A Web of Fantasies
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They don’t all have the same look, yet not dissimilar, as it should be for sisters. (Met. 2.13–14)

Most of Metamorphoses is narrated by a masculine authorial persona, which for the sake of simplicity has here been referred to as ‘Ovid.’ Nevertheless, Ovid’s hexameter poem has several internal narrators and even third-degree narrators already included in an internal narration. This is a highly problematic issue, for much has been said about the narrator of Metamorphoses. Some would argue that there is a single narrator throughout the poem, while others would argue for many voices; others try to find a middle ground. Readers have always found it difficult to read embedded stories in Metamorphoses and other texts. The crucial question seems to lie in deciding whether to see the internal narratives as productions of a greater ‘unique’ and omnipresent authorial figure or to give these narratives and their narrators independence and a value free from the authority of the external author. Again, the question is whether to adopt a resisting or a releasing reading.

Metamorphoses includes about forty internal narrators who narrate sixty episodes. Of these numerous narrators only fourteen are female (Cornix, an unnamed daughter of Minyas, her sisters Leuconoe and Alcithoe, the Pierides, an unidentified muse, Calliope, Arethusa, Alcmene, Iole, Venus, Galatea, the Sibyl, and Circe’s famula), two are unidentified, and the rest
are male.³ Statistics, however, may be deceiving, for female narratives occupy very large portions of the text (e.g., the Minyeides: half of Book 4, and Calliope: half of Book 5). While the weight of masculine voices is larger, occupying more lines than the discourses of women, women’s voices are still very audible and their visual constructions very ‘visible.' The main concern of this book is with women, and therefore this chapter will concentrate only on female narratives in the search for a female gaze and a female voice. Aspects of male narratives have been alluded to in previous chapters, but a full discussion of male-authored narratives is beyond the scope of this study.⁴

The debate over the interrelations, precedence, and independence between the main narratorial voice and imbedded narrators is particularly germane when dealing with stories told by female characters. As with Heroïdes: is it possible to separate the voices of women from the male authorial voice? In a resisting approach to the text, it is not. Female discourses will always be impregnated by the masculinity of the author. In a releasing reading, the reader is allowed to question his authority and consider female narrators as authorial figures in their own right.⁵ While the ensuing discussion will try to avoid being completely one-sided, this chapter, by its very nature, is predominantly an exercise in releasing reading. Although it is undeniable that the author’s voice is felt throughout behind the female voices, the very nature of the poem admits the possibility of shifting narrators; thus we can relieve women’s utterances from the male authorial weight.

The phantasiae that women create with words presuppose a previous gaze, whether this is a ‘real’ vision evoked in the imagination or simply an imaginary experience. Women’s production of visual images through discourse provides a way of entering the domain of the female gaze. This chapter studies the visual (and other) constructions that women create in their narratives as expressions of their gaze. However, the reader will note that although the primary focus is the gaze in relation to images woven with words, voice, and image will be constantly interlinked. Some episodes that were explored in previous chapters will now be assessed specifically as products of the female imagination. When women represent visually (whether on actual canvas or in their mind’s eye), they usually do it for a female internal audience, although a few episodes, like the Sibyl and Venus, have male listeners. The audience of these images will also be a primary concern, since receptors of visual constructions play an important role both in the design and effects of the images and even provide hints about the reactions of external readers.
A Gathering of Weavers

Although weaving is a central aspect of the daughters of Minyas, their apparent means of expression is verbal, which is why they deserve a place in this and not the previous chapter. Nonetheless, as Rosati has shown, the visual and the textual are constantly interlaced in the tale: just as weaving is a metaphor for narrating, narrating can also be a metaphor for weaving. Therefore both facets always need to be kept in mind when dealing with the stories of the Minyeides.

Book 4 begins with the daughters of Minyas who resist the divinity of Bacchus. While the whole town joins the Bacchic revel, these women stay at home weaving and telling stories. Their narratives expand through half of Book 4 and comprise the tales of Pyramus and Thisbe, Mars and Venus, Leucothoe and Clytie, and Salmacis and Hermaphroditus. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, behind every act of female speech and communicative weaving lies a latent subversive mode, for the female voice itself is felt as something both transgressive and inadequate. A woman's speech in itself, regardless of what she says, is often a claim to have a voice, a struggle for power. So the daughters of Minyas stay at home and weave believing that this is what 'proper' women do, but they deconstruct this 'virtue' by the very act of telling stories. One can then observe a contradiction and a gender struggle from the beginning of the tale. They want to stay in and be 'good women,' so they choose weaving, without realizing that this in itself is only a signifier of proper femininity if they remain silent (or chatter but without signifying). Instead, in their storytelling they claim a voice for themselves, speech being a masculine prerogative par excellence, as Telemachus indicates in the Odyssey. These interactions and battles between femininity and masculinity, activity and passivity, will be a constant undercurrent in the stories they tell and in the expression of their own visions. We will suggest here that one of the main characteristics of the Minyeides is fear of mingling, diversity, and change, which involves a conservative outlook that denies the power of Bacchus and which could be seen as the extreme opposite to metamorphosis (despite the fact that they are commonly seen as an alter ego of the poet). The gaze in these tales is not only a concrete act of seeing but also a way of knowing, understanding, and comprehending the world.

In these gender conflicts, the roles of the gods in the passage are meaningful. On the one hand, there is Bacchus, with all his sexual complexity; on the other hand, although she does not appear directly in the action, Minerva is also central. The text describes how when the women in town follow the Bacchic celebrations, they leave their weaving behind (Met.
4.9–10). By way of contrast, the daughters of Minyas stay at home weaving:

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots \text{solae Minyeides intus} \\
\text{intempestiva turbantes festa Minerva} \\
\text{aut ducunt lanas aut stamina pollice versant} \\
\text{aut haerent telae famulasque laboribus urguent.}
\end{align*}
\]

Only the daughters of Minyas stay inside, marring the festival with the untimely tasks of Minerva. They spin wool or turn the threads with their fingers, or cling to their webs and urge the slave-girls to work. (Met. 4.32–35)

Then when the stories are about to begin Alcithoe says:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{“dum cessant aliae commentaque sacra frequentant,} \\
\text{nos quoque, quas Pallas, melior dea, detinet” inquit.} \\
\text{“utile opus manuum vario sermone levemus.”}
\end{align*}
\]

“While the other women are idle and celebrate a false festival,” she said, “let us also, who worship Pallas, a better goddess, lighten the useful work of our hands with varied conversation.” (Met. 4.37–39)

This antagonistic presentation of Dionysus and Pallas is significant. While Bacchus is the god of celebration, Minerva is identified with working and household tasks. Further, Minerva rules over things ἐνδον, while Dionysus’s domain is the ἔξω. However, both gods are at some level sexually problematic. Dionysus is a male, but a very effeminate one, and Minerva is a goddess who is tightly linked with the father and masculinity in her role as warrior. The fundamental difference between them here is that Minerva is adamantly opposed to sexual mingling while Dionysus foments it. The alliance of the Minyeides with Minerva is also meaningful because it adds to the problematization of weaving as a feminine signifier. They, too, while striving to be purely feminine by staying at home like house-bound women, endeavor to have a voice and a gaze, which are not traditional feminine prerogatives.

PYRAMUS AND THISBE

The first tale that they narrate is the doomed love of Pyramus and Thisbe. All the stories of the Minyeides tend to support their decision to stay
inside and be 'proper women.' These stories, as Anderson recognizes, are also irreverent because they problematize the merits and dignity of gods and human beings. Catherine Campbell Rhorer has shown how the color implications of red and white in the story of Pyramus and Thisbe stage erotic struggles between sex and purity. For example, Thisbe arrives under the tree that bears snow-white berries (arbor ibi niveis uberrima pomis, Met. 4.89). One can see the white fruits as symbols of the young couple's virginity and sexual immaturity. Thisbe, while waiting for her love, escapes a lioness whose mouth drips blood from a victim (venit ecce recenti/ caede leaena boum spumantis oblita rictus/ “Look, here comes a lioness, her foaming jaws dripping with the blood of recently slain cattle,” Met. 4.96–97). Abandoning the place, the heroine leaves her cloak under the mulberry. The lioness bites it and stains it with blood (inventos forte sine ipsa/ ore cruentato tenues laniavit amictus/ “It so happened that she found the cloak without the girl and tore it to pieces with her bloody jaws,” Met. 4.103–4). The light garment is an obvious synecdoche for the girl herself. Although the text does not give a precise color definition of the cloak, it conveys that it is 'stainable' and thus probably of a light hue—otherwise, it would not make such a horrifying spectacle in Pyramus's eyes (Met. 4.107–8). Still, it is described as tenues amictus and thus it is possible to envision an association with the hymen here. In a somewhat fetishistic reaction, Pyramus grabs the cloak, takes it to the tree, and weeps on it. The white tree and the light cloth may be seen as symbols of the virgin. Tears are associated with ejaculation in male sexuality and there are cases when the mentula is said to weep. Thus Pyramus's weeping on the light cloth, a metonymy for her white body, under the white tree is sexually charged. Even more significant is his desire to 'stain' the garment himself with his own blood (“accipe nunc” inquit “nostri quoque sanguinis/ haustus!”/ “Receive now a draught of my blood too,” Met. 4.118). Here the drinking metaphor is linked to sexual imagery, as it is the case in the Ceres episode in Book 5. Now Pyramus's own blood has smeared the cloak, now he is the one to color 'her.' With this begins an aetiological story, that of the mulberry, whose fruits turned from snow-white to purple:

arborei fetus adspergine caedis in atram
vertuntur faciem, madefactaque sanguine radix
purpureo tinguetur pendentia mora colore.

