Dido’s Murals and Virgilian Ekphrasis

Michael C. J. Putnam


Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0073-0688%281998%2998%3C243%3ADMAVE%3E2.0.CO%3B2-K

*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* is currently published by Department of the Classics, Harvard University.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR’s Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html. JSTOR’s Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/journals/dchu.html.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
DIDO’S MURALS AND VIRGILIAN EKPHRASIS

MICHAEL C. J. PUTNAM

My purpose in this essay is to examine Virgil’s description, at Aeneid 1.453–493, of the murals which decorate Dido’s inco-
hate temple to Juno. After a detailed critique of the lines themselves, I will turn to the influence the passage exerts on the epic as it evolves. In conclusion I will trace Virgil’s originality vis-à-vis Homer and the eighth book of the Odyssey which serves as the Roman poet’s primary model.

Of the six ekphrases of works of art scattered throughout the epic the description of the mural paintings that Aeneas sees in the Carthaginian temple claims the reader’s attention for a variety of reasons. Since it stands as the initial example of the trope in the epic, it sets a pattern against which later uses will be measured. In particular this is the first instance in ancient letters where the narrator has us “see” an artifact through the eyes of his protagonist who, moreover, takes part in one of the scenes put before us. The paintings are the work of artificum manus (495), the “hands,” literally and figuratively, “of craftsmen.” But


2 On this point see Barchiesi (above, n. 1) 116.

The very anonymity of the effort is striking, especially by contrast to the prominence of Daedalus and Vulcan as creators in the poem’s other two ekphrases of some length, as is the plurality of artisans mutually involved (inter se). Both notions may serve to underscore the roles of Dido, as guiding spirit behind the artistic re-creation of Troy, and of Aeneas as empathetic respondent to this endeavor.
the narrator also posits Aeneas and his responses as a form of artisan-ship, allowing him to add his interpretive prejudice to what he views and to influence the reader accordingly. Aeneas, as he is associated with the epic's initial ekphrasis, thus anticipates the roles of Daedalus and Vulcan in the epic's only other lengthy descriptions of art. His recreation is parallel to their acts of origination. With Daedalus' artisanship Aeneas shares the element of autobiography, watching himself within an episode he views. In comparison with his portrayal of Vulcan at work, Virgil dots his initial ekphrasis with instances of Aeneas' emotional response to what he sees in the place of words of manufacture in the shield ekphrasis, as if, in the case of Aeneas here, his spiritual reactions are presumed to take an active role in the reproduction of what he contemplates and of what we review through him.

But, critics now rightly ask, in what senses do readers of Virgil's poem unduly limit themselves if they relinquish their own rights of interpretation to those of a character within the text, focal though he is? Aeneas construes the murals as evidence for two facts. First, since the eight episodes all deal with events associated with the downfall of Troy, Aeneas notes how universally celebrated such incidents were and, presumably, how worthy they and their protagonists were of immortality. This is especially so, given the fact that Dido and her artisans, not unlike Helen in Iliad 3 weaving her tapestry as Homer patterns his words, were in the process of utilizing select excerpts from a grand panorama of events as subject for visual art to decorate her city's central temple. The pride implicit in Aeneas' reaction complements the second way Aeneas views the murals, namely as evidence for the enormous sorrow such happenings engendered as they occurred and now arouse again at the moment of retrospection, and therefore of Dido's compassion in the face of human suffering and, in particular, of her understanding of Trojan hurt. We imagine from this, and we project into Aeneas' thinking, the shared experiences, and parallel sympathies, that might unite the two duces of their exiled peoples.

But Aeneas' critique of what he sees, his self-presentation through the narrator as experiential witness, need not preclude different, more troubling readings of what Dido has crafted and of what Aeneas is made to contemplate. Commentators, for instance, point to the disqui-

3 On aspects of the difference between how Aeneas reads and of how we read see Leach (above, n. 1) 311, and the critiques of Fowler (above, n. 1) 23 and passim, on the problematics of focalization, and Barchiesi (above, n. 1) 115, 119, and 120 n. 21. We take
eting fact that the murals decorate an edifice exalting the goddess who, the poem's opening lines remind us, is the arch-enemy of the Trojans and whose temple is dominant over a city whose future includes an intense struggle with Troy become Rome for control of the Mediterranean basin. Moreover, we sense from the moment of Trojan landing on the Carthaginian shore, where threatening woods and black rocks help form a backdrop (scaena, 164) against which evolving action will be performed, that tragedy, stemming from a chain of events riddled with instances of deception, will be a major concomitant of that action.

Presuming, then, levels of intent in Virgil's ekphrasis more profound and troubling than what we sense Aeneas experiences, I will first look at the description in detail. As I watch the ways by which Virgil tropes visual art into verbal narrative, I will have as a goal to trace the strands of symbolism that run climactically through the ekphrasis. I will then pursue those themes that connect it with what follows in the epic. I will attend, nearer to hand, to Aeneas' subsequent narrative which directly continues the forward momentum of the ekphrasis, then to the reappearance of Dido in book 6 where Virgil uses language from the ekphrasis to reempower her after her suicide, and to the final four books where especially the behavior of Aeneas and its consequences are highlighted by a series of references back to what he "sees," and soon figuratively becomes, in book 1.

Finally I will turn back to Virgil's primary model for the sequence that takes us from the murals to Iopas' song of entertainment at Dido's banquet and thence to Aeneas' tale of doom and exile, namely the three songs of Demodocus in Odyssey 8 followed by Odysseus' four-book

---

note of Aeneas seeing, but we as readers are manipulated by words to perceive very different things, to "read" quite dissimilarly. This in no way invalidates Aeneas' response or our appreciation of the dolor which the scenes bring to him. We are meant to study Aeneas' reaction to what he sees and use it as a touchstone for any further interpretation of the representations. But the reader has the luxury of time and an enhanced knowledge of the epic's plot, a situation impossible for an actor in the text, which allows him the opportunity to probe still further levels of meaning.


5 To trace the ambiguities in this setting in the light of its Homeric background is a major purpose of Clay's important essay (above, n. 1).
chronicle of his adventures. My purpose is to search for the later poet’s originality and especially for the heightened possibilities of meaning in an ekphrasis which forces the reader to pause not only to examine closely Aeneas’ responses to what he views but also to attempt, relying on knowledge given to neither Dido nor Aeneas, to glean from the time-bound narration of timeless art matters which Aeneas himself cannot perceive. What may be an “empty picture” (*pictura inani*, 464) to the remembering hero, or even to the mindful queen behind its creation, with art standing in for life and reproduction for immediate experience, will take on further signification for the reader alert to the poem as a whole and to Virgil’s propensity for layered meanings.\(^6\) Virgilian ekphrasis both brings time to a standstill and energizes its context.

Besides the novelty of having the reader closely observe Aeneas’ responses and of making the hero for a moment a part of the action itself, the ekphrasis is unusual in that Virgil first offers us a summary of the whole and then a brief reaction by Aeneas to one aspect of what he sees before proceeding to the description as a whole. First the summary (456–458):

\[
\ldots \text{videt Iliacas ex ordine pugnas} \\
\text{bellaque iam fama totum vulgata per orbem,} \\
\text{Atridas Priamumque et saevum ambobus Achillem.}
\]

Aeneas, in the precis, sees two things shortly to be elaborated. He first takes note of the scenes of battle in a row and of the universality of such warring, the smaller spacings of Carthaginian art (*ordo*) taking their restricted place in the grander sphere (*orbis*) of what humankind as a whole knows. *Hic etiam*, here too, Aeneas shortly announces, there is reward for heroic prowess as well as acknowledgment of life’s trials. As we prepare for the intense emotionality of the episode, the particular setting stands as synecdoche for the larger reaches of human endeavor much as Virgilian poetry itself at every turn brilliantly combines excellence in the details of craftsmanship with cosmic implica-

\(^6\) On the meaning of the phrase *pictura inani*, see B. Arkins, “New Approaches to Virgil,” *Latomus* 45 (1986) 33–42, at 42. The irony of *inani* must be directed at both Dido and Aeneas. For the Trojan hero the murals could be styled empty because they elicit only an immediate emotional response and remain devoid of deeper implications. It could be taken as a warning of Virgil’s greater expectations of the reader that for Aeneas art reproduces the past without any emblematic, on-going experiential value.
tions. But it is to the world-wide repute that Aeneas immediately responds, noting the universality of Trojan suffering (labor). The second focus of Aeneas’ summary is on the figure of Achilles and on another variation of comprehensiveness, his ferocity to friend and foe alike. Catholicity of Trojan labor is complemented by catholicity of Greek saevitia. We will see both at work in detail in the ekphrasis proper. Here it is well to ask whether the adjective saevus results from the narrator’s perception of Achilles’ emotionality or from Aeneas’ or from both. We remain uncertain whether the hero observes what we certainly do, that is, not merely pictorial details but an inner characteristic given to a figure particularized climactically at the end of the summary. Does Aeneas, as he watches the ubiquity of Trojan labor further extended by the immortalizing labor (455) of Dido’s craftsmen and martial exploits centered finally on one individual warrior, do what the reader must and pry into deeper meanings of the scenes’ validity?

