Aspects of Ecphrastic Technique
in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*
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By

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INTRODUCTION

This work sets out to examine Ovid’s treatment of the plastic arts and, more specifically, the creators of these arts within the Metamorphoses, by looking at the poet’s portrayal of artists and their work. This will be done by examining the three major ecphrastic episodes in the text as well as three so called ‘quasi-ecphrastic’ episodes. I have chosen to take an intertextual approach to the text and, to this end, I shall be discussing Ovid’s place within the tradition of ecphrasis, with close reference to those of his predecessors who used ecphrasis to express their artistic freedom.

When it comes to ecphrasis, the temptation is perhaps to gloss over Ovid, after all there are only three major ecphrases in the Metamorphoses and those are all shorter than the shield of Achilles by some way – in fact: “In view of the prominence of art it is surprising that so few ecphrases are found: the Aeneid can show fully as many.”¹ I have therefore chosen Ovid as my subject because, whilst Ovidian scholarship has received a great deal of attention in recent years, there still seems to be room for a more detailed study of this particular topic. There has been a wealth of research into all aspects of Ovid’s work since the 1940s from Fraenkel’s Ovid: a poet between two worlds² and Wilkinson’s Ovid recalled³ to Hardie and Boyd’s⁴ companions, which cover all Ovid’s works and have illuminated the work of an author who, until fairly recently, had been discounted as a frivolous pretender to Virgil’s epic crown. More specifically: Vincent, Leach and Knox⁵ have written innovative works on individual ecphrases from the Metamorphoses and Heffernan has included the poet in his extensive survey of the genre in his Museum of Words.⁶

¹ Solodow (1988), 228.
² Fraenkel (1945).
its place in antiquity. Jáš Elsner has led the way in advancing our knowledge, with his work culminating in an edition of Ramus dedicated solely to ancient ecphrases\(^7\) and receiving renewed treatment in Webb’s recently published Ecphrasis, imagination and persuasion in ancient rhetorical theory and practice.\(^8\) The study of allusion has also taken off since 1966 when Kristeva coined the term ‘intertextuality’ to denote a reader-focussed approach to authorial allusion, and Ovid is a prime candidate for intertextual studies. As Myers notes, “The increasingly fat commentaries on his works reveal a greater awareness of and attentiveness to Ovid’s dense allusiveness.”\(^9\) However, what is often neglected is the intersection between studies of Ovid’s ecphrases and his allusions. The tradition of ecphrasis as a notable topos in ancient literature stretches right back to Homer, and Ovid with his skill for parody, makes full use of the genre’s pedigree. Although little has been written on Ovid’s ecphrases from an allusive perspective, notable exceptions are Stephen Wheeler, whose Imago Mundi is ground breaking in its take on not only Ovid’s ecphrases, but on his ecphrastic approach to writing in the first half of the Metamorphoses, and Sophia Papaioannou, who uses an intertextual approach in her examination of the Crater of Aeneas; an episode rarely covered in detail. Ovid: “a poet utterly in love with poetry”\(^10\) is a tantalising subject for any study of ancient literature and is well deserving of further study.

Ecphrasis itself brings together the plastic and literary arts, giving voice to one and clarity to the other: if Poema loquens pictura, pictura tacitum poema debet esse, ecphrasis is therefore a combination of the best parts of the two. “That art is both more closed and more open than literature makes the phenomenon of ecphrasis where they meet of peculiar interest.”\(^11\)

This merging of art and literature leads us inevitably to the creator of both media. Kurman noted that:

\(^7\) Ramus special edition (2002), The verbal and the visual : cultures of Ecphrasis in antiquity
\(^8\) Webb (2009).
\(^9\) Myers (1999), 194.
\(^10\) Murray (1921), 116.
“What we do see in Homeric ecphrases...is the complementing of divine creation with an almost equal regard, on the part of the poet, for the creation of man – the artist.”

It is this emphasis on the power of the human artist and his interaction and competition with the divine that Ovid seems to explore in his ecphrases. Eleanor Leach succinctly sums up the gist of my research:

“It has often been remarked that Ovid shows a particular interest in artists and their works of art, an interest that often manifests itself in the use of words from the vocabulary of the graphic arts but is also apparent in the precise descriptions that allow the postures of his characters to be visualised as clearly as those of statues and his scenes to be envisioned with all the detail of actual paintings.”

Indeed, as Leach suggests, Ovid uses ‘artistic’ vocabulary throughout the Metamorphoses, but it is in his use of ecphrasis that we see Ovid truly taking advantage of his talent for description. Trained in rhetoric, Ovid uses rhetorical narrative pauses to allow free reign to his already fertile imagination and, in doing so, to step outside the main plot of the text and offer us more of himself:

“It is well known that the device of ecphrasis offers the poet an opportunity to reflect upon his own art while describing the art of another.”

The importance one places on ecphrasis as a topos is dependant on the point of view; do authors use ecphrasis to enhance the text as a whole or simply to ‘show off’ their skills? Indeed if ecphrasis merely “tests the writer’s powers of enargeia” does this then negate its importance by putting it out of kilter with the rest of the text? As Harrison asks:

“do passages of formal description, often long and apparently digressive, play an organic or functional role in the narrative in which they appear, or are they mere decorations, examples of ‘narrative pause’?”

13 Leach (1974), 102. See also Solodow, whose introduction to The world of Ovid’s Metamorphoses is at pains to note that “Art and artists are Ovid’s special interests in the poem” (Solodow [1988], 2).
15 Hardie (2002), 173.
16 Harrison (2001), 70.
Ovid, criticised even in his own time for his literary posturing, may be seen as using *ecphrasis* simply for the sake of digression, of pausing mid-story to demonstrate his skills of rhetoric. However, I hope to show that, although this is true, Ovid’s *ecphrases* also bring us closer to understanding the poet’s own feelings than any other part of his work.

“All *ecphrases* have something about them of the bravura piece, the ornamental digression, but their very conspicuousness prompts the reader to reflect upon their potential relationship to the main current of the poem.”

