

Presented at 2025 NeMLA Conference, Philadelphia

REVERSE EKPRHASIS

Traditional ekphrasis involves using words to vividly describe and bring visual or auditory art to life. For example, in Homer's *Iliad*, the description of Achilles' shield is so detailed that readers can almost "see" it. Yet, through today's technology, we now see images and sounds that words can barely describe.

The role of ekphrasis has shifted. Rather than words generating images, our image-saturated medias prioritize the visual and auditory, often relegating language to an interpretive role that reinforces, rather than creates, meaning. This reversal of ekphrasis is significant because it reflects how media technologies—from film trailers and music videos to social platforms—are reshaping not only storytelling but the way we process information and engage with the world. Visual and auditory modes of communication prevail because they engage our brains more quickly and emotionally than written or spoken words. This shift aligns with the increasing preference for media that prioritize immediacy and emotional impact—qualities inherent in visual and auditory experiences. While words still play a role, they now often serve to interpret or comment, providing context or analysis for emotional experiences already delivered by aural-visual arguments.

Texts for Analysis

Examples include films like *A Quiet Place*, film trailer rhetoric (such as "This summer... a hero will rise" from *The Dark Knight*), music videos like Childish Gambino's *This Is America*, and social media memes, all of which exemplify the secondary role of language in our image-saturated world.

Background Neuroscientific & Biological Mechanisms

Our brains are wired to respond to external stimuli, particularly visual and auditory signals, which historically helped us react quickly to threats. However, in today's media-saturated environment, these same biological systems are constantly triggered. Instead of responding to occasional, life-threatening situations, our brains are now in a near-constant state of "excitement." Studies show this overstimulation can lead to increased stress levels, shortened attention spans, and a diminished ability to deeply process and reflect on information.