.3; Homer, 'Iliad'. 18.487-9

<sup>24</sup> Callistratus, 'Descriptiones Statuarum' 5.1.

<sup>25</sup> Own translation.

the assertion of its material, reinforced by the word *πεποιημένος*, ‘made’. He also contrasts the artificial beauty of the stone Narcissus with the natural beauty of the water. Thus, from this first sentence, the reader/listener is invited to compare the natural beauty of the spring and the artificial beauty of the statue.

A more prominent moment of Callistratus drawing out the tension between material and subject occurs in 5.3, where he writes:

ἢ  
 μὲν γὰρ λίθος ὅλη πρὸς ἐκεῖνον μετηλλάττετο τὸν ὄντως παῖδα, ἢ  
 δὲ πηγὴ πρὸς τὰ ἐν τῇ λίθῳ  
 μηχανήματα τῆς τέχνης ἀντηγωνίζετο ἐν ἀσωμάτῳ σχήματι τὴν ἐ-  
 κ σώματος ἀπεργαζομένη τοῦ  
 παραδείγματος ὁμοιότητα καὶ τῷ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνας  
 κατερχομένῳ σκιάσματι οἷον τινὰ σάρκα τὴν τοῦ  
 ὕδατος φύσιν περιθεῖσα.<sup>26</sup>

*‘For whereas the marble was trying in every way to change the real boy to match the one in the spring, the spring was competing with the contrivances of art in the stone: to express perfectly a bodily form in a bodiless medium, subsuming the reflection so as to place within the water the nature of flesh.’<sup>27</sup>*

Here Callistratus directly compares the efforts of the artist with that of a spring’s in their ability to create a likeness of Narcissus. Although highlighting the materials of each, the competition of copying between the water and the stone exaggerates the final product’s quality and ability to take the place of the original. Finally, the last time that the material of the statue is mentioned shows how the very qualities of the material adapt to the subject matter:

τὸ δὲ οὐδε λόγῳ ῥητὸν λίθος εἰς ὑγρότητα  
 κεχαλασμένος καὶ ἐναντίον σῶμα τῇ οὐσίᾳ παρεχόμενος: στερε-  
 ωτέρας γὰρ  
 τετυχηκῶς φύσεως τρυφερότητος ἀπέστελλεν αἴσθησιν εἰς ἀ-  
 ραῖόν τινα σώματος ὄγκον διαχεόμενος.<sup>28</sup>

*‘There are no words to describe how the stone loosened to give a body in opposition to its own state. For it was naturally very hard, yet gave off a sense of softness, dissolving into a body of more slender mass.’<sup>29</sup>*

<sup>26</sup> Callistratus, ‘Descriptiones Statuarum’ 5.3.

<sup>27</sup> Own translation.

<sup>28</sup> Callistratus, ‘Descriptiones Statuarum’ 5.5

<sup>29</sup> Own translation.

In this example Callistratus goes one step further to say how the working of the stone has inexplicably changed its most basic properties. By giving the stone art, the artist has changed the very fabric of the stone. This device is similarly employed in *Descriptiones* 1.3, where the satyr's marble veins appear to be filling with air. Here, Callistratus goes beyond the Homeric model. No longer constrained by its material, the subject of Callistratus's ekphrasis breaks the limits of its materiality and gains a position above art to something greater and closer to nature.

### The Mirror

The mirror features significantly in the art of the ancient world. Plato, in his *Republic*, discusses the mirror and its relationship with artifice:

*'Or do you not perceive that you yourself would be able to make all these things in a way?' "And in what way, I ask you," he said. "There is no difficulty," said I, "but it is something that the craftsman can make everywhere and quickly. You could do it most quickly if you should choose to take a mirror and carry it about everywhere.'*<sup>30</sup>

What Socrates and Glaucon are discussing here is the very nature of imitation and reflection. They proceed to hypothesise on the nature of the reflection and how it is an imitation of things, as they appear to be. Callistratus may be using Plato's discussion in conjunction with the Narcissus myth to further question the validity of even the mirror as an agent of representation. Especially when seen in light of the competition between stone and water to create a likeness of the statue, as discussed above, the mirror comes under direct analysis in Callistratus's description. Both Plato and Callistratus identify the mirror as identical to the artist, as both only represent appearances, not necessarily reality. According to Plato, the poet can also only be called an imitator, like the artist and mirror. Callistratus seems to be using the ideas discussed in this section of Plato's *Republic* to argue the validity of artistic representation in both visual and verbal media. He equalises the position of both visual and verbal media in their attempts at representing reality: they are both inadequate. Both are only able to represent an imitation of reality, the third creator in Plato's hierarchy of creators, God being the first, the creator second (carpenter in his analogy) and the artist third, each further removed from the ideal.<sup>31</sup> Callistratus simultaneously validates and degrades his own efforts as an author of an ekphrasis with this discussion: validating his alignment with artists according to Plato's hierarchy. Callistratus constructs himself as equally capable of representing Narcissus as the sculptor or the mirror, whilst also

<sup>30</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 10.596d trans. J. Adam, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902) from *Perseus Digital Library* 4.0.