In reflecting on the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid’s *ecphrases* tell of a world where art surpasses nature and preserves it, where words can make pictures come alive, and where human artists are constantly punished for daring to outdo the *Deus artifex*. The power of art and the frailty of the artist both serve to shed light on Ovid’s own views on the subject: he himself seeks to better the art (both natural and crafted) that he describes and, in an amazing feat of *prolepsis*, he too is punished for its creation. Indeed:

“Since, as is now widely recognised, a reference to a practitioner in one artistic medium can reflect on any other type of artist, all artists in the *Metamorphoses* reflect to some extent on the one Artist – the poet himself.”

However, Ovid’s views on artists are dependent on our interpretation of them. Authorial intent is difficult to discern despite the wealth of knowledge we have of the poet. In order to ascertain a hypothesis on Ovid’s view of artists, I have relied on an intertextual approach: in considering how Ovid both adhered to and changed the work of his forebears, we may discern his personal concerns. It will be shown that Ovid often altered his sources to bring out different nuances of the myths he told whilst retaining a sense (albeit largely parodic) of his literary predecessors.

“Two things characterise the Augustan poet’s approach to the genre: an abiding concern for the traditional, stereotyped boundaries of the genre;

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17 Leach (1974), 104.
19 See Leach (1974), 104.
and in tension with this, a strong interest in testing and in going beyond these boundaries.²⁰

Ovid plays a constant game of alternately honouring and parodying other authors. He is keen to prove his knowledge of and ability to mimic tradition, yet desperate to show his audience that he can take the past and make it better. The differences between Ovid and Homer may arise from Ovid’s belief that he could improve upon the bard; it may also arise from his knowledge that he cannot equal him. Likewise, “Any attempt to challenge the Aeneid on its own ground would only have highlighted Ovid’s shortcomings”²¹ So Ovid adds comedy to his epic, and a Hellenistic flavour to his ekphrasis. All this serves to give us ekphrases that are uniquely ‘Ovidian’ and give great insight into the poet’s character and beliefs.

In chapter one I shall discuss the origins of ekphrasis as both a genre and a rhetorical exercise: looking at its literal meaning, how it developed in the Hellenistic period and the words and motifs with which it is associated. This will include a brief discussion of authors from Aristotle to Quintilian and the Progymnasmata that form the basis of our understanding of the rhetorical topos. I shall touch briefly on simile as an additional means of conveying enargeia as well as outlining Ovid’s own fondness for using rhetoric to embellish his works. I shall consider the origins of ekphrasis as a fusing of art and literature particularly in light of Plato’s doctrine of mimesis.

In chapter II I shall discuss authorial intent and the opposing views of post-Kristevan commentators on this and intertextuality. This will involve a survey of current thinking on the subject from Conte, Hinds and others, and some consideration of the extent to which we may discern Ovid’s own use of allusion and parody. I shall attempt to give perspective to the limits of reader interpretation by considering Jaussian readings and defining the importance of focalisation in this type of study. I shall then give an account of the key terminology that has been developed in the course of recent scholarship on ekphrasis, including the importance of prolepsis and narrative pause as well as others to illuminate the theoretical approaches taken by other scholars in the study of ekphrasis. Finally I shall discuss the origins of the modern definition of ekphrasis as a description of a work of art or artefact, to which I have chosen to adhere in this study. Although the

²⁰ Hinds (1992), 82.
²¹ Griffin (1977), 61.
modern definition differs greatly from the ancient one and indeed although “One searches in vain for any unambiguous use of the term to mean ‘description of a work of art’ in any source before the late nineteenth century”22, I have nonetheless chosen to use this definition, partly in the name of brevity and partly to emphasise the relationship between Ovid’s use of the topos and his treatment of artists. Therefore, unless explicitly stated, all references within this study to ecphrasis are to the modern definition; and the role of ecphrasis as a purely rhetorical device, while explored, is down-played to maintain the literary balance of the work.

In chapter III I shall look at early ecphrases from the archaic and classical periods starting, of course, with Homer. I shall begin with an exploration of Homer’s ‘artistic imagery’ and how this relates intertextually to Ovid as well as the ways in which Ovid uses Homeric simile outside his ecphrases in order to contextualise this part of the study. I shall then consider the shorter ecphrastic episodes from both the Iliad and the Odyssey including the brooch of Odysseus and the cup of Nestor before moving on to detailed discussion of the shield of Achilles which, as will be shown, has great significance for all subsequent writers of ecphrasis. Continuing to look at archaic ecphrases I shall then discuss Pseudo-Hesiod’s Shield of Heracles in reference to both Homer and Ovid before moving on to the classical period. For this I have chosen to concentrate on that most plentiful of classical literature: tragedy. Aeschylus’ Septem marks a new departure for the genre of ecphrasis and I shall add to this Aeschylus’ Phoenissae and Euripides’ Ion to form a picture of the changes and innovations that ecphrasis underwent in the classical period.

In chapter IV I shall continue this ‘history of ecphrasis’ into the Hellenistic and Roman periods to give a well rounded picture of the influences of Ovid’s predecessors on his own style. I shall begin with Theocritus’ Idyll I and Apollonius’ cloak of Jason in the Argonautica as these are prominent works in a period which marked a shift from the ecphrases of metal works to those of textile works and provided the inspiration for Ovid’s Hellenistic flamboyance. I shall then move on to Roman ecphrases, beginning with Catullus 64, which may be said to provide the influence for more than one of Ovid’s works as well as his ecphrasis. This is of particular interest in light of the arguments for authorial intent and reader interpretation as it calls to our attention the question of focalisation. I shall then move on to a thorough discussion of

22 Webb (2009), 5.
Virgil’s epic *ecphrases* and the long standing argument of his influence upon Ovid and the poets’ rivalry. I shall finish by briefly looking at Virgilian metamorphoses as a possible source of allusion in Ovid’s own *Metamorphoses* to give added perspective to the extent of the debt of allusion owed by Ovid to Virgil. In my choice of *ecphrases* in chapters IV and V I have been selective because of size constraints, and am fully aware of the gaps that this may leave in the study. However, I have chosen those which I believe to be most relevant to the nature of the work. In the same way, reference to post-Ovidian authors is minimised because of the emphasis that I have placed on authorial intent. This unfortunately means that the likes of Achilles Tatius and, of course, Philostratus are missing from a study of *ecphrasis* (an unusual occurrence). However, as their writings could produce no allusion within Ovid, I have chosen to forego discussion of them.23

