

**Katabasis in Ekphrasis Poetry:**  
**A Study of Memory, Rhetoric and Mind**

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## **Statement of Candidate**

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Research at Macquarie University. I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and that I have given fully documented reference to the work of others. The thesis has not previously, in part or in whole, been submitted for assessment in any formal course of study.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Diana Marietta Papas", is displayed within a rectangular frame.

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Diana Marietta Papas, October 2018

## Abstract

Over the last few decades, modern definitions of ekphrasis are typically limited to the verbal description of a visual work of art (real or imagined). Rarely is modern ekphrasis contextualised in the ancient rhetorical tradition as a function of mind, memory and imagination. This thesis—which focuses specifically on the literary genre of ekphrasis poetry—aims to illuminate ekphrasis strategies as articulations of memory and the function of imagination. Given the close associations of imagination with creativity, the function of imagination has become a rapidly growing area of research in cognitive literary studies. The thesis addresses imagination in terms of mental imaging (the formation of visual and other kinds of sensory images), and the recent research into the brain’s default mode network which relates imagination to memory, conceptual blending, prospection, mind wandering and navigation. The thesis explores the ancient literary genre of katabasis—typically defined as a journey of the living into the realm of the dead, underworld or place of psychic unconscious. Katabasis is also characterised as a descent into memory, involving a trial, confrontation and subsequent ascent into knowing or “seeing”. Using an interdisciplinary approach, the thesis reveals the rhetorical devices of katabasis and ekphrasis in poetry which share common strategies with cognitive theories on the function of imagination. A selection of poems written by Adrienne Rich and Seamus Heaney are examined for their techniques of ekphrasis and exploration of katabasis. The thesis aims to reframe the function of mind, memory and imagination—key to classical and medieval conceptions of ekphrasis and katabasis—into modern and contemporary ekphrasis criticism.

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## **Preface**

The citation of sources in this thesis follows the MLA Guidelines, 8th ed., with the exception of block-indented quotations, which adhere to the 7th ed. guideline of single rather than double line spacing.

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## Introduction

### *Overview*

This thesis is a cross-disciplinary study on the genre of ekphrasis poetry and the associative cognitive functions of the imagination and mental image construction. Recent cognitive literary studies show that imagination is one of the most promising areas to date for interdisciplinary engagement, and leading scholars suggest more critical research is needed on the cognitive processes of readers and writers (Daston 73-95; Richardson 225). Considering these developments, my research aims to broaden the focus of ekphrasis poetry by considering imagination as a cognitive function, including the cognitive responses of the reader, mental imaging, and the model of conceptual blending—all mental processes which enable the creation of meaning. My research engages with recent cognitive studies on the brain's default mode network, relating imagination to memory, prospection into the future, theory of mind, mind wandering and mental navigation (Marcus et al. 676-682; Richardson 225-226; Starr "Theorizing Imagery" 259). Imagination and the brain's default mode network provide a framework for exploring mental image construction in ekphrasis poetry.

The objectives of my research are to re-consider the classical and medieval rhetorical arts of memory, imagination and ekphrasis (as mnemonic tools for memorising spatial and other information) in the context of modern ekphrasis poetry; explore the associative links between the ancient classical literary genre of katabasis to the writing of ekphrasis poetry, that is, a journey into the mythical underworld, imagination, or the psychic unconscious; study the recent scholarship in cognitive literary studies, with particular focus on the brain's default mode

network; and finally, with these frameworks in place, consider extending modern and contemporary ekphrasis criticism beyond “poems about paintings”.

Before addressing the thesis structure and scope, I will provide some introductory definitions of terms central to the thesis argument, which are later explored in more detail. The primary terms include ekphrasis, katabasis, mental imagery, and imagination—terms which have evolved meanings across different historical contexts.

Definitions of ekphrasis—popular in modern critical discourse in the last century—often curtail ekphrasis to a poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art, the verbal representation of a visual representation, or words about an image (Johnston et al. 1-2; Webb 1).<sup>1</sup> In a comprehensive study on ekphrasis, Ruth Webb (2009) challenges the scope of these definitions, showing that in antiquity, ekphrasis embraces a more detailed and sophisticated adaptation in rhetorical theory and practice. This is addressed in the recent research of Johnston, Knapp and Rouse (2015), illustrating that ekphrasis practice in medieval contexts maintains an important relationship between physical pictures, mental images and allegory as a mode reliant on the visual (Johnston et al. 8-9). Peter Verdonk (2013) also contends that literary ekphrasis has evolved from classical rhetoric and explains that in recent decades, ekphrasis is more commonly associated as a literary sub-genre of poetry written in response to visual works of art (119-129). Verdonk develops the definition of ekphrasis to the detailed description of any real or imagined visual object or scene, abstract idea, mental image or state of emotion (119-129).

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Spitzer “The “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, or content vs. metagrammar”, in *Essays on English and American Literature*; See also Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, p.3; Bartsch and Jas Elsner, “Introduction: eight ways of looking at an ekphrasis”, *Classical Philology*, 102 (2007): i.



Another literary term which originates from an ancient literary genre is katabasis, commonly defined as the descent of a living person into a mythical underworld or psychic unconscious, accompanied by the narrative structure of a journey to look inwards, downwards and back (Atwood 156; Baldick; Campbell, *Hero* 43-48). The experience is described by Joseph Campbell (1991) in his study of the historical development of mythology as a metaphorical death, rebirth and resurrection, where the protagonist engages with inner-vision or transformative “seeing” (Campbell, “Historical” 235-238; Campbell *Power*). The term *nekyia* is often associated with katabasis, involving conversations with the souls of the dead.<sup>2</sup> Later, this association becomes important for critical readings of selected poems where *nekyia* interacts with ekphrasis as a mode reliant on mental imagery.

Later in my thesis argument, I will present imagery, vivacity and immersion as being integral to ekphrasis poetry and rhetorical practice. Imagery is defined by Abrams and Harpham (2012) in the broadest sense to signify “all objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature, whether by literary description, by allusion, or in the vehicles (the secondary references) of its similes and metaphors” (169). Its applications range all the way from the “mental pictures” which, according to Abrams and Harpham, are experienced by the reader of a poem holistically, to all components which construct a poem, including non-visual sensory and synaesthetic experiences (169). I refer to Elaine Scarry’s 1999 study, *Dreaming by the Book*, which observes the authorial technique of “vivacity”—vividly imagined emotion—used by authors to evoke visual imagery in readers, also suggesting that imagined motion of imagery makes visual imagery accessible to readers (31). Another perspective, offered by

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<sup>2</sup> Occurring at the near-midpoint of Homer’s *Odyssey*, the *nekyia* illuminates Odysseus’s entire katabasis and journey from Troy to Ithaca. See Falconer (2012) “Heaney, Virgil, and Contemporary Katabasis”.

Federico Langer (2012), is that mental images interact with emotions and correspond “with the experience of ‘seeing with the mind’s eye,’ hearing with the mind’s ears,’ and the like” (178).

The imagery debate is contentious and concepts such as multi-sense perception, vivacity, memory and seeing with the “mind’s eye”, are considered later in my thesis argument.

These concepts permeate the function of imagination as addressed by Alan Richardson (2015) in his influential study of literary and cognitive intersections. He defines imagination as an “interrelated set of mental capacities and activities concerned with modelling entities and events that are not immediately present to perception and that may or may not have counterparts in the lived world” (225). According to Richardson, imagination is construed in terms of mental imaging, the formation of visual and other kinds of sensory images). More specifically, in cognitive literary studies, the brain’s default mode network relates imagination to memory, prospection into the future, theory of mind, mind wandering and mental navigation (Marcus et al. 676-682; Richardson 225-226). One of the leading and experimental strategies for understanding human cognition is the neuroscientific research on the brain’s default mode network (Raichle 434). Raichle established the term “default mode” in 2001 to describe the resting state of the brain’s function, after conducting “positron emission tomography” measurements and functional neuroimaging experiments (434). Results of the experiments show that areas of the brain which consistently exhibit activity reductions during task performance are not activated in the resting state (Raichle et al. 676; Raichle 434). This approach in various forms has dominated the cognitive neuroscientific agenda ever since, and many directions have evolved an extensive literature including that of cognitive literary studies (434). The brain’s default mode network is understood to involve several different functions including the neurological basis for self-reference and collation of autobiographical information, such as a memories, images and

personal reflections on emotional states. Following the studies of Raichle and others (2001), the discussion has led into the field of cognitive literary studies, opening new opportunities for understanding the way readers respond to literary work. According to Alan Richardson (2015) and Mark Turner (2002), it is the phenomenological experience of mind wandering—recalling the past, envisioning the future and daydreaming—that makes the human mind fundamentally poetic or literary (Richardson 231). Later in the thesis, I explore the brain’s default mode network in detail, applying its functions to ekphrasis poetry with particular emphasis on mental imaging, navigation and mind wandering.

### ***Research Contexts***

The scope of the research project is to extend contemporary discourse of ekphrasis poetry (since the mid-twentieth century) beyond “poems about paintings”, and to broaden its focus to the function of imagination as a process into deep internal vision. The research shows that ekphrasis once involved a sophisticated, nuanced and detailed scope of application in ancient rhetorical practices, evoking responses in audiences’ imagination, emotions and memory images. As discussed briefly, Ruth Webb challenges the boundaries of modern ekphrasis theory by revisiting definitions of ekphrasis in ancient rhetorical handbooks. She concludes that ekphrasis concentrates on vividness, the visual, emotional and cognitive responses of an audience, and the power of the word to place an image “before the eyes” (5, 10, 11). The ancient rhetoricians applied techniques to make the audience see (metaphorically) with the mind’s eye (10). In the rhetorical tradition, the function of imagination is understood to be activated in the audience so that they experience a sense of presence, or a *metathesis*—a transference of time and

transportation to the past or hypothetical future (100-101).<sup>3</sup> The speaker is said to “transport” the audience in imagination backward or forward to the events of the speech, making use of *enargeia*—a technique which encourages vivid and visual language to make the listener feel “as if they were present” (101).

It is this function of imagination which raises several research questions in my thesis. Why has modern ekphrasis theory (commonly defined as poems about paintings) since the 1950s separated from its rhetorical traditions? What are the implications of re-considering the function of the imaginative mind and the arts of memory in ekphrasis poetry? Is there a connection between the literary devices of ekphrasis and katabasis? And finally, what are the associations between modern cognitive scientific studies into the function of imagination and modern and contemporary ekphrasis poetry?

I apply the research objectives to a selection of poems written by Adrienne Rich and Seamus Heaney. These poems are chosen for their ekphrastic treatment of immersive self-exploration, imagination and katabasis, especially the processes of recalling and constructing mental imagery. The poems were written between the mid-1960s and 1970s, a period known for a resurgence of popularity in ekphrasis writing, particularly in response to visual art (Heffernan 135; Verdonk 121). In 1978, Eugene Huddleston and Douglas Noverr published a list of over 800 American poems that could be linked in some way to visual art (Heffernan 135). James Heffernan (1993) explains that by the twentieth-century, ekphrastic poetry owes much of its popularity to the establishment of public art museums, stating that “Twentieth century ekphrasis springs from the

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<sup>3</sup> See de Jonge (2005), pp. 463-480: “metathesis” may also refer to the technique of rewriting a given text: “...whether in prose or poetry, in order to make a comparison between the first and second version, thereby pointing to certain virtues, faults or particularities in the style of the original”. See also Greenberg (1958), pp. 51-66: “metathesis” may also refer to the changing of the order of words in poetry.

museum, the shrines where all poets worship in a secular age” (Heffernan 138). Also, with the rise of multi-media technology and innovation, art readily moved across disciplines. A persuasive example is the collaborative work of poets such as Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes (1930-1998) with photographers and lithographers—a popular trend in Britain in the 1950s (Nott 15). Both Rich and Heaney vigorously explore relations with the visual arts, and share a common trajectory in evolved analytic approaches to understanding their own socio-cultural, political, historical and personal roots (Corcoran 261; Heffernan 135-136). This is a topic explored in a later chapters.

### ***Research Frameworks and Approach***

The research frameworks include ancient classical rhetorical traditions and contemporary cognitive literary studies. In chapter one, I examine historical literary research, including a critical reading of secondary sources on the ancient rhetorical practices of ekphrasis, the ancient arts of memory and katabasis. The scope of this thesis does not allow for a complete historical study of ancient rhetorical traditions or the medieval craft of thought and memory; the full extent of such a discussion would be more suitable for a longer thesis. The etymologies of certain classical terms, central to the thesis argument, are examined to reveal their origins of meaning. These terms include *ekphrasis*, *enargeia*, *katabasis*, *katharsis*, *metathesis*, *apocalypso*, and *parabole*, all of which are important for establishing the associative links between ekphrasis, katabasis, and the function of imagination.

