

# Experientiality: does it divide or link description and narration?\*

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## Yes to “dynamization” of description; no to “descriptivization” of narration

The range of explications in this volume clearly illustrates how understanding of description varies in accordance with the position from which each of these “descriptions of description” is made. From the stylistic standpoint, description defined as a textual type involves a complete listing of the characteristics of the object described, research into everyday spontaneous dialogues indicates that there is something like a “descriptive function” that can be successfully deployed both without a systematic listing and without the direct identification of the object’s attributes, but just by using a very limited repertoire of compensatory linguistic devices – on the basis of shared experience and knowledge of the participants in communication.<sup>1</sup> Whereas both Czech stylistics and historical poetics standardly work with the concept of the *dynamization of description* (cf. Krčmová 2008: 115), expressing the overcoming of initial “staticity” through the subjectivization of the perspective and the introduction of eventfulness, text-oriented narratology, which takes the opposition between both textual types as a possible basis for the definition of narrative (description is what *suspends the flow of narrative*, thus reducing reader’s suspension) robustly resists the concept of the “narrativization” of description – with the argument that after all, in that

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1 See the paper by Jana Hoffmannová in this publication, pp. 10–20.

case there would be no point in distinguishing between description and narration (cf. Ronen 1997: 279). Most narratologically-based definitions of description, whose determining parameter is the represented object, predictably places the stress on the *spatial distribution* and hence the simultaneity of the *objects* and their *attributes*. Here is an example from Gerald Prince's *Dictionary of Narratology*: "Description is the representation of objects, situations or (nonpurposeful, nonvolitional) events in their spatial rather than temporal existence, their topological rather than chronological functioning, their simultaneity rather than their succession" (1987: 14)<sup>2</sup>. However, an alternative intermedia approach shows that the dominance of the "coexistence of things" in descriptive representations does not mean that the chronological aspect cannot be deployed in a meaningful way.<sup>3</sup>

Hence it might well appear that the variety of views on the definition of description tends towards disparity, thus helping to confirm the view that we might as well give up on distinguishing description from narration. However, as the present philosophical papers also testify, this would be rather a pity with regard to the modes of constructing the individual components of a fictional world. To clarify our image and understanding of description it is enough to focus attention on which aspects of any given type of representation appear dominant. Let us take the quoted example of the dictionary definition given by narratologist Gerald Prince: despite his preference for objects or their spatial constellations as the subjects of description he admits that the representation of happenings not associated with any human intention (e.g. repeating natural processes) is more to do with *descriptive components* in the construction of a fictional world. Another narratologist, Monika Fludernik (1996), again sees the *main* subject of *narrative* representation in *intentional action* and the experience of time from a *subjective perspective*. The predominant representation of static objects (*description*) and dynamic actions and events (*narrative*) sufficiently distinguishes both modes of representation to enable them to be called autonomous. And it is possible to deal with the intersection of the set of texts employing narrative and descriptive strategies with the aid of the more subtle criteria for

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2 Cf. also Herman – Jahn – Ryan (2005: 101): "Description is a text-type which identifies the properties of places, objects or persons (see EXISTENT)".

3 Cf. the paper by Emma Tornborg in this volume, pp. 76–96.

their intentionality (as presented e.g. by Fludernik). We might then more precisely determine the potential opposition that arises here with the aid of the notions of *action*, which is exclusively narrated, and *happening* (such as natural processes), which may be described as well.<sup>4</sup> Werner Wolf, who endeavours to provide a theoretical basis for description that is not subject to narrow narratological or somewhat prescriptive stylistic requirements, but to a broader *intermedia* perspective, emphasizes that when defining a text type it is desirable to combine the criteria *object of representation*, *function* and *formal devices*. Whereas Wolf says that narrative “consists of actantional representations implying motivated and (e.g. causally and teleologically) meaningful changes of situations” (Wolf 2007: 33), description provides representations with an “existence”. Hence descriptions do not require changes in the situation as an essential element<sup>5</sup> and cannot in themselves be the suspension providers (though they may contribute towards the suspension in the narrative), and nor do they aim teleologically for a particular objective. The objects of description are concrete phenomena that can be fictitious or real, but are all represented with noticeable emphasis their sensory appearance. They are frequently static (spatial) and visual, but dynamic (temporal) objects can also be relevant” (ibid.: 35).