In chapter V I shall move on to Ovid’s own *ecphrases*, beginning with the Palace of the Sun in book 2. I shall consider Ovid’s references for the myth itself as well as possible sources for the *ecphrasis* proper. I shall analyse the text in an attempt to apply to it the theory of *ecphrastic* study as defined in chapter two, and suggest Ovid’s most likely influences which, in this case, may be those of the Hellenistic period. I shall then consider the Crater of Aeneas in book 13, returning to both Homer and Virgil in order to discuss Ovid’s deviation from the epic ‘norm’ set out by his predecessors. I shall also consider the sources for the myth as portrayed on the crater, thus examining both the macro and microcosm of the episode and concentrating on the focalisation evident within the piece. Finally I shall discuss the Arachne *ecphrasis* of book 6, which is by far the largest and most important of Ovid’s *ecphrases*, as well as being the one that gives us the best idea of Ovid’s treatment of artists. I shall again consider the sources for Ovid’s myths as well as the parts of it that may be his own invention, and consider the consequences of this for the direction of this study.

Having introduced these nuances of Ovid’s treatment of artists in relation to his use of *ecphrasis*, chapter VI will then consider three episodes within the *Metamorphoses* that I have deemed *quasi-ecphrastic*,24 in that they

23 Of interest on the subject however, are the following: Beall *Word painting in the Imagines of the elder Philostratus* (1993), McCombie *Philostratus, Histoi, Imagines, 2.28: ecphrasis and the web of illusion* (2002), and Morales *Vision and narrative in Leucippe and Clitophon* (2004).

conform in some way to the definitions of *ecphrasis* outlined in the first chapter, but are not strictly in line with my final definition of the trope and, although they do not conform to our definition of *ecphrasis*, they are nonetheless invaluable to our interpretation of Ovid’s view of artists. I shall begin with the story of Philomela, the sources Ovid may have used and the facets of the story which make this at once a *quasi-ecphrasis* and an indication of the place and fate of artists within the *Metamorphoses*. I shall then discuss the most symbolic of all artists, Daedalus, and Ovid’s treatment of his story and his art. This will further illuminate the treatment of creative personalities in the text and elucidate the role of the reader/interpreter within the epic. Finally I shall consider the myth of Pygmalion; again a possible case of Ovid’s own inventive genius, and the power attributed to artists within the *Metamorphoses*, as well as Ovid’s view of his own place within the hierarchy of artists.

It is my intention that, in the course of this study, I may be able to ascertain as far as possible Ovid’s opinion of his own place in the long tradition of artists and poets, which began with Homer and his feelings on the relative merits of artistic invention, as well as defining our own limits as interpreters of a text which relies heavily on allusion to which modern scholars may not always have access. This is by no means an exhaustive or definitive survey of what is a vast and complex subject. I hope, however, to play a part in unravelling the threads of this scholarly web.
CHAPTER ONE
RHETORICAL BACKGROUND

The basis of this study is the idea that, through Ovid's use of *ecphrasis*, we might learn more about his views on art, artists and permanence. In other words, the focus is on authorial intent, a subject that has courted much controversy in recent scholarship. Indeed it is necessary at this point to clarify several of the theoretical approaches utilised within this work so that my methodology in later chapters might be more clearly discernable. To this end I have laid out here, not only a brief history of *ecphrasis*, but also my reasons for the definition of the term used in the course of this study, as well as commentary on the debate surrounding intertextuality and authorial intent.

Ecphrasis

Although widely used, the term *ecphrasis* is a particularly complicated one and its history doubly so.¹ The first example of what is recognisable to us as *ecphrasis* appears in Homer² and so is a phenomenon represented in our earliest extant literature. However the term itself, its rhetorical connotations and its development into an independent ‘genre’, are rather younger, as Becker has deduced:

>“Of the over five hundred occurrences of the word ἔκφρασις (in a search on the Ibycus system), nearly two-thirds occur in Eustathius, and very few occur before the third or fourth century A.D. The infinitive ἔκφραζεν appears once in Demetrius, On Style 165 (first century B.C. or A.D.), meaning ‘to decorate’, or ‘to adorn’. The treatise On the Sublime attributed

¹ As Atkins says, “However successfully we may seem to have traced the origin of a particular idea or doctrine, we shall still, as a rule, be able to find some anticipation of that idea, some earlier statement leading up to the actual doctrine.” (Atkins [1957], 11). This is particularly true in the case of *ecphrasis*, as the term itself is open to interpretation and many passages which appear to discuss *ecphrasis* do not use the term.

² Perhaps the “earliest extant judgement of the fine arts” (Atkins [1957], 13).
to Longinus (probably written in the second century A.D.) does not mention *ecphrasis*. *Ecphrasis* is mentioned in the *Rhetoric* attributed to Dionysius of Halicarnassus (but probably composed at least a century later), in a section on mistakes in judicial speeches (10.17).3

The first extant mention of *ecphrasis* in rhetorical texts is in the *Progymnasmata* of Aelius Theon. Theon states:

“Ecphrasis is descriptive language, bringing what is portrayed clearly before the sight. There is ecphrasis of persons and events and places and periods of time.”

He then goes on to give examples of *ecphrasis*, citing primarily Homer, Herodotus and Thucydides. This particular set of *Progymnasmata* has been assigned a date of approximately the 1st century AD7 when schools of rhetoric had been in operation for several hundred years. Theon clearly considers the practice of *ecphrasis* to have been popular for some time as he says that:

3 Becker (1992), 5.
4 Of the complete surviving *Progymnasmata* there are, first Theon, and then Hermogenes, Aphonius the sophist and Nicolaus the sophist, as well as fragments from others including Sopatros. These are all along roughly the same lines, although Theon’s has more of what one might call character and individuality, as Kennedy says: “only Theon…suggests that students might be asked to write about their own experiences – something that did not again become a subject of elementary composition until the romantic period” (Kennedy [2003], x).
5 Theon *Progymnasmata*, 11.118. (All *Progymnasmata* references are to Spengel, using the Kennedy [2003] translation).
6 Of particular relevance is his description of that type of *ecphrasis* which is pertinent to this study: “There are also *ecphrases* of objects, such as implements and weapons and siege engines, describing how each was made, as the making of the arms in Homer” (Theon *Progymnasmata* 11. 118). This is of note on several counts; that he mentions the arms of Achilles (the first and most notable of the *ecphrases*), that he counts weapons primarily among his objects and that he specifically notes the ‘making’ of these tools. Theon clearly considers the oldest *ecphrases* to be those which typify the genre, despite the considerable advances which had been made in the use and style of *ecphrasis* since the archaic period.
7 References to Theodorus of Gadara and Dionysus of Halicarnassus put him no earlier than the late first century BC, while Quintillian refers to a Theon twice (*Institutio Oratoria* 3.6.48/9.3.76), if he is the same man as the author of the *Progymnasmata*, this puts him no later than AD 95, when Quintillian was writing.
“What is called *topos* and *ecphrasis* have very clear benefit since the ancients have used these everywhere, all historical writers using ecphrasis very frequently and orators using commonplace.”

