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# 1

## Narrative Immersion

### Some Linguistic and Narratological Aspects

*Rutger J. Allan*

#### 1. Experientiality and Immersion

A good story is like life. By representing experiences in such a way that they appeal to real-life experiences, a gripping story is able to give the reader the feeling of being part of the storyworld: the reader sees what the characters see, thinks what the characters think, and feels what the characters feel. According to the narratologist Monika Fludernik, the quality of *experientiality*, ‘the quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experience’,<sup>1</sup> should be regarded as the defining characteristic of narrative rather than, for example, plot structure. For Fludernik, narrative is a subjective representation of actions, intentions, and feelings filtered through the medium of consciousness: ‘narrativity is primarily based on a consciousness factor rather than on actantial dynamics or teleological directedness’.<sup>2</sup> In other words, *narrativity is experientiality*. Even though many narratologists may not go so far as to *equate* narrativity with experientiality, most will agree that experientiality is indeed a crucial element of narrative.<sup>3</sup>

Narrative experientiality has two aspects that are intimately connected: on the one hand, it involves the representation of human experiences in the text; on the other hand, it relates to the capacity of a narrative text to effect a certain psychological experience for its recipient (listener or reader). The tight interplay between these two aspects of experientiality is also evident in the phenomenon of *immersion*, which will be the main focus of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Fludernik (1996) 12.

<sup>2</sup> Fludernik (1996) 30.

<sup>3</sup> For some general points of criticism on Fludernik’s view, see, e.g., Herman (2002) 140–5. According to Herman (2002) 9–22, narrative is more adequately characterized by the presence of four basic elements: (i) situatedness (in a specific discourse context), (ii) event sequencing (structured time course), (iii) world disruption (introduction of a disequilibrium into the storyworld), (iv) ‘what’s it like’ (how some consciousness experiences the world disruption). The last element can be roughly equated with Fludernik’s experientiality. One of the problems with Fludernik’s experiential definition of narrativity is that it blurs the genre boundary between narrative and lyric. Grethlein (2015a) criticizes Fludernik’s conception of narrative by pointing out (through an analysis of Heliodorus’ *Ethiopica*) the importance of the temporal dynamics, more specifically, plot development for the experientiality of narrative.

A well-known psychological effect triggered by works of art is the audience's feeling of being mentally drawn into the world that is represented by the work of art. In the field of narratology, this psychological phenomenon is referred to by the term *immersion*.<sup>4</sup> This notion has been introduced into the field of cognitive narratology by Marie-Laure Ryan<sup>5</sup> and it has rapidly gained ground across various other academic disciplines such as visual art, drama, and film studies.<sup>6</sup> It goes without saying that this increasing interest in the phenomenon gained considerable impetus with the development of new technologies (such as 3D cinema, computer gaming, and virtual reality) which aim at enhancing the subject's feeling of being immersed in a virtual world.

Immersion can be defined as the feeling of being transported to a virtual world to the extent that one experiences it—up to a point—as if it were the actual world. The 'up to a point' is an important proviso in the definition. The experience of being immersed in an artificial world hinges on a willing suspension of disbelief: an immersed reader or spectator will inevitably retain some degree of self-awareness and awareness of the actual physical world surrounding him or her. An immersed reader/spectator will also remain aware to some degree that the world represented by the work of art is not the actual world.<sup>7</sup> This means that a complete immersion in the storyworld to the extent that one, without any reservation, takes it as the actual world is impossible.<sup>8</sup>

The intensity of the experience of being immersed is dependent on various cognitive and emotional properties of the immersed subject but it is obviously also determined by particular features of the work of art (or, more specifically, the text) that is meant to elicit the immersive experience. In the conception of the Immersed Experiencer Framework (IEF) developed by the cognitive psychologist Rolf Zwaan:

<sup>4</sup> See Ryan (1991), (2015 [2001]). There are various theoretical concepts from different research traditions that are similar to immersion: *entrancement* (Nell (1988)), *psychological participation* (Walton (1990)), *transportation* (Gerrig (1993); Green and Brock (2000)) or *aesthetic illusion* (Wolf (1993), (2004); Wolf, Bernhart, and Mahler (2013)). These studies have been of crucial importance to our understanding of immersion. An excellent introduction to the field of research is Wolf's entry 'Illusion (Aesthetic)' in the online *Living Handbook of Narratology* (Hühn *et al.* (2018)).

<sup>5</sup> See Ryan (1991) 21–3.

<sup>6</sup> In her 1991 book, Ryan more prominently uses the term 'recentering' to describe the reader's transportation to a fictional world. The terms 'immersion' and 'immersive' have emerged in virtual-reality technology to describe a user's experience of being physically present in a simulated, computer-generated environment. See also Ryan (2015 [2001]) and Wolf, Bernhart, and Mahler (2013).

<sup>7</sup> Our residual awareness of our real environment when we attend to a story and our realization that the storyworld is not 'real', even if we are fully immersed, is also discussed by Grethlein (2015), pointing out that our reception of narrative is necessarily 'bracketed by "as-if"' and showing that aesthetic experience hinges on intricate interplay between immersion and a more reflective stance towards the narrative. See also Wolf (2004) 328; Grethlein (Chapter 6 of this volume); and Budelmann and Van Emde Boas (Chapter 3 of this volume).

<sup>8</sup> Complete cognitive immersion would come closest to having a dream or hallucination. When we are dreaming, we are not reminded of the real world as we are in the case of narrative immersion: we do not have a book in our hands or are watching a film screen. Emotions, therefore, affect a dreamer in an unrestrained way, not curbed by the realization that the experienced world is in fact not the real world.

language is a set of cues to the comprehender to construct an experiential (perception plus action) simulation of the described situation. In this conceptualization, the comprehender is an immersed experiencer of the described situation, and comprehension is the vicarious experience of the described situation.<sup>9</sup>

Zwaan's IEF is an *embodied* theory of language comprehension. The idea behind the embodied understanding of language is that words activate regions in the brain which are also involved when the subject is actually experiencing the referent of the word. When reading a sentence in a narrative, the immersed reader will construct a mental representation that is grounded in the same sensory, motor, and emotional sources in the brain as the real-life experience.<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that Zwaan's conception of the reader as an *immersed* experiencer is broader than the notion of readerly immersion as intended in this chapter. Zwaan's claim is that a reader as a language comprehender will tap into the same sensorimotor sources as real-life experience and thereby vicariously experience the described situation. Narrative immersion as it is conceived of in this chapter is a more specific phenomenon. It not only involves a vicarious experience of the described scene, but also narrative immersion additionally involves the feeling of being transported to the storyworld, which requires the reader's reduced awareness of the actual world and of the text as the medium of the representation.

In a more recent publication, Zwaan takes a more nuanced stance towards the claim that language comprehension is fully grounded in the brain's system of action, perception, and emotion.<sup>11</sup> Zwaan proposes a pluralist view of cognition in which, in some contexts of language use, comprehension is more strongly grounded in perception and action (grounded, embodied view of cognition), while, in other contexts, comprehension more strongly involves the manipulation of abstract, amodal symbols (symbolic view of cognition). This pluralist and scalar view of language comprehension helps us to understand at least one aspect of narrative immersion.<sup>12</sup> Immersive texts will invite the reader to construct a mental representation of the described situation that is grounded in perception, action, and emotion, while non-immersive texts lack a clearly defined spatio-temporal framework and centre around abstract concepts that are not (directly) grounded in sensorimotor experience.

The experience of immersion is a scalar phenomenon. Readers can feel themselves being immersed in the storyworld to various degrees. The more a text enables the reader to construct an experiential simulation of the described situation (e.g. by means of words or other linguistic cues), the more intense the feeling of immersion will be.

<sup>9</sup> Zwaan (2004) 36.

