A Web of Fantasies
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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Salzman-Mitchell, Patricia B.
A Web of Fantasies: Gaze, Image, and Gender in Ovid's Metamorphoses.
The Ohio State University Press, 2005.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/28257.

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that the ‘male gaze’ is active and penetrative is a well-established tenet of feminism. This performative power is stressed in Kaplan’s observation that men’s gazes carry the power of action and possession, while women can return the gaze but cannot act upon it. Her contention is particularly relevant for the discussion of the present chapter and to Roman conceptions of seeing and sexuality. Latin views on the gaze transpire clearly in a poignant entry of Varro’s *De Lingua Latina*:

> video a visu, <id a vi>: qui<n>que enim sensuum maximus in oculis: nam cum sensus nullus quod abest mille passus sentire possit, oculorum sensus vis usque pervenit ad stellas. Hinc:
> visenda vigilant, vigilium invident.

et Acci:

> cum illud o<d>ui<s> violavit <is>, qui invidit invidendum a quo etiam violavit virginem pro vit<i>avit dicebant; aeque eadem modestia potius cum muliereuisse quam concubuisse dicebant.

“I see” from “vision,” that is, from *vis* “force,” for the greatest of the five senses is in the eyes. For while no sense can perceive what is a thousand paces away, the strength of the eyes’ perception reaches up to the stars. Hence:

> They watch what must be watched, and hate the vigil
> And in Accius:
> When he [Actaeon], who looked upon what must not be seen, violated [her/Diana] with his eyes,
From which they even said “he violated the virgin” instead of “he ruined her,” and with the same modesty they said that someone “was” with his wife rather than “he lay together” with her. (De Lingua Latina 6.80)

Varro’s false derivation of video from vis can be taken nonetheless as a reflection of Roman ideology about the gaze and can be linked with Western phallogocentricism. Vis is sometimes associated with sexual violence and thus Varro connects seeing with the male power to violate the female body. This link between vision and sexual potency points to the performative power of the male gaze. The very word for man in Latin, vir, has also been connected in a mistaken etymological derivation with the word for strength, vis. A similar relation is latent in the Latin word acies which means at the same time a sharp edge or point, vision, and sharpness or keenness of the sight, thus implying a penetrative power in the gaze. The fact that acies is used in the semantic field of battle may also be relevant for Roman ideas about the gaze, as it also involves an active advancement of a military troop or line. Finally, one may also consider here that “the eye is a tactile creature, an agent of human contact,” as Claude Gandelman states, and that in a more haptic (and eroticized?) form of vision the gaze “touches” the surface of an image. In a simplifying way, one could say, for example, that in the erotic look of Jupiter on Callisto, there is always an implicit yearning for touch. This chapter, then, will explore these connotations of seeing, namely, the penetrative and intrusive aspects of looking, in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, and will also investigate its variations, destabilizations, and deconstructions.

RE-VIEWING RAPE

Rape is a pervasive theme in Ovid’s epic and a situation where the male gaze is acting, controlling, and penetrating. Jupiter is the most prominent rapist in the poem, who in his various adventures maintains a pattern: he sees, he falls in love, he chases and deceives and finally ravishes the woman. The first victim of the lord of the thunderbolt—and the first ‘true’ rape victim in the poem—is Io in Book 1, whose father, Inachus, laments her loss, not knowing what has happened. Soon her fate is known.

The first contact of Jupiter with the girl is achieved through the eyes: viderat a patrio redeuntem Iuppiter illam/ flumine/ “Jupiter had seen her returning from her father’s stream” (Met.1.588–89). The god woos her with words, but the girl escapes (Met.1.597). As usual with gods, and
Jupiter in particular, there is a display of masculinity in the speech of the wooer. Here, Jupiter remarks that he holds the scepter and throws the thunderbolts (“sed qui caelestia magna/ sceptra manu teneo, sed qui vaga fulmina mitto”/ “But I am the one who holds the celestial scepter in his mighty hand, I am the one who hurls the wandering thunderbolts,” Met. 1. 595–96). Both elements are well-recognized phallic symbols. The girl tries to escape but soon after, Jupiter catches up and rapes her (“tenuitque fugam rapuitque pudorem/ He held her flight and raped her,” Met. 1.600). What began as a penetrative gaze is followed by a grasp/detention of the victim by the aggressor implicit in tenuit and concludes with an act of penetration. The power of action involved in the male gaze is fairly obvious, but there are aspects of the story which have been disregarded, perhaps because the feminist efforts to dismantle and expose patriarchal strictures have led critics to focus almost solely on Jupiter and Io. What is missing in much of the discussions is Juno. To rape Io, Jupiter needs to blind his divine sister and consort. He covers the scene with a thick dark cloud (“cum deus inducta latas caligine terras/ occuluit . . . / “When the god covered the wide land with a dark mist spread over it,” Met. 1.599–600). In contrast with her husband, Juno’s gaze cannot penetrate the darkness, and she cannot see. Nonetheless, she senses that she is being wronged. Juno’s gaze, like that of most gods, is vertical. She looks downward from the sky (“Interea medios Iuno despexit in Argos” Meanwhile Juno looked down upon the middle of Argos,” Met. 1.601; “atque suus coniunx ubi circumspicit . . . quem postquam caelo non repperit/ “And when his wife looked around to see where her husband was . . . after she did not find him in the sky,” Met. 1.605 and 607; “ait delapsaque ab aethere summo/ “She said so sliding down from the top of heaven,” Met. 1.608). The vertical gaze pertains to deities and males but is felt as devious in women.

A witty twist operates in the passage. While Jupiter changes Io into a white heifer to disguise her, Juno can still see who she is. Juno asks for the heifer as a present and Jupiter feels that “non dare suspectum est/ “Not to give it to her would be suspicious,” (Met. 1.618) and that if he did not give it to her poterat non vacca videri!/ “She could seem not to be a cow!” (Met. 1.621). Suspicere points precisely at the idea of seeing what is underneath the appearances, and this is exactly what the cow-eyed goddess does, which also represents a more feminine and alternative way of seeing and reading. Perhaps, the askance position of Juno’s gaze may hint at the way females read and look at/in Metamorphoses, placed in an oblique spot, not being able to read like men, yet not having a clearly constructed place as women. But perhaps this very oblique positioning opens up to more
and different readings for women than a straightforward gaze. Juno’s “sus-
picion” can be then taken as meta-literary and programmatic.

Interestingly, the play on eyes goes on, as the girl is put under the cus-
tody of Argus, the monster with one hundred eyes. Argus’ eyes are, how-
ever, surrogates for Juno’s and in this sense the oblique quality of her gaze
is developed further. While the goddess has certain power to control the
girl with the gaze, she has no rule against males, neither Jupiter, nor Mer-
cury, who puts all of Argus’ watchful eyes to sleep with the story and phan-
tasia of Pan and Syrinx. Mercury finally cuts off Argus’ head, but Juno, in
an effort to preserve the power of her surrogate’s gaze, collects Argus’ eyes
and places them in the feathers of her bird, the peacock (Met.1.722–23).
Later in Book 2 she flies across the skies in her chariot borne by peacocks
(habili Saturnia curru,/ ingreditur liquidum pavonibus aethera pictis,/ tam
nuper pictis caeso pavonibus Argol “The daughter of Saturn advances
through the flowing air in her swift chariot drawn by decorated peacocks,
decorated only recently after the death of Argus,” Met. 2.531–33). This
symbolic decapitation of Argus is also a form of castration. Juno as a
female cannot control her gaze and is overwhelmed by masculine vis. Not
only is her own gaze easily obstructed, but she also ends up in a sadly
mocking and fetishistic gesture of carrying Argus’ eyes as decorative blind
spots on her peacocks. The hundred eyes of Argus have become, from
being powerful and controlling, passive articles of visual enhancement of
the birds. Juno then represents an intersection in the axes divine/human
and male/female. As goddess she manages to possess a gaze, which can
have some effective power over humans; but against the divine male, her
eyes become disarmed and nonperformative. Yet the eyes of Argus on the
peacock may recapture the power of the female gaze even after decapita-
tion by keeping the idea that the matrona has eyes out everywhere for the
security of the domus. Thus Juno is not so easily defeated as she can seem,
for, like a matrona, she wins by the appearance of submission.

It can also be added that Juno’s jealousy (in-vidia) is based on a desire to
regain Jove’s gaze, which had been placed on Io, for herself. It is significant
that Juno punishes Io by throwing the horrifying image of a fury before
the girl’s eyes and blinding her from knowledge and sense of reality:

\[\text{horriferamque oculis animoque obiecit Erinyn} \]
\[\text{paelicis Argolicae stimulosque in pectore caecos} \]
\[\text{condidit et profugam per totum exercuit orbem.}\]
She cast the image of the horrifying Erinys before the eyes and mind of the Argive concubine, placed hidden goads in her heart and pestered her in flight throughout the whole world. (Met. 1.725–27)

There is here an interesting struggle for the possession of the gaze. While Juno has been striving to see and to regain Jupiter's gaze for herself, she now imposes *stimulos caecos* on her rival. This is an interesting phrase because although it means “hidden goads,” *caecos* can also allude to the blindness of madness imposed on Io. The fact that Juno throws a dreadful *phantasia* to terrify and destroy the girl preannounces, and is in tune with, the interactions between Minerva, Envy, and Aglauros in Book 2. It is curious here that one of the epithets for Juno in Homer and elsewhere is *βοώπις*, the “cow-eyed.” This is a rather odd, even unflattering epithet which indicates some quality both of the goddess's gaze, probably that she has wide and powerful eyes, and of her visual appearance. It is said that this attribute of Hera in Homer may be a relic of the time when the goddess was theriomorphic, but according to Kirk this is doubtful. Instead, Kirk suggests that *βοώπις* may mean “with placid gaze,” like that of a cow. However, given the restlessness of Juno’s soul and gaze, this seems doubtful.

There is a curious coincidence in the episode. Juno is the jealous matron who has been deprived of her husband's attention and through the Homeric epithet she is in some way assimilated to a cow. It is most interesting in this respect that out of all possible creatures on earth, Jupiter decides to transform Io into a heifer, who is not only called a *vacca* (Met. 1.612 and 621) or *iuvenca* (Met. 611, 652, 745), but also a *bos* (Met.1.612 and 743). Io's transformed shape offends Juno in the very locus of her sight, as Jupiter seems to have replaced one *bos* with another and the “informed reader,” to borrow Fish's term, will be delighted at the recollection of the Homeric name. Likewise, it is probably because of Juno's “cow-ish” quality that she can recognize that Io is not a true *bos* and see beyond appearances.

In Book 2, Jupiter chances to see Callisto, a nymph of Diana's cohort, in a deep forest (*Iuppiter ut vidit fessam et custode vacantem . . . / “When Jupiter saw her tired and unguarded . . . ,” Met. 2.422*). He soon decides to approach her. Ovidian wit and humor are displayed in the clever sound-play of *vacantem* and *vacca*, the name to identify Io in the previous rape episode. One could suppose that he does not only see Callisto “without a custos,” but that he also sees her as a “cow.” Thus, despite the promises to Juno that Io would not be a cause for her care ever again, he
has done it one more time, and the play on vacca and vacantem points to Callisto being another Io. The *hoc certe furtum* (“for sure this deceit”) of line 423 tells the reader to think back and reflect on the connections between the episodes of Io and Callisto. Jupiter’s penetrative gaze at the beginning translates into action and Callisto is ravished:

illa quidem contra, quantum modo femina posset
(adspiceres utinam, Saturnia, mitior esses),
illa quidem pugnat, sed quem superare puella,
quisve lovem poterat? . . .

She indeed fights back, indeed she does, as much as a woman can (if only you had seen her, Saturnia, you would be kinder), but whom could a girl overcome? Or who could overcome Jupiter? (*Met.* 2.434–37)

He is here again concerned with Juno seeing and knowing about his adventures. What Jupiter does is something that the goddess cannot see. But what would happen if she were actually allowed to see? The text assumes that she would align with the rape victim. If this were the case, then Jupiter is here preventing sisterhood and asserting the power of the phallus over feminine alliances. Furthermore, this prevention of sisterhood is seen in Diana’s rejection of Callisto at the discovery of her pregnancy. The narrative delay in the uncovering of Callisto’s rape displays Ovid’s sense of humor and his anti-mimetic and anti-realistic taste, as it is absurd that the goddess had not recognized a nine-month pregnancy before. While it is true that the nymphs and goddess do not know whether Callisto had been raped or consented to sex, Diana never even gives her the opportunity to explain and rejects her immediately. Instead, the text accuses her with the ideological weight of words like *culpa* (*Met.* 1.452) and *crimen* (*Met.* 2.462). Finally, the pool acts as a mirror that discloses truth (even though Callisto doesn’t look directly into it), for it is the locus where Callisto is exposed, a crucial moment that will change her life and conclude in transformation. Interestingly, while Juno struggles to destroy the girl’s *forma* by turning her into an awful bear, Callisto and her son end up as very visible stars in the sky. Then again Juno is mocked and humiliated, and the final prohibition to the stars not to “bathe” in the waters of the seas seems mild and insufficient for Juno’s wrath.