One brief phrase intervenes between summary and detailed exposition which also forms an important introductory note—en Priamus (461). Aeneas’ exclamation comes part way through his address to Achates and serves to divide it into two segments, the first an interrogative exclamation concerned with Trojan labor, the second a statement of assurance that fama brings reputation and that reputation fosters empathy of sufficient strength to formalize such esteem in art, to touch the mind even with matters worthy of tears (to rephrase one of the poem’s most famous lines). For a brief moment Priam is the special focus of Aeneas’ own empathy which will be confirmed by his prominence in the larger ekphrastic design.

In discussing the ekphrasis proper I will have as a general goal to trace how we are made to admire the figuration of art through the figurations of language. We are at the mercy of a master deployer of words who manipulates what we see by what we read, fomenting a conspiracy between the reading and the seeing eye and proving, at least for the ekphrastic moment, the complementarity between the dimensionality of tangible art and the spatial quality of writing. In particular I will examine how Virgil uses various devices, such as signposts for space and time, the interspersion of Aeneas’ responses, and the tenses of verbs, to build toward a climax which, however, at the end exposes the vanity of any idealizing aspect of ekphrasis in its search to stop time. In the final scene ekphrasis prepares to burst into narrative as stilled, timeless art sheds its static nature for the reality of immediate (narrative)
experience. The fact that the episodes are out of chronological order (the second episode, for instance, is based on events described in *Iliad* 10 while the third is *pre-Iliadic*) prepares the reader for divining that Virgil’s purpose is more than the mere exposition of historical detail.

The first scene is devoted to general fighting (466–468):

namque videbat uti bellantes Pergama circum
hac fugerent Grai, premeret Troiana iuvenus;
hac Phryges, instaret curru cristatus Achilles.

The essential rhetorical figure here is chiasmus. We have, in order, Greeks, Trojans, Trojans and Greeks, with the repetition of *hac* emphasizing the duality. Our eye follows from one side of the fighting to the other (twice represented) and then returns again to the first side. It is forced to travel back and forth by verbal play in order to form in its designing what one critic, of another context, calls the “spatialization of synchronic tension.” Yet the lines also build to a climax. We have already seen Achilles characterized as *saevus* (458). Here our act of visualization also traces in the mural a growing sense of particularity as we contemplate a still more specified Achilles. Abstract leads to concrete as we observe the hero in his glory: *instaret curru cristatus Achilles*. Assonance and alliteration, figures of sound in service of a presumably visual impact, help lead our eye as it follows from chariot to the terrifying crest of the warrior’s helmet. (The participial adjective gains particular stress for being Virgil’s only use of a word which he may have invented.) Aeneas merely continues to gaze (*videbat*), and spatiality is insisted upon by the repetition of *hac*.

Centrality is the narrator’s concern in the second episode (469–473):

---

7 Barchiesi (above, n. 1) 118, observes that the miniaturizing effect of the scenes is Virgil’s way of controlling Homer and the Greek poetic past. The poet could also be said, through the dynamism of ekphrasis, to intensify the past, giving it the force of a brilliant series of nuclei that exert their power over present and future as well.

The very fact that the episodes are non-chronological and that the reader must search for “non-historical” connecting strands among the episodes abets the atemporal ambition of ekphrasis. Though we are presented with a chain of discrete events, the reader is constantly expected to think backward as well as forward in order fully to appreciate Virgil’s intellectual design. The act of reading itself encourages the rhetorical stasis to which ekphrasis aspires.

nec procul hinc Rhesi niveis tentoria velis
agnoscit lacrimans, primo quae prodata somno
Tydides multa vastabat caede cruentus,
ardentisque avertit equos in castra prius quam
pabula gustassent Troiae Xanthumque bibissent.

The five-line vignette focuses around its median line. This is itself
golden, with noun, adjective, noun, adjective, in ABBA grammatical
order, the whole pivoting around the central verb *vastabat*. The line is
also ear-catching for the slow spondees in the first four feet and, once
more, for the alliteration which links *caede* and *cruentus*, and the asso-
ance that, among other effects, draws *Tydides* and *caede* together.
Again verbal figuration forces the inner eye to follow a pattern which
words dispose, toward an axis telling of a continuity of slaughter, but
here, more than elsewhere in the ekphrasis and as a further aid to see-
ing, Virgil attends in particular to color vocabulary. There is the light-
dark contrast between the snowy sheen of the tents and the (implicit)
nocturnal background of the events as well as the red-white contrast, so
beloved of the Romans, between *niveis velis* and *caede cruentus*. We
have the hint of yellow in the name of the river Xanthus and perhaps of
yellow again or green through the mention of *pabula*.

The episode is carefully placed spatially (nec procul hinc) and its
narration draws attention to Aeneas’ empathetic reaction, both recog-
nizing and weeping. The tense change between *vastabat* and *avertit*,
emphasizes what one sees, namely the persistence of gratuitous slaugh-
ter occurring prior to what the viewer-reader must know from memory,
namely the unique event which sparked the night raid in the first place.
Both Aeneas and the reader must comprehend the larger circumstances
of the episode.\(^9\) We will return to their importance later. Here we

\(^9\) On this point see Williams (above, n. 1) 151, and Heffernan (above, n. 1) 27–28 and
199 n. 40.

The parallelism and balance between *agnoscit lacrimans* and *avertit* encourages the
reader for a moment to see Aeneas, as well as Diomedes, as the subject of the latter verb.
It is as if he had a part in turning the horses aside, i.e., in causing the demise of Troy.
Since the verb anticipates the posture of Athena, eyes turned aside (avera, 482) from
Trojan supplication, we may be briefly meant to sense Aeneas’ failure to see the causes of
tragedy or his part in the initiation of his city’s collapse. (The connection is furthered by
the link between animum . . . pascit [464], of Aeneas, and *pabula gustassent* [473], of the
horses of Rhesus, between the fostering of the mind that comes from aesthetic
attention and the literal eating that nearly occurs to figures within the object of that attention.)
should note that this is the only incident among the murals devoted directly to Diomedes (he is implicit in episode 4, to come). We should also conclude, since, as I noted before, it is out of order temporally with what follows, that a pattern based on something other than chronology is crucial for our appreciation of the ekphrasis as a whole.

In the third episode we turn away from centrality and its complementary circularity to directionality as an organizing principle (474–478):

parte alia fugiens amissis Troilus armis,
infelix puer atque impar congressus Achilli,
fertur equis curruque haeret resupinus inani,
lora tenens tamen; huic cervixque comaeque trahuntur
per terram, et versa pulvis inscribitur hasta.

The language of this vignette stresses the difference between the present, which in this case rules the episode so that we share in its immediacy, and a past which we must know about (amissis armis, congressus) in order to make the horror of the present more vivid. Complementing this distinction are the categories of active and passive, singular and plural, life and death. We begin with the juxtaposition of fugiens and amissis, continue with congressus contrasting with fertur, haeret, and tenens, and conclude with two present passives, trahuntur and inscribitur, which form part of a duet of concluding lines that sharply contrast briskness (477) with slow finality (478). Again aural and visual aspects of the description conspire to collocate the fast dragging of Troilus’ head with the more measured act of inscribing which brings the episode to an end.

There is a growing particularity as we move from horses, chariot, body drawn on its back (resupinus), and reins to neck, hair, earth, dust, and spear. From one vantage point our seeing-reading eye follows the line of motion forward with the march of hexameter lines mimicking the onrushing speed of chariot and horses. From another we look in the opposite direction as our vision works backwards in countermotion, from animals and vehicle out front, to reins and supine body (whether alive or dead is left to our imagination), to neck and hair, and, still further behind, to spear. In the final moment of particularity we turn from bluntness to pointedness. This change is supported by paronomasia on the word versa. We behold the action of writing as the culmination of a
series of verses describing both forward impetus and backward inversion, a combination emanating from the tension which Virgil again builds between the seeing and the reading eye, between the multidimensionality of notional ekphrasis and the unforgiving drive of narrative.

More than the two previous episodes, therefore, the description of Troilus illustrates the tension inherent in ekphrasis between dynamic and static, between the verbal aspects of ekphrasis which the momentum of narrative necessitates and the inherent immobility of the visible art that we are meant to imagine. It is as if Virgil, in his first recourse to ekphrasis in the epic, were experimenting with it as a point of friction between various aspects of narrativity in epic and testing the possibilities available to him.

Concomitant with this creative tension is the irony lodged in perusing verbal description about an act of writing located in painting. Useless “writing” is inscribed climactically in brilliant words about art as if to underscore the inseparable union in ekphrasis between what is seen and the medium through which sight is imagined. Ekphrasis here fosters such a collusion, of writing in war and writing of war, of dust and permanence, of the “turns” on which linear writing depends that also both mimic the reversals, and therefore portend the ultimate moment of mortality, which fate brings even to the young. ⑩

Though the episode is placed graphically (parte alia) vis-à-vis the other murals, there is no response from Aeneas to the scene. The resultant shift from first-person perspective to objective narration combines with the immediacy of description to give the episode a universal, atemporal quality. One infelix puer and his tragedy, depicted in the presentness of art, anticipate, as paradigm, the several ill-fated youths, from Marcellus to Turnus, whose misfortunes mark the epic’s course.

