

This paper examines the relationship of rhetoric to poetry in the ekphrases of Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*. Earlier studies have illustrated the manipulation of epic conventions commonly found in Homeric and Hellenistic poetry (Hopkinson 1994; Hollis 1994). And while the application of the programmatic principle of *poikilia* to one descriptive passage has been demonstrated also (Faber 2004), what has not been examined fully is the general influence of the rhetorical treatises of the imperial period upon the *Dionysiaca*, and - in particular - the prescriptions for ekphrasis in the progymnasmata. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the poet's adaptation of the features of ekphrasis as they appear in the rhetorical handbooks of Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius, and others. Bartsch (1989, 10-23) has shown how these features are exemplified by the ekphrases in various Greek novels and in Philostratus' *Imagines*. With particular attention to the ekphrasis of the palace of Elektra in *Dionysiaca* 3. 124-179, this paper demonstrates the innovative incorporation into the epic of the rhetorical conventions of ekphrasis common to the novel, including: emphasis upon the monstrous, enigmatic allusiveness, interpretative activity, the *locus amoenus*, mythos, hints of allegory, encomiastic elements, and the manipulation of time and focalisation. The demonstration of these specific verbal, thematic, and structural elements reveals the close relationship of rhetoric to poetry in the formulation of literary aesthetics in late antiquity generally, and in the *Dionysiaca* in particular. It also reveals the purposeful development of a literary figure in an age that sought consciously to adapt literary and rhetorical conventions to its own immediate circumstances. The paper concludes by placing the descriptive passage of the *Dionysiaca* in the context of the "Third Sophistic", showing how they anticipate Byzantine and early medieval ekphrases (cf. Hörander, 2006; Wandhoff, 2003).