

## ABSTRACT

Mental Pictures in a Rustic Setting: Ekphrasis in Virgil's *Georgics*

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For the better part of the last century, the literary and rhetorical term ekphrasis has been applied primarily to poetic descriptions of art and architecture. Best known for its application to such famous examples as the shield of Achilles (*Iliad* 18) or the relief sculptures of the Trojan War within the temple of Juno in Carthage (*Aeneid* 1), ekphrasis has a much wider scope of application than has been previously supposed. I intend to analyze descriptive passages in Virgil's *Georgics* with a view to supporting a broader definition of ekphrasis while also evaluating the advantages and disadvantages involved with the methodology of categorizing such passages.

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MENTAL PICTURES IN A RUSTIC SETTING:  
EKPHRASIS IN VIRGIL'S *GEORGICS*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### *Statement of the Problem*

For the last several decades and extending back even into the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars from multifarious disciplines have shared a common interest in the rhetorical trope of ekphrasis. As for particular authors whose works intersect with this line of inquiry, perhaps none besides Homer has engendered so much scrutiny amongst scholars as the Roman poet Virgil. Though drawing heavily upon the immense repository of previous poetic traditions, both Greek and Roman, Virgil nonetheless managed to establish his own unique bastion of originality and formidable poetic prowess. His uses of ekphrasis provide a particularly noteworthy sample of this balance, both imitating Homer's depiction of the shield of Achilles with his own version for Aeneas' shield in the *Aeneid* and yet recasting this trope in view of the Roman rhetorical tradition. Nevertheless, while the sum of scholarly ink spent on Virgil's *Aeneid* ekphraseis has amounted to numerous volumes, the *Georgics* have remained relatively untouched in this regard. It is the purpose of this thesis, therefore, to reenergize Virgilian scholarship in a new way by investigating the manner in which ekphrasis does or does not appear and how it does or does not function in Virgil's *Georgics*.

While it is evident from its appearance in Homer that the presence of ekphrasis does not depend upon a rhetorical tradition, in Virgil's case this tradition is important and influential enough to merit substantial consideration. A further reason for exploring the

influence of rhetoric vis-à-vis ekphrasis is the profound narrowing of scope that has befallen the term throughout the last century. Ruth Webb, in her recent book *Ekphrasis, Imagination, and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, argues that the term ekphrasis has undergone both a remarkable diminution and dilation in the last century and that it behooves modern scholars to remember the term in its proper ancient context.<sup>1</sup> In order to recover this original context and its ancient definition of ekphrasis, Webb directs her readers to the rather neglected Roman rhetorical tradition surrounding the Second Sophistic and especially to the writers of the *Progymnasmata*, a series of rhetorical exercises, which fortunately have passed on to us an express definition. The earliest of these, Aelius Theon, usually identified within the first century A.D., calls ekphrasis “descriptive language, bringing what is portrayed clearly before the sight,”<sup>2</sup> and later writers of the *Progymnasmata*, who run as late as the fifth century A.D., adhere closely to this definition. Such a broad statement permits that ancient ekphrasis may encompass imagery pertaining to such things as “persons and events and places and periods of time,”<sup>3</sup> though objects of course are not excluded.<sup>4</sup> It is these ‘sub-categories’ that, according to Webb, modern scholarship has discussed in an especially restricted way.

Having begun with a general definition that identifies ekphrasis in terms of merely descriptive language, modern reception has treated the term almost exclusively as

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<sup>1</sup> Webb 2009: 28.

<sup>2</sup> Kennedy 2003: 45.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy 2003: 46.

it relates to works of art and architecture. Webb, believing that this diminution has its origins in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, selects two primary factors in her explanation of this phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> First, scholars during this time of the late modern era held a keen interest in ancient art and aesthetics as well as in the relationship and divisions between the different arts such as painting and poetry. Secondly, there was simply not much enthusiasm at the time for the study of Greek rhetoric during the Imperial period, whence comes the *Progymnasmata* and other rhetorical exercises or treatises dealing with ekphrasis. Both of these factors caused scholars to pin down ekphrasis to the aesthetic themes currently in vogue while ignoring the ancient rhetorical tradition which would have deterred them from declaring *ex cathedra* that ekphrasis was purely the poetic description of a work of art or architecture. Furthermore, even as modern scholars on the one hand narrowed the ancient definition of ekphrasis, they also chose to broaden the scope of this newly-fashioned term to involve all literature within or without antiquity relating thus to art and architecture.<sup>6</sup> A final important distinction that Webb makes between the ancient and modern definitions of ekphrasis is that their source material implies different applications for its use. While the ancient definition itself presupposes the practical application of ekphrasis to the arena of oratory, the modern sense of ekphrasis takes its impetus from poetic examples and implies that it is a singularly poetic endeavor. Truly, the differences between these two definitions prompt a reconsideration of the proximity between ancient and modern cultures and how they both approach the text with a critical mind.

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<sup>5</sup> Webb 2009: 14.

<sup>6</sup> For Webb's paradigmatic example of this tendency, cf. Spitzer 1955: 206-7.

It should no longer be surprising, therefore, if modern Virgilian scholarship has remained close to the contours of the modern definition of ekphrasis. Not only have Virgilians dealt primarily with ekphraseis of works of art, but they have also clung especially tightly to the *Aeneid*, in which the poet raises many questions about the proper function of art and iconography within human communities. Such queries whet the appetites of those interested in modern aesthetic concerns while other ekphraseis potentially intended by the author are left relatively untouched. This is particularly true of Virgil's middle poem the *Georgics*, in which only one example, the temple description from the proem to the third *Georgic*, has come under much scrutiny. This is a crucial gap in the tradition of Virgilian scholarship that ought to be addressed and investigated. If ancient ekphrasis encompassed much more than modern critics allow for, there should still be many undiscovered riches just waiting to be revealed.

Another aspect contributing to this dearth of material is the sheer difficulty of Virgil's *Georgics* and the interpretive demands it imposes on the reader. As one critic has put it, "The poem privileges mystery, not solution; complexity and ambiguity, not certainty."<sup>7</sup> Nor was it without reason that John Dryden, the illustrious playwright and a master poet in his own right, declared the *Georgics* to be "the best poem by the best poet." Both its difficulty and its greatness stem in part from its chronological placement within the overall corpus of Virgil's poetry. On the one hand, the *Eclogues*, though better than the best works of lesser poets, stand as the least mature of Virgil's poems both because they lack the grandiose tone and universality of the latter two and inasmuch as they are Virgil's first public attempt at the poet's art. On the other hand, Virgil died

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<sup>7</sup>Perkell 1989: 190.



before he could fully complete his *Aeneid* and its condition, therefore, is inevitably less polished and not as perfect as that of the *Georgics*. For these reasons then, the workings of ekphrasis in this poem remain as a field needing to be tilled and cultivated. Thus this thesis has the *telos* at which it shall aim, to consider the nature and function of ekphrasis in the *Georgics* by drawing from the ancient definition of ekphrasis, modern interpretive strategies, and the categorization and attentive analysis of examples from the text. By so doing it is my hope to show how flexible ekphrasis is as a tool used by poets and how it can even defy rigid categorization by us as critics.

### *The Ancient Definition of Ekphrasis*

To understand more fully the task at hand and to establish some categories by which ekphrasis in the *Georgics* can be distinguished requires a more detailed explanation of ekphrasis as the ancients discussed and thought about it themselves. For this purpose, I will return again to Ruth Webb's analysis of the Roman rhetorical tradition and use her as an interpretive lens to consider the ancient sources on ekphrasis. Let us return, therefore, to the *Progymnasmata* as a representative sample of the rhetorical tradition and consider how its treatment of ekphrasis may shed valuable light upon Virgil's incorporation of it in his own writings.

In the ancient context, ekphrasis was generally used only in the confines of technical or educational discourse such as treatises and handbooks of rhetoric, scholarly commentaries, and the parlance of the classroom where special terms were employed for the analysis of texts. We do not find the term ekphrasis outside of such sources and

authors generally use other terms for such methods of literary description.<sup>8</sup> As is clear from the *Progymnasmata*, poets such as Virgil would have most likely come into contact with ekphrasis as a term of their rhetorical education. Composed by a number of different writers over the course of four or five centuries, the *Progymnasmata* is a series of rhetorical exercises that are designed to inculcate a set of argumentative skills cultivated into habit through an emphasis on example and imitation.<sup>9</sup> Although these exercises were intended for application in the arena of public rhetoric, specifically that of the law courts, declamation, or epideictic oratory, the examples these exercises incorporate and the presuppositions upon which they hold are derived from the earlier literature of Homer, Hesiod, Thucydides, Xenophon, etc. Students were given the task of imitating applicable examples either composed by their own instructors or drawn from authors such as these for each individual exercise.<sup>10</sup> They would thereby grow thoroughly acquainted with the existing literary tradition and be encouraged to use their skills creatively to test the logic and coherence of each example from this tradition, ultimately becoming equipped to fashion their own speeches and arguments. Ekphrasis is only one piece of this grand educational artifact and one that carries its own unique definition and set of various nuances.

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<sup>8</sup> Webb 2009: 39-40. Terms used outside of classroom instruction included διηγέομαι ('relate', 'go through'), ἐρμηνεύω ('to express in words'), etc.

<sup>9</sup> Fleming 2003: 107 is even more precise. "To acquire rhetorical power, the ancients believed, a student needed, first, nature, that is, native talent (or at least a fervent desire to improve); second, art, that is, a precise but flexible theory of civic discourse that could be learned in formal settings; and, third, practice, that is, a rigorous program of drill and exercise meant to internalize the art and make it part of the student's very ethos."

<sup>10</sup> Chreia, Fable, Narrative, Topos, Ekphrasis, Prosopopoeia, Encomion, Invective, Syncrisis, Thesis, Law

Aelius Theon, the earliest of the writers of the extant *Progymnasmata*, gives us the definition of ekphrasis that each of the succeeding writers observes with little variation. The definition he adduces is as follows: ekphrasis is a descriptive speech which leads the thing shown vividly before the eyes (ἐκφρασὶς ἐστὶ λόγος περιηγηματικός ἐναργῶς ὑπ’ ὅψιν ἄγων τὸ δηλούμενον).<sup>11</sup> Only Nikoloas, the latest of the writers of the *Progymnasmata*, changes this definition at all, and his alteration of περιηγηματικός to ἀφηγηματικός is slight but essentially the same in terms of meaning. This definition is primarily concerned with the effect of the speaker’s words upon the audience and thus it is not surprising that the language involved in this evocation of subjective experience would be metaphorical. While it is translated as “descriptive,” the adjective περιηγηματικός more literally means “leading around,” as though the speaker were presenting an action or object for visual scrutiny. The subsequent participle ἄγων further reinforces this notion and its modifying adverb ἐναργῶς, which in its adjectival form ἐναργής most basically denotes “clearly visible” in reference to real objects,<sup>12</sup> continues the metaphorical train of the definition. Clearly the authors had to resort to metaphor in this situation since it is not possible for language to bring anything literally before the eyes. It is evident, therefore, that the ideas behind ekphrasis are perhaps even too abstract for commonplace rhetorical discourse. Nevertheless, there is further insight to be gained in the additional associations of this definition with other forms of visual representation. The idea of leading “the thing shown before the eyes” can easily remind us of theatre and

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<sup>11</sup> Kennedy 2003: 45.

<sup>12</sup> Webb 2009: 53.

spectacle.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, it is no coincidence that Nikolaos intends that his living audience “all but become spectators” (μονονοῦ θεατάς εἶναι).<sup>14</sup> These various analogies convey the importance and close relationship between ekphrasis and visual representation not to mention the imagination.

The idea that ekphrasis is “a descriptive speech which leads the thing shown vividly before the eyes,” implies that a powerful dialogue must be opened up between the imagination of the reader, really a listener in the context of antiquity, and the words that he or she is hearing. Corroborating this notion, Plutarch states that both Thucydides and Xenophon incorporate a kind of vividness (ἐνάργεια) into their writing which makes it seem as though the events described are happening (γιννόμενα) in the present rather than the past (γεγενήμενα).<sup>15</sup> The intention here is clearly not for mere imaginative adornment but for the readers to think of themselves as partakers and participants in the events of the narrative. This identification occurring within the imagination has the additional effect of creating a similar bond with the emotions, so that the readers not only see what the characters see but share in their feelings as well. Having become so invested in the images and emotions described by the author, it would be all the more likely for ancient readers to supplement impressions from their own imaginations onto this simulated image encouraged by an external agent. Webb adduces observations of this habit of ancient readers from both Philostratus and the Roman rhetorician Quintilian, likely a

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<sup>13</sup> A practical examination of these ideas in Virgil’s contemporary setting is Feldherr 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy 2003: 166.