We move in the fourth episode from the rhetorical characteristics of the first three scenes, that is chiasmus, centrality combined with circularity and the challenge between the linear thrust of verse and an inner eye working against that thrust, to repetition as a unifying feature (479–482):

⑩ See the eloquent pages of Heffernan (above, n. 1) 27–28, on the dragging of Troilus’ spear as a metaphor for a type of writing symptomatic of the near eradication of the line separating image and word.
interea ad templum non aequae Palladis ibant
crinibus Liiades passis peplumque ferebant
suppliciter, tristes et tunsae pectora palmis;
diva solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat.

The scene consists of four lines, three of which end in a form of the imperfect tense (*ibant, ferebant, tenebat*). What abets the atemporality of ekphrasis here, and runs in counterpoint to narrative, is multivalent repetition, where rhyming verbs in the same tense suggest unchanging continuity within the same temporal framework. The resultant stichic, measured quality complements the stateliness and majesty of the event itself. In breaking this pattern line 481 receives particular emphasis. It begins with *suppliciter*, enjambed and at a sense pause, and continues in highly alliterative fashion, with repeated “p”s and “t”s which both coopt the sounds of the preceding line (*passis peplumque*) and reinforce those of *suppliciter*.11 This burst of emotionality contrasts with the subsequent, concluding line where Athena’s lack of response is paramount. Hence we trace a chiastic pattern from Pallas in the opening line to *diva* in the last, with the expanded emotionality of the Trojan women intervening. Rhyme and repeated, final imperfects overlay and confirm the effect of this balance. They take us back in the concluding line to the processional order of the initial two and offer the appearance of controlling emotionality and with it, for a moment, the course of events through the deployment of words. The circularity of chiasmus conjures up a picture’s framing wholeness while repetition aims, however futilely, at the stopping of time. On this occasion a word of temporality (*interea*) replaces one of space to designate the relationship between scenes, reminding us that, however much ekphrasis may ascribe to a posture of temporal fixity, differentiation of time would exist between the events depicted in the paintings themselves just as it takes the eye time to pass from one frame to the next.12 The narrator

11 On the effective appearance of the word *peplos*, art within art, as the ekphrasis begins its second half, see R. F. Thomas, “Virgil’s Ecphrastic Centerpieces,” *HSCP* 87 (1983) 175–184. The “infelicità” of the *peplos* as a gift is discussed by Barchiesi (above, n. 1) 123.

As in the case of Aeneas and *avertit* (see above, n. 9), Athena’s averting her eyes from a work of plastic art is preparation for the enactment of tragedy.

12 The point is made by Williams (above, n. 1) 151.
here allots no response to Aeneas, one reason perhaps being that *interea* itself pinpoints the onlooker within the ekphrasis as he moves along.

What we see in the fifth episode is Priam in the prayerful process of ransoming the body of Hector which Aeneas, and we, know to have been dragged around Troy’s walls (483–487):

\[
\text{ter circum Iliacos raptaverat Hectora muros} \\
\text{exanimumque auro corpus vendebat Achilles.} \\
\text{tum vero ingentem gemitum dat pectore ab imo,} \\
\text{ut spolia, ut currus, utque ipsum corpus amici} \\
\text{tendentemque manus Priamum conspexit inermis.}
\]

Once more, as in the second episode, there is a central line (485) whose axial position is staged for us by the repetition of the word *corpus* in the adjacent, bounding lines (*exanimum corpus*, 484; *ipsum corpus*, 486). We are made carefully to contemplate one body as it affects three men, mistreated by one, prayerfully bought back by another, witnessed through art’s retrospective present by yet a third, Aeneas the viewer within the narrative. The power of the hero’s reappearance as spectator is especially apparent here. He becomes literally central to the description, being allotted the whole of the pivotal verse and a verb of recognition in the last line, a more emphatic entrance than at 470 (*lacrimans agnoscit*), the only other instance in the ekphrasis where the responsive immediacy of Aeneas as viewer is also strongly felt.

We honor a virtuoso five-line compression of major events of books 22 and 24 of the *Iliad*. Once again verbal rhetoric serves as metaphor for spatial deployment, designing a circularity that focuses the reading eye as if it were also actively seeing. Hence the reader of the text and viewer in the narrative here tend to become one and the same. In this case the Aeneas who knows all aspects of Hector’s death, in particular the circumstances of how he had been mutilated before he was ransomed, is paralleled by a reader alert to the fact that Virgil is following a post-Homeric source for the setting of the mutilation. Scanning Virgil’s text arouses in us a kindred sense of recognition and feeling of commiseration to what seeing the mural brings to Aeneas. For the first time in the ekphrasis proper the painting remains unlocated in relation to its neighbors. This absence makes the appearance of Aeneas and his placement one of the major *foci* for the reader’s eye as it surveys the scene. The participant shares pride of place with the events themselves in our minds as we scan Virgil’s text.
I will return in a moment to one further detail, namely what is intimated by the progress of verbs from *raptaverat* to *vendebat* and *dat* in adjacent lines. As a whole this powerful reintroduction of Aeneas as viewer, after his absence in the poignant third episode, serves also to prepare for his own unexpected entry into the pictures themselves which occurs in the first of the two brisk, subsequent designs (488–489):

> se quoque principibus permixtum agnovit Achivis,  
> Eoasque acies et nigri Memnonis arma.

As we enter a post-*Iliadic* world from here until the end of the ekphrasis, we find the pictures once again placed (*quoque*) and we observe Aeneas watching (*agnovit*), but here and in what follows there is no display on Aeneas’ part of empathy toward the scenes themselves. Likewise in the change from *agnoscit lacrimans* (470) to *agnovit*, we experience a lessening of intensity as we turn from the hero’s immediate, emotional acceptance of what he sees to an act of mere cognition. The restitution of the perfect tense to the narrative is a deliberate change from the present tenses that have hitherto characterized Aeneas’ responses and from the imperfects that have generally ruled the narrative. The effect is to give distance and historical perspective to both Aeneas and the reader. The turn away from actuality causes a conflation of the two through mutual acts of recognition. Aeneas recognized himself at a remove from the events in which he once shared, now become an object of aesthetic interest, and the reader has a parallel sense of perspective in his belated act of contemplation and understanding.

Last we have the portrait of Penthesilea (490–493):

> ducit Amazonidum lunatis agmina peltis  
> Penthesilea furens mediisque in milibus ardet,  
> aurea subnectens exsertae cingula mammae  
> bellatrix, audetque viris concurrere virgo.

Of the eight temple murals whose descriptions the ekphrasis comprises, the depiction of Penthesilea, at once conclusion and climax, is the only scene that both lacks any locating word (in this it matches the Hector episode) and any reaction from Aeneas (here the Troilus vignette alone is parallel). It is likewise narrated completely in the present tense with only active verbs. There is no allusion to past events, as in the cases of
Troilus or Hector, or of action to come (the situation of Diomedes soon to turn Rhesus' horses away from the fields of Troy) which the reader as seer must recollect for full comprehension of a painting. In this respect any comparison with the presentness of the Troilus episode breaks down. Troilus suffers as much as acts. Penthesilea, by contrast, is inspiring, not enduring, events which appear to be still happening before our eyes.

Hitherto we had been urged to share Aeneas' perceptions and, on two occasions, his spiritual involvement with what he saw. We now for the first time in the ekphrasis both directly observe a character's actions and enter into her emotionality as well. We have imagined the psychic reasons at the basis of the prayers of the Trojan women to Athena or behind Priam's gesture of supplication to Achilles. In the case of Penthesilea we are made, through words, both to see exterior and intuit interior circumstances. The vividness of her visual appearance is complemented by a number of verbal novelties unprecedented in the previous episodes. The words *lunatis, peltis*, and *subnectens* are used here for the first recorded time in Latin letters. We are urged to contemplate a woman who not only leads but rages, burns, and is filled with a daring that, in the poet's sonic play, pits *virgo* against *viri*.

