A Web of Fantasies
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“Set-piece description is regularly seen by narratologists as the paradigm example of narrative pause.” This is how Don Fowler begins his discussion of narration and description as problems raised by ekphrasis. This detention of the story, where “the plot does not advance, but something is described”—this in itself being a questionable statement—has been discussed principally by Mieke Bal. However, the meanings of narrative detention for gender have been less explored. Mulvey observes that “the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.” If one thinks in terms of the traditional gender paradigm of activity equaling the male and passivity equating with the female, one could imagine a certain identification of narrative with the active and advancing masculine, or at least with masculine aspects, and description with the passive and static female. When Leonard Shlain relates the female to image and the masculine to literacy, he suggests that the female is metaphorically connected with space while the male is envisioned as time.

The poet William Blake seems to have seen the male and the female in a similar way when he says that “Time and Space are Real Beings, a Male & a Female. Time is a Man and Space is a Woman.” This can be applied to narratological issues, for descriptions are commonly of spaces and narrations tell about actions in time; thus in a broad way, descriptions in a text may be seen as more feminine moments, and narrations as more masculine ones, though there is much room for discussion on this question.
These plays and interactions between narrative and description affect the gaze and the way in which characters and readers construct their phantasiae from the images they see. The present chapter focuses on the relation between gaze and movement, both in characters physically stopping their actions and in the detention of the narrative pace and the gaze by and for internal and external readers. The eyes of males often have the power to fix visual objects, namely, women and boys, while at the same time they delay the narrative. Nevertheless, the image itself has some power to paralyze the viewer and a two-way movement is recognized.

Looking at Statues

CONTEMPLATING THE IVORY MAIDEN

It is common in Metamorphoses that, when a woman is described, the flow of the narration is suddenly detained and everything stops in the contemplation of an immobile figure, paralyzed by the gaze of the viewer/narrator, internal and external. In consequence, the ‘mind’s eye’ of the reader also experiences a pause. It is true that not all descriptions of women are construed in these terms, but the stoppage of the narration with a fixed description is almost a commonplace; even in pictures of the female body in action (e.g., Daphne and Atalanta) there is an illusion of detention. Two episodes are particularly rich in interplays between gaze, desire, mobility, and immobility: Pygmalion’s ivory maiden and Andromeda.

The story of Pygmalion is well known and is one of the episodes that has received more attention in relation to the gaze. Some points, however, have been overlooked by the critics. In particular, this discussion will argue with Elsner’s view of Pygmalion as viewer and will say a few things about the interactions between gaze, movement, and paralysis in the story. Disgusted with the sexual misconduct of the Propoetides, the women of Amathus who had denied the divinity of Venus and were thus forced to become prostitutes and were later turned to stone, Pygmalion constructs for himself a perfect ivory maiden. As mentioned before, critics have seen Pygmalion as the paragon of the visual artist, as the alter-ego of the elegiac poet and as a viewer/reader. But while some like Sharrock see the statue as lacking in self-agency and not having “a mind of her own,” yet still being able to fulfill Pygmalion’s “erotic fantasies, of being ‘a whore in bed,’” some like Liveley try to recover some female agency in the sculpted maiden.
The focus here will be on Elsner's understanding of the story as a myth of the viewer and reader. Elsner thinks that “the ivory statue (which we may see as a figure for the poem) may have been created by Pygmalion the sculptor but it generates him as a viewer-lover.” As Liveley says, the viewer that Elsner imagines is not genderless but clearly male, and just as Wheeler does not explicitly acknowledge the gender differences in his “all-encompassing” audience, Elsner also falls into the very universalization of the male experience that Fetterly’s resisting reader condemns. Proof of this is his affirmation that “the second person of credas directly addresses the reader as viewer of the statue and equates the reader with Pygmalion as one who might also believe” and that “as Pygmalion loves and desires, so the reader loves and desires.” The problem here is, who is the “reader”? What if the reader is actually a woman? Does she also “love and desire”? We are again in the problematic Mulveyan crux. In a transsex identification she is allowed to have the same experiences as the male reader, otherwise she remains outside the pleasure of the scene. Although it is fairly ‘acceptable’ to talk about power and objectification in trans-sex identification, don’t “love and desire” bring a whole lot of more complex issues? Do women “love and desire” images of women? Neither Elsner’s nor Mulvey’s assumptions work here, Elsner’s, because of his male-centered universalization, and Mulvey’s because of the ‘reductiveness’ of her model. Any ‘solution’ would in itself be self-defeating, yet one may suggest that unilateral ‘identification’ is not the only model for productive gender-aware readings of the episode, for it imposes too many limits on viewing. To get a full view of the richness of the episode, the reader needs to be prepared to assume various focalizing points and contrasting views simultaneously.

Beyond these criticisms, however, Elsner’s contention that Pygmalion is really a myth of the viewer is undoubtedly fruitful and has “opened our eyes” to a different way of looking at the story. It has certainly informed the present reading. Nonetheless, one does not need to think in terms of ‘either/or’: whether to see Pygmalion as a reader or as a creator, for both aspects can, and need to, be reconciled. Elsner is aware of this, but he feels the need to stress the differences for the sake of his own argument. First, Elsner seems to imply that Pygmalion is a viewer only after the creation of his statue. But the phantasia that he must have forged in his mind before setting to work had already generated him as viewer and given him a gaze. The important point about regarding Pygmalion as a viewer before he creates his statue is that it permits us to inquire about what previous viewings and readings inform his work and constitute him as a creator. This is one aspect where Elsner’s thesis can be expanded.
The motor of the story is something that Pygmalion has seen (quas quia Pygmalion aevo per crimen agentis viderat/ “Pygmalion had seen these women lead their lives in shame,” Met. 10.243–44), the promiscuity of the Propoetides. So Pygmalion sets out to create his own image of a perfect (and immobile) maiden. Part of Elsner’s argument is based on the fact that Ovid dedicates a mere two and a half lines to the creation of the statue and close to fifty to the viewing of the image. But length is not all that counts here and sometimes two lines can tell more than a hundred. Indeed, these few lines are very meaningful for issues of gender, readership, and creativity:

interea niveum mira feliciter arte
sculpsit ebur formamque dedit, qua femina nasci
nulla potest, operisque sui concepit amorem.

In the meantime he successfully sculpted a statue of dazzling ivory with amazing art and gave it a beauty that no woman can be born with. He fell in love with his own work. (Met. 10.247–49)

These lines describe Pygmalion as an active artist whose actions and agency lead to the creation of the ivory maiden. It is noteworthy that in this narration Ovid uses verbs in the preterite to show a succession of actions that suggest narrative progression and performance and place the male as central, active, and mobile character. Taking into account the previous idea that narrative involves a more masculine movement and description a more feminine one, Pygmalion here, through the ‘diachronicity’ expressed by the perfect, embodies the masculine action and the ‘performativity’ of the creator. Then again, if Pygmalion identifies with Ovid the creator at the very moment of commencement of creative action, it is a male artist/viewer/reader that lurks behind the image.

Pygmalion’s previous readings and viewings inform his creation; he—and any artist—is a viewer before creating a work of art. In the three meaningful lines quoted above, Pygmalion shows that he has both ‘read’ Roman literature and ‘seen’ ancient statues. In considering Pygmalion’s previous viewings the concept of phantasia can clearly be seen at work as a critical tool. One of the central issues in the episode is that Pygmalion wants a chaste woman whom he can marry. The epitome of the candid, immobile, and chaste woman is Lucretia and the passage shows her hiding behind the ivory statue. Thus, in the creation of a wife who is beautifully pale and chaste, Pygmalion is reading Ovid, for an allusion to the image of Lucretia in the Fasti is construed in very similar terms as the ivory girl.
This is a difficult point, because the final writing and revision of both *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* may have taken place simultaneously when the poet was already in exile. Nonetheless, the image of Lucretia, whether already inscribed in the *Fasti* or still as mental phantasia of the poet, acts as intertext for Pygmalion’s girl. Lucretia is also “snowy”; when Sextus Tarquin conceives a desire for her, the text reads:

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forma placet niveusque color flavique capilli,
quique aderat nulla factus ab arte decor;
verba placent et vox, et quod corrumpere non est.
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Her beauty, her snow white color, and her blond hair please him and her grace made by no art. Her words and her voice please him, and her incorruptibility. (*Fasti* 2.763–65)

Lucretia is almost a statue, except for the fact that she can speak. First one notes the allusion to the skin of both women as *niveus* and the word *forma*, involving its double meaning of beauty and shape. A few lines later in the *Fasti* passage, the description of Lucretia tells us: *hic color, haec facies, hic decor oris erat* “This was her hue, this her beauty, this was the grace of her face” (*Fasti* 2.774). Any reference to Lucretia’s color is absent from Livy’s version, but it accords with Ovid’s preoccupation about color and women elsewhere. In Livy, the decisive factors in arousing Tarquin’s desire are both beauty and chastity: *forma tum spectata castitas incitat* “Her beauty and exemplary purity incite him” (Livy 1.57.10).

Spectata here clearly emphasizes the condition of Woman as spectacle. The lover is again a viewer and in both Livy and Ovid the narration is focalized through the male, with whom the (male) reader also identifies. Ovid picks up on the two fundamental features of Lucretia’s character as construed by Livy (*forma* and *castitas*), but translates them into color imagery (*niveus color*—white having connotations of purity). It is interesting that *castitas* is actually an invisible quality, which the plastic artist makes visible. Important also is the comment *sine arte*, as it denotes that her pale beauty/purity is natural and not achieved through cosmetics. Lucretia’s *sine arte color* should be compared with *feliciter arte* in Pygmalion’s construction. The statue is the work of an artist, and he chooses deliberately to carve it out of ivory, but Lucretia is naturally pale and thus fulfils ‘naturally’ the male fantasy of the white woman. The reference to *ars* is teasing; for while the ivory statue is pure *ars*, the virtue of Lucretia is that she is not ‘artificial.’ Paradoxically, what Pygmalion wants is a non-artificial female. This may be seen to undermine the ‘artificiality’ of Pygmalion’s
girl, a reading that would agree with Liveley’s de-mystifying view of the statue. So Pygmalion has read/seen Lucretia and, with her phantasia in his mind, he constructs his ivory wife.

Critics have recognized that there is another statue that informs Pygmalion’s creation: Aphrodite of Knidos described in Lucian, Amores 13–16. Lucian’s statue can be connected with those three meaningful lines that construct Pygmalion as viewer before (or at the same time) he becomes a creator. The artist Praxiteles created a beautiful statue of the naked goddess Aphrodite about to enter her bath. There was a man who was so profoundly in love with the statue that he managed to lock himself inside the temple where the sculpture was and had sex with the ‘goddess.’ After this a mark appeared in the thigh of Knidian Aphrodite. In Lucian’s story the reader focalizes with the male narrator who, in a voyeuristic stance, comes to the temple with his friend to look at the statue, although the apparent intention is aesthetic and not erotic contemplation (it is questionable whether these two forms of viewing can be separated, however). This story functions as an evident intertext for Pygmalion who sexually desires his statue. Like Pygmalion’s maiden (and like Lucretia), Lucian describes the statue as of pure brilliance and splendor (τῆς λίθου λαμπρότης, Amores 15). Although the original Knidian statue is lost, through copies, art historians have deduced that, although there was some polychromy in Praxiteles’ work—as usual in Greek sculpture—the body of Aphrodite seems to have been white or at least covered in a light tint, and over this surface the mark of sexuality would be even more visible. But the statue also recalls for us the issue of the goddess in the bath, a distinctly female pleasure and thus a particularly tempting sight for male desire. Ovid’s Pygmalion, then, who in other versions actually fell in love with a statue of Aphrodite, models his own statue on that of the goddess; therefore, one could envision him as viewer and reader of this traditional account. We are here, as with Diana’s readings of rape in Metamorphoses, envisioning, in a releasing critical maneuver, a literary character with self-agency and life beyond his specific episode who can become a reader. One may suppose, then, that Pygmalion has read and seen this statue of Aphrodite and was already in love with its phantasia before creating his statue; therefore, he tries to recreate for his own enjoyment an image of her. In this sense, Pygmalion aligns with other male viewers/lovers of goddesses.

Praxiteles’ art is so realistic as to be capable of deceiving the human eye and heart. Indeed, the inability to distinguish between statue and goddess is itself telling. This uncanny ability links Praxiteles to Pygmalion. But in Ovid’s tale Pygmalion takes the roles of both the artist
and the viewer and thus embodies the figures of Praxiteles and the intruder. Most poignant also is that the text compares the statue’s lover with Anchises (ο καυσός Ἀγχίστις καθείρχο, Amores 16). This is interesting in light of our observations regarding Actaeon and its relation to the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite. If Pygmalion is associated with the viewer/intruder (like Actaeon) who comes to love a statue of the goddess in her bath, Pygmalion is in some way associated with Anchises as lover of Aphrodite and with Actaeon who sees a bathing goddess. Given that in Metamorphoses Pygmalion comes after Actaeon, one may also suppose that Pygmalion informs his construction and his love with his own ‘reading’ of Actaeon. But Pygmalion is smart enough to make a statue of a woman and not a goddess to fall in love with, and so he avoids the typical punishment of males who view and love goddesses.