My research on cognitive literary studies focuses on recent studies into the function of imagination and the brain’s default mode network. According to Richardson, the brain’s default mode network is only recently emerging as a serious topic for research within the cognitive

sciences (225). Further collaborative research between scientific theories of conceptual blending and imaging, and their relationship to literary and cultural theories of artistic composition, present valuable opportunities but are more suitable for a longer thesis discussion. Instead, I focus on the process of creative thinking and mental image construction. Furthermore, to manage scope, I am unable to delve into the full extent of cognitive poetics, a field which has a complex, interdisciplinary range involving the deep cognitive functions of how readers engage with literary texts (Stockwell 5). Alternatively, I complete close and critical readings of the poetic text, considering poetic texture, figurative language, implicit meaning, style, imagery, spatial juxtaposition, nuances of language, and overall, the reader's cognitive responses.

In chapter two, "Seamus Heaney: Poetry as Digging", I examine the ekphrasis poems "Punishment" and "The Grauballe Man" (1972) written by Seamus Heaney in response to photographs of preserved bodies buried in bog land. In chapter three, "Adrienne Rich: Poetry as Re-vision", I examine Rich's poem "Mourning Picture" (1965), a conventional ekphrasis poem written in response to a painting of the same title, and an unconventional ekphrasis poem, "Diving into the Wreck" (1973).

## Chapter One:

### Ekphrasis, Katabasis and the Literary Mind

When I was hunting in Lesbos, I saw in the grove of the Nymphs the most beautiful sight I have ever seen, a painting of an image, a love story...

...While I was looking on and admiring these scenes, I was so moved that the desire took me to repaint the painting and respond in words. So I sought out an interpreter of the picture, and then elaborated it in four rolls... (Longus)<sup>4</sup>

In the book *Daphnis and Chloe* written in the second century AD, the desire to repaint a scene is so compelling, Longus seeks an “interpreter” to assist him “repaint” an extended narrative of a visual image (Morales xxi). In this text, Longus presents an ekphrasis as the emotive and cognitive responses of being moved (“repaint the painting and respond in words”); the experiences of a journey (the desire which “took him”); and the interpretation (“I sought out an interpreter”), and finally, a translation of a visual image into a verbal representation (“elaborated it in four rolls”). I will investigate these cognitive functions across various research contexts, including ancient rhetorical practices and contemporary cognitive theories.

#### ***Ekphrasis in Ancient Rhetorical Traditions***

Ekphrasis is composed of the classical Greek words *ek* meaning “out” and *phrasein* meaning to “tell, declare or pronounce”, and originally meant “telling in full” (Heffernan 191). Frances Yates, in her influential work on the ancient arts of memory, refers to the famous example expressed by Plutarch (c. 46–120 AD) about the fifth century Greek poet Simonides of Keos who made the comparison between poetry and painting (28, 253):

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<sup>4</sup> Translated by Phiroze Vasunia (2011).

Simonides called painting silent poetry while poetry is painting that speaks; for the actions which painters depict as they are being performed, words describe after they are done. (qtd. in Yates 28)<sup>5</sup>

This comparison is later condensed by Horace in the nineteenth century BC with his use of the phrase *ut pictura poesis*—“as is painting so is poetry” (qtd. in Yates 253). Mary Carruthers (1998) in her book on the medieval arts of memory, observes that in the ancient rhetorical context, ekphrasis is defined as a verbal description of any subject composed in verse or prose, as long as it “brings its subject vividly before the eyes”—enough to make the listener see the subject as though they were actually present (130-133). Webb also emphasises the importance of vividness in ancient classical ekphrasis, explaining the defining quality as *enargeia*, or language which invokes the visual and emotional responses of an audience (5, 9-10, 37). The technique of *enargeia* activates vivid language to “bring the subject before the eyes” as a process of knowing, a recollection and a matter of will—of being moved (Carruthers 68, 130). Webb reveals a persuasive example recorded in the ancient *Progymnasmata*, or rhetorical handbooks, dispensed to students throughout Greek speaking areas of Rome, well established by the first century (51). Here, ekphrasis is defined as a descriptive speech which brings (literally leads) the thing shown vividly (*enargōs*) before the eyes (51).<sup>6</sup> Referring to Book 4 in Quintilian’s treatise *Institutio oratoria* (the Orator’s Education) (c. 95 AD), Webb explains that rhetoric is associated with the power of *phantasiai* (mental images) and is perceived as the missing link between language and sight (88). The experience of *phantasia* (imagination) thus renders the rhetorical subject visible (89).<sup>7</sup> Quintilian also suggests that in order to move an audience, the speaker must “himself be

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<sup>5</sup> See Plutarch “De gloria Atheniensium”, *Moralia* IV, 3.

<sup>6</sup> All translations of *Institutio oratoria* cited in Ruth Webb’s work are her own.

<sup>7</sup> See Quintilian *Institutio oratoria*, 10.7.23: “Speech is like a journey out from a harbor”.



moved” (qtd. in Webb 100).<sup>8</sup> This is evident in the technique of *enargeia* which activates the will of the speaker and audience to be moved (emotionally and cognitively). Carruthers explores medieval *memoria* (memory) as a process of “creative thought” constructed on the work of memory:

It built upon remembered structures “located” in one’s mind as patterns, edifices, grids, and—most basically—association-fabricated networks of “bits” in one’s memory that must be “gathered” into an idea. Memory work is also process, like a journey; it must therefore have a starting point. And this assumption leads again to the need for “place,” because remembering is a task of “finding” and of “getting from one place to another” in your thinking mind. (23)

Such articulations of mental constructions—navigation, location, bits or fragmentation—appear in recent cognitive theories, especially concerning mind wandering. But the concept of “mind wandering” can be traced back to the ancient rhetorical practice of ekphrasis. Quintilian makes the assessment that *enargeia* is a psychological process associated with pathos and imagination (*phantasiai*)—something he compares to the habit of daydreaming (54, 95). He recognises the temporal and spatial dimension of the imagination as a *metastasis* or *metathesis*—translated as a transference of time in classical Greek (100-101).<sup>9</sup> Specifically, the function of *enargeia* has the capacity to make the audience feel present at past and future events, as discussed earlier. But the *metathesis* of visibility, or “placing before the eyes” in the words of Quintilian, connotes more than the rhetorical concept of time; the audience is transported in their imagination to the events narrated as though actually witnessing them (100).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Quintilian *Institutio oratoria*, 6.2.26.

<sup>9</sup> See Quintilian *Institutio oratoria*, 9.2.41: “*Translatio temporum*” translated in Greek as *metastasis* or *metathesis*.

<sup>10</sup> See Quintilian *Institutio oratoria*, 9.2.40-1: “*sub oculos subiectio*” in the context of *enargeia*, meaning the art of “placing before the eyes”.

The classical rhetorical practice of ekphrasis recognises the function of imagination in activating visual and emotional responses in an audience. Marcelle Freiman (2017) explores these concepts in her ekphrasis poetry, revisiting ancient rhetorical ekphrases as teaching strategies for students of oratory (“Enactment”). She focuses particular attention on the performative act of ekphrasis, and the impact upon the minds and emotions of an audience (“Enactment”). Freiman concludes that in conducting a practice-based inquiry, new directions open for theorising ekphrasis in a way which is more relevant to a contemporary and trans-temporal world.

### *Ekphrasis in Modern and Contemporary Criticism*

In studying the differences between ancient rhetorical and modern ekphrasis, it is clear that modern definitions of ekphrasis are most prominently associated with a description of a work of art, and ancient classical definitions associate ekphrasis more consistently with the arts of memory and the cognitive functions of the mind and imagination (Webb 5). A resurgence of ekphrasis poetry emerged in the early to mid-nineteenth century, marked by a great number of poems written in response to real and imagined art work. The most famous examples are “Ode on a Grecian Urn” by John Keats (1819), “On the Medusa of Leonardo Da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery” by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1819), and “My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning (c. 1853). According to Heffernan, the popularity is attributed to the embedded visual art and imagery in the poetics of the Romantic period (92). In particular, “notional” ekphrasis, or ekphrasis in response to imagined art, gave audiences of the time—idealising ancient classical cultures—pictures they would never see except in words (92). Heffernan suggests there was a strong perception of the perishable nature of a work of art and the associated contexts of

historical and political events surrounding extraction of certain historical artefacts (93).<sup>11</sup> The romantic ekphrasis revival coincided with the birth of the public museum, which aims to preserve the history and culture embedded in works of art (93).

From the mid-twentieth century, ekphrasis poetry flourishes again with a great number of poems written in response to the visual arts, such as Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead" (1959), Anne Sexton's "The Starry Night" (1961), William Carlos Williams's volume of poems *Pictures from Breughel* (1962), and John Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" (1975). This trend continued toward the end of the twentieth century (Squire 157) and in 1989, a bibliography was published consisting of eight hundred American poems which could be linked, in some way, to a visual work of art (Heffernan 135; Long and Gage 286-296). During this period, ekphrasis is most commonly defined as "the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art" (Johnston et al. 1-2), or "the verbal representation of a visual representation" (Heffernan 3). Twentieth century ekphrasis theory is primarily situated within New Criticism, focusing on a close reading of the poem rather than the response of the reader (Freiman, "Enactment"). Murray Krieger (1967), in his formative essay on ekphrasis, elevates ekphrasis from what he calls a "classic genre" of literature to a literary principle (Heffernan 2), claiming that the plastic, spatial object of poetic imitation symbolises the "frozen, stilled world of plastic relationships which must be superimposed upon literature's turning world to 'still' it" (Krieger 265-266). Michael Davidson (1983) challenges Krieger's idea of stillness in poetry by proposing that "poetry occurs as a *movement* between a state of openness and a desire to *move* beyond a self-enclosed, solipsistic universe" (emphasis added) (78). Richard Stamelman (1984) concludes

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<sup>11</sup> See for example Lord Byron's "The Curse of Minerva" (1807), a satirical poem which attacks Lord Elgin and his taking of the Parthenon marbles.

that the ekphrastic object “is perpetually in movement, swerving in and out of the poet’s consciousness...” (615). Consistent with this view, Tamar Yacobi (1995) emphasises “the still moment does not follow, nor correspondingly, does its divorce from narrative and narrativity” (615-616). Instead, she suggests ekphrasis poetry “dynamises the object on every possible level”, and within a re-represented narrative, “we then have the ekphrasis of the visual model (as distinct from the visual work of art) to narrativised effect (as against descriptive, picture-like, or thematic bearing)” (Yacobi 599-649). She argues that ekphrasis poetry—which aims to re-represent the visual model—is a narrative extension involving perpetual movement. Earlier, I suggested that movement is key to ancient rhetorical practices of ekphrasis, perceived as a journey of getting from one place to another in the thinking mind (Carruthers 23).

According to Davidson, ekphrasis articulates the relationship between language and reader-response, allowing for the poet’s multiple and fragmented reactions (Davidson 77). In Freiman’s own practice-based assessment, reading and writing poetry in response to a visual work of art is a “fracturing” experience, inciting “a combination of attraction, repulsion and surprise”, triggering associative “memory images of childhood and vague feelings of discomfort and dread” (“Enactment”). This immersive experience might represent a katabasis into the psychic unconscious, and the process of re-collecting and articulating memory-images.

Cole Swensen (2011) also challenges the scope of ekphrasis discourse, emphasising that conventional modes accentuate a separation between the writer and the work of art; the writer remains not only mentally distant from the visual object but physically in opposition to it (70). In the conventional sense, she suggests that ekphrasis writing keeps “art at a safe distance” sealed within its own frame, demonstrating the otherness of poetry (70). She extends contemporary ekphrasis to a mode which involves not *looking* at art as much as *living with* it, where art, artist,

poet and audience share a context (70). Furthermore, she argues that sharing context involves the viewer shifting constantly; at times the viewer observes, and at other times, the viewer is the work of art (70). I address the sharing of context later within contextual blending and projection theories, providing valuable insights into an ekphrasis which activates the function of imagination. Swensen underscores ekphrasis as a mode of thinking where the relationship is not so much between a writer and work of art as it is between the verbal and visual modes of experience, both of which the writer lives (71). Arguably, this supports the views of Yacobi and Freiman on the immersive experiences of ekphrasis writing, arguably a katabasis, and its fragmented responses.