Although temporality appears to be one of the dominant features of narration, Wolf holds the view that it cannot be entirely excluded from the sphere of description either. However, we should be more precise: for Fludernik does not speak of mere temporality, but of the “experience of time” – in logical association with the fact that narrative is ascribed a fundamental role in dealing with human experience in general: she believes that narration is a “quasi-mimetic evocation of ‘real-life experience’” (Fludernik 1996: 98). Hence she sees *experientiality* as a kind of essence of experience in the very basis of narration. Does it mean that we may be able to ascribe this experiential aspect to narrative as an exclusive attribute?

Werner Wolf does not believe it is possible to deny experientiality to descriptions either, or at least to those descriptions which are successful or

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4 Further explication may be found also in Aumüller 2007.

5 Of course this does not mean that a description would exclude any depiction of changes.

effective.<sup>6</sup> He says that the experientiality of narration allows readers above all to “co-experience” or “re-experience” the events in which the characters are involved and it has the capacity to evoke in them the short-term feeling that they are re-centred in a storyworld, while striking descriptions again have the capacity to evoke a vivid image in the reader’s mind. In this sense they may elicit the feeling “of being ‘close’ to the phenomena described” (Wolf 2007: 14). If narration imitates and suggests the experience of action in time, then description operates primarily as an imitation or as a “substitute for *sensory experience*” with fictional objective reality (ibid.; highlighted by AJ). References to phenomena in the fictional world are made thanks to (often paradigmatically structured) *attributions* of a wide range of *qualities*, particularly those perceptible through the senses, and often “surface details”, which highlight the physical being of objects. The *experientiality of description* is thus anchored according to Wolf in the plasticity of representation, i.e. in the capacity of description to evoke a vivid (primarily visual) mental image.

Based on the expositions of both theoreticians it would seem that the category of experientiality as such is shared both by description and narration, i.e. it can hardly be used as a yardstick to draw a clear dividing line between narration and description. However, its proposed functions differ for description and narration; because Wolf does not go into too much detail over its function in the case of description, the interesting possibility arises of identifying the descriptive elements that contribute to the experiential function.

### ***The other one was a slim, beardless, ruddy-cheeked young man...***

#### **Paradigmatic description**

Let us first base ourselves on examples that we can consider to be more or less adequate application of model or “prototypical”<sup>7</sup> description, which is

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6 Here, a typical evaluation category of Anglo-American fiction criticism, i.e. the category of “good” or “successful” narrative or description has affected Wolf’s definition; what we can deduce from its introduction is the finding that experientiality may not be considered a constitutive characteristic of every description.

7 The concept of the prototypical description is introduced in his *Brown Book* (1934–1935) not as the subject of investigation, but merely as an aid in examining ways to describe experience, or the feeling of “familiarity” by Ludwig Wittgenstein: “In saying this, one takes as *the prototype*

usually ascribed staticity (identification of the state of a thing or states of things), the construction of an object from its individual parts and the attribution of qualities, plus the construction of the simultaneity of these things and their qualities, and – if it is at all taken into account – an anonymous (and thus “objectivizing”) observational subject.

This kind of “prototypical description”, which “pieces together” the object being described from its individual components and qualities often proceeds in accordance with an easily identifiable paradigm. Again this is mostly based on the internal hierarchy of the object and from the way objects of the same class are usually arranged in the cognitive process and the typical way they are observed. For example, an individual is first characterized in general from his or her overall appearance (based on gender, physique and clothing, which enables us to identify social background and the like), and then “scanned” from head to toe. This approach is displayed in Karel V. Rais’s novel *Zapadlí vlastenci* (Backwood Patriots, 1894), which describes the arrival of a young assistant teacher Karel Čermák at his new place of work, small village Pozdětín located in the mountains, accompanied by an old farmer. The description of both characters systematically copies the initial scheme (physique, face, headwear, clothing and footwear) and the qualities described are primarily contrasting (the thickset old farmer in his old-fashioned country fur coat, and the slim young man in his city clothes, which are inappropriate for the mountains). Hence a paradigm is introduced which is then repeated in subsequent descriptions, i.e. those which correlate two characters, whether drawing attention to what connects or what separates them. Descriptions of characters maintain certain constants: e.g. the narrator almost always also mentions the state of their clothing, implicitly indicating that the characters are most frequently people who are perhaps not explicitly poor, but not wealthy and always very frugal, or who