The *Progymnasmata* themselves are first mentioned in *Rhetoric for Alexander* probably by Anaximenes, in the late fourth century BC, which has come down to us with the works of Aristotle, although neither author explicitly mentions the term *ecphrasis* as such. We might hope, however, that it was at around this time that the rhetorical concept of *ecphrasis* developed, as it was at this time that rhetoric itself began to develop alongside the late Athenian democracy. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is one of our first complete writings on the subject, and he is said to credit Empedocles of Agrigentum as the father of rhetoric and a man of Homeric genius, because of his use of metre. Accordingly, we may suggest that the development of rhetoric truly began in the mid fifth century BC and that terms such as *ecphrasis* would have begun to emerge and be consolidated through the Classical and Hellenistic periods. This is unfortunately where any study of rhetoric falls short: there is little material extant from the Hellenistic period. We can be certain from commentary and later scholia that rhetoric was developing at great speed during this time, but our detailed knowledge is hampered by the disappearance of all but a few fragments of critical works. We know, for example, that Theophrastus wrote *On Style*, which was “probably the first treatise to deal with style as a subject independent of rhetoric in general”, and it was at this point that the study of literature became more introspective.

“For the artist, no longer interested in the state, literature ceased to be in the old sense an expression of the community, and became rather the craft of coteries, with whom “Art for Art’s sake” was a guiding principle.”

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8 Theon *Progymnasmata* 1.60.
9 Although there are others now lost to us, which may have proved most useful according to their titles:
   “Θηραμένης, Κείσος, σοφιστής. Μιλητῶν βιβλία γ’, περὶ ὁμοιώσεως λόγου, περὶ ἐκώνων ἢτοι παραβολῶν, περὶ σχημάτων.”
10 Diogenes Laertius 8.57.
11 McCall (1969), 53.
12 Atkins (1952), 166. Atkins is most dismissive of this new fashion in writing and in particular of the Asiatic style, made popular by such writers as Hegesias of Magnesia, and calls it “an artificial style which depended for its effects on
The definitions first suggested in Aristotle were no doubt compounded and advanced in this period and it is to the Hellenistic period that we may be most tempted to attribute the invention of the *Progymnasmata* in the form now familiar to us. The first Latin evidence for the study of rhetoric is probably the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, often ascribed to Cicero but in all probability by ‘person unknown’. Although the term *ecphrasis* is again missing from the piece, there is discussion on a related term and one that almost certainly foreshadows the use of *ecphrasis* in the *Progymnasmata*: *descriptio*, the Greek ἐνάργεια.

### Description

Each of the surviving *Progymnasmata* describes *ecphrasis*, with little delineation, as “descriptive speech, bringing what is described clearly before the eyes.” This idea of description as one of the fundamental objectives of rhetoric preceedes the use of the term *ecphrasis* by several centuries and, whilst *ecphrasis* as a trope is more concisely developed, one may trace its origins back through the use of *enargeia*. We may therefore return to Aristotle[^14] who states that (*Rhetoric* 3.10.6):

> “τοῖς δ’ ὄνομασιν, ἵνα ἔχῃ μεταφοράν, καὶ ταύτῃ μὴ ἁλλοτρίαι, χαλεπὸν γὰρ συνεϊν, μὴ ἐπιπόλαιον, συνεῖν γὰρ ποιεῖ παραχεῖν, ἐὰν ἐν πρὸ ὁμιλητῶν ποιεῖ ὀραν γὰρ δεὶ τὰ πράττομα μᾶλλον ἢ μέλλοντα. δεὶ ἀρα ταύτων σταχαζόμεθα τριών, μεταφοράς ἄνιθέσεως ἐναργείας.”

> “as to words, they are popular if they contain metaphor, provided it be neither strange, for then it is difficult to take in at a glance, nor superficial, for then it does not impress the hearer; further, if they set things “before the eyes”; for we ought to see what is being done rather than what is going to be done. We ought therefore to aim at three things—metaphor, antithesis, actuality.”[^15]

[^14]: Or indeed earlier, if we follow McCall’s thinking that the ἐικονολογία in Socrates’ account of Polus (*Phaedrus* 269A.) can translate as “speech with images” (McCall [1969], 4).

He again cites Homer as his example, and we see the overlap between enargeia and ecphrasis, having defined the term according to the Progymnasmata. By enargeia, Aristotle means the bringing of seemingly inanimate objects to life so that we, the reader ‘see them’ clearly before our eyes.16 ἀπὸ τί πρέπου ζήτηθα ρητορική τε καὶ ηθική καὶ τοῖς ὑποκείμενοις πράγμαις ἀνάλογοι. τὸ δ’ ἀνάλογον ἑστώ ἦν μὴ περὶ εὐγενῶν αὐτοκαθάρισμας λέγηται μὴ περὶ εὐτελῶν σεμαίνων, μηδ’ ἐπὶ τῷ εὐτελεῖ θυμούτθαι ἐπὶ κόσμοι.17

"Propriety of style will be obtained by the expression of emotion and character, and by proportion to the subject matter. Style is proportionate to the subject matter when neither weighty matters are treated offhand, nor trifling matters with dignity, and no embellishment is attached to an ordinary word" (3.7.1-3).

In other words that the style of writing should be appropriate to the subject matter, just as the Progymnasmata say of ecphrasis:

“One should not recollect all useless details and should make the style reflect the subject, so that if what is described is colourful, the word choice should be colourful, but if it is rough or frightening or something like that, features of the style should not strike a discordant note with the nature of the subject.” (Theon 119-22).

