Imagining Christian kingship in Sigismund II Augustus's "Genesis" tapestries at Wawel Castle (1553)

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Chapter Three: The *Ekphrasis* and the Tapestries

As we approach the only eyewitness account of the *Genesis* series, the *ekphrasis* within Stanisław Orzechowski's wedding panegyric, it is necessary to consider the generic and rhetorical conventions to which the *ekphrasis* is bound, as well as the circumstances of its composition. Before adopting the text into our methodology of interpreting the series, we must question the extent to which we can rely on the *ekphrasis* to reconstruct contemporary readings of the tapestries. Taking all of this into account, however, we may examine the interplay between the *ekphrasis* and the tapestries, especially regarding the image-creation and agenda of Sigismund Augustus and its legibility for a viewer at the unveiling.

After an overview of the author's motivations for writing the text and the culture surrounding *ekphrasis* at the Polish court, this chapter will provide a close reading of the *ekphrasis*, beginning with its position within the wedding panegyric. It will then discuss how Orzeechowski's conscious use of the generic conventions of *ekphrasis* allow him to craft an image not only of the tapestries, but of their patron, including through his commentary on their stylistic value, their narrative morals, and their explicit links to the king's person.

3.1. The *Ekphrastic* Author

If one reads the *ekphrasis* as an attempt at the most accurate depiction of the unveiling, a kind of forensic recreation of events, one is immediately struck by several "errors" in the account. Orzechowski omits *Fratricide Conceived* and *Noah's Drunkenness*, separates *Paradise Bliss* into three hangings and *The Building of the Ark* into two, and

conflates *The Animals Exit the Ark* and *Noah's Thanksgiving Sacrifice*.[262] Arguably, therefore, it is not particularly productive to interrogate the "accuracy" of Orzechowski's text as an eyewitness account, as this stands in conflict with the aims of the text. The panegyric was written for the king and gifted directly to him after its composition. Its primary functions were to aid in the project of magnificence and, by proxy, to elevate the author in the king's good graces, not to replicate the unveiling for absent readers outside of the court.

In fact, the *ekphrasis* must be read firstly in the light of the dire circumstances in which the author found himself in the summer of 1553, despite his prolific career as an author and orator. Born in 1513 in the city of Przemyśl (southeastern Poland) to a Polish nobleman and the daughter of a Ruthenian priest, Orzechowski entered seminary at the age of twelve. He left Poland in 1528 to study in Vienna, and then spent the next three years living with and studying under Luther in Wittenberg.[263] While there, Orzechowski also drew the attention of Lucas Cranach the Elder and, during a short stay in Nuremberg, Albrecht Dürer, both of whom inspired Orzechowski's interest in art.[264] After leaving Saxony, Orzechowski travelled to Italy to study at the Universities of Venice, Bologna, Padua, and Rome.[265] It was in Italy that Orzechowski's issues with the Church coalesced into the two agendas that would define his career: the abolition of clerical celibacy, and the extension of communion with Rome to the Eastern Church to create a truly "catholic" Church.[266] Upon his return to Poland, Orzechowski cultivated infamy for a decade of

[262] There is also a chance that he made a mistake in the chronology of the Moses series as well because, according to Exodus, the battle with the Amalekites occurred before the bestowing of the Ten Commandments, not after.
[263] Ludwik Kubala, *Stanisław Orzechowski i jego wpływ na rozwój i upadek Reformacyi w Polsce* (Lwów: H. Altenberg, 1906), 2-4.
[264] Jerzy Starnawski, "Wstęp," In *Wybór pism: Stanisław Orzechowski,* ed. Jerzy Starnawski (Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1972), 4.
[265] Marcin Fabiański, *Wokół wawelskiego dworu Jagiellonów* Kraków: Zamek Królewski na Wawelu, 2020), 184.
[266] Kubala, *Orzechowski*, 4.

maverick politicking, heretical treatises, and stirring rhetorical skills, earning the moniker "the Polish Demosthenes."[267] He was an especially vocal opponent of the papacy, including denouncements of indulgences and the sacrament of Confession, and believed that Roman law was at odds with the sovereignty of Polish law. As he wrote in his castigation of Julius III's papacy, *De lege coelibatus contra Syricium* (1548), Orzechowski declared himself to be "not a popish subject but a royal subject," in a kingdom where "the king is limited by the law, of which he is a servant."[268]

Notably, Orzechowski was also one of the most vocal opponents of Sigismund Augustus's marriage to Barbara Radziwiłł, including speeches against her in parliament in 1548. In the first of these, he stigmatised the Lithuanian nobility's passivity toward the royal marriage, and accused the Radziwiłł faction of attempting to usurp the king's authority. In the second, he focused on the queen's allegedly salacious past, and gives her family the epithet "Zdradziwiłł" (a pun on the Polish word for treason, *zdrada*).[269]

In 1551, two years before writing the panegyric, Orzechowski broke his clerical vow of celibacy by marrying Magdalena Chełmska, daughter of the burgrave of Kraków. Consequently, Orzechowski was excommunicated for heresy and sentenced to exile.[270] Orzechowski embarked on an appeal process both to the Polish episcopate and even the pope himself, whom he had so virulently attacked in past treatises. Orzechowski argued that he had not committed any crime, spiritual or secular, by marrying. He asked for papal dispensation for marriage to avoid persecution, not because of his loyalty to Rome, and threatened that if he did not receive it, he would be forced to apostatize and spread antipapal

[267] Ibid., 5-6, 15.
[268] Cited in Ibid., 17-20.
[269] Starnawski, "Wstęp," 25.
[270] Hanna Świderska, "Stanisław Orzechowski: The Uneasy Years, 1550-1559," *The Polish Review* 8, no. 3: 12-13.

sentiment around Poland. Finally, in 1552, the *sejm* suspended the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts over the *szlachta* and froze all ongoing cases. Orzechowski received absolution from the Polish Primate, Mikołaj Dzierzgowski, reuniting him in communion with the Church.[271]

Still, by the summer of 1553, Orzechowski was in dire financial straits without his clerical income. His reputation had earned him the admiration of some dissident thinkers, but the scorn of the Catholic episcopate and nobility. On the other hand, his insistence on continuing to profess his "Catholic" faith and never officially break from the Roman Church isolated him from many major reformers. In Sigismund's eyes, Orzechowski's vitriolic attacks on Barbara on the *sejm* floor had cemented his place as a *persona non grata* at court.[272]

For his own part, Orzechowski was no great admirer of the young king, believing him to be weaker and less trustworthy than his father.[273] As he wrote to Jakub Przyluski after the death of Sigismund I:

> Everywhere there are rumours of worse tidings, nothing good is predicted, and it seems, rather, that a terrible end threatens us. The wagon of Poland is destroyed along with its driver. Nothing can comfort us, so say all the voices around us, the most distressing and shameful of all.[274]

Orzechowski had also gained notoriety with a previous treatise addressed to Sigismund, *Fidelis subditus* (1543), published right before his first wedding to Elizabeth of Austria. In a surprisingly blunt, perhaps even somewhat patronising tone, Orzechowski reminds the king that he must serve the kingdom, not the other way around, and that, because of his

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[271] Ibid., 22-24.
[272] Ibid., 3-4, 8, 15, 25.
[273] Starnawski, "Wstęp," 2.
[274] Cited in Starnawski, "Wstęp," 18.

youth, it would behove him to proceed with humility and heed the counsel of older and wiser men:

> Why am I speaking to you? Because you are to lead me, and I am to be led by you. You must therefore be wiser than me. If you will be, then I have won: I will be free, wealthy, and happy. If you err, I will die: there will be nothing left for me...other than to leave my homeland...Thus I have decided, while I am still well, to beseech you, to hold you to your holy obligations: study, cultivate your abilities, prepare yourself to protect liberty and your homeland in the hour of danger. And because your age does not allow you to know everything, my benevolence urges me to give you an earnest warning. Do not dismiss it. Remember, that he who does not want to hear the truth will be punished by God with sycophants.[275]

While we have no record of Sigismund's reaction to the treatise, it is possible that this set the tone for their future relations, which would only be further strained by Orzechowski's polemics against Barbara.