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*of a description*, say, the description of a table, which tells you the exact shape, dimensions, the material which it is made of, and its colour. Such a description, one might say, *pieces the table together*. There is on the other hand a different kind of description of a table, such as you might find in a novel, e.g., “It was a small, rickety table decorated in Moorish style, the sort that is used for smoker’s requisites.” Such a description might be called an indirect one; but if the purpose of it is to bring a vivid image of the table before your mind in a flash, it might serve this purpose incomparably better than a detailed ‘direct’ description”, [http://wab.uib.no/cost-a32/Ts-310\\_alter.html](http://wab.uib.no/cost-a32/Ts-310_alter.html) [accessed 31. 1. 2014], highlighted by AJ.

have no concern for their garb due to more weighty matters, as in the case of the parish priest. Thus we see such phrases as “his heavy winter shoe of shabby lambskin with bows that were now badly worn”, “the collar of his short yellow fur coat, the shaggy piping of which was already heavily matted”, “a cap with a broken peak” and the like. (Other examples from novels by Rais’s contemporaries<sup>8</sup> persuade us that the image of the kind-hearted farmer in the threadbare fur coat and the shabby cap are among the practically “obligatory” *topoi* of the realist country novel.) Any variation or de-automation of the descriptive scheme consist primarily in the extent to which it is implemented: some descriptions can be somewhat abridged in relation to the paradigm, as we see for example in the following example describing two members of the local “confraternity of literati” (a church singer’s association) from the same novel:

A duet sung by the two old male voices rang out from the literati Šmokřil and Petruška. They were sitting on the first bench just to the left of the organ, they had the Nightingale of Paradise hymn book open on the lectern, and as they sang with all their might, both of them had their eyes half closed and their heads drooping to their shoulders: Petruška to the right and Šmokřil to the left.

Šmokřil was small, squat and balding in a large blue overcoat with many collars and a yellow clasp at the front. Stooped, he almost seemed to vanish in his coat as his tenor voice bleated.

Petruška was a giant of a man with a balding head and long grey hair falling from his crown to the collar of his short yellow fur coat, the shaggy piping of which was now heavily matted. He had large, strong legs and was shod in high well-oiled boots, overhung by tassels of his thick leather pants, which made his legs look like pillars. He sang bass – every syllable gurgling in his throat.

(Rais 1958: 27)

As opposed to the initial description of one of the main characters Čermák, the subsequent narrative primarily presents the contrasting secondary

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8 The description then becomes a fulfilment not only of a literary convention, but also a cultural one (the idea or image of a peasant which raises readers’ expectations). Cf. e.g. Jirásek’s *U nás* (Round Our Way, 1929: 147).

characters, who stand out due to some dominant psychological feature or a tendency towards specific behaviour and conduct (Šmokřil is a smug grouch, while Petruška is rather spiteful). The resulting character depiction can be placed somewhere between a sketch of a unique individual and an entertaining illustrative representation of a human type, which together form an image of a village community.<sup>9</sup> “Announcement of a character” by means of speech or song is a strategy favoured by Rais: the young niece of the priest’s housekeeper Albina is first presented through a song (with a characteristically girl’s theme) heard from behind a door which the girl opens suddenly, little suspecting more company in the room – and she blushes almost as red as her prim striped dress with fright and shame. This is not an individualizing portrait even in this case. The description is closely linked in with the dual effect of the character’s entry, subject to the current situation and the social rules: all those in the room turn their attention to the nimble young girl in the prominent dress, while she herself takes fright from the unexpected audience. The way her fresh appearance is described corresponds to the extent to which her characterization is subsequently given: this always only takes place in dependence on the way her affection for the assistant teacher develops, so that her attributes remain her simple grace and above all her kind-heartedness and her weakness for touching love stories, whether real, as experienced by her aunt, or as narrated by the popular sentimental ballad at that time “Vnislav and Běla”. The depth of psychological characteristics classifies Albina, much alike the other females, rather as a secondary character. In terms of the narrative structure it can surely be said that it is the love affair with the temporary separation of the lovers and the traditional class and financial obstacles which is the weight-bearing element in the narrative arc, as well as the one that draws the attention of Rais’s “mainstream” reader, offering him a happy ending with the promise of marriage and above all a good position in the region where the assistant teacher

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9 Only the teacher Čížek is “portrayed” like that with great thoroughness in a truly individualized way: however, the reason is not based in the internal structure of the text, but more on the author’s intention to compare as much as possible the character’s physiognomy to his real prototype, the teacher, author, violin maker and musician Věnceslav Metelka, whose diaries Rais used in writing the novel, and whose memory he wished to celebrate, alongside the patriotic endeavours of other “national awakeners” among the teachers and the priests. – This same portraying effort is also evident in the illustrations by Adolf Kašpar depicting the teacher.

has become integrated, both in the social and the intimate spheres. However, the actual subject of representation here is the revivalist activities and experience of the mountain patriots represented chiefly by the teacher and the priest. Evidently, thus, the individual realizations of the descriptive procedures here are not exclusively matters of authorial style (or the narrative diction of the individual novel) understood primarily in the linguistic sense. They are frequently realized to an extent corresponding both to the role of the character in the story and to the “furnishing”<sup>10</sup> of the fictional world.