The immediacy that first allows us to visualize the scene without interruptions of spatial placement or of response on the part of Aeneas, as participant viewer, is complemented by an astonishing lack of the rhetorical devices that, in the first five episodes, coopted the power of verbal artistry in such a way as to have the reading eye mimic the seeing. As we share in both the superficial and profound characteristics of the episode's cynosure we are also experiencing the disintegration of a major aspect of ekphrasis, or at least of this particular description as Virgil has hitherto prejudiced us to interpret it. Such is the poet's extraordinary sleight-of-hand, in the creation and placement of his final episode, that the unspoken boundary between ekphrasis and narrative, between apparently timeless visual art under scrutiny (and projected by brilliant rhetoric that forces the reader again and again to capitulate before the demand of ekphrasis that we pause for atemporal contemplation) and the time-ridden world of epic narrative, tends to break down. The inescapably narrational aspect of ekphrasis, which by definition as a figure it must seek to minimize, takes control as the ending of the description blends into the resumption of the story-line. Ekphrasis and narrative, begin here, finally, to merge, and with good purpose. The
energy only implicit in the inert picture suddenly becomes dynamic as it works its way into the epic tale itself. Penthesilea envisioned fighting for Troy, in the painting’s graphic present, yields to Dido, alive and right before us, in all her bravery, and we, understanding spectators of the whole scenario, remain in no further need to be signaled by ekphrastic representations of time and space.\(^{13}\)

Virgil furthers the connection by linking the Penthesilea vignette to the simile that follows in four lines, after Dido has made her way to the temple. The Carthaginian queen is compared to Diana, keeping busy her choral dances (498–502):

\[
\text{qualis in Eurotae ripis aut per iuga Cynthia} \\
\text{exercet Diana choros, quam mille secutae} \\
\text{hinc atque hinc glomerantur Oreades; illa pharetram} \\
\text{fert umero gradiensque deas supereminet omnis} \\
\text{(Latonae tacitum pertemptant gaudia pectus).}
\]

The linkage from \textit{virgo} to Dido to Diana is forthright.\(^{14}\) The thousands among whom Penthesilea burns for battle become the thousand Oreades who cluster around the goddess, and the Amazon’s weaponry, and exposed breast, blend easily into the quiver which the huntress slings over her shoulder. The ekphrastic moment and subsequent simile serve parallel purposes here, and each aims to complement Dido who metaphorically possesses the martial capabilities of Penthesilea and shares in aspects of the divinity of Diana whose activities center on the dance and the chase. But the equation of Dido with two \textit{virgines}, one heroic, the other immortal, has its ominous side. As long as she remains a “virgin,” which in her case means as long as she refrains from sexual involvement, she can retain her quasi-divine stance of power. Eroticism, we soon learn, will bring her only misadventure.

The search for deeper significance in Aeneas’ relation to the ekphrasis must begin with a look at one of the more salient aspects of the description, namely the overriding presence of the figure of Achilles.

\(^{13}\) Penthesilea \textit{fures} also anticipates the varieties of \textit{furo} which will soon overtake the Carthaginian queen (cf., e.g., at 4.65, 69, 101, 283, 376, 433, 465, 474, 501, 548, 697).

\(^{14}\) For further parallels between Dido and Penthesilea see C. Segal, “Dido’s Hesitation in \textit{Aeneid} 4,” \textit{CW} 84 (1990) 1–12, esp. 3–7.

\(^{14}\) The connection is made by Lowenstam (above, n. 1) 43–44, who also remarks on the linkage with Camilla and of the latter’s death with that of Turnus.
He appears, we remember, at the climax of the initial summary (458), so we are not surprised to find him a constant in the ekphrasis proper. He is explicitly mentioned in episodes 1, 3, and 5 and his force is implicit in 7 and 8. (Only the episodes that directly or indirectly include Diomedes, numbers 2 and 4, and the single line devoted to Aeneas’ recognition of himself among the Greeks lack any reference to him.) As critics duly note, Virgil has us attend particularly to the hero’s brutality.\textsuperscript{15} The summary dwells on his saevitia, and this ferocity takes vivid form in his treatments of Troilus and Hector which have their similarities. The first, ambushed and forced into unequal combat, is towed, moribund, behind his chariot. The second, before the scene of ransom, had been dragged three times around Troy’s walls, a dramatic change from the Iliad where he is only drawn around the bier of Patroclus.

As the presence of Achilles alters from explicit to implicit, his victims change from dying or dead (Troilus, Hector) to alive (Memnon, presumably, and Penthesilea). It is crucial that at this very moment in the paintings’ “narrative,” during the brief episode 6, Aeneas is presented for the only time in the ekphrasis, which is to say that at the moment Achilles disappears Aeneas, briskly but strikingly, takes center stage. The insinuation is tellingly accomplished. The Aeneas who, in the epic’s final triad of books, is regularly compared to the Greek warrior through the poet’s allusiveness, is already at work here. In the poem’s final scene Aeneas faces a Turnus who is both Priam, as he stretches forth his hands to Achilles in prayer, and Hector, as he prepares to meet his doom. The reader at the epic’s conclusion thinks back to the prophetic power of the complementary vignette in the ekphrasis. But Aeneas-Achilles is still nearer to hand. Achilles may lurk in the reader’s mind poised to kill Memnon and Penthesilea, after the events of the ekphrasis have concluded, but it is Aeneas who, for whatever reason, causes the demise of the latter’s surrogate, Dido, not much later as the narrative proper resumes and takes its tragic form.

\textsuperscript{15} For Achilles’ domination of the ekphrasis see Clay (above, n. 1) 204–205. W. S. Anderson, “Vergil’s Second Iliad,” TAPA 88 (1957) 17–30, in particular 24–30, was the first at any length to draw out the analogy between Aeneas and Achilles. See most recently A. J. Boyle in Roman Epic, A. J. Boyle ed. (London 1993) 96–101.

To help adumbrate an equation of Aeneas with Achilles in the reader's mind is a major reason for the extraordinary sequence of verbs in lines 483–485. Achilles is the subject of the first two which take us from pluperfect, looking to the long-past mutilation of Hector, to imperfect, describing the act of ransoming still in progress during a past the spectator-reader must imagine. As we turn to the narration's immediate present, with the verb dat, Aeneas, responsive beholder, is of course the subject, but the logic of the list of verbs, one per line in a temporal sequence from distant past to present, and the fact that no subject is directly named both urge the reader at first to infer that Achilles, who in Iliad 24 grieves along with Priam, continues as subject of the final verb in the sequence. Such a hint serves to support what I have already suggested. Aeneas begins to merge with Achilles at a moment in the ekphrasis when the Greek hero becomes a figure in the background of the action and when Aeneas turns from being the immediate viewer of the pictures to sharing in their “action.” As this action becomes dramatized fully in present time and as the poet prepares to project us from ekphrasis back to the narrative of Dido and Aeneas, Memnon and Penthesilea are still alive, and so is their killer.

As Penthesilea becomes Dido, past yields to present and ekphrasis is replaced by narration as the figured rhetoric of a presumably atemporal description of art gives way to a renewal of epic time. But the ekphrasis also continues to exert influence on both nearer and farther reaches of the epic. As we trace this influence, we will be dealing, not unexpectedly for a poet of Virgil's complexity, with acts of anticipation, of repetition and, in turn, of retrospection. Let us first look at its continuum with book 1 as the narrative resumes.

In terms of plot development, as we have seen, Virgil manages a smooth transition from Penthesilea to Dido. In terms of the rhetoric of ekphrasis, in this case as a device to look at time past through the fixity of art, as well as of the story-line itself, the murals anticipate the narrative of Aeneas which takes up the whole of books 2 and 3. Even with the arrival of Memnon and Penthesilea, after the death of Hector Troy is in its final moments, and it is to the downfall of Troy that the first segment of Aeneas' tale is devoted. Likewise, merely as an act of narration which as it were stops epic time to tell, again in this case, of past Trojan events, Aeneas' first-person recitation has much in common with the particular thrust of the murals' description. The results of Dido's manus and Aeneas' reportorial skills are richly complementary.
Virgil prepares the transition in several ways. One is through the figure of Priam. The aged king’s presence is felt more strongly than that of any other save Achilles during the whole episode before the murals. He shares in the initial summary (458), receives a singular address from Aeneas (en Priamus, 461), and, of course, appears prominently in the ekphrasis proper (487). He is the first principal in the fall of Troy of whom we hear Dido later asking (multa super Priamo rogiantes, 750) as she rebates the major protagonists of the ekphrasis prior to the commencement of Aeneas’ narrative. And the old man’s death remains a climactic moment within that narration.

Another important link between the ekphrasis and Aeneas’ narrative involves the talismans connected with Troy’s fall. Three elements, in fact, namely the loss of the Palladium, the small statue of Pallas Athena stolen by Ulysses and Diomedes from her shrine on Troy’s citadel, the death of Troilus, and “the tearing up of the lintel of the Phrygian gate,” which is to say the entrance of the wooden horse into the city, do come together in Plautus’ Bacchides. Virgil begins his series of references with an event not mentioned by Plautus but one which forms an implicit subject of the second episode of the ekphrasis, namely the turning away of the horses of Rhesus before they could crop the grassland of Troy. He continues with Achilles’ killing of Priam’s youthful son Troilus, who by both name and genealogy stands as emblem for the city itself. Though Virgil would have known from art and literature scenes involving fallen warriors, there are no specific models, either literary or artistic, for the Troilus episode. It is therefore up to the reader to engage in deciphering its message. Part of Virgil’s point, given the contiguity of the tale of Rhesus, is certainly its iconicity as symbol of Troy’s collapse.