Nevertheless, Orzechowski realised the pragmatic need to return to the king's favour, and his pen had proven to be his most potent weapon thus far. In fact, the panegyric was not Orzechowski's first foray into princely propaganda. In 1544, his *Ad Sigismundum Poloniae Regem Turcica secunda* was an attempt to rehabilitate Sigismund I's authoritative image after it was tarnished during the "Chicken War" between the king and the noble insurgents.[276]

In the summer of 1553, two opportunities arose to change Orzechowski's circumstances: the opening of the position of court historian at Wawel, and the royal wedding. The panegyric, composed directly after the wedding and sent to Sigismund as a

[275] Cited in Kubala, *Orzechowski*, 16.
[276] Starnawski, "Wstęp," 9.

gift, was both an attempt to ameliorate the bad blood between him and the king and to demonstrate his literary aptitude for a position that would save him from destitution.[277]

Fig. 12 Frontispiece of *Panegyricus nuptiarum* from the original printing (1553).

3.2. Writing *Ekphrasis* in Sixteenth-Century Kraków

In addition to the personal motivations of the author, the *ekphrasis* must be read as an example of a rigorously codified classical literary genre. For Renaissance humanists, *ekphrasis* was seen as part of classical rhetorical training,[278] and a chance to participate in a longstanding tradition from antiquity. For the rhetoricians of the Second Sophistic who coined the term in the *Progymnasmata* (ancient rhetoric handbooks), *ekphrasis* was "a descriptive speech which brings the things shown vividly before the eyes."[279]

[277] According to Ludwik Kubala, it was "written to restore himself to the king's good graces" (Kubala, *Orzechowski,* 38). Hanna Świderska agrees that its "object was to coax gifts from King Ferdinand and Zygmunt August." Świderska, "Stanisław Orzechowski," 26.
[278] Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 28.
[279] Jaś Elsner, "Introduction: The Genres of Ekphrasis." *Ramus* 31, no. 1-2 (2002): 1.

The word "descriptive" is important in the Renaissance context, as the humanists sometimes translated "*ekphrasis*" into Latin as *descriptio*.[280] However, *descriptio* entailed much more than a litany of details; the crux of the definition is bringing these descriptions to life for the reader. Nikolaos, author of the last edition of the *Progymnasmata* (late 5th cent. AD), defines *ekphrasis* as the narration of *how* something happened. In fact, this can be deduced from the very etymology of the word "*ekphrasis*": to tell (*phrazo*) in full (*ek*). The key to this fullness of narration is *enargeia* ("vividness"), the power of the poet to animate the inanimate, absent, or past in the mind's eye of the reader.[281] In the words of Hermogenes, "the special virtues of ekphrasis are clarity (*sapheneia*) and visibility (*enargeia*); the style should contrive to bring about seeing through hearing."[282]

For his own *ekphrasis*, Orzechowski was probably heavily influenced by the ubiquity of the genre at the sixteenth-century Polish court and in humanist circles in Kraków. At least two *ekphrases* had been written for the occasion of Sigismund Augustus's first wedding to Elizabeth of Austria in 1543. Pedro Ruiz de Moro, a friend of Orzechowski and professor of Roman law at Kraków, included a detailed description of a collection of golden ornamental vessels in his panegyric. Georgius Sabinus, rector of the Albertina (University of Königsberg), also penned an *ekphrasis* of embroideries of the deeds of great Polish kings which were not present at the wedding, but invented by the author.[283]

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[280] Ruth Webb, "Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre," *Word and Image* 15, no. 1 (1999): 10.
[281] Ibid., 13.
[282] Cited in Elsner, "Introduction," 1.
[283] Fabiański, "Renaissance Nudes," 256. Other royal wedding panegyrics from the sixteenth century, including those by Justus Decius (1518) and Stanislaw Górski (1535) include lists of wedding presents and descriptions of the ceremonial decor, but do not include *ekphrases*. See Decius, *Diarii et earum, quae memoratu digna in splendidissimis, Potentissimi Sigismundi Poloniae regis, et Serenissimae dominae Bonae Mediolani Barique ducis, principis Rossani, nuptiis gesta…descriptio*, trans. Marcin Fabiański, in *Autorzy Złotego Wieku o kulturze i sztuce na Wawelu*, ed. Marcin Fabiański (Kraków: Zamek Królewski na Wawelu, 2014), 13-41; Górski, *Wesele Królewnej Jadwigi i Joachima Brandenburskiego na Wawelu*, trans. Fabiański, in *Autorzy Złotego Wieku*, 109-113.

One of the major ancient works that may have inspired Orzechowski was arguably the most popular classical text in Renaissance Poland: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Fueled in part by the belief that Ovid had died and was buried in Poland, the text was kept in libraries across the country, and was part of the standard curriculum at Kraków University. Book VI in particular is relevant to Orzechowski's work, as it describes the lifelike figures woven by Arachne, and her expert use of colour and light in creating her illusions. Moreover, Orzechowski's description of *The Flood* tapestry echoes the violence and vividness of the descriptions of the great flood brought on by Jupiter in Book I. The raging waters, stormy skies, intense destruction, and plights of victims caught in the fray in *Metamorphoses* all reverberate in Orzechowski's account:

> On the fourth tapestry you could see the heavens split with rain and a storm raging in the sky with lightning bolts; struck with fear, the faithless generation fell to the ground. Here, you could see the shameful flight of Cain's progeny, a sign of their guilty consciences. As some climb trees to escape the rising waters, others climb towering rocks, and others still flee to the high mountains. This tapestry was so full of confusion and so terrified the viewer, that he himself, struck with fear at such a horrible sight, feared for himself in the flood and longed for the Ark.[284]

However, by far the most popular *ekphrasis* circulating in sixteenth-century Kraków was the *Tabula* of Cebes (likely by a pseudonymous author), an allegorical dialogue between youths observing an enigmatic tablet, and an old man who decodes it for them. The tablet depicts three circles of Life, the path of science and culture, and the dangers of deceit and delusion along the way. In true Platonic fashion, the man teaches that "evil lies in living badly," and that living well must combine the development of the mind

[284] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Arrasy*, 54-55.

with the development of character and virtue. The harder path is living well; living badly is often the easier choice.[285]