The descriptions of the interiors are also paradigmatic in *Zapadlí vlastenci*, as space is normally “read” from left to right and “composed” in accordance with spatial polarities, as is the case, for example, of the description of the teachers’ room or the priest’s little room, which is jovially referred to by its occupier as the “residence” and is furnished for the most part with numerous bird cages. The paradigmatic nature of the description may also depend to some extent on the “house philosophy”: these functional little rooms are basically subject to a certain order of life and its rationale. A certain systematic order predominates in both households. Nevertheless, among the depictions of the landscape, which in this novel are for the most part panoramic with the focus on phenomena associated with the season and the time of day (e.g. in the early spring wanderings of the Pozdětín musicians to Větrov, Chapter 10, pp. 153–154), we of course also find the onset of perceptual mimetism or “perspectivized observation”.<sup>11</sup>

Examples of paradigmatic descriptions of characters structured in a similar way to the introductory example can predictably be found in a number of other realist works, but this never justifies us in identifying a paradigmatic description with some kind of realist prototype. For example, in Jirásek’s “new chronicle” *U nás* (Round Our Way, 1897–1904) a procedure based on a diffuse attribution of qualities, i.e. their “assignment” to individual references regarding the character’s current activity, particularly that which is characteristic of their nature or living situation (traditional Czech stylistics would thus evaluate this case rather as an “indirect characterization”) is more frequent than the above mentioned “concentrated” paradigmatic

<sup>10</sup> The expression “furnishing” is there derived from Umberto Eco’s term *furnished world* (cf. Eco 1997: 626).

<sup>11</sup> Likewise the paper by Stanislava Fedrová deals with this subject, cf. 97–115 in this volume.

descriptions. The scene is always fully under the control of the omniscient third-person narrator, but there is almost always another character present here as well: The individual being described then finds himself in the latter character's field of vision, so this character is implicitly ascribed the capacity to observe. In several cases one of the primary characters (e.g. Father Havlovický) at various points notices the individual characteristics of the other person (e.g. old Plšek, the Evangelic), which are then associated with the imparted information and accompanied by an assessment, or he becomes aware of the already known characteristics of the other person in a particular situation. The motivation behind this process is not only based in the narrative, but also cognitively based: in everyday experience among people we only have the opportunity to meet or glimpse fleetingly we often first notice some outstanding feature that suffices to identify the person in question, and it is only when we meet or observe them again that we discover some other element in their appearance or we bolster our knowledge with a characteristic phenomenon in their behaviour, e.g. their speech. The distribution of information presented by the narrator and his intentions thus sets a certain parallel to the ongoing acquisition of information in our own experience in the actual world. Notice here that an image mediated by a description – in the sense of the attribution of a set of qualities “piecing together the object of the description” – thus emerges from the successive experiences of one of the characters. Hence this means that a description acquires an experiential nature: not of course through the sensory aspect of the perception of objects, their qualities and details or the detail itself (as Wolf emphasizes), but through the explicit “temporalization” of the attribution process, i.e. its association to the characters' experience taking place over time.

### ***The full glow that fell on her...* Temporalization of attributes and atmosphere**

An even more subtle variant is the association of temporality with the attributes themselves, i.e. the thematization of their temporary nature<sup>12</sup> whenever the object is not ascribed permanent, but merely “momentarily ap-

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12 Here we come close to the issue dealt with in the paper by Emma Thornborg (see pp. 76–96) on the temporality of ekphrasis.

pearing” attributes, i.e. those which might appear differently or less clearly in other circumstances or to another observer. This may be clearly illustrated by a passage from the second volume of Jirásek’s chronicle *F. L. Věk* (1890–1907): after a prolonged absence the protagonist comes to visit the Butteaus – and is unpleasantly surprised by the fact that Mrs Butteauová has not informed his friend Thám of the visit, as well as appalled by the poor family circumstances and disappointed by Paula’s embitterment following her son’s death, which has evidently also affected her relations with Thám and her previous patriotic sentiments. However, at first the protagonist is affected by the atmosphere staged by Mrs Butteauová, who brings him into the unlit apartment and in the darkened room promises the brooding Paula a surprise – an unexpected guest. The actual image of the long unseen Paula then suddenly appears to Věk in the light struck by her mother:

The bluish glow of ignited sulphur flickered in the darkness. Its odour could be smelled as the candle burst into flame and its sudden light illuminated Thám’s young wife standing in the middle of the other room, slim, well-proportioned, in a white cap and with a black lace scarf loosely tied round her throat and hanging down over her bosom. Her face was pale and slender, the full glow that fell on her casting a shadow beneath her perceptible cheekbone. And due to this gauntness her mouth appeared larger than it was, as did her beautiful eyes that gazed enquiringly into the first room. Her face displayed fatigue and anxiety, but her overall appearance was touching. At least Věk was touched, just as it had previously aroused his compassion, when he had caught her alone in a dark corner, absorbed in thought. (Jirásek 1910: 80)

This text only relates allusively to the descriptive paradigm (beginning with an overall overview of the figure), but undoubtedly provides a complex image of Mrs Paula Thámová. Nevertheless, the descriptive strategy here is not based on the “attribution of stable objective qualities”, but on capturing of features that appear in the given light conditions particularly conspicuously to the observer situated in the same space. Temporality is present here in a dual aspect: the first is associated with the situatedness of the object of depiction in space (Paula, her physiognomy emphasized by the lighting), and the second with the observing subject (i.e. Věk, even though the observation

is again ascribed to him by an external institution, the third-person narrator) and above all his situatedness in time: this relates more narrowly to the narrative structure, for the young woman's excessive slenderness and fatigue only "appear" to Věk due to the lapse of time since their last meeting. Hence there is no reason to raise objections should anybody wish to ground the passage alternatively as "an account of how Věk saw Mrs Paula, how she appeared and how this appearance touched him", for this is not a question of acquiring arguments to make classifying decisions on whether the passage is narrative or descriptive: we can easily argue that the temporal aspects, the indication of a personal perspective and the resulting experientiality fulfil both functions at the same time here. There again, this is by no means confirmation of the theory that there is no point in distinguishing between the two modes of representation. Quite the reverse, should we observe such interpenetration of narrativity and descriptivity in the broader context of Jirásek's mature work, then not only does an important element in the author's poetics thereby emerge from this observation, but it also gains in importance from the standpoint of historical poetics, i.e. uprooting the fixed idea of easily detachable paradigmatic description as the dominant descriptive form in realist depiction.

Both in *F. L. Věk* and in the "new chronicle" *U nás*, i.e. in the alternative chronicle genre with the characteristically slackened narrative pace and the high degree of episodicity, we find variously graded intersections of descriptive and narrative representation, the common principle behind which is the *attribution of changeable* and above all *actually changing qualities* to a selected object or spatial constellation of objects. Of course, these depictions much more frequently involve stimuli from two different sources: the first is the sphere of visual arts, which undoubtedly forms the backdrop for the variations in the charming, often "chiaroscuro" portraits of the female characters that provide them with a particular ambience,<sup>13</sup> while the second is the narrator's intensive observation of the phenomena of cyclical natural time, which again often involve the aspect of lighting. If this is the case for the representation of characters situated in interiors then it is even more so for the depiction of exteriors: Jirásek likes to refer to the environment surrounding the protagonist when they are changing most conspicuously, e.g. at sun-

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13 Specific proofs and analyses in Fedrová – Jedličková 2011: 44–47.

set and dusk, when the apparently “stable” qualities of things are “destabilized”, as we can see in the extract dealing with the situation in which the young teacher Kalina returns from his mother’s to the school which he took on after his father died:

The teacher set off out to the right beneath the lime tree and up; but just a little further on he turned again to the right, on the narrower path to the vicarage, beyond which further to the right the wooden school among the fruit trees shone white. The trunks of the old lime trees and part of the whitish path beneath them began to drown and disappear in the soft dusk. However, further up to the right above the vicarage and its surroundings – the belltower and the church, it was brighter beneath the still clear sky, shaded by the trees. In the last light the shingle mansard roof of the vicarage building was still to be seen clearly; however, the flood of woodbine, almost entirely muffling the whiteness of the wooden walls, was growing much darker. Only patches of red foliage peeped through the fading green around the gleaming small windows in the west-facing facade.