The fruits of the tree turn black with the sprinkling of the blood and the roots drenched in purple blood color the hanging berries. (Met. 4.125–27)
Purpureo colore is relevant because purple is associated with Bacchus in Met. 3.556. Most peculiar also is the commonly condemned (Segal calls it “bathetic”13) metaphor of the pipe bursting for Pyramus’s self-performed wound where the verb eiaculatur is potent:

\[
\text{ut iacuit resupinus humo, cruor emicat alte}
\]
\[
\text{non aliter, quam cum vitiato fistula plumbo}
\]
\[
\text{scinditur et tenui stridente foramine longas}
\]
\[
\text{eiaculatur aquas atque ictibus aera rumpit.}
\]

As he lies with his back on the ground, the blood spouts up high, just as when a pipe breaks due to rusty lead and spouts up long streams of water through a small hissing hole and breaks into the air with its jets. (Met. 4.121–24)

Anderson argues that because this, and possibly Fasti 1.270, are the first appearances of the verb, possible sexual connotations are misguided and anachronistic.14 But if one thinks about the image of his body bursting in springs of blood in the erotic context of a story where the ultimate goal is lovemaking, the simile cannot but imply an unfortunately displaced sexual discharge. Besides, both Segal and Hinds believe that in the word ictus there is a latent idea of male ejaculation, reminiscent of the Lucretian passage where ictus is used in this sense (DRN 4.1049–53).15

This is a tale of errors, of love forbidden and displaced, where the protagonists, as Barkan affirms, suffer from “perceptual confusion” and where the object of love appears as metonymy in other objects.16 Now when Thisbe returns to the place, the metaphoric sexual union in color is completed with her death. Her first realization of the situation is deeply significant in terms of color. The text reads: *quae postquam vestemque suam cognovit et ense/ vidit ebur vacuum . . . /

“After she recognized her own cloak and saw the ivory scabbard empty of the sword . . .” (Met. 4.147–48). The scabbard from which the sword has been drawn is of ivory, an epitome of whiteness. Pyramus’s weapon, a metaphoric instrument of male sexuality, has been kept while inactive in a white case, which accords well with the imagery of sexual purity and virginity. Further in the story, Thisbe decides to share the sword “still warm with her lover’s death” (Met. 4.163).17 The text gives away the aetiological formula in Thisbe’s words:

\[
\text{at tu quae ramis arbor miserabile corpus}
\]
\[
\text{nunc tegis unius, mox es tectura duorum,}
\]
Thisbe's interpretation of the color of the mulberry is death, as she sees it as black or very dark, and she associates the color with the imagery of mourning and the funeral. However, the mulberry is not an absolute black but rather a very deep dark purple, especially, as it has been tinted with blood. It is outstanding at this point that the text identifies this as the color of mature, ripe fruits: nam color in pomo est, ubi permaturuit, ater / “For black is the color of the fruit when it is ripe” (Met. 4.165). This detail aids in the interpretation of purple as the color of sexual maturity. While at the beginning of the story their affection may be said to be more immature, the desire and sexual implications of the metaphors at play mark a clear, though doomed, passage to adulthood. In the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe the combination of red and white functions as a metaphoric—even displaced—form of sexual intercourse. The light cloak and the white scabbard, the white tree before their encounter and their shedding of blood by death act as a symbolic deflowering that stains the white. Sexual maturity and the loss of virginity are finally embodied in the transformation of the fruits of the mulberry, from white to red.

Interestingly, it is their purity that the Minyeides strive to preserve without mingling with the god of wine. Bacchus identifies with the deep purple of the grapes (uvae, Met. 4.14) and the Minyeides with the white of purity they pretend to have, thus making the name of the second narrator, Leuconoe, significant. In this sense, the change of the mulberry’s color from white to purple embodies what the Minyeides reject, the mingling with Bacchus and their own transformation into ‘stained women.’ The tree is thus the visual emblem of the story. Its transformation is what matters to the narrator, as it is exactly what the sister is set out to narrate (Met. 4.51–52).

The meanings of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe go even further in their links to the ideology of the daughters of Minyas. Both lovers, who are confined to the house, and especially the girl, make a transgressive move towards the outside, the wilderness. First, the text insists on the impor-
tance of walls and dividing lines (Met. 4.57–58). City walls and the walls of the house are precisely what Pyramus and Thisbe will break through to be together. The emphasis on the house is also apparent in the repetition of the word domus; there is likewise a constant insistence on the semantic field of roofs and coverings, which Segal interprets as the shelter of childhood, away from which the lovers move. This contrasts with the stubborn desire of the Minyeides to stay at home and not follow the passionate world of the god. Furthermore, the lovers cheat their guardian and traverse the doors, which are emblematic limits between inside and outside, chastity and sexuality, propriety and crime. The verb describing the exit from the house is egredior (94), which is the same verb used for Medea leaving her house in Book 7 (egreditur tectis vestes induta recinctas / “She leaves the house dressed in loose robes,” Met. 7.182), in a line that bears profound echoes of deviancy as well as sexual openness. The lover, who goes out of the city and the house, will ‘mingle’ in symbolic sex and be doomed. With this story the Minyeides justify their closure inside the house.

What kind of gazes are present here? Whom does the narrator focalize with? There is not a ‘straightforward’ identification here as in the episode of Apollo and Daphne, for example. The narrator tells us that both youths were pretty (iuvenum pulcherrimus alter,/ altera, quas Oriens habuit, praelata puellis/ “He was the most beautiful of all youths, she was the loveliest among the girls of the East,” Met. 4.55–56). But the narrator also does not stop and dwell on the physical description. This is a gaze that does not reify—at this moment—the image, but in fact lets the narration flow. While the lovers are finally fixed in the static metaphor of the mulberry, they are fixed together, preserving the sexual ‘balance’ that had been developed. To say that the gaze of this narrator is ‘male’ or ‘female’ would be rather reductive, for the gaze here shifts and fluctuates. The first narrator permits the flow of images and treats the female and the male in similar ways (in terms of power relations) and does not focalize specifically with any of the characters at all times, but rather sees the story as an observer who can look at the scene from varied viewpoints. This is a gaze that does not look from the conventional place of the male perspective that aligns with the male oppressive eyes; rather, it displaces and fragments the look toward a series of erotic objects. Male readers are forced to redirect their gaze and not align only with a unique male gaze, while women readers find a different place from where to view the scene which is neither identification with the male gaze, nor deprivation of aesthetic pleasure, but an appreciation of the scene from a plurality of viewpoints.
This brief tale by Leuconoe of the affairs of Mars and Venus also acts as a justification of the morality of the Minyeides. The Sun, the god who sees everything first, saw the lovers (\textit{primus adulterium Veneris cum Marte putatur, hic vidisse deus; videt hic deus omnia primus} / “It is thought that this god saw the affair of Mars and Venus first, this god sees everything first,” Met. 4.172) and told Vulcan, Venus’s husband. The Sun here recalls many telltale characters in the poem, such as the birds in Book 2. Vulcan fashioned a net of thin threads of bronze to capture the adulterous lovers:

\begin{quote}
\textit{excidit: extemplo graciles ex aere catenas retiaque et laqueos, quae lumina fallere possent, elimat. non illud opus tenuissima vincant stamina, non summo quae pendet aranea tigno; utque levis tactus momentaque parva sequantur, efficit et lecto circumdata collocat arte.}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
But his spirit failed him, and the work he was fashioning fell from his hands. Immediately he forges slender chains of bronze and bonds that can cheat the eyes. Neither the finest threads would surpass that work, nor the threads that the spider weaves from the ceiling beam. He made the web in such a way that it would yield to a slight touch and a small movement, and he spread it artfully around the bed. (Met. 4.174–81)
\end{quote}

Vulcan’s web unavoidably recalls the weaving of the Minyeides and their condition of being creators. He is the bringer of morality and nemesis for passionate crimes in the story. Like Vulcan, the Minyeides wish to ‘catch’ morality with their weaving. But Vulcan is a laughingstock, as in a way the Minyeides will be when they are transformed into bats. Vulcan has a sort of Cyclopean character in his problematic hypermasculinity. As Ernest Kris and Otto Kurz show, plastic artists in antiquity were looked down on as craftsmen, social inferiors, one of the likely reasons being that they worked with their hands. Therefore, “one must be prepared to assume, as Zilsel does, that all the insults, malign gossip, and mild contempt to which Homer’s Hephaestus was subject are attributable to the fact that this highly artistic metal-worker labored with his hands.” In Ovid, Vulcan is the forger of metal, but he is often cheated by his beautiful consort in a way that recalls the relationship between Juno and Jupiter.
Likewise his epithet mulciber, “the softener,” lends a somewhat delicate hue to his character. No matter how successful Vulcan’s vengeance is, he still remains embarrassed by Venus and in this he suffers some sort of demasculinization, seen symbolically when his work falls from his hands (Met. 4.175–76). Finally, the intercourse of Mars and Venus that both Vulcan and the Minyeides oppose functions as an appropriate metaphor for all the mingling involved in the Dionysiac ritual.

While the narrator and the reader/viewer see the adulterous pair humiliated and trapped in the net, despite Vulcan’s effort to turn the scene into a comic spectacle (Met. 4.185–86), we do not really see much because the lovers are not described in detail; instead we only hear that they were caught in their embrace (Met. 4.184). But curiously, by the very act of narrating how the Sun told the tale to Vulcan, the Minyeides are telling it to us and in this sense they become delatores as well.

LEUCOTHOE AND CLYTIE

The next story of the Minyeides involves precisely the vengeance of Venus: the Sun falls in love. As seen in chapter 3, the Minyeides identify with Leucothoe in her whiteness and fixation as a proper virgin who spins in a scene that alludes to Lucretia’s purity in Ovid and Livy. The circle of the slaves weaving around Leucothoe (Met. 4.220–21) is a doublet for the Minyeides spinning and telling stories. Yet to this apparent innocence of Leucothoe, one passing comment is puzzling:

\[
\text{at virgo, quamvis inopino territa visu} \\
\text{victa nitore dei posita vim passa querella est.}
\]

But the maiden, though terrified by the unexpected vision of the god and overwhelmed by his radiance, endured the god’s violence without complaint. (Met. 4.232–33)

What does posita querella imply? Is this a voluntary act of surrender? If so, perhaps the Minyeides are condemning her behavior. Leucothoe, who was before chaste like them, has willingly surrendered to the power of a god, while they still oppose one with strength. There is one further point of significance in the story. Leucothoe’s defeat by the god is symbolized by the fall and loss of her weaving (et colus et fusus digitis cecidere remissis/ “Both distaff and spindle fell from her heedless fingers,” Met. 4.229). The loss of power, as with Vulcan, is envisioned as something significant falling
from a character's arms. Leucothoe drops her weaving, thus showing defeat. In contrast, the Minyeides cling to their threads to the end and they even become part of their transformation (Met. 4.389–90 and 394–98).

Thus the Minyeides paint Leucothoe as an example of what a woman may suffer when she ‘loosens’ herself. Paradoxically, the ones who end up lost and completely overcome by Bacchus are the Minyeides themselves, although curiously they are not forced to participate in the Bacchic celebrations. The fate of a woman, again, “hangs from a thin thread”—a particularly apt metaphor for weavers. While complete sexual availability is condemned, a woman must know when to give in to the power of a male god. This is precisely the root of the Minyeides’ transformation. They wish to impose their own vision and end up blinded. The gaze in the story seems to focalize partly with a male gaze, as both Leucothoe and Clytie are fixed as visual objects. But the very fact that Venus has provoked the god’s love and that he is virtually impotent to save his beloved turns this male gaze into something more complex than it appears at first, where identifications are constantly shifting and often undermined.