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of embodiment theory and empirical studies of the experiential aspect of narrative understanding, I refer to Sanford and Emmott (2012) 132–60. An introduction to the study of embodied cognition is Barsalou (2010).

<sup>11</sup> See Zwaan (2014).

<sup>12</sup> I thank the editors for pointing this out to me. See further the Introduction, Section 2.

What are the textual cues capable of evoking an immersive experience in the reader? In relation to literary texts, a number of textual features serving to transport the reader mentally to the scene are discussed by Ryan. As immersive devices she mentions such diverse elements as internal and variable focalization,<sup>13</sup> scene narration, dialogue and free indirect discourse, prospective (rather than retrospective) first-person narration, a totally effaced narrator, *mimesis* ‘showing’ (rather than *diegesis* ‘telling’), and reassignment of the reference of deictic elements to the perspective of a participant in the scene.<sup>14</sup>

Building on Ryan’s work, I would like to propose a set of linguistic and narratological elements which I consider to be conducive to immersion. In the following list, I categorize the immersive features under five general headings: Verisimilitude, Perspective, Transparency, Interest and Emotional Involvement, and the Principle of Minimal Departure.<sup>15</sup>

- (I) **Verisimilitude:** The text evokes a lifelike (‘vivid’) mental representation of persons, objects, actions, and their setting.<sup>16</sup> A lifelike representation:
- (a) focuses on concrete, physical objects;
  - (b) provides graphic sensory details;
  - (c) provides detailed spatial information;<sup>17</sup>
  - (d) progresses at a relatively slow pace (*scene* narration: narration time approximates narrated time);
  - (e) advances in chronological order (no flashbacks/flashforwards)
  - (f) activates (cultural) knowledge schemas (*cognitive frames*) which enable the addressee to ‘complete the picture’ mentally.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> At first glance, one might suspect that variable focalization, the shift in the focalization from one character to another, disturbs the feeling of immersion. However, it seems that humans possess a considerable cognitive capacity to process shifts in perspective without there being any detriment to the feeling of being immersed in a scene. For example, in the opening scene of the film *Saving Private Ryan* at Omaha Beach, a scene often praised for its immersive qualities, the camera standpoint shifts continually, sometimes taking the point of view of one of the soldiers (subjective shot), sometimes taking a perspective that cannot be identified with a character (objective shot). This continuous shift in point of view (between subjects, as well as from subjective to objective and back) is in no way detrimental to the audience’s feeling of being immersed in the battle scene. I will return to this issue at a later stage.

<sup>14</sup> See Ryan (2015) 85–114.

<sup>15</sup> This list is a slightly evolved version of the list of immersive features published in Allan, De Jong, and De Jonge (2014). My identification of five general aspects of immersion is based on Wolf’s inventory of principles of aesthetic illusion (see Wolf (2004) and his ‘Introduction’ in Wolf, Bernhart, and Mahler (2013)).

<sup>16</sup> See also Wolf (2004) 339–40 and Wolf, Bernhart, and Mahler (2013) 43–4. Texts that evoke a specific location at a specific time and are rich in descriptions of sensory details and (vigorous) action/movement are likely to induce embodied simulation effects (see, e.g., Zwaan (2004); Sanford and Emmott (2012) 155–6; and Huitink (Chapter 9 of this volume)).

<sup>17</sup> Preferably, the spatial clues are associated with a deictic center within the described scene: see also below under (II) Perspective.

<sup>18</sup> Written descriptions of objects and events are necessarily ‘gappy’: they do not feed every conceivable detail to the reader. This ‘gappiness’ is not necessarily detrimental to the immersive experience, since a reader will be able to fill in the details on the basis of his or her general world knowledge and personal experiences. For a discussion of the role of cognitive schemata and scripts in understanding literary texts,

- (II) **Perspective:** The text chooses its spatio-temporal deictic centre within the described scene. Preferably, it takes the perspective of (is focalized by) a character with whom the addressee may identify and feel empathy.<sup>19</sup> Specific linguistic indications of this perspective shift are:
- (a) *proximal* ('here' and 'now') deixis (e.g. historic present);
  - (b) imperfect aspect (indicating an 'internal viewpoint');<sup>20</sup>
  - (c) subjective-evaluative vocabulary which can be ascribed to a character.
- (III) **'Transparency' of the text:** The text directs the addressee's attention to the storyworld, that is, it defocuses from the text itself as a medium and from the narrator as a mediating voice.<sup>21</sup> The artificiality of the text is concealed; the narrator remains invisible. More specifically, we will find:
- (a) no metanarrative elements (e.g. narrator comments);
  - (b) direct or free indirect discourse;<sup>22</sup>
  - (c) no elements drawing attention to the conventionality of the textual (literary) genre.<sup>23</sup>
- (IV) **Interest and emotional involvement:** The theme of the text is of strong interest to the addressee. The text contains elements eliciting the addressee's emotional response (e.g. subjective-evaluative vocabulary).<sup>24</sup> The text (segment) is crucial to the main storyline and creates *suspense*.<sup>25</sup>
- (V) **Principle of Minimal Departure:**<sup>26</sup> the storyworld should not (or only minimally) depart from the 'real world' as we know it: the storyworld should be internally consistent and subject to the same rules as 'real life'.<sup>27</sup>

see Stockwell (2002) 75–89. There is also empirical evidence for the importance of inferences from world knowledge (cognitive scenarios) in discourse comprehension (Sanford and Emmott (2012) 12–44).

<sup>19</sup> This is an aspect of Ryan's *emotional immersion* (Ryan (2015) 106–14). See also Wolf (2004) 340 and Wolf, Bernhart, and Mahler (2013) 47–8.

<sup>20</sup> For the mimetic quality of the imperfect, see Bakker (1997b), (2007). Rijksbaron (2012) = Rijksbaron (2019) 133–69 discusses the imperfect's function in character focalization.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ryan's requirement of transparency of the medium in the experience of virtual reality (Ryan (2001) 56–8, 118–19). See also Wolf (2004) 340, 342–3 and Wolf, Bernhart, and Mahler (2013) 50–1.

<sup>22</sup> For the effect of immediacy, involvement, and vividness of the use of direct speech, see, e.g., Leech and Short (2007) 276. There is also some empirical evidence for this effect; see Sanford and Emmott (2012) 181–90.

<sup>23</sup> *Ars est celare artem*. To put it in Russian formalist terms, *defamiliarization* is detrimental to immersion since it draws the audience's attention to the artistic devices used in the literary work and challenges the audience's familiar perceptions of the world. It encourages the audience to take a distanced, observing stance with respect to the represented world. As noted by Ryan, self-reflexivity in literature is incompatible with the experience of immersion (Ryan 2001): a reader is not able to attend mentally to the verbal medium and the world it represents at the same time. An example is the disruption of the dramatic illusion as caused by the breaching of the fourth wall in Aristophanic comedy. For this reason, immersive works of art tend to be serious rather than comic. See also Wolf (2004) 341, 344–5.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. also (II) Perspective (c).

<sup>25</sup> See also Wolf (2004) 342 and Wolf, Bernhart, and Mahler (2013) 50.

<sup>26</sup> See Ryan (1991) 48–60.