16 Aristotle’s other prerequisite for good writing is propriety:

τὸ δὲ πρέπου ἐξη ὅ λεξις, ἓν ἢ παρηγορίης ἡ ρήσις καὶ τοῖς ὑποκείμενοις πράγμαις ἀνάλογοι. τὸ δ’ ἀνάλογον ἑστώ ἦν μὴ περὶ εὐγενῶν αὐτοκαθάρισμας λέγηται μὴ περὶ εὐτελῶν σεμαίνων, μηδ’ ἐπὶ τῷ εὐτελεῖ θυμούτθαι ἐπὶ κόσμοι.

17 It is therefore easy to discern a development from the one term to the other.

18 The works now lost include Theophrastus περὶ λέξεως and Hermogoras on whose work the Progymnasmata are most probably based, as Kennedy says “with him the rhetorical handbook and the traditional system of ancient rhetoric achieved almost its full development” (Kennedy [1963], 318.).

19 McCall (1969), bases this date on internal evidence which has been generally accepted and has disproved several theories on the authorship of the piece including those which attempt to credit Cornificius as the author.
“Descriptio nominatur, quae rerum consequentium continet perspicuam et dilucidam cum gravitate expositionem”

“Vivid description is the name for the figure which contains a clear, lucid, and impressive exposition of the consequences of an act”

This of course is not *ecphrasis* as we might understand it, and the author illustrates his definition with examples of how description might be employed to evoke pathos in a jury by illustrating the possible consequences of their decision, but the term still appears to be synonymous with *enargeia* and is under the heading *exornationes sententiarum* suggesting that description is an embellishment; an artistic, almost sophistic aside or addition to add weight to an argument, but not an essential part of it. The author of the *Ad Herennium* also mentions *effectio*, which he takes to be a description of a person so clear as to be recognisable to the jury and *demonstratio*, a similar term but referring to an event, which will again “ante oculos esse videatur.” (“pass vividly before our eyes”)

21 “Quodsi istum, iudices, vestris sententiis liberaveritis, statim, sicut e cavea leo emissus aut aliqua taeterrima belua soluta ex catenis, volitabit et vagabitur in foro.”
22 Indeed Beaujour believes *ecphrasis* to be particularly suited to epideictic oratory and says that “Such gratuitous uses of *ecphrasis* were always tainted with the dubious reputation of sophistry: a profitable but somewhat undignified display of skill, an ungentlemanly indifference to usefulness, truth, justice, wisdom and the common good” (Beaujour [1981], 30).
24 Ibid 4.55.68.
In fact it is in this context, as a purely rhetorical elaboration, that the *Ad Herennium* introduces us to a new dimension of description; the mnemonic (3.22.37):

“Imagines igitur nos in eo genere constituere oportebit, quod genus in memoria diutissime potest haerere. Id accidet, si quam maxime notatas similitudines constituemus; si non multas nec vagas, sed aliquid agentes imagines ponemus; si egregiam pulchritudinem aut unicum turpitudinem eis a tribuemus; si aliquas exornabimus, ut si coronis aut veste purpurea, quo nobis notatior sit similitudo.”

“We ought then to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in memory. And we shall do so if we establish likeness as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague, but do something; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we dress some of them with crowns or purple cloaks, for example so that the likeness may be more distinct to us.”

Our first glimpse of *ecphrasis* from the Latin corpus therefore, has led us further still from definition we first encountered in the *Progymnasmata*; how then, might later writers amalgamate these disparate nuances of description? Our attention turns to the closest contemporary of the *Ad Herennium*, Cicero’s various works on rhetoric. The melding of what may well be a Hellenistic approach to description (both the author of the *Ad Herennium* and Cicero himself were known to have drawn on Theophrastus) and that which is more familiar to us as *ecphrasis*, may be down to the work of Cicero:

“It has often been pointed out that in rhetorical theory Cicero reaches back beyond the technical Hellenistic age to the broader Aristotelian approach to

25 Ibid 3.22.37. One cannot help but make the link between the *Ad Herennium’s veste purpurea* and Apollonius’ cloak *ecphrasis* in the *Argonautica* (see further below) it is tempting to imagine that this was the intention of the author of *Ad Herennium*. One must wonder, however, how much effect the mnemonic capacity of description had on Ovid as, whilst the memorising and recitation of his work was inevitable, Ovid lived in an age when the written word was solid and tangible; copied and distributed to be read first hand: what was taught to Ovid as a rhetorical device became far more than a method of declamation in the hands of an accomplished poet. (see *authorial intent* pg 34).
rhetoric and, even further back, to the pre-Platonic view that philosophy and the art of persuasion are not incompatible.”

*De Inventione*, older than the *Ad Herennium* by several years but incomplete, would appear to be the earliest Latin work on rhetoric; although only the first part of a five part treatise on *elocutio* has survived, we may assume, or at least hope, that description would have been covered in the text as, judging from later works on rhetoric, it was a well established trope. Our most important example of Cicero’s contribution to rhetoric however is *De Oratore*, written some forty years later. Despite this being Cicero’s longest work on the subject of rhetoric, it has little to say on our subject. There is no mention of *ecphrasis* or any of the terms directly associated with it that we have so far discussed. What we have from Cicero is a discussion of metaphor, which is of particular importance to the current work. In this he tells us that (*De Oratore* 3.40.161)

> “Nam et ‘odor urbanitatis’ et ‘mollitudo humanitatis’ et ‘murmur maris’ et ‘dulcitudo orationis’ sunt ducta a ceteris sensibus, illa vero oculorum multo acriora, quae paene ponunt in conspectu animi, quae cernere et videre non possimus.”

> “For while the rest of the senses supply (such metaphors) as ‘the fragrance of good manners’ and ‘the softness of a humane spirit’ and the ‘roar of the waves’ and ‘the sweet style of speaking’, those (metaphors) drawn from the sense of sight are much more vivid, virtually placing within the range of our mental vision objects not actually visible to our sight.”