**SALMACIS AND HERMAFPHRODITUS**

This last story of the Minyeides is told by Alcithoe. Before she opens her tale, Alcithoe’s femininity is asserted by the insistence on her weaving (quae radio stantis percurrens stamina telae / “who, running her shuttle through the threads of the upright loom . . .,” Met. 4.275). Again, she introduces a *praeteritio*, which includes several stories of metamorphosis. The first few that she mentions have to do with gender bending and gender reversal (Met. 4.277–89). This preoccupation with gender destabilizations and mingling appeared at the beginning of Book 4, where the text explained that all mothers and servant women alike join the festival (Met. 4.9) and that they dance with the satyrs (Met. 4.25); we hear the mixed voices of women and youths (Met. 4.28–29). The Dionysian orgy upsets gender and social boundaries by creating chaos in the eyes of the daughters of Minyas. What is more, in the first description of the Bacchic revel the participants are described as follows: *turba ruit, mixtaeque viris materisque nurusque/ vulgusque proceresque ignota ad sacra feruntur/ “A crowd rushes on, both mothers and daughters-in-law mingled with men, commons and nobles are driven to the unknown rites”* (Met. 3.529–30). At last, Alcithoe decides to tell the story of the fountain of Salmacis (Met. 4.285–87).

What the daughters of Minyas fear is a mingling of the sexes. The
irony is that what they fear is something that they actually represent because they weave and speak at the same time. In her description of Salmacis as an unvirginal nymph, Alcithoe also shows her novelty with regard to previous pictures of nymphs presented by Ovid; in this one may even note a certain irreverence toward and independence from the overarching author. But Salmacis’ gaze is also problematic and complex; in a way, like Hermaphroditus, she mingles in her desire aspects of masculinity and femininity. While she actively sees and turns Hermaphroditus into the object of her eyes, she also looks at herself with a ‘male gaze’ when she regards her image in the mirror as well as when she desires to be looked at by the boy (nec ante . . . / quam circumspexit amictus,/ et finxit vultum et meruit formosa videri/ “Not before she arranged her robes and composed her face, and deserved to look beautiful . . . ,” Met. 4.317–19). Alcithoe introduces Hermaphroditus with a visual image of indefiniteness. Not only is he a puer, but also it is said that cuius erat facies, in qua materque paterque/ cognisci possent/ “In his face you could recognize his father and his mother” (Met. 4.290–91). The fact that Hermaphroditus bears the marks of mother and father in his face, points to the forthcoming mingling of masculinity and femininity in the story. His very name is also a conflation of his father’s and mother’s (Hermes and Aphrodite). Gender instability marks the boy long before the introduction of Salmacis into the story; indeed, his feminine characteristics are notable from birth. Furthermore, the effeminacy of a male is a visual mark of Bacchus who is said to be an eternal puer (Met. 4.18) and to have a “virginal face” (tibi, cum sine cornibus adstas,/ virgineum caput est/ “Your head is virginal when you stand without your horns,” Met. 4.19–20), a feature already introduced by Acoetes in Book 3 (utque putat, praedam deserto nactus in agro,/ virinea puerum ducit per litora forma / “Having found a prize (so he thought) in a deserted field, he brings with him a boy of virginal beauty to the shore,” Met. 3.606–7) and in the very words of Bacchus referring to himself (quae gloria vestra est?/ si puerum iuvenes, si multi fallitis unum?/ “What is your glory if being young men you cheat a boy, if, many in number, you deceived just one?” Met. 3.655). The whole Bacchic celebration is viewed in Metamorphoses and other contexts as effeminate and devirilizing. In Book 3 Pentheus wonders why youths have left their arms to take up the thyrsus (Met. 3.541–42). Likewise, the virility of Bacchus himself is traditionally questionable, a trait expressed in Metamorphoses through the eyes of Pentheus, the ‘macho’ proud of his masculinity (Met. 3.553–56).

Spencer believes that Pentheus must be about thirty years old, for in his dispute with Bacchus he assumes the position of an elder against a puer. There is, however, no concrete evidence to maintain that
Pentheus is thirty years old; his immaturity, his almost adolescent eagerness to see in Euripides, and his inexperience in handling these matters make him look younger. We may argue that Pentheus tries to show himself as a grown-up by treating Bacchus like a puer. The fact that both Bacchus and Hermaphroditus are called puer and that attention is drawn to the beauty of their faces creates identification between them. For her part, Salmacis represents all the visual sensuality identified with the Dionysian revel that the Minyeides strive to avoid in their stubborn 'matronhood.' Everyone in town is seduced by Bacchus's beauty, and he becomes an object of visual admiration: tu formosissimus alto/ conspiceris caelo/ "You shine the fairest in the lofty sky" (Met. 4.18–19). It is precisely this visual fascination that seduces the other women, but not the Minyeides. In the same way, Salmacis, the hypersensuous female, is seduced by the beauty of the puer Hermaphroditus (Met. 4.316). Salmacis succumbs to what the daughters of Minyas will not.

But just like the Minyeides, Salmacis is a sexually ambiguous character who wavers between being an object of the gaze—she tries to make of herself an attractive visual object (Met. 4.318–19)—and having an intrusive gaze. The reactions of Hermaphroditus to the nymph's declaration of love are those of a modest, blushing virgin (Met. 4.329–30). His blush may be assimilated to the color combination in the mulberry, which emblematised the Minyeides' fear of mingling with Bacchus. The red of the blush is viewed as the color of apples, but more poignant is the reference to the painted ivory. It is the boy here who is 'painted': he is the white board to be colored by the thought of love and by the gaze of a desiring woman. The image is enhanced by the reference to his eburnea colla in line 335 (cf. Narcissus in Met. 3.422), which Salmacis strives to embrace. Then Hermaphroditus persuades her to retire and she leaves the pool for his enjoyment. But when the boy, having disposed of all his clothes, jumps naked in the fountain, the nymph cannot control her desire at the sight of his naked body. It is here that a most eloquent simile takes place:

desilit in latices alternaque bracchia ducens
in liquidis translucet aquis, ut eburnea si quis
signa tegat claro vel candida lilia vitro.

He jumps in the water and, swimming with alternating movement of his arms, he shines through the clear water, as if someone were to encase ivory figures or white lilies in clear glass. (Met. 4.353–55)
The body of the *puer* has the whiteness of ivory or lilies and it is this image that arouses Salmacis’ desire. One may again think of the fragility of white, the 'stainable' character of ivory, and the 'virginal' weakness of flowers. But the image of ivory looks forward to Pygmalion’s maiden and in some sense converts Hermaphroditus into an artefact. The end of the story is well known: Salmacis violently wraps herself around the boy like a serpent and they become one forever—a mixture of man and woman, neither one nor the other. This is precisely what the daughters of Minyas fear, yet, paradoxically, in the very act of telling Hermaphoditus’s story they assume a nonfeminine stance, because they not only speak, they also look.

The story portrays a woman who is seduced by the world of sensuality and beauty. She cannot resist the attraction of a *puer* with a beautiful face. Salmacis and Hermaphoditus are a sort of doublet for the Minyeides and Bacchus. Bacchus is also a beautiful boy whose gender definition is problematic and who merges in himself the female and the male. To fall into such a passion is dangerous and entails the loss of proper gender and sexual boundaries, which the Minyeides so wholeheartedly strive to preserve. Salmacis’ doom and disintegration as a woman confirm and support the decision of the Minyeides to stay in the house and not to succumb to Bacchus’s charms.

Focalization in the story seems to be achieved through Salmacis who reifies the boy. She appears to have a ‘male gaze.’ Therefore, the narrator who looks with Salmacis also possesses a ‘male gaze.’ In this she once more transgresses the limits of traditional femininity that in appearance she tried to defend. But in view of the failure of Salmacis’ gaze, one is allowed to question whether this is the right way of looking for a woman. Likewise, this failure of Salmacis’ gaze may be telling the reader that we should not look at the *puer* Bacchus either or we will get ‘lost’ like Salmacis.

The narrative gathering of the daughters of Minyas ends with their transformation into bats, a change that displays their stubbornness to an extreme. They reject leaving the house, and there they will stay forever (*tectaque, non silvas celebrant lucemque perosae nocte volant seroque tenent a vespere nomen/ “They frequent the houses, not the woods, and hating light they fly at night; and have the name of the late evening,” Met. 4.414–15*). They are also fixed as creatures of the night. The setting of the scene of transformation at twilight stages the liminality of the new beings they have become (Met. 4.399–401), a liminality that may also express
their gender instability. Interestingly, they cling to their weaving to the end, but in their transformation they lose their capacity for articulate speech, emitting only a thin squeak (levi stridore, 413). Transformation not only silences these women, but also leaves them in the dark. The metaphorical incapacity to recognize Bacchus as a god is extended to the fact that bats prefer the darkness of night. This visual rejection of Bacchic visual imagery is well exemplified when they escape from the phenomenon that is overtaking their house: diversaeque locis ignes ac lumina vitant, dumque petunt tenebras/“In various directions they flee the light and fires, while they seek darkness “ (Met. 4.406–7). Relevant as well is the transformation of their weaving. Ovid does not tell what the Minyeides weave, whether it is some kind of clothing or a tapestry. It is, however, purple and Ovid uses the same language that he employs later for Philomela’s, Arachne’s, and Minerva’s cloths (telae, fila, stamina):28

resque fide maior, coepere virescere telae
inque hederae faciem pendens frondescere vestis;
pars abit in vites, et quae modo fila fuerunt,
palmite mutantur; de stamine pampinus exit;
purpura fulgorem pictis adcommodat uvis.

A greater thing than you would believe: their threads began to turn green and the hanging cloth was covered by leaves and acquired the appearance of ivy. A part becomes grape-vines, and what were once threads turned into tendrils. From the warp shoot vine leaves and purple adapts to the radiance of colored grapes. (Met. 4.394–98)

The text does not actually say whether the weaving had images or whether it was a more conventional ‘silent’ cloth, but its transformation into grapes together with the loquacity of the daughters of Minyas supports the possibility that the sisters wove pictures and thus expressed their voices through that means as well, and that weaving was not only a ‘futile’ activity as Anderson calls it, but a deeply communicative one, like Arachne’s.29 But whatever they weave is appropriated by Bacchus, who turns the textiles into hanging grapes.30 If what they wove were images, he then would be robbing them of a gaze by turning the weaving into Bacchic imagery. Unlike Arachne, who at least preserves a skeleton of her old weaving art, the Minyeides lose it completely, for there is nothing connected with weaving in the newly formed bats. Perhaps the problem of the Minyeides is that they do not accept that human beings are a combination of feminine and masculine aspects, and that despite their
adamant rejection of masculinity, they are themselves more complex in a gender perspective than they want to be. As Ovid’s poem constantly shows, nothing is stable and identity is proved precisely in the process of change.