(Jirásek 1929: 69)

These changes in circumstances have no influence on the conduct of the character, i.e. from the narrative development standpoint they might appear redundant. In such cases, even narratology acknowledges the representational mode to be descriptive, while the key argument is the fact that that it is not a deliberate act by the character that is depicted, but unintentional events that repeat over the course of natural time.<sup>14</sup> The association with the character is only retained in the sense that the depiction of the circumstances follows the teacher on his way to the school, i.e. this depiction is limited visually or in terms of perspective. Otherwise Jirásek very often makes it clear that he has depicted no more or less than what can be seen of a particular place under the changing light conditions, often without identifying any particular perceptible object, i.e. just taking into account the vacant

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<sup>14</sup> Hence it is easy to relate Gerald Prince’s initial definition of descriptivity to the situation (1987): of basic importance from the narratological standpoint is the fact that these are not irreversible changes, but merely repeating acts, which only vary slightly depending on the progress of the seasons and above all do not have any basic influence on the characters’ intentional behaviour.

position of a potential observer. Rather than constellations of objects in space, the actual objects of description are the changes in their optical attributes and the resultant effect on the reader induced by a particular atmosphere. By atmosphere we understand the notion as it is presented in the reflections of Gernot Böhme (1998),<sup>15</sup> i.e. as a specific correlation between the subject and its surroundings, as a “tempered space” (*gestimmter Raum*) arising out of sensory contact between man and the world. This means that the atmosphere cannot be attributed either to the objects or their constellation, nor does it result from projections of the subject (even if it is unthinkable without his perception), but it is a specific reality that emerges from among them. The atmosphere may “arise” and enthrall us, but it might also be consciously staged (it might also be added that one of the possibilities is of course “a verbal performance”). This is basically possible because we have already experienced or assimilated certain types of atmosphere within the context of our culture, where their typical characteristics are somehow fixed (for example, an idyllic atmosphere is associated with visual models such as the pastoral landscape of fine arts, relaxed atmosphere with images of exotic seascapes as presented by travel agencies etc.).

Hence the experientiality of this type of literary “atmospherism” is not based on a direct relation to the experience of the characters, but on the fact that the actual description has the potential to activate the sensory and culturally assimilated experience of the reader, i.e. it may evoke in him a mental state that is akin to real-life experience of a “tempered space”. Hence in this characterization we come close to Wolf’s argument in favour of description as a kind of “substitute for sensory experience” (Wolf 2007: 14), or the evocation of stored sense experience. Some authors speak of “perceptual mimesis” in this context (e.g. Scarry 1999), while others object that mimetic represen-

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15 “Atmosphären sind gestimmte Räume, oder, nach der Definition von Hermann Schmitz, randlos ergossene Gefühle. Wir reden von der festlichen Atmosphäre eines Ballsaals, der ernsten Atmosphäre, die ein Mahnmal umgibt, der heiteren Atmosphäre eines Tales. Atmosphären sind etwas zwischen Subjekt und Objekt, eine gemeinsame Wirklichkeit beider. Sie gehören nicht einfach zum Subjekt, sind auch nicht dessen Projektionen, denn man kann von Atmosphären ergriffen werden und in Atmosphären eintreten. Sie werden auf der einen Seite zwar durch Dinge und Menschen erzeugt, gehen von ihnen aus, und man kann sie, wie im Bühnenbild, bewusst inszenieren. Auf der anderen Seite sind sie aber in dem, was sie sind, niemals vollständig bestimmt ohne ein empfindendes Subjekt” (Böhme 1998: 19–21).

tation would also have to primarily include linguistic correlates to our pre-verbal experience of the world (Kuzmičová 2013: 88ff).

