As Cynthia Wall has so magisterially illustrated in *The Prose of Things* (2006), descriptions of rooms hold a marginal position in eighteenth-century texts. This is due partially to conventions of writing and partially to the absence of fixed furniture arrangements before the end of the eighteenth century. On the one hand, literary descriptions before the eighteenth century were often stylistic exercises in rhetorical enumeration. Mieke Bal, in her superb essay on description, cites (a translation of) a *locus amoenus* passage from Longus’s novel *Daphnis and Chloë*:

> And that garden indeed was a most beautiful and goodly thing and such as might become a prince. For it lay extended in length a whole furlong. It was situated on a high ground, and had to its breadth four acres. To a spacious field one would easily have likened it. Trees it had of all kinds, the apple, the pear, the myrtle, the pomegranate, the fig, and the olive; and to these on the one side there grew a rare and taller sort of vines, that bended over and reclined their ripening bunches of grapes among the apples and pomegranates, as if they would vie and contend for beauty and worth of fruits with them. So many kinds there were of satives, or of such as are planted, grafted, or set. To these were not wanting the cypress, the laurel, the platan, and the pine. And towards them, instead of the vine, the ivy leaned, and with the errantry of her boughs and her scattered blackberries did imitate the vines and shadowed beauty of the ripening grapes.

> Within were kept, as in a garrison, trees of lower growth that bore fruit. Without stood the barren trees, enfolding all, much like a fort or some strong wall that had been built by the hand of art; and these were encompassed with a spruce, thin hedge. By alleys and glades there was everywhere a just distermination [sic! M.F.] of things from things, an orderly discretion of tree from tree; but on the tops the boughs met to interweave their limbs and leaves with one another's, and a man would

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1 Research for this article was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in the context of the Graduate School 'Factual and Fictional Narration' (GRK 1767).
have thought that all this had not been, as indeed it was, the wild of nature, but rather the work of curious art. Nor were there wanting to these, borders and banks of various flowers, some the earth’s own volunteers, some the structure of the artist’s hand. The roses, hyacinths, and lilies were set and planted by the hand; the violet, the daffodil, and anagall [sic!] the earth gave up of her own good will. In the summer there was shade, in the spring the beauty and fragrancy of flowers, in the autumn the pleasantness of the fruits; and at every season amusement and delight (Longus, 1955, pp. 189-91; cited Bal, 1982, pp. 112-13).

As Bal notes, this garden cannot be drawn. Its rhetorical structure is based on the list which is meant to signal a plenitude of items. The description first divides the trees in the garden into those that do or do not bear edible fruit; then spatially into external and internal; and finally outlines the patterns of trees and flowerbeds. Although the logic of textual succession is partly motivated by spatial distribution, the description is not mimetic and not focalized. The list is the linguistic means of realizing a poetics of instantiation. For a garden to serve as the optimal manifestation of an ideal, it has to display a variety of trees, among them fruit trees, and has to supply both the security of enclosure and the pleasures of aesthetic variety. The description, one could almost say, microtextually echoes the *prodesse et delectare* of classical poetics – it instructs the reader about the available varieties of trees and delights him or her with their aesthetic arrangement.

There are three traditional types of description in use in literature before the eighteenth century. The first category comprises ekphrastic passages in which objects are depicted at length (the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* [see The *Iliad*, Book 18, lines 478-608, pp. 322-33] being the standard exemplum). Type two consists of the portrait description in the Petrarchan tradition which occurs in love poetry (Sir Philip Sidney’s and Edmund Spenser’s sonnets), but also in romance (e.g. the ekphrastic description of Philoclea’s portrait in the *Old Arcadia* [1580] or the introductory depiction of Pamphilia in Mary Wroth’s *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania* [1621]). The third type of pre-eighteenth-century description is allegorical. Unlike the *locus amoenus* passage above, allegorical vignettes are sometimes perspectival in a foregrounded manner – their information allows readers to trace spatial arrangements with great exactitude. See, for instance, Diego de san Pedro’s *The Prison of Love* (*Cárcel de Amor*, 1492)

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2 For the passage in the *Old Arcadia* see Sidney, 1987, pp. 10-11.
in John Bourchier’s English translation (1549?). In this text, the narrator, a knight from Spain, encounters a prisoner being led to a castle, and the guard tells him: ‘I ame principall officer in the house of the god of loue [...] And with the beautie of this Image I cause ye affections wherwith I broyle and enflame the lyues as thou maist se by this prisoner whom I lede in to the prisone of loue: who all onely by dethe hopeth his delyuerance’ (Bourchier, 1492, 8). The knight, on the plea of the prisoner, gains access to the castle and discovers him sitting in a chair of fire. The castle and the knight’s imprisonment are depicted extensively in allegorical manner. The Castle of Love is built on a rock, the foundation being the stone of Faith. It is upheld by four pillars, namely Understanding, Reason, Memory, and Will. There are two porters, who ask him to leave his ‘armour’ behind, who are called Hope, Rest, and Contentacion. The first porter is later identified as Desire, the second porter as Torment. The ‘auctor’ or narrator ascends the stairs, which are later identified as Anguish. He then encounters the prisoner of love, one Lereano, who is fettered to a chair that is burning. He has a shield, with which to defend himself, which is called Wit. Though sitting in the chair of flames (Just Affection), he never gets scorched. There are two women who minister to him, called Pain and Passion, and they serve him the Bread of Steadfastness. There is also a Moor (Despair) and three servants, who are Evil, Pain, and Dolour, who give him a dish of Despair, with the meat of “Doutfulness” and the Cup of Tribulation. Finally, the walls of the castle carry three images, namely of Heaviness, Anguish, and Travail, and the brightness surrounding the prisoner and emanating from an eagle’s beak corresponds to the prisoner’s Inward Thoughts.