<sup>27</sup> Departures may be tolerated if they can be explained by generic conventions (see Ryan (1991) 51, Wolf (2004) 340, and Wolf, Bernhart, and Mahler (2013) 46). For example, we may assume that Homeric epic features such as the use of hexameters, the epic *Kunstsprache*, and the appearance of the

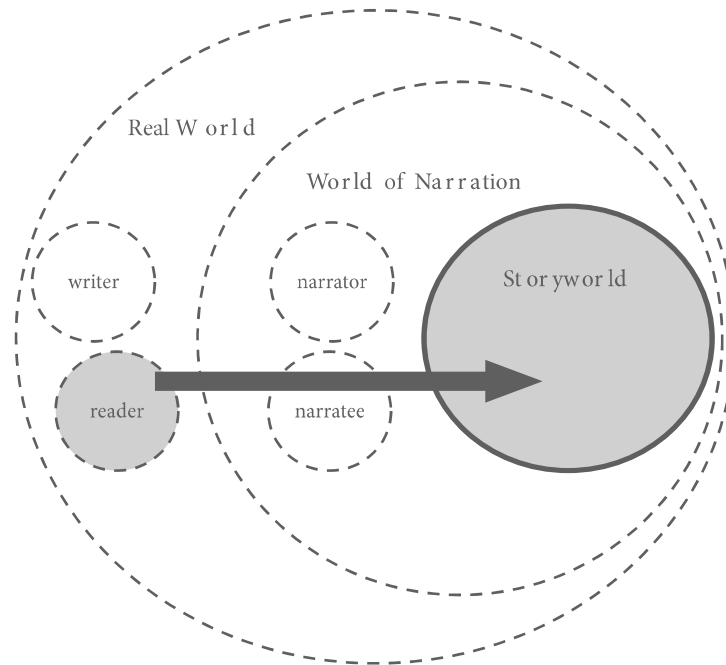


Figure 1.1 The reader's experience of immersion in the storyworld

The experience of immersion can be represented graphically as in Figure 1.1.

The reader experiences a mental transportation into the storyworld (arrow) which is in the focus of the reader's attention (thick circle). Awareness of the surrounding real world (including the reader's self-awareness) and the mediating world of narration, on the other hand, is mentally backgrounded but not entirely absent (dashed circles).<sup>28</sup>

Immersion can be a useful addition to the theoretical apparatus used to analyse Greek narrative. An important virtue of the concept of immersion is that it is firmly embedded in current narratological and linguistic theory: it relates to well-established narratological concepts such as speed, order, focalization, narratorial visibility, suspense, and genre conventions. Immersion also substantially draws

gods on the scene did not disrupt the audience's immersive experience (even though these deviate from the audience's real-life experiences) since these features conform to the epic generic conventions associated with a poetic performance. To put it differently, they do not violate the audience's expectations by disrupting existing cognitive schemas (cf. Stockwell's *schema preservation*; Stockwell (2002) 79–81). We may even assume that the special language of Homeric epic *enhances* the audience's feeling of immersion in the storyworld as it functions as a catalyst to help the audience to be mentally transported into the exotic past heroic world distinct from the audience's present world; see Clay (2011) 15.

<sup>28</sup> The figure is a more elaborate version of a figure presented by Dannenberg (2008) 24.

on linguistic theory. Since the emergence of cognitive narratology,<sup>29</sup> cognitive poetics,<sup>30</sup> text world theory,<sup>31</sup> and mental space/blending theory,<sup>32</sup> the traditional disciplinary boundaries between literary criticism and (cognitive) linguistics have been blurred to a considerable extent. This converging development has stimulated the application of linguistic concepts to literary criticism. In the case of a literary phenomenon like immersion, one may think of linguistic categories such as tense-aspect, modality, deixis, and cognitive schemas/frames. A further, more practical advantage of using linguistic analytic concepts is that they can contribute to a fine-grained close reading of the text. Finally, a promising aspect of immersion is that it can also be studied empirically in the field of cognitive psychology. This line of research may yield valuable insights into such issues as the relation between immersion and emotion and the role of mental simulation.<sup>33</sup>

In order to illustrate how we can apply the notion of immersion to Greek narrative, I will discuss a number of passages from Homer and Thucydides describing battle scenes (Section 2). To throw the immersive passages into relief, I will also present some examples of passages from Homer and Thucydides that lack immersive features and thus invite the reader to take a more distanced perspective with respect to the storyworld (Section 3). The choice of these two authors is no coincidence: both have been praised for their *enargeia*, their capacity to portray scenes in such a way as to turn the listener/reader into an eyewitness to the narrated events.<sup>34</sup>

The concept of immersion and the specific textual features associated with immersion show obvious similarities with *enargeia* as well as other ancient technical terms such as *ἐναγώνιος* and *ekphrasis*.<sup>35</sup> The similarities between immersion and *enargeia* are striking: they both have to do with texts which, through their wealth of sensory details, create the illusion that the hearer or reader is actually perceiving the described object or events. Both concepts are associated with the emotional impact of the described scene on the recipient. As Huitink shows in Chapter 9 of this volume, there are also indications that the ancient critics in their conception of *enargeia* had an understanding that identification with an intradiegetic audience may steer the recipient's emotional response

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Ryan (1991); Gerrig (1993); Fludernik (1993), (1996); Jahn (1996); and Herman (2002).

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Stockwell (2002). <sup>31</sup> See Werth (1999) and Gavins (2007).

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., Dancygier (2012).

<sup>33</sup> Examples of empirical research relating to immersion are Zwaan (2004)'s Immersed Experiencer Framework and Green and Brock 2000's Transportation Theory. In Chapter 3, Ryan (2015) provides a brief overview of cognitive psychological research on immersion. For immersion and cognitive theory, see also Allan (2019).

<sup>34</sup> For Homer, cf. schol. bT *Il.* 6.467 and 23.362–72; Bakker (2005); Clay (2011); Plett (2012); Allan, De Jong, and De Jonge (2014) and Allan (2019); for Thucydides, cf. Plut. *De glor. Ath.* 347a; Connor (1985); Walker (1993); Bakker (1997b), (2007); Allan (2013), Allan (2018); Grethlein (2013a), (2013b), (2015b).

<sup>35</sup> For *enargeia*, see Walker 1993; Plett 2012; and Huitink (Chapter 9 of this volume); for *ἐναγώνιος*, see Ooms and De Jonge (2013) and for *ekphrasis*, see Webb (2009). For the relationship between the concept of immersion and the ancient terminology, see Allan, De Jong, and De Jonge (2014), (2017).



(cf. the immersive function of perspective above) and that *enargeia* involves the idea of transparency of the medium.

## 2. Immersion and Greek Narrative

- (1) [Ajax is beset by the Trojans' flying spears.]  
 δεινὴν δὲ περὶ κροτάφοισι φαεινὴν  
 πῆληξ βαλλομένη καναχὴν ἔχε, βάλλετο δ' αἰεὶ  
 κὰπ φάλαρ' εὐποίηθ' ὃ δ' ἀριστερόν ἄμον ἔκαμνεν  
 ἔμπεδον αἰὲν ἔχων σάκος αἰόλον οὐδὲ δύναντο  
 ἀμφ' αὐτῷ πελεμίζαι ἐρείδοντες βελέεσσιν.  
 αἰεὶ δ' ἀργαλέω ἔχετ' ἄσθματι, κὰδ δέ οἱ ἰδρῶς  
 πάντοθεν ἐκ μελέων πολλὸς ἔρρεεν, οὐδέ πη εἶχεν  
 ἀμπνεῦσαι πάντη δὲ κακὸν κακῷ ἐστήρικτο.

(Hom. *Il.* 16.104–11)

The bright helmet kept up a fearful clatter around his temples under the constant hitting, and there was hit after hit on the well-made cheek pieces. His left shoulder was tiring under the continuous holding of the glittering shield: but for all the pressure from their spears they could not dislodge it from him. All the time he was gripped by painful gasping, and the sweat ran in streams from all over his body, and he had no chance to recover his breath – all around him danger was piled on danger.