For all the transformative power of Bacchus, we can still imagine a struggle by the Minyeides for preservation of their voices and their gaze. First, they are not completely silent, and although their new squeak cannot articulate human words, it can be viewed as a last cry of the inner self. Even as bats, they try to speak and narrate. Likewise there is a curious meaning in their new form. Ovid alludes to the Latin *vespertilio* (from *vesper*, “evening”). In technical terminology, they are called *chiroptera*, meaning “hand-winged.” Ovid alludes to this characteristic in line 411 with *perlucentibus alis* (“transparent wings”). The preservation of this sort of metamorphosed hand can also be viewed as a reminiscence of the hands that the Minyeides used for weaving, which constitute such a central part of their story. Their weaving, however, is lost to them, and with it the capacity to narrate stories and create visual imagery. The eternal darkness in which the Minyeides are wrapped forever clearly symbolizes their lack of knowledge and understanding of the divine order and place in the world. The insistence on the loss of light stresses, in a manner akin to what happens in most metamorphoses, a literalizing fixation of a characteristic that was already there. Also, while the Minyeides try to be ‘feminine,’ they actually appropriate endowments that are traditionally masculine because they have a ‘voice,’ they have a ‘gaze,’ and they create visual images.31

Every story of narrators in the poem may be linked to the main narrator, ‘Ovid.’ Paradoxically, Ovid, being a male author, has often been identified with women authorial figures to display personal poetics, which suggests perhaps that *Metamorphoses* itself is a mixture of ‘masculine’ epic and ‘feminine’ fluidity and that strict gender definitions are doomed to failure. The metamorphic stories of the Minyeides also approximate to the art of the poet in that, as Wheeler suggests, they believe in a Callimachean type of poetics in their search for the rare mythological tale instead of dwelling on trite and common stories.32 Another parallel between these women and the main narrator is that their stories are a form of opposition to the power of a god, which proves significantly suggestive for those who want to see in Ovid an ‘anti-Augustan.’ The final silencing and symbolic blindness of the Minyeides can also be linked to the exiled poet, who claims to have been robbed of his capacity to sing.33 However, the Minyeides could be read as embodying the opposite end of the critical spectrum. They reject the blurring of boundaries that is so kin to *Metamorphoses*. In
this way, they are punished readers, for they do not appreciate this ‘Bacchic’ poetics. They see a world where mingling and transformation are dangerous; thus they resist change, personifying a rather conservative literary stance, more keen on Minerva’s poetics and Augustan ideology. One could see the Minyeides as the embodiment of Ovid’s literary critics and a proof from ‘Ovid’ that trying to separate categories—gender and other—is an impossible task. It is not enough to tell obscure stories of transformation to be Callimachean and Ovidian when all the Minyeides do is reject fluidity of identity and condemn the outcomes of the stories they present.

What the Minyeides see is a world of corruption and temptation opposite to the image they wish for themselves. But their very doom is due to their incapacity to see that there are other possibilities for women beyond seclusion—although one may see that the Bacchic revel does not offer a particularly edifying context for femininity if we understand that celebrants are possessed by Bacchus and do not have a mind and a gaze of their own. But in the stories that the Minyeides tell there are alternative roles for women, which despite being doomed, can be taken as alternatives to traditional seclusion. The Minyeides see a world where separation of gender categories is desirable, yet their very gender complexity undermines this view. Despite the recuperative readings of their voices, the sisters are not good models for feminist readings, for in their stubbornness they almost oppose sisterhood, unlike Arachne and Philomela.

**Calliope’s Gaze**

Book 5 presents the singing contest between the Pierides and the Muses, with the palm going to the Muses. The story presents an enormous complexity in its narratorial and visual levels. In a Chinese-box fashion we hear the voices and perceive the gazes of the external narrator, the muse who tells the story of the contest to Minerva, the Pierides, and Calliope. Within Calliope’s narrative we see and hear what Arethusa experiences. The story begins with Minerva’s curiosity. The goddess has heard about the new spring created by Pegasus’s hoof and wishes to see it:

fama novi fontis nostras pervenit ad aures,
dura Medusaei quem praepetis ungula rupit.
is mihi causa viae; volui mirabile factum
cernere; vidi ipsum materno sanguine nasci.

The reputation of the new spring has come to our ears, which the hard
hoof of Medusa's winged son created. This is the reason for my visit. I wanted to see the marvelous deed, I saw him being born from his mother's blood. (Met. 5.256–59)

The phrase *volui mirabile factum/ cernere* stresses the goddess's desire to see and to know. At the same time, she asserts herself as viewer and witness, affirming that she has actively seen (*vidi*) Pegasus's birth. But the episode will bring her more visual spectacles than just the spring. Urania is very perceptive and understands Minerva's visual desire ("*quaecumque est causa videndi/ has tibi, diva, domos, animo gratissima nostro es*/ “Whatever the reason that brought you to see this house, goddess, you are most welcome to our hearts,” Met. 5.260–61). She soon leads her to the site where the goddess can look around and admire the scene:

> quae mirata diu factas pedis ictibus undas<br>silvarum lucos circumpicit antiquarum<br>antraque et innumeris distinctas floribus herbas.

She admired the spring made by the stroke of Pegasus's hoofs for a long time and gazed around at the ancient woods, the grottos, and the lawns spangled with numerous flowers. (Met. 5.264–66)

The scene recalls other stories of characters coming to *loci amoeni*, especially Actaeon, Narcissus, and Hermaphroditus. First the goddess admires the waters of the spring, which are highly significant symbols in the poem. Then she looks around and, unlike Actaeon, is allowed to look at the *antra* (cf. *antrum nemorale* in Met. 3.157). We may suggest, then, that although a female, Minerva's divinity (and presumably her masculine aspects) allows her to look and not be punished. What is interesting is that the muses understand well the visual hankering of their guest and will tell stories that are highly visually charged. But the first thing one of the muses narrates is that they would be completely happy if only fierce Pyreneus had not harassed them:

> sed (vetitum est adeo sceleri nihil) omnia terrent<br>virgineas mentes, dirusque ante ora Pyreneus<br>vertitur, et nondum tota me mente recepi.

But (to such level has the crime come) all things terrify our virginal souls. And cruel Pyreneus appears before our eyes, and I have not yet recovered from this. (Met. 5.273–75)
The story of how Pyreneus hassles them is important, for it foregrounds the major themes to come in Calliope's song. The Muses are concerned about their virginity (virgineas mentes) and it is a phantasia of Pyreneus that threatens their virginal minds. The Muse goes on to relate how once they were, as guests, trapped in Pyreneus's house and offered violence (vimque parat, Met. 5.288). This euphemism unavoidably alludes to rape and, one must recall, entrapment is also a common metaphor for sexual violence, as in the episode of Philomela. It is, then, the personal experience of the Muses that will influence the choice of narrative material in Calliope's song. But the figure of Pyreneus offers further connections with other characters, for he is a human who offends deities (the Muses), just like the Pierides, who challenge the Muses, and Arachne, who offends the godhead of Minerva. Here Minerva comes to see the locus amoenus in a somewhat masculine (and arguably intrusive) attitude, but she soon finds herself the witness of a feminine story of rape. It is curious, though, that while here she seems receptive to this kind of feminine testimonies, she rejects the theme of rape presented from a woman's perspective in the following book, when she engages in the contest with Arachne. Minerva's defeat in the following book may reveal that she has not been a successful gender-sensitive reader of Calliope's song. On one level, Minerva seems to read theodicy correctly and tries to enact it in Book 6 in her contest with Arachne, but she does not appear successful in understanding how gender works and how female audiences read gender issues.

The Muse's story is interrupted by the sound of the magpies, which is "quasi-human" (Met. 5.296–97) and an aetiological tale follows. The Pierides vied with the Muses in the art of singing, but were defeated and transformed into garrulous birds. The voice of the human women, however, is somewhat silenced by the narrating voice of the unidentified Muse, who does not give their account more than fourteen lines. The Pierides relate the battle between gods and giants, giving supremacy to the giants and mocking the cowardice of the gods. Their speech alludes to the gods' capacity for transformation, not taken, as in Arachne's tapestry, as a device for deceit, but as a resource of the coward. The story seems like a simple offense to the power of the deities and represents en abîme the defying attitude of the Pierides toward the Muses. As presented, the story does not show much artistry, yet the Pierides' voices are censured by the Muse narrator and we only hear some aspects of an abridged version of their tale. The Pierides lose the contest and are transformed into magpies who can imitate any voice but have lost their own (imitantes omnia picae, Met. 5.299). Garrulity seems to be a feature of the magpies, yet they cannot...
sing or narrate their own stories, like the Minyeides whose voices are reduced to a thin squeak and like Echo who can only repeat fragments of others’ voices. We may suppose that, as in the case of the Minyeides, it is not only hubris against a divine power that causes their doom, but the very desire to have a voice, which is in itself subversive of gender norms. In this sense, the Pierides’ ‘unsignificatory’ garrulity parallels the ‘uncommunicative’ patterns of the textiles of ‘good women’ and the squeaking of the Minyeides turned into bats. This meaningless chatter of the Pierides agrees with a common ancient accusation against women, namely, that they talk a great deal but don’t say anything.

Minerva’s reading of the story is peculiar, for in Book 6 she chooses for her tapestry a more epic theme—the divine order and the punishment of humans who defiled the divinity of the gods. Minerva thinks that by putting divine authority back in its place she will win the weaving contest. But, it appears, she does not read the contest between Pierides and Muses well, for what actually triumphs is the very feminine theme of rape from the victim’s viewpoint. Minerva is so tied up in her own image and her struggle for authority that she loses the artistic sensitivity to produce an image that will move the audience.

