The Importance of Description: An Introduction

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The importance of descriptive passages varies among literary works and most likely differs among literary genres as well. Some non-literary narratives, such as a joke, may exist even without description. With the help of cognitive narratology, it may be argued that zero descriptions are inscribed in the text when a scenario is activated which implies default descriptions. If the importance of descriptions in narrative texts is imagined as a spectrum, short non-literary genres may represent one extreme in which descriptions play a negligible role, while the other end is occupied by narratives in which descriptions are of utmost importance. To introduce the thematic cluster on description I will explore the significance of the descriptive in the two extremes, first in a joke, then in utopian writing by means of two nineteenth-century Hungarian utopic novels which both abound in lengthy descriptions stitched together by a weak story. Utopia's main purpose is to describe an alternative reality, but that reality is not alternative as much from the viewpoint of individual human action as it is from the standing of technical or (in many cases) a transformed natural environment and social functions. Such an alternative reality can be described, not narrated while the description may additionally make use of narrative elements.

Even if narratology's usual focus on time and event may imply otherwise, descriptions are not disposable elements (or mere embellishments) of narrative. In his *Narrative Discourse,* Gérard Genette defined the descriptive pause as a case in which zero narrated time is paired to some narration time; this definition unavoidably created the impression that description is a feature of the *sujet* and hardly has anything to do with the *fabula*, which means description is a rhetorical device of story*telling* and is therefore not essential to the story. As if description was some optional addition to what is to be told in a narrative. When Genette decided to use the term pause (instead of description) as the abbreviated form of the descriptive pause, he emphasized the dimension of time, for which he even developed the following quasi- or pseudo-mathematical

formula: "pause *NT* = n, *ST* = 0. Thus *NT* ∞> *ST*" (Genette, *Narrative* 95). According to this interpretation, the pseudo-time of the narrative is infinitely greater than the story time since the latter is zero. However, the pause is almost continuously accompanied by an adjective in Genette's text as it is generally called a "descriptive pause" (e.g. 93, 94, 95, 99, 106). In a footnote Genette attempted to prevent two misunderstandings: on the one hand, narratorial commentary may be another instance of when discourse corresponds to zero story time even though Genette does not regard these types of passages as "strictly speaking narrative." On the other hand, "every description is not necessarily a pause in the narrative" (94).

In his analysis, Genette actually narrates the development of the nineteenth-century French novel later eclipsed by Proust and his no-pause-descriptions. Within Genette's narration, Balzac elaborated "a typically extratemporal descriptive canon" (100), which can be properly described by the formula above, Stendhal "avoided that canon by pulverizing the descriptions" (101), but his position remained marginal, while Flaubert was the precursor of the Proustian description (ibid.), which makes the concurrence of description and a character's contemplative pause a rule (102). This narrative seems to imply (perhaps unintentionally) a teleology which posits Proust as the end-point of a development. In other words, it is as if Proust attained the aim of finally getting rid of descriptive pauses or the Balzacian canon of description by always narrating how someone experiences an image and never halting narrated time.[1] One can, however, consider the possibility of a narratology that focuses on space instead of time, including questions regarding how a narrative creates a world which can be either fictional or imaginary in nature. Such a narratology must necessarily assign a highly important role to description.

[1] For Genette, a description that does not constitute a pause is a narrative about a person who looks at an object. Gerald Prince's definition of description, however, extends to "(nonpurposeful, nonvolitional) happenings" as well, therefore he can offer the following example for a description without pause: "After the fish followed an excellent meat dish, with garnishing, then a separate vegetable course, then roast fowl, a pudding … and lastly cheese and fruit" (Prince, *A Dictionary* 19). For Prince this sentence from Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* is the description (and not the narrative) of a dinner, although this contradicts his general characterization of descriptions, namely that they represent objects or happenings "in their spatial rather than temporal existence, their topological rather than chronological functioning, their simultaneity rather than succession" (ibid.). In this example all the items are represented in temporality, in chronological functioning and in succession, still it is regarded as a description. The nonporpurseful, nonvolitional nature of a dinner is also questionable.