In the same book, Jupiter has another adventure, Europa. There is no specific mention of the god’s gaze in this story. He transforms himself into a bull to seduce her on the shores, but it is actually the girl who does the looking:
The daughter of Agenor looks at him with admiration because he is so beautiful, because he threatens no battles. (Met. 2.858–59)

Her gaze, however, is powerless and nonperformative while he is actually shown in action. Likewise, her gaze cannot penetrate the meanings behind the aspect of the bull, that is, that he is a fake bull. Europa does the looking over Jupiter, yet her gaze is not ‘male,’ as it does not control. In fact, it is the god who acts upon it, runs away with her, and finally rapes her. Is Europa’s a ‘feminine’ gaze? or rather what would a ‘feminine’ gaze entail? If one understands feminine as the opposite of masculine, then if the male gaze is performative, penetrative, controlling, and objectifying, Europa’s gaze is feminine as it is the contrary. The interesting thing about this story is that the male, not even looking, and by his very image seems to control and be able to penetrate the girl later. Although the reader does not see Jupiter directly looking, we could—based on what we already know about how gods fall in love—suppose that he has previously seen her and loved her. In the three episodes discussed up to now, Io, Callisto, and Europa, the standard view of the monolithic male gaze seems to work quite well. The three girls have no power over the gaze of a male god.

Conversely, in Juno there is an attempt to possess an active gaze, though askew, which, although it does not achieve its purposes completely successfully, provides the story with the twists and spice necessary to entice the interest of the reader and seduce him. Thus, while the author still maintains the supremacy of the male gaze and in the end preserves the gender balance of power relations, the narrative needs women and women’s gazes. Ovid then exploits the possibility of women looking to turn the world of Metamorphoses into a more complex and multifaceted one.

Finally, regarding the role of the reader, critics have proposed a very stimulating audience-oriented interpretation of Argus, where his fate reflects on the dangers for the audience of falling asleep during the performance of the poem. Says Wheeler, “The fate of Argus tells us that continuing participation in the narrative transaction is, figuratively speaking, a matter of life and death.” But what are the gender assumptions for the reader? On the one hand, one can say that the male reader—or the female reader in a trans-sex identification—aligns his/her gaze with Jupiter’s as dominating and controlling force. But on the woman’s side, there are various other possibilities. One is to identify with Juno as offended matrona, who, as it is common, sees the rape victim as guilty of her misfortune; the
other is to sympathize with Io, Callisto, and Europa. The interesting design of the episodes is that Ovid seems to split the female audience, which inhibits the possibility of sisterhood—that is, the possibility to be with Juno and the maidens at the same time and understand that in the end they are all victims of patriarchy. Furthermore, for a woman reader and viewer, the embedded *phantasia* of Syrinx and Pan and the consequences for Argus, the internal audience, constitute a warning that they need to be witnesses of rape and keep their eyes open.\(^{16}\) Io being the first actual rape of the poem (Daphne avoids physical rape) is an exemplary instance of how one should read sexual violation. If a woman reader does not want to be decapitated and lose her gaze, she must keep awake and listen to the stories. In this sense, the two critical movements of interpretation dealing with women in Ovid may be applied. If we see a defender of patriarchal hierarchies in Ovid, we (I am assuming a collective female *we* here) may think that he wants us to see so that we “learn the lesson.” If, on the contrary, we see in *Metamorphoses* a text that is sympathetic to women, we may take these stories as exposure and denunciation of what women must be aware of.

Apollo’s first love affair is Daphne.\(^{17}\) Once Cupid has pierced him with an erotic arrow, his attraction to Daphne is envisioned as visual: *Phoebus amat visaeque cupit conubia Daphnes*/*Phoebus loves her and desires marriage with Daphne when he sees her* (*Met.* 1.490). Further, Cupid takes revenge over Apollo with two shafts of opposite effect: a golden one provokes love; the other, made of lead, produces the rejection of love in Daphne (*Met.* 1.468–71), golden being a particularly erotic color related to the fire of passion.\(^{18}\) The lover is here someone who has been previously penetrated by Cupid, which adds complexity to the sexual balance between penetrator and penetrated and aligns Apollo with the elegiac lover. There is a battle over masculinity where Apollo and Cupid dispute over who is more penetrative, whose arrows have greater power (*Met.* 1.456–65). Cupid wounding Apollo stages the complexity of the standard pattern applied by historians of sexuality to the ancient world. That is, the active and penetrative partner holding power and preponderance over the passive or receptive partner.\(^{19}\)

spectat inornatos collo pendere capillos
et "quid, si comantur?" ait. videt igne micantes
sideribus similes oculos, videt oscula, quae non
est vidisse satis. . . .
He watches her unarranged hair hanging over her neck and “what if they were combed?” he says. He sees her eyes shining with fire like stars, he sees her lips and it is not enough for him to look at them. (Met. 1.497–500)

Apollo desires what he sees and Daphne becomes a pleasurable spectacle for his eyes. Verbs of seeing like specto and video (as in visa decens followed by her description in Met. 1.527) act as initiators of the narration, focalizers and boundary markers of visual images. Trespassing these boundaries implies an act of visual penetration that intrudes into the picture and the text. They act in a similar way as phrases with est plus a locative word in ekphrastic description. The visual construction of Daphne that we see here is focalized through Apollo’s eyes. It is worth noting that the above verses present a mixture of actual seeing and phantasia. While Apollo definitely sees the girl, and her flowing hair could be an ‘actual’ aspect of the running virgin, her glittering eyes and her kisses are more a product of his ‘phantasy.’ Because he desires, he imagines that she desires as well. The phrase micantes oculos recalls the erotic-attractive eyes of Cynthia in Propertius 1.1 and may even convey a hint of orgasm, as in Ars Amatoria 2.721. But Daphne never looks back and this points to the image being a product of Apollo’s lust. Likewise, the use of oscula is provocative because, while the reader could understand the word as simply “mouth,” as some translators do, the meaning “kisses” is also possible. This duality endows the text with typical Ovidian humor and ambiguity and if one reads oscula as kisses, Apollo obviously does not see them with his eyes but with his mind, whether these kisses are his, hers, or mutual. However, by wondering what Daphne would look like if her hair were combed, Apollo shows a desire to change her, to modify her rather than to respect the image that she has chosen for herself.

But seeing is not enough and his gaze needs to become action. Apollo’s active gaze results in Daphne’s flight. It is true, however, that actual penetration is not manifest in the story because the girl changes into a tree and thus escapes imminent rape. Nevertheless, the laurel finally ‘consents’ to become the tree of Apollo, upon which he exerts control and power and which will always, with its presence, be a symbol of Daphne’s absence. The transformation into a tree bears further metaliterary connotations, for Daphne is finally enclosed by the bark of the laurel (libro, Met. 1.549), which, as has been amply shown by the critics, involves a word play with “book.” Daphne transformed into a tree is thus included in the book of Metamorphoses and identifies with the dura/scripta puella of Latin elegy, while Apollo the lover becomes the elegiac ama-
So what began with Apollo's act of looking and his visual focalization of Daphne's image is now transformed into text. Daphne's episode thus embodies the transformation of image into text that is so pervasive in *Metamorphoses*.

Of the love affairs of Apollo in *Metamorphoses*, two are young boys: Cyparissus (Met.10.106ff) and Hyacinthus (10.162ff). Yet in neither episode is Apollo's gaze mentioned as a possessive and penetrative force. Both boys are transformed, Cyparissus into a tree and Hyacinthus into a flower. It is noteworthy, however, that in the one moment in these episodes that Apollo's gaze is mentioned, it does not objectify but rather produces an introspective effect in the god:

Phoebus ait “videoque tuum, mea crimina, vulnus. tu dolor es facinusque meum: mea dextera leto inscribenda tuo est. ego sum tibi funeris auctor.”

Phoebus said, “I see your wound, which is my crime; you are my sorrow and guilt and my right hand should be branded with your death. I am the cause of your funeral.” (Met.10.197–99)

Likewise, the loves of Apollo with boys are never envisioned as rapes but rather as scenes of mutual love and camaraderie. Though there is a power relation between the active dominant partner and the passive or submissive one, in the homosexual relation the boy is not visually objectified in the same way as women are. The narrator, Orpheus, who has rejected the company of women and is a strong advocate of homosexual love, carefully chooses these two stories. Thus the positive, nonviolent relationship between gods and boys is obviously biased and tinted by Orpheus's agenda.

But what happens when goddesses have affairs with boys? Venus loves Adonis, in a story where her son's arrows (Met.10.526) pierce her. But the relationship shows more signs of camaraderie than overmastering and Adonis does not appear as a spectacle until his death when Venus sees him from the sky (Met.10.720–22). Similar is the case of Galatea and Acis, where the lovers enjoy peacefully each other's company without visual violent domination from the woman. The boy is a spectacle, but one that does not provoke a violent desire (Met.13.753–54). In neither case is there violence between the lovers as with Apollo and Jupiter.
But can a woman possess a penetrative gaze? Would she want to? What would this entail? Women are normally 'nonpenetrative' in sex, thus their active sexuality needs to be defined with a different parameter. The closest we get to penetrative sexuality by a woman in *Metamorphoses* is probably Salmacis. The nymph does not follow her sisters in the virginal tasks of Diana. Instead she concentrates on her toilet, using her pool as mirror (*quid se deceat, spectatas consultit undas/* “She checks her image in the mirror-like waters to see what may become her,” Met. 4.312). Salmacis looking at her image in a pool cheats expectations of readers who imagine that they will find another Narcissus-like story of self-absorption. Instead, Salmacis falls in love with the boy Hermaphroditus when he comes to bathe in her pool. The fact that she is picking flowers right before she sees Hermaphroditus also implies an innovation, for scenes of girls picking flowers often symbolize the innocence of the virgin who will soon be “de-flowered.” Instead, Salmacis is the sexual aggressor here. These two details can again be taken as narrative challenges of Alcithoe, the daughter of Minyas who narrates the story, to the general narrator's motifs to prove her originality. This, of course, would work only if one reads Alcithoe's story in a releasing way. Salmacis' desire commences with the eyes. She sees the boy and longs to possess him: *cum puerum vidit, visumque optavit habere* (Met. 4.316), and Hermaphroditus becomes a spectacle henceforth. Georgia Nugent, as mentioned before, observes that Salmacis' desire could be thought of in the Freudian terms of the “fantasy of the penis in the little girl.” Yet in a subtle play of desire and gaze, Ovid relates that Hermaphroditus saw the pool (*videt hic stagnum lucentis ad imum usque solum lymphae*/ “Here he sees a pool of crystal-clear water all the way to the bottom,” Met. 4.297–98) and, as his playing in its margins later on shows (340–45), he was attracted to it. But in a witty Ovidian twist the pool and nymph are really the same thing. So, while Hermaphroditus rejects Salmacis, he is attracted to her (pool). Her initial gaze becomes performative in her wooing speech, which in other cases is taken up by the male. Salmacis' desire is materialized in her kisses and embraces. In the following scene, she is the desiring subject that takes pleasure in the image of the boy. The boy undresses, jumps in the pool, and swims; but the readers, as spectators, perceive the scene through the eyes of Salmacis and, with her, readers are affected in their “eyes” by the *phantasia* they construct: *tum vero placuit, nudaque cupidine formae/ Salmacis exarsit; flagrant quoque lumina nymphae/* “Then indeed he pleased her, and Salmacis caught the fire of
love with the desire of his naked body; the eyes of the nymph also burn” (Met. 4.346–47). The question is: is this a female gaze or is there a simple gender “reversal,” where the eyes are female and the gaze is male? In other words, does Salmacis’ gaze offer the male and female reader a feminine perspective from where to look at the poem? In principle, one is inclined to answer negatively, as the control and objectification of Hermaphroditus assimilate to the power of the male gaze and, like the male rapists, Salmacis cannot contain herself and jumps to his embrace. But, unlike male rapists, whose vis seems logical and appropriate to their gender, though not unproblematically of course, women who desire are viewed as out of their mind. In the episode of Clytie it is said of her, *dementer amoribus usa/* “madly consumed with love” (Met. 4.259) and Salmacis is *amens,* or “insane” (Met. 4.351). The links to the previous episode of the book are even more extensive. Her desire is viewed in her dazzling eyes, which are compared, in an arresting simile, to the sun reflected on a mirror:

\[
\text{flagrant quoque lumina nymphae,} \\
\text{non aliter quam cum puro nitidissimus orbe} \\
\text{opposita speculi referitur imagine Phoebus.}
\]