The *Tabula* was widely available in Poland thanks to the transcontinental distribution of Ludovico Odaxius's Latin translation (Bologna, 1497), which was published in over sixty editions across Europe. It was also published domestically numerous times. In 1515, Hieronim Wietor (one of the most prolific publishers in Poland) printed his first version of the text (without illustrations), followed by a version with a woodcut of the tablet as described by Cebes in 1517. The Latin translation was published by Florian Ungler in 1522 with a foreword by Georgius Libanus (1464-1546), a renowned humanist at Kraków University. Two years later, Wietor published another edition with extensive commentary by the Italian humanist monk Johannes Camers (1448-1546).[286]

For the Kraków humanists, the most important element of the *Tabula* was its moral teachings. In his introductory poem to his 1515 edition of the *Tabula*, the poet and Kraków University docent Rudolf Agricola Junior (1443/4- 1485) wrote that Cebes replicated the path of human life as accurately as the painters Apelles and Zeuxis. In his *Libellus de erudienda iuventute* (1526), Leonard Cox (1495-1549), a lecturer on classical literature at the same university, argued that youths should be taught the *Tabula* along with the *Sententiae* of Publilius Syrus. His fellow classics lecturer Georgius Libanus encouraged his pupils to study the *Tabula* for its moral content in his *Paraclesis id est adhortatio ad graecorum literarum studiosos* (1535). One year later, King Sigismund I ordered a frieze reconstruction of the *Tabula* as described by Cebes for the Heads' Hall at Wawel. It was

[285] Piotr Hordyński, "*Tabula Cebetis* z oficyny Hieronima Wietora: Zapomniany drzeworyt krakowski z roku 1519," in *Żeby wiedzieć: Studia dedykowane Helenie Małkiewiczównie*, ed. Wojciech Walanus et al (Kraków: Lettra-Graphic, 2008), 181-182.
[286] Fabiański, *Wokół wawelskiego dworu,* 187-188.

completed in 1541, and included an inscription quoting Agricola's prefatory *Argumentum* to his edition of the *Tabula*, which stresses the moralising potential of the text.[287]

Fig. 13 Detail of Dionyzy Stuba, *Tabula Cebetis,* 1540, fresco. Kraków: Zamek Królewski na Wawelu.

It is relevant to consider the *Tabula* in relation to Orzechowski's *ekphrasis*: not only was it one of the most popular examples of the genre in Poland at the time, but it is also directly referenced by the author in his own text. At the start of the *ekphrasis*, Orzechowski promises that he "will present [the tapestries] in the style of Cebes, so that you will come to know not only the works of an outstanding artist, but also the person of the noble monarch."[288] Throughout the text, Orzechowski's explanations of the lessons in each of the tapestries are likely guided by the *Tabula*'s moralising approach to *ekphrasis*. However, it is noteworthy that Orzechowski's style is not actually influenced by Cebes, but is clearly informed by the rhetorical handbooks of the Second Sophistic. Probably, Orzechowski's appeal to Cebes is for the benefit of the contemporary Polish viewer, whose first point of reference for the genre of *ekphrasis* would be the *Tabula*.

[287]Fabiański, "Renaissance Nudes," 249-251.
[288] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Arrasy,* 51.

3.3. The *Ekphrasis* in the Panegyric

Orzechowski's *ekphrasis* is included toward the end of his panegyric. In the original 1553 published version, it takes up only about nine pages of a total of around seventy-four. This version of the panegyric actually begins with a preface addressed to the son of Jan Tarnowski, castellan of Kraków, who had joined the Viennese court of the future Emperor Ferdinand. Orzechowski writes that he has sent the panegyric to the younger Tarnowski

> …so that you may come to know the praise of King Ferdinand, at whose magnificent court you reside. A great and memorable king who, among all the other things he has graciously given our homeland, has also given us a joyful and much-desired wedding…I have written to you so that, as you blissfully spend your youth at the court of King Ferdinand, you might learn what is taking place in your homeland during your absence.

After praising the Tarnowski family, especially the senior Jan, Orzechowski asks the junior Jan "to keep me among your followers."[289] It is likely that this preface was included for the published version, and that Orzechowski was attempting to curry favour with a new potential benefactor, a member of one of the most powerful magnate families in Poland. Notably, in the published version, Orzechowski never directly addresses Sigismund, although he bestows lavish praise on him throughout.

The panegyric proper begins with an address from Orzechowski to the reader, in which he declares his intentions behind the text:

> I understand that you want to hear from me how our king was wed and how the wedding transpired, the nature of the queen's progress, how she was received, who was present….I will succeed in this, and will not allow you to be spared from such great joy, such that I am not sure it can ever be found. I will tell you about things

[289] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Dzieła*, 105-106.

> that are pleasant to hear, and worthy of knowing, which will remain in our books on Poland, worthy of remembrance.
>
> I will refrain from a high style of speech, for it muddles the senses, and I will also not adopt a low style, for it obscures things. I will speak in a mid-brow manner that would bring you joy and pull you out of all hopelessness. You see what my aim is. Now, it is up to you to listen eagerly about the wedding. The act of listening itself will unite you, for you want to learn as much as possible about the wedding from beginning to end. No one has ever heard nor spoken nor read about one more magnificent in expense, more splendid in grandeur, more pleasant in goodwill.[290]

From here, Orzechowski launches into a laudation of the might, prosperity, and centuries of alliance and intermarriage between the houses of Habsburg and Jagiełło, all of which has led to the marriage between Sigismund and Catherine. He then explains how the marriage was brokered, including how Mikołaj "the Black" Radziwiłł represented the king at the betrothal ceremony in Vienna. Then, he describes Catherine's progress from Vienna to Kraków, with stops in various towns where she was met by dignitaries sent by Sigismund. When Catherine reaches Kraków, he starts his detailed account of the wedding festivities, beginning with a litany of the many bishops, magnates, noble lords, visiting royals, and other dignitaries as they processed through the city to Wawel Cathedral. After a description of the wedding ceremony itself and some of the initial feasting, he stops at the moment when Sigismund and Catherine made their ceremonial entry into the wedding bedchamber on the second night of the celebration, and takes the viewer through an ekphrastic tour of the tapestries adorning the walls.

After the *ekphrasis*, Orzechowski recounts the wedding night ceremony, followed by an overview of the subsequent days' tournaments. In the final pages, he again addresses his readers, exhorting them, "knights of Poland, to support this marriage, and place all your

[290] Ibid., 107-108.

hope in it, for how else can we expect to receive help from God in times of great misfortune if we shun the one [Catherine] whom He has given us?" In the face of external danger (Orzechowski specifically mentions the Turks), "let our understanding with the Austrian house plant the seeds of hope for you." Drawing a parallel between the cultural flourishing of Poland under Bona Sforza and the bright future of the kingdom under Catherine, Orzechowski asserts that "not only the unity but also the magnificence of the kingdom rests on this wedding." His parting words to the reader are as follows:

> I have been more long-winded than I promised, but if you have whiled away any time in listening to this, may you be rewarded with the particular contentment that you have gained from this wedding.[291]

For the purposes of this analysis, it is important to remember that Orzechowski introduces several themes in the panegyric that are echoed and reinforced in the *ekphrasis*. Chief among them is the magnificence of Sigismund, the legitimacy of his rule, his princely attributes, and his illustrious court. Secondly, the panegyric makes multiple references to the emotions evoked by the wedding, especially in the introduction and conclusion addressed to the reader, which describe the hope, joy, and sense of wonder that Orzechowski hopes to convey to the absent reader. This focus on the audience's affective response to the splendour and might of the Polish Crown carries on into Orzechowski's descriptions of the tapestries.