I do not want to challenge the obvious truism that narrative is about narrating events: it would be both difficult and absurd to develop a definition of narrative that views description as a necessity. Discussions on minimal narrative will most likely never expand upon description. The importance of descriptive passages, however, not only varies among literary works, but also among literary genres. Some non-literary narratives, such as a joke, may not even contain description, such as can be said in the case of the following joke: "A horse walks into a bar, and the bartender asks, 'Why the long face?'" If we agree that the aforementioned text meets the requirements of minimal narrative, then we must admit that this joke is capable of narration without description.

Gérard Genette thought that any verbal utterance is automatically a narrative. One of his examples of the minimal form of narrative, "I walk" (Genette, *Narrative* 30), does not even relate an event. Possibly by inserting descriptions, to mention just one option, such a narrative can be amplified, yet amplification will not make it more narrative. In 1989 Gerald Prince argued that at least one event is necessary for a narrative (Prince, *Dictionary* 58). Most theoreticians, however, believe that an event is a change of state (Toolan 14); the question arises of whether a change of state can be narrated without describing State 1 and State 2, or one of them at the very least. If we take Genette's second example of minimal narrative as an instance of narrating an event, the answer will be positive: "Pierre has come" (ibid.). Neither State 1 ("Pierre is not here"), nor State 2 ("Pierre is here") is described; only the action which changed the situation is narrated, namely that he has come. Based on the action, however, both states can easily be reconstructed. It is, however, probable that when the narrating agent makes the narrative more developed and interesting through amplification, some details or descriptions regarding both states will be needed. It is only the minimal form that renders description unimportant. In 1982 Gerald Prince (followed by Shlomith Rimmon-Kennan in 1983) stated that a minimal narrative presupposes at least two events in chronological order (Prince, *Narratology* 4; Rimmon-Kennan 19). The example of the joke referred to above meets even this requirement. State 1: a horse outside the bar; Event 1: the horse walks in. State 2: a horse in the bar; no contact with the bartender. Event 2: the bartender talks to the horse. State 3: the two agents in the bar have verbal contact. It is only Gerald Prince's complex definition of minimal narrative dating from 1973 that this example of a simple joke cannot fulfill since Prince's definition stipulated the presence of three events connected by the principles of chronology, causality and closure (Prince, *A Grammar* 31).

Such a minimal narrative can lack description. It can, however, also be argued that the expression "long face" already contains a minimal description, namely an adjective. If we contrast "a face" with "a long face," we can clearly see that the latter has been described to a limited degree. In Jasper Fforde's novel *Lost in a Good Book* Miss Havisham and Thursday Next see a grammasite ("A parasitic life form that live inside books and feed on grammar"), more precisely an adjectivore, at a gunport of the prison hulk in the back story of *Great Expectations*. I quote their educative dialogue:

> "Can you see the gunport it was feeding on?"
> "Yes."
> "Describe it to me."
> I looked at the gunport and frowned. I had expected it to be old or dark or wooden or rotten or wet, but it wasn't. But then it wasn't sterile or blank or empty either—it was simply a gunport, nothing more nor less.
> "The adjectivore feeds on the adjectives *describing* the noun," explained Havisham, "but it generally leaves the noun intact." (Fforde, Ch. 26.)

Fforde's witty fantasy forces the reader to confront the possibility of a narrative cosmos that exists without description. For a description we need adjectives, and without adjectives there is no description. Strangely enough, the adjectivores leave the noun intact: the gunport is still there, but it is simply a gunport. Let us therefore imagine telling the joke about the horse walking into a bar after the attack of an adjectivore: it will no longer be a joke if the bartender cannot describe the face of the horse.