(trans. Hammond (1987), adapted)

An important aspect of the immersive quality of this passage is its wealth of sensory details. It zooms in on a number of concrete objects of which perceptual features are mentioned: the helmet is bright and gives a fearful clatter, the helmet and shield are hit incessantly, the cheek pieces are well-made, the shield is glittering, Ajax' gasping is painful, and sweat is streaming down his limbs. The passage also provides detailed information about the spatial dimensions by means of prepositions, adjectives, and adverbs: *περὶ κροτάφοισι*, *κὰπ φάλαρ'*, *ἀριστερόν*, *ἀμφ' αὐτῷ*, *κὰδ* (*ἔρρεεν*), *πάντοθεν*, *ἐκ μελέων*, *πάντη*.

In Ancient Greek narrative, the imperfect is often used to present the described scene from an internal viewpoint (instead of a retrospective viewpoint), viewing the events as they are taking place without reaching an endpoint. This internal viewpoint may be identifiable with a story character (in which case we are dealing with character focalization)<sup>36</sup> but it may also invoke a depersonalized 'camera standpoint' from which the scene is registered.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Rijksbaron (2012).

Furthermore, the persistent use of the imperfect (**ἔχε**, **βάλλετο**, **ἔκαμνεν**, **δύναντο**, **ἔχετ'**, **ἔρρεεν**, **εἶχεν** (shown in bold)) suggests that the events and states described should be interpreted as occurring simultaneously rather than sequentially.<sup>37</sup> This has special consequences for the spatial and temporal dimensions of the presentation of the scene.

In a narrative text, if there are no explicit indications of the temporal relation between the narrated events, the order in which the events are told will be interpreted by default as reflecting the chronological order: the order of the narration iconically reflects the temporal order of the narrated events. In our passages this temporal principle is still valid but manifests itself in a different way. Since the imperfects refer to events and states that are temporally coextensive, the order of the narration does not signal the subsequent occurrence of the events but suggests instead that the narrator moves his gaze through the scene, successively focusing his attention on one of the ongoing events or states.<sup>38</sup> In this 'scanning operation', narrating and narrated time are necessarily aligned: every time the narrator fixes his (visual) attention on another facet within a complex scene, narrated time advances to the same extent. To compare, if narrating time were not paralleled by the progression of narrated time, we would be dealing with a description of a static picture.

The movement of the narrator's (and with him the narratee's) visual attention through the scene obviously also has a spatial aspect. The strong focus on Ajax' body parts and on specific parts of his armour creates the effect that we are viewing the scene in *close-up*.<sup>39</sup> The narrator's gaze moves downwards across Ajax' body: Ajax' helmet is bright and is making a ringing sound as it is hit, his well-made cheek pieces are also being hit incessantly, his left shoulder is becoming tired, his shield is glittering and immovable, his breathing is difficult, and his sweat is running heavily down his limbs.

Although the scene seems to be primarily focalized by the narrator, there are also indications that the narrator's perspective is at times blended with Ajax' perspective.<sup>40</sup> The use of subjective-evaluative terms such as *δεινῆ* and *κακὸν κακῶ*

<sup>37</sup> The pluperfect *ἑστῆρικτο* is no different from the imperfects in this respect as it denotes a state simultaneous to the preceding imperfects. This means that we are dealing with what I call the descriptive mode rather than with the diegetic mode (for my typology of narrative modes, I refer to Allan (2009) and (2013)). Note that I use the term 'descriptive' in a broader way than is usual in narratology. I also include scenes in which the events (activities, accomplishments, or achievements) are portrayed as occurring simultaneously and as not (yet) reaching their completion ('he was running', 'he was throwing', 'he was dying').

<sup>38</sup> Following Chafe (1994) and Langacker (2001), clauses or, more precisely, intonation units can be seen as *attentional frames*, i.e. successive windows of attention subsuming a cognitively manageable amount of conceptual content. Attentional frames are the primary units of discourse. Bakker (1997a) is an application of this idea to the analysis of Homeric discourse.

<sup>39</sup> For the distinction between various spatial standpoints in Homeric epic, I refer to De Jong and Nünlist (2004).

<sup>40</sup> For a case of blended viewpoints (or double focalization) in Thucydides, I refer to Allan (2018).

invite us to identify with him and view the events from his perspective. The addition of the detail *περὶ κροτάφοισι* stresses that the terrible noise was very close to his ears.<sup>41</sup> Although terms like *ἔκαμνεν* and *ἀργαλέω* may also have an external visible aspect, they certainly also give us an insight into Ajax' mental state. These hints of Ajax' own perception of his dire situation increase our empathy and our emotional involvement with his fate.

These shifts from an external to internal viewpoint and vice versa do not disturb immersion.<sup>42</sup> Recipients of a narrative show a considerable ability to process shifts in perspective without experiencing them as unnatural or disruptive. Zwaan describes this type of transition as follows:

When the experiencer whose perspective the comprehender as an immersed experiencer is invited to take is an agent, actively changing the environment, an internal state (e.g., a goal) might transition into an action, which may transition into a change in the environment, which may then transition into another internal state (e.g., frustration when the current state of the environment is not consistent with the goal motivating the action).<sup>43</sup>

According to Zwaan, this transition from external to internal perspective and back is natural to discourse and experientially based. In everyday life, we are used to blending external and internal perspectives, through our ability (and inclination) to ascribe mental states (beliefs, feelings, intentions) to agents on the basis of the agent's observable behaviour.

Another passage illustrating the immersive qualities of Homeric narrative is the account of Achilles' killing of Hector:

(2) οἶος δ' ἀστήρ εἶσι μετ' ἀστράσι νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶ  
 ἔσπερος, ὃς κάλλιστος ἐν οὐρανῶ ἴσταται ἀστήρ,  
 ὧς αἰχμῆς ἀπέλαμπ' εὐήκεος, ἣν ἄρ' Ἀχιλλεὺς  
 πάλθεν δεξιτερῇ φρονέων κακὸν Ἔκτορι δῖω  
 εἰσορόων χροῖα καλόν, ὅπῃ εἴξειε μάλιστα.  
 τοῦ δὲ καὶ ἄλλο τόσον μὲν ἔχε χροῖα χάλκεα τεύχεα  
 καλά, τὰ Πατρόκλοιο βίην ἐνάριξε κατακτάς  
 φαίνετο δ' ἦ κληῖδες ἀπ' ὤμων αὐχέν' ἔχουσι  
 λαυκανίην, ἵνα τε ψυχῆς ὠκιστος ὄλεθρος  
 τῇ ῥ' ἐπὶ οἱ μεμαῶτ' ἔλασ' ἔγχεϊ δῖος Ἀχιλλεὺς,  
 ἀντικρὺ δ' ἀπαλοῖο δι' αὐχένος ἦλυθ' ἀκωκῆ  
 (Hom. *Il.* 22.317–27)

<sup>41</sup> Ameis-Hentze rightly note that *περὶ κροτάφοισι* should be taken with *καναχὴν ἔχε*, not with *πήληξ*.

<sup>42</sup> See also n. 11 above. <sup>43</sup> Zwaan (2004) 47–8.

Like the Evening Star on its path among the stars in the darkness of the night, the loveliest star set in the sky, such was the light gleaming from the point of the sharp spear Achilles held quivering in his right hand, as he purposed death for the godlike Hektor, looking over his fine body to find the most vulnerable place. All the rest of his body was covered with bronze armour, the fine armour he had stripped from mighty Patroklos when he killed him. But flesh showed where the collar-bones hold the join of neck and shoulders, at the gullet, where a man's life is most quickly destroyed. Godlike Achilles drove in there with his spear as Hektor charged him, and the point went right through his soft neck.