On the basis of previous readings and phantastic viewings of the figure of Lucretia, the statue of Knidian Aphrodite and perhaps the image of Diana in her bath, Pygmalion forges a perfect maiden with whom he soon falls in love and through whom he becomes artist and viewer, reader and writer. Further, while Elsner is surely right in stressing Ovid’s construction of Pygamlion as a viewer, he does not stress sufficiently the importance of his being a viewer and reader before creating his statue, for reader and artist are inseparable categories in the story. Literature and art are constructed on the basis of previous readings and viewings.

After the three introductory lines where Pygmalion makes his ivory maiden, the reader’s gaze is directed to the finished work and there he experiences a detention of the action in the contemplation of the statue:

virginis est verae facies, quam vivere credas,
et, si non obstet reverentia, velle moveri:
ars adeo latet arte sua. miratur et haurit
pectore Pygmalion simulati corporis ignes.

Her face is that of a real maiden, which you would think was alive, and, if shame did not prevent it, you would think she would want to be moved: to such an extent does his art conceal his art. Pygmalion admires her and burns in his heart with the fires inspired by the crafted body.

(Met.10.250–53)

The verbs now are mostly in the present, which gives an idea of detention and synchronic action, often associated with visuality, while
diachronicity is linked to narrative. Thus, the image of the woman detains the action and with its visual charge produces a stoppage in the narrative. The phrase *velle moveri* has often puzzled critics. The statue is so real that, “you would believe that she is alive and desirous to be moved”—although *moveri* could have a middle-reflexive sense here. Yet it is curious that the text does not read *velle (se) movere*, which would imply an active desire of the statue to move, to gain life, but one may think that her ‘imagined’ desire is the desire of a passive object to be activated by her creator. Note how Pygmalion is most mobile when he “tries her” (note *admovet*) with his hands (*saepe manus operi temptantes admovet*).

There is also the question of why the ivory statue would experience *puedor* at the thought of self-generated movement. Pygmalion wants a woman whom he can marry, and movement is not appropriate in a respectful *matrona*. The paradox is that men do not always want an immobile woman, Pygmalion desires a wife who is a fixed image that does not move, yet he wishes that she would actually stop being just a statue. Here Sharrock’s inference that Pygmalion wants a wife/goddess/whore is appropriate.

After the description of the ivory maiden, the story turns to Pygmalion’s actions as lover. He applies kisses, arranges the statue, and offers gifts, all typical actions of the elegiac lover. But notably, Pygmalion seems to be affected by the immobility of the statue by becoming himself less active. This process, paradoxically, takes place when the statue begins to be mobile or at least ‘movable.’ Most of the verbs that describe Pygmalion’s actions toward the statue are in the present (*admovet, dat, putat, loquitur, tenet, credit*, etc). According to Elsner, this is the section that best shows Pygmalion as a viewer, but also as (elegiac) lover. Again, the sequence of actions in the present gives an idea of synchronicity rather than narrative diachronicity, which has interesting implications for his transformation from artist to lover. It is well known that the elegiac lover is always somewhat feminized and static in his adoration of the *puella*, especially in comparison to the ‘man of action.’ The image here provokes in turn some fixity in the viewer—such is the case with Perseus, who, like Pygmalion, also *stupet* at a magnificent image (10.287). In this sense, there are further connections between the story and Lucian’s tale of Knidian Aphrodite because in the Greek text the curious visitors/viewers are also affected with paralysis at the sight of the statue, especially Charicles, who stood almost petrified before the image of the goddess (ὁ Χαρικλῆς ὑπὸ τοῦ σφόδρα θάμβουσι δόλιου δειν ἐπεπήγει τακερὸν τι καὶ ρέον
It is significant that when Ovid narrates the scene at the festival of Venus, when Pygmalion is actively seeking a ‘result,’ he soon returns to the use of the perfect (constitit, dixit, sensit, Met.10.274–77) to refer to Pygmalion. But when he returns home, Pygmalion appears to be newly detained in the contemplation of the ivory maiden, when the present is now used: admovet, temptat, mollescit, subsidit, cedit, remollescit, flectitur, fit, stupet, retractat, gaudet, veretur (Met.10.282–88). In the end, Pygmalion has suffered several transformations, first from viewer to creator—and from creator to viewer. Finally, from artist to lover, who, after manufacturing an immobile statue, is immobilized himself by the image he has fashioned. However, as usual, there is some continuity in transformation: the creator is still a viewer, and the lover is still an artist at some level. The narrative and descriptive sequencings in the episode are marked by the use of the perfect and the present, respectively. The former shows an advance of the action and implicates a more masculine movement of performativity and action. Description slows down the action and delays the gaze in contemplation, making the readers, internal and external, more ‘feminine’ and immobile.

**FLEXIT AMANS OCULOS: ORPHEUS’S VISUAL FAILURE**

When talking about Pygmalion, one cannot forget that this is the story of not one artist but three, and therefore the story of three (or more) viewers. Pygmalion creates his ivory maiden, but Orpheus sings their story and Ovid that of Orpheus. The episode of Pygmalion and his girl mirrors Orpheus’s desire to see. The bard lost his own dear Eurydice precisely because he could not resist casting a controlling and longing eye on his wife. The gaze is central to his fate (metuens avidusque videndi/ flexit amans oculos / “In fear and desirous to see, the lover turns back his gaze,” Met.10.56–57) and will exert a profound impact on the whole of Book 10. Issues of paralysis and mobility are also central in Orpheus’s descent to the Underworld. With his music, he is able to paralyze the creatures of Hades and freeze their normal routines:

. . . nec Tantalus undam
    captavit refugam, stupuitque Ixionis orbis,
The verb *stupuit* for Ixion is particularly telling here, for it indicates Orpheus's power to control and immobilize through music. Let us remember that Orpheus has the capacity to make static objects move and to freeze moving objects with his art. Here Ovid is drawing on Virgil's description of how the realm of the Underworld and the inmost Tartarian halls are astounded at the bard's song (Virg., *Georg.* 4.481–82). Notwithstanding, while he is a successful musician and poet, Orpheus is an unsuccessful viewer. When he turns to gaze at Eurydice, he is himself stupefied by her disappearance:

non aliter stupuit gemina nece coniugis Orpheus,  
quam tria qui timidus, medio portante catenas,  
colla canis vidit. . . .

Orpheus was stupefied by the second death of his wife not unlike the man who, in terror, saw the three necks of the dog Cerberus, the one in the middle bearing chains. (Met.10.64–66)

John Heath suggests that Orpheus represents the unheroic failure in comparison with Hercules’ success in the Underworld. Instead of paralyzing Cerberus, through the force of the simile, the guardian of the realm of Dis immobilizes Orpheus. This sense is also conveyed by the comparison with Olenos, the husband of Lethaea, in lines 68–69, which brings forth the fact that Orpheus is not willing to die to achieve his goal. Heath’s conception of Orpheus’s failure is appropriate and his suggestion that the poet projects his own desires through the stories he tells in Book 10 is suitable. But although he justly shows that Eurydice can be assimilated to a “hellish denizen who turns onlookers into stone,” Heath does not expose the gender implications of this. All this leads to a comparison with Perseus. Like Perseus, Orpheus *stupet*, but not just temporarily as the hero. His stupefaction has profound implications for his life and marks the loss of his beloved’s image, the failure of his gaze, and the collapse of his masculinity. Like Perseus, he faces a ‘Gorgon’ with the power to petrify, yet unlike him, Orpheus cannot overcome her power.
What Orpheus then does with the story of Pygmalion is to create a *phantasia* of his own success. The ivory statue can be understood as Orpheus’s desiring fantasy to fix his eyes forever, to have an immobile girl who would never move or fade away. Further, in Orpheus’s story of loss, when the couple is headed upward to the realm of the living, Eurydice, who follows her husband, is probably the one who looks at him from behind, while Orpheus must not turn around (*ne flectat retro sua lumina* /*That he should not turn his eyes back,* Met. 10.51). In appearance, hers is a mute gaze with no power to control or influence her husband. It is perhaps this prohibition on looking and the knowledge that he is being seen by a woman, which are felt as a weakening of masculinity for the bard, and Orpheus cannot resist it. In contrast, Pygmalion’s ivory statue can always be looked at, but, ideally, she cannot look back. However, Orpheus’s dream is dismantled by the power of Venus, who turns the statue to life and finally gives her a gaze, thus frustrating Orpheus’s desire to fix the beloved forever as a spectacle. But the statue’s ‘coming to life’ could also realize the dream of Orpheus in a different way. Through his art, the bard can move rocks and stones, thus animating them, and he also almost succeeds in bringing Eurydice to life. Pygmalion, Orpheus’s *alter ego*, succeeds with his attentions and prayers, and accomplishes the dream of the Thracian bard. So the awakening of the statue is complex from Orpheus’s perspective, for on the one hand, it realizes his dream of giving life to his beloved, but on the other, it shows Orpheus’s failure to petrify and impose eternal visual control over her image, for Pygmalion’s statue comes to life, opens her eyes and—in a releasing reading—could even escape the gaze of her lover.

**PERSEUS’S STUPEFACTION**

Instead of a concrete statue, the episode of Andromeda and Perseus presents a quasi-statue and has many points of contact with the tale of Pygmalion and his ivory maiden. The hero Perseus visits the land of the Ethiopians and finds Andromeda chained to a rock, Ammon’s punishment for her mother’s crime. As with Pygmalion, the affair begins with the male gaze:

| vidit Abantiades, nisi quod levis aura capillos       |
| moverat et tepido manabant lumina fletu,            |
| marmoreum ratus eset opus; trahit inscius ignes    |
et stupet et visae correptus imagine formae
paene suas quaternes est oblitus in aere pennas.

(As soon as) Perseus saw her chained by her arms to a rough rock, save for
the fact that a light breeze would stir her hair and that warm tears were
trickling from her eyes, he would have thought she was a marble statue.
Unknowingly, he burns with the fire of love. He is stupefied and seized by
the sight of beauty he has seen; he almost forgot to flap his wings in the
air. (Met. 4.674–47)

Perseus sees Andromeda immobile and believes her a marble statue,
except for her wind-blown hair, which can be understood as a sign of her
being still alive. This scene accords well with the observation that
women looked at are normally depicted as inactive. Beauty is equated
with immobility and the male gaze fixes the figure of the girl and slows
down the narrative. The reader, also focalizing with Perseus, stops 'his' gaze
in the contemplation of statue-like Andromeda. Perseus falls in love with
the frozen image. Movement of the hair gives reality to the picture and
anticipates the possibility of movement and pleasure.

It is worth remembering that Perseus constitutes an odd case, since,
although a mortal, he can still fly like the gods, and this endows him with
the possession of a vertical gaze characteristic of deities (despectat, con-
spicit, 624 and 669). Perseus's mobility, which is also seen here in the fact
that he is a traveling hero, emblematizes masculine movement against
feminine fixation, not only with reference to Andromeda but in relation
to all the other female spots/landscapes that Perseus traverses: the
dwelling of the Graeae (773–75), the house of Gorgons (778–79), Libya
(618–20), and the garden of the Hesperides (628). Perseus views
Andromeda, but the passage insists on her 'not seeing.' First, her eyes are
full of tears (manabant lumina fletu / "Tears were trickling from her eyes,
674) and then it is said that, if she were not tied up, she would modestly
cover her face with her hands. Instead, her tears do the job: manibusque
modestos/ celasset vultus, si non religata fuisset;/ lumina, quod potuit, lacrimis
inplevit obortis / "If she had not been in chains, she would have covered her
modest face with her hands; she did what she could and filled her eyes with
rising tears" (Met. 4.682–84). Andromeda's eyes acquire an alternative
function, which is not to see. Although she does not look, it cannot be said
that her eyes are completely inactive, for they "do what they can" to cover
her face. It is a somewhat frustrating and frustrated attempt, but an
attempt still at some kind of activity. It is peculiar, however, that Ovid
never says that she would cover her nudity if she could. While not looking
at a man's eyes before having been formally introduced to him is what a virgin should do; her embarrassment may also be due to the fact that she is naked. A point to be borne in mind here is, as with Pygmalion, the issue of modesty and marriageability. Andromeda cannot 'look back' because modest women should not do so. Andromeda, then, is the fixed, immobile statue-like beauty that the male gaze freezes for his pleasure and delights in at the prospect of making her mobile. And it is the unbinding of Andromeda which Perseus sees as a passport to marriage (“praeferrer cunctis certe gener”/ “Surely, I should be preferred as son-in-law over all the suitors,” 701). One may suppose that it is not only the statue-like condition of Andromeda that seduces Perseus, but the fact that she embodies the fantasy of the blind woman. Seeing that silence was a condition praised in women in the ancient world, we may infer that men desire a woman who cannot/does not want to see. Andromeda covering her face in shame conveys the idea that she does not possess powerful, threatening, and castrating eyes, which is precisely what Perseus has been fighting to eradicate in Medusa and the daughters of Phorcys by robbing them of their gaze.