Again, there is a clear link to the *enargeia* in the *Progymnasmata* but the terminology is once more absent and we are given instead the impression of *veritas* rather than *enargeia*, which stands in for *ecphrasis* in Quintilian. Closer perhaps to *enargeia* is *delucidum*, which Cicero uses in his *De Partitione Oratoria* to illustrate ‘clarity’ (*De Partitione Oratoria* 6.20):

> “Est enim haec pars orationis quae rem constitut paene ante oculos, is enim maxime mens ipsa moveri potest. Sed quae dicta sunt de oratione dulcida, cadunt in hanc illustrem omniam; est enim pluris aliquanto illustre.

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26 McCall (1969), 87.
27 Although the two works may share a common source (Caplan [1954], xxii).
29 Atkins tells us that “In the use of (*enargeia*) Cicero was said to be supreme” (Atkins [1952], 269).
“For it is the department of oratory which almost sets the facts before the eyes- for it is the sense of sight that is most appealed to, although it is nevertheless possible for the rest of the senses and also most of all the mind itself to be affected. But the things that were said about the clear style all apply to the brilliant style. For brilliance is worth considerably more than the clearness above mentioned. The one helps us to understand what is said, but the other makes us feel that we actually see it before our eyes.”

Quintilian and Phantasia

Quintilian’s opinion of description, as stated, relies again on the employment of enargeia. Quintilian states that enargeia arises from impressions given by those who possess εὐφαντασίωτας, the power to present images realistically. He mentions that what the Greeks call ἐνάργεια may be called illumination or actuality. This skill is particularly useful to the orator because (Institutio Oratoria 6.2.32):

“quae non tam dicere videtur quam ostender; et affectus non aliter, quam si rebus ipsis intersimus, sequentur. An non ex his visionibus illa sunt; ‘Excussi manibus radii, revolutaque pensa’?”

“(enargeia) makes us seem not so much to narrate as to exhibit the actual scene, while our emotions will be no less actively stirred than if we were present at the actual occurrence. Is it not from visions such as these that (Virgil) was inspired to write – ‘Sudden her fingers let the shuttle fall, and all the thread was spilled’?”

Again we have a very plausible link to the Progymnasmata through the use of clarity to produce mental ‘pictures’, but once more we are not told

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30 Cicero De Partitio Oratoria 6.20. Trans. Rackham (1960). What was previously said on clearness refers to five ornaments of style listed as “dilucidum, breve, probabile, illustre, suave.” (Part Or 6.19.)
32 Quintilian tells us that these are the names given by Cicero, which Butler (1960), 434, suggests may be a reference to the passage in De Partitio Oratoria mentioned above.
33 Quintilian Institutio Oratoria 6.2.32 Trans. Butler (1960). from (Aeneid 9.474.)
explicitly that these are descriptions. When Quintilian does refer to
description he does so under a clause he has taken from Celsus,
*subieimus evidentiae*\(^{34}\) which Butler translates as *vivid illustration*. He
gives it the Greek name *ὑποτύπωσις*, which again suggests that the
purpose of description is to bring a given situation before the eyes
(*Institutio Oratoria* 9.2.40)

> “Ab aliis υποτύπωσις dicitur proposita quaedam forma rerum ita
> expressa verbis, ut cerni potius vide atur quam audi: ‘Ipse inflammatus
> scelere ac furor in forum venit, ardebant oculi, toto ex ore crudelitas
> eminebat’”

> “Others give the name of υποτύπωσις to any representation of facts
> which is made in such vivid language that they appeal to the eye rather
> than the ear. The following will show what I mean: ‘he came into the
> forum on fire with criminal madness: his eyes blazed and cruelty was
> written in every feature of his face’”\(^{35}\)

In this passage Quintilian admonishes modern authors for their outlandish
use of vivid description\(^{36}\) (in particular Seneca, whom he suggests is too

\(^{34}\) Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 9.2.40. Trans. Butler (1960). Quintilian states that
he draws in this instance upon Cicero (*De Oratore* 3.53.202. Trans. Rackham
(1960), who refers to the same figure as *sub oculos subjicto*, although in fact
Cicero here refers to the more non-committal *paene subjicto* and suggests that it is
more an amplification than ornamentation, intended to clarify one’s speech rather
than elaborate it. Lausberg meanwhile interprets Quintilian’s use of *evidentia* in a
more traditionally *‘ecphrastic’* manner “The *evidentia*…is the vivid and detailed
description of an object…by means of enumeration of its sensible peculiarities.”
(Lausberg [1975], 224). However, as Beaujour points out, this interpretation seems
peculiar to Lausberg himself rather than appearing in a reading of the original text
(see Beaujour [1981], 29).

\(^{35}\) Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 9.2.40. Trans. Butler (1960). Here Quintilian quotes
Cicero’s *Verrines* 5.62.161.

\(^{36}\) However, as Laird notes “This idea that *descriptiones* in literary discourse are
ornaments, somehow detachable from their contexts, brings out their role as
objects of aesthetic appreciation.” (Laird [1996], 93). This may indicate their status
outside rhetoric, which tended to assume that “painting/poetry comparisons were
usually made illustratively to adorn arguments about something else – most often
the visual arts were used subordinately in analogies to show how good writing or
speaking could be effected.” (Laird [1996], 76.) This means that, as something
‘apart’ from the rhetoric in which they figure, they become what *ecphrasis* is later
understood to be – a genre in its own right.
Rhetorical Background

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dramatic\(^{37}\) but does mention that the clear and vivid description of places is variously called *topographia* as it is in the *Progymnasmata*. What gives an orator the power to create such images is, according to Quintilian, what the Greeks call *phantasia*, and the Romans call *visiones*.\(^{39}\) *Phantasia*, like *energia*, brings things vividly before the eyes, but is intended rather as an aid to the orator himself for, to make a judge feel pity and grief for a defendant, it is essential to create those feelings in one’s own mind ([*Institutio Oratoria* 6.2.29])

“Primum est igitur, ut apud nos valeant ea quae valere apud iudicem volumus, adficiamurque antequam adficere conemur.”

“Accordingly the first is that those feelings should prevail with us that we wish to prevail with the judge, and that we should be moved ourselves before we attempt to move others.”\(^{40}\)

This definition of *Phantasia* as what might be translated loosely as ‘imagination’, stems from Aristotle who defines it as a way of speaking, in order to make oneself clear, and notes that it is an ornamental device to charm the hearer and play on their emotions which, but for their gullibility, should not be necessary ([*Rhetoric* 3.1.6]).