Indeed, based on the generic conventions of *ekphrasis*, it is entirely justifiable, even necessary, to consider it in the context of the surrounding panegyric. A guiding principle for all *ekphrases* is that they should progress from an account of the events preceding, to the ekphrastic event or object itself, and then to the aftermath. Current scholarly consensus dictates that *ekphrasis* was not intended to be a static moment or arrested point, an

[291] Ibid., 144-145.

"ornament" or "foreign body" within a text that "sutures" space, time, and narration, an enclosed space which readers may visit or exit at will.[292] It is not a device designed to "intrude upon" and "freeze" the discursive flow, and "suspend" the arguments of the author.[293] Rather, *ekphrasis* is less of a pause than an interlude that interfaces with, complements, furthers, and reflects on the totality of the narrative.[294] In Ruth Webb's words, *ekphrasis* is "an evocation of a scene unfolding in time."[295] According to Webb, this is the fundamental difference between mere description and ekphrastic narration within a text: while the former creates a narrative pause, the latter produces an intensification of the narrative thanks to enargeic details. Therefore, *ekphrases* within texts cannot be read as independent, tangential passages, but as a key element of the immersive effect (and affect) of the whole.[296] The "ekphrastic moment" allows the subject (in this case, the artwork) to bleed into the surrounding narrative, to stretch and slow the passage of time but never arrest it entirely. Its buildup can be felt in the prior narrative, and its effects can be felt after its formal conclusion.[297] Therefore, in our study of the *ekphrasis*, it will be reasonable to expand the search for meaning-making and image creation beyond the porous boundaries of the *ekphrasis* and into the surrounding panegyric.

Having situated the *ekphrasis* within the surrounding text, we may now move on to a close reading of Orzechowski's tour of the tapestries, and its impact on an interpretation of *Genesis* in terms of Sigismund's kingship.

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[292] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory : Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 179.
[293] Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis:The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 7.
[294] Elsner, "Introduction," 3-4, 6.
[295] Webb, "Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern," 12.
[296] Ibid., 14.
[297] Liliane Louvel, "Types of Ekphrasis: An Attempt at Classification," *Poetics Today* 39, no. 2 (2018): 258-260. See also James Heffernan, "Ekphrasis and Representation," *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (1991): 301.

3.4. Rhetoric and Image-Creation

By centering himself, the narrator and rhetor, as a crucial player in the events, Orzechowski introduces an interesting tension between his text and his alleged inspiration from the *Tabula*. In the latter text, the anonymity of the author (as it was written pseudonymously) allows the moral messages of the *ekphrasis* to take centre stage, rather than the author's engagement in the scenes. In Orzechowski's case, the author begins by announcing himself as the author and narrator, an eyewitness and participant in the wedding, while then focusing much of the core text on the moral messages. On the other hand, the reference to Cebes works to establish Orzechowski's familiarity with the ekphrastic genre to the reader (even though he borrows little from Cebes himself), and this combined with his presence at the wedding festivities constitutes an appeal to authority. In a sense, then, Orzechowski chooses both to subvert the approach of his inspiration and to actively lean into it. He is able to present himself as a worthy and skilled narrator via *ethos*, and then step away to give space for the main focus of the text: the king, by proxy of the tapestries.

Indeed, Orzechowski's self-positioning as a "tour guide" is another direct link to the *ekphrastic* playbook. Alternative translations of the *Progymnasmata* define *ekphrasis* as "a speech which leads one around (*periegematikos*), bringing the subject matter vividly before the eyes."[298] Here, the first part of the definition is crucial, as it centres the role of the author/orator in interpretation and meaning-making. The word *periegematikos* refers to an *ekphrasis* in which the author acts as a guide, taking the listener on a tour of the ekphrastic subject. This approach, along with the references to speech throughout the text, presents the *ekphrasis* as a conversation between rhetor and listener. Some of

[298] Webb, "Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern," 11.

Orzechowski's linguistic choices reflect this: the entire text is addressed to the second person ("you"), and he repeats certain phrases that constantly remind the reader that he is next to them, walking through the chambers and pointing out each tapestry. For example, he opens the *ekphrasis* with the declaration that he "will present them [the tapestries] to you," then starts his tour of the *Noah* set by stating, "First I will show you God, enraged at the progeny of Cain." The phrases that repeat the most are related to sight, recurring in nearly every description of a tapestry. While Orzechowski sometimes writes in the passive voice (e.g. *cernebatur*) to convey that a tapestry itself conveyed something, he also refers to the viewer's perception (e.g. *videres*). In both ways, Orzechowski centres the reader's experience on the act of viewing, of imagining themselves present, not merely of reading his text. For the *Moses* subset, he explicates this fact: he states that he "want[s] to serve those with this work who were not there," and narrates the entire walk through the antechamber as a guide speaking to his guest:

> For this end, I will lead you for a moment out of the bedroom, wherein I will shortly return, and into an antechamber, richly decorated, with tapestries woven with gold showing Moses's embassy to Egypt and his meeting with Pharaoh, then the passage of the Israelites, the passing down of the law, and the war with the Amalekites. Then I will take you to a great hall next to the antechamber of the bedchamber.[299]

The fact that he refers to the viewer in the second person singular stresses the personal nature of the text: he is addressing one person specifically, "you," essentially giving a private tour. His occasional tangential comments on the unveiling also mimic the flow of a conversation, as if he is relating the events to a friend. Perhaps the most notable is his aside on *Paradise Bliss*:

[299] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Arrasy*, 54.

> And the nudity of both had such an effect on the viewers that the men smiled at Eve, and the girls who had come in smiled playfully at Adam. For his unclothed nature revealed his masculinity, and hers her femininity.[300]

In these moments, Orzechowski constantly reminds the reader that he is speaking directly to them and narrating a conversation around the tapestry collection.

As a tour guide, Orzechowski is able to use his authorial power to add context, order, and meaning to the subject, and to canonise an interpretation of it for readers. He accomplishes this in part by using *periegesis* (the root word of *periegematikos*). In contrast to *diegesis*, which literally translates to "leading through," *periegesis* is a more elaborate and detailed tour which draws the reader's attention to certain elements along the way.[301] For Orzechowski, these details mostly focus on the association of Sigismund with his magnificent tapestries and with the biblical patriarchs they depict, as well as the pertinence of the moral messages from the Genesis stories for contemporary audiences. In the most obvious examples of moral glosses, he describes *Cain Flees the Wrath of God* as an "image that teaches us that that the end of godless brethren is always sad," while *The Moral Downfall of Mankind* gives us "proof that the evil crow lays evil eggs", and that Cain's offspring, the godless and sinners, are "most worthy of such a father." His final word on the tapestries is directed toward the king himself, as he reminds Sigismund of their message to him,

> he who in such and sundry examples in the wedding chamber and in each of his rooms placed himself beneath the eyes of a wrathful God, so that, whether waking or sleeping, by night or by day, he and his wife would contemplate the King of Kings above them, in whom there is always a ready punishment for sin.[302]

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[300] Ibid., 51.
[301] Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination, and Persuasion*, 75.
[302] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Arrasy*, 53, 55.