The obvious fact that Perseus actively looks, while Andromeda is clearly the passive object, led to a straightforward application of the monolithic male gaze to the episode. Segal shows the link between the stories of Pygmalion and Andromeda by affirming that “Andromeda is the inverse of Pygmalion’s beloved, a living body made into a statue-like spectacle for a male viewer” and insists that Andromeda is only an erotic object and that her “statuesque role is Andromeda’s only function in the episode.” For Segal Andromeda’s body as a statue somehow legitimizes “male erotic viewing under the rubric of art.”42 While this seems true for the most part, it is not appropriate to assign absolutely no agency to Andromeda (she is at least capable of talking and expressing herself, while Pygmalion’s girl is not) and even less so to assign Perseus absolute control, for he suffers some destabilization by the very act of looking and almost loses control.

Perseus is as mobile as one can be: he flies around in every direction and needs constant flapping of his wings in mid-air, which is curiously endangered by the paralyzing effects of love (note in particular stupet in line 676). Love makes Man weaker, it paralyzes him, and, like a woman, he becomes immobile and passive. The reference to the chains of love in line 679 is interesting in this respect:

*ut stetit, “o” dixit “non istis digna catenis, sed quibus inter se cupidis iunguntur amantes.”*
As he stood he said: “Oh, you do not deserve these chains, but those that bind fond lovers to each other.” (Met. 4.678–79)

While some see this expression as one more element of male domination and power, since entrapment and enclosure are common features of rape, the “chains of love” also provide a different dimension to the power relations in the story. The reference unavoidably recalls the servitium amoris of Latin elegy, where it is normally the male lover who finds himself a slave to love and to a cruel mistress. Perseus’s allusion to erotic chains precisely at the moment when he stetit and stupet, losing control—though briefly—of himself, evokes feelings of domination experienced by the elegiac lover and hints at the fact that he is feeling entrapped and powerless like a slave. Perseus could be using the elegiac jargon to express his own feelings, for here the female object of the gaze and desire, by its very immobility, controls, even disturbs and overmasters the viewer—which is definitely more than Segal’s assumption that Andromeda is “just a statue.” In a more releasing reading, the very fixed image of Andromeda as statue affects both the male gaze and the narration, which stops and centers on her image. A double-edged play is at work. Not only does Man’s gaze freeze Woman’s image, detaining the story; but also Woman’s image paralyzes Man and with him the eyes of the external viewer/reader (again, for the moment this reading assumes a trans-sex identification for female viewers). The reader is not immune or detached but becomes affected by what he sees and reads.

So one way of reading the episode is by identifying with Perseus’s gaze, whether we are male readers or female. Another way is to resist Perseus’s and Ovid’s gaze by questioning their reliability and exposing the mechanisms whereby Andromeda is constructed by narrator and focalizer as a fantasy for and by the male gaze. First, one can disagree with Segal that Andromeda is the reverse of Pygmalion’s maiden, for the story displays the same metamorphic sequencing observed in Pygmalion. From ivory statue, the woman is released by love and comes to life. Andromeda is also constructed as a marmoreum opus. The word opus cannot but have metacritical overtones. In this, Ovid plays a trick on his readers (perhaps his preconceptions play a trick on him) and shows himself as an unreliable and subjective viewer whose gaze we can resist. When in the Ars Amatoria Ovid admonishes the male lover to avoid reproaching a woman with her “faults” (vitia), he adduces the example of Andromeda: nec suus Andromedae color est abjectus ab illo/ “And her color was not made a reproach to Andromeda by him [i.e., Perseus]” (AA. 2.643). Andromeda’s
The color of Andromeda’s skin varies according to different versions of the story, giving rise to much discussion about this issue. In the Asian account she is white, and in the African account she is black. Ovid appropriates the African version in the *Heroides* and three times in the *Ars Amatoria*; in Latin elegy Andromeda becomes a paradigm of the black woman who was loved despite her color. In the version adopted by the *Metamorphoses*, the home of Andromeda, daughter of Cepheus, was Ethiopia. Therefore, her picture as a marble statue becomes curious. Since the story takes place in Ethiopia, the reader is led at first to believe that Andromeda is black, but the image of a marble statue is normally associated with pure whiteness of the body. It is quite surprising that critics like Anderson who have a very deep knowledge of Ovid do not seem to be aware of this problem. Anderson comments on the line: “Andromeda had a beautiful body, white like marble, nude like most statues.” Apparently Anderson does not register the incongruity of the myth and Andromeda’s description simply because he falls in the trap of aligning himself with the gaze of the desiring male subject in the tale. This seems to be a usual maneuver whereby “throughout the history of western art figures of female beauty, whether virginal or provocative, sacred or secular, are regularly assimilated to an ideal of European whiteness, even where ethnic origin might suggest they should be represented otherwise.” The version of the story that Ovid had in mind, on the evidence of Sappho’s letter and the setting of the tale in *Metamorphoses*, was the African, which makes Andromeda black. But Ovid still describes her beauty with images of whiteness. Like Apollo wishing that Daphne would comb her hair and thus alter her appearance in conformance with his desire, the viewer is here changing the nature of the image. Andromeda is not considered

candida si non sum, placuit Cepheia Perseo
Andromede, patriae fusca colore suae.
et variis albae iunguntur saepe columbae,
et niger a viridi turtur amat ur ave.

If I am not dazzling white, Cepheus’s Andromeda, dark with the color of her country, did please Perseus. White doves are often joined with those of varied hue, and the black turtledove is loved by the green bird [the parrot]. (35–38)
beautiful in her blackness. Thus Ovid’s male gaze annihilates what Andromeda is and constructs her as a perfect fabrication of man’s mind that suits his taste and desire, just as Pygmalion will do in Book 10. But why does Ovid change his presentation of Andromeda in the various places he mentions her? Perhaps it is because in the other Ovidian passages where the heroine appears she is not looked upon directly as the erotic object of the gaze; instead, her color is referred to in a somewhat oblique way. In fact, in Heroides 15 it is the character Sappho, a woman, who does the speaking. In Metamorphoses 4, on the other hand, Andromeda is a clear object of the gaze that entraps the onlooker, an effect that would perhaps be lost if her blackness were emphasized. Perseus/Ovid silences and distorts Andromeda’s image. In agreement with recent views on race in antiquity, and despite all earlier assumptions that color prejudice was almost nonexistent in the ancient world, this appears to be a judgment on race. When something negative is said, Ovid’s texts mention “black Andromeda”: when something positive is meant, she metamorphoses into a “white statue.”

Perhaps, if Andromeda had clearly looked back, Perseus would have been completely petrified, but it is indeed Medusa, his fierce female enemy, who has the actual power of turning brave men into stone. Perseus has defeated her with her own lethal gaze. As Barkan suggests, Perseus is a master of mirror and reflection, which is why he can manipulate the girl’s image and even give a reflection of Andromeda that is sieved through his own subjectivity. Interestingly, while most mirrors in Metamorphoses only serve the purpose of feminine toilette or self-contemplation, as in the Narcissus episode, Perseus here puts the forces of the mirror to a very masculine and epic task: killing the monster. Like Ulysses and the song of the Sirens, Perseus gets to see the monster and thus acquires the knowledge of the unknown and the ‘other’ in order to defeat it. While it is the vision of the horrific Medusa which petrifies, the text also suggests that she has a powerful gaze (cf. Met. 5.240–41: sed nec ope armorum nec, quam male ceperat, arce/ torva colubriferi superavit lumina monstri/ “But neither by the power of arms nor by the stronghold he had wrongly taken did he overcome the fierce eyes of the serpent-bearing monster”). Perseus uses his shield as mirror, looks at Medusa reflected in it, and decapitates her when she is asleep. This episode bears resemblances with Argus, who is also doomed when he falls asleep and whose eyes are also meaningful. Loss of sight is here developed through decapitation of a female monster, who thereby loses her sight and her phallic gaze. It is worth remembering that
Perseus was already a robber of female eyes as he had stolen the only eye that the two daughters of Phorcys shared.

At his wedding Perseus tells the story of how he defeated the Gorgon and why she had snakes: once she had been a beautiful girl whose best feature was her hair. Neptune raped her in a temple of Minerva and the goddess punished her by turning her hair into snakes. This is in itself remarkable, for the victim is punished instead of the rapist. Again, as with Juno, goddesses are powerless before gods and thus, they need to perpetrate their vengeance on the victim. The text stresses that Medusa the girl was an object of amazement and visual enchantment (Met. 4.795–96). From beautiful spectacle she is transformed into horrifying sight, which it is however forbidden to gaze upon. In an inversion of the sequences of transformations observed in the Theban cycle, here is a female object of the gaze that is turned into a most powerful viewer. This is precisely what makes Medusa intolerable and deeply threatening: that a female may possess a gaze and turn men (literally) into objects (of the gaze). The petrifying power of Medusa’s eyes is then a hyperbolic metaphor for any woman who wishes to see and to affect the world with her eyes.

Perseus uses the head of Medusa to destroy his enemies and to vanquish his opponent in the conquest of his bride. Andromeda and Medusa are thus opposites: the bad, monstrous, and powerful woman, who can fix, control, and petrify with her eyes; the one that “cannot be looked at,” but who can look at whatever she pleases and who thus needs to be beheaded. Andromeda is powerless, bound, a woman destined for marriage, fixed (turned into stone) by the male gaze, but who cannot, in her modesty, look back at the gaze of Man, thus embodying the fantasy of the blind woman. Very well, but are these two women really so different? Like a ball, Andromeda’s image bounces back and almost petrifies her viewer, although Perseus resists. There is something of Medusa in Andromeda; a domesticated Gorgon who can still be controlled and loved, although she can nonetheless surprise you.

The episode clearly displays the male gaze, yet it still invites an exploration of “the risks entailed by the male in his control of the gaze.” At first glance, the monolithic male gaze works fairly well, but soon the reader realizes that Perseus’s control actually hangs from a thin thread and that his gaze and masculine supremacy are often in danger of destabilization. Likewise, while the male reader (and female in trans-sex identification) can focalize with Perseus and enjoy the pleasure of looking, the resisting reader can disarticulate the viewer’s fantasy and expose the strategies whereby Andromeda is constructed as a work of art and deprived of her own identity. We can be fooled by Perseus’s gaze and
Ovid’s narrative, or we can decompose the layers of reflections that the
master of the mirror imposes on us. The first road paralyzes us and leaves
us stupefied before Andromeda’s image. The second will surely give us
more critical mobility.

**Fixing the Bride**

**SLOWING DOWN ATALANTA**

Running is a common feature of virgins in *Metamorphoses*. Various char-
tacters run away from their suitors until they become fixed in one way or
another: Daphne, Syrinx, and Lotis. That fixation is a common aspect of
marriage imagery is well known, but here the focus will be on the con-
nection between this aspect and the function of the gaze. The episode of
Atalanta and Hippomenes is most emblematic. Venus narrates the tale in
Book 10, under the wishful sight of the Thracian bard. This girl of fleet-
ing feet (laude pedum, Met. 10.563) has been told by an oracle that mar-
riage will be her bane (“coniuge . . . / nil opus est, Atalanta, tibi: fuge
coniugis usum / nec tamen effugies teque ipsa viva carebis”/ “There’s no ben-
efit for you in a husband, Atalanta; flee the contact of a husband, and yet
you will not flee, and though alive, you will lose yourself,” Met.
10.567–68). So Atalanta turns herself into a stereotype of the ‘running vir-
gin’ who lives in the woods (Met.10.566–67) just like Daphne, Callisto,
and Diana. The insistence of the oracle on the idea of fleeing (fuge,
effugiens, and later fugat, 569) recalls Daphne’s flight in Book 1. Again, as
in the Daphne episode the emphasis on the feet (563, 570, 653) can be
taken as metapoetic, and may assimilate Atalanta to the fleeing
puella

Atalanta’s identification with the dura puella of erotic elegy is also
observed in the affirmation that she was indeed harsh (illa quidem inmitis,
573). In Ovid’s presentation of the girl there are obvious intertextualities
with Propertius, who mentions that Milanion conquered harsh Atalanta
(Milanion nullos fugiendo, Tulle, labores/ saevitiam durae contudit Iasidos/
“Milanion conquered the cruelty of harsh Atalanta, Tullus, by fleeing
from no toil,” Prop.1.1.9–10) and refers to her speed (ergo velocem potuit
domuisse puellam/ “Thus he could subdue the fast-footed girl,”
Prop.1.1.15). But what is rather unelegiac is the episode’s insistence on
the idea of marriage (564, 567, 571, 576, 613, 618, 620, 621, 634, 635),
which is a central issue in the heroine’s life. Her virginity is signaled by
mobility and running, but at the same time, her speed is described with
images of flying, especially in passu volat alite virgo (587) and in the simile of the Scythian arrow in 588. Yet the most obvious image of flying is the reference to the talaria flowing with the wind as she runs, which has given much trouble to translators and commentators (aura refert ablata citis talaria plantis/ “The breeze bears back the streaming wings she wears on her swift ankles,” Met.10.591). The word talaria links Atalanta to three main characters who have winged ankles or sandals, namely, Minerva, Mercury, and Perseus. From a gender viewpoint Atalanta aligns herself with two mobile males who fly around, survey the world, and spot immobile women on land in Metamorphoses. The connections with Minerva, although the poem does not show her with wings, may also point to the mobile characteristic of deities, male and female, and to the particular ‘masculinity’ of Minerva herself.