<sup>31</sup> Plato, 'Republic', 10.597a-598c, trans. Adam.

demoting the entire profession of poet/artists by making it clear that all artists can hope to do is imitate things as they appear to be.

Thus, the mirror, like realism, is in pursuit of the ultimate deceit: making its viewer believe that it is in fact reality and not an image at all. Elsner neatly summarises the two main deceits that Narcissus is prey to within his story; ‘first, Narcissus believes absolutely that the image he loves is *real*, and second, he fails to see that the image reflected in the pool, which he takes to be real, is in fact himself.’<sup>32</sup> The statue of Narcissus in Callistratus’s *Descriptiones* is unaware of the Platonic assertion of the mirror’s artificiality, treating the image of itself in the spring as reality, tricked much like Zeuxis and the birds in the episode of Pliny’s *Natural History* where the birds peck at Zeuxis’s painted grapes and then Zeuxis attempts to pull back the curtain, painted by Parrhasius.<sup>33</sup> The mise-en-abyme set up by the author as well as Philostratus in *Imagines* 1.23 invites the audience to reflect on the admiration between Narcissus and his image. They also portray their own admiration of the statue in the narrative, Callistratus’s statue in the Hall of the Muses as well as his description of the statue. What does it mean for the reader/listener to take pleasure in any of these representations? Is the reader assuming the role of Narcissus in that they are to falsely take pleasure in these tricks of stone and word? Surely their deception should be one stage more severe, for, if the reader feels admiration for the image of Narcissus, s/he is falling for a representation of a representation, unlike Narcissus, who falls for a simple reflection at only one remove from the original. Being twice removed from the original again puts the reader, in Platonic terms, in the artist’s position, unable to access the original ideal and only able to represent its appearance in their mind. Pausanias’s description of the sanctuary of Despoina and Demeter in Lykosoura similarly uses a mirror to highlight the status of the artwork it reflects.

*‘On the right as you go out of the temple there is a mirror fitted into the wall. If anyone looks into this mirror, he will see himself very dimly indeed or not at all, but the actual images of the gods and the throne can be seen quite clearly.’*<sup>34</sup>

Platt interprets this as a way for the viewer to see something closer to the real god through the agency of the mirror; only ‘by perceiving the gods indirectly, via a reflection, one can actually see them clearly (ἐναργῶς)’.<sup>35</sup> Is Callistratus’s

<sup>32</sup> Elsner, ‘Roman Eyes’ p.137.

<sup>33</sup> Pliny the Elder, ‘Natural History’ 35.36, trans. W. Bostock, (London: Taylor and Francis, 1855) from *Perseus Digital Library* 4.0.

<sup>34</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 8.37.7, trans. W.H.S. Jones, (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1918) from *Perseus Digital Library* 4.0.

<sup>35</sup> Platt, ‘Facing the Gods’, p.222.

ekphrasis acting like this mirror, allowing the reader/listener to view in their minds the statue of Narcissus? By not viewing the visual directly, but indirectly, the audience is finally able to visualise something that by definition is impossible (in fact fictional, mythological and legendary) to visualise: Narcissus's beauty incarnate. Callistratus thus makes his work the mirror in which his readers can see Narcissus. Thus, Callistratus aims to make the reader question the role of ekphrasis and its relationship with its subject.

## Illusion

Finally, the article will examine illusion, which is the primary goal of an ekphrasis as the reader/listener is intended to see the object vividly before their eyes, despite its absence. But like many ekphraseis, the very existence of the original subject is under question. The armour of Achilles and Odysseus's brooch probably never existed and almost certainly were never seen by Homer (whoever that may be). Similarly, the subjects of the ekphraseis of Virgil and Catullus were also fictional, only existing in the minds of their authors. What does it mean, then, to write a description of an object that only exists in the author's mind for the purpose of placing it within the mind's eye of another? This is an idea further expanded upon and exploited through Callistratus's description of a statue of *Kairos* or Opportunity. Opportunity, of course, lacks a visible manifestation, but is afforded one by the artist, only to be denied this physicality through its description in words.<sup>36</sup> In the case of the statue of Narcissus, the object may never have existed, and was only given a presence through the medium of words. Callistratus confuses the status of the original statue as, according to the last lines of *Descriptiones* <sup>5</sup>, he himself brings back a copy of it, placing it in the Hall of the Muses:

τοῦτον θαυμάσας, ὧ νέοι, τὸν Νάρκισσον καὶ εἰς ὑμᾶς παρήγαγον  
εἰς Μουσῶν αὐλήν ἀποτυπωσάμενος. ἔχει δὲ ὁ λόγος, ὡς καὶ ἡ  
εἰκὼν εἶχεν.<sup>37</sup>

*'The Narcissus was so amazing, gentlemen, that copying it, I brought it  
back for you to the Hall of the Muses. This description is such as to agree  
with the statue.'*<sup>38</sup>

Assuming that the original statue did in fact exist, and Callistratus did acquire a copy of it, the purpose of the ekphrasis is in question: why write a description when a copy is available? Callistratus is able once again to put the visual and verbal media in direct comparison. The reader is invited to compare the validity of each of the author's reproductions of the statue, whilst being

<sup>36</sup> Callistratus, *Descriptiones Statuarum* 6.