David Kennedy (2015) also suggests a new turn in critical responses to ekphrasis, directing attention to “the idea of the encounter” between text and image (*Encounter* 1). He makes the assertion that the ekphrastic critic must avoid judging the poem’s faithfulness to its source (the visual work of art), and equally go to “the poem beneath or behind it” (“Ekphrasis and Poetry” 90). More recently, Kennedy (2018) suggests that contemporary ekphrasis should consider an age which is profoundly ekphrastic and intersemiotic, where reading and interpretative competencies are derived from exposure to a variety of media (“Intermediality” 321).<sup>12</sup> Arguably, his ideas of the ekphrastic poem going beneath and behind the work of art echoes Swensen’s view that ekphrasis is a mode between the verbal and visual experience, which is not so much looking at art as much as living with it. Kennedy’s assertions may relate in essence to views expressed by Adrienne Rich (discussed later), which expressly relate poetry to the journey underground beneath the level of consciousness.

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<sup>12</sup> For more information on intersemiotics, see Jacobson (1959) “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”, pp. 232–239, especially p. 233: “Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems”.

### *The Ancient Classical Arts of Memory*

In classical Greek mythology, Mnemosyne is the goddess of memory, a river of Hades next to the Lethe (the river of forgetfulness), and the mother of all nine muses. According to Carruthers, this mythological narrative “...places memory at the beginning, as the matrix of invention for all human arts...” (7, 21). Invocations to Mnemosyne and the Muses—appeals which essentially call upon the art of memory—appear at the beginning of classical epic poems, such as Homer’s *Odyssey*— (Benjamin 97). Ancient rhetoricians relied on mnemotechnical tools to recount epic tales, lyrical poems and medieval scripture. These mnemonic tools include the ancient strategies of ekphrasis and *enargeia*. Carruthers explains these mnemonics as “the matrix of a reminiscing cogitation, shuffling and collecting “things” stored in a random-access memory scheme or set of schemes” (Carruthers 4, 9). She explains that medieval *memoria* relies on the concept of memory architecture involving a library built up over one’s lifetime to be used creatively (4). According to Carruthers, the medieval art of memory is most practically considered a compositional art—qualities today which are acknowledged as a function of imagination and creative thinking.

It is widely acknowledged that the art of memory was first observed by the classical Greek poet, Simonides of Keos (556–467 BC). Simonides came to the realisation that orderly arrangement of images into places or locations is essential for effective memory, and therefore, successful delivery of rhetorical speeches (Yates 1, 2).<sup>13</sup> Yates observes that ancient scholars of rhetoric understood the mnemonic *topoi* (subject matter of dialectic) to be topics physically stored in *loci* (location or memory places) (31). According to Quintilian (c. 35 –100 AD), images or “simulacra” are invented in a place which calls up associations in memory (qtd in. Yates 22,

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<sup>13</sup> See Cicero *De oratore*, II, lxxxvi, pp.351-4; translated by H. Rackham (1960): After the roof of a banquet hall collapsed, crushing all guests to death (except for Simonides), Simonides was able to identify the victims based on where they had been sitting.

23).<sup>14</sup> Augustine (354–430 AD) also observes the facility of locational memory, referring to memory as “palaces” or “caverns” where “treasures of innumerable images” are unveiled out of their secret places (47).<sup>15</sup> Clearly, the architecture of the mind, the placement of thoughts into imaginary receptacles, the idea of movement, and the metaphorical painting of mental images are foundational principles in the ancient rhetorical practice of ekphrasis.

This leads my argument to the medieval concept of rhetorical *ductus* or “flow” of a composition—a rhetorical feature defined in the textbook of fourth century rhetorician, Consultus Fortunatianus (Carruthers 77, 80). *Ductus* insists upon movement and guiding “a thinking mind on its way through a composition” (emphasis added) (77, 78, 80). Carruthers explains that for a person following *ductus*, every composition, visual or aural “needs to be experienced as a journey, in and through whose paths one must constantly *move*” (81). The emphasis on movement in composition is suggestive of the brain’s default mode of mind wandering, a comparison I address later in the research findings.

Augustine reflects in his writings on rhetorical *ductus* and meditation, modelling them as a “way”, a movement or turning (of direction) in fear, and as a climbing through emotional stages of a mental ladder (Carruthers 80).<sup>16</sup> It is evident that rhetorical *ductus* or compositional flow was identified with the concept of movement, an ascent or descent, and an emotional force leading to creation. These concepts make their first appearance in the literary structure of katabasis.

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<sup>14</sup> See Quintilian *Institutio oratoria*, XI, II, pp.17-22; translated by H. E. Butler (1970).

<sup>15</sup> See Augustine *Confessions*, X, pp.8, 17; translated by E. B. Pusey (1957).

<sup>16</sup> See Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, II.viii.9.1-6; translated by R.S. Pine-Coffin (1961).

### *Katabasis in the Ancient Classical Tradition*

The literary genre of katabasis—the descent of a living person into an underworld, unknown or psychic unconscious—is often accompanied by the narrative structure of a journey to look inwards, downwards and back (Baldick; Campbell, *Hero* 43-48; Campbell *Power*). For example, in Homer’s *Odyssey*, Odysseus embarks on the personal descent into Hades, the realm of the dead, where he encounters the spirit of Tiresias, a blind prophet who tells him how to get home.<sup>17</sup> Odysseus’s story represents the protagonist’s immersive experience into various trials and revelations, symbolic death, rebirth or resurrection (Campbell *Power*). Joseph Campbell explains that the typical mythical “hero” leaves one condition and transforms into another “richer” condition, having experienced some form of trial and revelation (*Power*). The *anabasis*, or ascent, typically concludes the journey as the protagonist returns from darkness into the light and into knowing. Other mythical descents include the search of Orpheus in Hades for his wife Eurydice; the descent of Theseus into the labyrinth at the palace of King Minos; and Demeter’s descent to retrieve Persephone from Hades, to name only a few. Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003) suggests that Greek mythology teaches us the enormous experiences of the depths—something the classical Greeks recognised as essential for creative composition (99-100).

Earlier in my discussion, I examine the classical Greek term *metathesis* which in rhetorical ekphrasis is defined as a transference in time and space, and the catalyst for activating an audience into experiencing the temporal present, past or hypothetical future. Arguably, the concept of *metathesis* corresponds to the structure of katabasis—the subject descends into deep internal vision and ascends transformed. Katabasis is regarded by some scholars and writers as

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<sup>17</sup> See Homer, *Odyssey*, book 10.540; translated by Robert Fagles (1997): Tiresias, blind seer of Thebes, retains his prophetic powers in the underworld.



being a “memorious” genre (Falconer, “Katabasis” 405) and arguably a vertiginous one.<sup>18</sup> The katabasis is connected with the act of remembering, as shown in the classical Greek epic, functioning as a catalytic agent for creativity. As noted earlier, Blanchot argues a similar view, suggesting that the katabasis as essential for creative composition (99-100).

A powerful example of ekphrasis poetry as an articulation of katabasis is presented in the classical Greek monody, or lyrical lamentation for the dead. Within its rhetorical frame, ekphrasis is used as a temporal and visual portal between past, present and future states. In the rhetorical and performative context of monodies, the body of the deceased is made “visible” to both speaker and audience (Webb 171). The implication is a painterly portrait of the dead—an ekphrasis or visual evocation of the resurrected deceased. Simonides of Keos exploits poetic language to evoke absent things, appealing to memory images in a monody of his own. In one epigram, he directly relates memory as an event pulled out of darkness by language (Carson, *Economy* 85):

Asbestos glory these men set around their dear fatherland  
and in a dark blue death cloud they wrapped themselves.  
Not dead having died. Because virtue down from above  
keeps pulling them up glorying out of Hades’ house. (fr. 59B, 121D)<sup>19</sup>

The remembered are raised from the house of the dead: “Because virtue down from above / keeps pulling them up glorying out of Hades’ house”. Anne Carson (1999) examines the epigrammatic fragments of Simonides in her book *Economy of the Unlost*, referring to the general mood of disorientation in his monodies which is spatial, aural, temporal and cognitive

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<sup>18</sup> See Borges (1998) *Collected Fictions*: “Funes, His Memory”: a story about a man who dies from a good memory; “The Maker”: a story about Homer who goes blind and must draw up images from a “well” of memory.

<sup>19</sup> See *Further Greek Epigrams*, D. L. Page, editor (1981); all fragments translated by Anne Carson (1999) unless otherwise noted.

(86) . The premise of the lamentation is memorial but movement is represented in and out of Hades between two worlds, where temporal and spatial dimensions intersect (86). According to Carson, Simonides understands the importance of injecting movement into a mental space to ensure it is memorable (85).

Somewhat resonating the observations of Blanchot, Margaret Atwood (2002) espouses the essential nature of the katabasis for writers: "...all [writers] must descend to where the stories are kept" (178, 179). She dedicates a chapter to the creative process of writing in her book *Negotiating with the Dead*, suggesting "...perhaps all writing, is motivated, deep down, by a fear of and a fascination with mortality—by a desire to make the trip to the Underworld, and to bring something back from the dead" (156). Perhaps the poetic effort directs the spectator's gaze to an inner reality or dimension, and to the deepest part of the imaginative self; the poet is a visionary in this regard. I will examine the cognitive scientific literary studies on the functions of imagination and reveal the distinctive relationship between ekphrasis and katabasis.

### ***Imagination in Cognitive Literary Studies***

Memory would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being, from which I could never have escaped by myself. (Proust vol.1.3-8)<sup>20</sup>

I began my argument by acknowledging more research is required in the interdisciplinary fields of literary studies and cognitive sciences and their associative patterns, especially the function of imagination in ekphrasis poetry. Richardson (2015) makes the suggestion in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* that many possibilities are opening between literary and scientific research on the function of imagination (232). Earlier, I explained the function of

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<sup>20</sup> See Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*; all excerpts of Proust are translated C. K. Scott-Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (1981).

imagination is recognised in ancient rhetorical practices as a critical, if not essential, component of creative composition. I provide an extended view that an understanding of contemporary ekphrasis cannot reside outside the catchment of recent cognitive studies, specifically with reference to the deep immersive state of the imagination.

As discussed in the introduction, I have adopted Abrams and Harpham's definition of the term "imagery", defined as all objects and qualities of sense perception which may be described literally, by allusion, or using simile and metaphor (151). Its applications range from "mental pictures" which, it is sometimes claimed, are experienced by the reader of a poem holistically, to all components which construct a poem, including non-visual sensory and synaesthetic experiences (150). Gabrielle Starr (2010) discusses how the reader's imagery "...can be prompted by [authorial] instruction", and memories can contribute to the construction of mental images ("Multi-Sensory" 277). Starr proposes that the aesthetic experience involves a special instance of a "bidirectional state"—one that blends internally and externally focused modes of cognition ("Theorizing Imagery" 247). This "bidirectional state" is important, she claims, because it involves the imagery of motion. Using the example of Milton's poem "Pandaemonium" in *Paradise Lost*, she discusses how "motion matters" in the visual enactment of a scene, referring to the trajectory of imagery which invites readers to "travel through the portal and deeper into the interior darkness" (248).

Richardson addresses the formation of visual and other kinds of sensory images in terms of conceptual "blending operations" as a complex network of meanings, metaphors and analytical schemas for the construction of mental images (225-226, 248).<sup>21</sup> The fundamental operation of

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<sup>21</sup> See Kosslyn and Koenig (1992) *Wet Mind: The New Cognitive Neuroscience* for more on mental imagery of the brain and how we recognise visual objects.

cognitive blending is considered by cognitive linguists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner as being at the very “heart of imagination” (228). Arnold Modell (2003) draws on cognitive linguistics to suggest that conceptual blending is an essential component of “...our capacity for generative imagination which relies upon the use of metaphor as a cognitive tool”, involving a “mapping or transfer of meaning between dissimilar domains” (Modell xiii; Richardson 228).

Significantly, the cognitive theories encompassing metaphor and conceptual blending are integral components of Turner’s theories on narrative imaginings, including the parable which facilitates creation of meaning (Turner 3, 5, 165). Turner suggests that parable combines story with projection—one story is projected onto another for constructing meaning (5). He explains that the original classical Greek word *παραβολή* (*parabole*) derived from the verb *παραβάλλειν* (*paraballein*) had a much wider, schematic meaning: “the tossing or projecting of one thing along-side another” (7). He further suggests that writers blend the parabolic journey of the mind into “a detailed travelogue”, such as when Odysseus descends (44). Turner identifies the parabolic mind as a projection deriving from spatial navigation. Referring to Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, he observes the reader is repeatedly asked to project the story of a mover in space onto the story of a thinker where mental states are identified as physical locations (45). And we might recall the ancient rhetorical interpretation of *loci* which also denotes memory places. According to Turner, Proust presents the effect of memory on his mind as a story to help his mind move from one mental state to another, thereby effecting a change of spatial location:

I was more destitute than the cave-dweller; but then the memory—not yet of the place in which I was, but of various other places where I had lived and might now very possibly be—would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being, from which I could never have escaped by myself; in a flash I would traverse centuries of civilisation... (Proust vol.1, 3-8)

The concepts of motion, transformation and manipulation are addressed by Eve Sweetser (1990) in the contexts of cognitive linguistics modelled by Fauconnier, Johnson, Lakoff and Charles Fillmore. Sweetser examines the case of readers projecting movement and manipulation onto the story of thinking—a pattern she refers to as: “the mind is a body moving through space” (47). Turner regards this pattern as primarily deriving from what he theorises to be: “THE THINKER IS A MOVER AND A MANIPULATOR”, suggesting that creative writers often use this pattern to create parabolic stories of mental events (44).