The narrator is here led into the castle and guided through the interior in the manner of a disquisition on the horrors of erotic servitude; the qualities of love-lornness are discursively transformed into an architectural design and operate by means of memorial techniques (compare Miller). While portraits usually employ a top-down-structure (hair–eyes–cheeks–lips–necks–bosom), which is not after all so different from the themes-subthemes-structure proposed by Philippe Hamon (Hamon, 1981; Hamon, 1982) and discussed in Bal’s reference to the locus amoenus passage, in this example we encounter spatial focalization which follows the narrator on his path into the central apartment and therefore closely resembles a

3 All manuscript abbreviations are spelled out in my quotations.
4 The facsimile edition has no pagination. I have numbered the pages starting with the title page.
'route perspective' in linguistic parlance (Linde and Labov, 1975; Taylor and Tversky, 1992 & 1996; Tversky et al., 1999).\(^5\)

The near-absence of mimetic descriptions before the eighteenth century can moreover be explained by reference to interior design before 1660. Early modern interiors, as numerous studies have demonstrated, were fairly empty and did not have a fixed arrangement of furniture (Rybczynski, 1987; Tristram, 1989; Young, 2004; McKeon, 2005; Brown, 2008). Tables and chairs were positioned around the walls and carried into the chamber when needed for meals. In fact, beds were a rare luxury, with benches and tables also used for sleeping. Futon-like mats could be put on benches or the floor. Only in the second half of the eighteenth century did non-aristocratic households start to furnish their interiors on a more regular basis. From the mere possession of a piece of furniture, whose very existence was foregrounded, attention shifted to the quality of objects displayed (and that display was the issue is, for instance, noted by Brown, 2008) and later on to their tasteful (or tasteless) arrangement as evidenced in the descriptive passages of Victorian novels. One can, therefore, argue that the history of interior design is responsible for the very existence and content of literary descriptions in narratives (Wall, 2006). This evolution can also be observed in drama, where the Restoration period, despite its introduction of grand scenery by means of shutters and wings, was still focused on a fairly empty stage. By the time of Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *The Rivals* (1775) or *The School for Scandal* (1777), however, more extensive furnishings appear in the stage directions, though they still remain scant by Victorian standards of the *pièce bien faite* (‘well-made play’).\(^6\)

This culturalist reading of the presence of description in eighteenth-century literature, in my opinion, complements rather than disproves Ian Watt’s theses about the novel’s increased attention to realistic detail as documented by the fact that Daniel Defoe’s novels are cluttered with objects. As I will show below, when it comes to interiors, Defoe does not necessarily provide extensive descriptions of interior spaces and their contents. It is, however, true that his protagonists own and handle a great variety of objects and that the desire for possession and attainment of such

\(^5\) On description in general see the recent volume by Wolf and Bernhart, especially Nünning’s article, as well as the earlier introductory essay by Haupt. Excellent contributions on literary description are also, for the nineteenth century, Kullmann, 2004, and, for the early modern period, Jahn, 1993.

\(^6\) One may think of the sofa under which Lydia Languish and her maid Lucy hide the books from the lending library from the eyes of Mrs. Malaprop in Act I, Scene ii of *The Rivals*, or of the screen behind which Lady Teazle hides in the fifth act of *The School for Scandal*. 
objects is constitutive of their social and personal self-fashioning. People are what they seem to be on account of their dress and comportment; identity congeals into what one owns and what one wears and how one is able to live. It is less the quality, beauty or conveniency of an item that makes it remarkable in Defoe; ownership trumps appreciation. Though Watt’s emphasis on realistic detail in my opinion fails to reflect the scarcity of actual passages of description in Defoe’s texts, his insights are important to focus on the emergence of objects as named entities in early eighteenth-century fiction. The empty spaces of early modern houses, streets, towns, and other spaces start to fill up with consumer goods. The first stage in confronting this deluge of objects is to name them, to list them; only later – once one has become accustomed to the items cluttering one’s life – does one start to focus on them in detail, to distinguish between them, to appreciate their artistry, their neatness, or their beauty.

What I would like to do in this article is to analyse the descriptions of interiors from the viewpoint of perspective and focalization and to do so by taking Franz Karl Stanzel’s seminal (a)perspectivism thesis as a starting point for a diachronic analysis of description in English literature. I will then discuss examples of descriptions from the eighteenth century in a variety of texts.