“τὸ μὲν οὖν τῆς λέξεως ὁμος ἔχει τι μικρὸν ἀναγκαῖον ἐν πάσῃ διδασκαλίᾳ; διαφέρει γαρ τι πρὸς τὸ δηλούσαι ὡδί ἢ ὡδί εἴπειν, οὐ μέντοι τοιοῦτον, ἀλλὰ ἀπαντά ψωματία ταύτα ἑστι, καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἄκροατὸν διὸ οὐ δεῖς οὕτω γεωμέτρειν διδασκεῖ.”

“However, in every system of instruction there is some slight necessity to pay attention to style; for it does make a difference, for the purpose of making a thing clear, to speak in this or that manner; still, the difference is

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\(^{37}\) Quintilian [*Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.130. Trans. Butler (1960)]. He similarly accuses Ovid of being “utroque lascivior” (“wanton on both counts”) at 10.1.93 and bemoans the fate of Ovid’s Medea, which may have been all the greater had he controlled his language (10.1.98.)

\(^{38}\) As Phillimore in his translation of Lessing “What we call ‘poetical pictures’ the Ancients called Phantasie”…and what we call the illusion, the deceit of the picture, they called the energy” (Phillimore [1874], 144.)

\(^{39}\) Quintilian [*Institutio Oratoria* 6.2.29. Trans. Butler (1960)].

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
not so very great, but all these things are mere outward show for pleasing
the hearer; wherefore no one teaches geometry in this way.”

Clearly there is some disparity between these two definitions, with
Aristotle considering Phantasia to be a mode of speech and Quintilian
believing it to be a mental preparation on the part of the orator; but once
more the term rests on the concept of enargeia – of bringing things before
the eyes, and it is to this rhetorical concept that I believe we owe the
definition of ecphrasis laid down in the Progymnasmata of which our first
surviving copy, that of Aelius Theon, was written at approximately the
same time as the Institutio Oratoria. We may say at this point in history
that the evolution of ecphrasis was complete. The authors discussed are by
no means the only ones whose discussions of rhetoric may shed light on
the current discussion, but their treatments are substantial and the
progression from one to the next forms a solid line of development of style
from the 4th century BC to beyond Ovid’s own time. It is however a matter
of some consternation that the term does not appear in surviving Latin
rhetorical handbooks but, as Innocenti suggests

“Ancient Roman rhetoricians do not offer a systematic theory of vivid
description in their rhetorical treatises, perhaps because it was treated at the

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41 Aristotle Rhetoric 3.1.6. Trans. Freese (1959). Although even this rhetorical
definition is called into question in light of Aristotle’s use of Phantasia in De
Anima 3.3 to indicate an innate capacity in humans and animals (see Caston [1996]
20-55.).

42 It is for this reason that I have neglected to incorporate later treatises on rhetoric
such as Longinus’ On the Sublime, and it is also appropriate to end here as
(although necessary from a rhetorical standpoint) we have now somewhat
‘overshot’ Ovid who is the focus of this thesis.

43 One text of interest is the On Style, previously attributed to Demetrius, where the
author discusses enargeia (section 209) in terms similar to those defined by
Aristotle. However, as a date for the piece has yet to be agreed on by scholars, it
serves little purpose in establishing a chronology of the development of rhetorical
ecphrasis. There are also the two Senecas to consider: the elder Seneca’s
Controversiae are incomplete and so is of little help. The younger Seneca is of
course best known for his tragedies in which he employs the rhetorical style with
an abandon that led Quintilian to admonish his elaborateness (see further above).
He also uses ecphrasis in his work and, while not mentioning the term within his
rhetoric, he discusses imago (comparison) and says that “ut et dicentum et
audientem in rem praesentum adducant” (“this is to bring both speaker and listener
face to face with the subject under discussion”) (Seneca Epistulae Morales 59.6
Trans. Gummere (1925)).
early stages of a student’s education and because it may be produced in various ways to achieve various purposes.44

Nonetheless, the use of elaborate language in the description of various different subject matter was a clearly defined concept in antiquity and is what I would like to define as the **artistic imagery** that is the focus of my study of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The other type of **artistic imagery** on which I will focus in later chapters is simile, in particular that which relates to, or is directly incorporated into *ecphrasis*. My reason for integrating a discussion of such a seemingly disparate term into this treatment is the resemblance between the two and indeed that one (*ecphrasis*) developed parallel to or out of the other (simile). My discussion of the origins and development of simile will remain relatively concise as it is a subject that has received much attention in the past fifty years.45

**Simile**

As with *ecphrasis*, there appears to be little mention of simile in early texts, as McCall notes: “In most of the early teachers of rhetoric, there is simply no record of any discussion of comparison.”46 And so, despite tempting glimpses of Gorgias’ ἴδε ὕσσως σχηματισμοῖς περιττοτέροις,47 we must again turn firstly to Aristotle. Aristotle uses primarily παραβολή and ἐικών to describe comparison. In chapter four Aristotle describes ἐικών in relation to what appears to be a well established term, μεταφορά (*Rhetoric* 3.4.406b):

> “…”

“The simile also is a metaphor; for there is very little difference. When the poet says of Achilles, ‘he rushed on like a lion’, it is a simile; if he says, “a

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44 Innocenti (1994), abstract.
45 See particularly McCall’s exhaustive work on the subject *Ancient rhetorical theories of simile and comparison* (1969).
46 McCall (1969), 1.
lion, he rushed on,” it is a metaphor; for because both are courageous, he transfers the sense and calls Achilles a lion. The simile is also useful in prose, but should be less frequently used, for there is something poetical about it.”