<sup>15</sup> Plutarch, *Artaxerxes*, 8.1, cited in Webb 2009: 20.

contemporary of Aelius Theon cited earlier from the *Progymnasmata*.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Quintilian goes so far as to doubt the intelligence of a reader who cannot form images from the material being read.<sup>17</sup> Through Webb's perusal of the ancient sources, therefore, we learn that the readerly ideal among the ancients as it pertains to ekphrasis was for both sensual and emotional identification as well as imaginative supplementation.

Perhaps the most apparent difference, as we will see, between the ancient and modern definitions of ekphrasis concerns their emphasis, or lack thereof, on distinct subjects. Modern criticism consistently identifies works of art as the singular domain of ekphrasis. On the other hand, owing to a much different set of concerns, the ancients granted to ekphrasis a much less restricted range of subject material. Theon allows for the categories of events, persons, places, times, and *tropoi*. Although later writers of the *Progymnasmata* will add to this basic list, including such items as states of affairs (*kairoi*), seasons, mute animals or plants, festivals, and paintings or statues, Theon's initial categorization provides the most general overview under which these supplemental additions might be just as easily applied. As Webb is quick to point out, Theon's subjects for ekphrasis are an almost exact match to the traditional elements of narration (*stoicheiastes diegeseos*) that students of rhetoric would use to construct their own narratives or to analyze those of others, including narratives from the poets and historians. In ancient practice, narrative is composed of "the action (*pragma*) performed by the person (*prosopon*), the place (*topos*) in which it occurred as well as the manner (*tropos*) in which

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<sup>16</sup> Webb 2009: 21-2.

<sup>17</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 8.3.64-5.

the action was carried out and its cause (*aitia*).”<sup>18</sup> This implies that ekphrasis as conceived in the ancient world could encompass the same variety of subject matter as narrative while also being clearly related to it as far as the components are concerned. Ekphrasis might not be bigger than narrative or a narrative in itself, but it is clearly meant to be an integral part of narrative when it is used. Also of noteworthy importance is the fact that the final narrative element of cause (*aitia*) does not appear in Theon’s list of subjects for ekphrasis. This is likely because a cause is typically inferred from the facts of circumstance and cannot be directly described for the eyes of the mind except by implication. Since, however, the remaining elements of narrative do correspond to the subjects of ekphrasis, let us take a closer look at what insight this connection may yield.

The vast majority of scholarly treatments on ekphrasis in the ancient world also take heed of a related term in rhetorical terminology called *enargeia*. Theon’s definition makes reference to this concept through the adverbial form of the word and the most apparent meaning of its nounal form for the purposes of ekphrasis is “vividness.” It is of great importance both for the connection between ekphrasis and narrative and for key distinctions between the ancient and modern definitions of ekphrasis.<sup>19</sup> Unlike modern criticism of ekphrasis, which fixes its attention on stationary objects, students of rhetoric in the ancient world conceived of the term as applying primarily to actions or events that occur over a span of time. Even the most famous example of ekphrasis, the shield of Achilles, was categorized by Theon not in terms of its status as an object but as an action

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<sup>18</sup> Webb 2009: 63.

<sup>19</sup> Zanker 1981 offers an analysis of this term in relation to other competing terms and definitions during this period of antiquity.

in motion, and specifically, according to the manner in which it was constructed (*tropos*). Indeed, Theon associates this particular example in its most utilitarian sense alongside other descriptions of the fashioning of war implements such as ramparts and siege engines. Including also the possibility that ekphrasis applies to actions (*pragmata*) carried out over time, Theon stresses that such ekphrastic compositions must be attentively integrated into their larger narrative context. The author, moreover, must take note of the circumstances preceding the actions and their succeeding consequences. As a result, ekphrasis in the ancient sense is beginning to look like a kind or subtype of narrative. But what, therefore, is the difference between such categories? The key and answer to this question is *enargeia*, which, according to Nikolaos, makes listeners into spectators while narrative (diegesis) is a simple account of events.<sup>20</sup> Put more simply, ekphrasis is an elaborate form of narration in which more details and imagery are added to appeal to the imagination of listeners and readers. Both Nikolaos and earlier even Quintilian describe normal narration as a generic description of facts which becomes more descriptive through “vividness” (*enargeia*) and transformed into something more when it explores possibly implicated images and consequences.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, according to both men, this added vividness has the effect of appealing to the hearer or reader’s imagination and of being instrumental for persuasion in rhetorical speeches especially.

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<sup>20</sup> Kennedy 2003: 166.

<sup>21</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 8.3.67-9.

### *Modern Definition of Ekphrasis*

With a sense of the landscape for ancient ekphrasis established, let us now turn to the tradition of modern criticism and its approach to interpreting ekphrasis. I will proceed in this section to sketch some of the earliest and most foundational critics of ekphrasis before proceeding to more recent critical treatments. This brief survey cannot possibly and is not meant to cover every possibility for the interpretation of ekphrasis as a literary device.

Two of the earliest and most well-known treatments of ancient ekphrasis come from the eighteenth century, in which such criticism was symptomatic of a desire on the part of philosophy and aesthetics to distinguish the advantages, disadvantages, and proper scope of the arts, such as music, painting, and poetry. Any treatment of the modern criticism of ekphrasis is not complete without some discussion of Edmund Burke and Gotthold Lessing.<sup>22</sup> Both Burke and Lessing seek more specifically to relate poetry and painting to one another, a discussion that pertains directly to the nature of description and its place in the function of literature. Neither one of these men considered description a matter of depicting mere appearance but as a way of approaching something more metaphysical and intangible.

To begin with the aesthetic opinions of Burke as they relate to the strengths and goals of poetry and painting, the key distinction to keep in mind is that between

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<sup>22</sup> Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Conception of the Sublime and the Beautiful* 1967 and Lessing in *Laocoon: an Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* 1962.



representation and effect.<sup>23</sup> Concerning the respective goals of painting and poetry, Burke maintains that painting strives after beauty while poetry seeks the sublime. And in Burke's mind, the sublime is the more worthy goal of the two. The means by which these two arts intend to accomplish their ends are representation and effect respectively. Painting can and is only concerned with imitation and representation. In Burke's mind it is not possible for painting to depict both a representation and its effect, since the most it can do is stand in place of the object that it is depicting. This act of representation at its best only achieves beauty. Poetry, on the other hand, can portray the reaction, thoughts, and emotions in response to a particular representation, which in Burke's mind is the more impressive achievement, even if it does not accomplish the act of representation as well as painting does. Ultimately, it is the effect that matters most and, for Burke, it is poetry that can best accomplish this goal.

In contrast to Burke's enforced divorce of painting and poetry from one another, Gotthold Lessing seeks to define the proper spheres of painting/visual arts and poetry without positing a complete divergence between them. Instead, he proves that poetry might seek to approximate the effects of art and vice versa.<sup>24</sup> Chapters 16-19 of the *Laocoon* treat this subject as it pertains to the famous ekphrasis of Achilles' shield and the poetry of Homer in general. Lessing begins from the first principles of establishing the dichotomy that the visual arts are "suitably related" to bodies in space and poetry to actions in time. The visual arts "can imitate actions, but only by suggestion through

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<sup>23</sup> Burke 1967: 166-177.

<sup>24</sup> Lessing the critic is not exempt from criticism of his own views. See Mitchell 1987: 95-115 and Becker 1995: 13-22.

bodies” while “poetry also depicts bodies, but only by suggestion through actions.”<sup>25</sup>

Finding his support for these premises in the poetry of Homer, most specifically the *Iliad*, Lessing goes on to explain that, in contrast to modern poets, this ancient poet best represents bodies through a consecutive series of events. The effect of this technique is to gradually unfold the appearance of an object in an unobtrusive way through a revelation of its history or construction. As examples of this technique, Lessing cites descriptions of the staff of Agamemnon (*Iliad*. 2.101-108), the scepter of Achilles (4.234-239), and the bow of Pindarus (4.105-111). The subsequent chapters provide Lessing the opportunity to further elaborate on his claims and to appeal and investigate the description of Achilles’ shield.

In chapter seventeen, Lessing addresses the objection that the symbols of poetry, because they are arbitrary, might easily represent bodies in space. His response is to say that since the primary of goal of the poetic art when it comes to such descriptions is to create the illusion “that we feel the real impressions which the objects of these ideas would produce on us,”<sup>26</sup> the fact that we are not actually perceiving an object should be absent from our minds. Nevertheless, for Lessing this suspension of disbelief is not achievable inasmuch as it is simply not possible for the poet to simulate the speed and clarity of visual sight in the lingering sequence of words. As a result, the poet ought to avoid attempting to accomplish the impossible. But how is Lessing to deal with the fact that Homer, his poetic archetype of excellence, does in fact make such an attempt with the shield of Achilles? In answer to this question, he resorts to his earlier explanation of

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<sup>25</sup> Lessing 1962: 78.

<sup>26</sup> Lessing 1962: 85.

Homeric description. Lessing believes that Homer's perhaps excessive exuberance in description can be excused since he is not depicting the shield itself but the construction of the shield, just as he had done with other objects on earlier occasions. While this may seem to be a bit of a cop-out, as a whole Lessing's general argument about the boundaries between verbal and visual art has remained prevalent for centuries and is still foundational for modern criticism of ekphrasis.

Shifting now to more recent treatments of ekphrasis, let us note some of the varying ways in which modern critics seek to categorize the use of ekphrasis. Indeed, one of the most popular methods in recent years is to note correspondences between an ekphrasis and the whole of the work surrounding it. Perhaps the best examples of this practice are Putnam's thorough analyses of ekphrasis in the *Aeneid*. Treating primarily the *Aeneid*'s "notional ekphraseis" (descriptions of works of art and architecture) as well as two others (the cloak of Cloanthus in Book 5 and Silvia's stag in Book 7), Putnam, drawing upon earlier work by James Heffernan takes as his starting point the idea of ekphrasis as an "interpretive signpost for the reader."<sup>27</sup> The following constitutes his overall thesis for the book:

For by its very act of disruption, ekphrasis forces itself on the reader as a generative moment, as two types of narrativity confront each other. For Virgil this instant of intersection, of destabilization and at times transgression, is the overture not for a digression from the heavy onslaught of epic narrative but for a meditation on one art as mirror of another, on Virgil's descriptions of examples of the fine arts as synecdoches for that larger manifestation of artistic accomplishment which is the poem itself.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Heffernan 1993: 69.

<sup>28</sup> Putnam 1998: 3.

On this plane of interpretation then, each ekphrasis is directly related on a metaphorical level to the narrative surrounding it and from which it departs, thus making each ekphrasis a kind of *mise en abyme*.

Tying ekphrasis to narrative, albeit in a different manner, Don Fowler, in his article “Narrate and Describe: The Problem of Ekphrasis,” introduces focalization into the interpretive discourse.<sup>29</sup> Fundamentally, focalization emphasizes the point of view through which a description is viewed and the question it prompts is “who sees?” Speaking in theoretical terms, Fowler argues that description is impossible without some point of view being implicated, “a point of view is necessarily inscribed, though there may be accepted ways in a particular culture of ordering the elements.”<sup>30</sup> Then, as an example, Fowler offers the description in *Aeneid* I of the murals within the temple in Carthage. This passage in particular is not complete without the emotional response of Aeneas to these images and the hermeneutic crux is how to interpret Aeneas’ own reading of them. Does the order or manner in which he reads the murals carry any interpretive significance? On the one hand, a sinister reading might suggest that the murals depict a hostile attitude toward the Trojans on the part of Dido.<sup>31</sup> Otherwise, Aeneas’ reading might reflect the need for a tragic rather than a triumphant reading of

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<sup>29</sup> This terms was coined for this purpose by G. Genette, cf. Genette 1980: 161-211. See also Fowler 1990. On this passage see also Smith 1998: 26-43 for a similar methodological approach that draws upon the concept of focalization.

<sup>30</sup> Fowler 1991: 29.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Horsfall 1973-74.

history.<sup>32</sup> Fowler does not so much argue for a particular interpretation to this passage as much as he identifies the ambiguity in the text concerning what is actually “seen” and what is “read-in” and whether Aeneas is misreading the murals. For the purposes of the present analysis, the concept of focalization will not be taken as a category of ekphrasis but will instead be used as an interpretive tool. Its relevance and purpose are tied to the relationship between description and the surrounding narrative, much like Putnam’s aforementioned category of *mise en abyme* ekphrasis.