As mentioned in the previous section, *ekphrasis* is able to seep into the rest of the panegyric, with its buildup and denouement palpable beyond what we may consider to be the beginning and ending of the ekphrastic passage. However, not only does *ekphrasis* impact the surrounding text, but the ekphrastic subject as well. According to Tamar Yacobi, by reading *ekphrasis* not as a self-contained whole but as part of a different textual whole (as Webb posits), it opens the door for new meanings, and for new narrative and didactic purposes.[303] If *ekphrasis* is a rhetorical technique that creates images in the mind's eye of the reader/listener, then the rhetor is a painter and the *ekphrasis* is his painting.[304] In fact, the subject within the *ekphrasis* can be seen as a separate entity from the "real subject," due to the two degrees of removal between it and the reader. The "real subject" (for example, a tapestry) is once removed by the ekphrastic author in their verbal interpretation of it, and again as it is imagined by the reader of the *ekphrasis*. This triadic reading event creates what Liliane Louvel terms "the pictorial third."[305] In short, therefore, *ekphrasis* cannot be seen as a mimetic exercise. This also sheds new light on Orzechowski's apparent "errors" in his eyewitness account. Indeed, *ekphrasis* does not presume to replicate its subjects with fidelity, but to incorporate them within the narrative, and to exact a degree of transformative authorial power over them.

In Orzechowski's case, this authorial power is exacted to bolster the image of the patron of the ekphrastic subject: namely, Sigismund Augustus. The beginnings of this agenda can be felt as early as the panegyric's introduction, in which Orzechowski states that he will avoid a "high style of speech, for it muddles the senses," but also a common style, so that all the details of the proceedings are preserved. He will therefore adopt a "mid-

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[303] Tamar Yacobi, "Verbal Frames and Ekphrastic Figuration, in *Interart Poetics. Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media*, ed. Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 37.
[304] Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination, and Persuasion*, 27.
[305] Louvel, "Types of Ekphrasis," 260.

brow" tone that will bring joy to readers.[306] This reflects Aristotle's distinctions between low, middle, and high style of rhetoric, later revised by Cicero, Quintillian, and others. For Cicero, the middle style is aimed at providing pleasure to the audience, whereas for Quintillian, it is aimed to "charm." In other words, the middle style is related to one of the three goals of Ciceronian rhetoric: *delectare*.[307] By adopting the middle style, Orzechowski uses his tone to place himself within a tradition of emotionally-charged speech and writing intended to produce an affective response (in this case, "joy") from the listener/reader. This could be produced by descriptions of the king's and the tapestries' magnificence, but also from Orzechowski aforementioned references to contemporary politics, urging his reader to accept their new Habsburg queen, to support their young king, and to unite as his subjects in order to preserve the kingdom from external dangers and domestic discord. In other words, from the first sentences of the text, the scene is set for both an emotionally and politically charged text in service of the monarch. At the same time, Orzechowski's adoption of the middle style places him in a position of humility relative to the king and his artworks, and his effusive praise of the tapestries' mastery and artistry also suggests that he is allowing the textiles themselves to speak in a high style. As works of creative genius far surpassing his own, only the tapestries are worthy of the style. Although Orzechowski never explicitly states that he lacks the skill to properly describe the tapestries, this interpretation would suggest that the author can convey some of their grandeur, but that the tapestries can only be fully appreciated in person, without an intermediary speaking for them. Considering that the tapestries function as a kind of metonym for the king in the text, this has implications for the magnificence of the king as well, surpassing that which can be described in words.

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[306] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Dzieła,* 107-108.
[307] Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 80-82.

Interestingly, in this same passage, Orzechowski uses verbs of speech, not writing, to refer to himself and his audience. In his introductory paragraphs, he says that he will "speak" about the wedding, and asks the reader to "listen eagerly" to his account. In fact, the very act of listening will "unite" his readers/listeners, for they all "want to learn as much as possible about the beginning and end of the wedding."[308] These allusions to speech and listening may be another meta-reference to the genre (in this case, a homage to the oratorical tradition of classical panegyrics and *ekphrasis*) even though Orzechowski's text was composed for print. However, the phrase "unite" is perhaps even more important, especially considering the aforementioned appeals to political affect. Orzechowski's self-stated aim is to use this wedding to bring his divided countrymen together through their common support of Sigismund's kingship, for which he argues by enumerating Sigismund's numerous virtues and achievements. This aim is echoed in Orzechowski's conclusion, in which he mentions "the particular contentment that you [the reader] have gained from this wedding."[309] We could relate this "contentment" to the "joy" from the introduction, in which case this is more than simply an enjoyment of the text for its literary value, and rather the "contentment" of foreseeing and ushering in a future of concord, peace, and prosperity under Sigismund's strong and virtuous leadership.

Throughout the rest of the text, Orzechowski paints a picture of a magnificent monarch, the new patriarch of a trans-European dynasty. In this sense, he follows in the tradition of epideictic *ekphrasis*, or what Louvel calls "monumental *ekphrasis*," as it erects a figurative "monument" for its subject.[310] According to the *Progymnasmata*, the epideictic exercise *enkomion* required the rhetor to cover the early life, education, and achievements of the subject. In case of any discreditable details from their biography, the rhetor was

[308] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Dzieła,* 107-108.
[309] Ibid., 145.
[310] Louvel, "Types of Ekphrasis," 252.

advised to circumvent them. Moreover, Menander Rhetor's *On Epideictic Speeches* mentions that "proof" of the claims made about the subject must be given. It is not enough to litanise the achievements; it must be made clear that the subject himself "was the planner, the commander, the discoverer of the moment for battle, a marvellous counsellor, champion, general, orator."[311]

Orzechowski takes such an approach in his introduction of Sigismund, his intended patron and the main target of his propitiatory efforts. He presents the king as the

> dignified heir of the Jagiellonian dynasty, who became a king as a child, has never failed to fulfil the honour of his forefathers; who not long ago neither by treachery nor by war, but by justice and mercy triumphed in Moldavia, and it was this warlike and Roman nation that often disrupted the Turks, beat Matthias of Hungary, and scared off Jan Albrecht of Poland, that he [Sigismund] joined to his country in a strange twist of fate. So exceptional is the Jagiellonian name, so full of glory and bravery and respect, that wherever you turn, be it to the east of the sun, or to the west, or to the south, or to the north, you will find many examples of the bravery of this illustrious house. Yet it happens that in a world devoid of progeny, everything has fallen on the one Sigismund Augustus in these years of danger, when he has been unsupported by any offspring and unprotected from destruction."[312]

In other words, Orzechowski appears to follow Menander's advice by giving concrete examples of the king's successes, and highlighting his leading role in them. Orzechowski enforces his claims by comparing the young king to his father, whom Orzechowski eulogised at his funeral. He draws an iconographic parallel between the two Sigismunds through the god Jupiter. Sigismund Augustus is said to "have held sway with Jupiter" over the weather during the wedding, which echoes Orzechowski's epithet of Sigismund I, "the son of Jupiter," from his funeral oration.[313] In all of these ways,

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311 Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination, and Persuasion,* 164.
312 Orzechowski, "Panegyricus,*"* in *Dzieła,* 111-112.
313 Ibid., 137.