By contrast, the Muses are very sensitive to the concerns and tastes of their audience. They manage to show deference to Minerva’s mood and at the same time to create intrigue by asking her if she would care to hear the rest of the story (Met. 5.333–34). To the song of the Pierides Calliope responds with the story of the rape of Proserpina. From the beginning, Calliope reasserts the divine power, affirming that “all things are the gift of Ceres” and thus she should be celebrated (Met. 5.343–44). She also views the feminine as the principle of all things. Calliope relates how Venus, disturbed by the rejection of love by Minerva and Diana, worried that, left to her own devices, Proserpina would adamantly remain a virgin. Interestingly, Venus mentions that both Diana and Minerva have rejected her power (Met. 5.375–76). It is worth inquiring how Minerva reads this allusion to herself in Calliope’s narrative. She might be pleased to hear the emphasis on her virginity, which is an astute move on the narrator’s part. The muses strive for virginity, Proserpina and Ceres for the preservation of maidenhood, while Minerva is emblematized as a virgin goddess. The narrator in this way forges an alliance with the reader and attracts her sympathy. But Venus urges Cupid to incite a desire for Ceres’ daughter in the god of the Underworld by piercing him with an arrow of love—one finds again, as with Apollo in Book 1, the image of the lover that is penetrated by Cupid.
The introduction of Proserpina begins with an interesting ekphrasis:

haud procul Hennaeis lacus est a moenibus altae,
nomine Pergus, aquae: non illo plura Caystros
carmina cyncorum labentibus audit in undis.
silva coronat aquas cingens latus omne suisque
frondibus ut velo Phoebos submovet ictus;
frigora dant rami, Tyrios humus umida flores:
perpetuum ver est. quo dum Proserpina luco
ludit et aut violas aut candida lilia carpit.

Not far from Henna's walls there is a lake of deep water by the name of Pergus. Not Cayster with its flowing waters hears more swans' songs than this pool. Woods crown the water surrounding its banks and with its foliage as an awning it protects from the rays of the sun. The branches provide coolness and the moist earth produces purple flowers. There is eternal spring. In this grove meanwhile Proserpina plays and plucks violets and white lilies. (Met. 5. 385–92)

The phrase lacus est, as in other ekphrases, marks the visual and narratological boundaries and frames the image of Proserpina, but there are many layers of intrusive gazes and readers. The obvious male intruder (physically and visually) is Pluto, who comes up from his realm to inspect the land of Sicily. He sees Proserpina and becomes instantly infatuated with her. But many other internal audiences 'view' the scene with their minds' eyes, and they are all female: the Pierides, the nymphs who judge the contest, the other Muses, the Muse who narrates the tale to Minerva, and Minerva herself. So at this middle level, the viewers and visual intruders in the ekphrasis are women. In the external audience, one assumes, as usual, both male and female readers. Curiously, the picture that Calliope presents not only provides a testimony of rape, but in a metaphoric way, also allows women to intrude in a female locus amoenus and assume, momentarily, some sort of Actaeon-like stance. This would go well with Mulvey's model of trans-sex identification. One may also suppose that they identify with the victim and, from a monolithic male viewpoint, lose all possible empowerment and enjoyment. The problem here is that the Muses and Minerva are also striving to preserve their virginity. They do find enjoyment in the viewing and gain power because they gain knowledge. So this is a different kind of empowerment that Mulvey's model cannot conceive.
Flowers in general “are traditionally associated with virginal purity and also with its vulnerability,” while the act of picking flowers may be seen as sexual violation. These remarks are very appropriate for our passage, and they are enhanced by the fact that when she is carried away by Pluto, Proserpina’s flowers fall from her bosom. The text here is explicit in making the connection between the loss of the flowers and the loss of Proserpina’s virginity:

collecti flores tunicis cecidere remissis,
tantaque simplicitas puerilibus adfuit annis,
haec quoque virgineum movit iactura dolorem.

The gathered flowers fell from her loosened tunic. Such was the innocence of her childish years. Even this loss caused pain to the maiden. (Met. 5.399–401)

The dolor virgineus can also be interpreted as the physical pain of deflowering. The flowers Proserpina collects are noteworthy because they are not just any flowers, but “violets and lilies.” As with purple, the color of the mulberry, this combination of white and a purplish color conveys the symbolism of sex. The idea of death, which is always linked to the violence of rape, also surrounds the episode, as Dis is involved and the couple is headed toward the Underworld.

There is also a play on gazes in the story. On the one hand, the reader seems to witness the rape through Pluto’s lustful eyes (visa est dilectaque raptaque Diti/She was seen, loved, and taken away by Dis,” Met. 5.395). Proserpina’s position as visual object may be enhanced by Hinds’s idea that the locus amoenus is a place of performance and could be physically assimilated to an amphitheater. Proserpina is then “forced to ‘play’ (ludit, 392) out ‘the spectacle’ of her own violent abduction.” Finally, unlike the story of Daphne, this rape is a phantasia of a woman narrator; as such it may be understood in the same way as the weaving of Philomela, that is, a denunciation of rape and a search for sisterhood. As with Philomela, the color implications of rape in the combination of white with red or purple are present. Calliope’s phantasia can be seen as an imaginary tapestry where rape is inscribed through visual imagery. The female reader has a choice: to align with the male gaze of Pluto (and the overarching male narrator), in which case she would gain power in a transsexual way. She can also identify with the female victim as sufferer, but the problem with this option is that Proserpina is not really given a gaze in the text and this type of identification would be a passive one. But the female reader can
also read the story as a whole, not focalizing with the rapist but finding an alternative, more holistic viewpoint from where to appreciate the complete story. She could also adopt shifting viewpoints and thus acquire a more complex understanding of the scene that surpasses the constraints of focalization.

On their way to the Underworld, Pluto and Proserpina encounter the nymph Cyane in her own pool. The text introduces the scene with another ekphrastic formula, which becomes meaningful for the sexual overtones of the story:

est medium Cyanes et Pisaee Arethusae, 
quod coit angustis inclusum cornibus aequor.

Between Cyane and Pisaean Arethusa there is a bay confined by thin points of land. (Met. 5.409–10)

Here again, the reader needs to perform a metaphorical penetration of the text to read and view what is inside an ekphrasis. As in the Actaeon episode, water is an image of femininity and the verb *coit* is quite ‘consequential’ as it brings overtones of sexual penetration, for *coeo* means both to “come together or assemble” and to “copulate.” This image of an intrusion into a feminine space may also be strengthened by the idea that the bay symbolizes a vagina enclosed and centered between the legs. 43

Cyane tries to impede the rape with a speech that wants to bring Pluto to his senses and points to the uncivilized aspect of rape, but to no avail, as her voice fails to be heard. Pluto does not hold his wrath, but smites the pool with his scepter. The smitten earth opens up and the couple plunges down to the Underworld. Some sort of metaphoric rape can be inferred from the god’s violence toward her pool, after which the symbolism of her *vulnus* (Met. 5.426) becomes clearer. Cyane laments the fate of Proserpina and the disrespect shown to her pool, and through her tears dissolves into water. The description of her transformation is detailed:

at Cyane, raptamque deam contemptaque fontis 
iura sui maerens, inconsolabile vulnus 
mente gerit tacita lacrimisque absimitur omnis 
et, quarum fuerat magnum modo numen, in illas
extenuatur aquas: molliri membra videres, 
ossa pati flexus, ungues posuisse rigorem;

CHAPTER FIVE
primeaque de tota tenuissima quaeque liquescunt,
caeluei crines digitique et crura pedesque;
(nam brevis in gelidas membris exilibus undas
transitus est); post haec umeri tergusque latusque
pectoraque in tenues abeunt evanida rivos;
denique pro vivo vitiatas sanguine venas
lympha subit, restatque nihil, quod prendere possis.

But Cyane, lamenting the rape of the goddess and the contempt for the
rights of her spring, silently bears an inconsolable wound in her soul and
is entirely consumed by tears. And she dissolves into those waters whose
great deity she had recently been. You would see her limbs softening, the
bones bending, the nails having lost their hardness, and first of all melt
the slenderest parts, the bluish hair, her fingers, legs and feet—for the
change is small from tender limbs to cool water. After these, her shoul-
ders, back and side, and her frail chest dissolve into soft streams. Finally,
water creeps through the weakened veins instead of living blood. Noth-
ing remains which you could grasp. (Met. 5.425–37)

Cyane's watery nature is worthy of attention, for transformation into
water is a particularly feminine phenomenon in Metamorphoses. The
origin of Cyane's transformation lies in her tears. In general, tears are par-
ticularly feminine and associated with women's debility and inconti-
nence. Granted, there are numerous examples of men who cry in Meta-
morphoses, but tears may still carry feminine overtones in men. Cyane has
tried to be hard and assertive but has been vanquished by Pluto. Defeated
by Man, she has proved to be mollis to such an extent that it leads her to
liquefaction. Cyane tries to stop the rape and oppose Pluto but is defeat-
ed and vanquished; likewise, violence—even metaphorical rape—is
exerted on her and all she can do about it is cry. In a sense Cyane is
already mollis before her actual physical mollification.

Is Cyane, then, only an example of female powerlessness and dissolu-
tion? While this is partly true, the story finds a way to be narrated and to
leave a mark and testimony in Metamorphoses. Cyane has not only lost
her body, but also her voice. She has now become another silent charac-
ter through rape and dissolution. Yet when Ceres later comes searching
for her daughter, Cyane is able to communicate through visual imagery:

venit et ad Cyanen. ea ni mutata fuisse,
onnia narrasset; sed et os et lingua volenti
dicere non aderant, nec, quo loqueretur, habebat.
And she came to Cyane. If she had not been transformed, she would have told her everything, but, although she wanted to talk, she had neither mouth nor tongue, nor any means to speak. (Met. 5.465–67)

The choice of *muto* in line 465 is a remarkable one. The verb means “to change,” but through sound play it also recalls the idea of silencing and muting implied in *mutus*. The raped nymph has lost her voice and needs to find an alternative form of expression: Proserpina’s *zona* lies on the pool. Cyane is able to give an *indicium* of what has happened. As with Philomela’s and Arachne’s tapestries, female visual communication is accomplished through hints that invite the female reader to ‘suspect,’ to see behind the appearances. The silent code of imagery replaces words: Ceres sees Proserpina’s *zona*, a most potent symbol of what has been loosened and lost. Thus, Cyane can perform sisterhood in an alternative way and, though silenced, can still be a witness of what has occurred.

After Cyane’s dissolution, the narration returns to Ceres’ search for Proserpina. References to food and drink are central to the story. The episode presents a thirsty Ceres who has not yet touched water (Met. 5.446–47). At this moment in the story line the key conflict that has been developed is a struggle between the preservation of virginity and sexuality—already present in the conflict of the muses and Pyreneus. Food and drink are in ancient poetry—and beyond—linked to sex. The act of not drinking may be linked with the desire on Ceres’ part for the preservation of her daughter’s virginity. Now the goddess arrives at a hut and is given water. While she is drinking the barley water she has been offered, a rude boy laughs at her and calls her greedy: *dum bibit illa datum, duri puer oris et audax/ constitit ante deam risitque avidamque vocavit* (Met. 5. 451–42).