If an ekphrasis can have an openly stated or implied point of view attached to it, then it requires little extension of thought to believe that an ekphrasis can support or refute a particular worldview or philosophy. In an article on ekphrasis in Seneca and Epictetus, Shadi Bartsch informs us of a particular example in which Seneca offers a marvelous description of the city Syracuse. Through this description Seneca surveys many of the wondrous features of the city’s landscape such as the island itself or the famous fountain of Arethusa as well as the harbor and the city buildings in general. However, this ekphrasis is quickly tempered by a contrasting appraisal centered around the history of tyranny in Syracuse and that of Dionysius II in particular. By ironically juxtaposing the visible mystique of the contemporary city with the atrocities of an unseen (by the reader) historical figure,<sup>33</sup> Seneca subverts the traditional effect of encomiastic ekphrasis. He would have his readers balance their evaluations of reality between visible and invisible criteria, between the aesthetic and the historical. This contrast, therefore, becomes a parable for how one ought to look at life, “not to leap into life with careless

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<sup>32</sup> Fowler 1991: 33.

<sup>33</sup> Bartsch 2007: 85.

glee, as if about to see something *mirum*, for beauty and amazement are not the whole story, and the human condition can be painful and drab.”<sup>34</sup> In this case the ekphrasis of Syracuse is meant by Seneca to be understood as an unrealistic and ill-informed way of seeing and interacting with external realities. It is a worldview that this philosopher finds untenable, ill-advised, and prone to lead those who hold it into error.

### *Methodology*

By this point we have now seen different many of the different ways in which scholars have attempted to collate and critique ekphrasis from all eras of literature. I have taken pains myself to categorize several of the analyses of ekphrasis spanning from ancient to modern times in order to provide a new framework with which to compare Virgil’s *Georgics*. The methodology which I will employ for the categorization of ekphrasis in the *Georgics* owes much to the scholarly analysis of allusion, reference, and intertext in recent years,<sup>35</sup> and particularly that of Richard Thomas in his seminal article entitled “Virgil’s *Georgics* and the Art of Reference.” Herein Thomas introduces a typology for reference with the following categories: casual reference, single reference, self-reference, correction, apparent reference, and multiple reference/conflation. By means of these categories, it is his goal to document the different artistic effects available to the poet through this device. In my own study I will be following Thomas’ lead by formulating my own typology of categories for ekphrasis in the *Georgics* in the hopes that I might offer a more expansive definition that will show both the advantages and limits of categorization as a methodology.

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<sup>34</sup> Bartsch 2007: 86.

<sup>35</sup> See especially Pasquali (1942), Conte (1986), and Hinds (1998).

### *Categories of Ekphrasis in the Georgics*

Besides two categories of ekphrasis discussed already in the preceding pages (*mise en abyme* and philosophical ekphrasis), I would like to introduce three categories particularly appropriate for the *Georgics* that I have found during the course of this study.

Virgil's *Georgics* is quite simply difficult to interpret on account of its polyphonic nature, the characteristic alternation so often observed between optimism and pessimism, the hope for life and the certainty of death and misfortune.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, it should come as little surprise if one of the ways by which Virgil manages the manifold melodies and harmonies of this poem is through ekphrasis. I have decided to label as a "tonal ekphrasis" those passages of description in which the voice and nature of the poem, whether optimistic or pessimistic, is at stake. One of the most interesting things about these kinds of descriptions is that these passages can convey both optimism and pessimism at the same time, or simply at one extreme or the other (See Appendix).

Another one of Virgil's chief concerns throughout his poetry and particularly in the *Georgics* is establishing his own point of view on poetry and poetics. Passages in which Virgil incorporates description for this end I will call "metapoetic ekphrasis." Because the *Georgics* is a poem with a more mundane subject matter, more consistent at first glance with technical prose treatises, there is a tension between the subject material and Virgil's poetic aspirations. Consequently, Virgil is consistently making an effort to redefine the boundaries of the genres he works in as one cohesive unit, such as he does in an ekphrasis on a storm (*Georgics* 1.316-334) by combining military language with the

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<sup>36</sup> Still a seminal article on the mechanics of this dynamic in Virgil's poetry, in the *Aeneid* especially, is Parry (1963).

imagery of a scene from the countryside of the farmer.<sup>37</sup> A slight variation to these reflections is what I will name “biographical ekphrasis.” In such passages Virgil uses description to focus on his own place in the poetic tradition rather than on the nature of poetics in general. The prime example of this kind of ekphrasis is the proem to the third *Georgic* in which Virgil foretells his own future epic work in the *Aeneid*. It can be difficult to distinguish metapoetic and biographical ekphrasis, but most often when biographical ekphrasis is evident it is accompanying a metapoetic ekphrasis. The latter, on the other hand, very often occurs by itself.

Such are the different categories of ekphrasis that I will explicate in the *Georgics*, both in the following analyses and in the appendix to this thesis.

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<sup>37</sup> A detailed and well-composed discussion of this topic in the *Georgics* may be found in Harrison 2007: 136-167.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Storm Ekphrasis in Virgil's *Georgics*

The storm ekphrasis of the first *Georgic* (316-34) vividly illustrates Virgil's extraordinary capacity to describe scenes from the natural world with a realistic and emotionally-charged potency. It is an ekphrastic symphony exhibiting three separate movements and unified by a constancy of scene and imagery.<sup>1</sup> Beginning at the outset of Autumn and with the introduction of harvest time, the first movement, signaled by the adverb *saepe*, details the portentous activity of the winds which chaotically uproot the very plants that the farmer was about to collect for himself. The windy air grows dark from the earth borne debris. A second movement, again demarked by *saepe*, catalogues the formation and destruction of the impending storm as water and moisture are harvested from the land and sea, only to fall more destructively upon the elements whence they came. The destruction of the winds is replicated and accentuated in the devastation caused by the heavy rains and floods. As the farmer's previous work is wiped out and washed eventually out to sea, Jupiter himself, in the third and final movement, clears the scene of any remaining life as animals depart and the populations of men are oppressed by the fear of his thunderbolts. Devoid of all the living wealth with which this passage began, only the inanimate shores and groves can respond to the melancholy situation brought on by the violent forces of nature. In this analysis I will note the various ways of categorizing this passage and show how they and other factors contribute to its interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Smith (2010): 75 who compares the whole of the *Georgics* to a symphony.

Set against the context of the first *Georgic*, this ekphrasis contains many significant verbal and thematic echoes that are worth deeper exploration. As a whole this passage is filled with the imagery of war and battle. Words or phrases such as *induceret* (316), *concurrere proelia* (318), *agmen* (322), and *stravit* (331) all convey an atmosphere in which the storm of the Georgic world is likened to a battle. If, however, this description treats a battle, who or what are the opposing forces? Beginning with the first martial code word, *induceret*, which connotes a general leading his soldiers into the midst of battle, we notice that the farmer (*agricola*, 317) is the stand-in for a military leader. Our storm appears a mere one line later in the clear position of the opposing combatant. However, the fact that Virgil's Georgic world is intentionally reminiscent of a battlefield has been much discussed and is intentionally made explicit by the poet himself, most lucidly at lines 160-175, and introduced by the words *agrestibus arma* (160).<sup>2</sup>

In fact, Virgil models this particular passage upon a similar selection from Hesiod's didactic epic the *Works and Days* (414-65), to which he will consistently and constantly refer, especially in the first two books of the *Georgics*.<sup>3</sup> Until this point of the poem, Virgil has begun by setting the scene of his agricultural world and the parameters by which it runs. The Georgic world is a fallen world driven by toil (*labor*) and necessity (*egestas*) as it is administered by Jupiter, who rules an age in which the spontaneity and ease of his father's rule exists no longer. Instead, subsistence and existence must be fought for and nature bucks at mankind's attempts at mastery (119-146). The storm in

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gale (2000): 243-69 for commentary on this motif throughout the *Georgics*.

<sup>3</sup> See Farrell 1991: 70-77 for discussion on the relationship between these two passages.

this passage is both a symbolic reminder of this worldview and a particular manifestation of nature's truculent and stubborn resistance.

Virgil's use of military imagery as an engine for this storm ekphrasis, not to mention for the struggle between man and nature throughout the poem as a whole, lends intense pathos to a scene from everyday life that might not otherwise merit such extraordinary attention. The magnitude of this event becomes clear from the context. Following his precatory proem, Virgil's primary concern until the storm ekphrasis is for the construction and maintenance of a world, both on a philosophical and practical level. Whether or not we are to identify the admonitory poetic speaker with Virgil himself, his masterfully creative hand is always at work. The world of the farmer appears and he is instructed in the many ways by which he is to plow, cultivate crops, irrigate, manage pests, observe signs, pass time indoors, etc. Outside of his philosophical and mythological digressions, Virgil largely achieves this construction through proscription and the didactic voice. Although certain negative trends and influences are pointed out and repudiated in these opening lines, the verses are generally positive in tone and it is not until this description of a storm that we as readers receive a demonstrably darker view of reality.

The arrival of the storm, moreover, signals the destruction of all that Virgil and his dutiful farmer have worked and fought to construct in the opening of the poem. Heavy winds uproot the work of planting and irrigation, floods destroy the careful labor of the plow, and whatever comfort the farmer has obtained from his livelihood has been put to flight by the thunderbolts of Jupiter. Virgil nods to the connection between this destruction and the preceding construction in lines 325-26, which echo the phrasing of

*haec cum sint hominumque boumque labores* at line 118, a passage in which Virgil has been instructing the farmer in irrigation and will soon turn to arming the farmer with his plow. After the storm, however, this toil of men and cattle has been for naught and neither man nor creature remains in the scene at its close. Description has overthrown proscription.

The preceding context of this passage, namely the fact that the beginning of the poem to this point is more positive and optimistic, offers a chance for some brief remarks concerning the categorization of this ekphrasis. Inasmuch as the tone of the first *Georgic* shifts climactically here to a more pessimistic dissonance while also complementing the similar tonal darkness with which this book ends, this storm ekphrasis can very easily be categorized as a “tonal ekphrasis.” Its main function as such is to stand out as a contrastive tone to the more positive passages which precede and lend a sense of tragic realism to the movement of the poem as a whole. Life is more than just comedy or just tragedy, but a poignant mixture of both.

Besides referring back to and drawing from the preceding context of Virgil’s poetic world, this storm ekphrasis foreshadows the episode with which the first book will ultimately close, the omens of the death of Julius Caesar and the succeeding outbreak of civil war. The connection between these two passages is primarily one of verbal and pictorial reference.

Proluit insano contorquens vertice silvas  
Fluviorum rex Eridanus camposque per omnis  
Cum stabulis armenta tulit.

(*Georgics* 1. 481-483)

The Po, king of rivers, uprooted forests as it  
Flowed forth from its raging headwater and carried  
Cattle with their stables through all the fields.<sup>4</sup>

Ergo inter sese paribus concurrere telis  
Romanas acies iterum videre Philippi...

(*Georgics* 1. 489-490)

Accordingly Philippi saw the Roman battle lines  
Rush together among themselves with matching weapons...

On the one hand, *proluit* and *concurrere* are clear verbal echoes of *diluit* (326) and *concurrere* (318) from the anticipatory storm ekphrasis. In addition, *camposque per omnis / cum stabulis armenta* matches in sense with *sata laeta boumque labores* (325). Both passages depict the toil of human beings and their cattle as ultimately fruitless, in the former case because of the strife between man and nature, in the latter because of the strife between man and man. Nevertheless, Virgil's use of the word *concurrere* in both of these passages points to another dimension of the storm ekphrasis that merits further discussion.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the connection between these two passages is the interchange between metaphor and reality. What was metaphorical in the storm ekphrasis, the martial imagery of war, has become the reality of the second passage and, while the first passage depicts the storm in the world of the farmer, the latter description of civil war recycles the stormy imagery for the effect not of metaphor but of referential development. Once we have read the two passages in sequence, Virgil now intends for us to interpret them in light of one another. Just as we looked at the storm ekphrasis in light

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<sup>4</sup> All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

of what preceded it, we will now interpret it again in light of what follows. The question now becomes what meaning the later context of civil war can bring to light for this storm ekphrasis. If the line *omnia ventorum concurrere proelia vidi* has relevance to civil war, then the implication is that the winds are at war with one another. Because ekphrastic passages are so concerned with the interplay between the senses and reality, it is pertinent to determine through whose eyes we are viewing this battle of the winds.