Perspectivism and Aperspectivism: Stanzel’s Model Reconsidered

In the Section 5.2 of his Theory of Narrative (1984), Stanzel proposed a thesis regarding the development of description. He submitted the hypothesis that before the late nineteenth century, in fact before the advent of the figural novel, i.e. the novel of internal focalization, descriptive passages tended to be aperspectival, whereas, with the onset of interior focalization, perspectivism asserted itself. The only critic to have engaged with this thesis so far is Manfred Jahn, who noted that his students consistently agreed that Stanzel’s example of perspectivism (a passage from James Joyce’s Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man) was a clear instance of a perspectival description, but overwhelmingly balked at the alleged aperspectival nature of the Trollope passage which Stanzel quotes as illustrating a lack of perspective (Jahn, 1999, pp. 95-96). What does Stanzel, then, mean by the term (a)perspectival?

Stanzel’s definition of this term, it should be underlined, does not at all coincide with internal focalization per se. Stanzel is of course well aware that the figural novel emerges only at the turn of the twentieth century, hence it does not make sense to expect internal focalization to occur in
the Victorian or eighteenth-century authorial novel. Instead, Stanzel’s hypothesis concerns the imaginative evocation of novelistic space and the reader’s ability to visualize the setting in precise and empirically validatable terms. Stanzel’s empirical test consists in the reader trying to draw a map of the space depicted in the descriptive passage. As it so happens, his two examples are both of interiors (although he could have chosen gardens or landscapes); his thesis is not restricted to the inside of houses.

Let us look at the passage cited by Stanzel as an example of aperspectival description. It comes from Anthony Trollope’s *Barchester Towers* (1857) and delineates the shocking experience of Dr. Grantly and Mr. Harding when they first visit the new bishop, Dr. Proudie, in his office:

His lordship was at home, and the two visitors were shown through the accustomed hall into the well-known room where the good old bishop used to sit. The furniture had been bought at a valuation, and every chair and table, every bookshelf against the wall, and every square in the carpet was as well known to each of them as their own bedrooms. Nevertheless they at once felt that they were strangers there. The furniture was for the most part the same, yet the place had been metamorphosed. A new sofa had been introduced, a horrid chintz affair, most unprelatical and almost irreligious; such a sofa as never yet stood in the study of any decent High Church clergyman of the Church of England. The old curtains had also given way. They had, to be sure, become dingy, and that which had been originally a rich and goodly ruby had degenerated into a reddish brown. Mr. Harding, however, thought the old reddish-brown much preferable to the gaudy buff-coloured trumpery moreen which Mrs. Proudie had deemed good enough for her husband’s own room in the provincial city of Barchester.

Our friends found Dr. Proudie sitting on the old bishop’s chair, looking very nice in his new apron; they found, too, Mr. Slope standing on the hearth-rug, persuasive and eager, just as the archdeacon used to stand; but on the sofa they also found Mrs. Proudie, an innovation for which a precedent might in vain be sought in all the annals of the Barchester bishopric! (*Barchester Towers*, pp. 33-34; cited Stanzel, 1984, p. 120; my emphasis).

As Stanzel correctly notes, one would be hard put to draw a map of the room, since its content is given, but not the relationship of the individual items in their relation to one another. One can imagine the bishop’s desk to be on the left, the fireplace with the hearth-rug in the middle, the windows on the right, and the notorious sofa as placed in the middle downstage so
to speak; but the fireplace could just as well be to the right, the sofa to the left and the desk in the upstage middle, with two sets of windows to the left and right of it. The narrative does not authorize us to read the sequence of impressions as occurring in a left to right clockwise direction. On the contrary, the passage is structured rhetorically by moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar and scandalous. To this extent, then, Stanzel is perfectly within his rights to characterize the passage as aperspectival.

Why, then, Jahn’s students’ ‘doubt and incomprehension’ (Jahn, 1999, p. 96)? An explanation might be sought in the implied perspective of the paragraph. What we are confronted with are the impressions registered by the two entering clergymen. They step into a very familiar room and note as a pièce de résistance first the sofa and then the curtains and finally, horror of horrors, Mrs. Proudie enthroned upon her ‘chintz affair’. The passage therefore could be argued to reflect the newcomers’ gaze as it sweeps across the familiar surroundings and gets arrested at what they perceive to be striking incongruities. The whole vignette is of course an ironic comment on the traditionalism of the rural clergy, who expect everything to remain exactly the same, down to the furnishings of the bishop’s chambers. It also registers (perhaps less ironically so) Victorian male affront at female intrusion into the male preserve of clerical business, the domestic sphere transgressing into the public domain. Mrs. Proudie has not merely dared to change the curtains (it is, incidentally, rather strange that the colour buff, not a flaming red or tasteless pink or pea green, should receive such derisory notice); she has moreover obtruded her sofa and herself onto the bishop’s official space, thus annihilating the boundary between the private and the public realms.