The eyes of the nymph kindled, no different than when the full face of the most dazzling Phoebus is reflected in the image of a mirror placed opposite to it. (Met. 4.347–79)

This very simile implies the specularity and self-reflection of Salmacis’ desire, which is not reflected by Hermaphroditus. Yet she is not aware of this specularity and still nourishes the hope of joining the boy in love. She jumps in the pool and wraps around him like a serpent (Met. 4.362–67). But the image of the serpent is itself problematic and discloses the complexities of gender definitions for Salmacis’ gaze. Unlike thunderbolts, for example, which seem to be ‘unproblematic’ signifiers of masculine vis, while on the one hand serpents are analogized to the penis, on the other hand, they pertain mainly to terrifying/phallic women like the harpies or Medusa. Here, the usefulness of the concept of gender ‘inversion’ or ‘reversal,’ which has come to be a common phrase in the vocabulary of gender(ed) readings, must be placed under suspicion. A woman who appropriates male patterns is not the same as a man, for not only is she less successfully endowed with agency and subjectivity than males, but also there is a constant sense of transgression that colors every action of
women in power. Thus Salmacis' gaze is not entirely 'male,' but she is rather a problematic female and the symbol of the serpent exemplifies it, as an icon of gender instability.

But how successful is Salmacis? It is partly true that she succeeds in some sort of penetration of the *puer*’s body, as both bodies merge in one and she manages to inject some of her femininity and *mollitia* into the boy. But she does this at the cost of self-annulment. Nugent has shown that, although on the surface Hermaphroditus is a mixture of male and female, it is the masculine that the story preserves:

> ergo ubi se liquidas, quo vir descenderat, undas semimarem fecisse videt mollitaque in illis membra, manus tendens, sed iam non voce virili Hermaphroditus ait: “nato date munera vestro, et pater et genetrix, amborum nomen habenti: quisquis in hos fontes vir venerit, exeat inde semivir et tactis subito mollescat in undis!” motus uterque parens nati rata verba biformis fecit et incesto fontem medicamine tinxit.

Thus when he saw that the flowing waters in which he had plunged as a male had made him half-male and his softened limbs in them, stretching his arms to the sky, but not with virile voice any more, Hermaphroditus said: “Mother and father, grant this wish to your son, who has both your names: let any male who comes into this spring leave from here a semi-male and let him suddenly soften in these silent waters!” Both parents were moved; they fulfilled the request of their bi-formed son and tinged the spring with a polluting substance. (Met. 4.380–88)

Although the body may be a hybrid of male and female, the mind is still masculine. Lines 380–81 tell us that when “he” saw that the water had changed him, who had previously entered as a male, into a half-male, he did not have his virile voice any more. The address to the parents is also an address to “his” progenitors, and the words *vestro nato* and *nati* make apparent that the speaker of the new body is masculine. In fact, after the union of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus in one body, Salmacis disappears and only a *semi-marem* (note that it is not a *semi-mulier*) is left, a boy who is *mollis*, but still a boy in the end. While Nugent's view of Salmacis’ anni-hilation has some truth in it, the fact that the pool, which is a feminine landscape par excellence, is still a pool hints at the preservation of something feminine. It is, however, interesting that Ovid uses the word *fons*
(385, 388), which is masculine at the moment of transformation, but combined with the feminine unda (380). This could show that while the masculine seems to dominate, the feminine still stands and adds major aspects to the hermaphrodite result of transformation.

Echo parallels the fate of Salmacis. Questions of viewing and the penetrative gaze are essential to the story of Narcissus. But the focus here shall be Echo, who normally suffers from being a sort of appendix or “echo” of Narcissus and who is first connected with Narcissus in Ovid. She was a nymph who had lost her power of speech and could only repeat what others said. This was the work of Juno, who punished her for entertaining her with talk while Jupiter enjoyed the company of the nymphs. When Echo first saw Narcissus she still had a body:

adspicit hunc trepidos agitantem in retia cervos
vocalis nymphe, quae nec reticere loquenti
nee prior ipsa loqui didicit, resonablis Echo.

The nymph Echo, with her resounding voice, who knew neither to be silent after someone had spoken nor to speak first herself, saw him driving frightened deer into hunting nets. (Met. 3.356–58)

The phrase adspicit hunc acts as a semantic unit with a stinging effect, which may convey the idea of a quick glance rather than a prolonged look. Her gaze could be taken, as Nugent supposes for Salmacis, as a locus of desire involving the fantasy of penis envy (although this might not be a productive way to approach the episode). But hers is, nonetheless, a furtive look. It is rather intriguing that both in the case of Salmacis and in Echo, this fantasy is directed to undeveloped pueri, whose masculinity has not been completely achieved yet. In any case, the instant passion of Echo is similar to Salmacis’ desire:

vidit et incaluit, sequitur vestigia furtim,
quodque magis sequitur, flamma propiore calescit,
non aliter quam cum summis circumlita taedis
admotas rapiunt vivacia sulphura flammas.
She saw him, burnt with passion, and secretly followed his footsteps. The more she follows, with stronger flame she burns, no different than when burning sulphur smeared all around the top of torches catches the flames that have been drawn near. (Met. 3.371–76)

The resemblance with Salmacis is obvious, but the parallel with the Apollo-Daphne episode will be emphasized here. There is a re-enactment of the first affair of Apollo, but with a gender destabilization. Let us bring back Apollo’s erotic conflagration into the scene:

Phoebus amat visaeque cupit conubia Daphnes, quodque cupit sperat, suaque illum oracula fallunt, utque leves stipulae demptis adolent aristis, ut facibus saepe ardent, quas forte viator vel nimis admovit vel iam sub luce reliquit, sic deus in flammas abit, sic pectore toto uritur et sterilem sperando nutrit amorem.

Phoebus loves her and desires to marry Daphne when he sees her. He hopes to achieve what he desires, and his own oracles fail him, and as the soft stalks are kindled once the ears are removed, as the hedges burn with torches, which by chance a traveler either draws too close or leaves behind at daybreak, thus the god catches the fire of love, thus the god burns in his heart and nourishes his fruitless love by hoping. (Met. 1.490–95)

Apollo and Echo suffer the same infatuation through the gaze, which leads them to an erotic chase for the beloved. But while Apollo strenuously runs after Daphne’s steps (admisso sequitur vestigia passu/ “He follows her footsteps at full speed,” Met. 1.532) and the text insists on his chase in the constant use of the verb sequor and its compounds (Met. 1.504, 507, 511, 532, 540), Echo only follows Narcissus’s steps secretly (sequitur vestigia furtim). The furtiveness makes her action weaker (note that Apollo acts rapidly and openly instead), probably reflecting the patriarchal mandate that women do not pursue men. However, although Echo is the erotic initiator of the action, she has really very little agency. Echo can only reproduce Apollo’s wooing discourse by repeating other people’s speech:

o quotiens voluit blandis accedere dictis et mollis adhibere preces! natura repugnat
nec sinit, incipiat, sed, quod sinit, illa parata est
exspectare sonos, ad quos sua verba remittat.

Oh, how many times did she wish to approach him with sweet words and
to add soft prayers! But her nature forbids it and does not allow her to ini-
tiate speech, but what it allows, she is ready to do: to wait for the sounds,
which her words could return. (Met. 3.375–78)

Liveley suggests that Echo's “re-appropriation” of Narcissus's words may be
taken as a sign of female agency and subjectivity.34 But hers is a very
restricted form of verbal agency and even if Echo finds expression through
the cracks of her verbal constrictions, her speech and the results of the
story give her very little power. Echo's sad desire to re-enact Apollo's woo-
ing is only achieved later as a pale repetition of Narcissus's words.
Likewise, while Daphne remains silent during her chase and neither looks
back nor speaks to Apollo, Narcissus not only looks but also responds:

respicit et nurus nullo veniente “quid” inquit
“me fugis?” et totidem, quot dixit, verba recepit.

He looks back and seeing no one coming behind he responds: “Why do
you flee from me?” and hears in reply the words he has said again. (Met.
3.383–84)

It is only then that Echo can express her desire as a coda to Narcissus's
speech. Only after the boy flees like Daphne (ille fugit fugiensque . . . Met.
3.390). Unlike Daphne, he can articulate a speech of rejection which is
in fact effective, as Echo recedes and physically disintegrates. Like
Salmacis, her attempt to possess an intrusive gaze has led her to self-
annulment. But while Salmacis has at least instilled her “feminine
aspects” in Hermaphroditus, Echo has virtually disappeared. She has no
body any more and although the text conveys that she is now “only a
voice” (omnibus auditur: sonus est, qui vivit in illa/ “She is heard by all. It is
a sound that lives in her,” Met. 3.401), the reality is that she is an empty
voice with no self-agency.35

Previous episodes could more easily be understood by identification of
the male reader with the internal male viewer, controller, and intruder.
Yet in the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus the scene is focalized
through a woman and the object of the gaze is a boy. Within ancient con-
ceptions of sexuality this should not represent a problem, because the
male reader would still play an active part in the game of viewing, and the
images of boys as erotic objects are acceptable and extended. The case of Narcissus would work in a similar way. Homosexuality was not entirely without its problems, however, and these boys may put the masculine reader in an awkward position. But the tales are also strange for women readers. In the case of Salmacis, they get to identify with a powerful woman, but Salmacis’ character is not entirely edifying for women either, being herself a stereotype of the dreadful female in power. She represents a sort of abomination and, in this sense, the woman reader finds herself trapped in this ‘perverse’ position and in the end assumes the gaze of a man but only to look at a *puer*. While some episodes of *Metamorphoses* allow positive and alternative possibilities to the female gaze that can be nonobjectifying yet creative, the story of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis does not do great wonders for the female reader.

A different case of female intrusive gaze, which does not involve sexuality directly, claims notice. Minerva has entrusted a box containing the baby Erichthonios to Aglauros and her sisters Herse and Pandrosos, daughters of Cecrops, mythical founder of Athens. But the goddess expressly commands them not to look upon her secret (*sua ne secreta viderent, Met. 2.556*). Aglauros cannot resist the temptation and opens the box:

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timidas vocat una sorores
Aglauros nodosque manu diducit, et intus
infantemque vident adporrectumque draconem.
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Only Aglauros calls her sisters timid and undoes the knots with her hand. Inside they see an infant and a snake stretched next to him. (*Met. 2.559–61*)

Erichthonios was a child who then grew to be an Attic foundation hero and king of Athens. It is said that he was begotten by Hephaestus. For when Athena went to him one time to request weapons, Hephaestus embraced her and tried to possess her. The goddess successfully rejected him, but his seed fell to the ground. A child was born from it and the baby was handed over by Gaia to Athena for her to look after. Thus this is the closest Athena ever got to having a child of her own. This story is most meaningful for understanding the opening of the box, which may well be taken as a metaphor for the goddess’s (repressed) motherly instincts and even her fantasy and fears of pregnancy. This is an awkward thing for a virgin goddess, and opening the box is seen, metaphorically, as an opening of
Woman's uterus. Aglauros is another version of Pandora, the 'curious' woman who opens and looks inside, triggering disaster and pollution. When she removes the lid, the 'insides' and secrets of female sexuality and the female body are released. Laura Mulvey observes that the myth of Pandora foregrounds the topography of surface/secret and interior/exterior in women. Minerva constantly strives to preserve an external image of quasi-masculine power. Aglauros' curiosity threatens to disclose the goddess's hidden female interior and to expose a forbidden knowledge. Perhaps Aglauros' intrusion offends Minerva because it mimics her own curiosity and epistemic and visual desire, as the goddess of wisdom, to see and know. Minerva, by turning against Aglauros, wishes to teach her a lesson about the dangers involved in visual curiosity for women.