Orzechowski sets up the image of Sigismund that the reader carries into the *ekphrasis*. In the first paragraph of his *ekphrasis*, he prepares the reader to link the person of the king and both the magnificence and morals of the tapestries in their minds, for by viewing them,

> you will come to know not only the works of an outstanding artist, but also the mind and innate majesty of the greatest king, which is most fully expressed through his commissioning of such things.[314]

He then ends the *ekphrasis* with an echo of this sentiment, stating: "such was the admirable art and sequence of the hangings which demonstrate the spirit and mind with which Sigismund Augustus has been endowed."[315] By bookending the *ekphrasis* with reminders of the patron's indelible link to his commissions, Orzechowski leaves no room for ambiguity as to who the true protagonist of the text and the tapestries is.

Curiously, however, the morals that Orzechowski extracts from the tapestries are more cautionary than laudatory. The princely virtues that he sets up in the earlier parts of the panegyric are contrasted with the princely vices that may befall a less pious and righteous monarch. Naturally, the implication is not that Sigismund is guilty of these vices, rather that the temptation of sin, especially for those in positions of power, is great, and that all people must guard themselves against it. Here, we may find one other link to Cebes's *Tabula*: the notion that living well requires more moral and intellectual effort than living badly, which can be achieved through sloth and weakness. These morals could apply to any reader, but the conclusion of the *ekphrasis* suggests that they are particularly pertinent for a king who "placed himself beneath the eyes of a wrathful God…in whom there is always a ready punishment for sin." In fact, the sins and calamities that *Genesis* depicts, in Orzechowski's account, can be read as foils for the many attributes of Sigismund

[314] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," Arrasy., 51.
[315] Ibid., 55.

mentioned earlier in the panegyric. For example, unlike the cursed sons of *Genesis*, Cain and Ham, Sigismund is a worthy member of a great lineage who "has never failed to fulfil the honour of his forefathers." Unlike the warmongering descendants of Cain, Sigismund's victories are won "neither by treachery nor by war, but by justice and mercy."

The possible instances of comparative (positive) allusions between Sigismund and the patriarchs seem to focus on Noah. The brief mention that Sigismund "held sway with Jupiter" over the weather at the wedding can be compared to Noah's cooperation with God in surviving the Flood. This could also be a reference to the righteousness of those present at the wedding, especially the royal couple, who were rewarded with beautiful summer weather, in contrast to the faithless "progeny of Cain" who were punished with a storm. Similarly, Orzechowski's comment that "everything has fallen on the one Sigismund Augustus in these years of danger" could be compared to the tale of Noah, who stood alone against the sinful nations and the subsequent flood in protection of his family.

Crucially, these subtexts relating Sigismund to his tapestries are not out of place within the ekphrastic genre, as it was common for ancient *ekphrases* of art associated with or owned by a character (real or fictional) to serve as a stage for exploring and asserting the character's identity. Classical examples include the shield of Heracles, the treasure chest and goblet of Achilles, and the tapestry collection of Ion at Delphi.[316] Ancient *ekphrases* could also use artworks to explore a patron's or addressee's attributes. For example, Virgil's *ekphrasis* of the Shield of Aeneas can be read as propaganda for the Emperor Augustus, as the historical events and virtues that he highlights among the shield's images are those that are most relevant to the imperial-dynastic project and the projected future of Rome.[317] In general, by immortalising the artwork in the *ekphrasis* and his

[316] Elsner, "Introduction," 7.
[317] R.D. Williams, "The Shield of Aeneas," *Vergilius*, no. 27 (1981): 8–11.

epideictic interpretation of it, the author simultaneously immortalises the image of its owner. The artwork and its meaning become a constant, protected from alternative or divergent interpretations, and the owner's identity is thus made stable by proxy.[318]

Moreover, by stretching time and space through an ekphrastic moment, the author creates a "cosmological setting"[319] for these explorations of identity, making the communication of power and majesty all the more potent. Homer makes a clear reference to *ekphrasis* as a stage for image-creation in "The Shield of Achilles," on whose "vast expanse with all his craft and cunning the god [Hephaestus] creates a world of gorgeous immortal work."[320] A similarly literal example can be found in Orzechowski's evocation of the Jagiellonian world: "wherever you turn, be it to the east of the sun, or to the west, or to the south, or to the north, you will find many examples of the bravery of this illustrious house."[321] Later, he highlights the "great hall" where the Noah series hangs, and ends by praising the "sundry examples in the wedding chamber and in each of his [Sigismund's] rooms" which hang "above" the king and his wife. The combination of the massive tapestries that dwarf even the king, the larger-than-life characters, and the grand rooms is not only imposing for Orzechowski and his readers. It will also affect the king himself as he conducts his daily business surrounded by these tapestries: "whether waking or sleeping, by night or by day, he and his wife would contemplate the King of Kings above them."[322] In other words, in Orzechowski's interpretation, the chambers function as a projection of dynastic universalism, but simultaneously maintain a hierarchy of divine power over earthly power.

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[318] Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, 8.
[319] Elsner, "Introduction," 6.
[320] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 1998), 483.
[321] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Dzieła*, 112.
[322] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Arrasy*, 54, 55.

Certain details of the physical tapestries themselves also reflect Sigismund's attributes, especially his magnificence. For example, his opening sentences introduces the "magnificent tapestries, rare and not otherwise seen among kings" which express "the mind and innate majesty of the greatest king."[323] Later, he concludes his tour of the bedchamber by stating, "Such were the decorations of the wedding chamber, worthy of such a great king."[324] Orzechowski also repeatedly mentions the tapestries' use of opulent gold thread, a clear nod to the cost and luxuriousness of the textiles.

Furthermore, Orzechowski uses the very act of commissioning the tapestries as an example of Sigismund's grandeur and wisdom: his tapestry collection "proves the spirit and mind with which Sigismund Augustus has been endowed."[325] In fact, while Orzechowski directly mentions the artist several times, the king is presented as a co-author, whose input is just as important to the finished commission.[326] Orzechowski starts and ends the *ekphrasis* by stating how *Genesis* reflects Sigismund's "mind," and places the text within a panegyric written primarily for Sigismund's glory. In this way, Orzechowski deviates from a common theme in many classical *ekphrases*, which Louvel refers to as "pragmatic" or "technical" *ekphrasis*.[327] As Jaś Elsner notes, a focus on "making," whether by human or divine craftsmen, can be found in the ur-*ekphrasis*, the Shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*, and is echoed by Theocritus, Virgil, and Lucian, among others.[328] In

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[323] Ibid., 51.
[324] Ibid., 54.
[325] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Dzieła*, 135.
[326] He mentions the artist in the introduction: "the remarkable nature of the materials and artistry" and "the work of an outstanding artist." On *Abel's Sacrifice:* "You could see how mad Cain bites his own hand in anger, which the skilled hand of the artist personified in the tapestry behind Cain's back in the form of a woman." On *Cain Flees the Wrath of God:* "The wrathful God looking down at the earth is presented with unbelievable artistry." On *The Moral Downfall of Mankind*: "For the artist skillfully showed how criminal Cain's progeny were." On *God Converses with Noah*: "This tapestry of excellent handiwork hung at the head of the room." On *Noah's Thanksgiving Sacrifice*: "With illustrious artistry it presented the killing of animals as an offering." Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Arrasy*, 51, 53, 54, 55. For more on Orzechowski's discussion of the role of the artist, see Chapter 4.2.
[327] Louvel, "Types of Ekphrasis," 254.
[328] Elsner, "Introduction," 5.