Atalanta engages in running contests with the promise of wedlock for the suitor who can outdo her in the race. Many young men, however, pay the penalty for losing with their own lives. One day, Hippomenes, wondering who would be so foolish as to look for a bride at such a high price, sits as a spectator at the race deemed so unfair: sederat Hippomenes cursus spectator iniqui (Met.10.575). This line is quite remarkable for issues of gazing and mobility. In contrast with Atalanta’s running, the text shows a man who is immobile. He is, however, an almost detached spectator who looks down on the whole event as ridiculous, yet at the same time he comes partly in search of scopophilic pleasure to observe the race. But Hippomenes’ gaze soon changes when Venus describes what happens to him on first seeing the girl:

\[
\text{ut faciem et posito corpus velamine vidit,} \\
\text{quale meum, vel quale tuum, si femina fias,} \\
\text{obstipuit. . . .}
\]

When he saw her face and her body without clothing, like mine, or like yours—if you were a woman—he was stupefied. (Met.10.578–80)

Posito velamine recalls Diana sine veste in Book 3, and thus turns Hippomenes into a sort of voyeuristic Actaeon. Likewise, his paralysis, denoted by the verb obstipuit, aligns the boy with Perseus who almost loses control at the sight of Andromeda. Here again, it is not only the viewer who fixes the image, but the image can also affect the viewer. Venus’s comparison with her own naked body obviously points to Atalanta’s beauty, but the comparison with Adonis—if he were a woman—is problematic, for it
conveys gender ambivalences in Atalanta. She is a girl, but a girl who cannot be fixed in marriage, a mobile girl who possesses, at some level, more power than her male suitors. The situation is complex, because Hippomenes, the puer, is here viewed as a sort of Adonis, a boy under the influence of a powerful female.

Soon, however, the narrative shifts to present the figure of Atalanta; the readers focalize with Hippomenes, and with his gaze. The narration is somewhat detained:

_quae quamquam Scythica non setius ire sagitta
Aonio visa est iuveni, tamen ille decorem
miratur magis: et cursus facit ipse decorem._

_aura refert ablata citis talaria plantis,
tergaque iactantur crines per eburnea, quaeque_
_poplitibus suberant picto genualia limbo;_
_inque puellari corpus candore ruborem_
_traxterat, hau aliter, quam cum super atria velum_
candida purpureum simulatas inficit umbras._

Though she seemed to the Aonian youth to go no less swiftly than a Scythian arrow, he admired her beauty more: and the race itself gave her beauty. The breeze bore back the streaming wings she wore on her swift ankles, her hair was thrown back over her ivory back, and the ribbons with decorated borders were placed at her knees. Her body had acquired a blush of girlish radiance, as when a purple awning drawn over a gleaming white atrium stains it with borrowed shades. (Met.10.588–96)

While reading this episode the reader wonders for a long time when the metamorphosis will come. While physical transformation happens only at the end when the lovers are turned to lions by Cybele, the section presents a gradual transformation of Atalanta into a wife, by first transforming her into object of the gaze and then by gradually slowing her down and fixing her image. The _visa est _of line 589 places Atalanta for the first time as the art object to be looked at (the previous description focuses more on the effects of the image on Hippomenes). As mentioned before, such phrases are narratological and visual markers that focus our eyes and frame the description to come. They act as the cinematographic camera when framing the image for the gaze of the viewer. _Miratur _again points to the youth’s amazement and erotic paralysis. Likewise, the visual infatuation is expressed later in the fixation of Hippomenes’ eyes on Atalanta.
(constitit in medio vultuque in virgine fixo / “He stood in the middle and with his eyes fixed on the girl,” Met. 10.601). But a two-way play is conveyed here, too, where the gazer is also fixed by the image he sees, for the passive fixo referring to his vultus also implies that while Hippomenes fixes the image with his eyes he is also fixed by it.

The connections with art are relevant here. The reference to terga eburnea in line 592, placed in a book where we have just read about Pygmalion’s eburnea virgo, cannot be taken but as a reference to a statue. The erotic and—hopefully marriageable—girl is conceived with references to an immobile image. It is almost as if Hippomenes cannot conceive a wife because she is fast of feet, but needs to turn her image into something that is static. Right from his first glance, Hippomenes, with whom the reader focalizes, is trying to fix Atalanta and detain her running. The story will become then an effort of the lover to stop her movement and convert her into a ‘proper,’ immobile, erotic object.

The next indicator of Atalanta’s transformation is seen in the way she returns his gaze:

\[\text{talía dicentem molli Schoeneia vultu aspicit et dubitatar, superari an vincere malit.}\]

With soft expression the daughter of Schoeneus looks at him while he says this and doubts whether she prefers to win or to be overcome. (Met. 10.609–10)

This is the first time that Atalanta looks at Hippomenes, yet her gaze does not objectify the male, and although later the text insists on his being young and beautiful, there is no detailed description of the body of Hippomenes to match the way we see the body of Atalanta. Differing from the former characterization of Atalanta as hard (inmitis), her face (and eyes) is now mollis. Next, there is a monologue where, as often in female characters, the girl expresses her doubts and battles with her soul. Notably, she begins to think of herself in the passive regarding viewing. Atalanta recognizes that what has ensnared Hippomenes is her image: “\text{a! miser Hippomene, nollem tibi visa fuissem!}” / “Ah, miserable Hippomenes, I wish I hadn’t been seen by you!” (Met. 10.632). Soon Hippomenes competes with her in running and finally vanquishes her with the help of Venus’s golden apples. But the race constitutes a constant effort of the male to stop and delay the female. In this sense, the repetition of the word mora is relevant. Venus is the first to use the concept when she recognizes
that there was little time to give Hippomenes help (nec opis mora longa
dabatur, 643). Further, the crowd cheers to Hippomenes and tells him
not to tarry because he will win: pelle moram: vinces! (659). In part it is
his image that delays Atalanta in her running: o quotiens, cum iam posset
transire, morata est/ spectatosque diu vultus invita reliquit! “Oh, how often,
when she could pass him, did she tarry and unwillingly left behind the face
that she had contemplated for a long time” (Met. 10.661–62). In this case
Atalanta assumes the position of viewer, who, like Perseus, is stopped by
the image. But she is still mobile like a man. Soon, however, Hippomenes
throws one of the golden apples on the side of the path and avid Atalanta
stops to pick it up: obstipuit virgo nitidique cupidine pomī/ declinat cursus/
“The maiden was stupefied and the desire for the brilliant apple made her
turn away from her course” (666–67). The yearning for a fruit, as in the
episode of Proserpina, is a common symbol of sexual desire and even
presages the loss of virginity. But Atalanta, with a new burst of speed,
makes up for her mora (669) and leaves the youth behind. The same trick
is played again: et rursus pomī iactu remorata secundi/ consequitur transitque
virum/ “And after being newly delayed at the tossing of a second apple,
she followed on and passed the man,” Met. 10.671–72). The conclusions
of the race and the story are piquant:

an peteret, virgo visa est dubitare: coegi
tollere et adieci sublato pondera malo
impediigue oneris pariter gravitate moraque,
neve meus sermo cursu sit tardior ipso,
praeterita est virgo: duxit sua praemia victor.

The maiden seemed to hesitate whether she should go after the apple or
not: I forced her to pick it up and added weight to the apple she held.
Equally with the weight of the burden and with the delay I impeded her,
and lest my speech be slower than the race itself, the maiden was over-
taken, and the winner took his prize. (Met. 10.676–80)

Note that Atalanta is now referred to in the passive: she “seems/ is seen”
(visa) and “she was outstripped” (praeterita est). Further, duxit is interest-
ing in light of the implications of the verb as an expression of a male “tak-
ing a wife” (uxorem ducere). The verb impedio makes for a loaded pun, for
it is precisely Atalanta’s feet that the weight of the apples hinders. And so
Atalanta is newly detained (moraque), but this time her transformation is
complete. With the loss of the race she has become a ‘delayed’ girl and
thus she is marriageable. She has now left behind the trace that most
marked her individuality, her excellence in running. Anderson rightly observes that by desiring Hippomenes’ victory early, she is in a way accepting a form of death: “We might be tempted to read this dilemma as Ovid’s poetic representation of the universal dilemma of woman (or man) in love: she must ‘die’ as an independent *puella* in order to become a wife.” To conclude the story, Venus draws attention to herself as narrator and to Adonis as audience. The same *mora* with which Atalanta was affected is what Venus fears might affect her narrative. This coincidence is also interesting from a reader-response viewpoint, for Venus is aware that when we see Atalanta delayed, the gaze of the reader/viewer is delayed with her. In this sense it is noteworthy that, as Anderson shows, there is a largely dactylic rhythm in lines 669–70 when Atalanta speeds up, but then the spondees prevail in 671 as she slows down.

WANDERING WOMBS

Jupiter bids Peleus to take his place as lover and seek a union with Thetis, the virgin goddess of the sea (Met. 11.227–28). As seen in chapter 2, the whole setting of the scene where Peleus encounters the goddess is an ekphrasis that turns her into a visual artifact. Ovid creates a double framework whose boundaries are doubly marked in a Chinese box structure. In the internal frame delineated by *est* in line 235 there is a little “*Metamorphoses*”:

> illic te Peleus, ut somno vincla iacebas,  
> occupat, et quoniam precibus temptata repugnas,  
> vim parat, innectens ambobus colla lacertis;  
> quod nisi venisses variatis saepe figuris  
> ad solitas artes, auso foret ille potitus;  
> sed modo tu volucris: volucrem tamen ille tenebat;  
> nunc gravis arbor eras: haerebat in arbore Peleus;  
> tertia forma fuit maculosae tigridis: illa  
> territus Aeacides a corpore bracchia solvit.

There Peleus takes hold of you when you are lying conquered by sleep, and because, though entreated by his prayers, you reject him, he prepares to offer violence, entwining both arms around your neck. He would have accomplished his attempt if you had not changed often into varied forms resorting to your usual arts of transformation. Now you were a bird; he, however, held you as a bird. Now you were a sturdy tree, but Peleus held...
Thetis’ protean character, stressed also by *ambiguam* in line 236 (*ambigu-um, magis arte tamen*), vividly recalls Proteus’s mutability in the Odyssey, narrated by Menelaus in Book 4, who also needs to be held tight to be over-mastered. The scene presents all the ingredients of *Metamorphoses*: love, rape, sexual violence, and a succession of physical transformations. Here is a goddess who changes forms, not to rape but to avoid being raped, and a mortal man who succeeds in raping a goddess, though with the help of some god, as Thetis recognizes. If one takes one step backward, one sees that it was Jupiter who in fact desired Thetis, but was discouraged by the prophecy that she would engender a child who would surpass his father (Met.11.222–26). Instead, Jupiter bids his grandson Peleus to pursue Thetis in love. From these lines the reader understands Peleus as a surrogate of Jupiter’s desire. Thetis, for her part, tries to avoid rape through metamorphosis, like Daphne or Syrinx, but is unsuccessful. Daphne and Syrinx could change form thanks to the help of their divine relatives; but Thetis, though a deity herself, is powerless against the desires of males.

It could even be said, with standard feminist critique, that this description of Thetis makes a spectacle of a woman whose rape gives pleasure to the male viewer. Most noteworthy is this framed detention of the reader’s gaze, which also fixes Woman in sexuality. Thetis, to remain a virgin, needs to keep on moving and changing, but the formula to obtain the girl is given to Peleus: “keep a firm hold of her no matter how many times she changes.” Proteus actually advises: “ignaram laqueis vincloque innecte tenaci”/ “Bind her unaware with snares and tight bonds” (Met.11.252). Bonds and chains pertain to the common imagery of love and marriage and symbolize the power and control that Peleus will hold over the goddess. And this is exactly how Thetis is gained. The firm arms of Peleus holding her lead to her surrender, her rape, and their union, which is understood as marriage in the text:

exhibita estque Thetis: confessam amplexatur heros
et potitur votis ingentique inplet Achille.
Felix et nato, felix et coniuge Peleus.

Thetis was revealed as herself: the hero embraced the exposed goddess, attained his desires and filled her with the mighty Achilles. Peleus was blessed in his child, blessed also in his wife. (Met.11.264–66)
This episode leads to the question of sex as an event that fixes women; modern English slang expressions for lovemaking (from the controlling perspective of the male) like “to nail/screw” respond to this conception. But Thetis is also fixed as a visual image, and *exhibita Thetis* makes us think of a picture in an ‘exhibition.’

One can recall a related story where the wandering island of Delos only becomes fixed and stops its wanderings when Latona finally gives birth to Apollo, immortalized in the Homeric *Hymn to Delian Apollo* and in Callimachus’s *Fourth Hymn to Delos*. The story is also briefly mentioned in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 6.184ff. Latona, impregnated by Zeus, is denied a place on earth to give birth. She then wanders until Delos (mobile at the time and not attached to the bottom of the sea) offers itself as the place of birth for the divine twins. Solomon draws an interesting connection between Delos’ wanderings and female hysteria. Hysteria was considered a female disease whereby the *hyster* (womb) was dislodged and floated loose in the body, causing various complications. “The cure for ‘hysteria,’ ‘wombness,’ was sexual intercourse, the purpose of which was to impregnate the woman, thereby anchoring the womb down with a fetus.” With these ideas in mind, one may reconsider the sexual act of marriage as an act of fixation; the virgin would be like the loose, wandering womb, who can move, change, and run until a man comes to fix her. In this same light, the virgin island of Delos, untouched before, and movable, becomes lodged, anchored, and fixed by an act of giving birth, which becomes symbolically its own pregnancy and procreation. This is exactly Thetis’ fate for, while a virgin, she is free to move and change constantly. Her fixation implies matrimony and readiness for procreation and motherhood. The emphasis on Thetis’ future child is also relevant, as she needs fixation and immobility to conceive, in accordance with ancient sexual beliefs.