Women who open things up with the gaze are dangerous and devious, as they appropriate the penetrative power of the male. It is now necessary to extend the meanings of the penetrative metaphor here, for while women do not penetrate sexually, they still have minds and if seeing is also knowing, realizing, and understanding, women can be penetrative with their minds. However, this type of penetrative power is still problematic from the point of view of gender and involves some appropriation of male prerogatives.

Aglauros is allowed only a glance and her gaze has no power to control. The physical position of the intrusive eye is here relevant. Not only are the sisters glancing at the forbidden, but they are observing from above. This vertical disposition is hinted at by the perspective of the bird who narrates the story placed on an elm (abdicta fronde levi densa speculabar ab ulmo, quid facerent/ “Hidden in the light leaves that grew densely on an elm, I watched what they would do,” Met. 2.557–58). The positioning of the onlooker from above is in Metamorphoses characteristic of gods who control the human world from Olympus, as seen with Juno. More specifically, it is what male gods do before raping a girl. In the same book Mercury spots Herse while flying over the Munychian fields: hinc se sustulerat paribus cadufer alis/ Munychiosque volans agros gratamque Minervae/ despectabat humum cultique arbusta Lycei/ “From this place Mercury had lifted himself up with his twin wings and in his flight he saw the Munychian fields, the land beloved by Minerva and the groves of the Lyceum” (Met. 2.708–10). This vertical gaze is almost exclusive to male gods. While goddesses have the power to look down and control, mortal women are banned from this and their intrusive gazes are punished. Aglauros not only breaks the prohibition of not looking, but she probably looks down on the forbidden, just as the crow that is punished by Minerva for talking too much (Met. 2.557–58 and 563–64), and then she symbolically appropriates a 'right' of the...
gods. Perhaps, behind this issue of verticality and power lies a very simple principle. Power and the body are physically identified, and it is normally the taller person who holds power. This is the case commonly between men and women, where men are normally taller and control the gaze from above. In a way, the awkwardness of a taller woman produces discomfort partly due perhaps to this question of the gaze. Women should ‘look up’ to their masters. Interestingly, this story pre-empts Actaeon’s tragedy. The bird that saw the forbidden and divulged it is an example of what in the next book Diana will fear that Actaeon will do. But also, it is not only the sin of telling the story that damns the crow, but the fact that the bird has seen the secret.

It is Aglauros who in-videt inside the box, a witty pun on the cause of her destruction: Invidia. In Metamorphoses Minerva is a goddess connected with Envy and seeing. It is the rage at the disrespect to her commands that infuriates her. It is peculiar that when Aglauros seems to have it all—gold and the honor of a divine family—Minerva “looks at her with angry eyes”:

vertit ad hanc torvi dea bellica luminis orbem  
et tanto penitus traxit suspiria motu,  
ut pariter pectus positamque in pectore forti  
aegida concuteret. . . .

The warrior goddess turned her fierce stare toward her and she heaved a deep sigh with such emotion that it shook both her breast and the aegis placed on her brave breast. (Met. 2.752–55)

This description most clearly recalls the personification of Envy later in the book, which suggests that Minerva is an envious deity; Envy’s direct connection with Livor is significant as she really acts as a surrogate for the warrior deity. Envy is displayed in an interesting narrative circle. Aglauros in-videt (looks into), Minerva looks with eyes askance (a typical gesture of envy), and then looks into the dwelling of Envy. Finally, Envy attacks Aglauros, who envies her sister.

The OED tells us that “envy” may refer to any malignant or hostile feelings, but the more restricted definition as “the feeling of mortification and ill-will occasioned by the contemplation of superior advantages possessed by another” seems more appropriate for a reading of Metamorphoses. When Minerva wishes to exert vengeance over Aglauros, who has dishonored her, she goes in search of Envy (Met. 2.760–61). The pas-
sage is freighted with overtones of pollution and darkness. When Minerva arrives she finds Envy eating snakes:

\... videt intus edentem
vipereas carnes, vitiorem alimenta suorum,
Invidiam visaque oculos avertit. . . .

She sees Envy inside eating the flesh of vipers, nourishment of her vices, and as soon as she sees her she turns her eyes away. (Met. 2.768–70)

The insistence and repetition of the syllable \textit{vi-} is crucial in the passage. It is central in the concept of seeing which is prominent here as envy itself is an act of \textit{in-videre} and, curiously, it is Minerva who first “sees into” (\textit{videt in-tus}). But \textit{vi-} is also part of the concept \textit{viper} on which envy feeds her vices (\textit{vi-tiorum}) and it is also the ablative of \textit{vis}. Once Minerva has seen Envy she has to \textit{oculos avertere}. Finally the sounds \textit{-v-} and \textit{-vi-} are present in the root of Livor. She finally reaches Aglauros and infests her with a \textit{venenum} that fills her with jealousy as Minerva had bid (Met. 2.784).

Envy is the desire of what somebody else possesses, which excites in the envious person a need to intrude and destroy, to see into, to ‘poison’ and pollute the person who causes the feeling of envy. In this sense, envy conveys in itself thanatic implications: it can destroy, it can kill, and it is notable in this respect that the Fury Megaera is another personification of Livor. In Nonnus’s \textit{Dionysiaca} she is the personification of the Evil Eye of Envy, and Claudian in \textit{in Rufinum} invests her with the characteristics of an envious person: she drinks the blood from the strife within a family (1.77–79) and she has \textit{oculis liventibus} (1.139).\textsuperscript{45}

Envy is a particularly feminine concept in \textit{Metamorphoses} and thus its personification in Book 2 is most significant.\textsuperscript{46} Not all the characters who envy are female; some examples are Vulcan (Met. 4.167ff.), Lyncus (Met. 5.657), and Daedalus (Met. 8.250). But the overwhelming majority of envious figures are female. Not only are they more numerous, but their envy leads them to crueler action in the poem. Of course, the most envious goddess is Juno, whose \textit{invidia} is normally expressed in its erotic variant, jealousy. She feels envy for Io in Book 1, for Callisto in Book 2; she punishes Echo for hiding Jupiter’s affairs with the nymphs; she destroys Semele and her sister Ino in Books 3 and 4; she tries to prevent Alcmenè’s childbirth in Book 9, and in Book 10 she is jealous of Ganymede. But another goddess envies in \textit{Metamorphoses} and not only Aglauros and Envy
are envious in the episode of Book 2. Minerva is a goddess of revenge and the punishment she wishes to exert here can only be achieved through the power of Livor; thus Envy becomes a sort of alter ego for the goddess. Most interesting, however, is the combination of Minerva and Livor in the episode of Arachne, in which the goddess is clearly envious of Arachne’s work. The text reads: non illud Pallas, non illud carpere Livor/possit opus: doluit successu flava virago/“Neither Pallas nor Envy could carp at that work: the golden-haired goddess of war was hurt by Arachne’s success” (Met. 6.129–30); carpere is a typical verb for Envy in the episode of Book 2 (781, 792). The reader here recalls the metapoetic and self-conscious allusions to the poet that envy involves. Arachne is the embodiment of the artist, destroyed by a deity’s wrath (or Envy if we follow this possibility).

Envy is ‘materialized’ in the form of visions. Aglauros’ envy toward Herse is provoked by a phantasia of her sister enjoying the love, wealth, and honor of a divine marriage. Aglauros ‘sees’ these things:

\[
\text{germanam ante oculos fortunatumque sororis}
\]

\[
\text{coniugium pulchraque deum sub imagine ponit.}
\]

She places before her eyes her sister and her fortunate marriage, and the god under a beautiful image. (Met. 2.803–4)

Aglauros’ envy is somehow pre-announced by her ambitious reaction to Mercury when he comes to beg her help in wooing Herse: adspicit hunc oculis isdem, quibus abdita nuper/viderat Aglauros flavae secreta Minervae/“Aglauros looked at him with the same eyes with which recently she had seen the hidden secrets of golden-haired Minerva” (Met. 2.748–49). Aglauros already possesses a gaze that looks into things and in these lines it is almost as if she were already seeing into the luck of her sister. But a woman who dares to look into things can only be heading for transformation. Mercury, taking advantage of a pun on movement and immobility (motura, Met. 2.817), turns her into a stone.

In principle, with the sisters, the reader is allowed to look into the box and remain unscathed, unlike Aglauros. However, we do not get to know much about what we see, and in a way we are not permitted to see much, while the emphasis is laid on the act of seeing. One way of understanding the episode is to see that women readers are being warned that they should not open up secret boxes with the gaze, but at the same time, it awakens our curiosity and furnishes our desire to see.
Ekphrasis always evokes a set-piece description, normally within a larger narrative, that intends to bring the object vividly before the mind's eye of the reader or listener. The word ekphrasis has been understood in two fundamental ways. There are descriptions of works of art like Aeneas' shield in *Aeneid* 8 or Arachne's tapestry in *Metamorphoses* 6, and descriptions of natural features and events. Still, this sharp distinction needs some deconstruction, especially in application to Ovid, who sprinkles his 'natural' ekphrases with comments like "it was so real it seemed painted" and his artistic ekphrases with remarks like "the painted image was so good it seemed real." There is, at least in Ovid, a fudging of the boundaries between descriptions of art and nature because this common methodological distinction does not seem very fruitful; a framed description of the 'natural' type can often be read as a reflection on art and the craft of the poet. The undercurrent of this is perhaps that there is no 'nature' in poetry but that everything is, at some level, constructed as *ars*.

Part of this study's contention is that much of the erotics of reading are meaningful for ekphrasis and that penetration is a valid metaphor for reading. We will mostly assume a masculine reader/viewer or a woman reader experiencing trans-sex identification. The text-image seduces the reader and provokes desire, a desire to keep on reading, to penetrate it. The reader/viewer exerts some sort of symbolic violence while penetrating the image with the gaze. Critics have often written about the act of reading in sexual terms (it is a way of knowing a body, a corpus, etc.) and the female body is commonly identified with textuality. Writing has also been envisioned as a penetration: "the seed or semen of the author's mind brooding in the repository of the page that bodies its meaning forth" (Gubar, 77). Another common analogy is that of the pen-penis that writes on the virgin page and joins in a long tradition that identifies the author as male and his passive creation as female. A parallel assumption may be drawn for the relationship between text and reader. The book with its covers (or edges of the roll) presents boundaries that the reader needs to trespass in order to read. When we read we penetrate the text with our mind and eyes. When we look at a picture we penetrate it with our gaze. When we read an ekphrasis we perform both simultaneously. The acts of reading and viewing art can be thought of in erotic terms.
The description of the doors of the palace of the Sun in Book 2 is a standard ekphrasis, which recalls Aeneas’ viewings of the doors of the temple of Apollo at the beginning of Aeneid 6. When Phaethon arrives at the palace of his father, the text offers a description of the carvings on the doors. The doors were radiant, but the workmanship surpassed the material (materiam superabat opus, Met. 2.5). There is no precise delineation of the borders here, but it is explicit that the designs are carved on doors (bifores valvae, Met. 2.4), which are themselves boundary markers. One needs to read and look inside the borders of the door to appreciate the images. For the designs engraved in it, much has been propounded. Yet again, one can think of a miniature Metamorphoses that treats the facts of the sky, the lands, and the waters with their inhabitants. What is more, some of the characters depicted on the door will appear later in the epic, like Doris and Proteus, and there are even stories of characters transformed into stars. For this ekphrasis, the internal viewer Phaethon and the external reader at a secondary level perform the same exercise of visual penetration. This act of penetration of text and work of art can be found in different degrees in all ekphrases and forms part of the erotics of reading as well as conveying important gender implications for the reader. The penetrative metaphor, however, will be obviously more useful for some ekphrases than for others.

Metamorphoses is also loaded with descriptions of natural events or scenes, and their connections with art should not be overlooked. An ekphrasis of this type also possesses a symbolic border, usually expressed with introductory phrases like “est via . . .”, “est locus . . .”, where the verb sum with a locative word marks the limits of the description to come. The male gaze as penetrative, intrusive, and controlling wields power to “open things up” and to break up a certain enclosure, particularly of female spaces. In various episodes men look into forbidden spaces and earn chastisement. But this spatial intrusion is also a narrative and visual intrusion, whereby both male internal viewer and external viewers and readers need to break visual boundaries to see and to grasp knowledge of what is going on in a scene.