Aristotle goes on to say that simile (τίκών) is a term in common usage, and gives a list of authors (none of whom are extant) that make use of it, but his insistence that it is ‘poetical’ negates its practicality in rhetoric because such terms are less likely to be persuasive – this is quite the opposite of enargeia, which may be employed specifically because of its persuasive qualities and so at this early stage in the development of rhetoric it appears that there is some considerably divergence in the meanings of simile, and what will later become recognisable as ecphrasis. Aristotle’s most interesting comment on subjects which relate to the current work occur shortly after this however, when he says (Rhetoric 3.11.1412a7-10)

“ποιεῖ δὲ καὶ ἐν ταῖς εὐδοκιμούσαις ἕικοσιν ἐπὶ τῶν ἁφύχων ταύτα·
κυρτά, φαληρίωσαντα: πρὸ μὲν τ’ ἀλλ’, αὐτοὶ ἐπ’ ἀλλα’ κινούμενα γὰρ καὶ ζωντα ποιεῖ πάντα, ἣ δ’ ἐναργεία κινησις.”

“In his popular similes also he proceeds in the same manner with inanimate things: Arched, foam-crested, some in front, others behind; for he gives movement and life to all, and actuality is movement.”

Similes, to be successful, must appear alive – they must contain enargeia, and the two therefore, although of unequal desirability, are inexorably linked. As is the case with ecphrasis however, we are sadly lacking in evidence from the Hellenistic period. Although there are scant references in other classical texts as well as hints from the interval, we must once more ‘fast forward’ to the Roman period to gain any real insight into the progression of the use of simile in rhetoric. In Latin texts, by far and away the most common term for simile is similitudo, which appears in the Rhetorica Ad Herennium where we are told “Ante oculos ponendi negotii causa sumetur similitudo” (“A comparison will be used for vividness and be set forth in the form of a detailed parallel”) The example then given is that of a lyre player, who should be talented as well as finely clothed. The

49 Ibid 3.11.1412a7-10 (quoting from Iliad 13.799).
50 Rhetorica Ad Herennium 4.47.60. Trans. Caplan (1964).
simile itself is greatly extended\(^{51}\) and furthermore we are told that the comparison “sub aspectus omnium rem subiecit” (“sees everything vividly”), the prerequisite for *ecphrasis* cited in the *Progymnasmata*. Certainly from this point on the two terms, simile and *ecphrasis*, appear to run parallel to one another, although simile is used, not so much to evoke pathos, but rather “aut laudis aut vituperationis” (“to either praise or criticise”)\(^{52}\) However, the word used for simile in this passage is *imago*, which here means the same as *similitudo*, but McCall admits “The word occurs several times in the section on memory in Book III, but always in the sense of ‘pictorial image.’”\(^{53}\) Here *imago* is used to describe the ‘pictures’ one creates in the mind to aid the memory, once more returning us to the *Ad Herennium*’s use of *imago* as mnemonic. That the same word is used of both simile and pictures, and that both forms are linked to mnemonics, retrogressively suggests that vivid description may have arisen in the oral tradition as an aid to memory, which forms an interesting starting point for the origin of *ecphrasis* in the archaic period.

On the subject of simile, Cicero is sadly of little use. McCall both praises and laments his ‘philosophical’ approach to rhetoric:

> “Cicero makes frequent use of terms of comparison but never really undertakes any detailed treatment of them…in the midst of the overall development of ancient rhetoric along lines of increasingly lifeless and automatic classifications, Cicero injects a temporary antidote of refreshing humanitas in his continuing search for the ideal orator.”\(^{54}\)

In fact it is not to *De Oratore* that we now turn but to the earlier *De Inventione*, which mentions, like the *Ad Herennium*, *imago* and *similitudo*, but with rather different definitions: in the case of *imago*, the definition is similar, but Cicero’s *imago* is explicitly a mode of speech, unlike the mnemonic function performed by the definition in *Ad Herennium*:\(^{55}\) *Similitudo* on the other hand, whilst sometimes used in a similar fashion, more often indicates “an element of probable proof; it thus constitutes the quality of resemblance, rather than a stylistic figure of comparison.”\(^{56}\) It is

\(^{51}\) See pg 68. Homeric simile.
\(^{53}\) McCall (1969), 79. The section of the *Ad Herennium* is 3.16.28-24.40.
\(^{54}\) McCall (1969), 87.
\(^{56}\) McCall (1969), 93.
not therefore an elaboration in the same way that *dilucidum* is in Cicero, and it is an entirely separate entity to metaphor.\(^{57}\)

Quintilian, like Cicero, uses *similitudo* more than other terms for comparison, but also mentions *simile* as well as several other terms not covered here. *Similitudo* is mentioned several times in passing, along with *exemplum*, the overall impression being that the two terms were “ornaments to a *causa*”,\(^{58}\) but is first discussed in depth in book five when he brings the reader full circle to Aristotle by remarking “nostri fere similitudinem vocare maluerunt, quod ab illis (proprie) παραβολή dicitur” (“Roman writers have, for the most part, preferred to give the name of ‘comparison’ to that which the Greeks call ‘parable’”).\(^{59}\) While *similitudo* is an ornamentation of speech, *simile* is quite clearly a historical comparison; the description of a specific past event (real or imagined) used to persuade the audience of the truth of what is being argued.\(^{60}\)

Quintilian also comments briefly on the Greek, saying it is the mode of comparison used by the Greeks to express the appearance of people and things and that it should be used more sparingly “quo probabilius fit quod intendimus.” (“than those comparisons which help to prove our point”)\(^{61}\)

He once more uses *similitudo*; however, in book eight, where he considers it very much a part of vivid description and therefore akin to *enargeia* (8.3.72)

> “Praeclare vero ad inferendam rebus lucem repertae sunt similitudines; quarum aliae sunt, quae probationis gratia inter argumenta ponuntur, aliae ad exprimendam rerum imaginem compositae.”\(^{62}\)

> “The invention of similes has also provided an admirable means of illuminating our descriptions. Some of these are designed for insertion among our arguments to help our proof, while others are devised to make our pictures yet more vivid.”\(^{62}\)

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\(^{57}\) Metaphor and simile share a particularly fraught relationship in ancient rhetoric, with opinions varying on their status. “Aristotle's opinion is that metaphor is the general term and that simile is merely a special, slightly inferior, type of metaphor...Cicero, followed by Quintilian, reverses Aristotle's argument, claiming that simile is the genus and metaphor the species (Cicero 2:123; Quintilian 3:305).” (Addison [1993], 402.)

\(^{58}\) McCall (1969), 186.


\(^{60}\) Ibid 5.11.6.

\(^{61}\) Ibid 5.11.24.

\(^{62}\) Ibid 8.3.72.