The narrative is not devoid of perspective, but it veils the precise spatial arrangement of the items noted by the two visitors and overlays the clergymen’s impressions and moral outrage by a narratorial medium that filters their consciousness through a highly elaborate rhetorical discourse: ‘every chair and table, every bookshelf against the wall, and every square in the carpet was as well known to each of them as their own bedrooms’. This sentence is not likely to be free indirect discourse, though the vocabulary of scandalization mimics the indignation experienced by the two guests. Were one to turn to Uspensky, one could therefore argue that this vignette expresses Grantly’s and Harding’s perspective ideologically and psychologically, but not linguistically or spatially. Hence the impression of Jahn’s students that this cannot be totally ‘aperspectival’.

When one turns back to Stanzel’s major thesis, however, focusing on the inability to draw a map of the setting, the passage’s aperspectivism
Early Description and Perspective

As Wall illustrates in her seminal *The Prose of Things*, descriptions in early modern texts focus primarily on spaces (in the depictions of London by Stow, for instance) and then on inventories of items gathered in one space, thus producing a model of description in lists (Wall, 2006, Chapter 3). Initial anticipations of the depiction of persons by means of description can be found in the work of Aphra Behn; it is what people wear that characterizes them – outside the topoi of the beauty catalogue and the portrait, a character’s facial expressions does not yet figure in the way we are familiar with from the nineteenth century. Thus, Prince Tarquin, in the passage cited by Wall (2006, p. 126), is presented as having ‘his Cloak cast over his Face, and a black Periwig’; he is moreover ‘all alone, with his Pistol ready cock’d’ (*Fair Jilt*, p. 165). This description is fully functional, since it explains the strategies of his assassination attempt. When Prince Tarquin is about to be executed, we get an extended description of his comportment and clothing, emulating the visual spectacle: ‘The details of the prince’s clothes, the arena of execution, the motion of his hands, the stroke of the executioner, the cultural differences between executions in Flanders and those in England, the behavior of eager, weeping, sympathetic, bloodthirsty spectators, combine for an exact, drawn-out scene’ (Wall 2006, p. 127; see *Fair Jilt*, p. 174).
Yet this scene remains theatrical, its descriptions part of the spectatorial frame of watching from afar.

When we move into interiors, there are some close-ups of people’s faces in Richardson’s *Clarissa*, for instance, when Lovelace indulges in a lengthy prosopography, as Wall calls it (2006, p. 143), of the woman he is about to get into his power (Letter 99, Richardson, p. 399; cited as Letter III, p. 55 in Wall, 2006). In this passage he spends a full paragraph on her ‘wax-like flesh’ and ‘its delicacy and firmness’, rejecting the Petrarchan snow imagery as analogue to her ‘flesh and blood’ complexion. He continues by focusing on her ‘wavy ringlets’, ‘wantoning in and about a neck that is beautiful beyond description’, and then turns to her cap, a ‘Brussels-lace mob’, and her negligée, a ‘morning gown’ of ‘pale primrose-coloured paduasoy’ (Richardson, p. 400; quoted Wall, 2006, p. 143). The paragraph continues to describe the cuffs of this garment, her earrings, handkerchief and shoes; but the main effect of this description is not fashion-related information but erotic tease – the garments allow glimpses of and invite speculations about her body. Lovelace’s eyes are glued on Clarissa’s packaging, which hides that which she keeps from him and which he intensely desires.

As Wall demonstrates in Chapter 7, domestic tours are the first instances of extensive depictions of interiors. These include both the layout and the description of individual rooms. *The Journals of Celia Fiennes* (1662-1741) and Defoe’s *A Tour Thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-1726) serve as spearheads of a whole avalanche of house guides published in the eighteenth century (Wall, 2006, pp. 191-97). Let us look at some of these descriptions to see how they handle perspective.

Samuel Pepys, for instance, visited Audley-End on October 7th, 1667, and gave the following description of it:

Took coach to Audley-End, and did go all over the house and garden; and mighty merry we were. The house indeed do appear very fine, but not so fine as it hath heretofore to me; particularly the ceilings are not so good as I always took them to be, being nothing so well wrought as my Lord Chancellor’s are; and though the figure of the house without be very extraordinary good, yet the stayre-case is exceeding poor; and a great many pictures, and not one good one in the house but one of Harry the Eighth, done by Holben [sic]; and not one good suit of hangings in all the house, but all most ancient things, such as I would not give the hanging-up of in my house; and the other furniture, beds and other things, accordingly. Only the gallery is good, and above all things the cellars, where we went down and drank of much good liquor. And indeed the cellars are
fine: and here my wife and I did sing to my great content (Pepys, 1997, p. 606; my emphasis).