In a paper entitled "The Boundaries of Narrative" Genette went even further by declaring that unqualified nouns "may be considered as descriptive by the sole fact that they designate animate or inanimate beings" (Genette, "The Boundaries" 5). The idea that designation is already description leads to the conclusion that description without narrative is possible while it is impossible to narrate anything without description. Despite this theoretical possibility, Genette declares that "purely descriptive genres never exist" (6). The validity of this claim may depend on the definition of genre and purity. I find it imaginable that in some literary traditions short descriptive poems can be regarded as forming a genre;[2] it is rather obvious that some of the most canonical

[2] If epigrams are viewed as a genre, then epigrams obviously cannot be exclusively descriptive in nature since many narrative epigrams (including those in dialogic form) have been written throughout the roughly 2,600 years that the genre has existed. However, we can speak about types of epigrams as genres or at least subgenres. For exam-

haikus are purely descriptive.[3] Genette's other important claim is that description is "naturally" *ancilla narrationis*, a handmaiden of narrative, and always plays an auxiliary role to narration.[4]

While I do not go so far as to view designation automatically as description, I would like to consider the fact that cognitive narratology allows for the interpretation of the articles in "*a* bar" and "*the* bartender" as also bearing a descriptive function, even if these examples cannot even be taken as a form of minimal descriptions. According to cognitive narratology, readers understand narrative on the basis of general scenarios (or scripts, or frames, or schemata; Stockwell 75–90) which govern our expectations. New details modify these expectations, although it must not be forgotten that a great amount of detail will not be needed if the story follows an expected scenario. A scenario implies not overly detailed visions of some objects and locations. If nothing else is said about the given bar which is the setting of the narrative, we do not have any reason to imagine anything special about it. Yet, even if the setting is just "*a* bar," it is still expected that this location contains tables and chairs, a few people with drinks in front of them and, most importantly, a bartender. Based on this interpretation originating from cognitive narratology, I therefore categorize this type implication as a zero description.

The role played by preexistent scenarios in cognition also explain why the second sentence of the joke refers to "*the* bartender" (with

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ple, Claudius Claudianus, a late Roman poet active around 400 CE, wrote a series of seven epigrams describing a crystal ball that enclosed a drop of water (*Carmina minora* 33–39). Claudianus seems to continue the tradition of Martial's Books 13 and 14 (*Xenia* and *Apophoreta*), which describe little souvenirs given away at a banquet. In a rather strict sense of the term, this entire tradition can be regarded as part of the genre *ekphrasis*. On the one hand, the epigrams describing a curious object do not form a genre of their own, but rather a variation of the epigrammatic genre; on the other hand, we can dispute their purely descriptive character as well. When one of Claudian's crystal poems starts with the following: "while the child is happy to touch the crystal's slippery surface…" (c. m. 38,1), we can interpret such elements as narrative, with which the poems cannot be *purely* descriptive anymore. If we read such passages from the theory of Philippe Hamon, they appear as contributing to the focalization of the descriptive (Hamon).

[3] Some translations of Baisho's exemplary haiku refer to frogs that jump; the presence of the verb may provide this haiku with a rather limited form of narrativity. Other translations only mention the noise the frogs make on the water's surface.

[4] Genette makes a possible exception: in didactic or semi-didactic works, narrative may be the auxiliary of narrative ("The Boundaries" 6). Didactic, evocative, engaged literary works seem to have played an increasingly important role in literature since the times of structuralism; today, the didactic probably cannot be very easily dismissed from serious literary discussion. The utopian may have always already belonged to the field of the didactic.