As observed earlier, one of the leading and experimental strategies for understanding human cognition is the neuroscientific research on the brain’s default mode network (Raichle 434). Results of the neuroimaging experiments show that areas of the brain which consistently exhibit activity reductions during task performance are not activated in the resting state (Raichle et al. 676; Raichle 434). The brain’s default mode network is understood to involve several different functions including the neurological basis for self-reference and collation of autobiographical information, such as memories, images and personal reflections on emotional states. In an article in the journal *Neuroimage* (2016), Davey et al. show that the brain’s default mode network is becoming almost synonymous with self-referential mental activity (390). More recently, the link between self-referential thought and the default mode network has received particular attention on the idea that a dedicated brain system might support the human sense of self (390). In cognitive literary studies, the brain’s default mode specifically relates imagination to memory, prospection into the future, theory of mind, mind wandering and mental navigation (Marcus et al. 676-682; Richardson 225-226). According to Richardson and Turner, the phenomenological experience of mind wandering makes the human mind fundamentally poetic or literary

(Richardson 231).<sup>22</sup> When left unfocused, the human mind tends to wander toward what cognitive scientists term a default group of mental ruminations (Marcus et al. 676-682). We ruminate on the past, hypothesize about the future and analyse what people might have “really meant” (Richardson 230).

In the brain’s default mode, remembering is linked closely to the function of imagination by neuroscientific researchers (Schacter and Addis 773-786). Richardson observes: “...future thinking relies on re-presenting the images stored in memory, either as originally encountered or as disassembled and recombined” (231). Recalling an earlier discussion on ancient rhetorical practice, the craft of composition is perceived as gathering “bits” across associative memory networks, rather than an act of pure persuasion (Carruthers 3). The idea that memory is a reconstructive system, involving recombining disassembled images is collectively referred to by Østby and co-authors (2012) as “mental time travel”:

A reconstructive memory system enables mental time travel by use of previous experiences as a basis for construction of imagined future situations. Thus, there is a theoretical and empirical connection between the ability to reconstruct and re-experience our own personal past and the ability to imagine new experiences. (Østby et al.)

Associated with the concept of mental time travel is navigation. According to Richardson, the topic of navigation has garnered the least attention in recent cognitive studies (236). In the cognitive scientific context, navigating involves projecting oneself forward, both in space and time especially in relation to travel through unpredictable or unknown environments. Richardson discusses a person’s navigation as the requirement “to backtrack—and the eventual need to return”, and perceives the experience as forming and maintaining “episodic memories along the

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<sup>22</sup> See Turner (1996) *The Literary Mind* 58-64: connections across mental spaces, complex operations of projection and linking.

route” (236). Richardson’s account of navigation directs our gaze to katabasis, notably with respect to memorial odyssey. He recognises the human predilection for navigation as a critical human ability throughout “deep history”, converging at the very heart of the default mode network. I suggest this is the moment when katabasis, imagination, ekphrasis and memory intersect.

Nancy Easterlin has written comprehensively about the human cognitive propensity for “wayfinding” and Odyssean structures of literary experiences (257-273). Richardson asserts Easterlin’s approach to navigation significantly overlaps with the memory-imagination network (237). This complex imagination system involving memory, prospection, navigation, mind wandering and theory of mind, facilitates an occasion for enriched poetic vision (237).

As for movement (among memory, prospection, navigation), I refer back to the ancient concept of *ductus* or compositional “flow” which insists upon *movement* and guiding “a thinking mind on its way through a composition” (emphasis added) (Carruthers 77, 78). This concept is suggestive of mental navigation and mind wandering. As a fully engaged, absorbed creative activity, it is often noticed by writers that when one writes in a process of “flow”, one can lose a sense of time and place, or rather, of being in time and place (Freiman, “Cognitive” 128).

In an interview with Will Aitken in 2004, poet and classical scholar Anne Carson discusses the essential nature of movement in poetry:

[A] poem, when it works, is an action of the mind captured on a page, and a reader, when he engages it...repeats that action...but it is a *movement*...through a thought, through an activity of thinking, so by the time you get to the end you’re different than you were at the beginning and you feel that difference (emphasis added). (“The Art” 190-226)

Therefore, the reader or writer undergoes a transformation, and is a different person at the end of the thinking process, reflecting ancient observations of *metathesis*, catharsis and katabasis. Freiman (2015) observes the writing process as a movement towards discovery (“Cognitive” 128). Furthermore, she suggests that affective responses are expressed in language as a means of “cathexis” (the concentration of mental energy on one particular person, idea or object), or perhaps “catharsis” referring to the studies of Eric Shouse (2005) on affect responses (136). In psychoanalysis, “cathexis” is defined as the process of investment of mental or emotional energy in a person, object, or idea (Hall 39)<sup>23</sup>. Sigmund Freud characterises psychoanalysis as “a dynamic conception which reduces mental life to the interplay of reciprocally urging and checking forces” (qtd. in Hall 49). According to Calvin Hall (1954) in his influential primer of Freudian psychology, the urging forces are cathexes, the checking forces are anti-cathexes (49).

Another way of observing this experience is that the affect responses provide a “non-conscious experience of intensity...” (Freiman, “Cognitive” 136; Shouse). Similar to the ideas of Campbell, Blanchot, Butcher and Atwood in relation to katabasis, intensity and immersion influence the results of the writing experience. The experience is known as a catharsis, a purgation and purification of the emotions (Falconer, “Selfhood” 218; Kallendorf and Kallendorf 296, 297) and a return back into consciousness (Campbell *Power*; Kallendorf and Kallendorf 296-297).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Originating from the Greek word κάθελξις (kathexis), the *Oxford Dictionary of Classical Greek* defines cathexis as in succession, one following after the other.

<sup>24</sup> Catharsis was first introduced by Aristotle in *Poetics*. While scholars are still debating its actual meaning in Aristotle’s text, it is most often defined as the purging of the emotions of pity and fear in an audience. See Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1995) *Truth and Method*: “The spectator recognizes himself [or herself] and his [or her] finiteness in the face of the power of fate. What happens to the great ones of the earth has exemplary significance... To see that “this is how it is” is a kind of self-knowledge for the spectator, who emerges with new insight from the illusions in which he [or she], like everyone else, lives” (132).



Starr also explores cathartic and creative immersive experiences in her research on imagery and the imagination. She claims that the activation of the default mode network may contribute to a state that is both immersive (deeply interior) and focused on the exterior world—an idea or image “draws us in” so strongly it enters our lives (“Theorizing Imagery” 259). As more and more of these cognitive processes are engaged, they activate a deeply “associative immersive state” that is part of our “intense aesthetic experience” (259). Rolf Zwaan (2004), scholar of cognitive psychology, posits such aesthetic responses may be the impetus for writing; they create images in the mind and drive creativity, and as already presented in the cognitive research, they enable readers to discover and re-create for themselves emotional and intellectual experiences in response to their reading (Oatley and Djikic 9-27; Zwaan 35-62).

In summary, recent cognitive studies on the function of imagination—particularly in relation to mental imaging, conceptual blending, the parabolic journey and the brain’s default mode network—greatly influence the construction of mental imagery as part of the creative writing process. I suggest this process involves the immersive experiences of katabasis and catharsis. The research findings show that the immersive functions of memory and the imagination are considered in both ancient and contemporary scholarship as essential components of rhetorical practice and the creative arts. Research in this field offers extensive interdisciplinary scope to extend contemporary critical discourse on ekphrasis poetry. In the following chapters, I examine a selection of poems which engage directly with the immersive, cathartic practices of katabasis and ekphrasis, and apply the cognitive theories and findings presented in this chapter.

## Chapter Two:

### The “Bog Poems” by Seamus Heaney

. . .poetry as divination, poetry as revelation of the self to the self, as restoration of the culture to itself; poems as elements of continuity, with the aura and authenticity of archaeological finds, where the buried shard has an importance that is not diminished by the importance of the buried city. Poetry as a dig, a dig for finds that end up being plants. (Heaney *Preoccupations* 41)

Memory would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up out of the abyss of not-being, from which I could never have escaped by myself. (Proust 3-8)

In this chapter, I critically examine katabasis alongside the poetic genre of ekphrasis and contemporary cognitive literary theories. Referring to the “bog poems” of Seamus Heaney, I explore the immersive associative process of katabasis and dynamic blends of mind wandering in the construction of mental imagery. It is evident from cognitive literary studies that the relationship between ekphrasis and cognitive poetics is increasingly perceptible. This is supported by recent findings which show that mental imagery emanates from a deep immersive place of imagination, mind wandering and navigation (Marcus et al. 676-682; Richardson 231). By observing these developments, my aim is to extend critical discourse of modern and contemporary ekphrasis poetry.

In chapter one, I discuss the origins of ekphrasis in the rhetorical practice of imaginatively brining an event or subject before the listener’s mind’s eye. (Verdonk 119-129). As discussed in the introduction, Verdonk presents a definition of ekphrasis as a detailed description of any real or imagined visual object or scene, abstract idea, mental image or state of emotion (119-129). With this definitional framework in mind, I provide a contextualised reading of the “bog poems”

(1975) written by Seamus Heaney in response to photographs taken by Danish archaeologist P. V. Glob of bog excavations in 1965. The excavations uncovered bodies of Iron Age people buried in bog lands in north-western Europe, particularly in Denmark and Ireland. The selected poems include “Punishment” and “The Grauballe Man” published in *North* in 1975. I treat these poems as ekphrasis poems in the modern, conventional sense (poetry about visual works of art, in this case, photographs) but extend their treatment to the deep, immersive state of katabasis and the function of imagination.

I return briefly to Mark Turner’s theories of the literary mind, including dynamic connections across mental spaces and complex operations such as projection, integration, linking and blending (57-58). Turner considers these dynamic connections as key to the construction of meaning and mental imagery. In chapter one, I address the concepts of motion, transformation and manipulation theorised by Eve Sweetser in the context of cognitive linguistics, more specifically her view that the mind is a body moving through space (47). Turner suggests this pattern is often adopted by writers for creating parabolic stories of mental events (44). He observes the trope of Odysseus’s descent and posits the mind’s projection and change of spatial navigation in which the mind moves from one mental state to another, therefore presenting an important theoretical framework. Referring to the “bog poems”, I explore Heaney’s application of cognitive poetics in terms of spatial navigation. As Heaney descends into the mire of the bog, he descends into a place of collective memory where buried historical artefacts lie preserved in the peat. I compare his use of ekphrasis poetics to the ancient rhetorical practices of ekphrasis, katabasis and *ductus*, or compositional flow—all literary principles related to the temporal and spatial dimensions of a journey. I illustrate Heaney’s experimentation with immersive katabasis for the construction of mental imagery and translation into an ekphrastic poetic.

## *Seamus Heaney*

Seamus Heaney (1939 – 2013) was born in Derry in Northern Ireland in 1939. The eldest son of a Catholic farming family, Heaney's poetry often expresses his pastoral roots and recreations of life in a rural community, recalling memories of a country boyhood and activities of farm life (Ellmann and O'Clair 1373). In Heaney's estimation, writing poetry is a redemptive act, one he famously compares to Jesus's writing in the sand in a story recorded in John's Gospel (McConnell 441). He describes poetry as "...divination, poetry as revelation of the self to self, as restoration of the culture to itself", comparing the experience to the aura and authenticity of archaeological finds (*Preoccupations* 41). For Heaney, writing exists as a sacrificial and sacramental practice but also as a conflicted and occasionally guilty process (McConnell 454). Like the substance of Robert Lowell's confessional poems, Heaney contemplates his divided cultural, religious and political heritage, articulating a guilty role within it (Hart 393). Heaney often evokes Catholic imagery in his poetry, including themes of revelation, blasphemy, catechism, consecration and Marian devotion.<sup>25</sup>

Heaney lived in a world of cultural, political and religious division in a country divided against itself (Verdonk 93). His Northern Irish heritage and contexts, affected by the political unrest of the time, shape his poetic style, subjectivity and language. He addresses art's isolation in his prose work *The Government of the Tongue* (1988), observing the struggle between the artist's commitment to his own vision and beliefs, and political discourse and social responsibilities (94).