This description is structured not according to spatial contiguity (you enter, then proceed through the lobby, up the staircase, etc.), but in reference to critical assessment. It starts out with the disappointing features of the house, the ceilings, staircase, pictures, and hangings, and then, having singled out one good picture, continues by praising the gallery and cellar. The description fails to clarify which ceilings Pepys is talking about (in the hall, in the gallery?); it also does not explicate where the pictures are hung (also including the gallery?). The outside of the house, inserted by counterpoint into the criticism, is conceded to make a fine figure, architecturally speaking (one assumes). When the gallery is praised, it remains open whether its superior quality resides in its proportions, its panelling, or in the views it offers onto the grounds; and the juxtaposition with the cellars is odd, since they are enjoyed for their wine and (presumably) not their construction; hence the impression of a logical non sequitur between the gallery and the cellars being ‘good’.

One can observe that Pepys focuses on foregrounded items in a list of features that he is interested in in houses (external approach, painting on the ceilings, grandeur of staircase, paintings, gallery and the view from it, wine) to the exclusion of other topics (china, carpets). His description is both judgmental and selective; it certainly does not aim to provide an exhaustive representation of the interior.

Defoe’s depiction of Wilton in the Tour is much more extensive. It also anticipates guidebook language by using a second-person (and even first-person plural) pronoun for the virtual visitor (the reader) and by tracing a path through the house that resembles a proper tour. In the terms of Linde & Labov and Taylor & Tversky (1992; 1996) this is therefore a clear instance of a ‘tour perspective’, of a description in which the observer or focalizer moves through the depicted space and lists impressions as they open up.

There are no less than four [...] rivers, which meet all together at or near the city of Salisbury; [...] The two first [i.e. the Nadder and the Willy] join their waters at Wilton [...] and these are the waters which run through the canal and the gardens of Wilton House, the seat of that ornament of nobility and learning, the Earl of Pembroke. [...] Wilton House is now a mere museum or a chamber of rarities [...].

You ascend the great staircase at the upper end of the hall, which is very large; at the foot of the staircase you have a Bacchus as large as life, done
in fine Peloponnesian marble, carrying a young Bacchus on his arm, the young one eating grapes, and letting you see by his countenance that he is pleased with the taste of them. Nothing can be done finer, or more lively represent the thing intended – namely, the gust of the appetite, which if it be not a passion, it is an affection which is as much seen in the countenance, perhaps more than any other. **One ought to stop** every two steps of this staircase, as we go up, to contemplate the vast variety of pictures that cover the walls, and of some of the best masters in Europe; and yet this is but an introduction to what is beyond them.

**When you are entered the apartments,** such variety seizes you every way that you scarce know to which hand to turn yourself. First **on one side you see several rooms filled with paintings** as before, all so curious, and the variety such, that it is with reluctance that you can turn from them; while **looking another way you are** called off by a vast **collection of busts** and pieces of the greatest antiquity of the kind, both Greek and Romans; among these there is one of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius in **basso-relievo**. I never saw anything like what appears here, except in the chamber of rarities at Munich in Bavaria.

**Passing these, you come into several large rooms,** as if contrived for the reception of the beautiful guests that take them up; **one of these** is near seventy feet long, and the ceiling twenty-six feet high, with another adjoining of the same height and breadth, but not so long. Those together might be called the **Great Gallery of Wilton,** and might vie for paintings with the Gallery of Luxembourg, in the Faubourg of Paris. These two rooms are filled with the family pieces of the house of Herbert, most of them by Lilly or Vandyke [...].

After we have seen this fine range of beauties – for such, indeed, they are – far from being at an end of your surprise, **you have three or four rooms still upon the same floor, filled with wonders as before.** Nothing can be finer than the pictures themselves, nothing more surprising than the number of them. **At length you descend the back stairs,** which are in themselves large, though not like the other (**A Tour**, pp. 198-99; italics in the original; my emphasis in bold italics).

The tour starts at the grand staircase and then describes the rooms on the first floor, which seems to serve merely representative purposes of museum-like display. It then passes several apartments and rooms, ending in two spaces of great height which Defoe christens the gallery. After the gallery, there are more rooms before one can ‘descend [by] the back stairs’. This clear spatial sequence is, however, vitiated by a considerable vagueness regarding the
precise spatial relationship between these stages of the guided tour. First, one would expect the grand staircase to be located in the centre of the house and for the various rooms to be arranged circularly (or quadrangularly) around it; with visitors, say, moving up the staircase and then turning left, passing a couple of rooms in a row and then arriving at the ‘gallery’, after which more rooms take one back to the main staircase. This, clearly, is not the path of the tour that Defoe is describing. Pictures from Wilton’s site online, for instance, demonstrate that (one of) the room(s) with busts is an oblong gallery, thus suggesting that the floor plan consists not of one sequence of rooms in which one needs to observe a one-way route but that there are parallel rooms at each stage so that one can branch off from the main rooms to subsidiary ones.