a definite article) since his existence and presence has already been implied by the mention of "*a* bar." Of course, the listener expects something strange, since the case of a horse walking into a bar makes it impossible to rely upon a default scenario; similarly, the number of objects one does not imagine as being present in the bar is infinite and can comprise anything from a lawnmower to a dissection table: unless, that is, one is told otherwise. The listener therefore adheres to the principle of the minimal departure[5] and does not modify the features of a scenario if it is not necessary. Those who listen to the joke probably expect some verbal interaction between the horse and the bartender. I therefore conclude that the narrative offers zero descriptions, which subsequently forces the narratees to rely on the default descriptions inscribed within the activated scenario. This does not mean, of course, that one's understanding cannot be modified at a later point or retrospectively, provided that new details appear that make one do so, as occurs in the following joke: "A blind man walks into a bar. And a table. And a chair." In this case the default scenario does not work: after the second sentence, the listener has to abandon the default description of the imagined bar in favor of visualizing a single, long, metal object, a process that also means having to abandon the first scenario that was activated for another one.

I argue that zero descriptions imply no deviation from the default descriptions inscribed in an activated scenario. Some speech genres rather than literary genres (such as joke) can operate with minimal or zero descriptions; at the other end of the spectrum, we can find narratives in which descriptions are of utmost importance. My example of the latter is utopian writing. While utopias tend to be narrative texts, hardly anybody reads them for the story. At least this has mainly been the case since Thomas More's *Utopia*, which gave the genre its name, but can hardly be credited with inventing it. The structure of utopias tends to follow that of a travelogue: a traveler sets off for an unknown and hidden place. Upon arrival, the traveler is given a guided tour in order to educate him or her regarding the alternative, more or less ideal society that is found there; the end generally concludes with the traveler's return to the place of origin, where a report of his or her experiences is then delivered. Although the journey to and fro may contain some adventures, focusing on the traveler occurs more commonly in satirical versions or anti-utopias. In a genuine utopia,

[5] The principle is mostly used in the theory of possible worlds, cf. Ryan, "Fiction" and Ryan, *Possible*.

the narrative frame is hardly more than a pretext, a carrier for the description of an alternative society. As a result, the story of gaining access to this new world is much less interesting than the content of the experience itself.

Since the eighteenth century, utopias have been increasingly set in the future, a version of utopian writing which is also called a *euchronia.* Although time travel poses a possible narrative tool for maintaining the travelogue scheme in euchronias, some utopian novels have also emerged- in which the main character is at home within the represented, alternative society and therefore does not need a guided tour of the utopia since the character's familiarity with his or her surroundings renders the utopian kind of learning process unnecessary.[6] In contrast to the main character of such a version of utopian writing, the readers, however, still have to learn a lot, a process that does not occur on the diegetic level even though descriptions also abound in this type of text since there are many unfamiliar objects, institutions, social mechanisms, habits etc. which must be explained and described in detail. From this viewpoint no difference can be detected between utopias and dystopias.

Descriptions therefore play an extremely important role in utopian novels, which I will try to demonstrate through the examples provided by two nineteenth-century, Hungarian utopian novels: *The Novel of the Next Century* by Mór Jókai and *The New World* by Titusz Tóvölgyi. Both abound in long descriptions stitched together by a weak story. When a story is set in the future, the description of an object or a social institution can be easily connected to a historical back-story. Readers are not only informed of how something works or looks, but also receive details regarding how it developed. (Even in Book 2 of Thomas More's *Utopia*, Hythloday entails some information about how King Utopus conquered a peninsula which was later transformed into the island of Utopia.) This is not, however, the only way descriptions challenge the zero narrated time definition since in utopian texts it is customary to describe customs, holidays and ceremonies. A ceremony, for example, is a chain of events, and therefore it can be legitimately said that a ceremony is not described but rather narrated. In this kind of formula-

[6] It is not impossible for a dystopia to develop an alternative of the guided tour. In Zamyatin's *We* the state wants to send out a spaceship and its citizens are encouraged to describe their society, so that their manuscripts can be put into it. The narrator and protagonist D-503 writes such an introduction for aliens, although the text becomes increasingly diary-like during the writing process. In Orwell's *1984* it is O'Brien who introduces Winston into a deeper or true understanding of his own society.