(trans. Hammond (1987))

After a detailed description of Achilles' impressive appearance, the poet draws our attention to the point of his spear. Its magnificent splendour is vividly evoked by means of a simile in which it is likened to the beautiful Evening Star, a highly salient image well known to the audience from life experience.<sup>44</sup> In the rest of the passage, we also find some sensory details—Hektor's skin is beautiful,<sup>45</sup> his armour is bronze and beautiful, his neck is soft—and detailed spatial information in the form of preverbs (*ἀπέλαμπ', εἰσορόων*), an adjective (*δεξιτερῆ*), an adverbial clause (*ἧ κληῖδες ἀπ' ὤμων ἀχέν' ἔχουσι/λαυκανίην*), an anaphoric adverb (*τῆ*), prepositional phrases (*ἐπὶ οἱ, δι' ἀχένος*), and an adverb (*ἀντικρύν*). As for the dimension of time, the speed of the narration is low (scene narration); the simile even suspends the progression of time completely.

An important feature contributing to the immersive experience is the switch to character focalization, which is embedded by the verbs of perception *εἰσορόων* and *φαίνεται*. From line 320 onwards, we see Hektor's body *close up* through Achilles' eyes. Achilles visually scans Hektor's skin, notices that it is *καλόν*, and looks for the spot which would be the most vulnerable for piercing with his spear. The rest of his body is covered with the bronze armour. It is attractive to interpret the content of the relative clause *τὰ Πατρόκλοιό βίην ἐνάριξε κατακτάς* as focalized by Achilles: at the supreme moment of his revenge, he recalls how Hektor obtained the armour.<sup>46</sup> Then a weak spot on Hektor's body is revealed. The imperfect *φαίνεται* 'was becoming visible' (324) suggests that we are witnessing the appearance of the

<sup>44</sup> Note that the scholia comment that similes contribute to *enargeia*. In cognitive linguistics, similes are analysed as conceptual blends of two cognitive domains: a specific element of the target domain (Achilles' lance) is enhanced by a perceptually salient element (or elements) selected from the source domain (the brightness of the Evening Star), a typically concrete cognitive schema (frame, script) which is part of our (experiential or cultural) world knowledge. The two input cognitive domains are accessed simultaneously and integrated into a novel conceptual blend. For similes as conceptual blends, see Dancygier and Sweetser (2014) 137–47. For a discussion of Homeric similes informed by cognitive theory, see Minchin (2001) 132–60.

<sup>45</sup> 'Beautiful' is a rather generic feature that does not seem to be very immersive. However, a term like 'beautiful' is specific enough to evoke a more concrete image in the hearer's mind grounded in previous experiences of beautiful skin. See also n. 16 above.

<sup>46</sup> See De Jong (1987) 87, 120.

weak spot through the eyes of Achilles. Also the sensation that Hector's neck is soft can be ascribed to Achilles as he is penetrating the neck with his spear.<sup>47</sup>

As in Homer, it is not difficult to find passages in Thucydides that show immersive features. A typical example is the following passage from one of the naval battles fought by Phormio:<sup>48</sup>

(3) οἱ δ' Ἀθηναῖοι κατὰ μίαν ναῦν τεταγμένοι περιέπλεον αὐτοὺς κύκλῳ καὶ ξυνήγον ἐς ὀλίγον, ἐν χρῶ αἰεὶ παραπλέοντες καὶ δόκησιν παρέχοντες αὐτίκα ἐμβαλεῖν προεῖρητο δ' αὐτοῖς ὑπὸ Φορμίωνος μὴ ἐπιχειρεῖν πρὶν ἂν αὐτὸς σημήνη. [2] ἤλπισε γὰρ αὐτῶν οὐ μενεῖν τὴν τάξιν, ὥσπερ ἐν γῆ πεζήν, ἀλλὰ ξυμπεσεῖσθαι πρὸς ἀλλήλας τὰς ναῦς καὶ τὰ πλοῖα ταραχὴν παρέξειν, εἴ τ' ἐκπνεύσειεν ἐκ τοῦ κόλπου τὸ πνεῦμα, ὅπερ ἀναμένων τε περιέπλει καὶ εἰώθει γίγνεσθαι ἐπὶ τὴν ἔω, οὐδένα χρόνον ἡσυχάσειεν αὐτοὺς καὶ τὴν ἐπιχείρησιν ἐφ' ἑαυτῶ τε ἐνόμιζεν εἶναι, ὅπῃ βούληται, τῶν νεῶν ἄμεινον πλεουσῶν, καὶ τότε καλλίστην γίγνεσθαι. [3] ὡς δὲ τὸ τε πνεῦμα **κατῆει** καὶ αἱ νῆες ἐν ὀλίγῳ ἤδη οὖσαι ὑπ' ἀμφοτέρων, τοῦ τε ἀνέμου τῶν τε πλοίων, ἅμα προσκειμένων **ἐταράσσοντο**, καὶ ναῦς τε νηὶ **προσέπιπτε** καὶ τοῖς κοντοῖς **διεωθοῦντο**, βοῇ τε χρώμενοι καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀντιφυλακῆ τε καὶ λοιδορίᾳ οὐδὲν **κατήκουον** οὔτε τῶν παραγγελομένων οὔτε τῶν κελευστῶν, καὶ τὰς κόπας ἀδύνατοι ὄντες ἐν κλύδωνι ἀναφέρειν ἄνθρωποι ἄπειροι τοῖς κυβερνήταις ἀπειθεστέρας τὰς ναῦς **παρεῖχον**, τότε δὴ κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον **σημαίνει**, καὶ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι προσπεσόντες πρῶτον μὲν καταδύουσι τῶν στρατηγίδων νεῶν μίαν... (Thuc. 2.84.1 3)

[1] The Athenians, formed in line, sailed round and round them, and forced them to contract their circle, by continually brushing past and making as though they would attack at once, having been previously cautioned by Phormio not to do so till he gave the signal. [2] His hope was that the Peloponnesians would not retain their order like a force on shore, but that the ships would fall foul of one another and the small craft cause confusion; and if the wind should blow from the gulf (in expectation of which he kept sailing round them, and which usually rose towards morning), they would not, he felt sure, remain steady an instant. He also thought that it rested with him to attack when he pleased, as his ships were better sailors, and that an attack timed by the coming of the wind would tell best. [3] When the wind came down, the enemy's ships were now in a narrow space, and what with the wind and the small craft dashing against them, at once fell into confusion: ship fell foul of ship, while the crews were pushing them off with poles, and by their shouting, swearing and struggling with one another, made captains' orders and boatswains' cries alike inaudible, and through being unable

<sup>47</sup> The immersive aspects of this scene have also been discussed in Allan, De Jong, and De Jonge (2014).

<sup>48</sup> This passage is also discussed by Rijksbaron (2012); Allan (2013); and Grethlein (2013b). Other typical immersive battle narratives in Thucydides are: 4.31 8 (Sphacteria; see Allan (2013), (2018)), 7.59.3 60.1 and 7.69.3 71.7 (Great Harbour of Syracuse; see Bakker (1997b); Grethlein (2015b)).

for want of practice to clear their oars in the rough water, prevented the vessels from obeying their helmsmen properly. At this moment Phormio gave the signal, and the Athenians attacked. Sinking first one of the admirals,...

<sup>49</sup>

In 2.84.1, we are informed that Phormio had given the order to the Athenian ships not to attack the Spartan ships before he had given the signal to do so. Thucydides also provides Phormio's motivation for this tactics (2.84.2), which is introduced by the particle *γάρ*: Phormio expects that the Spartan ships would not keep their orderly ranks and fall into confusion and that, if a wind arose from the gulf, they would not be able to remain steady for long.<sup>50</sup> He also thinks that he could start the attack whenever he pleased, since his ships were better. What we have here is explicit embedded focalization. We have access to Phormio's thoughts, and this internal perspective is explicitly signalled by verbs of cognition (*ἤλπιζε* and *ἐνόμιζεν*). Despite the internal perspective, however, this part of the narrative lacks a number of qualities that would make it immersive. First, relatively few perceptual details are provided that allow us to picture the situation envisaged by Phormio. Second, Phormio's order and its motivation are narrated as an analepsis (cf. the use of the pluperfect *προείρητο*), thereby disturbing the natural chronological order of the narrative. Third, Phormio's thoughts are represented in indirect discourse (cf. *ἤλπιζε* and *ἐνόμιζεν*), a form of discourse representation that draws attention to the mediated character of the narrative and is not conducive to immersion.