Orzechowski's *ekphrasis*, the patron shares the spotlight with the artist and even eclipses him. Thus, Orzechowski solidifies the tie between the king and his art. This gives Sigismund the claim to authorship as well as patronage and ownership, and presents the tapestries as extensions and reflections of his princely persona.

One could even argue that Orzechowski's focus on the tapestries' realism may have implications for his message to Sigismund, especially if one considers a crucial passage in his *Fidelis subditus*, addressed to the king. In it, Orzechowski urges Sigismund to use mimetic art as a mirror for his own kingship. Drawing on the examples of Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Cranach, he argues that those who can accurately paint themselves (in self-portrait) accomplish the highest feat of painting, and are "considered supreme in art." The king should use them as an example, so that every aspect of his wisdom will be visible in his deeds.[329] Hence, his praise of the lifelike scenes may not be simply praise of the artistic talent on display, but also a hidden moral lesson for the king. If one considers the tapestries, as Orzechowski seems to do, to be an extension of the king's image, then, in light of this passage, his claim that the tapestries reveal the "mind and innate majesty of the greatest king" takes on particular significance.[330] Not only is their subject matter and magnificence linked to his persona, but their mimetic qualities may be interpreted as a reflection of the visibility of his own wisdom and virtue.

The rich and descriptive language Orzechowski uses also befits the splendour of the artworks and the grandeur of the stories they present. Here, he appears to be following the advice of several *Progymnasmata* authors: in the third edition of the textbook (c. 350-400

[329] "Qua in re idem facies, quod pictores solent, qui cum specimen artis edunt, ad speculum ipsi se pingunt, quod quidem in pictura est summum. Quod si ii vultus suos ex speculo penicillo asse- qui non possunt, tanto minus creduntur posse aliorum. Illi vero qui hoc possunt, summi in arte habentur. Quales in Germania vidimus olim Durerium Norimbergae, & Lucam Vitembergae. Ad horum exemplum tibi quoque efficiendum est, ut omnis ratio tuae sapientiae, in tua vita mihi appareat." Orzechowski, *Fidelis subditus* (Kraków: Łazarz Andrysowicz, 1580), 50-51.
[330] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Arrasy*, 51.

AD), Aphthonios writes that the language should reflect or imitate (*sunexomoiousthai*) the subject matter: "if the subject is florid," says Hermogenes in his second edition (2nd cent. AD), "let the style be florid, too."[331] Orzechowski's text is brimming with such florid descriptions, but those that especially stand out are the moments in which he slows his own rhythm to elaborate on noteworthy details. For example, in *Cain Kills Abel*, he takes time to describe "the face of the fierce tyrant, wonderfully presented: the taut neck, the crazed eyes, the tormented face, the bristled hair, and finally the blow itself, dictated by anger and directed at his brother." In the next tapestry, *Cain Flees the Wrath of God,* he pauses to contemplate the remains of Abel, "covered with gore, disfigured by pallour, terrifying to behold."[332] His enumeration of the atrocities of Cain's progeny in *The Moral Downfall of Mankind* also paint a sordid picture:

> There you could see the rape of the noble virgins for the purpose of adultery, the violation of the matrons, the pillaging of cities, the theft of private property, the bloodshed and blatant violence, such that this progeny was most worthy of such a father.[333]

The most vivid description is reserved for *The Flood*: aptly, perhaps, as it is one of the largest and certainly the most dynamic and stylistically complex tapestry. In Orzechowski's words:

> On the fourth you could see the heavens split with a downpour, the open abyss, and the skies pouring out a storm with thunder and lightning. Struck with fear, the godless progeny fell to the ground. Here, you could see the shameful flight of Cain's progeny, a sign of their guilty consciences, some climbing trees in the overflowing waters, others climbing exposed rocks, and others seeking the high mountains. This tapestry was so full of confusion and so terrified the viewer that he himself, struck

[331] Cited in Elsner, "Introduction," 1.
[332] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Arrasy,* 53.
[333] Ibid., 54.

> dumb at such a horrible sight, feared for himself in the flood and longed for the Ark.[334]

From these descriptions, it would appear to the reader that Orzechowski is more interested in the tapestries' depictions of violence, death, destruction, and fear than the scenes of comparative calm and peace. *God Converses with Noah* and the central scene of *Paradise Bliss*, for example, receive much less attention than the more dramatic episodes. Even his interpretation of the rainbow in the rather joyful scene of *God Blesses Noah's Family*, a symbol of salvation and divine protection, is somewhat ominous in tone:

> …one colour, like water, maintain[s] our memory of the terrible flood. The second pale-coloured, promising that the Church will never be without its cross. The third like fire, which never ends, showing us the eternal punishment awaiting the godless.[335]

Considering the *ekphrasis* from start to finish, there is a noticeable tone shift from the first paragraph, in which Orzechowski exalts the king and his marvellous commissions, and the majority of the tapestry descriptions. This carries through to the final paragraph, which does initially return to the laudatory tone of the description ("Such was the admirable art and sequence of the hangings which demonstrate the spirit and mind with which Sigismund Augustus has been endowed") but ends with the solemn reminder that Sigismund is beholden to "the King of Kings above [him], in whom there is always a ready punishment for sin." Considering the tenor of Orzechowski's past treatises to the king mentioned in section 3.1, this is perhaps unsurprising, but it is an unusual choice for a piece that is included within an otherwise celebratory wedding panegyric. Part of the reason for this may simply be Orzechowski's personal experience with the tapestries: if this was indeed his mood upon viewing them, he may have wanted to convey this most faithfully to

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[334] Ibid., 54-55.
[335] Ibid., 55.

the viewer. Given Orzechowski's obvious aims with the text and rhetorical talents, however, it is unlikely that any part of the panegyric is not self-conscious. One possibility is that Orzechowski knew that a surface-level description of the tapestries that focused solely on their visual and material magnificence did not do justice to their didactic depth, nor to the depth of the "spirit and mind" which had led Sigismund to commission them (nor indeed to Orzechowski's own literary flair, which he hoped to showcase to the king). The story of *Genesis* is, for the most part, a story of turmoil and adversity, punctuated by moments of prosperity and bliss. Besides the obvious artistic value of the tapestries, which Orzechowski highlights multiple times, the series is not just to be admired but to be contemplated. Orzechowski's text suggests that their moral richness, not just their material richness, is why the tapestries represent "the mind and innate majesty" of their patron.