A paradigmatic example where Mulvey’s terms could be justified is the tale of Thetis and Peleus in Book 11, where an ekphrastic description of Thetis bathing precedes Peleus’ (visual) intrusion and her rape. At first sight, the reader believes herself in the presence of an ekphrasis of the natural type, whose limits are drawn by the habitual est plus place formula (Est sinus, Met. 11.229). Nevertheless, the text surprises us with a second internal frame:
myrtea silva subest bicoloribus obsita bacis,
est specus in medio, natura factus an arte,
ambiguum, magis arte tamen. . . .

There is a myrtle wood near by, filled with two-colored berries. There is a cave in the middle—it is unclear whether made by nature or art, but rather by art. (Met. 11.234–36)

The illusion of a ‘natural’ ekphrasis is soon dismantled and lines 235–36 hint at the artistry involved in the visual image to follow. The object of the reader’s gaze inside the ekphrasis is a woman, the goddess Thetis who will change forms to evade the embrace of Peleus. Even more poignant is that Thetis metamorphoses ad solitas artes (Met.11.242). This detail is curious, because Thetis becomes not only the visual object of the description, but also the artist who creates the image. Unlike the women who passively suffer transformation by gods, Thetis has the power to transform herself, yet to no avail, as a god will lead Peleus to subdue her. But the interesting aspect of this is that Thetis here identifies with both author and character, with creative object and subject, and in the bigger picture, with both Ovid and his characters.

The episode claims comparison with Actaeon, for there is here also a goddess surprised naked in the water (quo saepe venire/ frenato delphine sedens, Theti nuda solebas/ “Where you, Thetis, used to come naked, riding on a bridled dolphin,” Met.11.236–37). The male intrusion in this scene is, however, much more violent and forward than in the Actaeon story. Peleus jumps at Thetis to rape her (illic te Peleus, ut somno vincta iacebas,/ occupat, et quoniam precibus temptata repugnas,/ vim parat, innectens ambobus colla lacertis/ “There Peleus takes hold of you when you are lying conquered by sleep, and though entreated by his prayers you reject him, he prepares to offer violence, entwining both arms around your neck,” Met.11.238–40). Although we do not see him looking, the reader, used to accompanying the character in his visual intrusion, presupposes that Peleus has seen the goddess before his attack. Yet compared with Diana, Thetis is inoffensive and seems to have no more power but that of escaping, which soon becomes annulled when Peleus keeps firm hold of her and successfully exerts penetration.
Influenced by the mythical tradition and in particular Callimachus’s *Bath of Pallas*, Ovid rewrites the story of Actaeon. In comparison with Callimachus’s *Hymn*, instead of the boy Tiresias and Athena, we find Actaeon the hunter and Diana. There are sexual implications and erotic desire in Actaeon’s gaze and, thus, another less obvious intertext in the passage is the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, which stages the complex outcomes of seeing a goddess and having sex with her.

Actaeon is the grandson of Cadmus, the founder of Thebes, whose story is significant for the boy’s fate. Before Actaeon’s story, Ovid tells us how an enormous serpent killed Cadmus’s companions and was finally destroyed by him. Cadmus first sees his slain companions on entering a wood: *ut nemus intravit letataque corpora vidit* (Met. 3.55). This visual and physical intrusion will also be a central motif in the fate of his grandchild and, as Andrew Feldherr notes, one appreciates a change from viewer to viewed in the episode. Once he has killed the giant serpent, he looks with pride at his achievement: *Dum spatium victor victi considerat hostis*/*While the conqueror surveys the bulk of his defeated enemy* (Met. 3.95). But soon he hears a voice that foretells his doom: “*serpentem spectas? et tu spectabere serpens*”/*Are you looking at the serpent? You too will be a serpent and looked at* (Met. 3.98). Barkan acutely observes that here Cadmus is forced to look at a reflection of himself, as if in a mirror, an image entrenched in the chiastic structure of line 98. Cadmus foreshadows Actaeon’s tragedy.

Actaeon has been hunting with his dogs and companions all morning and at the end separates from his crowd and looks “by chance” into a pool where Diana is bathing. Sight is important for hunting and its acuteness is essential to the successfulness of the hunt. As Leonard Shlain explains, the activity of hunting involves visual sharpness and requires the use of the ‘cones’ in the retina, which provide a more tubular, focalizing, and detailed vision that can be linked to penetration. Actaeon’s intrusion in the woods is represented almost in the same terms as Cadmus’s intrusion: *per nemus ignotum non certis passibus errans/ pervenit in lucum: sic illum fata ferebant./ qui simul intravit rorantia fontibus antra/*Wandering through unknown woods with uncertain steps he came to the grove: thus his fate would have it. As soon as he entered the grotto besprinkled with fountain spray,” (Met. 3.175–77). These fates are more than the protagonist’s fates, they also carry the familial doom. Ovid introduces the scene of the bathing goddess as follows:
vallis erat piceis et acuta densa cupressu,
nomine Gargaphie succinctae sacra Dianae,
cuius in extremo est antrum nemorale recessu
arte laboratum nulla: simulaverat artem
ingenio natura suo.

There was a vale dense with sharp-needled cypress, Gargaphie by name,
sacred to high-girt Diana, in whose extreme corner is a shadowy cave,
made by no art, but nature had imitated art with its talent. (Met. 3.155–59)

The phrase *vallis erat* introduces an ekphrasis, which, as usual in Ovid,
bears metapoetic and meta-artistic resonances. In the context of
metaphorical sexual vocabulary, *vallis* is itself grammatically feminine and
serves to allude to the female body. The *phantasia* of the scene that the
reader forms in her mind’s eye comes as a framed picture, in which the
goddess will be enclosed. To read this scene one has to break the ‘pictorial’ limits. The very essence of ekphrasis here incites in the reader a desire
to intrude, to see “what is inside.” The idea of enclosure is further
advanced by the *antrum nemorale*, which itself marks an internal frame in
the scene and draws the reader to an even more interior space. Antrum
nemorale also bears connotations of female sexuality because the female
interior is frequently associated with enclosed spaces. Obscurity also plays
a part and the grove likewise points in this direction.

But the scene also presents a sacred space violated by Man, which is
comparable to Cadmus’s *silva* (Met. 3.28), the untouched forest in which
Cadmus makes his intrusion earlier in Book 3. Likewise, Actaeon’s gaze
on the goddess can be paralleled with Cadmus’s and Tiresias’ outrage of
the sacred serpents. Even more, this closed space is fitting to Diana, the
virgin, who has never been opened by a man; there is a clear analogy
between the space and the goddess’s body. The description of the pool as
*margin gramineo patulos succinctus hiatus* “widened into a pool framed by
grassy banks” (Met. 3.162) is significant in the construction of space as a
great female opening. The epithet *succincta* (156) entices the reader to
look and desire to see her naked body. *Virgineos artus* “virginal limbs”
(164) also enhances this sense.

Ovid’s plays on art and nature are extensive. Curiously, this scene, he
tells, is not painted by art, but seems to be because it is beautiful. This
statement implies that art is superior to natural beauty. In any case, with
this reference to *ars* the narrator warns the reader about the metapoetic overtones of the story. With Actaeon, the reader is desirous to look, and, if the ekphrastic scene stands as a synecdoche for the whole *Metamorphoses*, he will be an intrusive eye, which needs to break the physical and narratological boundaries of the book to read. Thus, the external reader, whether male or female in trans-sex identification, shares Actaeon’s voyeuristic desire to break the frames of the ekphrasis, thus exerting symbolic violence on the female enclosure. Talking about Actaeon’s “desire” may seem to contradict the text’s reasoning that he only saw the goddess “by chance” (Met. 3.141–43). However, while the youth may have looked at the goddess unintentionally at the beginning, this does not prevent desire, and the imagery and metaphoric language of the text imply such.71 First, we have the impression that from the moment he sees, Actaeon maintains his gaze fixed on the goddess for quite some time, as there are fifteen lines between the discovery and his actual transformation. Furthermore, in some versions of the myth, such as the one found in Euripides’ *Bacchae* (339–41), Actaeon actually boasts of being a better hunter than Artemis. The desire to surpass the goddess in hunting proposes a metaphor for sexual domination given that hunting is a common erotic metaphor and a figure for desire.72 Moreover, other sources like Hyginus (180) recount that Actaeon was desirous of the goddess. Furthermore, the setting of the scene takes place at midday (Met. 3.145), which is a particularly erotic time in *Metamorphoses* and recalls the eroticism of *Amores* 1.5.73 The imagery of the mountains stained with the blood of prey also points to the links between sex, hunting, and blood. Most interesting is that Actaeon himself mentions the blood of the animals and the fact that it is midday in his command to his companions (Met. 3.148 and 151–52), which could be taken as a veiled expression of sexual desire.

In this first part of the episode, the reader cannot really identify with the female because the focalizer is Actaeon. But the roles are reversed later in the story. Here, the text makes clear the penetrative power of Actaeon’s intrusion in the grotto:

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qui simul intravit rorantia fontibus antra,
sicut erant, nudae viso sua pectora nymphae
percussere viro. . . .
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As soon as he entered the grotto besprinkled with fountain spray, the nymphs, naked as they were, beat their breasts at the sight of the man.
(Met. 3.177–79)
John Heath, however, believes that Actaeon’s ‘innocence’ analogizes him almost to the figure of the huntress-girl who, all inadvertently, comes to a locus amoenus and is then raped. It is difficult to agree with Heath on this point, for he seems to allow no place for the possibility of Actaeon’s desire. But Heath is right in proposing that Diana’s reaction is based on her ‘reading’ of rape stories in Ovid’s Metamorphoses and that she is right to expect sexual violence according to the story circumstances. Heath’s suggestion that characters can read stories of the same poem in which they belong presupposes a releasing reading of the character’s mind and a certain independence from the main authorial voice. It also signals a self-consciousness of the characters as fictional entities and part of a body of literature, which can be compared with the characters’ knowledge that they are part of a ‘play,’ so common in Roman comedy. Nonetheless, for Heath, Diana’s reading is incomplete, for she cannot see a different role for the male than that of sexual assaulter. But the truth is: were it not a goddess that Acteon’s gaze came across but simply a beautiful virgin, how do we know that he wouldn’t have raped her?

Although the text presents the man in the passive voice, it is clear that he is actively looking and that what the nymphs try to protect the goddess’s body from is his sight. Ovid here plays with us as viewers and shifts the focus of the narration to the eyes of the nymphs, but the central figure in the picture is still the goddess, and the fact that she is said to be “taller than the others” helps this perception. Diana is the spectacle here because the great crime is actually to have seen her in her bath. She is the object of Actaeon’s gaze (visae sine veste Dianae “of Diana seen without clothes,” Met. 3.185). But one more (literal) layer of opening and disclosure can be observed. It is not the simple fact of seeing the goddess that carries a crime, but the fact that she is naked. Clothing constitutes an element that helps maintain a woman closed, protected from danger and from Man’s intrusive gaze, but Diana with her nakedness is, at some level, already open before being penetrated by Actaeon’s eyes.

Diana now turns on her side to avoid being exposed to Actaeon’s gaze, but she seems to turn her gaze forward in an oblique way to speak to him and attack him (in latus obliquum tamen adstitit oraque retro flexit “However she stood on her side and turned her face backwards,” Met. 3.187–88). She seems to be the viewer now. A redressing of the gender balance takes place. Diana exerts her vengeance on Actaeon, transforming him into a stag with a splash of water:

\[\text{ut vellet promptas habuisse sagittas,}\]
quas habuit sic hausit aquas vultumque virilem
perfudit spargensque comas ulterioribus undis
addidit haec clavis praenuntia verba futurae:
“nunc tibi me posito visam velagine narres,
si poteris narrare, licet!” . . .