The opening sentence of our ekphrasis makes it clear that we are viewing this storm through the eyes of Virgil himself with the deliberate inclusion of the personal pronoun *ego*. Indeed, it is not uncommon for Virgil to speak directly from his own point of view, but it is unusual for him to add emphasis to this perspective with this additional pronoun. Virgil actually only uses the pronoun *ego* five times in reference to himself throughout the whole of the *Georgics*, and then almost exclusively in the context of poetic programmatic statements.<sup>5</sup> In the third *Georgic*, for example, Virgil speaks about his own future poetic accomplishments metaphorically as a future triumphant demonstration of contests and the dedication of an ekphrastic temple to the victor Caesar. However, Virgil manipulates the phrasing and imagery of this passage to effectively put himself on par with Octavian as a victor in the poetic realm. He will be the first Roman poet (*primus ego*, 10) to bring the Muses from the Aonian mountain back to Italy and the first (*primus*, 12) to convey the palms of Idumaea back to his homeland in Mantua. There he will establish a temple on the field and “Caesar will be in the center as far as I am concerned and he will hold the temple” (*in medio mihi Caesar erit templumque tenebit*, 16). Here we see Virgil beginning to conflate himself with Octavian by placing himself

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<sup>5</sup> The other passages are *Georgics* 2.42, 2.101, 3.10, and 3.17.

(*mihi*) immediately next to Caesar, who is emphasized (*in medio*), in the line of verse. Moreover, in the next line Virgil predominates as the victor of poetry (*victor ego*, 17) though he is still positioned next to Caesar, who is placed at the line's beginning (*illi*). The compounded effect of this imagery and the word games Virgil pairs with it is to draw an analogy between Caesar's military success and Virgil's poetic victories.

Yet what exactly is Virgil triumphing over? This question can be answered by looking back further in this passage to the point where Virgil addresses his place in the poetic tradition and his future goals. Beginning with a circuitous reference to Apollo, several references to the tales of Hercules, and others to Delos, Pelops, and Hippodamia, Virgil's proem to the third *Georgic* creates a vast network of associations that points toward Alexandrian poetry and especially that of Callimachus.<sup>6</sup> Virgil, however, invokes these poetic standards (*omnia iam vulgata*, 4) only to reject them for a higher calling (*temptanda via est*, 8), specifically that of a new tradition of epic poetry for Italy. Therefore, when Virgil speaks of transferring the Muses from Greece to Italy and establishing a temple as a memorial to this achievement, he is subtly putting his own poetic achievements on par with the military exploits of Octavian while praising him at the same time. Richard Thomas sensibly argues that the temple here is a metaphorical reference to Virgil's future epic poem the *Aeneid*, which would locate the events of the proem to an as yet unrealized future place in time.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this does not mean that Virgil refuses to incorporate themes, motifs, or references to higher poetry in the *Georgics*. We have already noted, for example, the military imagery prevalent in the

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<sup>6</sup> See next chapter for scholarship references on these points.

<sup>7</sup> See Thomas (1988b) ad loc. 3. 1-48.

storm ekphrasis as well as references to war and battle at the end of the first *Georgic*. It is this fine line between genres that Virgil straddles and exploits to imbue his poetry with an added richness and depth.

Virgil embraces the themes of epic and asserts his own glory and identity by twice inserting the emphatic *ego* (10, 17). Elsewhere, on the other hand, in the second *Georgic* when addressing Maecenas, Virgil says, “I do not wish to embrace all things in my verses, / not if I should have a hundred tongues and a hundred mouths” (*non ego cuncta meis amplecti versibus opto, / non mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum*, 42-44). This sentiment is a complete reversal of the acceptance of martial epic in the proem of the third *Georgic* and Virgil instead adopts a clearly Alexandrian stance on poetics. Nevertheless, what both of these passages have in common is a significant usage of *ego* to indicate some sort of programmatic statement regarding genre.

Virgil employs the pronoun *ego* in the storm ekphrasis from the first *Georgic* for the similar but slightly more ambiguous purpose of displaying the flexibility of an Alexandrian poetry that can combine both “higher” and “lower” forms of poetry. Combining the literal event of a severe and destructive storm with the metaphorical imagery of a military encounter, Virgil fuses the generic habits of Alexandrian epic poetry, subtle and brief handling of scenes from everyday life, with the words and imagery of a conflict from high military epic, typified in works such as the *Iliad*. Immediately before the introduction of the storm, Virgil asks rhetorically:

Quid tempestates autumni et sidera dicam,  
Atque, ubi iam breviorque dies et mollior aestas,  
Quae vigilanda viris, vel cum ruit imbriferum ver...?  
(*Georgics* 1. 311-313)



What should I say about the times and stars of autumn,  
And what things must be watched for by men when the day becomes  
Shorter and the summer softer, or when rain-bringing spring falls...?

This short selection, ostensibly a transition into a discussion of the season of autumn, contains on another level two important “code” words that signal the typical concerns of Alexandrian poetry. Together the words *brevior* and *mollior* hint at the Greek term λεπτός, popularized especially by the poetry of Callimachus and Aratus. Signifying poetry that is subtly crafted in which every word has distinct meaning and purpose, poetry of this sort differed in size and scope from the immense epics of Archaic Greece. *Brevior* points to the shorter length and *mollior* to the subtlety and delicate nature of such poetry. Virgil may even be specifically using the comparative degree to imply a juxtaposition between this and longer epic poems. The challenge that Virgil seeks to overcome here is to incorporate elements of both kinds of poetry into one coherent section of verse.

Virgil combines elements of both Alexandrian poetry and martial epic admirably in this storm ekphrasis on both the macro and micro level. As we have seen, military imagery permeates the entire episode set in the world of the *Georgics*. However, Virgil encapsulates the entire metapoetic purpose of this passage in the confines of one three line section.

Saepe ego, cum flaviis messorum induceret arvis  
Agricola et fragili iam stringeret hordea culmo,  
Omnia ventorum concurrere proelia vidi...  
(*Georgics* 1.316-318)

Bookending these lines with the accentuating personal pronoun on one side and its accompanying verb on the other, Virgil encapsulates the agricultural (Alexandrian) theme and the military (martial epic) imagery literally within the grasp of his poetic vision as *vidi* makes clear and *ego* emphasizes. Therefore, Virgil focalizes this storm ekphrasis through his own eyes in order to bring us as readers to a more intimate understanding of his poetic goals. As a support for this device, the personal pronoun *ego* aligns this section of the text with other similar passages in the *Georgics* which treat the concerns of genre. Accordingly, because of its intimate concern with making a poetic statement about the nature of poetic genres and since it is tied to other passages showing Virgil's development, it might be categorized as both a "metapoetic" and a "biographical" ekphrasis in addition to its earlier adduced status as a "tonal ekphrasis." Consequently, the present analysis demonstrates how useful categorization can be as a methodological tool but also how flexible such passages can be by encompassing so many categories at once.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Temple Ekphrasis in Virgil's *Georgics*

Deservedly famous among the Virgilian corpus for its ingenious allusiveness and for the dramatic evolution it presents of Virgil's poetic persona in comparison to the remainder of the *Georgics*, this ekphrasis both anticipates a future epic, the *Aeneid*, while also connecting to many of this poem's key themes and concerns. Here I shall consider this passage in light of several trends of modern scholarship before moving on to an examination of its ekphrastic qualities and, finally, to its relationship with the *Georgics* as a whole.

Generally speaking, modern scholarship pertaining to this passage has focused upon two distinct trajectories. Concern has either been directed toward historical analogues such as allusions to actual temples, criteria used for the purpose of dating the poem, and the relationship between the sculptures of Virgil's temple and the visual arts.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, there have more recently been a plethora of studies interested in the nature of Virgil's literary sources for the passage, suggesting such familiar names as Hesiod, Pindar, Callimachus, Ennius, etc.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, little effort has been made to relate this proem to the *Georgics* as a whole. It may be and likely is, in fact, a prospective glance into Virgil's future, but that does not in any way exclude its potential relevance to

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<sup>1</sup> For consideration of ties to actual historical temples and implications on dating the poem, cf. Drew 1924 and Meban 2008. On the relationship between Virgil's temple and the visual arts, cf. Dickie 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Balot 1998, Thomas 1983b as examples.

the *Georgics* also. Let us accept some scholarly conclusions as a starting point and move on into the unknown from there.

It is highly probable and now widely accepted that Virgil's primary model for the proem to the third *Georgic* is the Alexandrian poet Callimachus, who lived during the fourth and third centuries B.C. Richard Thomas offers several cogent proofs of this allusiveness throughout his substantial body of publications.<sup>3</sup> To note just a few of the many focal points of intertextuality, *lucosque Molorchi* (19) is the second reference to Molorchus in extant ancient literature and the first occurs in Callimachus, *pastor ab Amphyrsos* (2) refers to Apollo Nomius who is mentioned with reference to the river Amphyrsus at Callim. *H.* 2.47-9, and *Latonia Delos* (6) seems a probable reference to the wanderings of Leto and Apollo's birth at Callim. *H.* 4. Though Virgil lists his way through these stories and themes, he deems *omnia iam vulgata* (4). In an ironic reversal, instead of embracing such items typical of Alexandrian poetics, Virgil deems common the themes of a poet who once boasted of his own loathing for the common in poetry. Having now rejected the subjects of Alexandrian poetry, the more lofty landscape of epic poetry begins to appear on the scene. Virgil invokes the Hesiodic Muses and boasts that he will transfer them to his homeland in Italy (10-11). This feat will win him glory, and more importantly, the immortality of being uttered in song perpetually (9). Consequently, when Virgil goes on to vividly construct a temple in honor of his own achievement, a temple which will stand both as an honor for himself and for his patron and fellow victor Octavian, it should come as no surprise that Thomas' declaration that all this fanfare is an

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<sup>3</sup> See especially Thomas 1983b and Thomas 1988b ad. Loc. to the following passages.

elaborate foreshadowing of Virgil's future *Aeneid* has been accepted in critical discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Although *prima facie* a description of an imaginary work of art, Virgil's temple ekphrasis is difficult to categorize. Unlike other ekphrastic objects from classical literature such as the shield of Achilles or Theocritus' rustic drinking bowl, both of which occur in the context of a larger narrative frame, Virgil's temple appears seemingly out of nowhere at the outset in the proem of the third *Georgic*. Although the *Georgics* is generally considered a work of didactic and not narrative literature, it does contain small episodic sections of narrative that complement and give a respite from the plodding and more dry tone of Virgil's didacticism. Moreover, Virgil's ekphrasis of his own temple is placed at an apt point in the poem when looked at in terms of the end of the second *Georgic*.

From its overall placement within the poem as a whole, Virgil intends for the beginning of the third *Georgic*, in concert with the end of the second *Georgic*, to be considered as part of a vision of the Saturnian golden age, and, in reality, a vision of its reestablishment under the reign of Octavian.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the second *Georgic* (458-542), Virgil vividly, and perhaps ekphrastically, contrasts two different ways of life, that bustling livelihood of the urban city compared with the restful quiet of the rustic farmer. A few passages suffice for a sketch of these pictures.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas 1983a: 180. Also see Galinsky 2009: 79-80 who offers some interesting observations on the reception of this passage by Virgil himself in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*.

<sup>5</sup> Putnam 1979: 168-9 offers a negative rather than positive view of the clear connection between these passages.

- A. O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint,  
Agricolae! Quibus ipsa, procul discordibus armis,  
Fundit humo facilem victum iustissima tellus.  
(*Georgics* 2.458-460)

O farmers so fortunate, if they could know their  
Blessings! For whom the very earth most just, far off from  
Discordant arms, scatters an easy livelihood from the ground.

- B. Hic petit excidiis urbem miserosque penates,  
Ut gemma bibat et Sarrano dormiat ostro;  
(*Georgics* 2.505-506)

This one assaults the city and its wretched Penates,  
That he might drink from a gemmed goblet and sleep upon Tyrian purple;

- C. ...gaudent perfusi sanguine fratrum,  
Exsilioque domos et dulcia limina mutant  
Atque alio patriam quaerunt sub sole iacentem.  
(*Georgics* 2.510-512)

They rejoice having been steeped in the blood of their brothers,  
And they exchange their homes and sweet thresholds for exile  
And seek a fatherland lying beneath the sun of a foreign land.

- D. Hanc olim veteres vitam coluere Sabini,  
Hanc Remus et frater, sic fortis Etruria crevit  
Scilicet et rerum facta est pulcherimma Roma,  
Septemque una sibi muro circumdedit arces.  
...  
Aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat;  
(*Georgics* 2.532-535, 538)

This kind of life the ancient Sabines cultivated,  
This Remus and his brother, thus surely did Etruria increase  
And Rome became the most beautiful of things,  
And she alone encircled the seven hills with a wall for herself.

...  
This kind of life was golden Saturn leading in the lands;

From these passages we can discern many differences between the lives of the country  
and the city-dweller. The first and easiest distinction to make is the presence of strife and  
war for the inhabitant of the city as opposed to its absence in the rustic setting, although

even this point will have its complications. Beginning the generalization of the farmer's life, quote A declares an easy life for him guaranteed by its distance from strife and, in turn, from the justice of the land in giving its gifts. A peculiar oddity of this passage is its seeming contradiction to other passages that stress the *labor* and difficulty of the farmer's life and, with strikingly bellicose imagery, the weapons he must use to tame the land.<sup>6</sup> This inconsistency ought to keep the reader alert and will function as a signpost for meaning.