**QUASI-BRIDES**

The previous examples merge marriage, sexuality, and immobility; but there are some other episodes in which, although the relation is not so clear-cut, something of this imagery can be appreciated. The previous reflections about Delos are useful when studying other stories of *Metamorphoses*. Since his birth, Apollo is someone who ‘fixes’ as, with his new presence he contributes to fix the wandering island. This capacity to fix (especially his lovers) will be prominent in his characterization in *Metamorphoses*. Let us look at Daphne, for example. It is true that, unlike Atalanta, Daphne rejects marriage and sex. It has been established, however, that her trans-
formation brings forth a form of symbolic (and displaced) marriage with the god and thus, not surprisingly, she loses the mobility of the virgin and becomes rooted, though not through actual intercourse. Many plays on fixation and the gaze run through the episode, as was discussed earlier, and Daphne becomes a spectacle to the eyes of the god who experiences love as a visual fixation. Apollo grasps a frozen image of the virgin but, in her running, she tries to evade him. The long chase begins, and for about twenty-five lines, there are no specific references to the gaze because the passage concentrates on the fleeing, the movement, and Apollo’s wooing (Met. 1.502–25). Then the text presents a new description of the running virgin that freezes her movement through the focalized gaze of the god:

fugit cumque ipso verba imperfecta reliquit,
tum quoque visa decens: nudabant corpora venti
obviaque adversas vibrabant flamina vestes,
et levis impulsos retro dabat aura capillos,
auctaque forma fuga est. . . .

She fled and with him she left behind his unfinished words, and even then she seemed fair. The winds disrobed her body and the opposing breezes caused her garments to flutter, and a gentle wind bore back her streaming hair. And the flight enhanced her beauty. (Met. 1.526–30)

Before the chase continues, a poignant simile is introduced, where a Gallic hound sees (vidit, 534) a hare and runs after her. The previous detention of Daphne’s image through Apollo’s eyes prefigures her final ‘arborization’ and gives way to the god’s desire to fix her and possess her. This fixation is finally achieved, though in a twisted way, as a change that prevents a straightforward possession by Apollo, but which realizes his desire to control and immobilize her (note how he still surrounds her as a tree with his arms and kisses the bark). The ending is paradoxical. Daphne obtains what she wants, the preservation of virginity, but Apollo also manages to fix her in a symbolic marriage.

The story of Syrinx parallels that of Daphne. Pan is attracted to her through the eyes (Pan videt hanc/ “Pan sees her,” Met. 1.699). This causes the nymph to run from the fixing eye of the pursuer, but she ends up being fixed as a reed and finally objectified as a reed-pipe in a symbolic (and displaced) union. The desire of fixation is newly achieved, though in an awkward way. Little is known about Lotis. Ovid tells us that she became a lotus tree after running away from Priapus (Met. 9.347–48). Supposedly, something similar occurs in this story. Finally, fixation can also be under-
stood in another form. Philip Hardie suggests that these characters also become ‘inscribed’ with the mark of their lovers and are a perpetual memorial for the god’s love. The laurel will always be a mark of Apollo, and the reed an emblematic instrument of Pan. The fixation is not only visual, but also verbal as these women become in a way ‘written.’ Inscription and fixation go together; this is particularly the case with Apollo’s inscription of his beloved Hyacinthus.

Fixed Boys

In sexual relations boys occupy a position similar, yet not equal, to that of women because they are also often envisioned as the passive partners, and therefore there are similar issues of mobility and fixation in the affairs of gods and boys. Likewise, in some sense it is felt that women are like children, but they just never grow up, while male youths do.

Narcissus

We begin our discussion of the erotic role of pueri with Narcissus. This boy, consumed by his own love, pines away and turns into a flower. It has been widely recognized that Narcissus’s self-fixation is achieved through his eyes, and that even in the Underworld he remains fixed to his own image in the Stygian pool. Narcissus’s psychological fixation is literalized in the physical fixation of his gaze. When he first reclines by the pool and tries to drink water, he is ‘stupefied’ by the image he sees. The scene is intriguing, leaving the reader to wonder if this is the first time that Narcissus ever tries to drink from a pool. Being a hunter one would think that Narcissus is no stranger to pools and streams and that he must have quenched his thirst in them before. Or was he so lucky before not to look into the water while drinking? Yet this seems to be a particularly ‘mirroring’ pool (cf. Met. 3.407). Perhaps this new ‘knowledge’ of himself to which Tiresias refers is the gaze of the male on the verge of maturity. Although as a child he may have physically seen his image, the image he now sees is a different one, that of the adolescent growing up. One can also think that Tiresias’ prophecy only takes effect after the curse by one of Narcissus’s rejected suitors: sic amet ipse licet, sic non potiatur amato! “May he himself thus love, thus may he not conquer his beloved!” (Met. 3.405). But then again, it is doubtful that Narcissus would not recognize his own image when reflected, unless he is ‘blinded’ by a higher force, and what he sees
is not really the image of himself that he recalls but a ‘fictional’ phantasia of something else. Narcissus is paralyzed by the beauty of the image he sees (Met. 3.416), just as Perseus will be in the following book. Relevant as well are the connections of immobility and statue-like beauty in the episode:

adstupet ipse sibi, vultuque inmotus eodem
haeret, ut e Pario formatum marmore signum.

He himself is stupefied at himself, and immobile, he is fixed with the same expression as a statue carved out of Parian marble. (Met. 3.418–19)

The passage also states that the reflected image has eburnea colla/ “ivory neck” (422) and a snow-white face slightly tinted by a blush (et in niveo mixtum candore ruborem, 423), just like Atalanta. Narcissus thus captures in himself the immobility of the lover paralyzed by the image of the beloved; but this immobility, when reflected in the pool, is transformed into a more reified immobility like that of statue-like Andromeda and Pygmalion’s ivory maiden. He is, at the same time, viewer and statue. The passage is focalized through Narcissus’s eyes. If we follow the suggestion that Narcissus had known his image before and is now seeing something different from his ‘real’ image, he is in a sense a creator of a particular phantasia that envisions the beloved as a statue, undergoing the same process as Pygmalion and Perseus. The connections with art and statues are shown further when he begins to lament and beat his breast:

dumque dolet, summa vestem deduxit ab ora
nudaque marmoreis percussit pectora palmis
pectora traxerunt roseum percussa ruborem,
non aliter quam poma solent, quae candida parte,
parte rubent, aut ut variis solet uva racemis
ducere purpureum nondum matura colorem.

While he grieves, he removes his tunic from the upper fold and beat his naked breast with his marble-white hands. The beaten breast took on a pink hue, no different from apples, which are often partly red and partly white, or as grapes in clusters of varied hue acquire a purple tint when they are not yet ripe. (Met. 3.480–85)

The ‘statue-likeness’ of the reflection is now transferred to Narcissus himself. His hands are now of marble and beat on the snow-white body. The
chest, as locus of love and passion, turns red accordingly and now recalls the blush of the young virgin erotically aroused (Pygmalion’s statue awoken). Narcissus pines away. Richard Spencer suggests that the episode of Narcissus contrasts with Pygmalion’s in that “the sculptor desires a partner to love, who will fulfill his life; Narcissus loves only himself. Pygmalion gives bodily form to the object of his love; Narcissus loses his bodily existence by fascination with the object of his love.”

This kind of reasoning is another good example of why Spencer’s approach is flawed, for, again, the insistence on contrast precludes him from seeing similarities and intermediate options. In this case, there is not only contrast between Pygmalion and Narcissus but also ‘likeness.’ In a very ‘narcissistic’ way, Pygmalion falls in love with a part of himself, a product of his own imagination, an emanation of his artistic mind. The symbolism of the reddening apple is used once more to indicate the proximity of sexual maturity. Like Narcissus himself, the poma is partly red, partly white. The fruit simile, however, denotes a progression: the second example of the grapes deepens the reddish tonality (purpura) and marks the change with the highly significant matura, yet nondum certainly undermines this sense.

After “melting down like wax” (a metaliterary element in itself), Narcissus is turned into a flower and this is all that remains of his body (Met. 3.509–10). This final metamorphosis has been unjustly discredited by some critics who claim that “the metamorphosis is at best very marginal to the story.” But the final transformation actually involves and preserves the fixation typical of erotic viewing. The new flower not only implies the fixation to earth of Narcissus’s own body, but also, as a complex metaphor, preserves the fixed gaze of the viewer with the inclination of the flower toward the ground. This is more than simply “tangential,” as some would like to see. He becomes now something to be looked at, a spectacle himself, for whom looking and being looked at were the causes of his tragedy. Interestingly, if the narcissus were placed by a pool it would also preserve the circular instability of Narcissus’s gaze, eternally looking at a reflection that eternally looks at him. Yet this would be an empty gesture, for the flower is blind and lacks understanding of what it is reflected in the pool.

HYACINTHUS AND ADONIS

Other youths in Metamorphoses are transformed into flowers and thus become fixed to the ground and prevented from self-motivated movement, namely, Hyacinthus and Adonis. The connections with the gaze in these characters are not as clearly displayed as in the episode of Narcissus.
Yet they become in one way or another fixed as visual mementos. In Book 10 Apollo falls in love with Hyacinthus, who dies after being struck by the god’s discus. The language used in the description of this accident recalls rape, with its emphasis on vulnus (Met. 10.187–93). The boy is then transformed into a hyacinth. With this transformation the puer is fixed to the ground but also fixed as writing and inscription by the god of poetry (Met. 10.205–6). One can think here of an analogy between the erotics of poetic composition and sexual fixation (Met. 10.207–16).

Adonis dies in a fight with beasts and is eternally preserved as a flower by Venus. The flower springs from the blood of the boy and acquires its deep red tonality. The youth, thus fixed in the earth as a flower, is always available to the controlling eye of the goddess. However, the flowing character of the anemone (Met. 10.737–39) and Adonis’ immobility are problematic. He is a flower rooted to the ground, but it can easily be swept by the winds. This instability may point at a failure of Venus, who, being a female, cannot completely fix her beloved.

To this short list one could add Cyparissus, who is transformed into a tree (Met. 10.106–42), fixed to the ground, and turned into a memorial. Although it is not clear whether Apollo is the direct author of his transformation, the god is surely the author of its meaning and symbolism as an eternally mourning tree. The transformation of the boy into a cypress recalls Daphne’s metamorphosis in Book 1.

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**Nailing Her Down to Earth:**

*Travel and the Poetics of Absence*

Barthes, in *A Lover’s Discourse. Fragments*, tells us:

Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so; she weaves and she sings; the Spinning Songs express both immobility (by the hum of the Wheel) and absence (far away, rhythms of travel, sea surges, cavalcades). It follows that in any man who utters the other’s absence something feminine is declared: this man who waits and who suffers from his waiting is miraculously feminized. A man is not feminized because he is inverted but because he is in love. (original emphasis)

In the Homeric poems the majority of women are fixed in one place
while their men move in a myriad of adventures by sea and land. The exemplary case is the figure of Penelope, always waiting in the palace of Ithaca while Odysseus travels homeward from the coasts of Troy. In the *Iliad* as well, women remain within the walls of the city viewing the war fought by men. Representations of the female in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are notably different. While the first appears as an essentially masculine poem with scarce and scattered emersions of female characters, in the *Odyssey* women people the story and are fundamental agents of the hero’s fate. The most prominent female characters that relate to Odysseus are Athena, Calypso, Nausicaa, Circe, and, finally, Penelope. A piquant coincidence in the relationship between the last four characters and Odysseus is especially relevant to the conceptions of man and woman that this chapter delineates. In all four cases the hero arrives on an island where a woman is waiting: Calypso in Ogygia, Nausicaa in Scheria, Circe in Aeaea, and Penelope in Ithaca. Man is the traveler, the one who cleaves through the waves, constantly passing from place to place. Women remain on land, fixed in a safe and unmoving space on solid earth. This overall picture of women in the *Odyssey* conforms to Barthes’s quotation. In Latin literature this division can be seen in the *Aeneid*, where Dido stays on land and Aeneas travels to and from Carthage. Unlike the *Heroides* and other classical texts, *Metamorphoses* does not present many examples of women cursing the sea for carrying their men away while they stay behind abandoned on land. Still, the poetics of absence can be traced in many episodes where a male void, abandonment, or rejection is experienced as a dolorous event in the life of women, as for example in the letter that Byblis writes to her brother giving expression to her unattainable love. Dido and Ariadne are briefly mentioned and the abandonment by men through the sea is felt, though not explicitly exploited. One episode in Ovid’s epic does raise explicitly this dichotomy between sea as masculine and land as feminine: Ceyx and Alcyone in Book 11. These other episodes are not so rich in gaze issues, but the poetics of absence in *Metamorphoses* is displayed in a different way of traveling in the poem: air. Sometimes this tradition where men travel and move whereas women become fixed to land is driven to an absurd extreme through ‘literalness,’ in which women who suffer their men’s absence are literally immobilized.