Such an emblematic, non-historical ordo of events in the ekphrasis, which is to say in the way Aeneas is made to view the murals, continues on implicitly in the two episodes that follow. It is presumably a monumental cult statue which, enlivened by the poet’s rhetoric to personify the goddess herself, fails to be appeased by the gift of a peplos

---

16 Pl. Bac. 953–955. The Palladium and wooden horse are linked together in Turnus’ speech at Aen. 9.150–152.
17 On the interconnection of Troilus, Rhesus, and Troy’s fate, see R. G. Austin on Aen. 1.474.
18 Williams (above, n. 1) 149 n. 2, allows for the possibility “that a mental association can here be made with the loss of the Palladium . . .”
from the suppliant Trojan women. But the reader who has absorbed a
deeper significance in the preceding two episodes might well make the
passage from grand temple adornment to the smaller Palladium on
whose stability the safety of Troy depends. Turning to the Hector
episode with this sequence in mind, the reader is not surprised to find
Virgil’s non-Homeric emphasis on the walls of Troy which replace the
bier of Patroclus as the locale for Achilles’ mutilation of Hector’s body.
The death of Troy’s major hero, another son of Priam, and Achilles’
flaunting of this accomplishment before the walls of the dead hero’s
city proleptically announce the demise of the city itself and the useless-
ness of her protective bastions.

What is implicit in the ekphrasis becomes explicit in Aeneas’ narra-
tive. Aeneas’ entry into the ekphrasis, which concisely calls attention
to his presence during Troy’s last moments, breaks the chain of talis-
mans whose representation also prepares us for her end. This combina-
tion makes the reader all the more eager to watch what happens when
another aspect of the ekphrasis comes alive, this time in book 2.
Aeneas’ narration will tell us in detail what the ekphrasis only hints
at—his actions during Troy’s final hours. It is to a purpose that its first
several hundred lines concern themselves directly with the two talis-
mans that remain only adumbrated in the ekphrasis. We learn from
Sinon’s quoted speech what happens (or at least what he wanted his
hearers to think happened) when Diomedes and Ulysses stole the Palla-
dium from Athena’s temple. But the central focus of Aeneas’ initial
words, indeed of the first half of the second book, is on the wooden
horse. It is the ceremonial breaching of the city’s walls, as Aeneas tells
us, to allow the monstrous creature entry that prepares the way for the
immediate arrival of the Greeks and for Troy’s doom.\footnote{In fact Virgil constructs the first half of book 2 around the figure of the horse. We reach the book's mid-point at the moment when the Greeks (briefly) seek shelter back within its belly (400–401).}

The ekphrasis, then, reaches out in anticipation to what follows, to
become “enlivened” in two significant ways, through the association of
Dido with Penthesilea and of Aeneas with Achilles, and through
Aeneas’ narration, which picks up the tale of Troy’s doom. This double
continuum has a distinctly sinister side which leads us directly into

When, at the end of the banquet which brings Aeneid 1 to a conclu-
sion, Dido asks Aeneas of Priam, Hector, Memnon, the horses of
Diomedes, and Achilles, then, in direct speech, of Greek treachery and his own wanderings (750–756), she is pressing the transition from what she knows to what is apparently unknown (or, in Virgil’s rhetorical usage, from ekphrasis to first-person narrative). But the narrative proper has already told us something of the queen’s psychic state as she makes these requests (749): infelix Dido longumque bibebat amorem, . . . We have been prepared for Dido’s tragedy to unfold by a number of factors, not least the military language Virgil had earlier allotted to Venus who plots how she will “seize her by trickery and gird her with flames,” and to Amor who “seeks” the queen, as if she were an enemy, and “occupies” her, again as if she were conquered territory.20

Her destruction, which is limned here metaphorically and had been suggested symbolically in her identification with Penthesilea, continues on through and then beyond Aeneas’ narrative. Dido’s initial solicitation, at the end of book 1, is echoed toward the beginning of book 4 (77–79):

nunc eadem labente die convivia quaeret,
Iliacosque iterum demens audire labores
exposcit penetrique iterum narrantis ab ore.21

Dido’s world now shares a crucial characteristic with the ekphrasis and first-person narrative that have introduced the final act of her drama. Epic action, of itself, now comes to a stop in the renewal of banquets and in the reiteration of words that accompany them. It is no accident that the splendid phrase Virgil gives to Aeneas, as he begins his tale, to

20 1.673, 717, 714.
21 The clear echo in line 79 (... pendent ... iterum narrantis ab ore) of De Rerum Natura 1.37 (equi tuo pendent resupini spiritus ore) urges the parallelism of love-sick Dido with Mars, lulled by the repeated words of Aeneas-Venus. The symbolism, with Dido’s loss of masculine heroism occurring at the hands of an Aeneas at the mercy of the machinations of Venus and Cupid, forms part of the strategy we have been watching Virgil follow, as he links the mural ekphrasis with what follows. Virgil pointedly repeats the verb pendeo at 4.88 (pendent opera interrupta). Dido’s “hanging” on Aeneas’ words causes the building of her city to come to a standstill. The metamorphosis of heroic queen into elegiac lover means the halt of Carthaginian civilization. Such a moment characterizes Virgil’s great conjuring trick in the Aeneid: to write a poem allegorizing a teleology of Roman greatness climaxing with Augustus that is also about the triumph of nature over culture, of paradigm over syntagm (whether we are dealing with rhetoric or with human behavior).
describe the complicity of stars and sleep (*suadentque cadentia sidera somnos*) is repeated in the story-line of book 4, line 81. Original narration and its setting are carefully reintegrated into book 4 as Dido’s life takes its catastrophic final turn.22

The murals of the ekphrasis may betoken for Aeneas the fame of Troy and Dido’s empathy for suffering and sufferers. By the time the reader reaches the initial lines of book 4 he realizes that the ekphrasis forms the initial segment of a deeper narrative, of which Aeneas’ own first-person exposition forms the next significant stage, preparing for Dido’s death. Artistic implications of Troy’s ruin lead to metaphorical adumbration of Dido as city in the process of being devastated. These in turn anticipate Aeneas’ narrative of Troy’s collapse which, as Dido hears it, abets her own downfall. When her death finally comes it is compared, in simile, to the fall of Tyre or Carthage (4.669–671). She herself endures that which her murals foretell and what her paramour describes. And Aeneas is the cause, witting or otherwise, of this suffering.

This gradual change from Dido, creator of murals and thus performer of an act which stands as synecdoche for the establishment of a city in all its grandeur, to Dido who wreaks her own self-destruction raises certain paradoxes about the ekphrasis and its relation to what follows. It is often the case that ekphrasis is treated in such a way that the viewer-narrator-recreator plays a masculine role while that which is viewed, and therefore passive and reimagined, is seen as feminine.23 This distinction, which privileges the word, that is to say literature, over image and visual art, would at first appear to be reversed vis-à-vis the mural ekphrasis. Aeneas at Carthage watches a monument to his vanquished countrymen, an elegiac memorial that induces mourning. He who was once active participant in a scene the ekphrasis portrays is now the passive sufferer of what he sees, yielding to a protracted display of grief. Dido, by contrast, not only causes the murals to be fashioned but seizes the opportunity to design a series of studies of brutality

22 Note also the echo of *audire laborem* (2.11) in *audire labores* (4.78). Repetition of narration means repetition of the content of narration. The future is absent in Dido’s world. The doom of Troy portends her own demise. In the case of the murals, Dido in her artistry and Aeneas, in his response, cannot grasp what the poet’s ekphrasis proposes to the reader. The same holds true for the effect of Aeneas’ story-telling, the tragic consequences of which neither teller nor hearer, only reader can comprehend.

23 On the gendering of ekphrasis, and in particular on the word-image antagonism, see the trenchant discussions by Heffernan (above, n. 1) 6–7, 46–47 (on Ovid’s Philomela), 108–112 (on the Grecian urn of Keats).
and venality which eliminate the compassionate side of Achilles that we find in *Iliad* 24 and serve to offer subtle homage to the violent Juno we have already come to know in the *Aeneid*.

But the reader watches another aspect of this change at work in the ekphrasis. The sub-text of the murals is the metamorphosis of Aeneas, from victim in a shared defeat and lamenter upon viewing its stabilization in art, first into the once and future hero which the paintings postulate, but also more particularly into the vanquisher of someone nearer to hand. Dido, dynamic fashioner of a New City, may at first seem leagued with Juno as the embodiment of the destructive potential of those in power and as harbinger of Carthaginian hatred of Rome. But the Roman enemy is already psychically within the gates. He who suffers his city’s literal defeat and is a voyeur of its aged leader’s ugly death metaphorically becomes the killer of another city’s ruler and the destroyer of the city itself.