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<sup>25</sup> For example, the poem "Funeral Rites" from *North* (1975) exemplifies Heaney's incorporation of Catholicism in his poetic, including themes of consecration, reverence, sainthood and blasphemy.

The fact is that poetry is its own reality and no matter how a poet may concede to the corrective pressures of social, moral, political and historical reality, the ultimate fidelity must be to the demands and promise of the artistic event. (Heaney *Government* 101)

### *Heaney and the Visual Arts*

Throughout his writing career, Heaney vigorously explores the visual arts in a series of ekphrasis poems and collaborations with visual artists (Corcoran 261; Heffernan 135-136). From the 1960s, he entered art circles in Dublin, establishing relationships with artists such as T.P. Flanagan, Colin Middleton, Derek Hill and contemporary art patron Gordon Lambert (O'Driscoll 54). Neil Corcoran (2012) studies the treatment of visual arts in modern Irish poetry and claims Heaney's use of ekphrasis "aids a motion characteristic of Heaney's oeuvre as it develops: returning on itself in order to move further forward" (265). Later, I argue this "motion characteristic" extends to Heaney's exploration of katabasis, a trajectory which reveals itself throughout many of his poetic compositions.

Evidence of Heaney's relationship with the visual arts appears in collections as early as *Death of a Naturalist* (1966). In *Door into the Dark* (1969), the poem "Bogland" reflects a series of 1960s paintings of bog lands by Northern Irish landscape painter T. P. Flanagan (261). He composed many conventional ekphrastic poems such as those in his collection *North* (1975), including "Sunlight", a portrait of a woman at work in a domestic scene arguably evoking Vermeer; his sonnet "The Seed Cutters", an invocation to Breughel; and "Glanmore Sonnets" in *Field Work* (1979) referring to the sculptor Oisín Kelly (261-263). He collaborated with Irish artist Felim Egan and responded to the artistic work of Sonja Landweer, Barrie Cooke, Carolyn

Mulholland and Richard Long (262). Heaney also participated in the visual arts as an art critic, curator and writer of catalogues (262).<sup>26</sup>

Notably in *North*, Heaney extends the genre of ekphrasis into the mythical realm of buried remains, observing Viking archaeological finds, corpses of Iron Age people and the anatomical plates of Baudelaire's poem "The Digging Skeleton" (263). A confluence of visual arts, historical preservation and archaeological excavation are motifs often represented with the nuance of ekphrastic vision in his poetry. He famously quotes Wallace Stevens in his poem "Fosterage" in *North*: "Description is revelation!" (*New Selected Poems* 89). We shall see distinctive articulations of revelation later as Heaney constructs his poetic vision from katabasis.

### ***Heaney and Katabasis***

Throughout his career, Heaney regarded writing as an immersive process, often engaging with the katabasis, referencing works such as Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Purgatorio* and *Inferno*. He explains this to Dennis O'Driscoll in an interview in 2008, observing his education in ancient classical texts, including understanding the literary structures of katabasis (295). Referring to his poem "The Strand at Lough Beg" (1979), he comments:

When I read the passage at the start of Dante's *Purgatorio*, describing that little lake and rushy shore where Virgil and Dante find themselves once they emerge from the murk of hell, I couldn't not connect it with my own strand... (qtd. in O'Driscoll 221)

Literary scholar Rowena Fowler (2014) examines resounding references in Heaney's work to the katabasis and the nekylia (conversations with the souls of the dead), appearing as early as the

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<sup>26</sup> See Corcoran (2012) pp.261-263: Heaney curated an exhibition in the Ulster Museum in 1982, *A Personal Selection*. His poem "Grotus and Coventina" in *The Haw Lantern* (1987) is written in response to the Roman altar relief dedicated to Coventina; the "Poet's Chair" in *The Spirit Level* describes a street sculpture in Dublin constructed by Carolyn Mulholland; and "The Mud Vision" in *The Haw Lantern* is inspired by British artist Richard Long's installation piece "Mud Hand Circle".

“bog poems” of *North* (320). Fowler observes that Heaney evokes the nekylia with ancestral poets such as James Joyce, William Shakespeare, John Keats, Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes and Joseph Brodsky in his collections *Station Island* (1984), *Seeing Things* (1991) and *Electric Light* (2001) (320). Heaney’s rejoinder “To George Seferis in the Underworld” (2004), consults Plato’s depiction of the afterlife, judgement, punishment and conversations with the dead (318). In his collection *District and Circle* (2006), a compilation modelled on Dante’s *Commedia*, Heaney once again descends into the underworld. He continues to explore katabasis in his collection *Human Chain* (2010)—as illness and loss become preoccupations—drawing on Virgil’s *Aeneid* book six to express the finality of death in the style of a “resurrection” (Cavanagh 197-198). Similar to the classical Greek monody, Heaney’s poetry often paints portraits of the dead, raising souls in memorial. Later, I present articulations of katabasis and nekylia in Heaney’s work, revealing functions of the brain’s default mode, such as navigation and mind wandering.

Poet and scholar Henry Hart (1998) suggests (referring to the poem “North”) that Heaney’s poetic intentions appeal to the apocalyptic (387). Hart studies the etymology of the classical Greek word *apokalupsis* from “apo” meaning “from” and “calypso” meaning hidden, cave or cavernous (387). The word’s derivation recalls Heaney’s own statement of “poetry as revelation of the self to the self...with the aura and authenticity of archaeological finds”, quoted in the epigraph of this chapter. Heaney directly compares the experience of composing poetry to the aura and authenticity of excavating archaeological artefacts (*Preoccupations* 41). As Hart suggests of the poem “North”, Heaney descends into history’s “mire” with the purpose of “offering up the dead to be judged for their deeds and the deeds done against them” (387). Heaney engages with the katabasis in the “bog poems” where revelation is the process of digging.

### *The “Bog Poems”*

In 1965, Danish archaeologist P. V. Glob conducted excavations of Iron Age people preserved in bogs in north-west Europe and Ireland. Photographs of these excavations revived Heaney’s own childhood memories of bog lands and in response, he wrote a sequence of ekphrasis poems published in the limited edition *Bog Poems* (1969) and subsequently in *North* (1975). According to Glob and other researchers, many of the preserved bodies appear to have suffered violent deaths and were buried with votive offerings, leading many archaeologists to believe the deaths were a form of ritualistic human sacrifice (Glob 144-192; McLean 301). The distinctive chemical properties of the bog contribute to preservation, and prolonged immersion causes a darkening of the skin resulting from a tanning process (McLean 301-302).

The contexts of preservation, metamorphosis and collective memory are important for reading Heaney’s “bog poems”. From excavation, exhumation, treatment and transportation to a museum exhibition (299-300), the corpses are treated as historical artefacts for public display.<sup>27</sup> Unquestionably, the subject of exhumation, iconicity and preservation raise questions of ethics. In terms of curatorial practice, many museums have developed their own institutional ethics policy on retention and display of “pagan”, prehistoric remains (Giles 79). Heaney is fully aware of the ethical considerations, especially in relation to artful voyeurism and observer ambivalence, something he articulates in his poem “Punishment” (*New Selected Poems* 72). In the “bog poems”, Heaney often directs a fascinated gaze and distantly observed horror in his detailed ekphrastic accounts of the victim’s anatomical conditions (Hart 403).

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<sup>27</sup> For example, the “Grauballe Man” is displayed in the Moesgard Museum of Prehistory in Denmark. See the *Moesgard Museum of Prehistory* website: <https://www.moesgaardmuseum.dk/en/>.



According to Hart, Heaney recasts the bog as a symbolic agent for the historical preservation of the human condition (403). Heaney also adds a mythological connotation to the bog and often sets the violent IRA campaign of the time into the Iron Age context (403). He offers a perspective on this in his article “Place and Displacement”:

...the complexity of the present conditions [Northern Irish troubles] may go some way to explain the large number of poems in which the Northern Irish writer views the world from a great spatial or temporal distance, the number of poems imagined from beyond the grave, from the perspective of mythological or historically remote characters. (8)

In earlier discussions, I consider Turner’s theories on dynamic mental spaces involving complex operations such as projection, integration, linking and blending. Turner’s theory of “the mind is a mover and manipulator” applies the imperative of motion between mental spaces, analogous to navigation or a journey. In the poetic text of the “bog poems”, I suggest Heaney is the agent between this world and the metaphysical world, offering a voice to the dead. The reader is asked to mentally navigate into the past, present and future, and imagine the experiences and thoughts of the preserved victims. This occurrence in Heaney’s cognitive poetic is closely aligned to the art of classical ekphrasis; the aim is to draw the reader into seeing the rhetorical subject, thus entering a temporal space of an imagined present.

### ***“Punishment”***

Heaney’s poem “Punishment” is written in response to a corpse exhumed from marshlands on the Windeby estate in Schleswig, Germany in 1952. The girl is estimated to be fourteen years of age and dates to the first century AD (Hart 407). Glob’s detailed ekphrastic account leads to a popular interpretation that the girl was punished for an act of adultery (Glob 114, 153; Hart 407). The girl’s peat covered body is naked, her head is shaved, a blindfold is tied over her eyes and

she wears an ox-hide collar around her neck (Hart 407; Verdonk 95). Heaney's poetic response in "Punishment" offers a multitude of critical readings across historical, political, social, feminist, gender-based and religious contexts as well as several other critical interpretations. For some scholars, the victim represents the Northern Irish girls punished for having relations with British soldiers (Verdonk 95); for feminist readers, the sacrificed girl recalls the exhausted female fertility myth (Coughlan 186); and for others, a political reading provides comparative interpretations to the violent IRA campaign (Hart 403). I position my own reading of this poem within the brain's default mode, and classical rhetorical frameworks of ekphrasis and katabasis.

The poem "Punishment" is a conventional ekphrasis poem responding to Glob's photographic and recorded depiction of the bog corpse. Yet the ekphrasis poetic extends from the simple re-presentation of portraiture to the function of mind in which mental imagery and narrative imagination are conceived. "Punishment" is characterised by projection—the poet, reader and perhaps even the subject embark on a mythical underworld descent resulting in the excavation of the human condition. Heaney fosters the impression that the poet and reader share certain situational and contextual factors, thus drawing the reader into a shared mental space. He achieves this response by articulating vivid and emotional language to "paint" the portrait of the dead girl as though witnessing and experiencing her punishment. This echoes the ancient rhetorical practice of *enargeia* discussed earlier; the listener is transported into the imagined temporal present as a witness to events (Webb 100-101).

Heaney's first person speaker performs an act of resurrection. He appropriates (or misappropriates) the persona of the dead girl and renders her image as real:

I can feel the tug  
of the halter at the nape

of her neck, the wind  
on her naked front. (*New Selected Poems* 71)<sup>28</sup>

Heaney shifts the temporal state into the present and assigns movement, adding a performative style to the poetic. “I can feel”, “It blows”, “it shakes”, “I can see”, and “I almost love you”, he writes, in an attempt to transport the reader into experiencing or witnessing events. The result is a mental space shared awkwardly by poet, resurrected girl and reader:

It blows her nipples  
to amber beads,  
it shakes the frail rigging  
of her ribs. (71)

and later:

her shaved head  
like as stubble of black corn,  
her blindfold a soiled bandage,  
her noose a ring

to store  
the memories of love.  
Little adulteress,  
before they punished you

you were flaxen-haired,  
undernourished, and your  
tar-black face was beautiful.  
My poor scapegoat,

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<sup>28</sup> All references to the poem “Punishment” are cited from Heaney, *New Selected Poems, 1966-1987* (1990).