This scene may have meaningful implications for the gaze. Although no verb of seeing appears in the text, the phrase *constitit ante deam* most likely implies that the boy stood looking at her, especially considering the implications of stopping in other episodes. The goddess’s reaction is interesting. She throws what she has not yet drunk in his face and turns him into a lizard:

offensa est neque adhuc epota parte loquentem
cum liquido mixta perfudit diva polenta.
The goddess was offended and as he spoke, she poured on the boy’s face the barley mixed with the liquid which she had not yet drunk. (Met. 5.453–54)

The scene recalls Diana throwing a splash of water on Actaeon, Athena’s punishment of Tiresias in Callimachus, and, indirectly, the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite. The boy’s transformation is here, too, a punishment for seeing and intruding into the privacy of a goddess. Further, the boy is referred to as *loquentem*, the speaker. In this the reader is reminded of Diana’s fears that Actaeon will tell others what he has seen and of Aphrodite’s warning to Anchises in Homer. Could something similar be posed? The act of drinking avidly, which in the story may be concurrent with sexuality, is a private one for Ceres. Having been turned into a lizard, the boy will be impeded from intruding into the private acts of the goddess and also from narrating what he has seen. In contrast with the fate of Cyane, where water implies *mollitia* and powerlessness, water is used here as a vindictive element with the power to change. But while Cyane can still ‘speak’ through symbols, the boys are eternally silenced.

After searching all over and not finding her daughter, Ceres returns to Sicily and comes to the pool of Cyane, where she finds a hint of what happened. Infuriated, she destroys the crops and all sources of food on Earth. Then comes the story of Arethusa who is witness to the rape of Persephone (*ergo dum Stygio sub terris gurgite labor,/ visa tua est oculus illic Proserpina nostris / “Therefore while I was gliding in my Stygian stream under the earth, your Proserpina was seen there by my very eyes,”* Met. 5.504–5) and informs Ceres that her daughter has been made queen of the Underworld and spouse of Dis. Arethusa uses the passive *visa* and not the more emphatic and performative *vidi* that Minerva does, for example, when she says that she saw the birth of Pegasus. Arethusa’s gaze poses the same implications as other female gazes. Although she cannot actually prevent or fight sexual violence, she can still be a witness and, in an indirect and oblique way, she can act upon her gaze by telling the story and stimulating others—like Ceres here—to take action.

When Ceres looks for help in Jupiter, he gives the male-oriented answer that justifies his own rapes in Metamorphoses: *non hoc iniuria factum,/ verum amor est/ “This deed is not a crime, but true love,”* Met. 5.525–26). The condition upon which Proserpina shall be returned to her mother in the upper world is, significantly, that she has tried no food in the Underworld (531–32). The connection between food and sex here is again meaningful. In the words of father Jupiter, the implications of eating and sexual purity are present: “She can only return if she is still sexually
untouched." But this is not the case, as Proserpina has eaten, and what she has eaten bears multiple symbolisms: a crimson fruit (*puniceum pomum*, 536). The meaning of the fruit as temptation is well extended in western ideology, with its most paradigmatic example in the Bible. The deep purple fruit has the color of love, passion, and, as seen before, of sexual maturity. Proserpina is no longer a maiden. She has lost the innocence of the simple child that she was (*cultis dum simplex errat in hortis, / puniceum curva decerpserat arbore pomum* / “While, simple girl as she was, she wandered in the tended gardens, she had plucked a crimson pomegranate from a bending bow,” Met. 5.535–36). In this issue of fruits as symbols of virginity lost, one is reminded of the golden apples, gifts of Venus, which Atalanta picks up during her race with Hippomenes and which will cost her her maidenhood. Hinds is probably right in pointing out that Proserpina has not learned from her mistake and has twice failed to learn that there are dangers in plucking earth’s fruits in a *locus amoenus.* 50 But what seems to be key in the story is not so much that the girl ate from the pomegranate, but that somebody reported the incident. It is the boy Ascalaphus who saw it:

Ascalaphus vidit . . .
vidit et indicio reditum crudelis ademit.

Ascalaphus saw it . . . he saw it and by his disclosure he cruelly prevented her return. (Met. 5.539 and 542)

Ascalaphus has actually performed what Actaeon was prevented from doing; in his case also, water proves to be the weapon of transformation. The issue of the *indicium* is again poignant. The queen of Erebus throws a splash of water in his face (his eyes) and transforms him into an ill-omened bird. 51 The new bird possesses big eyes (*grandia lumina*, 545) in a literalizing metaphor for someone who sees too much. The text also emphasizes that his punishment is due to his tattling tongue (551–52).

After a brief inclusion of the story of the Sirens, who preserve their voices though partly turned into birds, Jupiter resolves to divide the year in two halves, thus reaching a compromise between Ceres and his brother Pluto. Proserpina will spend part of the year on Earth and part in the
Underworld. After this comes the story of Arethusa followed by Ceres’ transformation of king Lyncus into a lynx after he committed a murder to become himself the bearer of Ceres’ gifts. With this concludes Calliope’s tale, which, not surprisingly, wins the contest.

Before concluding this reading of the episode, a few words about Arethusa’s tale and *phantasia* shall be offered. Ceres asks Arethusa why she is now a sacred spring and an aetiological tale follows. After lifting her green locks from the pool, what Arethusa tells is a story of love and violence, how she was chased by the river-god Alpheus. She used to be a virgin who delighted in hunting:

"pars ego nympharum, quae sunt in Achaide," dixit,
"una fui, nec me studiosius altera saltus
legit nec posuit studiosius altera casses.

sed quamvis formae numquam mihi fama petita est,
quamvis fortis eram, formosae nomen habebam,

nec mea me facies nimium laudata iuvabat,
quaque aliae gaudere solent, ego rustica dote
corporis erubui crimineque placere putavi."

"I was one of the nymphs who live in Achaide," she said, "and no other chose the woodlands more eagerly than I, no other set the nets more keenly. But although I never sought the fame of beauty, though I was brave, I had the name of beautiful. Neither did I enjoy that my beauty was praised too much. I, a country girl, blushed at the gifts of my body, which often gives pleasure to other girls, and deemed a crime to please.” (Met. 5.577–84)

Although Arethusa rejects her beauty, she nevertheless loads her discourse with allusions to it. Her virginity is stereotypical and responds to the mold of other wild virgins in *Metamorphoses*. Curiously, for a virgin who dreads being desired, her description seems to be tailored for a male viewer by setting the scene with a description of her beauty. What follows responds to the same patterns of female reification; however, the ekphrastic description of landscape and her interaction with it add complexity to the gender implications of the passage:

aestus erat, magnumque labor geminaverat aestum:
invenio sine vertice aquas, sine murmure euntes,
perspicuas ad humum, per quas numerabilis alte
It was hot, and the effort had doubled the great heat. I found a stream without eddy, flowing without a sound, crystal-clear to the bottom, through which every pebble could be counted, which you would scarcely think was flowing. Silvery willows and poplars fed by the water provided natural shade to the sloping banks. (Met. 5.586–91)

The verb *invenio* signals Arethusa’s intrusion into the landscape and recalls Narcissus’s and Hermaphroditus’s intrusion into their respective *loci amoeni*. The reader here is invited to focalize with Arethusa as she enters this virginal landscape, and the text creates an odd gender positioning for female viewers and readers. The clear transparency of the pool also recalls Hermaphroditus’s desire to swim in a similar pool, which incites this same desire in the nymph:

> accessi primumque pedis vestigia tinxi,
> poplite deinde tenuis; neque eo contenta, recingor
> molliaque inpono salici velamina curvae
> nudaque mergor aquis. quas dum ferioque trahoque
> mille modis labens excussaque bracchia iacto.

I approached and first I wet my foot, then I dipped up to my knee; and not content with this, I disrobed and left my soft garment on a bending willow. Naked I dived in the waters. I tossed my arms around while I beat them, drawing them and gliding in a thousand ways. (Met. 5.592–96)

The insistence on her nudity, which is repeated in lines 601–2 (“*sic ut eram, fugio sine vestibus [altera vestes/ ripa meas habuit]*/” “As I was, I fled without my robes [the other bank had my robes]”),’ seems designed for the gaze of a male who is seduced by the naked body of the nymph. It evokes the naked body of Hermaphroditus viewed by Salmacis and Daphne in her flight (*nudabant corpora venti / “The breeze unrobed her body,” Met. 1.527)*, and it even has a hint of Diana in her bath. One could say that Arethusa is, at least partly, looking at herself with a male gaze, as a man would see her. The complication is that she does not enjoy being looked at.

Although Arethusa is at all costs trying to convey the image that others have of her exemplified by *formosae nomen habeam*, she is the only
testimony that this is the ‘gaze of others.’ But couldn’t her picture of herself also convey autoeroticism? As virginal nymph who rejects contact with others, Arethusa is absorbed in herself and cannot achieve interchange with the other sex. The poetic coincidences with Narcissus and Hermaphroditus are striking. Moreover, water is an important signifier of self-eroticism and self-absorption notable in Met. 5.586–89, quoted above.

In Met. 5.586 there is a strong intertextual allusion to the beginning of Amores 1.5 (Aestus erat, medium dies exegerat horam/ “It was hot, and the day had passed its mid-point”), perhaps one of the most erotically charged poems in the collection, where a scene of lovemaking is insinuated. Further, the gradual description of Arethusa’s body recalls the very cinematographic (or perhaps pornographic) description of Corinna in Amores 1.5. In such a clear stream, given the antecedents of the poem, one may even suppose that Arethusa, like Narcissus, sees her own image reflected. Indeed, the very act of jumping in the river embodies awkward gender complications, where she penetrates the waters that belong to/are a male deity. We may compare this scene to Hermaphroditus’s pool, which is also described as so clear that you could even see the bottom (Met. 4.297–98). It is noteworthy that the word perspicuus (588) is only used twice in Ovid, here and for Hermaphroditus’s pool in Met. 4.300. The connotations of self-absorption conveyed by crystal-clear pools in Metamorphoses are most clearly revealed in the episode of Narcissus. Both Narcissus and Hermaphroditus are immature boys who cannot grow up and engage in the societal and sexual interchange of adults. In a way, Arethusa, fixed in the delights of the pool and rejecting sexual contact, represents an analogous case of a girl who cannot grow up and distance herself from herself. Her gaze is fixed on her own image, which coincides with the male gaze of Alpheus. Arethusa’s autoerotic gaze could be taken as a ‘male gaze’ and what she ‘objectivizes’ is herself, as Elsner suggests for Narcissus. Nevertheless, Arethusa, by the very act of narrating her story, achieves some maturity and thus grows up in a different way. Although she still rejects the contact with males, she does however develop the skill to interact verbally with a female audience. Arethusa grows out of autoeroticism and can even be sensitive to the needs of others, as when she delays her narrative to accommodate Ceres’ feelings. One could also suppose that her self-construction as object of the gaze represents the price that she must pay to escape rape and preserve her voice. Thus for the male ‘external’ viewer/reader, she offers a somewhat voyeuristic reifying picture of herself. The experience of the ‘female gaze’ is more difficult to decipher. As in other episodes, at this point in the narrative the female reader
may either align with the male gaze or acknowledge the difficulties involved in the pleasure of viewing and remain outside of it.