The change can be formulated also in terms of artisanship. We watch in the ekphrasis a moment where Dido is in power and Aeneas is the emotional responder. With the narrative of books 2 and 3 Aeneas is the craftsman of words and Dido the one who yields to destructive passion. The linkage from the horses of Rhesus and death of Troilus to the wooden horse is strongly forged. The talismans of Troy’s downfall help conjoin ekphrasis and narrative into one continuous tale of defeat. But the perceptive viewer-hearer observes a different pattern of cohesion between these exempla of visual and verbal rhetoric. As Aeneas takes the place of Achilles in the post-ekphrasis narrative, so as narrator himself he extends and confirms the parallel, telling of one city’s defeat while becoming the symbolic conqueror of another. With Aeneas’ mutation into destructive Greek, Dido’s act of civilization comes to an end along with her life. But the emblematic posture that Virgil allots his hero stays with us until the epic’s final book where, among other incidents which look to his narration to Dido, Aeneas prepares to destroy the city of Latinus. It is not fortuitous that Virgil there uses vocabulary to describe Aeneas’ destructive impulses similar to that which he puts into the mouth of Aeneas in book 2 as he tells of the violent entry of Achilles’ son Pyrrhus into Priam’s palace and of his slaughter of the king. Dido is the first, symbolic victim of this aspect of Aeneas.

---

24 The point is elaborated by Barchiesi (above, n. 1) 122–124.
I will return in a moment to the force which the ekphrasis continues to exert on the epic’s final books. First we must look again at Dido, in particular at her reappearance in book 6 where Aeneas finds her among the suicides, newly reunited with her former husband Sychaesus. Aeneas addresses her, wondering out loud if he were the cause of her death. She scorns his excuses and his attempts at consolation (469–471):

illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat  
ne magis incepto vultum sermone movetur  
quam si dura silex aut stet Marpesia cautes.

Virgil means us to recall Dido’s final speech in book 4 directed at Aeneas where she accuses him, because of his treachery and, to her at least, unresponsiveness, of having as begetter not a goddess and a Trojan but a mountain and tigresses (366–367):

. . . sed duris genuit te cautibus horrens  
Caucasus Hyrcanaeque admorunt ubera tigres.

Matters are now reversed. It is Dido who takes on the characteristic of hard flint or of a glimmering, Parian crag. But her reempowerment is depicted even more dramatically through line 469 which, with the sole change from diva to illa, reflects exactly line 482 of the ekphrasis where Athena scorns the peplos offered her by the Trojan women.

But to change here is also to confirm. Dido who, we recall, was compared to Diana in the first simile allotted her, is once again diva with the originating, active potency she possessed in book 1 restored to her. Nor does any disastrous liaison loom now in her future, no Aeneas as divinized Apollo, his weapons resounding on his shoulders.26 In death her earlier marriage is restored. As for Aeneas, Virgil has him give way to tears during the episode.27 He, too, for his final moment of association with Dido, takes on the feminine part he had assumed in his reaction to the murals. As a segment of the ekphrasis comes alive again in book 6, the two protagonists reassert their original roles and Dido,

26 Aen. 4.143–149. The simile balances Dido’s comparison to Diana (1.498–502) and is modelled in part on II. 1.43–45 where Apollo arrives as the god of disease and death for the Greeks.

27 demisit lacrinas, 455; lacrimas ciebat, 468; prosequitur lacrimis, 476.
for her last direct appearance in the epic, once again assumes the masculine posture of full command.

The topoi of the ekphrasis live on, also, in the poem’s last four books in both specific and general ways, as if to say that what we witness, and contemplate, in the ekphrasis is the stuff of history with patterns that ever recur no matter how changed the detail, in the circumstances of Virgilian epic or even of human destiny in general. I will take the episodes of the ekphrasis in the order they are originally described. Diomedes’ nocturnal slaughter of warriors caught in their sleep, unaware of danger, looks ahead, first, to the happenings of Troy’s last night, when the Greeks arrive to release their confreres from the wooden horse and wreak havoc in the city, secondly, to book 9 and the night adventure of Nisus and Euryalus whose unnecessary violence leads to their own undoing. The graphic death of Troilus anticipates the several occasions in the final battles where a less experienced, usually younger, warrior contends with someone more powerful. We think of the combats of Pallas and Turnus and of Lausus and Aeneas in book 10, but Virgil’s vocabulary draws us still more closely to the final duel of Turnus and Aeneas. Virgil’s only two uses of the adjective *impar* in the nominative occur at 1.475, describing Troilus as he faced Achilles, and 12.216, glossing how the Rutulians view the combat about to commence between their leader and the titular hero. Concomitant emphasis on the youth of Turnus—we hear of his “boyish face and the paleness of his youthful person” (*pubentes . . . genae et iuvenali in corpore palor, 221*)—is another link with Troilus. The wider contexts also are conjoined by Virgil’s choice of the adverb *suppliciter* to qualify Turnus.

---

28 On the relation of the scenes on the murals with events in the last books of the epic see G. N. Knauer, *Die Aeneas und Homer* (Göttingen 1964 [Hypomnemata 7]) 305–309, 328–329, and, in particular, 349–350; K. Stanley, “Irony and Foreshadowing in Aeneid 1, 462,” *AJP* 86 (1965) 173–198; Johnson (above, n. 1) 103–104; Clay (above, n. 1) 203–205; Lowenstam (above, n. 1) passim.

On the possibility of such recollection Barchiesi (above, n. 1) 115 n. 11, comments as follows: “Mi sembra però riduttivo leggere il testo come un enigma che viene gradatamente risolto dallo sviluppo della sua trama.” But if we find the ekphrasis effectually operative in its own surrounding context, then its echoes in more distant books will not seem so incongruous. The Trojan war repeats itself again with the difference that in the final books the Trojans in part become Greeks and the analogy of Hector/Aeneas with Achilles is strengthened. The relation of the ekphrasis to the conclusion of the epic suggests that recapitulation and reperformance are essential to Virgil’s view of mankind’s nature, on the deepest psychological level.
as he approaches the altar in prayer (220) and the Trojan women as they make their supplication to Athena in the next scene of the ekphrasis (again, these are the only two occasions on which the poet employs the word).

A version of the Athena episode itself is replayed in the epic's eleventh book as queen Amata and her fellow matrons make their way "to the temple and highest citadel of Pallas" (*ad templum summasaque ad Palladis arcès*, 477). Their gifts and subsequent petition will have as little effect against the Trojan onslaught as do the prayers of the Trojan women against the Greeks, according to Homer's account in *Iliad* 6 and to its recasting in Virgil's ekphrasis.

The Hector-Priam episode is replicated at several later moments in the epic but never more cogently, as I suggested earlier, than in the epic's final lines where we find Turnus, in the narrator's phrasing, "stretching forth his right hand in prayer" (*dextram . . . precantem / protendens*, 930–931), a gesture reconﬁrmed in words allotted to Turnus himself and addressed to Aeneas: "you have conquered and the Ausonians have seen me, conquered, stretch forth my hands" ( . . . *vicisti et victum tendere palmas / Ausonii videre; . . ., 936–937). The ekphrastic episode serves to summarize books 22 and 24 of the *Iliad*, asking us to ponder Hector's past mutilation and "see" Priam's ransoming of his body. The situation of Turnus' supplication before Aeneas resumes aspects of both Iliadic moments. As far as Turnus himself is concerned, it reminds us of Hector's prayers before his death. In the case of Aeneas, we ponder Achilles' compassion for Priam, a reaction not shared by his latter-day reﬁguration.

Finally we have Penthesilea whom Virgil carefully links by simile (11.659–663) with the virgin warrior Camilla whose *aristeia* dominate the second half of book 11. We first hear of her at the end of book 7 where she is styled a *bellatrix* (805), the only other ﬁgure in the epic besides Penthesilea in the ekphrasis (1.493) to receive that designation. The parallels between the two, and also with Dido, are obvious enough not to need further explication, but a reminder of how Virgil deliberately links the deaths of Camilla and Turnus, by appropriating 11.831 as the last line of the poem, is relevant. Heroic as are all three characters (and the similarities are purposefully wrought), nevertheless all must die, victims of fate and of its unstoppable instrument whom they are powerless to oppose.
Certain patterns come clear, even from this brief overview of how details of the ekphrasis resonate in the last quartet of books. In general terms, as we behold art becoming life, and as rhetoric that figures and freezes the melds into the closure of epic’s grand narrative, we sense nothing more salient than that history repeats itself. The last chapters of the *Aeneid* both continue and reiterate the contents and meaning of the ekphrasis which becomes a synecdoche for the poem as a whole, suggesting *in parvo*, in a fashion typical of Virgilian poetics, the intellectual schemata of the larger entity. On the surface at least, names, dates, and places may change but deeper symbols remain constant. In essence this grander continuum reasserts what the intimacy of the ekphrasis with Dido and books 2–4 taught us: that the adventures of heroes have much in common, the one with the other. There are murderous nocturnal sorties, young warriors doomed to die in combat with their betters, goddesses obdurate to the entreaties of their worshippers, ancient kings whose cities share their own agonies, virgin women who play the part of heroic men.