Although she wished she would have had her arrows ready, what she had available, the water, she thus took and poured on his manly face, and sprinkling his hair with the avenging water added these words foretelling his future ruin: “Now you are free to tell that you have seen me without clothing, if you can tell!” (Met. 3.188–93)

Without her sagittae, Diana is inermis, a word that also indicates male impotence. But the paradox is that she is really not inermis, and in a very feminine response, Diana soon looks for an alternative to the conventional penetrative arrows, but using an element that is mollis instead. The splash of water is here a clear substitute for the goddess’s weapons, and with it Diana returns the violence (in her eyes) that Actaeon’s gaze has exerted on her. The fact that the splash is directed to Actaeon’s vultus virilis is significant because it is precisely that virile gaze that she wishes to avenge. Compared with Callimachus’s similar version of the bath of the goddess, where Tiresias is punished with blindness for what he has seen, the punishment here seems strange. Diana does not directly blind Actaeon—although blindness is suavely alluded to—but deprives him of his power of speech. It is the transformation of her image into text which disturbs the goddess. The verb narres is poignant in a metapoetic sense as well. We are here also reminded of Anchises, who, in the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite, was warned not to boast of having had sex with the goddess. The later tradition that records that Anchises became crippled probably due to his ‘telling’ that he had an affair with Venus is meaningful for Actaeon. The similarities of these scenes to Ovid’s own fate are striking and it is piquant that Tristia 2.105 mentions Actaeon as a parallel to Ovid’s own crime. In this sense, Actaeon the ‘narrator’ colludes with the image of the poet in exile. Furthermore, although the causes of Ovid’s exile are disputed and unclear, some have interpreted Ovid’s words in the exile poetry as a confession that he actually saw something. It was even suggested that he was an eyewitness of Julia’s affairs or of some crime committed by Augustus himself. In his exile poetry he says that he has seen it but has not reported it. He may have seen something that Augustus wanted to keep secret; therefore, exile as a form of silencing corresponds vividly to
Actaeon’s loss of articulate speech. While this theory is no more than one of the several hypotheses that explain Ovid’s exile, it is interesting nonetheless as a fantasy that connects punishment and seeing for the poet and that relates him to the fate of Actaeon.

The episode concludes with a tragic play on the question of essence and appearance, what Actaeon really is and what he seems to be in the eyes of the dogs. Actaeon looks at his image reflected in a pool and recognizes his change, a scene that, compared to Narcissus’s self-delusion, is striking. The text reads: *ut vero vultus et cornua vidit in unda, / “me miserum!” dicturus erat: vox nulla secuta est! / “When in fact he saw his face and horns in the water, he was about to say ‘Ah, wretched me!’ But no voice followed”* (Met. 3.200–1). Issues of gaze and knowledge also affect Io, who goes to her father’s river and sees her own image. Despite her new form, Io recognizes her old self underneath (*rictus novaque ut conspexit in unda/ cornua, pertimuit seque exsternata refugit/ “When she saw her expression and new horns in the water, she was afraid and, terrified, she fled from herself,” Met. 1.640–41). In this, Io is like Actaeon in Book 3 who also sees his new horns in the water, but different from Narcissus who cannot distinguish self and other. Humorously, Actaeon sees ‘himself’ although he does not look himself any more, whereas in contrast, Narcissus cannot see himself but another when his own image is reflected. We sympathize with Actaeon’s suffering because we are able to distinguish between what he ‘is’ and what he ‘seems’ to be. But is this really so simple? What makes Actaeon Actaeon and not a stag? Actaeon has preserved his gaze, his eyes are still his, he can look in the pool and ‘see’ who he is, he can also recognize his dogs. This act of looking in the mirror in search of self-identity is remarkable. Barkan suggests that the secret that Actaeon saw while looking at the goddess is the secret of self-consciousness: “Metamorphosis becomes a means of creating self-consciousness because it establishes a tension between identity and form, and through this tension the individual is compelled to look in the mirror.” Therefore, “metamorphosis is, at the deepest level, a transfiguration of the self.” This mirroring is also present in the episode of Pentheus, who looks at his mother in a sacred space. Barkan understands that what Actaeon has seen is his divine aspect, and this costs Actaeon his life.

Speech and silence are an intricate part of many transformations in the poem, present here also. Diana transformed Actaeon into a stag to silence him. Another common way of seeing his punishment is to envision it as a transformation from hunter to prey. But the metamorphosis can also be understood in terms of viewer and object of the gaze. While a hunter, an epitome of masculinity, particularly in sexuality, Actaeon was the one...
who controlled his prey with his eyes; his gaze was fixed on the prey. As a stag, he is the object of the gaze of his hounds and the target of their desire. The text explicitly marks it: *videre canes* / “the dogs saw him” (Met. 3.206). He also begs his hounds to “know their master” (“Actaeon ego sum: dominum cognoscite vestrum!” / “I am Actaeon, recognize your master!” Met. 3.230), but to no avail. What is more, the play on essence and appearance is extended to his companions, who “look around” and cannot see Actaeon, although they see the stag: *ignari instigant oculisque Actaeona quaerunt* / “Unknowingly they urge on [the fierce pack] and search for Actaeon with their eyes” (Met. 3.243). Actaeon’s transformation into a spectacle is well established by his companions who lament that he is absent and missing the *oblatae . . . spectacula praedae* / “the spectacle of the quarry brought to bay” (Met. 3.246), when he is, paradoxically, the spectacle. Actaeon’s final wish, at the moment of his dismemberment, is to be the viewer rather than the viewed:

\[\ldots\ velletque videre,\\non etiam sentire canum fera facta suorum.\]

Indeed he would want to see, not feel the fierce deeds of his own hounds.

(Met. 3.247–48)

The penetrative reading and viewing model works well for the ekphrasis at the beginning of the episode. However, if one understands that Diana turns around and gazes at Actaeon, one could then question how the Mulveyan model works here. One could suppose a simple gender ‘inversion,’ where Diana’s gaze is male precisely because it is objectifying and controlling. The problem is that in this case one should suppose an inverse trans-sex identification: the male external spectator identifies with the gaze of the internal female viewer (and so does the female external viewer, but it is not necessary to call it trans-sex identification—or maybe it is because she still identifies with a “male gaze”?). On the other hand, even if the male identifies with Diana’s “male gaze,” how does a male reader feel about being a viewer of an objectified male, or even, what if the male viewer, who had up to now aligned himself with Actaeon’s eyes, resists switching bands and remains with Actaeon but is now objectified himself (this is rather difficult because the reader is forced to ‘see’ with Diana). The viewer Actaeon becomes the object of the gaze and his sight becomes feminized because he cannot ‘act on it.’ The reader needs to shift identifications to remain powerful. But even if one iden-
tifies with Actaeon’s dogs, the view is partial, because they can’t see beyond appearances. The reader then needs to remain outside the constrictions of identification and see the scene in its totality. With male viewers who can turn into objects of the gaze, female objects that become viewers, and hunters with an incomplete gaze, *Metamorphoses* with its shifting patterns and changing forms seems too fluid for Mulvey’s model, and thus the metaphor of penetration for viewing and reading, though useful for the ekphrasis, may not be enough to appreciate the complexities of the whole episode.

At this point one questions the usefulness of the concept of focalization when it imposes constraints. However, thinking about focalization helps in understanding an important effect of *Metamorphoses*, namely, that the poem expects the perspectives of the reader to be constantly shifting and that a one-sided view will restrict the appreciation of its richness. This demand that we switch our focalization makes us more active and participating readers and shows that contrasting views can be productive by their very contrast. Furthermore, the gender (and other) destabilizations that the text presents are transferred to the reader and the act of reading, and we find ourselves questioning our own stability and our own sense of identity. Focalization, then, is a dynamic process that opens up a world of questions about the text and about ourselves as readers.

The end of Book 3 narrates the death of Pentheus at the hands of the Maenades. After listening impatiently to Acoetes’ recollection of Dionysus’s deeds (the god had caused the ship of Acoetes to stand still and to be covered with ivy. When the ship’s men jumped overboard, they were turned into dolphins), Pentheus decides to go himself to Cithaeron and see what is going on. Pentheus’s eyes, just as in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, are important throughout the whole episode. When the priest comes to him, Pentheus’s wrath is manifest in his gaze: *adspicit hunc Pentheus oculis, quos ira tremendos fecerat*/*Pentheus looked at him with his eyes, which his wrath had made terrible* (Met. 3.577–78). But this tension in his eyes may well have to do with Pentheus’s avid desire to see the orgy, whether with his mind’s eye or with his physical eyes. When he finally approaches Mount Cithaeron, an ekphrastic description frames the sacred space of the women:

*monte fere medio est, cingentibus ultima silvis,*  
*purus ab arboribus, spectabilis undique, campus:*  
*hic oculis illum cementem sacra profanis*
prima videt, prima est insano concita cursu,
prima suum misso violavit Penthea thyrso
mater... 

Almost in the middle of the mount, there is a field, clear of trees, visible from everywhere, with borders framed by woods. Here his mother saw him first looking at the sacred rites with polluting eyes. She was the first to rush madly on him, the first to injure her son Pentheus with the hurled thyrsus. (Met. 3.708–13)

The phrase monte fere medio est introduces the space where the women will perform the Dionysiac rites. It is an enclosed space with borders marked by woods, which acts as a metaphor for feminine sexuality. The text, however, remarks that it is a spectabilis space, a place to be looked at. Although the developments of the Bacchanalia are secret, the word spectabilis seduces the reader/viewer by giving him a sense of permission to look, and thus one eagerly moves on. The following line aligns the reader’s eyes with those of Pentheus as he is found actively looking on the scene. But a hint of the tragedy to come is given by the oculis profanis. So Pentheus’s eyes open up and penetrate the enclosed space of sacred femininity, thus implying a symbolic rape and violation. However, as with all sexual violence, it pollutes the female. Eyes in this scene are not only penetrative and opening, but also polluting. The game of the gaze, however, is soon turned upside down. Women will have their revenge on Pentheus’s intrusion, and it is now Agave who does the looking (prima videt). The word violavit in the following line is poignant in connection with Varro’s reference to rape and the power of the gaze. But how genuine is the gaze of these women? Agave is frenzied, out of her mind; she cannot see the ‘real,’ but attacks an image that she fabricates in her own mind. She is in a way blinded by Dionysus and one can even say that in the end it is his eyes that do the looking while the women just phantasize and do not really control their gaze (it is not really a voluntary act of violence on Pentheus). The details of Pentheus’s death are meaningful for his loss of masculinity. The story, and with it Book 3 of Metamorphoses, ends like this:

“adspice, mater!” ait. visis ululavit Agaue
collaque iactavit movitque per aera crinem
avulsunque caput digitis complexa cruentis
clamat: ‘io comites, opus hoc victoria nostra est!’
non citius frondes autumni frigore tactas
iamque male haerentes alta rapit arbore ventus,
quam sunt membra viri manibus direpta nefandis.
talibus exemplis monitae nova sacra frequentant
turaque dant sanctasque colunt Ismenides aras.

“Look, mother!” he said. Agave howled madly at the sight, threw her
neck backward, and tossed her hair through the air. And embracing his
severed head with her bloody fingers she shouts: “Io, comrades, this work
is our victory!” No more quickly does a wind snatch away leaves touched
by the autumn cold, already lightly clinging to a tall tree, than is Penthus
torn limb from limb by impious hands. Warned by such examples, the
Theban women celebrate the new sacred rites, burn incense, and wor-
ship the sacred altars. (Met. 3.725–33)

Like Argus, Pentheus suffers decapitation and with the loss of his head,
he loses—among other things—the power to see. This decapitation, as it
was suggested for Argus, implies castration in the metaphor of deprivation
of his phallic eyes. Likewise, the simile of the wind tearing the leaves off
the tree recalls the tree on which Pentheus hides in Euripides’ Bacchae
(1061ff.). The chopping down of this tree has been seen by Segal and
others as a symbolic castration, and this can also be applied to the allu-
sion to the tree deprived of its leaves—like a man deprived of his phal-
lus—in Ovid.

Spencer suggests that there are many “contrasts” between Actaeon and
Pentheus and that the men are portrayed as “opposites.” The problem
with this kind of thinking is that in its effort to show contrasts, it over-
looks the many similarities that the actors of the Theban cycle present. In
the Actaeon episode Ovid stages the conflict between identity and
appearance. In contrast with Actaeon, Pentheus does not undergo a phys-
ical transformation. Nevertheless, the transformation takes place in the
minds of the women, who see him as a wild boar. One could suppose that
darkness may not help in the recognition of Agave’s son, but probably it is
Dionysus who is placing a false phantasia in the women’s minds and thus
controlling the kind of access to reality they have. Interestingly, the link
between Actaeon and Pentheus is strengthened by the fact that they are
both, in ‘reality’ or in the imagination, transformed into hunting prey: a
stag and a boar. The inward agony of both protagonists is alike, however,
in that it resumes the anxiety of not being recognized as who one is; it
brings about a conflict of identity and the self. Likewise, the prophecies of
Tiresias are once again realized. As in Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex, the protagonist loses his sight, and blindness becomes a trade-off for the acquisition of knowledge. In Ovid, the vates had predicted, i.e., seen (“meque sub his tenebris nimium vidisse quereris”/ “You will lament that with my blindness I have seen too much,” Met. 3.525) Pentheus’s end with a reflection on seeing and the desire to see (“quam felix esses, si tu quoque luminis huimus/ orbus” ait “fieres, ne Bacchica sacra videres!”/ “How fortunate you would be if you were deprived of eyes as well, so that you would not see the sacred rites of Bacchus,” Met. 3.517–18).