Even in Defoe’s time, apparently, the private quarters of the proprietors were closed off to visitors, hence the exit through the back stairs. This suggests that visitors were allowed only into one wing with the state rooms, a hypothesis corroborated by the absence of bedrooms in the extract. Celia Fiennes’ travelogues, which she started to write in 1702 but then never published (first extracts were printed in 1812 and the full manuscripts only in 1888), have a similar guide-book feel to them. She visits places of interest and of note, accumulating lists of houses seen and places she has visited. Her diaries include several extensive descriptions of house interiors, many of which take us through the sights as if we were on a tour:

[T]he house [Longford House near Salisbury on the Avon] stands finely to the River, a brick building, you enter into a walled Court low up 12 stepps at least [sic] into a noble hall, on the left hand was a parlour and on the right a large drawing roome a little parlour and large Staieres up to severall very handsom Chambers furnish’d with good tapistry and damaske and some velvets which was new […]. [O]ut of the drawing roome by Glass doors you enter the Garden on a terrass and that by stepps so to severall Walks of Gravel and Grass and to the Gardens one below the other (The Journeys of Celia Fiennes, pp. 57-58).

Though her text is very clear on the architectural setup of the entry hall, she then focuses only on the furnishings on the first floor without providing any information on the number of chambers or the precise location of tapestries and velvet curtains.

7 Wilton Estates kindly allowed me access to maps of the ground floor and first floor from 1746. The design indeed shows a quadrangle structure, but the names given to the rooms do not easily correspond to Defoe’s description; notably, the map fails to show the two galleries.
At the end of the eighteenth century, house descriptions get more specific and they are more perspectival in Stanzel’s sense, allowing the reader to draw a map of the described spaces:

[A]fter being led through a large hall, we were introduced to the ladies […]. The room where they sat was about forty-five feet long, of a proportionable breadth, with three windows on one side, which looked into a garden, and a large bow at the upper end. Over against the windows were three large book-cases, upon the top of the middle one stood an orrery, and a globe on each of the others. In the bow sat two ladies reading, with pen, ink, and paper on a table before them, at which was a young girl translating out of French. At the lower end of the room was a lady painting, with exquisite art indeed, a beautiful Madonna; near her another, drawing a landscape out of her own imagination; a third, carving a picture-frame in wood, in the finest manner; a fourth, engraving; and a young girl reading aloud to them; the distance from the ladies in the bow-window being such, that they could receive no disturbance from her. At the next window were placed a group of girls […] (Millenium Hall, pp. 58-59; my emphasis).

In this abstract from Sarah Scott’s novel A Description of Millenium Hall (1762), the narrator and her companion visit the hall of the estate in which the female community is housed. Here it is possible to draw a map of the hall with the various windows, bookcases and groups of characters which the visitors see as they enter. However, since the passage does not employ deictics in the form of to the left or in front, this is an example of a perspectival description which is not necessarily focalized through a particular subjective viewpoint. In fact, the only deictic hint regarding a point of view comes in the terms upper and lower, where (one assumes) the persons entering from opposite the windows see the bow (bay) further to their right (or left) and the lower end closer to them on their left (or right). In the terms of Linde and Labov or Taylor and Tversky (1992; 1996), the description therefore employs non-grounded spatial specifications, but in practice corresponds to a gaze tour, a view of the room from one particular point.

In the late 1790s, as narratologists know very well, the Gothic novel notably anticipates internal focalization in the representation of consciousness, employing considerable stretches of psychonarration and free indirect discourse. It is also in the Gothic novel where the first perspectival descriptions in Stanzel’s mode can be found in passages that present interiors from the experience of a character through internal focalization. A
good example of such a perspectival description occurs in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*:

Lady Blanche, it being not yet dark, took this opportunity of *exploring new scenes, and, leaving the parlour, she passed from the hall into a wide gallery, whose walls were decorated by marble pilasters, which supported an arched roof, composed of a rich mosaic work. Through a distant window, that seemed to terminate the gallery, were seen the purple clouds of evening and a landscape, whose features, thinly veiled in twilight, no longer appeared distinctly, but, blended into one grand mass, stretched to the horizon, coloured only with a tint of solemn grey. The gallery terminated in a saloon, to which the window she had seen through an open door, belonged; but the increasing dusk permitted her only an imperfect view of this apartment, which seemed to be magnificent and of modern architecture; though it had been either suffered to fall into decay, or had never been properly finished. The windows, which were numerous and large, descended low, and afforded a very extensive, and what Blanche's fancy represented to be, a very lovely prospect; and she stood for some time, surveying the grey obscurity and depicting imaginary woods and mountains, vallies and rivers, on this scene of night; her solemn sensations rather assisted, than interrupted, by the distant bark of a watch-dog, and by the breeze, as it trembled upon the light foliage of the shrubs. Now and then, appeared for a moment, among the woods, a cottage light; and, at length, was heard, afar off, the evening bell of a convent, dying on the air. When she withdrew her thoughts from these subjects of fanciful delight, the gloom and silence of the saloon somewhat awed her; and, having sought the door of the gallery, and pursued, for a considerable time, a dark passage, she came to a hall, but one totally different from that she had formerly seen. By the twilight, admitted through an open portico, she could just distinguish this apartment to be of very light and airy architecture, and that it was paved with white marble, pillars of which supported the roof, that rose into arches built in the Moorish style. While Blanche stood on the steps of this portico, the moon rose over the sea, and gradually disclosed, in partial light, the beauties of the eminence, on which she stood, whence a lawn, now rude and overgrown with high grass, sloped to the woods, that, almost surrounding the chateau, extended in a grand sweep down the southern sides of the promontory to the very margin of the ocean. Beyond the woods, on the north-side, appeared a long tract of the plains of Languedoc; and, to the east, the landscape she had before dimly seen, with the towers of
a monastery, illumined by the moon, rising over dark groves (*Mysteries of Udolpho* II, x, pp. 471-72; my emphasis).