I almost love you  
 but would have cast, I know,  
 the stones of silence.  
 I am the artful voyeur (71, 72)

Perhaps the girl is exploited, murdered and buried again for the sake of the voyeuristic observer, as Heaney acknowledges in two lines of verse: “I am the artful voyeur” and “my poor scapegoat”. By his own admission, Heaney artfully and intimately paints the girl’s portrait, observing the shrivelled and preserved corpse, imagining her nipples hardened by the wind, blowing on her naked front. According to Hart, Heaney guiltily recoils in horror from such voyeurism, knowing that mythical fertility cults and associated atrocities might furtively attract him (403). Heaney juxtaposes “artful” and “voyeur” to represent a veiled desire, and as a result, the reader is led (intentionally or not) to the sound of the word “voyage”. The speaker presents himself as lover and traitor: “I almost love you / but would have cast, I know, / the stones of silence” (72). But the speaker turns away, as did Orpheus in the underworld. Blanchot describes this moment as the artist’s Orphic gaze:

It is inevitable that Orpheus transgress the law which forbids him to “turn back”, for he already violated it with his first steps toward the shades... (172)

I mentioned earlier that different readings of “Punishment” offer a multitude of rich interpretations, many of which consider historical, political and religious attitudes in a divisive and sectarian Ireland. Seamus Deane, Northern Irish writer, poet and historian (1940–) portrays Heaney as “characteristic of his Northern Irish Catholic Community” (*Celtic* 175), observing his understanding of the roots of violence and poetry as growing in the same soil (“Timorous” 70). According to Verdonk, Heaney might even be imagining the girl as the “sister” of the Northern Irish girls who were tarred, feathered and tied to railings as a punishment for having relations

with English soldiers (95), as articulated by Heaney in the following lines: “when your betraying sisters, / cauled in tar, wept by the railings” (72). An alternative feminist reading is offered by Patricia Coughlan in discerning feminine functions as being set in opposition to one another, such as the tired fertility myth associated with the sacrificial deaths of virgins (186). Heaney addresses these concerns in an essay “Mother Ireland” (1972):

You have a society in the Iron Age where there was ritual blood-letting. You have a society where girls’ heads were shaved for adultery, you have a religion centering on the territory, on a goddess of the ground and of the land, and associated with sacrifice. Now in many ways the fury of Irish Republicanism is associated with a religion like this, with a female goddess who has appeared in various guises. (790)

Undoubtedly, the Northern Irish conflicts of the time affected Heaney personally and publically, and Heaney arguably draws the reader into the social and political unrest of a divisive and sectarian Ireland by articulating unspeakable atrocities inflicted upon the girl. By drawing the reader into such vivid, ekphrastic details—recalling in many ways the technique of *enargeia*—the reader responds cognitively and emotionally. Heaney projects himself into the cognitive space of the poem, imagining and constructing an artificial memory: “to store / the memories of love. / Little adulteress, / before they punished you” (71). Heaney navigates into her mental space but also projects his own narrative—he concludes her fate is sealed because she *is* an adulteress using the imperative “Little adulteress”, and he imagines she stores memories of love for someone unknown to the reader.

In chapter one, I discuss the function of the ekphrasis poem in activating strategies of composition equivalent to, but not dependent on the “painting” or visual object, allowing for multiple and fragmented responses (77). I use the example of Freiman’s own practice based experience of “reading” works of art and responding with a “fracturing” of the visual response. Freiman designates this process as “reaching back associatively” and cognitively into childhood

memories. I argue such an associative projection is analogous to the immersive experience of katabasis.

In the final stanza of “Punishment”, Heaney averts the gaze to the reader and himself, with an intimation of a confessional tone:

who would connive  
in civilised outrage  
yet understand the exact  
and tribal, intimate revenge. (72)

Heaney’s poetic intentions evoke the apocalyptic—an uncovering of the human condition buried in historical mire. He descends into the underworld and digs up preserved remains—imagined and projected—in the tradition of the katabasis, returning with a narrative and poetic vision.

### ***“The Grauballe Man”***

“The Grauballe Man” is a poem composed in response to a bog corpse excavated and photographed by P. V. Glob. The preserved body lay undisturbed in a very old layer of peat for centuries in a village near Grauballe in Jutland (Denmark), until accidentally unearthed by peat-cutters in April 1952 (McLean 302). The body was lifted from the bog and taken for excavation to Moesgard Museum. Here, it was discovered the cause of death was a deep cut across the throat from ear to ear, mostly likely the result of ritual sacrifice (302). The human remains date to the Iron Age period, almost two thousand years ago (Glob 58-59).

Like the bog girl, the Grauballe Man experiences a transformation from his underworld resting place—his body is exhumed, treated with preservative chemicals and is assigned to a museum space along with historical accounts, words and images. Heaney uses the elements of an

archaeological excavation to explore the katabasis and ekphrasis in his poem. The transformative and performative aspects—re-imagination and re-membering—are key to Heaney’s poetic interpretation of the pictured body. Heaney paints a portrait of a weeping man, and according to Hart, relates blood sacrifice to the blood feuds of modern Ireland (406). The poetic rites of the “dig” venture inwards and downwards into Irish history (406). The reader’s gaze is directed to the palpable presence of the preserved man:

As if he had been poured  
in tar, he lies  
on a pillow of turf  
and seems to weep (69)<sup>29</sup>

Similar to the bog girl, the Grauballe Man is resurrected and raised from an underworld resting place by language associated with birth and delivery: “And his rusted hair / a mat unlikely / as a foetus’s” and “bruised like a forceps baby” (69). The Grauballe Man’s preserved memory is effectively projected iconically into a historical visual object for public exhibition:

but now he lies  
perfected in my memory,  
down to the red horn  
of his nails,

hung in the scales  
with beauty and atrocity:  
with the Dying Gaul  
too strictly compassed (*New Selected Poems* 70)

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<sup>29</sup> All references to the poem “The Grauballe Man” are cited from Heaney (1990) *New Selected Poems*.

According to Hart, the Grauballe Man is like the “Dying Gaul” representing the emblem of colonisation, whose contemporaries are the Catholic victims in Northern Ireland along with the victims of sectarian violence (407). The artful voyeur is once again perceptible. Heaney creates the impression that the poet and reader share situational factors:

Who will say ‘corpse’  
to his vivid cast?  
Who will say ‘body’  
to his opaque repose? (70)

The performative act of this projection is analogous to the experiences of discovery and devotion, as with the stages of archaeological excavation, funeral processions, pilgrimage, and other kinds of purposeful navigation (Bolton 207). All of these acts are connected in some way to the image, iconic placement and act of remembrance or sacramental devotion. The ekphrastic poetic is in direct conversation with katabasis from the opening lines of verse:

As if he had been poured  
in tar, he lies  
on a pillow of turf  
and seems to weep

the black river of himself.  
The grain of his wrists  
is like bog oak,  
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg.  
His instep has shrunk  
cold as a swan’s foot  
or a wet swamp root. (69)



The poetic language descends into layers of peat and ascends to a vision articulated with the imagery of birth, delivery into light and life: “and seems to weep”, “like a basalt egg” and is “bruised like a forceps baby”. The “black river of himself”— perhaps a reference to the mythical River Lethe, the river of forgetfulness—is arguably an illustration of humanity’s underworld representing the underside of the human condition. In stanza six, Heaney writes of “The cured wound / opens inwards to a dark / elderberry place” (69). The blackness of this “elderberry place”— perhaps an artifice of language with “elder” juxtaposed against the ripeness of a “berry”—symbolises the darkest cavity of human nature.

The act of remembering activates a voyage into vision, combining the genres of katabasis and ekphrasis. Heaney appears to perceive memory, and its associated spatial and temporal experiences, as a mode of navigation or a “journey”. He regards memory in terms of the relationships between absence and presence. Heaney navigates into an otherwise inaccessible underworld of buried memories (Bolton 217). The imagined is resurrected, the vision is projected, and invocations (like those to Mnemosyne in Homer’s epics) are appeals for a personal rite of passage. Heaney’s “bog poems” represent a vivid and imaginative illustration of the ekphrasis poetic entering the voyage of the katabasis.

## Chapter Three:

### Adrienne Rich: Poetry as Re-vision

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. (Rich “Awaken” 18)

In this chapter, I extend my analysis of ekphrasis poetry to the cognitive theories about the brain’s default network. By conducting a contextualised reading of Adrienne Rich’s poems “Mourning Picture” and “Diving into the Wreck”, I study the immersive process of katabasis in poetry, and the cognitive theories supporting mind wandering and navigation. I assign these functions to the construction of mental imagery in ekphrasis poetry with the aim of extending contemporary ekphrasis criticism.

#### *Adrienne Rich*

A full biographical account of Adrienne Rich is not feasible within the scope of this thesis, however, significant social, political and feminist contexts are addressed to facilitate an understanding of influences in her creative work. I focus on features shaping the imaginative transformation, motion and evolution of her poetic “re-vision”.

Adrienne Rich was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1929 in a white, middle-class family in an environment she describes as privileged (Ellmann and O’Clair 1220; Rich “Awaken” 21). Despite these privileges, she observes the social boundaries of a patriarchal model in which her father played a dominant role (Rich “Awaken” 21). When Rich began her literary career in the 1950s, poetry was still identified as a male-led tradition. Poets including W. H. Auden, Robert Frost, Dylan Thomas, John Donne, Louis MacNeice, Wallace Stevens and W.B. Yeats acted as

primary role-models in the development of her poetic style (21). Rich acknowledges the male influence in a personal account of her life and work, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (1980):

...I went on to Radcliffe, congratulating myself that now I would have great men as my teachers. From 1947 to 1951, when I graduated, I never saw a single woman on a lecture platform, or in front of a class...The “great men” talked of other “great men,” of the nature of Man, the history of Mankind, the future of Man... (238)

Rich recognises the challenges of attaining a balance between the roles of wife, mother and artist, observing that traditional female functions subvert the function of the imagination (“Awaken” 23). According to Ellmann and O’Clair in *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, Rich expresses a guilt-ridden conflict between her sense of self as a woman and herself as a poet, accompanied by a growing anxiety of what was happening in her country during the 1950s and 60s (1220). In *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (1986), Rich directs attention to the discontinuities and erasures in women’s history diminishing the female experience of writing:

But women have been writing women’s history—and feminist history—for several centuries; it is *not* a new invention, but it has been ignored, buried, erased over and over. (147)

Rich advocates the sense of an awakening in women’s writing in her essay “Comment on Friedman’s ‘I Go Where I Love’” (1984), understanding the function of poetry as playing a critical role in illuminating hidden values and prejudices:

Art that opposes dominant values, that makes visible what is hidden, that addresses an extreme and usually veiled injustice, deserves the illumination of a criticism that fully reckons with the social factors impinging on both artist and critic. (737)

Rich makes intense self-exploration the focus of her poetry (Ellmann and O’Clair 1220), addressing women’s survivorship and evolving an analytic approach to challenging historical cultures of the female voice (Martin 179; Rich “Awaken” 25). According to Rich, the search for

self-realisation involves the awakening of a collective feminist reality and “re-vision” as an act of survival (“Awaken” 18). On this subject, she writes “And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society” (18). In the late 1950s, Rich published a poem “Snapshots of a Daughter in Law”, later reflecting she “was able to write, for the first time, directly about experiencing myself as a woman” (Ellmann and O’Clair 1221). Like Seamus Heaney, Rich came to the realisation that politics was not something “out there” but “in here”, core to her condition (*Notebooks* 24). Referring to her poem “Planetarium” (1968), Rich writes: “...at last the woman in the poem and the woman writing the poem became the same person” (“Awaken” 25). Many political and social events influenced her life and career, including her participation in the civil rights movement, gay and lesbian rights movements, anti-war protests and education for underprivileged children (Ellmann and O’Clair 1221; Rich “Awaken” 24). The complex characteristics of her Jewish-feminist-lesbian identity are addressed in her essay “Split at the Root”, her self-proclaimed first attempt to define a split consciousness.<sup>30</sup> The death of her father in 1968, the suicide of her spouse in 1970, and physical suffering caused by the onset of rheumatoid arthritis at the age of twenty-three, all contributed to her personal and artistic evolution (Fox).

Adrienne Rich received increased recognition of her work after her collection of poems *Diving into the Wreck* won the National Book Award in 1974. She refused to accept the award as an individual; instead she and other nominees, Audre Lorde and Alice Walker, accepted the award “in the name of all women whose voices have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world” (Gelpi and Gelpi 204).

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<sup>30</sup> See Rich (1986) *Blood, Bread, and Poetry, Selected Prose 1979 – 1985*, pp. xii, 100-123: she writes of the lesbian feminist and radical feminist, and the complexity of identities, including her own as she “grapples” with patriarchal bias, racism and racial identity as a Jewish lesbian feminist poet.

### *Poetry as Re:Vision*

For a poem to coalesce, for a character or an action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive. And a certain freedom of the mind is needed—freedom to press on, to enter the currents of your thought like a glider pilot, knowing that your motion can be sustained, that the buoyancy of your attention will not be suddenly snatched away. Moreover, if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment. (Rich “Awaken” 23)

Rich describes her re-vision as an act of looking back with a new critical direction and collective female reality (18). “Where does the imagination get its images anyway?” she asks in the Foreword of *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (xi). While acknowledging much of her re-vision is strongly affiliated with her views on the creative possibilities of a new feminist consciousness, her re-vision extends to the voice and vision of the poet. Rich perceives the poet as a “glider pilot” gliding across currents of thought, knowing that “motion can be sustained” (“Awaken” 23). In this chapter, I critically explore Rich’s concept of “re-vision” in terms of imagination which she describes as a transcending and transforming experience (23). Rich recognises the value of concrete experience for constructing ideas and images afresh, navigating the topic in her book *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*. Here, she describes poetry as “not a resting on the given, but a questing toward what might otherwise be” (234). For Rich, the quest is not a voyeuristic experience of distant, aesthetic spectatorship but one of embodiment, calling it “an instrument for embodied experience” (12). In an interview with Ruth Prince in *Radcliffe Quarterly* (1998), Rich distinctly refers to poetry as connecting fragments:

....where poetry is liberative language, connecting the fragments within us, connecting us to others like and unlike ourselves, replenishing our desire. It’s potentially catalytic speech because it’s more than speech: it is associative, metaphoric, dialectical, visual, musical; in poetry words can say more than they mean and mean more than they say (qtd. in Prince).