<sup>37</sup> Callistratus, *Descriptiones Statuarum* 5.5.

<sup>38</sup> Own translation.

conscious of their status as mere reproductions. However, if Callistratus was self-consciously following in the footsteps of his predecessors, of which he was undoubtedly aware, he was probably describing a statue that existed solely in his mind. Indeed, Krieger writes that ‘no wonder the object of such an *ekphrasis* (the shield, the urn) cannot be found: it could not exist, if it was to satisfy all the actions that we are told are being pictured on it.’<sup>39</sup> Indeed, no statue could have radiated light or shown perception and marble cannot change its properties due to its subject matter as Callistratus describes.<sup>40</sup> If the reader is to believe this, then the understanding of Callistratus’s copy and his ekphrasis of the statue must receive drastic ontological redefinition. If no original existed, then the ekphrasis and the copy simultaneously become the original, as the first evidence of the statue’s existence. Conversely, due to their identification by Callistratus as a ‘description’ or ‘copy’, they should also be thought of as one stage removed from the original. Thus, Callistratus’s two creations, the ekphrasis and the copy, must be thought of as originals *and* reproductions simultaneously. But associated with this idea is the fact that art cannot be the original, instead needing to copy something. Has Callistratus, through his complicated web of overlapping representations made art reality, no longer a Platonic ‘imitation’ but instead made something as it is? Sharrock states that ‘the role of realist art is not to be ‘real’ but to be artfully ‘realistic’. Art which is real has failed as art.’<sup>41</sup> Thus, Callistratus has failed in his artistic pursuit by not imitating but creating, putting himself on par with Plato’s carpenter. Due to the dualistic ontological nature of the copy and the ekphrasis, they both become their own subject and object. Their relationship with themselves is similar to that experienced by Narcissus throughout the narrative of the original myth. Goldhill notes how his own gaze places Narcissus and his reflection in both the active and passive roles.<sup>42</sup> Through the power of the erotic gaze, Narcissus at once becomes himself and his copy, sharing his status with his reflection and vice versa. Elsner characterises Narcissus as a hermaphrodite, simultaneously adopting the role of male and female, active and passive, and in his relationship with himself he is thus the object of his own objectifying gaze.<sup>43</sup> So, Callistratus’s copy and his ekphrasis, as well as Narcissus and his reflection, have a Narcissistic relationship with themselves, being their own object and subject of admiration. Thus Callistratus involves the audience in the matrix of relationships that the mirror creates through his ekphrasis.

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<sup>39</sup> Krieger, ‘Ekphrasis’, p.XVI.

<sup>40</sup> Callistratus, *Descriptiones Statuarum* 5.1; 5.4; 5.5.

<sup>41</sup> Alison Sharrock, ‘Representing Metamorphosis’ in *Art and Text in Roman Culture*, ed. J. Elsner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.104.

<sup>42</sup> Simon Goldhill, (2001) ‘The Erotic Eye’ in *Being Greek under Rome*, ed. S. Goldhill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p.186.

<sup>43</sup> Elsner , ‘Roman Eyes’, p.148.

## Concluding Remarks

To conclude, this article has argued that Callistratus has used the genre of epideictic ekphrasis in conjunction with the myth of Narcissus to comment on his own work, the genre of ekphrasis in general, as well as the nature of the relationship between imitation and reality. This article examined, firstly, the role of pleasure in ekphrasis. Juxtaposing it with the bittersweet fate that Narcissus is destined for, Callistratus invites the audience to question the role of ekphrasis as a genre of literature. Secondly, the way in which Callistratus dramatised the relationship between word and image was examined through a redefinition of the traditional modern dichotomy between the realms of word and image in time and space respectively, at least in Callistratus's work, due to the image's importance in memorialisation and his prayer to Paeon. Furthermore, the author highlights the weaknesses of ekphrasis as a genre and the inherent failure and frustration the writer and reader/listener must face. This was followed by a discussion of the significance of the apparent absence of Echo in his description of the statue and the ramifications that this has on the discussion of text and image. The article then assessed the methods by which Callistratus created a sense of wonder for his subject through the Homeric assertion of the object's materiality. However, Callistratus then subverts this Homeric technique, stating how his subject transcends its material, surpassing the possibilities of art. Through its interaction with Plato's ideas, Callistratus's work discusses the relationship between the mirror and imitation as well as the effects on reality that reflected perception has. Lastly, the consequences of the existence of the original statue were analysed. This raised ontological issues regarding Callistratus's copy and the ekphrasis itself, leading to the Narcissistic relationship that both the ekphrasis and the copy have with themselves. These analyses can give us a greater understanding of the way in which authors of ekphrasis in the ancient world were interacting and conceptualising the art that they create as well as that around them.