Not only do we get a clear outline of the succession of rooms through which Blanche passes; we moreover are rewarded with a landscape prospect that combines the uncanny of the mansion with the sublime in the landscape. The passage is perspectival in Stanzel's sense since it provides us with very explicit directions on the contiguous objects and scenes observed by Lady Blanche. Yet, despite the extensive particularities outlined in the text, the overall impression regarding the castle's interior is not of a clear structure but of a labyrinth.

We can therefore conclude that in the eighteenth century, though descriptive passages are not that common in fictional narratives, a marked increase in perspectivization can be noted where the layout of interiors is concerned. Is this also true of single rooms? The passage from *Millenium Hall* can be taken as a perspectival endpoint. Are there any examples of perspectivism to be found in earlier texts which depict rooms?

A novel that most readers agree to be full of precise descriptions is *Moll Flanders* (1722). Yet when one looks at the actual text, one is bound to be disappointed. For instance, in the following passage it is apparent that the plate which Moll wants to steal lies in the shop window. The scenario is focused on the plate and its accessibility. As one can observe, Moll enters and is about to snatch her prey when she is intercepted by a vigilant inhabitant from the house opposite. The owner of the shop being absent, it can be speculated that the ware lies on an interior windowsill (otherwise, Moll might have snatched it from outside through the open window); but as to the precise arrangements inside the shop, these are left very vague indeed since ‘at one side of the shop’ fails to clarify the position of the door and window to the room as a whole:

It was on the *Christmas-day* following, in the Evening, that, to finish a long Train of Wickedness, I went Abroad to see what might offer in my way; when going by a Working Silver-Smiths in *Foster-Lane*, I saw a tempting Bait indeed, and not to be resisted by one of my Occupation; for the Shop had no Body in it, as I could see, and *a great deal of loose Plate lay in the Window*, and *at the Seat of the Man*, who usually, as I suppose, Work'd at one side of the Shop.

I went boldly in, and was *just going to lay my Hand upon a piece of Plate*, and might have done it, and carried it clear off, for any care that the Men who belong'd to the shop had taken of it; but an officious Fellow in
a House, not a Shop, on the other side of the Way, seeing me go in, and observing that there was no Body in the Shop, comes running over the Street, and into the shop, and without asking me what I was, or who, seizes upon me, and cries out for the People of the House. (Moll Flanders, p. 343; italics original emphasis, bold italics my own emphasis).

Likewise, when Roxana in Defoe’s eponymous novel (1724) accedes to the wishes of the landlord, he returns her furniture to her, which is listed without a clear indication of where individual items would be placed.8

A much more perspectival passage is the one where Moll steals the bundle:

Wandering thus about, I knew not whither, I passed by an Apothecary’s Shop in Leadenhall-Street, when I saw lie on a Stool just before the Counter a little Bundle wrapped in a white Cloth; beyond it stood a Maid Servant with her Back to it, looking towards the top of the Shop, where the Apothecary’s Apprentice, as I suppose, was standing upon the Counter, with his Back also to the Door, and a Candle in his Hand, looking and reaching up to the upper Shelf for something he wanted, so that both were engaged mighty earnestly, and no Body else in the Shop. [...] It was no sooner said but I step’d into the Shop, and with my Back to the Wench, as if I had stood up for a Cart that was going by, I put my Hand behind me and took the Bundle, and went off with it, the Maid or the Fellow not perceiving me, or any one else (Moll Flanders, 1989, pp. 254-55; italics original emphasis, bold italics my own emphasis).

Here we get a very good sense of the spatial relations between Moll and the two shop assistants, but there is of course barely a pause in the temporal sequence of the story of theft. The description here serves the function of (delayed) orientation. Moreover, though the relative positions

8 This was the first View I had of living comfortably indeed, and it was a very probable Way, I must confess; seeing we had very good Conveniences, six Rooms on a Floor, and three Stories high: While he was laying down the Scheme of my Management, came a Cart to the Door with a Load of Goods and an Upholsterer’s Man to put them up; they were chiefly the Furniture of two Rooms, which he had carried away for his two Years Rent, with two fine Cabinets, and some Peir-Glasses, out of the Parlour, and several other valuable things. These were all restored to their Places, and he told me he gave them me freely, as a Satisfaction for the Cruelty he had us’d me with before; and the Furniture of one Room being finish’d, and set up, he told me, he would furnish one Chamber for himself, and would come and be one of my Lodgers, if I would give him Leave’ (Roxana, p. 32; italics original emphasis, bold italics my own emphasis).
of the involved parties are noted carefully, the rest of the shop receives no notice; hence we have no idea whether there were one or two shop windows, whether there were counters on each side of the door, and so on. The description here serves the function of explaining how the theft was possible but does not have an ulterior purpose of creating the atmosphere of the shop or of metonymically signalling the shop owner’s character through the description of his workplace; nor is the passage meant to reflect Moll’s emotions or dispositions in the way that descriptive paragraphs typically do in nineteenth-century novels.