But we must be still more specific. Our study of the ekphrasis showed two Aeneases, one the passive resufferer of Troy’s demise now taken visual shape, who gains hope from the celebrity of his past and from Dido’s empathy for its tribulations, the other a literal Trojan become symbolic Greek, an Achilles whose son, in Aeneas’ narrative, brings about the actual destruction of Troy but who himself not only fails to heed Dido’s prayers and emblematically destroys her city but, as the epic comes to a close, begins the actual devastation of Latinus’ city and kills a series of young warriors, one of whom prays for mercy as the poem ends. In book 11 the Latin women see their enemy, for help against whom they implore Athena, as a Paris, a “Phrygian robber” (*Phrygius praedonis*, 484), echoing the sentiments of Juno and Amata in the seventh book who find a parallel for his behavior in a past Trojan act of rape. But the ekphrasis proposes a more violent mutation. Instead of changing roles within a Trojan perspective, Aeneas becomes a Diomedes (*Aenid* 11 repeating *Iliad* 6) or, at the conclusion, an Achilles who forgets his *pietas* toward paternal ethics based on *clementia* and acts, like the focal figure of the ekphrasis, with a brutality which in Aeneas’ case is abetted by anger and the Furies’ fire.

---

29 7.321 (Paris), 363 (*Phrygius praedon*). The passage in book 11 is, of course, based in part on *Il. 6* 297–311 where the Iliades pray for help against the Greeks led by Diomedes.
I would like to conclude with a comparison of the ekphrasis and its larger poetic setting to its primary model, the three songs of Demodocus before the Phaeacian court, in Odyssey 8, followed by Odysseus’ narrative of his adventures (Odyssey 9–12).\textsuperscript{30} Demodocus’ first song serves as entertainment at a banquet and the narrator tells its contents, namely a quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles and the pleasure it gave Agamemnon for presumably predicting in its early stage a positive outcome for the Trojan war.\textsuperscript{31} The second, which Demodocus chants as accompaniment to dancers and is recounted by Homer at much greater length with the inclusion of several first-person speeches, is devoted to the adulterous affair between Ares and Aphrodite and to their capture by Hephaestus (266–366). Demodocus’ third song which, as his first, likewise accompanies a feast, concerns the entrance of the wooden horse into Troy and the ruination that resulted (499–520).

Virgil alters this pattern in several salient respects. He replaces Demodocus’ first song and its hint of Troy’s future demise with the ekphrasis of Dido’s murals and their detailed presentation of events pre-cursorial to Troy’s final collapse. A brief De Rerum Natura, sung by Iopas at Dido’s banquet, stands as substitute for Demodocus’ more expansive tale of erotic escapades among the gods (742–746):

\begin{verbatim}
  hic canit errantem lunam solisque labores,
  unde hominum genus et pecudes, unde imber et ignes,
  Arcturum pluviasque Hyadas geminosque Triones,
  quid tantum Oceano properent se tingere soles
  hiberni, vel quae tardis mora noctibus obstet; . . .
\end{verbatim}

Finally, the chronicle of the wooden horse and the results of its induction into Troy anticipates directly Aeneas’ first-person elaboration of the same events. Yet Aeneas, by rehearsing his own tale, also merges with Odysseus so that he becomes at once both blind bard and picaresque hero, entertainer at a grand repast, apparently uninvolved with what he sings, and valiant participant in that same story-line. By placing such emphasis on alterations to his Homeric model Virgil asks of his reader to examine these changes for their part in explicating the later poet’s intellectual designs.

\textsuperscript{30} Virgil may also be thinking of Phemius (Od. 1.326–327), as he sings to the wooers of the “sad return of the Achaeans” and Penelope weeps, but the general framework of Odyssey 8–9 is much closer to Aeneid 1 and what follows.

\textsuperscript{31} The dispute in question is otherwise unknown.
One point of departure is to watch audience reaction to what it hears or, in the case of the ekphrasis, sees. To all three of Demodocus’ songs the Phaeacians respond with pleasure. They take only aesthetic delight in what they hear for, in the case of the first and third songs which deal with the initiation and conclusion of the Trojan conflict, their utopian existence has kept them immune from war and hence from the ability to empathize with those who have endured its horrors. Odysseus, to be sure, shares the response of his fellow hearers to the second song which, rich though it may be in meaning, does not recount a situation with which any of Demodocus’ listeners, including their foreign visitor, could be expected to identify. But upon listening to the first and third songs, Odysseus weeps uncontrollably yet manages to hide his reaction from everyone else in the audience save king Alcinous.\textsuperscript{32}

Virgil reverses this distinction between public and private, and this reversal may help to explain why the Roman poet chose to expand the matter of Demodocus’ first song (one episode at the start of the Trojan war) into a series of vignettes connected with Troy’ fall, whose order is independent of chronology, and to honor them with thefiguration of ekphrasis which has no equivalent in Homer. What is private in the \textit{Odyssey}, namely Odysseus’ sorrow because he had experienced the events of which Demodocus sings and now reendures them in a way his fellow hearers cannot share, becomes public in the \textit{Aeneid}. Aeneas feels no qualms about openly weeping (459, 465, 470) and groaning (465, 485) as he stares at the murals, and, in one of the epic’s more memorable lines, he finds in them evidence of \textit{lacrimae rerum} (462), “tears for things.”\textsuperscript{33} The scenes are sorrowful in themselves and indeed of such poignancy that mere knowledge of them, from whatever source, could cause Dido to create them in the first place. The empathy that impels the Carthaginian queen to imagine the suffering of others in sufficient depth to actuate their permanence in art is paralleled in the tears which Aeneas sheds in response to this double aspect of the murals.

This means that what is public in the \textit{Odyssey}, the enjoyment of art for art’s sake, especially for its value as entertainment, is replaced by what in the \textit{Aeneid} is private, but in a profound, particularly Virgilian


way, abetted by the poet’s brilliant recourse to ekphrasis. Aeneas sees the surface meaning of the murals, namely the sorrow the events they picture brought to himself which can be shared by others, but it is the reader who, through the medium of ekphrasis, is allowed the opportunity of making the leap from the empathy that superficial viewing allows to the deeper understanding that description fosters. The frozen figuration of ekphrasis demands of the reader a pause for the contemplation of art. This in turn permits the connotational aspects of what is described to register along with, and often in contradistinction to, what it readily denoted. The reader in the Aeneid becomes what Dido and, in part, Aeneas are not permitted to be, a type of knowing Odysseus, harboring knowledge to himself and meditating upon what the immediate responder in the narrative cannot observe. No doubt there is also a certain equivalence between the reader, contemplating at leisure, and the perceptions of an Odysseus or an Aeneas, responding emotionally to what he hears or sees. They, too, not only were participants in the events in whose artistic reproduction they share but also now have a temporal distance between the actual occurrences and the present moment which would give the past a deeper resonance in the memories of each hero.

Ekphrasis offers the reader the challenge, as well as the privilege, of contemplating not art but words about art. The reader replaces Aeneas to become a spectator by imagination, an inner evaluator of art. Should he choose or be able to take advantage of the situation, he is allowed, by repeated contemplation in the mind’s eye, to generate meaning for art which the uninitiated audience, experiencing only a surface response, is not allowed to share. On the immediate level the poet replaces bardic performance with painting, aural with visual art, hearing with seeing. But Virgilian ekphrasis, by putting the final onus of interpretation on the scrutiny of visual images by turning external into internal seeing, adds a dimension absent in Homer and prepares the reader to expect a more complicated outcome to events subsequent to the ekphrasis than viewers within the text are capable of realizing. The ekphrasis of Dido’s murals is no exception to a general rule about notional ekphrasis: just as the art described seemingly freezes time in a permanent visual image, so ekphrastic narrative about such images likewise aims at atemporality. And this very atemporality allows to the reader leisure to shape opinions unformable by characters within the text. Confronting the timeless murals Virgil describes ekphrastically in
a text that is neither totally outside of time nor totally within it, the
time-bound hero must either pass limited judgment, as here in book 1,
or move on before deeper meanings might become clear (the situation
of Aeneas in book 6, facing the sculptures of Daedalus) or marvel in
ignorance before Vulcan’s astonishing shield.

Finally, replacement of Demodocus’ first song by Dido’s decorative
art might also be seen as a particularly Augustan gesture on the part of
Virgil. Instead of oral poetry repeating past epic adventures as bardic
entertainment within a palace we have the public monumentalizing of
art. A reader, contemporary with Virgil, who had seen Augustus’ grand
monument to Apollo, dedicated in 28 B.C., and pondered the meanings
of its decoration, whether interior statuary, door panels, or terracotta
embellishments, would not find the poet’s description foreign to his
intellectual milieu.