Quotes B and C, on the other hand, pertain to the city-dweller and are descriptive of the vice and criminal activity that such life would seem to encourage. In quote B the crime is destruction in the pursuit of avarice, while quote C develops this theme to its eventual consummation in civil war. Unsurprisingly, the exile who seeks a new home in another land may be a pointed reference to the defection of Mark Antony from Rome to Egypt. Returning to the life of the farmer at the end of the passage and the second *Georgic*, Virgil complicates matters in quote D by introducing civil strife, previously confined strictly to the city and its inhabitants, into the life of the farmer through references to the death of Remus at the hands of his brother, who in turn began a war with the peaceful and rustic Sabines. Here also, as we observed already in quote A, Virgil is inconsistent and it would seem that there is some indistinct connection to be made between the blessed life of the farmer and the development of civilization that can result in vice, strife, and civil war. This passage also suggests that Rome became the most beautiful thing among mortal affairs through a combination of its rustic roots and the conflict that arose through its evolution from the countryside to thriving metropolis and

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Thomas 1988a ad loc.

urban civilization. Nevertheless, the tonal quality of this passage changes yet again as Virgil invokes the golden age of Saturn in the same breath. Virgil would seem to associate the farmer's life and its connections to the Saturnian age with the strife of civilization begotten out of rusticity. Rusticity and civilization are interrelated but in tension with one another.

The answer and reconciliation to be found for this discontinuity between rusticity and civilization is fittingly addressed and resolved in the proem to the third *Georgic*. Virgil connects these passages through a continuity in imagery as well as a similarity in diction and word choice. Ending the second *Georgic* with a self-referential metaphor, Virgil says, "But we have come to the end of a vast plain in our courses, / and now is the time to release my horse from its steaming neck" (*Sed nos immensum spatiis confecimus aequor / et iam tempus equum fumantia solvere colla*, *Georgics* 2.541-542). This chariot trope, moreover, with which Virgil ends the second *Georgic*, occurs also at the end of the first *Georgic* in which the driver of the chariot is Rome who has lost control of her car (1.512-514). Now at the conclusion of the second *Georgic*, Virgil himself is the driver and is very much in control. As the third *Georgic* begins, the chariot trope is still present and Virgil remains the driver, now imagining a hypothetical future in which he takes his place as a victor driving one-hundred four-horsed chariots on the banks of the Mincius in Mantua (18). Consequently, Virgil utilizes the continuity of the chariot trope to create a relationship between the end of the second and the beginning of the third *Georgic*.

Virgil more powerfully relates these two passages by introducing conflicts at the end of the second *Georgic* that are then resolved in the proem to the third *Georgic*. Thoroughly dominating this vivid and imaginatively rich ending is the motif of civil



strife, a reflection which would have had potent historical implications for Virgil's contemporary readers. The structure of the passage lends itself to what might be viewed as a particular rendition and interpretation of Roman history from early times down into the present of the poem's composition, and eventually stretching into the future as the third *Georgic* begins. Quote D from above offers a meaningful glimpse of Rome's founders and the beginning of the city as a rustic settlement that over time became the most beautiful thing among the affairs of mortals. Similarly, quote A celebrates the rustic life in the abstract, tied to the early foundations of Rome by the imagery of a Saturnian abundance consistent with the specific reference to Saturn at the close of quote D.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, quotes B and C depict the evolution in civilization of general vice and wickedness into their final manifestation as civil war. As an ominous gesture, Virgil's inclusion of fratricide and the foundation of civilization in quote D, which ostensibly brings praise to the farmer's life, implies that the rustic existence, despite all of its blessings, cannot be exempt from the faults and dangers of civilization.

The proem of the third *Georgic* appears, to some extent, to offer a resolution for these conflicts and tensions through the mutual victories of both Virgil and Octavian. What was once a landscape and atmosphere of war and conflict has now given way to the peaceful sway of Octavian's triumph and newly-solidified rule. Based on textual evidence corroborated by historical sources, it is likely that this proem was one of the final passages of the *Georgics* which Virgil composed, hinting as it likely does at Octavian's triple triumph in 29 B.C. and his consolidation of the east after the defeat of

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<sup>7</sup> Smith 2007 discusses these positive aspects of the building of civilization in this passage and relationship it holds to the poem as a whole through a positive association with Bacchus.

Forming a kind of ring composition between the opening and close of the latter half of the *Georgics*, Virgil reassumes a tone of encomium and again relates himself to Octavian as he did previously. Whereas in the proem to the third *Georgic* Virgil cleverly puts himself on equal terms with Octavian,<sup>9</sup> the two are now separate in terms of distance and setting but still connected in several ways.

I was singing these things concerning the cultivation of  
Fields and herds and concerning trees, while great Caesar thunders  
At the deep Euphrates in war and as a victor gives laws among

<sup>9</sup> See my earlier chapter on the storm ekphrasis in Book 1 (316-34) for more on this.

Willing peoples and strives after the way to Olympus.  
At that time sweet Naples was nursing me  
Virgil as I flourished in the pursuit of inglorious leisure...

As in the proem to the third *Georgic*, Virgil is paired with Octavian and the reader is surely supposed to make meaning from this connection. The fact that Octavian and Virgil are also associated in this passage, which explicitly references the resolution of Rome's civil wars, further substantiates the idea that the proem of the third *Georgic* is also meant to illustrate the condition of Roman civilization post-Actium. Indeed, these two figures are conspicuously related there as well. By employing the word *fulminat* in particular here, Virgil exalts Octavian to the same level as, and perhaps even implies his replacement of, Jupiter, to whom this word nearly always applies.<sup>10</sup> This is especially important for the *Georgics* as a whole, inasmuch as it is the reign and actions of Jupiter that mark the end of the Saturnian age and the inception of the dominance of *labor* in the affairs of mankind. Consequently, if Octavian is replacing Jupiter as *auctor*, the implication is likely to be made that human civilization is passing into a new age.

The order and content of these passages might suggest that the new age of civilization under Octavian should have some relationship with the golden age of Saturn. While Virgil offers a balanced appraisal of the advantages and disadvantages of the age of *labor* under the rule of Jupiter, one cannot escape the feeling that the Saturnian age is to be preferred, hence Virgil's praises of the rustic life under the auspices of the bountiful and *iustissima tellus* (2.460). Nevertheless, by including references to war and fraternal strife in his depiction of the life of the golden age as has already been demonstrated concerning quote D above, Virgil implies that even in this bounteous condition there

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas 1988b ad loc.

were incompatibilities between rusticity and civilization. As it is portrayed in the *Georgics*, the new age under the rule of Octavian will triumph even over these longstanding discontinuities, though there is no guarantee of a future without any troubles.<sup>11</sup> The most apparent evidence of this in the proem to the third *Georgic* is the demonstratively noticeable absence of war and presence of peace. More subtly, however, Virgil cleverly plays with the notion of space and place in this imaginative scene.

One of the features that makes this descriptive passage so strange and memorable is the oddity of its spatial imagery. Having transported us to the rustic scene of Mantua and the banks of the Mincius therein, at Virgil's command we are immediately faced with the prospect of a temple elaborately ornamented by a variety of different images. Although it would be foolish to suggest that there could not be temple like this in a setting so far removed from the glories of Rome, such a monument would surely be more likely seen in the urban setting and in any case represents the affairs and triumphs of an urban state.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, what this image paradoxically amounts to is a civic monument in a rural space. The reason for the oddity of this description is to demonstrate how the new regime under Octavian has transcended the normal discontinuities between the urban state and the rustic world as seen at the end of the second *Georgic* and to conflate the two into a peaceful and cohesive unity. This relationship is noticeable even in the passage quoted above at the end of the *Georgics*. Although Octavian, representing the urban state, and Virgil, who writes of and represents rustic life, are separated from one another in terms of their location, Virgil implies that they have an interdependent

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<sup>11</sup> One cannot underestimate, for example, the devastating narrative of plague and disease at the end of this book (See Appendix).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Meban 2008.

relationship to one another. On the one hand, the inglorious leisure in which Virgil is safe to compose his poems is guaranteed by the military victories of Octavian. Similarly, Octavian gains glory and poetic immortality hereafter through Virgil's poetry in praise of him. Accordingly, the setting and context for the descriptive elements of the proem of the third *Georgic* is the post-Actium world under the reign of Octavian, now interpreted as the reestablishment, or rather, the transcendence of both the ages of Jupiter and Saturn.

At the beginning of this analysis we took as a starting point the assumption that Virgil's imaginative temple, taken by itself with the details presented on it, represents his future martial epic, the *Aeneid*. Indeed, such a hypothesis is warranted by the presence of *in medio mihi Caesar* (16), who is prominent in the *Aeneid* and in the center of the shield of Aeneas which depicts the victory at Actium, as well as figures such as *Assaraci proles demissaeque ab Iove gentis / nomina, Trosque parens et Troiaequae primus auctor* (35-36). Also important for establishing this point is Virgil's explicit rejection of Callimachean subject matter in the opening lines of this proem and his newly-proclaimed acceptance of higher generic themes and motifs. Therefore, there are significant tokens for multiple categories of ekphrasis here present. On the one hand, the sure-handed way in which Virgil explicitly transitions his own poetry, or foreshadows that transition, from a Callimachean genre to that of high military epic marks this ekphrasis, or part of it at the very least, as what I have termed a biographical ekphrasis. Nevertheless, the implicit reflection upon the nature of different genres is a sure marker for a metapoetic ekphrasis. For example, Virgil makes a clear distinction here between the subject matter of these two different kinds of epic. Callimachean epic often finds its basis in the realm of etiology and is thus highly concerned with the origins behind mythology and religious

practice. Virgil's new version of martial epic will take some elements of Callimacheanism and fuse them with Homer, the foremost archetype of the epic tradition. The fact that Virgil regards Callimachean epic as a now well-trodden path is also generic commentary consistent with a metapoetic ekphrasis. Yet this ekphrasis can also be linked to perhaps the most important category for the study of the *Georgics*.

The category of tonal ekphrasis may be the most important for the *Georgics* since much of the poem's meaning is to be derived from making sense of the contrasting tones of Virgil's optimistic and pessimistic voices. Clearly this ekphrasis in the proem to the third *Georgic* has an overtly positive tone to it due to its encomiastic material. It is not, however, beyond Virgil's poetic abilities to create a multi-toned passage or ekphrasis. By examining this ekphrasis in terms of its tonal qualities and how those qualities relate to other passages within the poem, I argue for a larger point beyond simple categorization that this passage is as much, and quite possibly more, related to the *Georgics* as it is to the *Aeneid*.

In order to come to an adequate sense of a poetic passage's tone, one must subject it to comparison with other vignettes to which it may correspond or contrast. I have already noted parallels above between the poetic context of the proem to the third *Georgic* and that of quote E at the conclusion of the fourth *Georgic*. These passages are alike both in their positive tone and in the way they relate Virgil and Octavian to one another, forming a kind of coherent ring composition in the latter half of the *Georgics*. Nevertheless, they also draw comparisons from their common emphasis on the themes of rebirth and immortality. This theme is quite obvious at the end of the poem as Aristaeus is able to regain his bees through the *bougonia* ritual after they had perished earlier from

disease brought on by divine retribution. Nor is it difficult to discern this same theme at the third *Georgic*'s beginning, seeing that Rome as a civilization has been resurrected from a kind of death arising out of the civil wars into a new and better state of life under Octavian as ruler. Through this ring composition, the reintegration of rusticity with civilization is apparent since both the city and the bees of an individual shepherd experience a restoration. Yet the themes of life and especially immortality are more prevalent in the proem to the third *Georgic* than would initially seem.