The narrative continues in 2.84.3 with a long temporal-circumstantial subordinate clause introduced by *ὥς*. From now on, the narrative acquires a more immersive character, which crucially hinges on its more detailed description of perceptual features and on the vantage point located within the scene.

With Rijksbaron,<sup>51</sup> I interpret the content of the temporal-circumstantial *ὥς*-clause as representing Phormio's perception. Rijksbaron points out that Phormio's perception is prepared by Thucydides' remark in 2.84.1 that the Athenian ships are sailing at very close quarters to the Peloponnesian ships (*ἐν χροῶ ἀλλήλοισι παραπλέοντες*) so that he could hear and see everything happening on the enemy's side.<sup>52</sup> Another more concrete indication, according to Rijksbaron, that the *ὥς*-clause is focalized by Phormio is the fact that with circumstantial *ὥς*-clauses preceding the main clause 'the event of the main clause does not simply "follow" ... on that of the *ὥς*-clause, but forms a *reaction* to it; this reaction, in its turn, is based upon an observation on the part of the subject of the main clause'.<sup>53</sup> It is not necessary, I would like to add, to assume that a reader will only

<sup>49</sup> The translations of Thucydides are from Crawley, revised by Strassler (1998).

<sup>50</sup> In Thucydides, *γάρ* often introduces a motivation focalized by a character 'for (he thought that) ...' (Hornblower (1994) 134. Cf. also De Jong (1987) 112).

<sup>51</sup> See Rijksbaron (2012).

<sup>52</sup> Rijksbaron (2012) 364.

<sup>53</sup> Rijksbaron (1976) 114 15.

understand that the content of the *ὡς*-clause is perceived by the subject of the main clause once the reader has reached the main clause and realizes in retrospect that it describes the subject's reaction to the state of affairs expressed in the *ὡς*-clause. In Thucydides, virtually all preceding *ὡς*-clauses provide the motivation for a subsequent reaction of the subject of the main clause. It is, therefore, very likely that the reader's default expectation is that the content of the *ὡς*-clause is focalized by the subject of the main clause.

The series of imperfects in the *ὡς*-clause (*κατῆει, ἐταράσσοντο, προσέπιπτε, διεωθοῦντο, κατήκουον, παρέιχον* (shown in bold)) refer to simultaneously occurring (or partially overlapping) ongoing events or states that are viewed from an internal temporal vantage point. Although a series of imperfects denoting simultaneous events or states does not necessarily imply character focalization (we may also be dealing with a narrator registering the scene from a neutral 'camera standpoint' within the scene), in this case the internal vantage point can be plausibly identified with Phormio's viewpoint.

The temporal and spatial organization of the narrative is similar to what we have seen in passage (1). We follow Phormio's visual and auditory perception through the scene, starting with his observation that the wind he had been expecting is indeed blowing, then focusing in on the ships that are (as expected) being thrown into disorder, colliding with one another, being pushed away with poles, and finally his observation that the crews are unable to understand their captain's order through their shouts and curses. The text also gives detailed information about spatial arrangement and movement, in the form of preverbs and prepositional adverbial phrases.<sup>54</sup> This is the opportunity Phormio has been waiting for, and he gives the signal to attack and sink one of the generals' ships.

At this point, the narration switches to the historic present tense (*σημαίνει* and *καταδύουσι* (shown underscored)), a tense which also often features in immersive narrative as it can be used to create the illusion of presence at the narrated events. In Rijksbaron's words, '[i]n historical narrative, such as that of Herodotus and Thucydides, the effect is that of a "pseudo-witness": the narrator poses as a "reporter on the spot"'.<sup>55</sup> As in the prototypical use of the present tense form, the historic present signals that the time of the event is *construed* as simultaneous with the time of speech (narration). In other words, the effect of the historic present is that the normal spatio-temporal distance between the world of the

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *κατῆει, ἐν ὀλίγῳ, προσκειμένων, προσέπιπτε, διεωθοῦντο, πρὸς ἀλλήλους, ἐν κλύδωνι.*

<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that this effect is not always fully detectable when a historic present is used: in many cases, especially when an isolated verb is marked as a historic present, its function seems to have been attenuated to a marker of salient events in the structure of the narrative, e.g., the start of an episode, a change of location of a protagonist, or a crucial turning point in the narration; see also Rijksbaron (2006) 22–5; Allan (2009), (2011a), (2011b). The present tense form in these cases does not necessarily signal a 'pseudo-presence'; rather, it signals that the event is of current relevance on the level of the communication between narrator and narratee: the narratee should attend to the event as it is of special importance to the understanding of the course of the narrative.

narration and the storyworld is collapsed, and that the events in the storyworld are now *presented* as being directly accessible to the experience of the narrator and narratee.<sup>56</sup>

The two tenses we find in this passage, the imperfect and the historic present, are both capable, in their own way, of contributing to the reader's feeling of immersion. The fact that the imperfect is a *past* time signals that there is a temporal distance between the time of narration and the time of the referent state of affairs: the imperfect invokes a vantage point located in the past from which the ongoing events or states are viewed.<sup>57</sup> The immersive effect of the imperfect is reinforced if the vantage point is a story character with whom the audience may identify, acting as a mediating consciousness through whom the audience perceives and evaluates the scene.

The historic present, on the other hand, is a sign of immediacy. The distance between the time of narration and story time is collapsed, and the narrated events are presented as directly accessible to the experience of the narrator and narratee. Since there is no mediating viewpoint through whom the scene is perceived, the historic present is typically associated with narrator focalization.<sup>58</sup>

Another semantic difference between imperfects and historic presents in narrative is that imperfects express that the end point (*telos*) of the event had not (yet) been reached. This makes the imperfect highly suitable for expressing events that occur simultaneously with other events. Historic presents, on the other hand, virtually always refer to telic events, that is, events that reach their natural endpoint (*telos*). As a consequence, historic presents tend to refer to subsequent events.

There is also a secondary narrative effect associated with the contrast between narration in the imperfect and narration in the historic present. The relatively slow narrative pace or even pause effected by the persistent use of the imperfect is typically connected with a high degree of perceptual granularity: the narrative thus suggests that the focalizer has time to observe the scene in all its sensory details. Narration in the historic present, by contrast, typically highlights the occurrence of a turning-point event, while the precise circumstances of the event are seen as less relevant.

<sup>56</sup> For the characterization of the present tense as a marker of epistemic immediacy, see Langacker (2008) 302–3, (2009) 185–212; Allan (2011a), (2013).

<sup>57</sup> The imperfect invokes a 'displaced immediacy', as Bakker (1997a) 37 calls it (a term borrowed from Chafe). That this narrative situation does not occur in Homer, as Bakker claims, is incorrect. Examples of this special narrative effect of the imperfect are: *Il.* 23.362–72 (chariot race, implicitly focalized by watching public), *Od.* 5.59–73 (Calypso's cave, implicitly focalized by Hermes), *Od.* 7.88–131 (Alcinous' palace, implicitly focalized by Odysseus; cf. Rijksbaron 2012). Such examples pose a problem for Bakker's idea 'that oral epic memory is more a matter of "remembering" in a firmly established speaker-now than of pretended observation in the past' (Bakker (1997b) 37).

<sup>58</sup> That there is indeed a shift to narrator focalization is also suggested by the phrase *κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον*, which elsewhere in Thucydides only occurs in narrator text (e.g. Thuc. 1.58.1, 6.61.2, 8.44.3, 8.87.1).