Even beyond the actual narrative content of the tapestries, this perspective is in accordance with the presentation of Sigismund in the rest of the panegyric. In the aforementioned passage in which Orzechowski praises Sigismund's various attributes and accomplishments, he places his illustrious kingship on a backdrop of tumultuous times. Sigismund, in Orzechowski's estimation, is not simply a mighty ruler, but one who has essentially triumphed against the odds. By the archetypes of the *Tabula*, he has "lived well." He has faced adversity since his coronation as a child, "years of danger…unsupported by any offspring and unprotected from destruction," yet he prevails and rules in splendour.[336] In this sense, the tapestries are an ideal mirror for Sigismund's kingship. Their magnificence runs in tandem with the dark and dramatic stories they depict, in which the patriarchs emerge prosperous and victorious despite everything.

[336] Orzechowski, "Panegyricus," in *Dzieła*, 111.

3.5. Conclusion

Unfortunately for the author, Orzechowski's panegyric did not have its desired effect. Sigismund was indifferent to it and never responded to it, seemingly recalling Orzechowski's public attacks on his late wife, and did not offer him the position of court historian. The panegyric was published in 1553, with the aforementioned addition of the preface to the younger Jan Tarnowski, but quickly disappeared from the public eye and from circulation. It was only unearthed and republished before the wedding of Sigismund III Vasa to Constance of Austria in 1605, for which the *Genesis* tapestries were repurposed.

The immediate fate of the panegyric was likely spurred on by Orzechowski's next publication, which he was writing at the same time as the panegyric: his *Annales* of Sigismund I's later years and Sigismund Augustus's early reign, to be presented to the king as a gift in 1554. According to Orzechowski's biographer Jerzy Starnawski, this was another attempt to win the vacant position of royal chronicler. Unfortunately, while Orzechowski tried to tread diplomatically through some of the controversial events, such as the Chicken War, his candid discussions of Sigismund Augustus's personal matters, especially the dramas surrounding his spurned first wife and scandalous second, would lead to the king's icy reception of the finished text. The *Annales* would only be published in 1611 in a censored version.

Orzechowski himself was finally cleared of all charges of heresy in 1561 by Paul IV. The issue of his marriage was never resolved, having been referred to the Council of Trent but never discussed, even though Orzechowski campaigned for its resolution until his death. In the remaining years of his life, Orzechowski published another wedding panegyric, this one for the younger Jan Tarnowski in 1558, and a biography of the elder Tarnowski in 1561. His most important remaining works included *Chimaera* (1560), a

treatise on the Reformation, *Quincunx* (1563), a Ciceronian political/religious dialogue between a papist, a reformer, and Orzechowski, and *Dyalog albo rozmowa około egzekucji Polskiej Korony* ("Dialogue, or a Conversation about the Execution of the Polish Crown," 1563) regarding the executionist movement and religious politics. Orzechowski died in 1566 at the age of fifty-three, survived by five children. To the end of his life, even in his last will, he steadfastly proclaimed his Catholic faith.[337]

Returning to the 1553 *ekphrasis*, Orzechowski's text cannot be divorced from his personal circumstances and motivations, nor from its genealogy of the Second Sophistic rhetorical textbooks, the most prominent ancient *ekphrases*, and the continuing Renaissance humanist tradition of the genre. However, while Orzechowski's descriptions of the splendour and artistry of the tapestries may have been influenced and enhanced by this context, this is not a reason to disregard the value of his account. We ourselves can look at the same tapestries that Orzechowski saw that night at Wawel, and understand that his was an understandable and expected reaction to the unveiling, one that was likely shared by many of his fellow guests.

As a self-fashioned "tour guide" during the unveiling, Orzechowski is once again operating within ekphrastic norms. The *ekphrasis* is essentially a conversation addressed to a singular "you," a personal musing between two people on the tapestries and the king, which uses the language of sight to recreate an individual viewing experience. The creative liberties and personal glosses he peppers throughout are, therefore, expected, shedding a different light on the aforementioned "errors" in his "eyewitness account" of the unveiling. If one considers *ekphrasis* to be, first and foremost, an affective rather than mimetic exercise, then the issue of verisimilitude between the "real" subject and its ekphrastic

[337] Starnawski, "Wstep," 43, 46-47, 53-54, 61-62.

counterpart becomes less salient. By its nature, *ekphrasis* must always be at a twofold remove from its subject, mediated by author and reader. The aim of the genre (in its classical understanding) is not to achieve the most accurate replication of the subject, but to bring it to life, perhaps even amplify its splendour for literary or ideological impact, and then to use it as a tool for other rhetorical aims (*epideixis*, *pathos*, etc.). As Tamar Yacobi notes, the unreliability of the author should not be understood as a failure. Unreliability, understood here as incongruencies between subject and description, assumes "reliability" as a norm of the genre, and assigns a value judgement to deviations from it, instead of considering them either as stylistic devices or means to a rhetorical end. The ekphrastic author is essentially subjective, and the text is a subjective experience immortalised in writing.[338]

Consequently, the discrepancies between Orzechowski's list of the tapestries and their actual subject matter does not necessarily detract from the quality of the *ekphrasis* as an "accurate" representation of the artworks. They detract from the "reliability" of the ekphrasis as an inventory of the tapestries, but that is not the aim of the text. The ekphrastic text is an independent entity, which relies only on its relationship to a reader's mind imagining the subject, and not to the real subject itself. The main power of the ekphrastic author is the transformation of the subject by canonising a description and interpretation of it—one that may not fully correspond to reality.

This should be understood as Orzechowski's primary goal with the text: to canonise a description and interpretation of *Genesis*, and of Sigismund's persona by proxy. By examining the *ekphrasis* and the surrounding panegyric in tandem, we discover the author's strategy of crafting an image of the king's magnificence and princely attributes. While a

[338] Tamar Yacobi, "Interart Narrative: (Un)Reliability and Ekphrasis." *Poetics Today* 21, vol. 4 (2000): 713-714.

proportionally small part of the entire text, the *ekphrasis* rhymes with the whole. The enlightenment and inspiration that Orzechowski hopes to bestow on the reader in his introduction is encapsulated and epitomised in the affective power of the "magnificent tapestries, rare and not otherwise seen among kings." The virtues that Orzechowski lists in his introduction to Sigismund are presented in the negative in the sinful deeds of Cain, and echoed through the heroism of Noah. The hardships and triumphs that Sigismund has faced as king are a reflection of the *Genesis* narrative. Sigismund's mastery of politics is matched by the depth of his cultural and theological erudition, "which is most fully expressed through his commissioning of such things." All in all, Orzechowski uses these comparisons and contrasts to present a detailed image of Sigismund: a magnificent, righteous, pious, and learned monarch, one who has overcome adversity in glory, and who is well-positioned to lead his kingdom through "years of danger."

The tapestries, in fact, are more of a means to an end than an ekphrastic subject in themselves. By immortalising the artworks in his text, Orzechowski is inevitably immortalising the person and image of the king, and using the ekphrastic moment as a cosmic stage for the exploration and exaltation of his identity. The tapestries serve as this cosmic stage, as an extension and reflection of his persona. In this reading, Sigismund emerges as the true subject of the *ekphrasis*, with the tapestries and their themes as his mirror. Thus, we are finally left with the question: what does this mirror reflect?

In order to answer this question, we must begin our reading of the tapestries themselves. The first level of analysis is that of their materials and style. Both of these elements play a role in the didactic and affective impact of the series, and are therefore a key factor in the overall project of Sigismund's image and agenda through *Genesis*.