If the opening of the third *Georgic* were to be interpreted as an optimistic sign of hope, restoration, and the possibility of immortality, then the implications for the meaning of the *Georgics* as a whole would be dramatically affected. In the last half-century scholarly work done on this poem has preferred a darker reading. This interpretation is admittedly somewhat more optimistic. For if this passage were interpreted as holding a positive view of life and the possibility of restoration, Virgil then would begin with life in the third *Georgic* until the plague of Noricum with which the book closes, by far the most pessimistic and devastating passage of the *Georgics*. But if Virgil had wanted to end his poem with an unambiguous note of melancholy and pessimism, he should have ended it here.<sup>13</sup> Instead, he continues with the addition of another book of poetry and, in a sense, sets out from scratch with a new subject material. Having sung already over crops, trees, and farm animals, all of which were killed or affected adversely by the plague, Virgil begins anew with bees and their *levium spectacula rerum* (4.3). However, even after Virgil proscribes the methods and means of bee-keeping, the entire hive suddenly dies from disease. Thus, having recapitulated in the

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<sup>13</sup> Smith 2010: 100.

fourth *Georgic* the overall structure of the first three books (didactic instruction generally followed by some kind of destruction), here at the midpoint of the final book Virgil has placed the reader again into a tonal atmosphere of death, similar to the end of the third *Georgic*. Yet in this case there is hope because of the *bougonia* ritual and Virgil shows us, by means of the intertwining tales of Aristaeus along with Orpheus and Eurydice, that although life and death are bound up together, hope for life and restoration should not be swallowed up in fear or despair at death. Ultimately, Virgil balances the poem between life and death, but, like any well-crafted Latin sentence, the emphasis of the first (proem to the third *Georgic*) and last (restoration through the *bougonia* ritual) words must be considered.

The thematic center of the proem to the third *Georgic* is life and immortality. It is no coincidence that the ekphrasis here begins with a subtle reference to Ennius' famous epitaph, "the way must be tried by which I too could / rise from the ground and as victor fly through the lips of men (*temptanda via est, qua me quoque possim / tollere humo victorque virum volitare per ora*, *Georgics* 3.8-9). There is no doubt that the image of rising from the ground in which one is buried and being made one with poetry represents the ideal of poetic immortality and the ultimate victory of the poet. Moreover, the verbal pictures of the triumphal procession and the temple built from marble on the banks of the river Mincius are associated with Roman practices intended to bestow a kind of immortality, whether it be for the triumphing leader or the god being enshrined. The victory of Virgil's poetry might be viewed as being connected with how it will confer poetic immortality for himself and contribute to the historical divinization of Octavian,



soon to be appropriately titled Augustus.<sup>14</sup> Nor can the fact be ignored that this scene and the images of sacrifice (*iam nunc sollemnis ducere pompas / ad delubra iuvat caesosque videre iuencos*, *Georgics* 3.22-23), offer a striking parallel to the sacrificial context of Aristaeus as he is about to undertake the *bougonia* ritual (*ad delubra venit...ducit et intacta totidem cervice iuencas*, *Georgics* 4.549, 551). In both of these passages, linked together through ring composition and verbal similarity, the sacrificial death of the bulls is ultimately tied to or will result in life, poetic immortality for Virgil and the resurrection of bees for Aristaeus.

At the outset of this analysis we acknowledged the argument in favor of reading this passage as a foreshadowing of Virgil's *Aeneid* and we warned that it would not be beyond Virgil to create a metaphor with two or more referents. There are indeed signs here that point toward the *Aeneid*, but noteworthy as well is the intimate connection that this passage has with the whole of the *Georgics* and especially the final two books. Virgil constructs this relationship primarily through structural similarity and repetition as well as the themes of life and death. As a tonal ekphrasis with an edge of hope and optimism it is not meant to be read alone and is complementary to the depictions of death and suffering in the plague of Noricum and the demise of Aristaeus' bees. Just as the structure for the *bougonia* ritual, complete with four widows to the four winds, refers in some fashion to the whole of the *Georgics* and its four books, so also does Virgil's ekphrasis of a temple in the countryside perform much the same function.

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<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, *modo vita supersit* (10) is a reminder of death.

## CONCLUSION

### Advantages and Disadvantages of Categorization

The primary goals of this analysis were to categorize and analyze Virgil's use of ekphrasis in his poem the *Georgics* with a view to evaluating the usage of categorization as a methodology for interpreting ekphrasis and exposing such descriptions in this poem to a greater level of scrutiny than they have hitherto received. In order to achieve these ends, existing categories from the ancient rhetorical tradition as well modern scholarship were catalogued and added to my own categories chosen through study of the primary text. Several important conclusions are apparent from this investigation.

As the two in-depth analyses in the main body of this thesis and the passages listed and discussed in the Appendix demonstrate, categorization of ekphrasis in the *Georgics* is an arduous process and one that results in a striking degree of fluidity between the distinctions of each kind of ekphrasis. On very few occasions can any particular descriptive text be assigned to a single category. Nevertheless, while the fluidity of these boundaries have not enabled us to establish the preferred degree of systemization, they do offer insight into the varied poetic effects of ekphrasis and their possible use for this poem.

Descriptive passages may not uncover the key to an entire poem but they can offer clues as to its most important themes and purposes. While I have endeavored to distinguish Virgil's mental pictures by various categories, even these different types, as the preceding and following (see appendix) analyses will show, can be grouped together to some extent to outline Virgil's most pressing concerns for the *Georgics*. Both the

storm and the temple ekphraseis highlight the significance of poetics and the poetic tradition in this work based on their inclusion in the categories of “biographical” and “metapoetic” ekphrasis. These are significant issues in the poem and Virgil is at great pains to mark his own place in the poetic tradition and his view of poetic genre.

On the other hand, meaning in the *Georgics* also hinges upon the poet’s attitude toward the universe, whether positive or negative. Accordingly, the storm (negative) and the temple (positive) resound from one side or other of the tonal scale, achieving a kind of harmonious ambiguity. Even after formulating a typology for Virgil’s ekphraseis, we are no closer to knowing whether he was a positive or negative thinker as regards the nature of existence. There seem to be roughly as many positive as there are negative descriptions and many of these selections strike both major (positive) and minor (negative) chords. Perhaps Virgil does not lean toward one side or the other but prefers to remain himself poised in balance between these two extremes. Perhaps the world is after all a harmonious symphony of joyous and somber melodies. In any case the “tonal” and “philosophical” ekphraseis converge in their concern with the trends of reality and existence and constitute a focal point of concern for Virgil.

Categorization is a fine tool but it cuts in broad strokes. It is useful to a certain point but then some poems resist being pinned down, the *Georgics* is one of these poems. Categorization must be used but it cannot offer a resolution to all fickle interpretive problems. This thesis, accordingly, is only the beginning of a pertinent conversation about redefining ekphrasis more broadly in light of both ancient and modern definitions as well as the methodologies appropriate to its interpretation. Much work remains to be done.

## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX:

### Classification and Analysis of Ekphraseis in the *Georgics*

#### *Tonal Ekphrasis*

##### A. (*Georgics* 1.147-159)

Prima Ceres ferro mortalis vertere terram  
Instituit, cum iam glandes atque arbuta sacrae  
Deficerent silvae et victum Dodona negaret.  
Mox et frumentis labor additus, ut mala culmos  
Esset robigo segnisque horreret in arvis  
Carduus; intereunt segetes, subit aspera silva,  
Lappaeque tribolique interque nitentia culta  
Infelix lolium et steriles dominantur avenae.  
Quod nisi et adsiduis herbam insectabere rastris  
Et sonitu terrebis aves et ruris opaci  
Falce premes umbras votisque vocaveris imbrem,  
Heu magnum alterius frustra spectabis acervum  
Concussaue famem in silvis solabere quercu.

Following immediately upon Virgil's long discussion of the age of *labor* and its beginnings, Ceres, the patron goddess of the fields and crops so central to this book, makes an appearance to comfort mankind and to help him adapt to this new and harder way of life. Conveying a tone of dismay and pessimism with such powerful words as *negaret* (149), *horreret* (151), *aspera* (152), *infelix* (154), *dominantur* (154), *frustra* (158), etc, this "tonal ekphrasis" provides a clear contrast in mood to the opening proem of the first *Georgic* which offered so much optimism for the future under Octavian. Nevertheless, Virgil ties this passage directly to the poem's opening, for the first line of this ekphrasis ends with the same words, *vertere terram*, as does the first line of the *Georgics*. Since this passage precedes the proem chronologically in terms of actual

history, the optimism of the earlier passage is heightened and this one gains at least some hope by its placement after the proem, in which Octavian plays so prominent and hopeful a role. Lastly, Virgil continuously juxtaposes the pessimistic tone of this passage to other parts of the poem in which the golden age of Saturn, which preceded the reign of Jupiter, appears.

B. *Georgics* 1.291-296

Et quidam seros hiberni ad luminis ignes  
Pervigilat ferroque faces inspicat acuto;  
Interea longum cantu solata laborem  
Arguto coniunx percurrit pectine telas,  
Aut dulcis musti Volcano decoquit umorem  
Et foliis undam trepidi despumat aeni.

Fitting the ancient category of *tropos*, describing the way something is done and in this passage the way a life is lived, this “tonal ekphrasis” depicts the private life of a farmer and his wife while they are not actively working in the fields. Although they are separated from the harder work and toil of the farm and its fields, it still dominates their existence and is always looming in the background. Consequently, Virgil inserts the words *ferro* (292) and *laborem* (293) signifying the age in which this family lives, one which has a harshness requiring consolation (*solata* 293). In addition, this ekphrasis is “metapoetic” inasmuch as the way in which the farmer’s wife sings to console herself mirrors one of Virgil’s own intentions for the *Georgics*, a song of consolation that will not sugarcoat the hard realities of human life.

C. *Georgics* 2.136-176

Sed neque Medorum siluae, ditissima terra,  
nec pulcher Ganges atque auro turbidus Hermus  
laudibus Italiae certent, non Bactra neque Indi

totaque turiferis Panchaia pinguis harenis.  
 haec loca non tauri spirantes naribus ignem  
 inuerrere satis immanis dentibus hydri,  
 nec galeis densisque uirum seges horruit hastis;  
 sed grauidae fruges et Bacchi Massicus umor  
 impleuere; tenent oleae armentaque laeta.  
 hinc bellator equus campo sese arduus infert,  
 hinc albi, Clitumne, greges et maxima taurus  
 uictima, saepe tuo perfusi flumine sacro,  
 Romanos ad templa deum duxere triumphos.  
 hic uer adsiduum atque alienis mensibus aestas:  
 bis grauidae pecudes, bis pomis utilis arbor.  
 at rabidae tigres absunt et saeua leonum  
 semina, nec miseros fallunt aconita legentis,  
 nec rapit immensos orbis per humum neque tanto  
 squameus in spiram tractu se colligit anguis.  
 adde tot egregias urbes operumque laborem,  
 tot congesta manu praeruptis oppida saxis  
 fluminaque antiquos subter labentia muros.  
 an mare quod supra memorem, quodque adluit infra?  
 anne lacus tantos? te, Lari maxime, teque,  
 fluctibus et fremitu adsurgens Benace marino?  
 an memorem portus Lucrinoque addita claustra  
 atque indignatum magnis stridoribus aequor,  
 Iulia qua ponto longe sonat unda refuso  
 Tyrrhenusque fretis immittitur aestus Auernis?  
 haec eadem argenti riuos aerisque metalla  
 ostendit uenis atque auro plurima fluxit.  
 haec genus acre uirum, Marsos pubemque Sabellam  
 adsuetumque malo Ligurem Volscosque uerutos  
 extulit, haec Decios Marios magnosque Camillos,  
 Scipiadas duos bello et te, maxime Caesar,  
 qui nunc extremis Asiae iam uictor in oris  
 imbellem auertis Romanis arcibus Indum.  
 salue, magna parens frugum, Saturnia tellus,  
 magna uirum: tibi res antiquae laudis et artem  
 ingredior sanctos ausus recludere fontis,  
 Ascraeumque cano Romana per oppida carmen.

The so-called *laudes Italiae* passage is a description of Italy and its natural and  
 manmade resources (cultural institutions, renowned people and families, etc). As such the

ancients would have assuredly categorized this passage as an ekphrasis of place.<sup>1</sup> For my own purposes I would assign it to the category of “tonal ekphrasis.” Here Italy on one level surely represents the triumph of human civilization over nature through labor (*urbes operumque laborem*, 155), and indeed to such an extent that Virgil calls Italy *Saturnia tellus* (173). Virgil has perhaps gone too far here in associated the present Italy with a bygone golden age. The rest of the poem is a testament to the absence of Saturn and his age of abundance. Commentators like Richard Thomas, who often seeks out darker meanings, view distortions such as this to be subversions of an idealistic façade.<sup>2</sup> This may certainly be part of the point. However, whether or not this description includes darker touches, the optimistic veneer predominates and creates a positive tone that is juxtaposed to other passages in which the ethic and success of *labor* are clearly under attack.