**LEUCOTHOE AND CLYTIE**

In Book 4 Ovid tells the story of Clytie, one of the daughters of Oceanus,
who was desperately in love with the Sun god. It is truly surprising how little attention this episode has received, especially when it offers an enormously rich source for discussions of viewing and gender. The Sun loved Leucothoe, so one night when she was spinning with her handmaids, the god, disguised as her mother, wooed her and possessed her. But Clytie in her jealousy (\textit{invidit Clytie, Met. 4.234}) divulged the story and informed her rival’s father. The punishment Leucothoe received is strange: she was buried alive:

\begin{quote}
ille ferox inmansuetusque precantem
tendentemque manus ad lumina Solis et “ille
vim tulit invictae” dicentem defodit alta
crudus humo tumulumque super gravis addit harenæ.
\end{quote}

Although she prayed and stretched her arms to the rays of the Sun saying, “He raped me against my will,” the cruel and merciless father savagely buried her in the deep earth and heaped a mound of heavy sand over her body. (\textit{Met. 4.237–40})

The Sun tried to revive Leucothoe, but she was literally stuck to the ground (\textit{dissipat hunc radiis Hyperione natus iterque/ dat tibi qua possis defossos promere vultus;/ nec tu iam poteras enectum pondere terræ/ tollere . . . caput/ “The son of Hyperion rends this with his rays and opens a path though which you could lift up your buried face, but now you could not lift your head crushed by the weight of the earth,” Met. 4.241–44). He actually tries to penetrate to her with his rays but is unsuccessful. The rays of the Sun are often described in Greek poetry as “striking things”; during the Augustan period the Sun is, more than ever before, identified with Apollo and his rays are assimilated to arrows. Here, however, the Sun’s rays are paradoxically used to ‘unfix’ her. He cannot save Leucothoe, but instead, he transforms her into a shrub of frankincense so that she can “reach the sky” in some way (251). In this transformation one can see a fixation of the beloved by the Sun god. The interesting play on gender and movement is seen in the fact that the Sun is a mobile god, who travels across the sky constantly, without ever stopping. In opposition, his beloved is fixed, rooted to the ground (\textit{virgaque per glaebas sensim radicibus actis/ turea surrexit tumulumque cacumine ruptit/ “And a shrub of frankincense with deep-driven roots rose slowly through the clods and broke through the top of the mound,” Met. 4.254–55). The same fixation is reflected in Clytie, who pines away with love for the Sun and becomes, as
a flower, stuck to the ground. The only movement she can achieve is a circular one following the journey of the god throughout the sky:

illa suum, quamvis radice tenetur,
vertitur ad Solem mutataque servat amorem.

Although roots hold her, she turns toward her beloved Sun and, though changed herself, she preserves her love for him. (Met. 4.269–70)

Book 4 begins with a festival of Bacchus, which all the Thebans, including the matrons, celebrate. These women leave their houses and their wool-work to participate in the frantic revels of Dionysus’s dances. But not the daughters of Minyas, who stay inside, weave, and tell stories to the rhythm of the spindle (Met. 4.32–35). The scene where the Sun finds Leucothoe clearly recalls the Minyeides and is an obvious remake of Livy’s portrayal of Lucretia:

. . . et inter
bis sex Leucothoen famulas ad lumina cernit
levia versato ducentem stamina fus.

And among twelve servants he sees Leucothoe by the lamplight, spinning fine threads with whirling spindle. (Met. 4.219–21)

In this sense, Leuconoe, one of the daughters of Minyas, rewrites herself (and her sisters) in the figure of Leucothoe, who acts as a fantasy about what they believe a good and desirable woman would be like in the eyes of the male viewer. This image of Woman, as with Lucretia, is conceived as a static picture fixed in the eyes of the male viewer, who detains the narration and delays our reading with his. Like Pygmalion and Perseus, the Sun falls in love with his eyes, and the Sun’s very declaration of love to her is an image that embraces the act of seeing: “ille ego sum” dixit, “qui longum metior annum,/ omnia qui video, per quem videt omnia tellus,/ mundi oculus: mihi, crede, placet”/ “I am the one who measures the long year,’ he said, ‘the one who sees all things, through whom the earth sees all things, I am the eye of the world. Believe me, you really please me” (Met. 4.226–28). The Sun god is the great eye of the world. He sees everything, and, thanks to him, things can be seen. Woman becomes an object of his mighty eye, his desire, and his lust. The revenge exerted on him by Venus is therefore effectual:
And you, who must see all things, now look only at Leucothoe and fix your eyes on only one maiden, eyes which you owe to the world. (Met. 4.195–97)

The Sun’s eyes become fixed in the girl, but they fix her at the same time. The lover, in his weakening and near feminization, loses his power to move, which is why the Sun faces problems as he travels across his usual celestial path:

modo surgis Eoo/ temperius caelo, modo serius incidis undis,/ spectandique mora brumalis porrigis horas/

“Now you rise too early into the dawn sky, now you set too late on the waves and prolong the wintry hours by lingering to look at her” (Met. 4.197–99). This slowing down of the Sun’s journey implies a slowing down of time in the day and affects the narration, decelerating it as well. The Sun, the great seer, now has his eyes fixed on only one thing and this fixation is transmitted to the object of love in her metamorphosis. The slowing down of the Sun can also be compared to the mora that affects Atalanta. The great paradox of the story, as Anderson notes, is the fallibility of the Sun’s eye, which in fact does not “see it all,” as he misses precisely the cruel punishment suffered by Leucothoe, or when he finally sees what has happened to her it’s all too late.82 Notably, the Sun’s ‘eye’ is even blind (he is also deaf) to Leuconthoe’s needs. In her suffering she appeals to her lover (tendemque manus ad luminas Solis/ “stretching her arms to the rays of the Sun,” Met. 4.238), but he cannot see. This is a somewhat humorous and debaseing picture of the mighty Sun god, who has little power against the cruel behavior of a human father. When he finally sees the cruel spectacle of Leucothoe’s ‘death,’ the text draws a comparison with the Phaethon episode:

nil illo fertur volucrum moderator equorum/ post Phaethonteos vidisse dolentius ignes/

“They say that the charioteer of the winged horses had seen nothing more painful than that after Phaeton’s conflagration” (Met. 4.245–46). As in the case of Phaethon, the Sun cannot control the fate of a loved one and his gaze is weakened. Although the big eye of the world can ‘see,’ his gaze is impotent. As Barthes says, “something feminine is declared” (original emphasis) because he loves.

As with some metamorphoses in the text, the agent of change (normally a god) is not explicit in Clytie’s transformation, but one is led to think that the Sun may have something to do with it. Her metamorpho-
sis is the perfect inversion of the Sun’s suffering. Clytie’s eternal visual fixation may well be a punishment for her crime and the god’s suffering, but it is also a continuation of her previous state of erotic fixation. Segal believes that Clytie’s transformation into a flower connotes innocence and gentleness, but this does not seem right. First, we do not know if Clytie is actually a virgin, as he supposes. Second, for a woman to actively love and look are deviant actions; therefore, it is difficult to see the flower as a sign of Clytie’s innocence. Perhaps, we ought to rethink the connotations of flowers as they present more complications than is apparent. Just as the Sun had his sight stuck on Leucothoe and could “barely move,” now Clytie loses her individual mobility precisely through the eyes. In this continuation of her state of dependence on love for the Sun, there is a geometrical inversion of the previous scene:

nece se movit humo; tantum spectabat euntis
ora dei vultusque suos flectebat ad illum.
membra ferunt haesisse solo. . . .

She did not move from the ground. She only gazed on the face of the traveling god and turned her face toward him. Her limbs, they say, were fixed to the ground. (Met. 4.264–66)

Haessisse here recalls haerent telae of line 35, where the daughters of Minyas are fixed to their task of weaving. Clytie is now immobile, capable of only one movement that follows the Sun with her eyes. Likewise, she is stuck to the ground, just as Leucothoe buried by her father, who cannot lift her head. Clytie’s punishment mirrors Leucothoe’s fate.

PHAETHON AND THE HELIADES

At the end of the first book of Metamorphoses, the Sun god has an affair with a woman called Clymene and from this union a son is born: Phaethon. From the beginning of the story, the Sun is both something to see and the great seer of the world. Clymene swears to her son Phaethon:

brachia porrexit spectansque ad lumina solis
“per iubar hoc” inquit “radiis insigne coruscis,
nate, tibi iuro, quod nos auditque videtque,
hoc te, quem spectas, hoc te, qui temperat orbem,
Sole satum; si ficta loquor, neget ipse videndum
se mihi, sitque oculis lux ista novissima nostris!"

She stretched her arms to the sky and turning her eyes to the rays of the Sun said: “By this light, my son, glorious in its gleaming rays, who sees and hears me, I swear this: that you are the son of this Sun, whom you see and who rules the world. If am not telling the truth, let he himself forbid me to see his light, and let this light be the last for my eyes.” (Met.1.767–72)

In the couple of Clymene and the Sun, there is a contrast between a woman established on earth and a god who moves across the skies. In search of his own identity, the boy wishes to drive the chariot of his father. The achievement of masculinity for Phaethon is understood in terms of adventure and movement. If he can advance across the sky, he will be like his father and prove his ancestry. But Phaethon is only a child, and not a divine one, and so he fails in his intent. Yet the apparently simple desire to drive his father's chariot has further implications for seeing and the gaze. As Phaethon calls his father at the beginning of Book 2 (“o lux immensi publica mundi” / “O common light of the vast world” Met. 2.35), the god is the great eye of the world, which can see it all (Sol oculis iuvenem, quibus adspicit omnia, vidit/ “The Sun saw the boy with the same eyes with which he sees all things,” Met. 2.32). The first image that confronts Phaethon upon arriving at his father's palace is the magnificent work on the doors. These doors show the whole living world, the skies, the lands, and the waters with their creatures. Much has been said about the meanings of this ekphrasis, but it can be suggested that the images on the doors are a representation of the things that the Sun can see in his flight, which is confirmed by the god's own explanation of the perils of the journey (medio est altissima caelo,/ unde mare et terras ipsi mihi saepe videre/ fit timor/ “In the middle of the sky the path is very high, from where it often scares even myself to see the sea and the lands,” Met. 2.64–66). These marvels exposed to Phaethon early awake in him a desire to see and to be a great seer like his father. Later when Phaethon finally sees the chariot of the Sun—Vulcani munera/ “the gift of Vulcan”—he is mesmerized and his avid eyes experience a deep visual pleasure (dumque ea magnanimus Phaethon miratuer opusque perspicit / “And while daring Phaethon looks and marvels at the work of art,” Met. 2.111–12). It is clear from this verse that Phaethon's ambition is a desire not only for masculine action, but also for sight and knowledge. Like his father, he wishes to drive the
chariot of the Sun and to be the great eye of the universe. But Phaethon is only a child and thus incapable of his father’s mighty sight. Indeed, his eyes are incapable of holding the dazzling images that the Sun god deals with daily. Phaethon is often blinded:

protinus ad patrios sua fert vestigia vultus
consistitque procul; neque enim propiora ferebat
lumina...

Right on he directed his steps toward the face of his father and stopped at a distance, for he could not bear the radiance any closer. (Met. 2.21–23)

Later on in his celestial journey, Phaethon is blinded again by the light of the fires that ignite the Earth and cannot tolerate it: sunt oculis tenebrae per tantum lumen obortae/ “He was blinded by such bright light,” Met. 2.181). This physical blindness also embodies the metaphoric blindness of the ignorant, the one who does not know or understand the perils ahead and stubbornly plunges into his own death. For not only is masculinity experienced as strength, as the desire to move across the skies and hold the reins, but being as masculine as the father also implicates the power to see and to hold the gaze, which the doomed puer does not achieve.

Curiously, the lengthy tale of Phaethon does not present a physical metamorphosis (unless one sees the conflagration of the universe as a form of change); however, it is succeeded by a clear transformation of his sisters, the Heliades, into trees:

plangorem dederant: e quis Phaethusa, sororum maxima, cum vellet terra procumbere, questa est deriguisse pedes; ad quam conata venire candida Lampetie subita radice retenta est.

They beat their breasts in mourning. Phaethusa, the oldest of the sisters, when she wanted to lie on the ground, complained that her feet had hardened. When fair Lampetie tried to come toward her, she suddenly grew roots and was held back. (Met. 2.346–49)

There follows a detailed description of the transformation of the hair into foliage, the arms into branches, and the bark creeping along their bodies. Its opening in particular marks the essential feature of the Heliades’ new
being: fixation. The reference to terra in line 347 is poignant if one keeps
in mind Leucothoe’s body buried in the ground and Clytie’s fixation as a
flower. Then, Phaethusa’s feet become immobile, preventing her dis-
placement and self-mobility, and finally, the mention of Lampetie’s ‘root-
ification’ crowns the image of fixation to the ground. This is a type of
immobility that has sprung from their tears and excessive mourning. The
tears also solidify and become amber drops; after Phaethon’s unsuccessful
travels, his sisters become fixed and rooted forever. In part, the story of
Phaethon and his sisters repeats the contrast between the Sun and Clymene. Both males travel across the sky, though the boy is tragically
doomed, and both mother and daughters are bound to earth, though the
latter to a literal extreme.