tion, iterative, heterodiegetic narratives may abound in utopian texts. Based on my interpretation, however, I contend that if how things are generally done in a completely alien society is explained to a character or the reader this type of explanation acts as a description rather than storytelling. The border between the two, however, is not always easily drawn since a description can contain narrative elements, just as a list of events can, in certain cases, create a description.[7]

Written between 1872 and 1874, Jókai's utopia tells the story of how Dávid Tatrangi, a Transylvanian-Hungarian inventor and genius in politics and economics, establishes world peace and a global society of harmony and well-being during a period spanning the years of 1952 to 2000. Early on in the novel, the story contains a six-page chapter entitled "The Alhambra of Vezérhalom," which mostly surrounds the description of a luxurious building complex that was temporarily being used as a hospital owned and run by an exiled Russian princess. Today Vezérhalom (literally "Chieftain Hill") is a hill in Buda that is located within the city borders of Budapest, although in Jókai's times it was actually on the edge of the capital city. Even if a total of four pages out of the entire chapter describe the buildings, the chapter begins with the following sentence: "This is the story of how the Alhambra came to the Vezérhalom in Buda"[8] (Jókai 1.119). The introduction explicitly calls the chapter a "story" of how something existing as an object in the imagined future came into being in the past, which still figures as the future in relation to the present of narrating. The second paragraph relays the information that a rich merchant had the palace built; following the description, readers will be informed of the changes in ownership after the builder's death. The descriptive part is a rich catalogue of architectural styles, colorful materials, and artifacts of different historical periods. Although the look of the building complex does not play any important role in the story's later development; the chapter may be legitimized by offering a nice opportunity to display the author's descriptive talents, and also by the passage which explains that most of the artifacts are high-quality replicas and describes the imagi-

[7] For an early example we can go back as far as to Homer. The catalogue of ships in the *Iliad* (2.494–2.759) actually lists actions: "[T]here came fifty ships, and on board of which went young men of the Boeotians"; "they…were led by Ascalaphus and Ialmenus"; "And with him there followed forty black ships" (Homer). Only actions for hundreds of lines, but the result is not the story of how the Greek gathered and traveled to Troy, but the description of the Greek army. See also Gerald Price's example from *The Magic Mountain* quoted in my first footnote.

[8] All the translations from Jókai's and Tóvölgyi's novels are mine.

nary technical developments by means of which twentieth century will be able to imitate great art for twenty percent of their cost. What the chapter offers is not only the description of the Alhambra but also that of the future cultural environment. The description may contain the narrative of the technical development which will have resulted in it. While dystopias tend to envision a purely functional and artless technical environment, Jókai imagines an advanced technique that brings with it the democratization of high quality art.

Published in 1888, Títusz Tóvölgyi's *The New World* (which bears the subtitle of "A Novel from the Socialist and Communist Society") contains a second chapter entitled "The Palace of a Man in the New World" (Tóvölgyi 212–216). While this title seems to promise pure description, the chapter in fact describes a house in which a party is going to be held. Descriptions of the house, preparations for the party and an introduction to the social behavior in a future communist society intermingle inexplicably. The first sentence of the chapter reads as: "Zoltán Sziklai, a man of immense income, inventor of glass architecture, celebrated the anniversary with his hundredth wife."[9] The description of the house is first broken off by two paragraphs explaining how somebody can have immense income and rent a luxurious palace from the state (which owns all property) in the future communist society that Tóvölgyi has created. The huge differences of income do not cause any social tension because these differences are based on merit, such as the individual's personal contribution to the common good; in Sziklai's case this contribution was inventing glass architecture. When the description mentions the entrance hall with its seventy-one portraits of the host's ex-wives, a six-line narrative of his marital history is inserted, which also functions to remind readers of the information provided in Chapter 1 concerning the regulation of sexual life in Tóvölgyi's new world: extra-marital sex is severely punished, but marriage only lasts for two months. While spouses have the right to stay together for another two-month marriage if they choose to, the obligation is only for a two-month term (210). "With some of his seventy-one wives Sziklai repeated the obligatory two months, with some of them even tripled it," yet he has lived with his current, seventy-first wife[10] for a complete

[9] It is rather ironic that the wonderful invention of glass architecture which makes Tóvölgyi's architect so wealthy was to become the symbol of panoptic totalitarianism in Zamyatin's *We*.