#### D. *Georgics* 2.323-345

uer adeo frondi nemorum, uer utile siluis,  
 uere tument terrae et genitalia semina poscunt.  
 tum pater omnipotens fecundis imbribus Aether  
 coniugis in gremium laetae descendit, et omnis  
 magnus alit magno commixtus corpore fetus.  
 auia tum resonant auibus uirgulta canoris,  
 et Venerem certis repetunt armenta diebus;  
 parturit almus ager Zephyrique tepentibus auris  
 laxant arua sinus; superat tener omnibus umor,  
 inque novos soles audent se gramina tuto  
 credere, nec metuit surgentis pampinus Austros  
 aut actum caelo magnis Aquilonibus imbrem,  
 sed trudit gemmas et frondes explicat omnis.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a literary tradition of praise for one’s homeland and it became a literary trope. Cf. Thomas 1988a ad loc. See also Thomas 1982: 36-51 for the relationship between this passage and the *Georgics* as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> See Mynors 1990 ad loc for a positive evaluation of this description.



non alios prima crescentis origine mundi  
 inluxisse dies aliumue habuisse tenorem  
 crediderim: uer illud erat, uer magnus agebat  
 orbis et hibernis parcebant flatibus Euri,  
 cum primae lucem pecudes hausere, uirumque  
 terrea progenies duris caput extulit aruis,  
 immissaeque ferae siluis et sidera caelo.  
 nec res hunc tenerae possent perferre laborem,  
 si non tanta quies iret frigusque caloremque  
 inter, et exciperet caeli indulgentia terras.

The ancient definition of ekphrasis is especially accommodating to this passage in particular since it offers a category for ekphraseis of seasons. Both this passage and the earlier *laudes Italiae* are encomia and, consequently, have an overtly positive tone. I would categorize this passage as a “tonal ekphrasis.” While most of the negative passages in the *Georgics* treat or are related to examples of death (e.g. the plague at the end of the third *Georgic*), this description imagines a scene of life and its flourishing (*magnus alit magno commixtus corpore fetus*, 327). Another sign of optimism is the presence of Jupiter in a fostering role over nature (*pater omnipotens...Aether*, 325). Unlike other passages in which the *pater* is antagonistic toward human kind (e.g. 1.316-34), his sexual activity here in the praise of spring seems gratuitous and more resembling of the Saturnian age depicted at the end of this book (458-540). If there is any tone of dissonance or hint of darkness, it must be the emphasis upon sexuality (*Venerem*, 329) which foreshadows the later association between spring and the *furor* of sexual desire (3.272).<sup>3</sup>

#### E. *Georgics* 3.478-566

Hic quondam morbo caeli miseranda coorta est  
 Tempestas totoque autumnus incanduit aestu

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas 1988b ad loc.

Et genus omne neci pecudum dedit, omne ferarum,  
Corripuitque lacus, infecit pabula tabo.  
Nec via mortis erat simplex; sed ubi ignea venis  
Omnibus acta sitis miseros adduxerat artus,  
Rursus aundabat fluidus liquor omniaque in se  
Ossa minutatim morbo conlapsa trahebat.  
Saepe in honore deum medio stans hostia ad aram,  
Lanea dum nivea circumdatur infula vitta,  
Inter cunctantis cecidit moribunda ministros.  
Aut si quam ferro mactaverat ante sacerdos,  
Inde neque impositis ardent altaria fibris,  
Nec response potest consultus reddere vates,  
Ac vix suppositi tinguntur sanguine cultri  
Summaque ieiuna sanie infuscatur harena.  
Hinc laetis vituli vulgo moriuntur in herbis  
Et dulcis animas plena ad praesepia reddunt;  
Hinc canibus blandis rabies venit, et quatit aegros  
Tussis anhela sues ac faucibus angit obesis.  
Labitur infelix studiorum atque immemor herbae  
Victor equus fontisque avertitur et pede terram  
Crebra ferit; demissae aures, incertus ibidem  
Sudor et ille quidem morituris frigidus; aret  
Pellis et ad tactum tractanti dura resistit.  
Haec ante exitium primis dant signa diebus;  
Sin in processu coepit crudescere morbus,  
Tum vero ardentes oculi atque attractus ab alto  
Spiritus, interdum gemitu gravis, imaque longo  
Ilia singultu tendunt, it naribus ater  
Sanguis, et obsessas fauces premit aspera lingua.  
Profuit inserto latices infundere cornu  
Lenaeros; ea visa salus morientibus una:  
Mox erat hoc ipsum exitio, furiisque relecti  
Ardebant, ipsique suos iam morte sub aegra  
Di meliora piis erroremque hostibus illum!  
Discissos nudis laniabant dentibus artus.  
Ecce autem duro fumans sub vomere taurus  
Concidit et mixtum spumis vomit ore cruorem  
Extremosque ciet gemitus. It tristis arator,  
Maerentem abiungens fraterna morte iuvenum,  
Atque opera in medio defixa relinquit aratra.  
Non umbrae altorum nemorum, non mollia possunt  
Prata movere animum, non qui per saxa volutus  
Purior electro campum petit amnis; at ima  
Solvuntur latera, atque oculos stupor urget inertis  
Ad terramque fluit devexo pondere cervix.  
Quid labor aut benefacta iuvant? Quid vomere terras

Invertisse gravis? Atqui non Massica Bacchi  
 Munera, non illis epulae nocuere repostae:  
 Frondibus et victu pascuntur simplicis herbae,  
 Pocula sunt fontes liquidi atque exercita cursu  
 Flumina, nec somnos abrumpit cura salubris.  
 Tempore non alio dicunt regionibus illis  
 Quaesitas ad sacra boves Iunonis et uris  
 Imparibus ductos alta ad donaria currus.  
 Ergo aegre rastris terram rimantur, et ipsis  
 Unguibus infodiunt fruges, montisque per altos  
 Contenta cervice trahunt stridentia plaustra.  
 Non lupus insidias explorat ovilia circum  
 Nec gregibus nocturnus obambulat; acrior illum  
 Cura domat. Timidi dammae cervique fugaces  
 Nunc interque canes et circum tecta vagantur.  
 Iam maris immensi prolem et genus omne natantum  
 Litore in extremo ceu naufraga corpora fluctus  
 Proluit; insolitae fugiunt in flumina phocae.  
 Interit et curvis frustra defense latebris  
 Vipera et attoniti squamis astantibus hydri.  
 Ipsis est aer avibus non aequus, et illae  
 Praecipites alta vitam sub nube relinquunt.  
 Praeterea iam nec mutari pabula refert,  
 Quaesitaeque nocent artes; cessere magistri,  
 Phillyrides Chiron Amythaoniusque Melampus.  
 Saevit et in lucem Stygiis emissa tenebris  
 Pallida Tisiphone Morbos agit ante Metumque  
 Inque dies avidum surgens caput altius effert.  
 Balatu pecorum et crebris mugitibus amnes  
 Arentesque sonant ripae collesque supini.  
 Iamque catervatim stragem atque aggerat ipsis  
 In stabulis turpi dilapsa cadaver tabo,  
 Donec humo tegere ac foveis abscondere discunt.  
 Nam neque erat coriis usus, nec viscera quisquam  
 Aut undis abolere potest aut vincere flamma.  
 Ne tondere quidem morbo inlueque peresa  
 Vellera nec telas possunt attingere putris:  
 Verum etiam invisos si quis temptarat amictus,  
 Ardentes papulae atque immundus olentia sudor  
 Membra sequebatur, nec longo deinde moranti  
 Tempore contactos artus sacer ignis edebat.

Perhaps the most “negative” passage in the *Georgics*, this ekphrasis, which the ancient rhetoricians would have categorized as an ekphrasis of an event (a plague),

centralizes the theme of death in the middle of the latter half of the poem (Books 3 & 4), which is bookended by two passages optimistic about life and the possibility of regeneration. It can thus easily be given the label “tonal ekphrasis.” Just as the storm and civil war of the first *Georgic* destroy all that the didactic speaker tries to teach and establish for the farmer, so also does this plague undermine all the efforts of the husbandman in the third *Georgic*. Moreover, all benefits of the age of *labor* fail in the wake of disease and we are left wondering *quid labor aut benefacta iuvant* (525). Although he borrows heavily from the final book of Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* for this passage,<sup>4</sup> Virgil, unlike Lucretius, does not end his work here and continues on into the fourth *Georgic*. There is surely some significance to this fact and it might hint that Virgil did not intend for this poem to come off as entirely negative or pessimistic. Instead, he ends the poem with the contrastive tone of the regeneration of Aristaeus’ bees. Additionally, because of its immense debt to Lucretius and its central concern with death and the failure of *labor*, this passage can also be viewed properly under the heading of “Philosophical Ekphrasis” (see below).

#### F. *Georgics* 4. 251-263

Si vero, quoniam casus apibus quoque nostros  
 Vita tulit, tristi languebunt corpora morbo  
 Quod iam non dubiis poteris cognoscere signis:  
 Continuo est aegris alius color; horrida vultum  
 Deformat macies; tum corpora luce carentum  
 Exportant tectis et tristia funera ducunt;  
 Aut illae pedibus conexae ad limina pendent,  
 aut intus clausis cunctantur in aedibus omnes  
 ignavaeque fame et contracto frigore pigrae.  
 Tum sonus auditur gravior, tractimque susurrant,  
 frigidus ut quoondam silvis immurmurat Auster,

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<sup>4</sup> See especially Harrison (1979) for an extensive treatment.

ut mare sollicitum stridit refluentibus undis,  
aestuatur ut clausis rapidus fornacibus ignis.

A similar ekphrasis to the plague at the end of the third *Georgic* discussed above.

This passage would also be categorized by the ancients as an ekphrasis of an event (a plague). Because of this similarity based on purpose and subject matter, it would easily fall under the category of a “tonal ekphrasis.” It ironically follows a discussion (219-27) of the possible immortality of bees. Nevertheless, this earlier discussion is then fulfilled to a certain extent by the regeneration of the bees of Aristaeus at the end of the fourth *Georgic*. Consequently, it is easy to pair up in terms of its tone with the storm and civil war passages of book one as well as the plague of book three while being contrastive to the end of the poem which concludes optimistically.

### *Philosophical Ekphrasis*

#### A. *Georgics* 1.118-146

Nec tamen, haec cum sint hominumque boumque labores  
Versando terram experti, nihil improbus anser  
Strymoniae grues et amaris intiba fibris  
Officiunt aut umbra nocet. Pater ipse colendi  
Haud facilem esse viam voluit, primusque per artem  
Movit agros, curis acuens mortalia corda,  
Nec torpere gravi passus sua regna veterno.  
Ante Iovem nulli subigebant arva coloni:  
Ne signare quidem aut partiri limite campum  
Fas erat; in medium quaerebant, ipsaque tellus  
Omnia liberius nullo poscente ferebat.  
Ille malum virus serpentibus addidit atris,  
Praedarique lupos iussit pontumque moveri,  
Mellaque decussit foliis, ignemque removit,  
Et passim rivis currentia vina repressit,  
Ut varias usus meditando extunderet artes  
Paulatim, et sulcis frumenti quaereret herbam,  
Ut silicis venis abstrusum excuderet ignem.  
Tunc alnos primum fluvii sensere cavatas;  
Navita tum stellis numeros et nomina fecit,

Pleiades, Hyadas, claramque Lycaonis Arcton;  
Tum laqueis captare feras et fallere visco  
Inventum et magnos canibus circumdare saltus;  
Atque alius latum funda iam verberat amnem  
Alta petens, pelagoque alius trahit umida lina;  
Tum ferri rigor atque argutae lamina serrae  
(nam primi cuneis scindebant fissile lignum),  
Tum variae venere artes. Labor omnia vicit  
Improbis, et duris urgens in rebus egestas.

As the consummate “philosophical ekphrasis” of the poem, this description is fit for the ancient categorization of *tropos* since it depicts with a grand sweeping gesture the consequences of the age of *labor* and how life must be lived under this new age of Jupiter. Richard Thomas aptly points out that “when elements of the golden age return (2.136-7, 458-542; 3.537-45) they must be considered in the light of the cultural system defined here and operative throughout.”<sup>5</sup> It is assuredly central to the overall philosophy of the poem and to the status of human culture and society. Inevitably, because of its centrality, the tone of this passage carries demonstrable importance for the rest of the poem. On account of this we can surely categorize this description also as a “tonal ekphrasis.” While many imaginative passages in the *Georgics* are representative of one tone, either positive or negative, this ekphrasis includes signs of both. On the one hand, it is by definition more pessimistic about life (*labor / improbus*, 145-6) than most passages concerning the golden age of Saturn (though even these can be problematic as regards their tone). Nevertheless, this description of life under the reign of Jupiter is not without some positive observations. For example, *labor omnia vicit* (145) and *ut varias usus meditando extunderet artes / paulatim* (133-4) offer the consolation that there is the possibility that through perseverance and hard work mankind can prevail over the forces

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas 1988a ad loc. Cf. Gale 2000: 143-54, who explains how this passage ties to Lucretius and Roman ideology.

of nature acting against him. While the earth might not bountifully share all of its resources, men may still abstract them through farming, viticulture, pasturing, and beekeeping, the four main topics of Virgil's *Georgics*. Such a poem would not be necessary for life in the golden age.