### ***Some pagan paradise... Cognitive aspects of descriptivity***

It is the emotional and cognitive aspects that Jirásek is able to utilize in such a sophisticated manner as the motivation for the depiction arising at the intersection of narration and description. The description of the ballroom in the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace in Prague, where Věk's young protege (and future bride) Mária Snížková is brought for a tour by her uncle before Leopold II's coronation ceremony, sounds rather superficial, for at first sight it primarily provides information about attributes that could easily be ascribed to any ballroom in any other palace, while the specific attributes are somewhat "slapdash". Why? A twofold cognitive perspective alternates in the description. The first one belongs to the omniscient narrator, who narrates Mária's visit to the palace while being able to identify the typical elements in the ballroom's furnishings and decorations (e.g. the candles in the girandoles). The second belongs to the character of Mária who tries to observe the ballroom in line with her uncle's exposition, but who does not pay focused attention either to the verbal commentary or to the place itself, because her mind repeatedly wanders off to her much yearned for companion – František Věk. It is only such a distracted and uninformed mind as that of a young provincial girl that could produce the following characterization: "through the high ballroom, on the ceiling of which a large picture had been painted, *some pagan paradise*, as her uncle explained [...]" (Jirásek 1910: 331; highlighted by AJ). Jirásek tends to handle such cognitive elements of focalization with moderation, but always with complete conviction. And why can it be said that despite its "superficiality" the description fulfils its function? As we have already indicated, the description is not fully individualized (with the exception of the cognitively "coded" reference to the fresco depicting the Olympian gods), but it does include all the signs that match the class of phenomena in question, i.e. a ballroom in a noble palace at the end of the 18th century, just as the majority of readers will imagine it. However, this kind of schematic depiction is sufficient in the given situation, for here the mechanism of reader cooperation is deployed, as is tellingly described by Umberto Eco in his exposition of the operation of fictional worlds in literature (Eco 1997: 640–641). He believes that this is based

on the fact that a number of aspects in the fictional world are naturally presumed (the *superficiality* principle) and that a number of them only become conceivable if the reader is able to adapt his experience of the actual world to them (the *flexibility* principle). Based on the example of an exposition of Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, the author shows that the rather general characterization of the Gascony landscape with its vineyards and olive groves has sufficient capacity to form the fictional environment, because it refers to a landscape type that is typical of southern Europe, or to the fixed (somewhat superficial) cultural idea of this kind of landscape. This means that even if the reader has never experienced this landscape type and cannot base his idea on his own experience, it will suffice for the purposes of the narrative in question if he takes this cliché-ridden cultural characterization for granted. The same applies to Jirásek's description of the ballroom at the Colloredo-Mansfeld palace: the marble facing of the walls, the chandeliers and girandoles with their profusion of candles, the Venetian mirrors and the high doors with their decorative carvings – none of this brings to mind a specific image of a particular ballroom, but just an "atmosphere of aristocratic magnificence". And it is on this basis of the reader's cooperation (which includes the aforementioned *flexibility* and *superficiality*, cf. *ibid.*: 635–642) that the psychologically based "superficiality" of Mária's observations brought about by her emotional excitement is sealed. Thus, Jirásek presents us with a rather schematic description (while relying on the superficiality principle) only to use it as a foundation for psychological projection of the character. Since this projection is a subtle (an inaccurate interpretation based on limited knowledge) and a singular one, it does not result in distorting the image of the reality observed, while providing a double individualizing quality at the same time: both when related to the subject of description, and to the observing character herself.

### **"From Saturday to the graveyard": description of the circumstances**

In view of its structure and its share in the structure of the narrative, this subcategory of description might serve as a good argument for those who doubt the usefulness of placing boundaries between description and narration. Let us first dwell upon a comparison of two excerpts: both include concentrated information on the time-space coordinates of the plot, which is unsurprising in view of the fact that both can be found at the beginning

of their respective chapters. The first is actually at the very beginning of the novel *Děti čistého živého* (Children of Pure Living Spirit, 1909), in the initial exposition, and explicitly stated, and the incomplete time details actually refer to historical time, while in the second, which comes from the aforementioned chronicle *U nás* (Vol. 1, 1897, at the beginning of Chapter 15) cyclical time is referred to, with its festivals and the associated annual events:

On a Saturday afternoon sometime towards the end of June 1860, as day was fast slipping into dusk, Machata the gravedigger set out from his little home, wedged in close between the road and several more substantial-looking cottages. Passing the dishevelled garden, where besides a few sunflowers, perennial honesty ran wild under an ancient apple tree with grotesque branches and sparse foliage, he quickly fixed several half-broken posts in the fence and having crossed the bridge he walked along the broad road down to the square, at the southern end of which a modest chapel stood out in the middle of a graveyard behind a solidly-built wall.

(Nováková 1966: 6)

The day before All Saints, that is, before the Padolí fair, a merchant's wagon drawn by a poor, gaunt, shaggy gelding, drew up at the "courtyard" in the late afternoon. Wearing a ring in his ear and a strangely-shaped hat, the merchant came to a halt right outside the unhewn sandstone portal, behind which a now bare poplar loomed in one corner. (Jirásek 1929: 146)

The contemporary reader will undoubtedly have the feeling that due to the quantity of incidental information, the straightforward identification of action governed by a specific intention (the gravedigger sets out for the graveyard to dig a grave for a burial the following day; the merchant comes to the local fair and stops off at the "court" magistrate's) is delayed to a surprising extent. In the first excerpt this tendency seems to affect the readability of the compound sentence, which the modern-day non-academic reader may even judge to be insufficiently transparent: the passage on the actual action is repeatedly interrupted here by the description of the additional activities (e.g. the rather automatic adjustment of the posts in the fence) and the secondary circumstances (the appearance of the house and the state of the garden).