[10] It is a little bit confusing that the actual wife is the seventy-first one while seventy-one portraits of ex-wives are mentioned. Either this could be the result of a simple mathematical mistake, or we can suppose that the portrait of each new wife

year, and it is rightly supposed that this marriage is for the rest of their lives (213).

Other than also serving as a means for relating the details of this new society to the reader, the host's sexual history is vital to understanding the arrangement of the party: there is a table for the thirty-two children of the host, another table for his forty ex-wives (the other thirty-one have either passed away or live somewhere else), and another one for the forty current husbands of the invited ex-wives. "A fourth table is for the guests" (214). About one-quarter of the chapter is filled with a dialogue conducted between the host Sziklai and his brother-in-law, which, however, does not seem to bring the story forward: they only discuss how much they love society's present organization and what was wrong with the previous one. From the standing of time, this dialogue can be called a scene. If the purpose of the whole novel is to describe a desirable future society rather than narrate a story, the speaker should instead be called descriptor rather than narrator, thereby making this particular dialogue into a cooperation between two second-degree or intradiegetic descriptors.

In Jókai's novel, Alexandra, the prime minister of the Russian post-revolutionary nihilist state, first enacts a *coup d'état* to declare herself Tsarina, then tries to seduce Severus, one of the closest allies of the novel's protagonist. The final act to the long process of seduction that results in Severus's complete surrender and treason is that the Tsarina performs a mass execution while creating an example of sublime scenery. First the narrator describes the pond at Pavlovsk Palace, upon which Severus and Alexandra Tsarina are enjoying a leisurely boat ride (Jókai 2.206–2.207). Severus finds the view beautiful and declares it to be the second greatest he has ever seen. Alexandra asks about the most beautiful scenery and promises to recreate it in Russia. In reply, Severus describes a pond in Egypt which is more beautiful because of the red lotuses, the red flamingos (instead of the swans of the north), and the water painted red by sunlight (207). Alexandra installs a steam guillotine by the pond that beheads four people at once and subsequently has twenty thousand political enemies executed in one day, thereby painting the water red with their blood. The red water dyes the swans' feathers red while the Egyptian lotuses are replaced with floating heads.

is added to the gallery upon the occasion of the first wedding, therefore allowing us to surmise that the actual wife (with whom Sziklai is renewing his vows for the sixth time) is also an ex-wife who legitimately has her portrait among the others. In any event, how the sixth renewal of the protagonist's marriage with his seventy-first wife manages to be the hundredth anniversary remains unexplained.

The description of the operation of the steam guillotine and the bloody pond is so impressive that it makes the narrative appear as a frame whose main purpose is to deliver this description, while the narration itself also flows from description to description. The narrator (descriptor) describes scenery, which is seen by the characters. Then a character (as an intradiegetic descriptor) describes another type of scenery and compares both. Then another character (the descriptee of the intradiegetic description) transforms the first scenery to make it more similar to the second one while the result is described by the extradiegetic narrator/descriptor. It is also true that the resulting visual experience has an overwhelming effect on Severus, who regards the termination of the opposition as a guarantee of Alexandra's enduring power, an opinion that therefore influences his decision to change sides. This way the description pushes forward the narrative.