### 3. Immersion versus Distance

In order to put the immersive narrative style into clear relief, it may be helpful to examine a number of passages that appear to lack an immersive quality. The first example is the proemium of the *Iliad*:

(4) *Μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος  
οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρὶ Ἄχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε,  
πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν  
ἡρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν  
οἰωνοῖσί τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή,  
ἐξ οὗ δὴ τὰ πρῶτα διαστήτην ἐρίσαντε  
Ἀτρεΐδης τε ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν καὶ δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.  
Τίς τάρ σφωε θεῶν ἔριδι ξυνέηκε μάχεσθαι;*

(Hom. *Il.* 1.1 8)

Goddess, sing me the anger, of Achilles, Peleus' son, that fatal anger that brought countless sorrows on the Greeks, and sent many valiant souls of warriors down to Hades, leaving their bodies as spoil for dogs and carrion birds: for thus was the will of Zeus brought to fulfilment. Sing of it from the moment when Agamemnon, Atreus' son, that king of men, parted in wrath from noble Achilles. Which of the gods set these two to quarrel?

The proem lacks a number of crucial characteristics of immersive texts: first, the text does not provide many sensory details and (except for Ἄϊδι) no clues of any specific spatial setting. The events are not presented as perceived from an internal viewpoint inside the storyworld, but as perceived from the retrospective viewpoint of the narrator. The events referred to in the relative clause, specifying the effects of Achilles' wrath—it brought anguish to the Achaeans, hurled their souls into Hades, made their bodies prey to dogs, thus fulfilling Zeus's plan—are not chronologically ordered in any clear way and they do not add up to a complete and coherent narrative world. The narrator only mentions them in a summary fashion, as an announcement of what is to come in the actual narrative, in order to incite the audience's emotional engagement and willingness to attend to the subsequent narration. The chronological order is even reversed (a case of epic regression) when the narrator turns to the cause of the wrath, the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, and then to the originator of the quarrel. Another important counter-immersive property of the proem lies in the prominence of the narrator appealing to the Muse. The audience's attention is drawn to the mediating role of the narrator and thus to the external setting of the narration, rather than to the storyworld.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> In a similar way, Thucydides' proem as well as the following *Archaeology* and *Methodenkapitel* feature a visible narrator and they represent the storyworld from a (relatively) distant point of view. The

In the narrative proper of *Iliad* and *Odyssey* it is not so easy to find larger stretches of text (that is, larger than an isolated summarizing line) that lack the usual Homeric immersive quality. An example is the following passage:

(5) ἐννῆμαρ μὲν ἀνὰ στρατὸν ὄχετο κῆλα θεοῶ,  
τῇ δεκάτῃ δ' ἀγορῆν δὲ καλέσσατο λαὸν Ἀχιλλεύς  
τῷ γὰρ ἐπὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη  
κῆδετο γὰρ Δαναῶν, ὅτι ῥα θνήσκοντας ὄρατο.

(Hom. *Il.* 1.53–6)

For nine days the god's arrows plied throughout the army. On the tenth day Achilles called the people to the assembly: the white-armed goddess Hera had put this in his mind, as she cared for the Danaans when she saw them dying.

(trans. Hammond (1987))

These lines mark the transition from the account of the plague to the account of the assembly. In these lines, ten days are summarized. There are very few perceptual details (with the exception of the not very remarkable epithet *λευκώλενος*). The spatial setting is only indicated in a general way (*ἀνὰ στρατὸν*). The natural chronological order is violated by the first *γάρ*-clause, which refers to Hera's prior action.

In Thucydidean narrative, it is less difficult to find non-immersive passages. An example is the following from the closure of the Melian episode:

(6) καὶ ἐλθούσης στρατιᾶς ὕστερον ἐκ τῶν Ἀθηνηῶν ἄλλης, ὡς ταῦτα ἐγίγνετο, ἥς ἦρχε Φιλοκράτης ὁ Δημέου, καὶ κατὰ κράτος ἤδη πολιορκούμενοι, γενομένης καὶ προδοσίας τινός, ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν ξυνεχώρησαν τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις ὥστε ἐκείνους περὶ αὐτῶν βουλευῆσαι. οἱ δὲ ἀπέκτειναν Μηλίων ὄσους ἡβῶντας ἔλαβον, παῖδας δὲ καὶ γυναῖκας ἠνδραπόδισαν τὸ δὲ χωρίον αὐτοὶ ὤκισαν, ἀποίκους ὕστερον πεντακοσίους πέμψαντες. (Thuc. 5.116.3–4)

Reinforcements afterwards arriving from Athens in consequence, under the command of Philocrates, son of Demeas, the siege was now pressed vigorously; and some treachery taking place inside, the Melians surrendered at discretion to the Athenians, who put to death all the grown men whom they took, and sold the women and children for slaves, and subsequently sent out five hundred colonists and inhabited the place themselves.

The massacre of the Melians is reported in a remarkably detached narrative style. The passage does not provide any graphic details, indications of the spatial setting,

first moment in the narrative that can be said to be immersive is the moment when the Corcyraeans speak to the Athenian assembly (1.32), which is represented as direct speech.

or affective language. How much time passes between the various events remains unspecified. No hint is given as to the intentions, considerations, or emotions of the protagonists. The events are presented in a summary fashion from an external retrospective narratorial perspective. The end of the Melians is brought to the reader in a pointedly distanced and unsentimental way. One may wonder why Thucydides switches to this bleak mode of narration, which is in its own way highly effective. Is it to let the horrifying acts, by accounting them in a detached way, ‘speak for themselves’? Is it to create a reflective distance between the events and the reader? Or is the behaviour of the Athenians simply too grim to immerse the reader in?

The final case I would like to discuss concerns the issue of the ‘double closure’ of the Sicilian episode, an issue which might profit from an approach in terms of immersion and distance. In his commentary, Hornblower notes that there seem to be two closures to the Sicilian narrative, both of which are cited in (7):

(7a) καὶ μὴν ἢ ἄλλη αἰκία καὶ ἢ ἰσομοιρία τῶν κακῶν, ἔχουσά τινα ὅμως τὸ μετὰ πολλῶν κούφισιν, οὐδ’ ὡς ῥαδία ἐν τῷ παρόντι ἐδοξάζετο, ἄλλως τε καὶ ἀπὸ οἷας λαμπρότητος καὶ αὐχρήματος τοῦ πρώτου ἐς οἷαν τελευτήν καὶ ταπεινότητα ἀφίκτο. μέγιστον γὰρ δὴ τὸ διάφορον τοῦτο [τῷ] Ἑλληνικῷ στρατεύματι ἐγένετο, οἷς ἀντὶ μὲν τοῦ ἄλλους δουλωσομένους ἤκειν αὐτοὺς τοῦτο μᾶλλον δεδιότας μὴ πάθωσι ξυνέβη ἀπιέναι, ἀντὶ δ’ εὐχῆς τε καὶ παιάνων, μεθ’ ὧν ἐξέπλεον, πάλιν τούτων τοῖς ἐναντίοις ἐπιφημίσμασιν ἀφορμᾶσθαι, πεζοὺς τε ἀντὶ ναυβατῶν πορευομένους καὶ ὀπλιτικῷ προσέχοντας μᾶλλον ἢ ναυτικῷ. ὅμως δὲ ὑπὸ μεγέθους τοῦ ἐπικρεμαμένου ἔτι κινδύνου πάντα ταῦτα αὐτοῖς οἰστὰ ἐφαίνετο.