Although at first it can be said that Arethusa's portrait feeds male voyeuristic desire, soon her visual construction will be aligned with virginity and she will change the focus to complain about the violence and intrusion of the male gaze. There is already a transformation in her from intruder and viewer to object of the gaze. Unlike episodes such as Daphne's where the focalizer seems to be Apollo all the time, here Arethusa switches from the male gazer to the experience of the young virgin. There is an interesting play of powers in the narratorial layers. The fact that she can narrate the story as a victim represents a new development that departs from the figure of the mute Daphne. The voice of the sufferer is now heard. After the river-god discovers her, Arethusa begins to run away. In the description of the chase, the text shows for the first time the perspective of the running virgin. Arethusa tells us that she cannot see Alpheus but only his shadow ("vidi praecedere longam/ ante pedes umbram" / "I saw his long shadow stretching out before my feet," Met. 5.614–15); nor can she see a clear image of her persecutor. She even doubts whether she has really seen him: "nisi si timor illa videbat;/ sed certe sonitusque pedum terrebat et ingens/ crinales vittas adflabat anhelitus oris"/ "Unless it was fear that made me see these things—but surely the sound of his feet terrified me and his panting breath fanned my braided hair" (Met. 5.615–17). Arethusa thus reconstructs a phantasia of Alpheus through the fragments and indicia that she perceives. This may be linked to the oblique female gaze and the possibility of seeing beyond what is apparent.

Soon Diana responds to Arethusa's cries for help and surrounds her with a cloud. Alpheus, after looking for her for a while and finding the cloud, fixes his gaze on it (servat nubemque locumque / "He watched the cloud and the place," Met. 5.631). Arethusa begins to disintegrate in blue drops. We may compare the function of the cloud here with that in the Io episode in Book 1. Although Juno looks at the cloud, she cannot penetrate it and can only 'suspect' what is behind. Alpheus, although he is not even sure of what lies behind it, can still visually penetrate the cloud and affect the girl to the point of metamorphosis, thus displaying the performative power of the male gaze. His gaze disintegrates her and provokes her dissolution.

Now Arethusa witnesses her own transformation and this is the phantasia that she constructs:

occupat obsessos sudor mihi frigidus artus,
caeruleaque cadunt toto de corpore guttae,
quaque pedem movi, manat lacus, eque capillis
ros cadit, et citius, quam nunc tibi facta renarro,
in latices mutor.

A cold sweat pours over my beleaguered limbs, and blue drops fall from
my whole body. Wherever I move my foot, a pool is formed and dew falls
from my hair; and faster than I retell these events to you now, I am
turned into water. (Met. 5.632–36)

It is not tears, as in other episodes, but **sudor** that leads to her transforma-
tion into water. Man here is stronger ("nec me velocior ille;/ sed tolerare
diu cursus ego viribus inpar/ non poteram" / "Nor was he faster than I, but
I, ill-matched in strength, could not bear the race for long," Met.
5.609–11) and change is the only possible way out of rape. Like Cyane,
Arethusa tries to resist with her own means, but they prove fruitless. She
is weakened and overpowered by Alpheus. Already **mollis**, she becomes
running water. **Latex** is a curious word, as it may mean simply "water" but,
more commonly, it indicates "running water," a spring or stream. Paulus
Ex.Fest. 118.23–24 defines it as "**profluens aqua**." Arethusa’s fluidity is sup-
ported by **manat** in line 634. In this sense, the running virgin is now run-
ning water; her capacity to escape is maintained.

Arethusa also compares herself to a dove fleeing from a hawk, a lamb
escaping from a wolf, and a hare running from dogs. This well-known
hunting imagery adds to the equivalence between Alpheus and Actaeon
the hunter; the word **aestus** also adds to the erotic connotations of the mid-
day heat. The paradox here, as in other episodes, is that the huntress is
now the prey herself. In part, Arethusa constructs her story on the model
of the episode of Actaeon and Diana in Book 3, told directly by the main
narrator. The comparison with prey also recalls Daphne fleeing from Apol-
lo in Met.1.533–34. Like Daphne, Arethusa sees herself as weak and inca-
cpable of surpassing Alpheus without divine help (619–20). The difference
is, however, that now the prey can tell the story. Although Arethusa
begins to sweat with fear and is soon transformed into a pool, the god rec-
ognizes her in the water and mingles with her as a river, which insinuates
an actual rape. Diana opens the earth and Arethusa plunges into its
depths. She resurfaces in Ortygia where she now lives happily as a pool.

The picture that Arethusa presents of herself is not much different
from other portraits of virgins in episodes narrated by male authorial fig-
ures, but Arethusa can escape, ‘speak,’ and give a female perspective.
Arethusa has ‘read’ Ovid, but has learned how to—or has been lucky
enough to—avoid the fate of the Ovidian virgin-victim. While, on the
one hand, there is an overarching authorial voice that caters to the male viewer-reader, on the other hand, this masculine gaze is juxtaposed with the autoerotic gaze of Arethusa herself. But when Arethusa starts running and does not concentrate on her image, there is a more ‘feminist’ cry for camaraderie among women and denunciation of rape. Her salvation is of a passive nature, through the pity and help of a ‘sister,’ yet her narrative power is doubtless active. Arethusa’s construction of herself as a visual object is therefore intricate and may serve different purposes simultaneously. On the one hand, it attracts the eye of the male reader who delights in reifying the female. On the other hand, Arethusa may be denouncing the suffering of women and the crime of rape. Both readings can coexist in the juxtaposed voices of male and female (Arethusa, Calliope, the unnamed muse, and ‘Ovid’).

The attempted rape of the nymph Arethusa appeals to the sensibility of the judges of the contest between the Muses and the Pierides because they have frequently experienced the sexual violence of males in Metamorphoses. But the primary audience of the story is the goddess Ceres, whose daughter has also been raped. The first time that Arethusa is heard, she does not tell her story, but prays that Ceres not devastate the land with hunger, claiming that the land has no guilt. In fact, it had saved Arethusa by opening a path through which she could escape from Alpheus (Met. 5.501–2), and by offering itself as home for her. In this first intervention by Arethusa, she delays the narration of her story by saying that she will tell it later in happier circumstances for the goddess (“veniet narratibus hora/ tempestiva meis, cum tu curaque levata/ et vultus melioris eris’/ “There will come a time more propitious to tell you, when you, once your pain is relieved, will be in better spirits,” Met. 5.499–501).

This is quite wise of Arethusa. Given the irritable temperament of Ceres in the tale, she may well withhold the story of her salvation for a moment when it may not cause envy in Ceres and when she can empathize with her. Therefore, once Ceres has recovered her daughter and a compromise has been reached, Arethusa can speak safely. Like Proserpina, she has suffered sexual violence (perhaps even figurative rape) and has been saved by the mercy of a deity. In this way, Arethusa becomes a sort of daughter to mother Ceres. Finally it is worthy to note that, as Patricia Johnson puts it, all the audiences of the story of the rape of Proserpina and, ultimately, of the contest between Muses and Pierides, are women who fight against the power of Venus and detest the crime love has performed on the goddess’s daughter. This opposition to Venus makes sense if one thinks of Venus as the embodiment of male desire, which explains why Venus often seems to be on the male side. The song of Calliope is directed to the judgment of
the nymphs who have suffered Venus’s power in many other episodes. Ultimately, it is the virgin Minerva who listens to the story of the contest. Venus in Book 5 complains about deities who wish to remain virgin; she refers directly to Minerva, Proserpina, and Diana. The first two have an obvious role in Book 5. The third appears in a veiled way through identification with other characters.

One finally wonders why Calliope has chosen the story of the rape of Proserpina, and what the effects of her phantasia on her audience are. The judges of the singing contest are the nymphs. Eleanor Winsor Leach suggests that it is not surprising that the nymphs vote for the Muses’ song given the honorific place they are given in the story of Ceres. But it is more than the honor of a prominent place that the story offers them. The violence perpetrated by Pluto in his rape of Proserpina mirrors the many rapes of nymphs in episodes throughout Metamorphoses. With her story, Calliope appeals to the empathy of the nymphs through a feeling of sisterhood because they understand well the experience of sexual violence. The story not only gives a voice to women, even if it is an alternative voice as in Cyane, but it also punishes male speech. The two boys who talk too much suffer silencing and transformation. The song of Calliope offers women an opportunity to reverse the typical silencing of rape victims. It is, like Philomela’s tapestry, a web of phantasies that represents the fate of women for other women.

So, what do women see? How do they see? What can Calliope’s song tell us about female gazes? Again, ‘female gaze’ or ‘what women see’ involves more than a physical gaze. It also refers to a more metaphoric gaze connected with capacities such as ‘understanding,’ ‘realizing,’ ‘knowing,’ and ‘perceiving.’ To begin with, there is a general concern by the Muses with virginity, explicit in their own personal story, in the tale of the rape of Proserpina, and in the internal audience. Calliope’s song is also highly visually charged because it is, in part, designed to respond to the visual cravings of Minerva and to the nymphs who are judges of the contest—and the reader knows well from the episode of Minerva and Arachne how much the nymphs delight in viewing. Calliope places herself as narrator and witness of a story of rape, which both allows women to be spectators and places the female as origin of all things. The interesting point about Calliope’s song is that she lets other women assume the narrating voice and express their gazes. Cyane embodies another instance of women’s silencing. What she has seen is the rape of Proserpina; thus she has become a witness who can potentially narrate what has occurred. But
unlike Actaeon, she finds a way to tell what has happened through visual images. The zona floating on her pool is a clear indicium of the crime, which invites Ceres to reconstruct the story. Cyane’s gaze, just as in the episodes discussed in chapter 4, captures the feminine qualities of the gaze: to witness and to incite an oblique and alternative viewing.

Arethusa is likewise a witness of Proserpina’s fate, but she is a witness of her own attempted rape and her own story as well. First, Arethusa sees herself as a man would, thereby recapturing the essence of rape stories like Daphne or Syrinx, but soon the focalization shifts and she shows us a female perspective. While Arethusa is not allowed to look directly at Alpheus, she still reconstructs him from fragments and hints of his image that she perceives. Like Juno, her ‘female gaze’ is oblique and calls for an extra effort to decipher the meanings of the images.