As the action described in the extensive compound sentence is separated by the description of these circumstances into two parts, the impression may arise that these circumstances actually dominate the scene. This is easily explained by the traditional function of the exposition to provide information on the time and the setting of the plot. Moreover, the descriptive elements cannot be separated off here, but it is also very difficult to judge which of these circumstances are indispensable for anchoring the character in the fictional world, and which of them are already “redundant” – as the narratologists themselves confirm, a certain amount of redundancy (references to specific phenomena and attributes of the fictional world) is essential for the narrative to function.

A transformation test enables us to verify the extent to which the question of redundancy is deceptive: if we imagine this same situation in a film, all the circumstances described will accompany the actions performed by the characters in several shots, simply because the “film cannot help describing” (as Seymour Chatman so tellingly puts it, 1990: 40–41), because it is unavoidable for it as a medium “to show the physical being” of the external world (or its *whatness*, as Wolf calls it, cf. 2007: 28). In film, just as in art which is “time-based”, but which has a visual component, the display of “reality in the simultaneity of things” appears obvious: The automatic adjustment of the fence posts lasts just a moment and thus will appear to be very natural; the choice between a broad shot and a close-up, for example, will then decide whether the viewer is at all aware of this action, or will ascribe any particular significance to it. In a review of this film, its “sense for realistic detail” may be discussed regarding the sequence in question (especially provided an approach of this kind were repeated and highlighted by the choice of shot and the like), but hardly its redundancy.

The realism of the representation in Nováková’s novel is based in the interweaving of “the simultaneous coexistence of the inessential” (i.e. the descriptive elements of representation) and the successivity of action (the narrative elements) referring to an event in the prehistory of the story told (Koutný’s death). Conversely, by referring to this procedure, which respects in as great detail as possible the unavoidable situatedness of man in time-

space, we may defend this method as realistic.<sup>16</sup> And it is in the proximity to this unavoidable real-life situatedness that the quality we seek here, its *experientiality*, is implicitly involved.

If we summarize the experiential aspects of descriptiveness in the cases under review, it is obvious at first sight that the temporal aspect predominates: however, as a result it is not the case that the traditional sharp polarity between the *staticity of description* and the *dynamism of narration* should collapse, or that description “is *dynamized* by narrativization”, but rather most frequently the interplay between the *temporal and the cognitive* aspect: The seemingly *stable* attributes of an object are described – as they are observed – in their *changeability*, depending on the ambient lighting, the mood or the focus of the implicitly or explicitly determined observer. Here questions are raised regarding the theoretization of the phenomenon (for example, does it make sense in this context to introduce a “descriptor” category as a complement to the narrator?<sup>17</sup>) and its application in the historical poetics of fiction, for it would seem that the changes in the aspects of experientiality at the intersection of description and narration are indeed, as we have been able to see in our excerpts, modelled to a considerable extent by the micro-context, but that they are quite obviously based on a “representative macromode”, which is bound to the rules of the genre. This particularly applies (as indicated in the excerpts from *F. L. Věk* and the “new chronicle” *Unás*) for the rhythm of the chronicle method, which is not only determined chronotopically, but also by alternation between emphasis on representation of the “world” and the “story”<sup>18</sup> in it. Investigating this relationship is a task for further research.

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16 Whether or not it will stand up to the reception demands of the modern reader is quite another question.

17 The case of “some pagan paradise” suggests it may prove helpful in some cases, since Márinka’s focalization does not affect the narration as a complex mode; her view interferes only with the descriptive part of the narratorial function.

18 Lecture by Marie-Laure Ryan in Prague 29. 10. 2013, see <http://www.flu.cas.cz/cz/text-worlds-stories> [accessed 31. 1. 2014]. Very roughly speaking, the author provided with exemplifications her suggestion to distinguish narrative genres in accordance with the extent of attention that is paid within the structure of their fictional world to the “world itself” (i.e. its “furnishing” in Eco’s sense) and to the story, or to be more precise the plot (for the terms *story* and *plot* were applied as synonyms in the lecture, while it may be argued easily that there is no other mode of existence for a fictional world than that of *storyworld*).

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