The central role played by description in utopian narrative makes it nearly impossible to separate description from narrative; if we were still to attempt to separate each and define the extent of their dependency upon one another, the narrative emerges as the handmaiden of description rather than vice versa. Utopia's main purpose is to describe an alternative reality; that reality is not alternative as much from the viewpoint of individual human action, as it is from a technical standing. The utopian world's transformed natural environment and the functions of its society form an alternative reality that can only be described rather than narrated. As was demonstrated above, description in this type of work may also make use of narrative elements. Both Jókai and Tóvölgyi describe houses of the future by utilizing descriptions that contain narrative features. While Jókai relates the history of ownership in reference to a certain house, Tóvölgyi focuses upon a ceremonial reception held in a certain house. None of the narrative features found in the entire work is important or memorable as opposed to the descriptions, which are. In the case of Tóvölgyi's work, the description of the house and the event to be hosted there serves to explain the order of sexual relationships in a communist future, resulting in descriptions that provide a dynamic connected to various narratives. To offer a few examples, Tóvölgyi summarizes Zoltán Sziklai's marriages, organizes a sort a plot around a love story, relates how society's harmonious and therefore apparently static operation is challenged by the revolt of the ugly[11] and offers solutions to how this imagined society will cope with

[11] In his *Assemblywomen* Aristophanes already drew a connection between the equality of goods and equality of access to sex. In Tóvölgyi's utopia all property and

revolution. All of these narratives promote the description. It is not the description that makes the narrative possible, but rather the narratives that deepen, explain and ultimately test the description.

Instead of providing a final answer to the question of what dependency relations exist between description and narrative, I suggest that the situation be visualized with the aid of a spectrum. My introduction began with the example of a joke which—I argue—represents one extreme of a narrative containing a description of minimal significance; utopian writing can be seen as the opposite extreme, in which narrative elements acquire importance by making the description more vivid. It is my contention that the function and importance of description in narrative texts should be analyzed and evaluated in every literary genre and literary work with a view toward this spectrum.

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The collection of papers featured in this issue devoted to description cannot examine all the possible variants that can be placed on the spectrum suggested above. **Orsolya Milián**'s analysis of ekphrastic poems underscores the fact that the topic of ekphrasis can hardly be avoided in the course of deepening our understanding of description. The two poems Milián discusses depict Peter Brueghel the Elder's painting, *The Parable of the Blind*, which can in turn be legitimately viewed as a narrative in its own right. The dynamic relationship between the narrative and descriptive therefore serves as a central issue for both the poems and the analysis. **Orsolya Tóth** investigates how the context created by the popularity of J. C. Lavaters's physiognomy influenced descriptions of handwriting in nineteenth-century novels and the role such descriptions played in characterization. **Péter Hajdu**'s paper discusses the descriptions of costumes and rituals in literary or semi-literary genres which lend crucial significance to the role played by descriptions in literary or semi-literary genres, such as ethnographic narratives, science fiction, including an additional example taken from postcolonial writing. In their studies, **György C. Kálmán** and **László Sári** discuss the important role played by descriptions in novels; the former paper

means of production belong to the state, but some remarkable inequalities in income still exist, a factor that is generally accepted as based on merit. The two-month marriages cannot guarantee equality in access to sex, which means that social tension can result since the ugly cannot accept beauty as a form of merit due to which the beautiful may have greater access to sex. (The current "incel" movement renders Tóvölgyi's seemingly absurd conflict strangely relevant.)

explores Flaubert's *Madame Bovary,* a novel frequently mentioned in connection to the descriptive in academic discourse while the latter investigates Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*, a work in which selected descriptions are revealed to play a surprisingly important role in the production of meaning. The cluster is closed by **Zoltán Z. Varga**'s reflections on Roland Barthes's description theory.[12]

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1.03 Kratki znanstveni članek / Short scientific article
UDK 82.0

[12] Acknowledgement: Thanks are due to the grant No K112415 of the OTKA/NKFIH (National Research and Development and Innovation Office, Hungary) which enabled the present collection of the papers on description.