Pentheus’s gaze fails. His powerful and destructive gaze turns out to destroy the gazer. Part of the reason for this is Pentheus’s own troubled and insecure masculinity. He is a youth striving to be a man and a king, but who is tied up oedipally with his mother, who has no meaningful father and an odd relationship with his grandfather and the ambiguously sexed Tiresias. In a way, he is similar to Dionysus but with fear of the sexual ambiguity that Dionysus has and rejoices in. In the failure of his gaze, we can place Pentheus with incomplete males striving for masculinity like Narcissus, Hermaphroditus, and Phaethon, and against the visual penetrative competence of Jupiter or Apollo. The ‘male gaze’ works fairly well here, for women are really deprived of a gaze through divine possession and Pentheus is reified and feminized.

Several critics have demonstrated that the Narcissus episode in Book 3 is enormously rich in issues of looking, art, and eroticism. The story actually begins with another story of seeing: Tiresias. When Juno and Jupiter desire a judgment about which sex, male or female, experiences more sexual pleasure, they bring their case before the seer, who, because he has lived both as a man and as a woman, can answer this question. Tiresias has a special and unique knowledge, but his perspective does not correspond to Juno’s wishes, and so, as punishment, the goddess blinds him. In Tiresias’ case, and in general but especially in Thebes, seeing is connected with knowledge. Tiresias knows more than what is allowed to mortals, and thus the punishment may be aimed at preventing knowledge. But Jupiter compensates for this by giving him the power to predict the future. In a way, Tiresias’ doom has to do with knowing, knowing something forbidden or inappropriate. Curiously, the story of Narcissus is linked with Tiresias’. The fame of the old prophet became greater when Liriope, Narcissus’s mother, asked if her child would become ripe in age and Tiresias responded: si se non noverit / “If he doesn’t know himself” (Met. 3.348). It is noteworthy that noscere and videre are made synonymous, as
it is really the act of seeing himself that destroys the boy. Noverit here clearly expresses Tiresias’ personal conception of what to see signifies. The prophecy, as has been well established, plays with the famous Delphic maxim. But, contrary to Gregson Davis’s opinion that Narcissus finally returns to the knowledge of his own self-identity, the problem here is that Narcissus does not ‘know himself’ in the mirror of the pool because he sees another reflected there.\textsuperscript{101}

The story, which actually precedes the tale of Pentheus, also presents elements relevant to the issues of gaze, ekphrasis, and gender. After his encounter with Echo and the curse of one of the youths scorned by him, the boy Narcissus comes to a clear pool:

\begin{quote}
\begin{ex}
fons erat inlimis, nitidis argenteus undis,  
quem neque pastores neque pastae monte capellae  
contigerant aliudve pecus, quem nulla volucris  
nece fera turbarat nec lapsus ab arbore ramus;  
gramen erat circa, quod proximus umor alebat,  
silvaque sole locum passura tepescere nullo.
\end{ex}
\end{quote}

There was a clear pool, silvery with its shining waters, which neither shepherds nor she-goats that graze in the mountain had touched nor any other cattle, which no bird, no beast and no branch falling from a tree had disturbed. There was grass around it, which the near water nourished, and trees that would never suffer the sun to warm the spot. (Met. 3.407–12)

The phrase \textit{fons erat inlimis} acts as a visual and narratological border that Narcissus, and the reader, will break to be able to see. There follows a description of a very virginal landscape that will be penetrated by Narcissus and that recalls the virginal land where Cadmus and his companions come to found Thebes earlier in the book. Furthermore, some connections with the Actaeon episode can be drawn. It is said that Narcissus has been hunting (\textit{hic puer et studio venandi lassus et aestu procubuit faciemque loci fontemque secutus,/ dumque sitim sedare cupit, sitis altera crevit} “Here the boy lay down, weary with the effort of the hunt and the heat, and attracted by the beauty of the place and the pool, while desiring to quench his thirst, another thirst grows in him,” Met. 3.413–15). The hunter stopping in a ‘virginal’ locus recalls Actaeon the hunter and his erotic implications. In Narcissus’s case, the thirst acts as a clear metaphor for erotic desire (\textit{sitim sedare cupit}, Met. 3.415). It is precisely this desire that will doom the boy.
The problem is that Rhamnusia—a name for Nemesis—by whom the curse of Narcissus's suitor was heard (Met. 3.406), plays an odd trick on Narcissus. After reading Actaeon's story, the reader expects to find a virgin nymph or goddess in the locus amoenus; but all one sees, with Narcissus, is a virginal puer, or rather his reflection in the water. Mulvey's terms of the male gaze that objectifies the female image are not enough to understand the intricacies of the story. One could suppose that Narcissus intruding into the place—which itself has much to do with feminine landscapes (pools surrounded with grassy banks as in Diana's episode)—is the active male viewer. This could be justified by Narcissus's desire to penetrate the image in the metaphor of penetrating the pool with his arms: *in mediis quotiens visum captantia collum/ bracchia mersit aquis nec se deprendit in illis!* “How many times did he plunge his arms in the middle of the waters trying to clasp the neck he sees. But he did not clasp himself in them!” (Met. 3.428–29).

As Elsner has shown, what Narcissus objectifies is himself or his own image. This creates problems because while Narcissus looks at the reflection in the pool, the reflection bounces back, looks at him and repeats every one of his actions, thereby also becoming penetrative and intrusive. Narcissus destabilizes Mulvey's model, because it is impossible to take Narcissus strictly as viewer and his reflected image as viewed. Likewise, it is worth wondering what happens to identification in the scene. A man looking with 'active' Narcissus finds himself looking at a (reflection of a) puer. Some believe, as was argued for Hermaphroditus, that this would not represent a problem because erotic relations between adult males and boys were common and accepted in Greece and Rome. But it was still not as unproblematic as critics would like. Furthermore, if the external male or female reader truly focalized with Narcissus he would fall into the same narcissistic delusion as the protagonist. If a woman reader identified with Narcissus, she could, as Mulvey suggests, acquire some power, but it is a limited power, for all she can control and reify with the gaze is a puer, and not a full-grown man. Both male and female external viewers who focalize with Narcissus will suffer from visual reification, for the image they look at will also return the look and make them objects of their own gaze. Identification is thus a complex concept. The reader must, and in practice does, constantly shift perspectives and is encouraged to read the story from a multiplicity of angles.

Like Actaeon and Pentheus, Narcissus is also an ‘incomplete’ or problematic male whose youth makes him a puer (namque ter ad quinos unum Cephisius annum/ addiderat/ “For Narcissus had reached his sixteen years,” Met. 3.351) stranded on the threshold of mature masculinity, in that he
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has not stopped being a child. He wishes to be a penetrative and active viewer, but he is also stuck in his auto-eroticism and ‘self-penetration,’ which can only lead him to death or transformation. In the end, Narcissus the viewer becomes a visual object in his metamorphosis into a narcissus, yet something of his gaze is preserved in the very shape of the flower that keeps on ‘looking down’ in a fantasy of erotic contemplation.

ARACHNE’S ALTERNATIVES

In the analysis of the previous episodes the question ‘what happens if the reader/viewer is a woman?’ was only partially addressed. This issue is linked to whether penetration is the only metaphor available for reading. The episode of Arachne and Minerva offers some deconstruction of the penetrative reading model offered before.

The tale of Arachne, recounted by Ovid in Metamorphoses 6, has been much discussed in recent years. It tells of a young lady from Lydia, whose father was a dyer of purple wool and whose mother, already dead, was also lowborn. Despite her humble origin, Arachne achieved great fame owing to her extraordinary talents at the art of weaving (clara, sed arte fuit/ “She was famous for her art,” Met. 6.8). Even though it was clear that Minerva, master and creator of the art, must have taught her, Arachne in her stubborn arrogance challenged the goddess to a weaving contest. Pallas, dressed as an old woman, tried to warn her against the crime of defying a deity and was ready to grant divine pardon if the girl apologized. But Arachne stuck to her own pride even when the goddess revealed herself. Arachne and Minerva each wove a tapestry. The girl’s tapestry was a wonderful work of art, prompting Minerva, in a fit of anger, to destroy the woven cloth and hit the girl three times on the forehead. Unable to bear this offense to her artistic talent, Arachne tried to hang herself with her own threads, so the goddess, “in an act of pity,” turned her into a spider.

Both woman and goddess weave a cloth—presumably rectangular—and divide its space in dissimilar ways. Minerva’s is symmetrical and hierarchically organized, while Arachne’s flows and is a combination of images impossible to represent in actual painting. There is, however, something disconcerting in the experience of reading this scene. When the two weavers set to work the reader can envision a symbolic frame for the woven images to come in: constituunt diversis partibus ambae/ et gracili geminas intendunt stamine telas / “They both settle on different sides and stretch the slender warp upon separate looms” (Met. 6.53–54). What follows is a description of the process of weaving that transmits the fluidity
and transitions of the work (Met. 6.55–69), which concludes with the narration of an ancient tale (et vetus in tela deducitur argumentum/“and an old story is traced on the loom,” Met. 6.69). But while at the beginning the action is in process, now the reader sees a description of the completed tapestries. Nancy Miller notes that Ovid, who is in the rest of the passage very accurate in the description of the weaving process, does not seem to respect here the technicalities of the art of weaving at the loom whereby the tapestry moves up from the bottom and thus the border is integrated from the beginning.\textsuperscript{103} If Ovid were describing this process realistically, we would see only fragments of images developing until the whole tapestry is completed. Instead, he jumps to the concluded works. Next we are immersed in the description of the ‘stories,’ and the text embraces us.

As in the previous episodes there were narratological borders that acted figuratively as borders of pictures, here there is a concrete border for the tapestries. At the end of each ekphrasis, the narrator tells us that the artists take good care in drawing a border. Minerva marks it with a wreath of olive (circuit extremas oleis pacalibus oras/ (is modus est) operisque sua facit arbores finem/“Around the borders she wove a peaceful olive-wreath (this was the end) and thus she concluded her work with her tree,” Met. 6.101–2) and Arachne with little flowers (ultima pars telae, tenui circumdata llimbo,/nexilibus flores hederis habet intertextos/“The edges of the tapestry, surrounded by a slender border, have woven flowers intertwined with ivy,” Met. 6.127–28). This is not what they weave ‘last,’ but the reader is deceived by the narrator’s manipulation of description. Miller reads this edge as a female signature, a mark of subjectivity and identity. It is the text of a woman signed by the closing intertextos of line 128. Miller ventures that this detail may respond to Ovid’s specific intention to lay weight on Arachne’s ‘signature,’ but it can also be an imitation of the Homeric ekphrasis, where the river Oceanus comes at the end as a ‘rim’ (Il. 18.607–8).\textsuperscript{104} It is interesting here that two di-spondaic words act as narrative and pictorial borders of the tapestries. Argumentum in line 69 opens the description of the tapestries and intertextos closes it.

Both the initial symbolic and narrative ‘frame’ and the emphasis on the borders affect the act of looking at the tapestries: to see, the reader also needs to intrude into their works. But this intrusion is milder than with Actaeon or Pentheus who physically enter feminine spaces. Unlike other ekphrases, as readers and viewers we undergo an awkward process. First we know that some description will come, but what comes is rather the description of weaving. Then there is another narrative frame denoted by vetus argumentum (Met. 6.69), which in a way we need to break to
see and read. Next we are immersed in the images before noticing that there will be a border circling them and our gaze. So we begin by exerting some sort of penetrative power, though a mild one, but then get lost in the images and only know that we have been truly penetrating the text(ile)—or that the text has engulfed us—once we are inside it and we realize that the strong frame of a border surrounds us.

Two reading movements are observed in this highly stimulating episode. The first can be described with the metaphor of penetration; the second—which deconstructs the first—sees the text as swallowing us. In any case the text is viewed as feminine, but there are two very different types of feminine figures involved, which imply two different metaphors for reading. The first and penetrative one, developed in the previous episodes, sees the text as a female in sexual terms. The second is more complex. Here the reader sinks into the text and is surrounded by it. This type of reader-text relationship, in its turn, is twofold. On the one hand, the text can be seen as a big feminine web that entraps the reader. It could even represent the threat of the castrating female. On the other hand, a more comforting relationship with the tapestries envisions the text as a *magna mater* who embraces us and in whom we can plunge and enjoy.