Mulvey’s theory of the monolithic male gaze is based on the infallibili-
ty of men looking; it does not allocate a place for males who fail in their
gaze. Both in Phaethon and in the Sun there is a failure of the masculine
gaze. Thus, if the external male viewer identifies with the Sun or
Phaethon he will, with them, experience a failure of his own and a subse-
quent weakening of his masculinity. These two figures, among others,
reveal that Mulvey’s model is too limited for the gender complexities of
Metamorphoses.

Deviant Exiles

TREASON AGAINST THE FATHERLAND

The previous section explored the issue of travel as a marker of masculin-
ity in contrast with women’s immobility and fixity to land. Conversely,
there are cases in Metamorphoses where women do travel and where con-
nections between traveling, displacement, and the gaze can be observed.
Exile will here be used in a broad sense, following the original meaning
from ex plus the Latin stem sal- (salio) for any individual who is displaced
from his/her land either by force or by personal decision, and not in the
more restricted sense of someone who has been forced to leave her land
by some kind of persecution.

Medea

Let us begin with Medea, a paradigm of the exile. When her story begins
in Book 7, she is no more than a girl, but a girl who promptly falls in love
and would give it all to gain her beloved. Her desire springs from an image of Jason. The text first describes how she became passionate for the hero (\textit{concipit interea validos Aeetias ignes} “In the meantime, the daughter of King Aeetes was ignited by the overpowering fire of love,” Met. 7.9); shortly thereafter we realize that she has just seen him: “\textit{cur, quem modo denique vidi, ne pereat timeo?”} “‘Why am I afraid that he whom I have only just seen may die?’” Met. 7.15–16). The visual impression proceeds in a double edged-way. Medea, struggling with her own emotions between duty and desire, states:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
\textit{sed trahit invitam nova vis, aliudque cupido, mens aliud suadet: video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor. . . .}
\end{center}
\end{quote}

But a new force drives me against my will. Desire persuades me one way, my mind another. I see the better course and I approve of it, but I follow the worse. (Met. 7.19–21)

These formulaic utterances have profound intertextual echoes, serve as a defining trace of Medea’s character, and hint at woman’s libido and inability to do the right thing.\textsuperscript{84} At a surface level, \textit{video meliora} seems to refer to Medea’s knowledge of the right path to follow.\textsuperscript{85} Her previous comment that she has just seen Jason bears the hidden sense that what is ‘\textit{meliora}’ may well be Jason, in her eyes. In addition, the monologue presents a key problem in the story: why does Medea burn for a foreigner? (Met. 7.21–22). Medea’s ‘barbarism’ and the problems of treason against one’s land have been widely explored and they remain central in the issues of movement and immobility that are here discussed. Medea knows that her proper role is to stay on land and safeguard her family, but love is more powerful. As Carole Newlands points out—though perhaps stretching Medea’s transformation too far—the heroine undergoes a change from dutiful daughter and innocent girl to rebellious woman, and finally monster.\textsuperscript{86} This first instance of hesitation stages the commencement of Medea’s transformation; in this change her decision to travel is central. To love Jason is to accept the foreign and, with it, the prospects of her leaving the land, of venturing to sea and following a new husband at her own will. But traveling like the epic hero will turn woman into a monster.

Medea’s doubts about going or staying show the beginning of a gender destabilization, because not only has she decided to travel but she even wishes to have the honors of a man and a hero: \textit{non magna relinquam,}
magna sequar: titulum servatae pubis Achivae/ “I will not leave great things behind, I will follow great things: the title of savior of the Achaean youth” (Met. 7.55–56). It is worth recalling that at the beginning of the story it is Jason who, as a typical epic hero, is actually an exile because he had left his own country for a foreign land, but this will rapidly be reversed when Medea is the one who leaves. Soon Medea encounters Jason again and the text newly focuses on the act of looking:

And now she was strong and her conquered passion had receded, when she saw the son of Aeson and the dying flame was rekindled. Her cheeks turned red and all her face became pale again; and as a tiny spark, which was hidden under the ashes, is often fed by the winds, grows and, newly awakened, regains its old strength; so now, when she saw the youth, the gentle love which you would now think was losing strength, blazed up again at the sight of the youth standing before her. And it happened that the son of Aeson was more beautiful than usual that day: you would pardon her for loving him. She looked at him and fixed her eyes in his face as if she had just seen him for the first time and in her madness she thought she was not looking at a mortal face, nor did she turn herself away from him. (Met. 7.76–88) 87

The passage is most illuminating. First, the relation between the light perceived through the eyes (lumina) is transformed into the flame of fire, the well-known luminous metaphor for love. As in many other episodes where the image is frozen by the gaze of the lover, in this passage the description stops and Ovid pauses the narration to 'paint' a static picture of the object of desire. Contrariwise, here the scene does not emphasize
Jason’s image; in fact, he is barely mentioned despite a playful intrusion of the narrator, who is focalizing with Medea (85). While in other scenes the one who looks is somewhat fixed by the image he himself fixes, Medea’s fixation is much more emphasized. Her eyes do not seem to entrap Jason or control his image; on the contrary, after being intensely looked at by Medea, he is still able to perform a confident free speech.\textsuperscript{88} However, soon enough, Jason will become a spectacle. His fight against the serpent and the army sprung from its teeth will be watched by all as a show, and among the public is, of course, Medea.\textsuperscript{89} It is worthwhile repeating that when women are spectacles in a positive sense, they are commonly (but not always) pictured statically. Men who are watched, as they are here, are in action. Interesting as well is the fact that when the Greeks finally triumph, Medea, who had been watching, is prevented from embracing Jason by her modesty, which stands in the way (Met. 7.144–45). Having looked and loved, Medea becomes mobile. She will now travel with her new husband. Her gaze, however, does not control or possess Jason and objectify him in the same way a male’s gaze is capable of doing.

Following Medea in her adventures, her first voyage is from Colchis to Iolchos, a trip that determines her destiny and her devious transformation. She has now made the unwomanly move, from land to sea. But a new trip will take place. After they arrive in Iolchos, Jason begs Medea to rejuvenate his father, Aeson, for which a series of movements out of the house are necessary. First, she comes out of the palace into the deep woods (egreditur tectis, Met. 7.182) in order to invoke the help of Hecate and the powers of magic. This exit from the house is an obvious intertextual wink to the beginning of Euripides’ Medea, where she leaves the palace. But this exit is not enough and she will now travel across the sky in a dragon-drawn chariot (220ff.). Medea’s eyes become meaningful from the sky, from where she sees and selects the herbs she will collect. A parallel may be drawn between her and the Sun, her grandfather, who looks at the world from above and is the great eye of the universe. This is what Medea does: she travels through the skies and looks down at the world, which recalls the ending of Euripides’ Medea. Moreover, her gaze is controlling; it knows nature and recognizes the plants that will bring her power. Seeing them is the first step to actual collection and possession of the herbs. The connection with the Sun becomes more apparent from Medea’s comments at the beginning of the magical invocations: she will be more powerful than the Sun (“currus quoque carmine nostr/ palet avi”/ “Even the chariot of the Sun, my grandfather, pales at my song,” Met. 7.208–9). Medea also indicates that it is her song that will control the Sun’s chariot—a piquant reference in view of her future trip across the
sky. The woman with powerful vision is now on her way to being a 'monster.'

From onlooker, Medea soon becomes a spectacle herself, but a spectacle that she nevertheless controls. While she performs the rite of rejuvenating Aeson, many curious eyes are poised on her. Still, she can deny them the power to intervene, to control: *hinc procul Aesoniden, procul hinc iubet ire ministros/ et monet arcanis oculos removere profanos/* “She orders Jason to go far way, she orders the attendants to go far way from there, and warns them to take their profane eyes off her secret rites” (Met. 7.255–56). Medea is the spectacle; she is also able to control what can be seen and what cannot, showing a power uncommon in a woman. After rejuvenating Jason's father, she plays a deceitful trick on the daughters of Pelias and newly escapes death in her flying dragon, from where she can see the whole world. What she sees actually includes various metamorphoses, thus turning Medea into a figurative reader of the whole epic (350ff.).

In addition, at the beginning of the episode a struggle between proper femininity and deviancy is staged in Medea's soul, a struggle that is centered on loving Jason and escaping with him or staying in her fatherland. The previously discussed opposition between male as traveler and woman as bound to land is here problematized. However, in her act of seeing, Medea does not seem to control or fix Jason entirely. But because this woman looks—which in the story equals “loves”—and because she is ‘deviant,’ she becomes mobile, as she will travel by sea with her man. By looking and loving, she also loses control of herself and her sense of duty, which represents a great danger in a woman. Of course, men also lose some control through their loving gazes; yet it does not seem to be a problem for men, for in most cases they can overcome their paralysis. If one compares, for example, Apollo losing control of himself at the sight of the beautiful Daphne with Medea's case, one sees that although Apollo can only think of his love, the story—at least for Apollo—does not end in tragedy or horror and, in the end, he still exercises some power over the laurel. Medea, who dared to gaze upon Jason, gradually becomes a monster. By looking, Medea becomes mobile and ends up flying across the skies, the place most remote from land, where proper women remain bound.

**Scylla**

In the following book, with Medea’s story still fresh in readers’ minds, the narrator presents a new tale of gazing, desire, and displacement. The
young girl Scylla, daughter of king Nisus, watches the war between her father and King Minos from the city towers. Teichoscopy in general is a curious situation in which women are allowed to look and men who fight become a spectacle for their eyes. It is also a rich place for gender issues because it allows the reader to see the scene through the woman’s eyes, in the same way that soliloquies by female characters give us reflections of women’s minds. The main point of the warrior’s existence is not to be looked at, as it is the case with women commonly, but to accomplish glorious deeds that place them beyond the personal in transcendent aspirations, to achieve \textit{kleos} through action. Still, Scylla looks on, which is the beginning of a transgressive move on her part: \textit{bello quoque saepe solebat/ spectare ex illa rigidi certamina Martis/ “Also during the war she often watched the combats of brutal Mars from there” (Met. 8.19–20). It has been noted that Ovid’s Scylla is modeled on Propertius’s Tarpeia in elegy 4.4.\textsuperscript{60} Not only the general theme of treason to the fatherland is taken over in \textit{Metamorphoses}, but also the dangerous image of women who look:

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
vidit harenosis Tatium proluedere campis
   pictaque per flavas arma levare iubas:
   obstipuit regis facie et regalibus armis,
   interque oblitas excidit urna manus.
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

She saw Tatius exercising in the sandy fields and lifting his adorned arms over his horse’s golden mane. She was stupefied by the looks of the king and his royal arms; and the urn fell from between her distracted hands.

(Prop. 4.4.19–22)

But in \textit{Metamorphoses}, Scylla’s greater transgression is that her desire to look is blatantly linked to the desire to know. Scopophilia in general goes hand in hand with epistemophilia, but in this passage, the breakage of boundaries is even more complex. The girl, who up to now had been bound to the enclosed space of the palace, breaks the limits of her knowledge, her quotidian world, and her desire through her sight:

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
iamque mora belli procerum quoque nomina norat
   armaque equeaque habitusque Cydoneasque pharetras;
   noverat ante alios faciem ducis Europaei,
   plus etiam, quam nosse sat est. . . .
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

And now with the delay of the battle she had also learned the names of the heroes, the weapons, the horses, the attire, and the Cydonean quivers.
Before all others she had learned the face of the leader, the son of Europa, even better than she should have. (Met. 8.21–24)

But knowledge in women is dangerous and not free from madness (vix sanae virgo Niseia compos/ mentis erat/ “The Nisean maiden was barely in her right mind,” 35–36). What can women do with knowledge but love? Thus Scylla conceives a passion for her enemy. Her desire leads her to wish to break limits and transgress her world, even to switch bands and to move and displace. She wishes to leap down from the tower into the Cretan camp and to open the doors of the city (est impetus illi/ turribus e summis in Cnosia mittere corpus/ castra vel aeratas hosti recludere portas,/ vel siquid Minos alid velit/ “An impulse drives her to throw her body from the highest towers into the Cretan camp, to open up the brazen doors to the enemy, or to do whatever else Minos may want,” Met. 8.39–42). The transgression originated in looking is not only moral but also spatial; it is a desire to leave her space and pass onto Minos’ territory. But the opening of the gates has sexual overtones and may reflect Scylla’s own fantasies about Minos, with whom she has fallen in love. One could envision here an analogy between the female body and the house or city, which is not uncommon and is present in other stories of Metamorphoses. Scylla’s desire is driven to an extreme. After a long hesitation in a monologue on the choice of treason to the fatherland or helping the beloved that recalls Medea’s, she decides to cut her father’s purple lock, seat of his power, which is an obvious symbolic castration. The power of the father is intended to be ‘given’ to the beloved. In contrast with Jason, who does not seem to have high ‘moral standards,’ Minos rejects such a devious love. Although Minos does not refrain from taking advantage of Scylla’s treason, he rejects such a devious love in words referring to land and sea:

... tellusque tibi pontusque negetur!
certe ego non patiar Iovis incunabula, Creten,
qui meus est orbis, tantum contingere monstrum.