Even where we encounter an extensive description of a room in an eighteenth-century novel, the presentation need not be very perspectival, though it is focalized:

He went up stairs into a Garret, where he saw a most moving Scene. There lay on a Bed (or rather on a parcel of Rags patched together, to which the Mistress of the House chose to give the Name of a Bed) a young Man, looking as pale as Death, with his Eyes sunk in his Head, and hardly able to breathe, covered with half a dirty Rug, which would scarce come round him. On one Side of him sat holding him by the Hand, a young Woman in an old Silk gown, which looked as if it had been a good one; but so tattered, that it would barely cover her with Decency. Her Countenance was become wan with Affliction, and Tears stood in her Eyes, which she seemed unwilling to let fall, lest she should add to the Sorrow of the Man she sat by, and which, however, she was not able to restrain. The Walls were bare, and broke in many places in such a manner, that they were scarce sufficient to keep out the Weather (David Simple, pp. 125-26; italics original emphasis, bold italics my own emphasis).

In this passage from Sarah Fielding’s The Adventures of David Simple (1744), the perspective is focalized through the eyes of David, the sentimental hero. Yet the enumeration of impressions does not follow a spatial logic, but draws the eyes and imagination of the readers to the main sufferer and his sister. The room itself is not only bare, but taken note of only when the affecting misery of the siblings has been expanded on; the vignette of overloaded sentimental sympathy operates in a centrifugal manner by concentrating first on the dying man, then on the sister sitting next to him amid the signs of poverty which underline the pathos of her anguish, and only at the last notes the dreary surroundings as another intensifier of the scenario. (The text continues with the presence of the cantankerous landlady, whose earlier mention would have disturbed the pathos of the scene).
Concluding Remarks

While it seems that the architectural outlay of interiors in eighteenth-century texts begins to anticipate perspectival descriptions in Stanzel's sense of the term, when one turns to rooms, that is, enclosed interiors, this trend is much weaker. Although descriptions of objects, including persons, become more and more minute by the end of the eighteenth century, the depictions of rooms lag behind. We continue to find lists of items which are arranged by different logics, but not in terms of spatial contiguity and relationality. Only at the very end of the eighteenth century does one find some instances of perspectivism in the depiction of rooms.

On the other hand, these examples from eighteenth-century texts suggest that focalization and perspectivism do not necessarily go together. Whereas in Stanzel's model, the modernist novel clearly displays perspectival descriptions motivated by internal focalization (the observer is a reflector figure), in the eighteenth-century texts that I have looked at, the conjunction does not always occur. One may have descriptive passages that are focused through the eyes of a character but do not allow one to draw a map, since the focus is on what strikes the protagonist rather than on presenting a very useful description of the room (Pepys, Fielding, Trollope). Conversely, one can have narratorial presentations of interiors that are extremely perspectival and allow one almost sufficient material for a map (Fiennes, Defoe); these usually correlate with a gaze or tour perspective. It also seems likely to me, though I have not yet done the relevant research, that many nineteenth-century descriptions, at least in English literature, will be focused through the eyes of various protagonists (motivated by their entry into rooms) on the pattern we observed in the Trollope passage. Yet, despite this (often merely implicit) visual focalization, these descriptions I suspect, like Stanzel's example from Barchester Towers, will also emerge as being not perspectival (i.e. consciousness-centred) in Stanzel's sense. It therefore seems very plausible to me that a more extensive analysis of descriptions in the Victorian novel will turn out to corroborate his assessment.

Perhaps one will have to acknowledge that our desire for reproducible interiors is anachronistic and possibly induced by the ubiquity of film and transmedializations of novels into film. Having been raised on a diet of visual representations that are by nature exact, when we turn to written texts we now expect them to provide equally complete information. As a result, we tend to suppress the important role of indeterminacy in the literary reading process. It is precisely because we do not get complete spatial information that we make fictional settings resonate psychologically – the
inbuilt gaps are not filled completely in the reading process but allow for empty but suggestive spaces in our minds and for imaginative creativity. The banality of photography and film in their more humdrum manifestations lies precisely in their freezing of impressions in one unchangeable visual image. Art movies therefore tend to symbolize the surface of reality depicted; they also creatively juxtapose scenarios, introduce indeterminacy and blur the boundaries between fantasy and the fictional world. While factual description focuses on providing information, on directing interlocutors and readers to gain a particular destination or put together a piece of furniture, literary descriptions need to engage our imaginations. The more suggestive the description the better; excessive delineations of spatial arrangements on the lines of the *nouveau roman* paradoxically turn out to be deadly and flat, whereas a few strokes of the stylistic brush can produce vivid images of fictional settings.

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**Criticism**