(Thuc. 7.75.6 7)

Moreover, their disgrace generally, and the universality of their sufferings, however to a certain extent alleviated by being borne in company, were still felt at the moment a heavy burden, especially when they contrasted the splendour and glory of their setting out with the humiliation in which it had ended. For this was by far the greatest reverse that ever befell an Hellenic army. They had come to enslave others, and were departing in fear of being enslaved themselves: they had sailed out with prayer and paeans, and now started to go back with omens directly contrary; travelling by land instead of by sea, and trusting not in their fleet but in their heavy infantry. Nevertheless, the greatness of the danger still impending made all this appear tolerable.

(7b) ξυνέβη τε ἔργον τοῦτο [Ἑλληνικὸν] τῶν κατὰ τὸν πόλεμον τόνδε μέγιστον γενέσθαι, δοκεῖν δ’ ἔμοιγε καὶ ὧν ἀκοῇ Ἑλληνικῶν ἴσμεν, καὶ τοῖς τε κρατήσασιν λαμπρότατον καὶ τοῖς διαφθαρείσιν δυστυχέστατον [6] κατὰ πάντα γὰρ πάντως νικηθέντες καὶ οὐδὲν ὀλίγον ἐς οὐδὲν κακοπαθήσαντες πανωλεθρία δὴ τὸ λεγόμενον καὶ πεζὸς καὶ νῆες καὶ οὐδὲν ὅτι οὐκ ἀπώλετο, καὶ ὀλίγοι ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐπ’ οἴκου ἀπενόστησαν. ταῦτα μὲν τὰ περὶ Σικελίαν γενόμενα. (Thuc. 7.87.5 6)

This was the greatest [Hellenic] achievement of any in this war, or, in my opinion, in Hellenic history; at once most glorious to the victors, and most calamitous to the conquered. They were beaten at all points and altogether; all that they suffered was great; they were destroyed, as the saying is, with a total destruction, their fleet, their army – everything was destroyed, and few out of many returned home. Such were the events in Sicily.

Hornblower notes that the second closure ‘duplicates the first in certain respects’, pointing to verbal echoes such as *μέγιστον* and *λαμπρότατον*. The occurrence of a second closure is, he further comments, ‘a not wholly logical concept’, and he resorts to a shot in the dark by explaining the first passage as ‘perhaps closing a recitation unit’.<sup>60</sup> Stahl, however, is critical about Hornblower’s connection between the two passages and he stresses their differences. He points, on the other hand, to a number of verbal echoes that link the first passage with the account of the army’s departure from Athens (6.30–2).<sup>61</sup>

As I would like to argue here, there is also a crucial difference between the two passages relating to a difference in immersive quality, more specifically, to a difference in viewpoint. The first passage invites us to reflect on the disaster as focalized by the Athenians at the moment they are experiencing it, while in the second passage, the retrospective narrator’s voice is dominant.

That we are viewing the events from the Athenians’ viewpoint is signalled in the first passage (7a.) by a number of linguistic features. First, in each of the sentences in the passage mental verbs occur as explicit indications of embedded focalization (*ἔδοξάζετο*, *δεδιότας*, *ἐφαίνετο*). The two imperfect forms, *ἔδοξάζετο* and *ἐφαίνετο*, as well as the perfect form with aspectually present meaning *δεδιότας*, suggest that the Athenians’ mental state is viewed from an internal temporal perspective. Likewise, the future participle *δουλωσομένων* in the lengthy relative clause signals embedded focalization: it expresses the intention with which the Athenians had come to Sicily. The two *present* infinitives depending on *ξυνέβη*, *ἀπιέναι* and *ἀφορμᾶσθαι* (‘it befell that they were going away and departing’) signal that these events are portrayed as they are taking place. Also the imperfect *ἔξέπλεον* suggests in a subtle way that the Athenians are recalling how they were sailing out from Athens saying prayers and singing paeans (cf. 6.32).

At first glance, the statement *μέγιστον γὰρ δὴ τὸ διάφορον τοῦτο [τῷ] Ἑλληνικῷ στρατεύματι ἐγένετο* (note the deviant aorist) seems to be a narratorial intrusion. However, it is attractive to interpret it as (also) focalized by the Athenians. As often in Thucydides, the *γὰρ*-clause introduces material that is focalized by a character specifying the character’s motivation for an action or an argument for holding a belief. In this case, the *γὰρ*-clause elaborates on the previous sentence in

<sup>60</sup> Hornblower (2008) *ad* 7.75.7 and 7.87.5–6.

<sup>61</sup> Stahl (2009) 193.

which the Athenians' feelings of suffering and humiliation are described, feelings that are reinforced through the contrast between their current state with the splendour and glory with which they set out. The content of the *γάρ*-clause can be ascribed to the Athenians' thought: they realize that this has been the greatest reverse that has ever occurred to a Hellenic army.

Despite Hornblower's comment, the passage is not a narrative closure, not only because the suspense is sustained rather than decreased (cf. *ὑπὸ μεγέθους τοῦ ἐπικρεμαμένου ἔτι κινδύνου*), but also because the following section seamlessly continues the flow of the narrative (*ὁρῶν δὲ ὁ Νικίας τὸ στράτευμα ἀθυμοῦν καὶ ἐν μεγάλῃ μεταβολῇ ὄν, ...*).

In the second passage (7b.), by contrast, the narrator is prominently present overseeing and evaluating from a retrospective viewpoint the whole complex of events, referring both to the glory of the victors and to the suffering of the vanquished. He even explicitly refers to himself: *δοκεῖν δ' ἔμοιγε καὶ ὄν ἀκοῇ Ἑλληνικῶν ἴσμεν*.<sup>62</sup> The main tense used in the passage is the aorist (*ξυνέβη γενέσθαι, ἀπώλετο, and ἀπενόστησαν*), whose bounded semantics tends to be associated with an external retrospective viewpoint. In sum, while the first passage invites us to be immersed in the narrative world, experiencing the situation vicariously through the Athenians, the second passage takes a more distant, holistic perspective with respect to the events.

#### 4. Conclusion

The readerly experience of being immersed in the storyworld involves a wide range of narrative techniques, including phenomena such as descriptions with rich perceptual details, scenic spatial and temporal organization, deictic shifting, character focalization, narratorial covertness, emotional engagement, empathy, and the creation of suspense. There are several issues with regard to narrative immersion which might be worth pursuing further, such as whether we can observe a diachronic development of immersive techniques. Thucydides' shifts into (implicit) character focalization, for example, seem to be much more sustained and to be showing greater complexity than the type of focalization that we find in Homer.<sup>63</sup> Why is it that some narrators seem to be less concerned with (or less capable of) achieving an immersive quality in their narrative? In what way

<sup>62</sup> Note that throughout his work Thucydides consistently refers to the Peloponnesian War with a *proximal* deictic pronoun *ὃδε ὁ πόλεμος* expressing that the war is at the centre of the attention of the narrator (and narratee). This also explains why the first time the war is mentioned is not yet accompanied by a deictic (1.1.1: *τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων*).

<sup>63</sup> For Homer, compare De Jong (1987) 121: 'the secondarily focalized passages are short and in comparison to direct speech far less frequent: character text is clearly the preferred mode of presentation of the words and thereby of the thoughts/emotions of characters'.

does their style differ precisely from ‘immersion-oriented’ narrators?<sup>64</sup> And, finally, the presence of immersive features is not constant throughout a narrative. Why do narrators show variation, aiming for immersion at some places in their narrative, while switching to a more distanced style at others? The (admittedly, highly selective) passages discussed in this chapter seem to point to a link between immersion and plot structure in that they suggest—which is also intuitively very plausible—that immersive narrative is more likely to occur at suspenseful turning points (‘peaks’) in the narrative, while proems, digressions, and closures will tend to be non-immersive.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> In Allan (2018) I discuss the difference in narrative styles between Herodotus’ account of the battle of Thermopylae and Thucydides’ battle on Sphacteria in terms of immersive features.

<sup>65</sup> I would like to thank the editors of this volume for their valuable and insightful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.