Something similar occurs with the borders. Arachne's border is composed of flowers, common symbols of virginity, as can be appreciated in Proserpina's rape, which occurred while she was picking violets and lilies (Met. 5.392). In the metaphor of reading as penetration, by looking at Arachne's work we open it up and we destroy the flowers. It is relevant here that Minerva, who has been identified with masculinity and the godhead, triumphs over the girl, and a symbolic violation is suggested by her rending of Arachne's cloth at the end of the episode (*et rupit pictas, caelestia crimina, vestes* / "And she rent the embroidered tapestry showing heavenly crimes," Met. 6.131). But if one accepts the more comforting metaphor for reading instead of the violent one, one can think of the tapestry as a pleasurable pool surrounded by flowers. In this case, Arachne's 'signature,' as Miller calls it, would be a mark of femininity and would signal the possibility of looking at her tapestry in a nonviolent way.

The model of the monolithic male gaze, while useful for some ekphrases, falls short of making sense of larger gender struggles present in *Metamorphoses*. Likewise, while penetration and violence work to some extent as valid metaphors for reading and viewing ekphrases, the episode of Arachne opens our eyes to a different viewing and reading of framed description.
The paraclausithyron can be described as “the song sung by the lover at his mistress’s door, after he has been refused admission to her house.” Ovid and the elegiac poets have widely exploited this popular topos in their poetry; notable examples are Tibullus 1.2 and 1.5; Propertius 1.16; and Ovid, Amores 1.6. Metamorphoses, however, possesses only one true paraclausithyron, the story of Iphis and Anaxarete in Book 14. Iphis’ desire for the girl commences with the eyes (viderat . . . Iphis Anaxareten / “Iphis had seen Anaxarete,” Met. 14.698–99; viderat et tois perceperat ossibus aestum/ “He had seen her and had caught the fire of love in all his bones,” Met. 14.700). This description invites us to anticipate a powerful male rapist like Jupiter, Mercury, or Apollo. But the tale diverges from this theme: Iphis goes as a suppliant to Anaxarete’s locked doors (supplex ad limina venit, Met. 14.702). The sexual overtones of the paraclausithyron are solidly acknowledged: a man who wishes to penetrate the doors of a mistress and enter her house, both doors and house being metaphors for female sexuality. Further komastic motifs are present in the story: the garlands at the door, the tears of the lover, and the hard threshold (interdum madidas lacrimarum rore coronas/ postibus intedit posuitque in limine duro/ molle latus/ “At times he hung garlands wet with his tears on her doorposts and on the hard threshold he laid his soft body,” Met. 14.708–9). But Anaxarete’s heart is of iron, immovable and impenetrable as a rock. Because of the girl’s rejection, Iphis decides on death and hangs himself by the door, and thus the lover himself becomes the garland and his death substitutes for the lover’s vigil. The banging of the lifeless body “begs for admittance” (icta pedum motu trepidantum aperire iubentem/visa dedisse sonum est adapertaque ianua factum prodidit/ “Struck by the motion of the trembling feet, the door seemed to have given a sound bidding to open and when it was opened, it revealed what had happened,” Met. 14.739–41). The role that eyes play in the tale is remarkable. Iphis had fallen in love through his eyes but could not achieve penetration. At the time of his death he wishes that the girl take pleasure in his dead body: “ipse ego, ne dubites, adero praesensque videbor,/ corpore ut exanimi crudelia lumina pascas”/ “I myself, you should not doubt it, will be there and will be seen present before you, so that you may feast your cruel eyes on my lifeless body,” Met. 14.727–28), and he envisions himself as passive in his being seen (videbor). But it is Anaxarete’s gaze that brings her doom. When the funeral pomp passes by, Anaxarete is curious to see: “Videamus” ait “miserabile funus”/ “Let us see,” she said, ‘this mournful funeral” (Met.14.751). The images of openness become apparent, which provoke the irony of love and desire at the wrong time:
et patulis iniit tectum sublime fenestris
vixque bene impositum lecto prospexerat Iphin.

And she entered the highest part of the house with its wide-open windows. Scarcely had she taken a good look at the body of Iphis placed on the bier. (Met. 14.752–53)

Her eyes are locked in a frozen stare at the sight (deriguere oculi, Met. 14.754). Anaxarete’s desire to see dooms her and transforms her into stone, a natural outcome of the dura puella she was before. With her transformation, Anaxarete becomes, apparently, truly impenetrable. Her case may be seen as the reverse of the Propoetides, who in various readings harden because of ‘sexual excess.’ But if one considers Liveley’s view that the Propoetides’ first denial of Venus actually implied abstinence and not prostitution, then their transformation into stone can also be seen as a preservation of their initial frigid condition. Even more interesting is the end of the story, where Anaxarete’s stone statue is placed in the temple of Venus Prospiciens (Met. 14.761). A statue of a woman leaning forward in a watching position, thus symbolizing the fate of women who scorn love and thus anger Venus, stood in a temple dedicated to Aphrodite in Salamis. This statue combines the figures of Anaxarete transformed and the goddess Aphrodite herself. The moment of looking forward in the window is frozen in a symbolically charged literalizing metaphor with Anaxarete’s transformation into a statue and may even be more complex and multifaceted than it appears. The figure of the “woman in the window” is extensive in mid-oriental and Mediterranean Asia and is particularly popular in Phoenicia and Mesopotamia. It is found, in the figure of a goddess, a priestess, or just an ordinary woman, looking out of a window in the high part of a temple (cf. et patulis iniit tectum sublime fenestris, Met. 14.752) and it conveys the meaning that love is on offer there. The image is apparently connected with sacred prostitution. Thus Anaxarete, though impenetrable as stone, may actually convey the idea of sexual penetrability in her eternal fixation in an open window; in this sense, her link to the sexually available Propoetides turned to stone is strengthened. The punishment for Anaxarete’s hybris is thus brought to full closure, for what could be worse for a dura puella who does not wish to open her doors (and body) than to be eternally fixed in a gesture of sexual availability.

To conclude, this is the story of a failed male who cannot achieve a true masculine gaze and whose eyes are nonpenetrative and nonperformative. Iphis’ impotence was already pre-announced in his very name,
which serves both for men and women and acts as an intratextual nexus with the story of the sexually ambiguous other Iphis in the poem (Met. 9. 688–797). Paradoxically, when Iphis’ eyes close forever some power over the woman is exerted. On the other hand, the girl does not let herself be seen, as proper femininity requires, but by the end of the episode, she desires herself to see, to go beyond the limits of the household and know visually what is going on. Anaxarete’s behavior literally seals her doom: Venus punishes her with petrifaction for resisting love. The right place for a woman’s gaze, then, is narrowly defined between absence and excess. She should not control her gaze by looking too much and at will, but no looking is problematic as well. She should be able to look back and to return the gaze, but not to act upon it, not to initiate it either, and not to reject it.

This is an embedded story told by the disguised Vertumnus to Pomona as an admonition that she should not be a dura puella and that she should accept him as lover.115 As Gentilcore has shown, Pomona is associated with the landscape of her magnificent garden and is at risk of and suffers the intrusion of Vertumnus, who woos her. In a way she wishes to be as closed as Anaxarete’s doors, but finally opens up. Because the narrator focalizes with Iphis, the reader is led to identify with his gaze. But his gaze, according to the gist of the story, is an excluded one and lacks the objectifying power of the male gaze. Unlike with Daphne or Atalanta, for example, Ovid does not provide a physical description of Anaxarete; instead the text focuses on the pathos of love suffered by the man. He (and the ‘male reader’) tries to see her, but he is precluded from such reifying vision. Instead, the lover is transformed into the center of attention, and he becomes a clear object of the gaze in his death. The male gaze of the reader, used to experiencing visual fulfillment in other episodes, is here frustrated. Therefore, if ‘he’ does not want to be blinded, he will have to opt for a different reading position. With his death, the text turns the reader’s gaze over to Iphis, yet the reader cannot really form an accurate phantasia of him, as no detailed description is offered. Both male and female readers are encouraged to move to a space where they can either look at the scene as a whole or adopt shifting focalizations. Finally, if women readers identify with Pomona, we can “be convinced” that we should “do as man says” and that if we try to exercise our own will and reject man’s power and own our own gaze, we will end up petrified. But the story is likewise a disturbing warning to men that masculinity is fallible and that if men let themselves be conquered by passion, they may end up in madness and death.
A few other episodes play with the idea of paraclausithyron in more veiled and displaced ways. Pyramus and Thisbe re-enact the topos of the paraclausithyron. It is not a door in this case, but a wall (paries communis, Met. 4.66) that separates the lovers: the episode exploits the poetics of absence. Perhaps the fact that what separates the lovers is a wall adds further drama to the story, for doors can be opened, but walls need to be broken down. It is, as with Narcissus, an impenetrable barrier, but while Narcissus’s tragedy focuses on seeing, Pyramus and Thisbe cannot see each other at all. Their relationship is based on the secret exchange of words through a hole in the wall (Met. 4.65–77). It is a relation where desire increases by prohibition and by the impossibility of seeing and touching. The analogies of the situation with a paraclausithyron are first perceived in the symbolism of the wall. It is the barrier that the lovers need to trespass, and to it—as in the paraclausithyron—they direct their prayers:

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\text{“invide,” dicebant, “paries, quid amantibus obstas?}
\text{quantum erat, ut sineres toto nos corpore iungi}
\text{aut, hoc si nimium est, vel ad oscula danda pateres?}
\text{nec sumus ingrati: tibi nos debere fatemur,}
\text{quod datus est verbis ad amicas transitus auris.”}
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“Envious wall,” they said, “why do you stand between the lovers? How big a thing would it be for you to let us join our bodies in embrace, or if this is too much, to open for our kisses? We are not ungrateful: we confess that we owe it to you that a passage is given for our words to reach each other’s loving ears.” (Met. 4.73–77)

In view of the power of envy as a force that has implications for the gaze, the epithet of the wall is itself meaningful, as the wall may be understood as a metaphor for social constraints and what the lovers fear is the gaze of the family that will prevent them from being together. The interesting adaptation here is that both lovers play the role traditionally assigned to the exclusus amator. Furthermore, the wall stands as an obvious erotic icon, with its hole through which they exchange their passion; the desire that it would open (pateres) for erotic exchange adds to the sexual symbolism. Like the door in the elegiac paraclausithyron, the wall receives kisses (partique dedere/ oscula quique suae non pervenientia contral “They each gave kisses to their side of the wall, which did not get through,” Met.
Further, mention of the deception of the custodes recalls the elegiac puella who needs to deceive her guardians to be with the lover. It is interesting that the girl herself opens the door of the house, unlike what happens in the traditional paraclausithyron where it remains stubbornly closed (Callida per tenebras versato cardine Thisbe/egreditur/ “Opening the door, clever Thisbe goes out through the darkness,” Met. 4.93–94). But for all the openness and desire to be visible for Pyramus, Thisbe tries to become invisible to the gaze of parents and society by veiling her face (falletique suos adopertaque vultum/ pervenit/ “Deceiving her family and with her head veiled, she arrives,” Met. 4.94).

The lovers undergo a series of adventures where looking plays a central role. Unfortunately, the eyes of Pyramus and Thisbe only meet when it is all too late. Thisbe, who throughout the episode has desired to see and be seen, suffers this irony of fate: that she can only see her lover in death, and the same twist applies to the function of the mulberry tree, which was meant to cover and protect them from society’s gaze and which now simply covers them in death (at tu quae ramis arbor miserabile corpus/ nunc tegis unius, mox es tectura duorum/ “But you, tree which now covers the wretched body of one, soon you will cover two,” Met. 4.159). The poetics of the paraclausithyron are felt throughout. The episode presents the complaint against the object of separation, kisses delivered to it (Met. 4.80), and the futility of the efforts to break down the barrier. First, Pyramus and Thisbe both desire to penetrate the wall with their eyes, words, and embraces. In the woods, they wish to see each other, but they cannot achieve it. Their eyes only meet at death. The story has its points of contact with the tale of Iphis and Anaxarete, who can open the doors of the beloved and make the girl take heed of him only when it is too late. Pyramus and Thisbe thus embody a failed attempt at mutuality.