B. *Georgics* 4.149-209

Nunc age, naturas apibus quas Iuppiter ipse  
Addidit expediam, pro qua mercede canoros  
Curetum sonitus crepitantiaque aera secutae  
Dictae caeli regem pavere sub antro.  
Solae communis natos, consortia tecta  
Urbis habent, magnisque agitant sub legibus aevum.  
Et patriam solae et certos novere penates,  
venturaeque hiemis memores aestate laborem  
experiuntur et in medium quaesita reponunt.  
Namque aliae victu invigilant et foedere pacto  
Exercentur agris; pars intra saepta domorum  
Narcissi lacrimam et lentum de cortice gluten  
Prima favis ponunt fundamina, deinde tenacis  
Suspendunt ceras; aliae spem gentis adultos  
Educunt fetus; aliae purissima mella  
Stipant et liquido distendunt nectare cellas;  
Sunt quibus ad portas cecidit custodia sorti,  
inque vicem speculantur aquas et nubila caeli,  
aut onera accipiunt venientum, aut agmine facto  
ignavum fucos pecus a praesepebus arcent:  
fervet opus, redolentque thymo frangrantia mella.  
Ac veluti lentis Cyclopes fulmina massis  
Cum properant, alii taurinis follibus auras  
Accipiunt redduntque, alii stridentia tingunt  
Aera lacu; gemit impositis incudibus Aetna;  
Illi inter sese magna vi bracchia tollunt  
In numerum, versantque tenaci forcipe ferrum:  
Non aliter, si parva licet componere magnis,  
Cecropias innatus apes amor urget habendi  
Munere quamque suo. Grandaevae oppida curae  
Et munire favos et daedala fingere tecta.  
At fessae multa referunt se nocte minores,  
crura thymo plenae; pascuntur et arbuta passim  
et glaucas salices casiamque crocumque rubentem  
et pinguem tiliam et ferrugineos hycinthos.

Omnibus una quies operum, labor omnibus unus:  
 Mane ruunt portis, nusquam mora; rursus easdem  
 Vesper ubi e pastu tandem decedere campis  
 Admonuit, tum tecta petunt, tum corpora curant;  
 Fit sonitus, mussantque oras et limina circum.  
 Post, ubi iam thalamis se composuere, siletur  
 In noctem, fessosque sopor suus occupat artus.  
 Nec vero a stabulis pluvia impendente recedunt  
 Longius, aut credunt caelo adventantibus Euris,  
 sed circum tutae sub moenibus urbis aquantur  
 excursuque brevis temptant, et saepe lapillos,  
 ut cumbae instabiles fluctu iactante saburram,  
 tollunt, his sese per inania nubila llibrant.  
 Saepe etiam duris errando in cotibus alas  
 Attrivere ultroque animam sub fasce dedere:  
 Tantus amor florum et generandi gloria mellis.  
 Illum adeo placuisse apibus mirabere morem,  
 quod neque concubitu indulgent, nec corpora segnes  
 in Venerem solvunt aut fetus nixibus edunt;  
 verum ipsae regem parvosque Quirtes  
 sufficiunt, aulasque et cerea regna refingunt.  
 Ergo ipsas quamvis angusti terminus aevi  
 Excipiat (neque enim plus septima ducitur aestas),  
 at genus immortale manet, multosque per annos  
 stat fortuna domus, et avi numerantur avorum.

Although the ancient definition of ekphrasis includes a category for ekphraseis of people, it should apply just as well to this particular ekphrasis since Virgil is using the bees as a metaphorical representation of human beings. Inasmuch as Jupiter is present in the first line and the activity of the bees roughly mirrors that of the human beings in the earlier description (*laborem / experiuntur*, 156-7), this imaginative scene is also reminiscent of the ekphrasis of the age of *labor* (1.118-46). In many ways this ekphrasis of the life of the bees depicts the ideal workings of a civilization and for this as well as the other reasons detailed above it should be assigned to the category of “philosophical ekphrasis.” Moreover, the idealism evident here and the personal touch to the contemporary reader insured by the term *Quirtes* (201) offer a positive tone and qualify



this description as a “tonal ekphrasis.”<sup>6</sup> Here we see a civilization that, for the most part, runs smoothly and is not liable to some of the problems apparent elsewhere, such as the rampant sexual desire evident in the third *Georgic*. Nevertheless, the bout of disease that strikes that the bees shortly hereafter (251-63) forms a juxtaposition in tone to this description. This passage may also be viewed as a “Metapoetic Ekphrasis” (see below). The whole of this imaginative portrayal of the life of the bees is an example of Virgil’s poetics in which small elements of Alexandrian epic are mixed in with the features of higher Homeric epic.

### *Metapoetic Ekphrasis*

#### A. *Georgics* 4.67-87

Sin autem ad pugnam exierint nam saepe duobus  
 Regibus incessit magno discordia motu;  
 Continuoque animos vulgi et trepidantia bello  
 Corda licet longe praesciscere; namque morantis  
 Martius ille aeris rauci canor increpat et vox  
 Auditor fractos sonitus imitate tubarum;  
 Tum trepidae inter se coeunt pinnisque coruscant  
 Spiculaque exacuunt rostris aptantque lacertos  
 Et circa regem atque ipsa ad praetoria densae  
 Miscentur magnisque vocant clamoribus hostem:  
 Ergo ubi ver nactae sudum camposque patentis,  
 Erumpunt portis: concurritur, aethere in alto  
 Fit sonitus, magnum mixtae glomerantur in orbem  
 Praecipitesque cadunt; non densior aere grando,  
 Nec de concussa tantum pluit ilice glandis.  
 Ipsi per medias acies insignibus alis  
 Ingentis animos angusto in pectore versant,  
 Usque adeo obnixa non cedere, dum gravis aut hos  
 Aut hos versa fuga victor dare terga subegit.

Hi motus animorum atque haec certamina tanta  
 Pulveris exigui iactu compressa quiescent.

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<sup>6</sup> Mynors 1990 ad loc sees *Quirites* as applying directly to Roman readers while Thomas 1988b argues that this is not necessarily the case.

This ekphrasis is the only full depiction of a battle in the entirety of the *Georgics*. Consequently, under the ancient definition of ekphrasis this episode would be assigned to the category of ekphrasis of an event, yet the further designation of this passage as “metapoetic ekphrasis” may be an equally useful distinction. Like much of the fourth *Georgic*, in which the world of bees is treated as a metaphor for the much larger world of mankind, there are elements here of both Homeric and Alexandrian epic. The typical concerns of Homeric epic, as it was perceived by an ancient audience, were kings and their battles, both of which are clearly at issue here. Thus there is a clear contrast between words like *regibus* (68), *bello* (69), *ingentis* (83), etc as opposed to words such as *angusto* (83) and *exigui* (87). Alexandrian poetry was more concerned with the smaller matters of everyday existence. Here both combine with everyday bees engaged in a battle of clearly epic proportions; the bigness of the battle is stressed more than the smallness of the bees. This fact is apt in this particular book of the *Georgics* in which imitation of Homer is a primary concern. To a lesser degree I would also view this poetic episode as a “tonal ekphrasis.” The description includes two different kings and a choice of words (*concurritur*, *acies*, etc) that echo the dark and ominous scene of civil war at the end of the first *Georgic* (1.463-514). This scene, therefore, together with the episode of the plague later are contrasting tones of pessimism in a book that begins and ends positively.

A. *Georgics* 4. 125-146

Namque sub Oebaliae memini me turribus arcis,  
Qua niger umectat flaventia culta Galaesus,  
Corycium vidisse senem, cui pauca relict  
Iugera ruris errant, nec fertilis illa iuven  
Nec pecori opportuna seges nec commoda Baccho:  
Hic rarum tamen in dumis olus albaque circum  
Lilia verbenasque premens vescumque papaver  
Regum aequabat opes animis, seraque revertens  
Nocte domum dapibus mensas onerabat inemptis.  
Primus vere rosam atque autumn  
Et cum tristis hiems etiamnum frigore saxa  
Rumperet et glacie cursus frenaret aquarum,  
ille comam mollis iam tondebat hyacinthi  
aestatem increpitans seram Zephyrosque morantis.  
Ergo apibus fetis idem atque examine multo  
Primus abundare et spumantia cogere pressis  
Mella favis; illi tiliae atque uberrima tinus,  
Quotque in flore novo pomis se fertilis arbor  
Induerat, totidem autumn  
Ille etiam seras in versum distulit ulmos  
Eduramque pirum et spinos iam pruna ferentis  
Iamque ministrantem platanum potantibus umbras.

The ancients would categorize this as an ekphrasis of a person. This description of the Cilician gardner is one of the most important passages for all of the *Georgics* because it appears to offer a kind of reconciliation to the problems associated with the age of *labor*. Its appearance at the same point of the fourth *Georgic* as the passage depicting the onset of the age of *labor* is further evidence of this relationship. But more importantly by far is the statement *nec pecori opportuna seges nec commoda Baccho* (129), which implies that this gardner figure lives a life apart from the boundaries of any of the previous three *Georgics*. Only in this way can he avoid the destruction of storms upon fields and plants as well as the devastation of disease. None of this is to say that the Cilician gardner lives a life like men during the Saturnian age, but he is able to make a

living with few problems and obtain a worthy modicum of happiness (*regum aequabat opes animis*, 132). Therefore, because this passage recapitulates the main themes and conflicts that Virgil has introduced for this poem, it can be labeled a “mise en abyme” ekphrasis. Likewise, by offering a picture of a satisfactory way of life that is meant to contrast the introduction of *labor* (earlier analyzed primarily as a “philosophical ekphrasis”), this ekphrasis can also reasonably be called a “philosophical ekphrasis.” Finally, by introducing a tone of consolation for the trials and suffering introduced in many of the other descriptive passages of the *Georgics*, this imaginative portrayal of the Cilician gardner is thirdly a “tonal ekphrasis.”

#### B. *Georgics* 4.295-314

Exiguus primum atque ipsos contractus in usus  
 Eligitur locus; hunc angustique imbrice tecti  
 Parietibusque premunt artis, et quattuor addunt  
 Quattuor a ventis obliqua luce fenestras.  
 Tum vitulus bima curvans iam cornua fronte  
 Quaeritur; huic geminae nares et spiritus oris  
 Multa reluctanti obstruitur, plagisque perempto  
 Tunsa per integram solvuntur viscera pellem.  
 Sic positum in clauso linquunt et ramea costis  
 Subiciunt fragmenta, thymum casiasque recentis.  
 Hoc geritur Zephyris primum impellentibus undas,  
 ante novis rubeant quam prata coloribus, ante  
 garrula quam tignis nidum suspendat hirundo.  
 Interea teneris tepefactus in ossibus umor  
 Aestuat, et visenda modis animalia muris,  
 trunca pedum primo, mox et stridentia pinnis,  
 miscentur, tenuemque magis magis aera carpunt,  
 donec ut aestivis effusus nubibus imber  
 erupere, aut ut nervo pulsante sagittae,  
 prima leves ineunt si quando proelia Parthi.

This ekphrasis details the construction and construction of the *bougonia* ritual while also describing it and its fulfillment. In the first line following this passage Virgil uses the word *extudit* which is most often employed in reference to the forging of metals.

In this way, I believe, the poet is signaling a connection between the preceding description and the material arts. Such a connection is typical of ekphrasis. By the ancient definition of ekphrasis this could be categorized as both an ekphrasis of *tropos*, how the *bougonia* is made and performed, and an ekphrasis of an event, the *bougonia* ritual itself. Otherwise I would describe this imaginative episode as a “mise en abyme” ekphrasis for the following reasons. On the one hand, Virgil is clearly trying to make a connection between this ritual and the *Georgics* as a whole. The four windows of the shrine each facing in the direction of one of the four winds symbolize the four books of the poem. It is not too much to imagine then that the centerpoint of the *bougonia* might be related to the central concern of the poem. In this case Aristaeus must slaughter a bull as an atoning sacrifice for the death of Eurydice for which he was in part responsible. Although Virgil is not always clear about a need for sacrifice and atonement earlier on in the *Georgics*, the presence of the religion and displays of piety has been pervasive throughout. Till this point in the poem, the only impingement upon mankind that has not been addressed in some way with some kind of consolation or solution has been death. Here we have at least the hope or possibility of regeneration and resurrection. Therefore, the main tension of the *Georgics* between life and death receives its due address and the poem reaches a fitting resolution.

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