The relation of the song of Iopas to the second song of Demodocus,
indeed its very appropriateness in the first place, was debated in antiq-
uity. Macrobius felt that to chant de sapientia at a banquet, whether
among the Phaeacians or the Carthaginians, would bring laughter down
on the performer. Servius, in clear answer, counters that a “song con-
cerned with philosophy” (philosophica cantilena) was perfectly suit-
able as part of a convivium for the queen while she is “still chaste”
(adhuc castae). Servius is on the mark, especially when we think of
the generic conflict which the Roman poets themselves encourage
between love-elegy and didactic poetry concerned “with the nature of
things.” When Tibullus’ speaker wants the help of the Muses to regain
his girl’s affection, he will not sing of war

nec refero Solisque vias et qualis, ubi orbem
complevit, versis Luna recurrir equis.\(^35\)

Propertius looks forward to learning the naturae mores, but only after
age has called a halt to his involvement with Venus.\(^36\)

But Servius’ comment also helps point up the rich irony in the situa-
tion Virgil is developing. Dido may still be chaste, in the commen-
tator’s phrase, but she is already the victim of Amor (the narrator styles

\(^{34}\) Macr. Sat. 7.1.14, Servius ad 1.742, both quoted by Austin on 1.742.
\(^{35}\) Tib. 2.4.17–18.
\(^{36}\) Prop. 3.5.25. Lines 26–38 list various topics for the speaker’s future study in the nat-
ural sciences.
her *miseram* already at 719) before the banquet begins, and we have seen how, three lines after the song’s conclusion, “she was drinking in her long love” (*longum . . . bibebat amorem*). An impersonal celebration, in traditionally dispassionate verse, of the patterns nature imposes on the physical universe would indeed be an appropriate complement to a human world that was equally graced with order, balance, and control.\(^{37}\) Since such is no longer the case with Dido’s psychic state, Virgil sets up a tension between song as entertainment and the reality of the queen’s erotic situation.

This tension is reinforced for the reader pursuing Virgil’s elaborate dialogue with the Homer of *Odyssey* 8.\(^{38}\) Virgil’s narrator may tell of a bard’s chanting *de rerum natura* but we are expecting to hear something parallel to Demodocus’ extended tale of the adulterous union of Ares and Aphrodite and their imprisonment in the toils of Hephaestus. Whatever the actuality of Iopas’ song, the reader tends to overlay it with a version of Homer’s story of corrupt eroticism. And in fact it is a more serious version of Demodocus’ *divertissement* that Virgil’s storyline fashions, leading first from Dido’s infidelity to the memory of her husband, then to her suicide.

But Iopas’ song may also be not as out of place, or as deliberatively contrastive, as it at first seems. The “nature” of which the bard tells is not unproblematic. The matter of the first line (742) is a case in point: *hic canit errantem lunam solisque labores*. Virgil is modifying a verse drawn from his extended bow to Lucretius in the second *Georgic* (478) where he tells of *defectus solis varios lunaeque labores*. To the *labores*, attached now to the sun, Virgil in the *Aeneid* adds the notion of wandering, which has become the moon’s lot. It is not long before both these characteristics recur in the narrative. Dido will soon ask Aeneas to tell of his wanderings (*errores tuos*) and of how seven years carried him wandering (*errantem*) over sea and land.\(^{39}\) We have long since

---

\(^{37}\) On the notion of cosmic order and the “ironic tension” which develops between the song and its setting as well as for an insightful interpretation of the song as a whole, see C. Segal, “The Song of Iopas in the *Aeneid*,” *Hermes* 99 (1971) 336–349, at 344.

The notion that Iopas’ song marks the point at which Dido changes from hospitable queen to erotic lover is perceptively developed by R. D. Brown, “The Structural Function of the Song of Iopas,” *HSCP* 93 (1990) 315–323.

\(^{38}\) Virgil’s other major source for Iopas’ song is the cosmogony that Orpheus chants to calm the strife among the Argonauts, at *A. R. Arg.* 1.496–511.

\(^{39}\) 1.755–756.
heard of the labor or labores of the Trojans and the Carthaginians. But the content of Iopas’ song anticipates both Aeneas’ incipient narrative, which will tell of Troy’s “final labor” (supremum laborem) and of Dido’s frenzied request, at the start of book 4, to hear him recount once again “the labors of Troy” (Iliacos labores), as she renews her banqueting.

Iopas thus symbolically anticipates both Aeneas and his tale that tells of wandering and struggles. Taken simply as singer of a de rerum natura, he merely entertains. Seen as precursor of Aeneas’ subsequent narrative, and as replacement for Demodocus’ second song of adultery surprised, Iopas and his song appear as a logical next step in the progression that began with the ekphrasis of the murals. In each case Aeneas is deeply involved, and each part of the sequence looks to the destructive eroticism that the Trojan hero will bring to Dido’s world, first as murderous Achilles, then as narrator of a tale of misery that brings to his Carthaginian listener the ultimate suffering of death.

This intimacy of Iopas and Aeneas along with the ambiguities attached to each bard’s subject matter and performance leads directly to the final parallel between Virgil and Homer, namely the merger of Demodocus, through his last song on the wooden horse, and Odysseus, for his subsequent extensive narrative, into the single figure of Aeneas himself. Aeneas becomes twiceover a performer, diverting his audience as did both Demodocus and Odysseus. But the combination also further underlines the doubleness we have already seen Virgil encourage us to see in Aeneas from the earlier ekphrasis. He is both a continuator of the art he enlivens (ekphrasis become narrative) and participant in that “art,” both entertainer in words and sufferer of the events he describes. But as Odysseus redivivus he also becomes Greek as well as Trojan and in particular a Greek who is master of a rhetorical subterfuge that could deceive at the same time as it enthralls.


41 2.11; 4.78.

42 The transition from the material of Iopas’ song to the narrative of Aeneas in books 2 and 3 is echoed in Pallas’ request to Aeneas at 10.161–162:

\[\text{... qu aerit sidera, opacae}
\text{noctis iter, iam quae passus terraque marique.}\]

43 It is no accident that the mixing of gifts (dona) and guile (doli) that figures in the
By means of the comparison we noted earlier of Dido to Diana, among other links, Virgil is at pains to draw a connection between the ruler of Carthage and Nausicaa who, in the simile at *Odyssey* 6.102–109 which served as model for *Aeneid* 1.498–502, is likened by Homer to Artemis.\(^4^4\) But to move from the virgin princess to Dido, from the eden of Phaeacia to the hard realities of Carthage, is to change from a young girl’s gossamer existence and its erotic suggestiveness to the incipient tragedy of the infatuated queen. In the process Aeneas becomes not only Odysseus engrossing Dido as a type of Alcinous who could listen “until bright dawn,” so enchanted is he by what he hears, but a duplicitous lover as well whose narration expands the ambivalent role that he must play throughout his liaison with Dido.\(^4^5\)

Let me return, in conclusion, to my initial discussion of Aeneas as both viewer and object of view, of the hero as “artist” who both reacts and explains. Why, the reader must ask, does Virgil place Aeneas in this privileged role as contemplative and critic, especially at the challenging moment when the poet is experimenting for the first time with ekphrasis and with the tension in narrative techniques its embedding in epic engenders? Why at this particular instant is he both a passive figure, pondering his own active past frozen in art, and yet dynamic as well, beholding for a moment his own passivity but responding as well? One answer lies in the ambiguous potential of Virgilian ekphrasis, at once both bringing the immediate plot to a rest and enhancing its on-

---

\(^4^4\) For discussion of the ancient criticism of this simile see Austin on 1.498.

\(^4^5\) *Od.* 11.375.

It is well to recall here that among the gifts that Aeneas offers Dido are a dress and veil of Helen which she was wearing when she sought *inconcessos hymenaeos* in Troy (*Aen.* 1.651). In accepting the gift Dido becomes Helen, with all the potential for tragedy that such a gesture implies. But the giver, Aeneas, is also a type of Helen, male for a moment changed to female seductress, luring Dido to become unfaithful to the memory of Sychaeus just as Helen had abandoned Menelaus.
going concerns. Here at least, through the pause ekphrasis necessitates, Aeneas is allowed the complementary occasion for self-reflectivity and for the demonstration of empathy toward others. At the start of the epic, the reader, for an instant becoming Aeneas by watching him watching, absorbs at least one extraordinary set of circumstances where its hero is allowed to choose meditation over action.\textsuperscript{46}

The difference between how Aeneas sees the murals and how the reader understands the ekphrasis that describes them is therefore crucial for appreciation of what follows, both immediately and in the epic’s longer distance. The ekphrasis furthers the several reversals that come Dido’s way, from active to passive, male to female, as control is gradually wrenched from her and given to her absconding lover. It is thus typical of all the other descriptions of art in the \textit{Aeneid}, claiming the reader’s contemplative attention, as the narrative appears to stop, to the nexus of multiple meanings which it harbors. As he rivals Homer for one of the most extensive stretches of his epic, Virgil also exerts his originality, turning Demodocus’ brief first song into one of the singular moments in the poem where sight and insight converge.\textsuperscript{47}

\textbf{Brown University}

\textsuperscript{46} The ending of the poem, where ekphrasis is also involved vicariously, tells a carefully reversed tale. Aeneas hesitates as he observes the suppliant Turnus and withholds action. On seeing the baldric of Pallas, which the reader knows from the brief ekphrasis at 10.497–498, has engraved on it the murder of the sons of Aegyptus by the Danaids on their wedding night, he kills.

\textsuperscript{47} I would like to thank Professor Charles Segal for his critique of this essay’s initial draft and Ruth Caston, Vassiliki Panoussi, and Philip Thibodeau for helpful comments on the final version.