In chapter one, I discussed the ancient rhetorical function of imagination in ekphrasis practice, activating the audience to the experience of presence or a *metathesis* (a transference of time and transportation to the past or hypothetical future) (Webb 100-101). In chapter two, I critically explore Heaney's engagement with the nekylia as he undertakes an immersive archaeological dig to unearth the preserved relics of the bog. Rich also engages with the nekylia in "Mourning Picture" and "Diving into the Wreck", rendering a vertiginous descent into a mythical underworld.

### ***"Mourning Picture"***

Adrienne Rich wrote the poem "Mourning Picture" (1965) in response to the painting of the same title by Massachusetts folk painter Edwin Romanzo Elmer, completed in 1889.<sup>31</sup> The oil on canvas was painted shortly after the death of his eight-year old daughter, Effie. Effie dominates the foreground of the painting, gazing out into the distance beyond the frame. She is depicted wearing a striped dress with lace collar and black stockings, patting a lamb, and in the bottom left corner of the painting, a cat walks toward her. To the right rests a cane pram with baby doll and straw hat with red ribbon. Disappearing into the background are Effie's parents, seated in the garden near a lilac tree in front of the house. They are dressed in black, staring gravely and distantly out of the painting in remembrance. Effie's unsmiling face gazes out of the picture, sternly and fixedly into the distance as though entering the viewer's world.

In "Punishment", Heaney unearths the girl from the bog in the manner of a resurrection. In a similar way, Rich raises Effie from the dead as an historical artefact and embodies her: "I am

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<sup>31</sup> See Elmer, *Mourning Picture* (1889), housed in the collection of Smith College Museum of Art, Massachusetts. The image is available on their website: <http://museums.fivecolleges.edu/browser.php?m=objects&kv=2000038&i=3215302>

Effie, visible and invisible / remembering and remembered” (39). Effie describes the mental restoration of her world in the following lines:

They have carried the mahogany chair and the cane rocker  
out under the lilac bush,  
and my father and mother darkly sit there, in black clothes.  
Our clapboard house stands fast on its hill,  
my doll lies in her wicker pram  
gazing at western Massachusetts.  
This was our world.  
I could remake each shaft of grass  
feeling its rasp on my fingers,  
draw out the map of every lilac leaf  
or the net of veins on my father’s  
grief-tranced hand. (39)<sup>32</sup>

Rich arouses the reader’s cognitive, visual and emotional responses in a similar way to the ancient rhetorical strategies of *enargeia*. She constructs a blended mental space, entering the consciousness of Effie and her parents, shifting between them. The reader responds to an artificial memory and is drawn into the temporal space of the poem: “This was our world. / I could remake each shaft of grass / feeling its rasp on my fingers, / draw out the map of every lilac leaf” (39). Effie postulates her ability to “remake each shaft of grass” to recreate her world, or illusion of her world, with the artefacts of memory images.

An immersive descent into memorial and lamentation is implied, perhaps as a contemporary expression of the classical Greek monody discussed in chapter one. Inside the commemorative event of the monody is movement, often represented as the poetic subject’s journey in and out of

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<sup>32</sup> All references to “Mourning Picture” are cited from Rich (2002) *The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems Selected and New*, pp. 39-40.

Hades and his or her situation between two worlds (Carson *Economy* 86). Rich adopts a similar model in her poetic composition by shifting between past, present and future states. “This was our world”, says Effie in stanza one, referring to the reconstructed world shaped by mental images, once shared physically with her parents. In stanza three, Effie projects a parabolic narrative into the future: “They will move from the house, / give the toys and pets away”. This recalls earlier discussions relating to the cognitive literary theories of the parabolic journey, involving “complex operations such as projection, integration, linking and blending” (Turner 57-58). Navigation has been included in several major surveys of the brain’s default network, focusing on the mental capacities for traveling backwards and forwards through time (Richardson 236). This is cultivated in Rich’s poem through a variety of spatial and temporal poetic techniques. Sue Lovell (2013) observes the faculty of mental time travel in Rich’s poem “Mourning Picture”, writing that “if the ekphrasis works well, the experience of linear time collapses as a result of identification and empathy” (286). She continues the discussion, noting that a spiritual dimension rushes in from Effie’s location beyond the grave (286). Rich vacates the voice of Effie and Effie occupies it. “I am Effie” she says, perhaps even conveying the experience of a portal (286). Comparatively, this recalls Gabrielle Starr’s suggestion of the aesthetic experience in relation to developing multisensory imagery (discussed in chapter one) and the claim that readers are invited to “travel through the portal and deeper into the interior darkness” (“Theorizing Imagery” 248). Once again, these concepts originate in ancient rhetorical ekphrasis—the experience of metathesis transports the audience into past or hypothetical future events (Webb 100-101).

In Elmer’s painting, the parent’s dark presence and empty gaze perceptibly represent internalised grief, and Effie’s luminous quality in the foreground distinguishes the realms of life



and after-life. Rich describes the desolation and distance of her parents in stanza one with the verse: “and my mother and father darkly sit there, in black clothes” (39). The words “darkly sit there” invoke a more resonant image than the mere appearance of their black clothes; Rich “paints” the darkness and isolation of their tangible grief. Notably in the painting, Elmer painted the parents under the shadow of a lilac bush in the background.

In an essay published in *Mosaic*, Fred Moramarco (1987) discusses the reversal in the imaginative process occurring in Rich’s poem, suggesting that Effie—the inspiration of the painting in death—is the only reality (32). Effie is her father’s dream-vision and Rich’s poetic re-vision. I suggest Elmer’s painting and Rich’s poem honour Effie’s memory in the style of the ancient monody, cited earlier, which glories the deceased out of Hades into memorial.

According to Moramarco, Rich allows Effie to project a reconstructed memory of her past, while at the same time, allowing her memory to live in the minds of her grieving parents (33).

This is revealed in the second stanza:

Out of my head, half-bursting,  
still filling, the dream condenses—  
shadows, crystals, ceilings, meadows, globes of dew.  
Under the dull green of the lilacs, out in the light  
carving each spoke of the pram, the turned porch-pillars  
under high early-summer clouds,  
I am Effie, visible and invisible,  
remembering and remembered. (39)

Rich resurrects and re-visions Effie in an ekphrastic poetic, evident in the descriptive account of Effie’s reconstructed world of fabricated memories:

This was our world.

I could remake each shaft of grass  
feeling its rasp on my fingers,  
draw out the map of every lilac leaf  
or the net of veins on my father's  
grief-tranced hand (39)

Here, as with the classical ekphrasis device of *enargeia*, vivid and emotional description “brings the subject before the eyes”. In the tradition of the nekylia, Effie sees and speaks directly to her parents and reader:

I tell you, the thread that bound us lies  
faint as a web in the dew.  
Should I make you, world, again,  
could I give back the leaf its skeleton, the air  
its early-summer cloud, the house  
its noonday presence, shadowless,  
and leave *this* out? I am Effie, you were my dream. (39, 40)

In the poem and painting, Effie confronts the artist's vision and the viewer's gaze, asking both to complete Effie's dream vision. As with the preserved bog corpses—excavated, exhumed and placed in a museum—Effie is the historical artefact set behind glass.

The contemporary cognitive theories of conceptual blended spaces, mind wandering, navigation and the “parabolic” journey are applicable to certain ekphrasis elements in Rich's “Mourning Picture”. Firstly, the abstract structures are shared by Elmer and Rich, distributing meaning across at least two stories: Elmer creates one story or “parabolic world” in his offering to Effie's memory; Rich creates a world by re-imagining Elmer's experience; in both poem and painting, each subject projects a different mental space; and the viewer and reader project their own mental spaces.

In *Arts of the Possible* (2008), Rich makes the fascinating observation that poetry can enter the mental space of others through language, charged with a deep invocation of meaning:

In making poetry, or any kind of art, we're translating into a medium—in this case language—the contents of our consciousness, wherever they may come from, let alone the huge underground beneath consciousness. And then poetry becomes something that can enter the consciousness of others—primarily and centrally through language...through images, aural reverberations, the texture of verbal relationships within a poem, the actual image a poem makes on the page, the different voices within the poem, the playing-off of all this on the reader's underground life. (135)

She refers to “the huge underground beneath consciousness” and the conveyance of language and imagery from the deepest charge of meaning. Finally, the contents of consciousness in the poetic composition play out in the reader's own “underground life”. I suggest Rich's ideas on the contents of consciousness, and navigating the minds of others, extend to the brain's default mode. She explores the subject of ekphrasis and translation of images using a poetic medium which intersects with the katabasis, or as describes it, “the huge underground beneath consciousness”; her poem “Mourning Picture” is the materialisation of this belief.

Careful not to undermine the authenticity of the original depiction in Elmer's painting, Rich extends ekphrasis beyond its conventional structure by activating the katabasis and immersive experience for readers. This experience triggers associative memory patterns and a fracturing of visual responses, as discussed earlier in connection with Freiman's own practice based experience of writing ekphrasis poetry. I assign these functions to the construction of mental imagery and translation into ekphrasis poetry, with the aim of extending contemporary ekphrasis discourse beyond works of art. In the next section, I consider the trope of discovery in the poem “Diving into the Wreck” as a metaphorical descent, representing a downward and backward voyage from unconsciousness to consciousness.

### ***“Diving into the Wreck”***

Adrienne Rich’s poem “Diving into the Wreck” was published in 1973 in a collection by the same title. The political and feminist aspects of the poem have incited most attention from critics, while less consideration is assigned to the iconic metaphors analogous to descent and discovery (Lindroth 69). “It is here,” says David Kalstone, referring to the poem “Diving into the Wreck” “that Rich makes her strongest political identification with feminism” (162). Wendy Martin in her book *An American Triptych* (1984), a comparative study of the works by Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson and Adrienne Rich, characterises Rich’s entire collection of *Diving into the Wreck* as her “best effort” to attain a “new understanding of her personal and political needs” (188). James Lindroth (1985) takes a different view in his article which examines the literary tropes of discovery, directing attention to the series of analogous tropes of discovery and survivorship in Rich’s work (69, 75). The literary trope of discovery is also the subject of Martin Jay’s essay (2002), referring to Rich’s poem “Diving into the Wreck” in relation to virtual immersion: the spectator “dives into the hold and becomes one of the victims” (98-99). More recently, in an essay focusing on South African novelist J. M. Coetzee’s rewriting of *Foe* (1987), Barbara Eckstein (2007) analyses the metaphors of immersion and diving, noting that both *Foe* and Rich’s “Diving into the Wreck” distinguish the barrier of silence that exists on land and revelation that exists under water (57-59). While fully acknowledging the multifarious feminist, social, political and hermeneutical readings of Rich’s “Diving into the Wreck”, I will concentrate on the elements of discovery, especially in connection with the evolutionary process of consciousness (from the psychic unconscious to the consciousness of knowing). Once again, I frame my critical reading of Rich’s poem within classical rhetorical contexts and the contemporary cognitive literary theories, especially navigation and mental time travel.

“Diving into the Wreck” is not recognised as an ekphrasis poem, certainly not in the conventional sense associated with visual works of art (real or notional). My aim is to consider “Diving into the Wreck” as an ekphrasis construction in terms of the cognitive functions of the imagination and the brain’s default mode network.

“Diving into the Wreck” begins with the diver’s preparations for a journey.

First having read the book of myths,  
and loaded the camera,  
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,  
I put on  
the body-armor of black rubber  
the absurd flippers  
the grave and awkward mask.  
I am having to do this  
not like Cousteau with his  
assiduous team  
aboard the sun-flooded schooner  
but here alone. (22)<sup>33</sup>

Prior to embarking on the descent, the speaker carefully studies the “book of myths” and reviews valuable information as though reading a treasured map holding secrets of a mythical place. Such ideas have historical roots, as discussed in the introduction. Ancient classical ekphrasis was used as a rhetorical, mnemotechnical device for recalling images, oratory and texts. As discussed earlier, one ancient ekphrastic device is to imagine memory as a chart or map guiding the mental processes of navigation. We see this concept strategically placed in Rich’s poem in stanza six:

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<sup>33</sup> All references to the poem “Diving into the Wreck” are cited from *Diving into the Wreck* (2013), pp. 22-24.