May both land and sea be denied to you! For sure I will not permit such a monster to touch Crete, cradle of Jove, my own land. (Met. 8.98–100)

From this moment onward, Scylla, who wanted a voluntary exile to follow her love, is set in a liminal space, neither on land nor at sea. She cannot return to the fatherland because it is destroyed and because it would reject her (114–16), but a new land does not await her. Thus, there is no
way of being a woman available to her any longer. It is the loss of the sight of Minos which drives her to follow him by sea: “me miseram! properare iubet! divulsaque remis/ unda sonat, mecumque simul mea terra recedit”/ “Wretched me, he orders his men to hasten! And the waves resound as the oars part them, while my own land and myself are receding from him” (Met. 8.138–39). We are here again in the presence of the poetics of absence, where a woman complains at the abandonment of her beloved. But unlike other women who stay on land, Scylla ventures to sea by clinging to the Cretan boat and begins to surf on the waves in this awkward way. Her attempts are soon dismantled by her father, now transformed into an osprey, who frightens her. She loosens her grip from the boat and ends up transformed into a Ciris, a bird which still bears the mark of her crime (Ciris from κείρω, “I cut”).

Scylla’s transformation into a bird stages the transformation from her enclosed and contained femininity to the boundary transgressions initiated with her gaze and her desire. It is the sight of Minos that leads her to movement and the desire of exile. Seeing for this woman becomes dangerously tragic. It leads to the opening of the floodgates of sexuality, embodied in the doors, and to the wish to leave land for the sea, to transgress the proper space for a woman. The final transformation into a bird that can fly and conquer the sky takes her one step further in her distancing from land. This is an unsuccessful story: Scylla’s desiring eyes end up turning her into a monstrum, as Minos observes, but she does not succeed in gaining the object of her lust, while Medea does. Unlike Medea, who is a magician with supernatural powers, Scylla must be a warning to girls that not everyone can be a Medea. Even Medea, however, does not get away with it in the end as she loses both her husband and her children.

Ariadne

When Minos leaves the land of king Nisus, the narrative moves to Crete. Very briefly Ovid tells the story of Ariadne who, in love with the foreigner Theseus, helped him to kill the Minotaur and return safe and sound from the labyrinth (Met. 8.169–82). This story echoes Scylla, as if Minos’ rejection of her would have earned its vengeance in his own daughter. The elements of treason to the father, love for a stranger, and desire to follow him through the sea to a distant land are all present in the Metamorphoses version of the myth, although the stress is duly laid on Ariadne’s rescue by Bacchus and her transformation into a star. The gaze is, however, not
mentioned directly in the passage. Ariadne is a character most appealing to Ovid, as she appears frequently in Ars Amatoria (especially AA 1.525ff.) and in Heroides 10, which she ‘writes.’ But it is probable that Ovid is drawing on the reader’s knowledge of Catullus 64, where the gaze of Ariadne is highlighted. As soon as Theseus arrives in Crete, the girl fixes her eyes on him:

hunc simul ac cupido conspexit lumine virgo
regia, quam suavis expirans castus odores
lectulus in molli complexu matris alebat,
quales Eurotae progignunt flumina myrtos
aurave distinctos eduit verna colores,
non prius ex illo flagrantia declinavit
lumina, quam cuncto concepit corpore flammam
funditus atque imis exarsit tota medullis.

As soon as she saw him with desiring eyes, the royal maiden, whom a chaste and soft little bed—breathing odors like myrtles that spring by the streams of the Eurotas or like the flowers of varied color that the spring-time breeze draws forth—still nourished in the soft embrace of her mother, did not take her burning eyes away from him before she caught the flame of love deep in her whole body and burned completely in her inmost marrow. (Cat. 64.86–93)

The parallelisms with Medea and Scylla are now complete. She sees, she loves, she commits treason to her father and she leaves. Like Medea and Scylla, Ariadne has lost any possibility of being a woman. She has lost her fatherland but has no other alternative country (Her.10.64) or male authority to respond to. She is left in a liminal space, on the shores that separate land and sea, symbolic of the transitional moment between life and death, humanity and divinity that she is undergoing. Her fate can only end with an alternative. Bacchus rescues her, makes her his wife, and turns her wedding coronet into a star (AA.556–57; Prop.3.20.18). The stories of Medea, Scylla, and Ariadne are all versions of the same female type. One who sees, who betrays the fatherland and the father, who loves a foreigner and wishes to travel with him far away. In all three stories the outcome is unsettling. They neither succeed in keeping their men, nor can they return to their families and countries. They are left in a liminal space where they cannot be proper women. Their ultimate transformations are clear metaphors for their marginality.
Movement, displacement, and exile are also present in the stories of Myrrha and Byblis who commit incest and upset intrafamilial relationships. As in other cases, the physical displacement symbolizes the deviation of these characters from standard moral and societal norms. Both stories have points in common with Medea and Scylla. Myrrha and Byblis suffer from a forbidden passion. Unlike the heroines of Books 7 and 8, they do not love an 'enemy' but someone close to them. Here also, a love driven to excess ends up converting Cinyras and Caunus into enemies, while both Myrrha and Byblis suffer exile.

*Byblis*

The story of Byblis in Book 9 is a milder version of the more horrifying tale to come in Book 10 and prepares the reader for it. Byblis falls in love with her twin brother, Caunus. Much has been said about the narcissistic overtones of the tales of Pygmalion and Myrrha, where the creator first falls in love with his creation and then it is the creation that desires her creator. But Byblis in love with her twin brother is not far from this. It is, presumably, his image that enthralls her, an image that, one can confidently assume, bears a close resemblance to her. We may compare another version of the myth of Narcissus where he is in love with his twin sister. After the girl died, Narcissus would go to a spring to find some relief in his own image that so closely resembled that of his beloved. Further, of course, by loving her brother, Byblis loves her own blood, and thus Byblis cannot break the limits of the self necessary for societal interchange and dutiful marriage.

Although there is a physical acquaintance and interchange between brother and sister (458–59), it is Caunus's image that feeds Byblis's passion. It is relevant that Ovid follows this statement by drawing attention to the gaze:

\[\text{paulatim declinat amor, visuraque fratrem}\\ \text{culta venit, nimiumque cupit formosa videri}\\ \text{et siqua est illic formosior, invidet illi.}\\\]

Gradually her love degenerates, and when she comes to see her brother she is all adorned. She is too keen to look beautiful, and if any other woman seems more beautiful to him, she envies her. (Met. 9.461–63)
Unlike Medea and Scylla, the accent here is not on a woman seeing the beloved but on being herself the object of the male gaze, as a 'normal' woman is. However, Byblis' vigil prevents the awareness of deviant desire; it is only in her dreams that her cupido spreads full sails. Then she can actually do the looking: saepe videt quod amat: visa est quoque iungere fratris corpus. "She often sees what she loves: she sees herself joining her body to her brother" (Met. 9.470–71). Soon, with the realization of desire, from subject of the gaze Caunus becomes object of the gaze: ille quidem est oculis quamvis formosus iniquis et placet. "He is indeed beautiful, even to hostile eyes, and he is attractive" (Met. 9.476–77). This development indicates Byblis' own transformation into a deviant woman. Afterward, she writes a letter to Caunus in which she confesses her passion, but she is violently rejected. Once again, Byblis expresses her amatory enterprise with nautical metaphors, a common vocabulary for matters of love, which is meaningful in view of the imagery of Medea and Scylla that Byblis may be 'reading' and using to construct her own image:

. . . ne non sequeretur euntem,  
parte aliquae veli, qualis foret aura, notare  
debueram, tutoque mari decurrere, quae nunc  
non exploratis inplevi lintea ventis.  
auperor in scopulos igitur, subversaque toto  
obruor oceano, neque habent mea vela recursus.  

To make sure the wind blew fair, with some part of the sail I should have checked what the wind was like, and I should have sailed safely, now I have spread full sails to unexplored winds. Thus I am cast against the rocks, I am shipwrecked and overwhelmed by the whole ocean, and my sails cannot bring me back. (Met. 9.589–94)

Byblis envisions love as sailing, which, despite being a common metaphor, may hint at the breach of the limits of 'landed' femininity. She does not end up at sea but becomes an exile. The devious woman who has 'given free sail' to her desire and who has dared to look 'actively' in an erotic manner, cannot stay in her accustomed space. Her brother leaves the city, disgusted with her wooing, and goes off to found a city, a very masculine enterprise. His purpose is therefore determined and magnificent, transcending the personal. But Byblis, whose very desire was a sort of return to herself (she confesses: "non hoc inimica precatur, sed quae, cum tibi sit iunctissima, iunctior esse/ expetit et vinclo tecum propriore ligari"/ "It is not an enemy who prays this, but one who, though most closely joined to you, wishes to be even more closely joined and to be bound to you by a tighter
bond,” (Met. 9.548–50), follows him but ends up wandering with no clear purpose: *siquidem patriam invisoresque penates/ deserit, et profugi sequitur vestigia fratris* / “Since indeed she abandons her fatherland and her hated home, and follows the footsteps of her exile brother” (Met. 9.639–40). The outcome of sexual deviancy and visual desire is physical displacement. Byblis wanders in the open, first following her love, but then, possessed by madness, she loses any sense of direction and disintegrates into a pool.

**Myrrha**

Myrrha falls in love with her father, Cinyras. This love is experienced not only with heart and soul, but sight plays a most important role in the story. At the beginning, Myrrha is the object of desire of many suitors (Met. 10.316–17), in a traditional standing for women. But soon she becomes the subject of desire and, with it, the subject of the gaze:

> ire libet procul hinc patriaeque relinquere fines,  
dum scelus effugiam; retinet malus ardor euntem,  
> ut praesens spectem Cinyran tangamque loquarque  
osculaque admoveam, si nil conceditur ultra.

It is well to go far away from here and to abandon the boundaries of my fatherland, as long as I can avoid crime. An evil passion holds me back even as I try to go, so that present, I may see Cinyras and touch him, talk to him and kiss him, if nothing else is allowed. (Met. 10.341–44)

The phrase *oscula admoveam* recalls the character of Pygmalion when he applies kisses to his ivory statue. It is poignant that Myrrha mentions exile as an alternative to crime and to seeing, when later in the story she will be condemned to a long wandering due to her fault. Regarding the gaze, it is interesting that when Cinyras asks her what type of husband she would prefer, Myrrha’s deceiving answer is “*similem tibi* / “like you” (Met. 10.364). This constitutes a playful intratextual gesture toward the story of her great-grandfather Pygmalion. In his case, “*sit coniunx . . . similis mea . . . eburnae*” / “May my wife be similar to the ivory maiden” (Met. 10.275–76) is directly related to physical appearance and the visual. This weight is felt in the Myrrha episode. But a witty inversion is displayed. While Pygmalion was in love with his creation, in Myrrha’s tale the creation (the daughter) loves the creator. Still, the plays on desire are more complex, as in fact, Cinyras unwittingly enjoys sexual intercourse with the girl.*

The conclusion of the story leads us back to exile. After being discovered by Cinyras, already pregnant by him, Myrrha flees sure death at the
hands of her father and wonders around with no direction:

Myrrha fugit: tenebrisque et caecae munere noctis
intercepta neci est latosque vagata per agros
palmiferos Arabas Panchaeaque rura relinquit
perque novem erravit redeuntis cornua lunae,
cum tandem terra requievit fessa Sabaea;
vixque uteri portabat onus. . . .

Myrrha fled, and was saved from death by the shades and the grace of the
dark night. She wandered through wide fields and left behind palm-bear-
ing Arabia and the Panchaean country. She wandered around for nine
months and when finally, exhausted, she rested in the Sabaean land, she
was barely able to carry the weight of her womb. (Met. 10.476–81)

Myrrha wanders and finally becomes fixed as a new tree to give birth,
which recalls the wanderings of Latona to give birth in Delos. But what
is of interest here is the fact that as someone who has committed a crime,
she must leave, be displaced. Curiously, it is not her father, who has also
performed a condemnable union, who leaves the city. Both Myrrha and
Byblis are characters that have their eyes fixed in a narcissistic and for-
bidden love; in a way, they can have eyes only for something that is kin
to them, and are not able to unite with the different. It is the sexual crime
that makes them errant, exiled women who do not have a home. The only
way out of this impossible situation seems to be transformation: Byblis
into a pool and Myrrha into a tree.

Gaze and movement affect the flow of the narrative. Men usually look
at women and “freeze their image.” With this visual detention, a stoppage
in the narrative is produced and the eyes of the external viewer/reader
also experience the power to control the mobility of the female images.
Nevertheless, the play is double, for the female can also paralyze the view-
er and deprive him of his masculine activity. Further, the erotic object is
often construed as an immobile statue for the viewer to enjoy. Making a
statue of the beloved serves the purpose of visual control and marriage
and procreation need the fixation of women. Yet some women are lost to
deviancy through their gazes. They begin by looking and end up commit-
ting crimes, abandoning the fatherland, and wandering through the world
as exiles like Scylla and Medea. A woman who allows herself to gaze in an
erotic way becomes deviant and mobile and is forced to live in a liminal
space for which usually the only possible outcome is transformation.