I came to explore the wreck.  
 The words are purposes.  
 The words are maps. (23)

The speaker in stanza one makes preparations for the dive with the help of various tools, books and methods—much like the writer—and according Eckstein, this equipment transforms the speaker from a creature of the land to a creature of the sea (62). Rich implies these tools are awkward: “the body-armour of black rubber”, “the absurd flippers”, “the grave and awkward mask”—items which are cumbersome on land but necessary and life-sustaining in the sea. The sea might represent any number of symbolic structures—the perilous unknown, psychic unconscious, underworld, limits of human knowledge and desire, or recalling Rich’s own metaphor, “the huge underground beneath consciousness”—iconic signals of vulnerability.

Rich is fully aware of the essential drive in human nature for self-knowledge and transformation which she believes is “in no way passive” (“Awaken” 23). Perhaps this articulates an awareness that one must dive into the wreck, rather than viewing it from aesthetic spectatorship. Rich directs emphasis onto survivorship—something well documented in her biographical accounts as discussed earlier in this chapter. Again, I underline Rich’s view that a certain freedom of mind is needed to enter the currents of thoughts “like a glider pilot” (23). Moreover, she holds the belief that the imagination has to question, challenge and conceive of alternatives in the life lived and in the present moment (24). Rich is conscious of the perils associated with this journey, a quality she installs by contrasting the darkness of her own impending descent to the lightness on board Cousteau’s boat armed with the support of his “assiduous” team:

I am having to do this

not like Cousteau with his  
 assiduous team  
 aboard the sun-flooded schooner  
 but here alone. (22)

Rich adopts the metaphor of the ladder to signal a descent into the psychic unconscious:

There is a ladder.  
 The ladder is always there  
 hanging innocently  
 close to the side of the schooner.  
 We know what it is for,  
 we who have used it.  
 Otherwise  
 it's a piece of maritime floss  
 some sundry equipment. (22)

The tools are analogous to navigation, movement and survivorship—the flippers, goggles, mask, suit, knife and oxygen tanks are essential for survival in the depths. Eckstein reflects on iconicity and immersion by highlighting that there can be no dive without the equipment and associated knowledge (62). Two lines in Rich's poem expressly connote this: "We know what it is for,/ we who have used it". Eckstein associates the diving equipment to the tools of the writer, but suggests that if the poet fails to deal with the "self of the content" or experiential encounter alongside the content, he or she has not dived into another element (Eckstein 64; Hegel 87).

According to Alan Richardson, the most critical literary response to date on the structures of perception and mental imagery is the work of Elaine Scarry's *Dreaming by the Book* (2001), offering a persuasive argument that vivacity is key to literary aesthetics and motor imagery (Starr "Theorizing Imagery" 249). Her discussion on vivacity evokes classical rhetorical *enargeia*,

*ductus* and locational memory, especially where the language of motion is used in the ekphrasis rhetoric. Gabrielle Starr (2015) also investigates the notion of motor imagery, involving the vivid aesthetic force which is not only depictive (belonging to a text) but “enacted” (belonging to the reader) (249). Starr’s cognitive literary approach emphasises that motor imagery, or imagined motion, makes visual imagery more accessible to the reader (249). Imagery in motion is performative and in Starr’s opinion, it possesses “epistemic value” (249). So the direct and powerful aesthetic experience is not only activated from the language of vivid poetics (what I claim is resonant of *enargeia*) but also, according to Starr, from experiential aspects of the brain, such as the immersive and associative mental navigation and mind wandering in the brain’s default mode network (252). Starr explains the activation of these experiential aspects as follows:

Default mode network activation is one part of the neural substrate of an emotionally valenced immersion in an external object—the artwork—and simultaneously in inner life, with all its complexity and difference. (254)

She also addresses the role for evocation of imagery in response to works of art, referring to the concept of imagining the future and remembering the past—understood by cognitive theorists as “mental time travel”. According to Østby and co-authors:

A reconstructive memory system enables mental time travel by use of previous experience as a basis for construction of imagined future situations. Thus, there is a theoretical and empirical connection between the ability to reconstruct and re-experience our own personal past and the ability to imagine new experience (Østby et al.).

An example of this powerful aesthetic appears in stanza six of “Diving into the Wreck”. The speaker relocates from the past in the verse, “I came to see the damage that was done,” to the present, “I stroke the beak of my lamp / slowly along the flank,” imagining a past to construct a hypothetical future. And this temporal shift implies mental time travel, similar to the projections



between blended mental spaces embodied in the poem “Mourning Picture”. I suggest the subject’s descent to the wreck formulates the same structure of the katabasis and nekyia. The dive into the wreck is an allusion to descent and ascent, “of something more permanent than fish or weed”, and therefore mental imagery is constructed and seen more permanently with the creative imagination of the mind’s eye. The poetic translation is the classical definition of ekphrasis—a function of the mind and the imagination. The narrator shifts back to the present tense in stanza eight:

This is the place.  
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair  
streams black, the merman in his armored body  
We circle silently  
about the wreck  
we dive into the hold.  
I am she: I am he (24)

The narrator becomes an androgynous mermaid/ merman in an armoured suit. Many literary scholars and critics agree that the poet constructs a new feminist myth—a re-visioning of post-60s women poets and feminist politics, uniting mermaid and merman (Eckstein 69).<sup>34</sup> But I suggest from a metaphysical projection, the reader directs their gaze to the wreck itself. The first person speaker “strokes the beam” of her lamp over the fragments of the wreck she came to see: “the wreck and not the story of the wreck / the thing itself and not the myth.” Rich invites us to “dive into the hold and become one of the victims” (Jay 98-99). Like Heaney’s poetic excavation

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<sup>34</sup> See Eckstein (1996) “Iconicity, immersion and otherness: the Hegelian “dive” of J.M. Coetzee and Adrienne Rich”, pp. 69: Eckstein refers to various views including those of Terence Des Pres (1988) observing that “Diving into the Wreck” sees the image of the wreck as a “threshold image”, a doorframe and a feminist coming; Alicia Ostriker (1985) agrees that in the poem, the poet revises a new feminist myth; Charles Altieri (1984) suggests that the poem “succumbs to the nostalgia for mythic answers to political and psychological problems”.

of the punished bog girl and bog man, and the fate of young Effie in “Mourning Picture”, Rich embodies the diver in search of a direct, kinaesthetic and vertiginous experience:

the thing I came for:  
the wreck and not the story of the wreck  
the thing itself and not the myth  
the drowned face always staring  
toward the sun  
the evidence of damage  
worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty  
the ribs of the disaster  
curving their assertion  
among the tentative haunters. (23, 24)

The details are painted with ekphrastic detail: the “drowned face” with “evidence of damage,” “worn by salt and sway” into “ribs of the disaster”. The distance between the viewer and the target of the viewer contracts, a coalescing of mental spaces signified in the final stanza: “We are, I am, you are”. Rich enters another element and records the process, ascends to knowledge, and arguably proceeds to translate the images into an ekphrasis poetic. The journey does not resolve itself in stasis; the necessity to dive again is connoted:

by cowardice or courage  
the one who find our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera  
a book of myths  
in which  
our names do not appear. (24)

The poem involves a cathartic process of descent, ascent and re-vision. The dive must be repeated more than once to learn from the “drowned face always staring” with opened eyes. The katabasis and the nekyia are involved—the speaker must visit, see and learn from the dead. Heaney’s bog poems render the apocalyptic in the sense that they uncover the buried. Equally, “Diving into the Wreck” is an invocation to descend into the psychic unknown and discover the damages and treasures of the “wreck”.

The final lines, “a book of myths / in which / our names do not appear” directs the gaze to Rich’s persona who is acknowledging women’s names as not appearing in the “book of myths”, most likely referring to the erasures of women throughout history. But another representation resonates in the new science of imagination, evolving a transformation of experience and shared, blended spaces. “*Our* names do not appear” (emphasis added), and while Rich may indeed be re-visioning a feminist and political reconstitution, the nameless extends to the broader sense of the word victim. The visionary descends and ascends with “re-vision”; while she does not return with the wreck, she returns with the story of the wreck, and I suggest, she translates it into a notional ekphrasis poem. Maurice Blanchot declares that Greek mythology teaches us the enormous experiences of the depths—something essential for creative composition (99-100).

This immersive process of katabasis is palpable in Rich’s poem. And so are the cognitive theories which assign the function of imagination in mental imaging and navigation. Following translation into a poetic medium, I suggest the katabasis represented in Rich’s poem “Diving into the Wreck” represents an extension to modern and contemporary ekphrasis criticism.

## Conclusion

This interdisciplinary examination evaluates ekphrasis poetry within the contexts of ancient rhetorical traditions, the literary genre of katabasis and recent cognitive literary studies. The thesis suggests that ekphrasis poetry is closely linked to the functions of mind and imagination, opening new opportunities for criticism in contemporary ekphrasis literary studies. Several areas of interdisciplinary collaboration have already developed in relation to the function of imagination, and some which are emerging, including recent studies on mental imaging, conceptual blending and the brain's default mode network. My research findings reveal the close relationship of the imagination with memory, projection, mind wandering and navigation, and other mental faculties which support the construction of imagery in ekphrasis poetry.

In ancient rhetorical contexts, *enargeia*, or the verbal technique of vivid, sensual word descriptions, was used to trigger the visual, emotional and cognitive responses of an audience. Ekphrasis was also used as mnemotechnical device for activating memory. The studies of Frances Yates, Mary Carruthers and Ruth Webb demonstrate the ancient concept of locational memory, assigned to the experience of a journey, in and through which paths one must constantly move. I extend this assignment, suggesting that ekphrasis intersects with the classical literary genre of katabasis in relation to the associative immersive process into the psychic unconscious and imagination. Subsequently, I make the claim that the structure of katabasis is the catalyst for creative inspiration and mental imaging, involving a catharsis—a purgation or purification of the emotions and a return into consciousness.

I examine the shift in the definitional framework of ekphrasis from visual stillness to dynamic movement, as proposed by Tamar Yacobi. This practice supports the immersive

experience of writing, involving the fracturing of visual responses and triggering of associative memory patterns. The thesis designates this trajectory in ekphrasis poetry as the immersive process of katabasis, the act of re-calling and re-constructing mental imagery.

My findings reveal that Heaney and Rich engage the processes of “digging” and “diving” into the deepest realm of inner vision as part of an immersive katabasis. This process combines the genres of katabasis and ekphrasis, and activates strategies of composition equivalent to, but not dependent on, the “painting” or visual object, allowing multiple cognitive and emotional responses. The selected poems represent imaginative and allegorical examples of the ekphrasis poetic as a katabasis while engaging the powerful sensory effects of the visual aesthetic and spatial imagery.

My research provides opportunities for an extended dialogue between cognitive scientific research and ekphrasis poetics. Several prominent areas for interdisciplinary collaboration have opened in relation to imagination, and more recently, mental imaging, conceptual blending and the brain’s default mode network (Richardson 225). Given the close association with the function of imagination, creativity and imagery in ekphrasis poetry, further collaborative research into the relationship between poetry and the cognitive sciences would be a valuable intervention.

Researchers do not agree on the precise role of the default mode network in the brain’s larger scheme, but more recent studies consistently support theories that the human mind is fundamentally “poetic” or “literary” (231). Within the scope of a broader, more comprehensive project, this topic opens fascinating and valuable research scenarios in the ekphrasis movement. Lisa Zunshine’s ground-breaking research, especially theory of mind, has already been thoroughly integrated into literary studies (231). Daydreaming and mental navigation appear to be another default mode activity with close connections to creativity and literary imagination. In

Richardson's opinion, the activity of navigation in the default mode network has attracted the least attention (236). As the thesis argues, navigation and imagination are considered critical human functions throughout deep history and according to Steven Mithen, play a significant role in human societies (41). With the development of the cognitive functions of imagination, the demands for conveying navigational information increases (41). Richardson recognises the complex nature of imagination system as offering creative prospects for the poet:

Through the interlaced activities of what we can begin to perceive as a complex imagination system—memory, prospection, navigation, theory of mind, and reverie (“Silent with swimming sense”)—the poet succeeds in turning loss into gain, aloneness into communion, as what begins in a small-minded sense of exclusion becomes the occasion for great poetry (238).

The imagery debate and conceptual metaphor discussions have opened new theories in literary studies—most significantly the research of Elaine Scarry into the vivacity and perception of visual imagery and the addition of motion (239). Equally, neuroscientific investigation into the default mode network might foster new perspectives on the dynamic functions of the imagination (239).

In summary, recent studies focusing on the functions of mind and imagination—particularly in relation to the brain's default mode network—reveal emerging patterns between mental imaging and the creative art of ekphrasis poetics. I suggest these functions extend to the associative immersive experiences of katabasis in ekphrasis poetry, opening new possibilities in critical discourse and cognitive literary studies.

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