Interestingly, Calliope’s song does not offer any instances of how and what males see. While Pluto may be seen to embody the typical monolithic male gaze, his viewing is destabilized by the fact that Venus instigates his erotic gaze. The two boys—with all the sexual problematization that surrounds boys in the poem—are silenced and transformed by Ceres and Proserpina. Their gazes are antagonistic toward the female and threaten to utter female secrets, but are dismantled. What the two boys see are secrets of women’s lives and interiority that should not be exposed. They suffer a fate similar to Actaeon’s.

Stealing the Cyclops’ Eye

Affairs between goddesses and mortal men offer a whole new set of possibilities for the gaze. As Stehle puts it, “one reason for the popularity of the mythic pattern of goddess with young man is that it opened space for fantasies of uncodified erotic relationships.”56 Galatea herself narrates her story to Scylla. The text presents another speech of lamentation and self-pity that, in appearance, represents man as monster and woman as victim. As Tissol indicates, the figure of Galatea narrating the story is an Ovidian innovation with respect to the model in Theocritus’ poem 11.57 This actually provides a feminine perspective. The stress on Galatea’s voice is seen in Met. 13.745 where she is defined as speaker who can speak until tears run down her cheeks (et lacrimae vocem inpediere loquentis). There is a curious trick in the tale. All we know about the Cyclops and Acis is what we hear through Galatea’s focalization. She begins by expressing her love for Acis and defining him as a young boy on the verge of masculinity, an image that assimilates him to other pueri like Narcissus, Hermaphoditus,
and Adonis (pulcher et octonis iterum natalibus actis/ signarat teneras dubia lanugine malas/ "He was beautiful and, at sixteen, his soft cheeks had been marked by an undefined down," Met. 13.753–54). The adjective dubia is particularly meaningful for Acis’ instability.

Galatea continues with her construction of Polyphemus’s image and imagines him as a spectacle horrible to the sight (nempe ille inmitis et ipsis/horrendus silvis et visus ab hospite nullo/impune)/ “Indeed he was rough and horrible to the woods themselves, and looked upon by no guest with impunity,” Met. 13.759-60). The same idea of hardness in the adjective inmitis will later define Galatea in Polyphemus’s speech. But Galatea soon moves to paint a picture of the Cyclops as somewhat effeminate in a way that recalls the self-adornment of Salmacis in front of her pool:

iamque tibi formae, iamque est tibi cura placendi,
iam rigidos pectis rastris, Polypheme, capillos,
iam libet hirsutam tibi falce recidere barbam
et spectare feros in aqua et conponere vultus.

And now you care for your appearance, now you care to please, now, Polyphemus, you comb your stiff hair with a rake, now you like to trim you hirsute beard with a sickle; and to gaze upon and compose your fierce features in a pool. (Met. 13.764–69).58

Polyphemus—or rather the phantasia of him that Galatea gives—is following the advice of Ars Amatoria 1.518: sit coma, sit trita barba resecta manu/ “Let hair and beard be cut by a practiced hand.” In this process, Galatea turns the tables and makes Polyphemus the object of the gaze. In this sense the gender destabilization and feminization of the elegiac lover that Polyphemus embodies is taken to the extreme that visually reifies him, like a woman. Likewise, the scene of self-admiration and cultus in front of a mirror recalls both Salmacis and Narcissus, whose sexuality is unstable and undefined, offering both male and female aspects. Personal care and self-admiration in the mirror are particularly feminine in ancient conceptions of sexuality.59 In men, personal cultus is necessary as affirmation of citizenship and definition of their place in society. It includes keeping the hair and beard well cut, washing, and eating adequately in order to stress the difference between the civilized man and the savage. In women, adornment before the mirror aims at self-construction as a visual object of desire for men. It has to do more with eroticism and less with self-definition in society.60 In the case of Polyphemus above, the comic effect lies in the incongruence of the image, that is, a hypermasculine
character who nonetheless looks at himself in the mirror as a woman would. Hypermasculinity tends to be problematic. Indeed, it seems that, like femininity, masculinity can barely avoid falling into excess. The gaze of Polyphemus looking at his own image in the pool resembles the case of women 'making themselves pretty' for men, in which case we say that the gaze is male although the eyes are female. This is probably what Galatea wishes to exalt: the instability and incongruity of the Cyclops, and the kind of power over him that this gives to her.

We suggest here that an important part of the Cyclops’ feminization and lack of power has to do with his incapacity to see. When Telemus predicts that one day Ulysses will take his one eye, Polyphemus responds, “altera iam rapuit [lumen]” / “Another has already stolen my eye” (Met. 13.775). This pun, as Tissol recognizes, is based on a double-entendre that links epic with elegy. While talking about Ulysses' enterprise, it plays on the common elegiac expression of the lover being robbed of his eyes, as in Ovid’s Amores (nostros rapuisti nuper ocellos/ “Recently you stole my eyes,” Am. 2.19.19) and Propertius (oculos cepisti, 3.10.15).61 But this 'stealing' of Polyphemus's eye has more profound implications for the narrative. The reader never really hears Polyphemus's voice or perceives his gaze directly; his vision is always mediated by Galatea's gaze as narrator. Thus in a way, Galatea has actually robbed him of his power to see and leave his own testimony in the poem, or rather, she lets him have a gaze but only sieved through her own feminine narrative. The reader, however, is also allowed to think that it is not only Galatea who has deprived the Cyclops of his gaze, but the very narrator of the Metamorphoses who lets Galatea command the gaze and the story. In regard to gender, Galatea as thief of eyes aligns with Perseus and Ulysses in the poem and thus acquires some prerogatives of the epic hero.

Soon, however, ‘blind’ Polyphemus becomes a singer and the situation turns extremely intricate. The episode proposes a komastic reading, though less obvious than those discussed in chapter 2.62 This hypermasculine giant bound to land woos Galatea, a creature of the sea. It would be possible to read the boundary between land and water, the solid and the liquid, as a metaphoric barrier to be crossed by the lover, who begs that Galatea lift her head up from the sea: “iam modo caeruleo nitidum caput exere ponto,/ iam, Galatea, veni, nec munera despice nostra!” / “Now raise your shining head from the blue sea, Galatea, come now and do not despise my gifts!” (Met. 13.838–39).63 In any case, Polyphemus is clearly an excluded lover, both spatially and figuratively. What approximates the episode to a paraclausithyron situation is Polyphemus’s song. Ovid presents here a sort of poet-lover who serenades his beloved and begs for
acceptance with a surprisingly long *carmen* (789–869). As in the elegiac paraclausithyron, the man is mollified and feminized while the woman remains hard, obstinate, and intransigent.

Now Galatea says that she was lying with Acis (*Met.* 13.786–87) while she heard Polyphemus's song, which in part describes her own image. So Galatea offers a construction of herself as she is seen through the eyes of the Cyclops.

candidior folio nivei Galatea ligustri,
floridior pratis, longa procerior alno,
splendidior vitro, tenero lascivior haedo,
levior adsiduo detritis aequore conchis,
solibus hibernis, aestiva gratior umbra,
mobilior damma, platano conspectior alta,
lucidior glacie, matura dulcior uva,
mollior et cycni plumis et lacte coacto,
et, si non fugias, riguo formosior horto.

Galatea, whiter than the leaves of the snowy privet, more full of flowers than the meadows, taller than an alder, more radiant than crystal, more playful than a tender kid, softer than shells smoothened by constant waves, more pleasing than the winter sun and the summer shade, more nimble than a doe, more beautiful than a lofty plane-tree, clearer than ice, sweeter than ripe grapes, softer than a swan’s down and milk curd, and, if only you would not flee from me, more beautiful than a well-watered garden. (*Met.* 13.789–97)

The game of narrators and narrated, viewers and visual objects, is somewhat circular. One should remember that Galatea makes fun of Polyphemus in an effort to preserve her hold on the gaze and its power. Galatea relates what Polyphemus said about her image. In Polyphemus’s speech there is a male-oriented discourse where the gaze is male because it reifies Woman; in this sense, therefore, Galatea looks at herself with a male gaze. Soon she changes roles and Polyphemus is evaluated by his physical appearance and placed as the visual object. Curiously, Polyphemus is more an object of the gaze than Acis, the boy subjected to Galatea’s domain. But there is more to the description of Galatea in the Cyclops’s song. The long list of comparisons that defines the *puella* tends to assimilate her to landscape, which has much to do with femininity in the poem. First, the adjective *niveus* alluding to Galatea’s whiteness
recalls the color of such eroticized virgins as Pygmalion’s maiden (note the use of \textit{niveus} in that passage), Atalanta, Daphne, and Andromeda. Then she is \textit{floridior pratis}, which literally assimilates her body to a pleasant landscape open to violation—an image so common in \textit{Metamorphoses}. \textit{Splendidior vitro} recalls the transparent pools that are so visually and erotically attractive to Narcissus, Hermaphroditus, and Arethusa.\textsuperscript{66} The reference to the pleasant climate is, as is well known, particularly apt to \textit{loqui amoeni}; trees and swans also appear in the imagination of landscape in the poem. There are two points to be made about this. First, Polyphemus (or rather Galatea’s construction of Polyphemus) has ‘read’ \textit{Metamorphoses} well and makes up the image of Galatea as a pastiche of Ovidian \textit{topoi} used in the poem. Likewise, the fact that Polyphemus describes Galatea with images of landscape and nature may also have to do with the fact that this is the world he, an uncultivated and rustic character, knows best. But perhaps it is this lack of originality that fails to seduce the intended object. Second, descriptions of landscape in the poem commonly preannounce ‘real’ or figurative rape and the possibility of violation. Galatea, as goddess and independent woman, does not enjoy being fixed in this \textit{topos}. Galatea is, then, symbolically the landscape and surface of the poem, into which the narrator and reader intrude. But the gaze of Galatea rejects this reading of \textit{Metamorphoses} and its fixation of women. Galatea can be seen as a critical reader of the gender stereotypes that \textit{Metamorphoses} proposes. In this respect it is worth pointing out that this episode takes place almost at the end of the poem, after conventional gender patterns have been so well established that criticism is allowed. It must be said that Polyphemus never attempts to rape Galatea, and so we are led to think that he is actually less ‘bestial’ than Galatea wants us to believe. Paradoxically, while she presents him as a monster, Galatea sees him as effeminate and develops the image of the Cyclops as elegiac lover and slave of love (note serviet in line 820).

Soon Galatea turns to the description of Polyphemus by narrating how the Cyclops sees himself:

certe ego me novi liquidaeque in imagine vidi
nuper aquae, placuitque mihi mea forma videnti.
adspice, sim quantus: non est hoc corpore maior
Iuppiter in caelo, nam vos narrare soletis
nescio quem regnare Iovem; coma plurima torvos
prominet in vultus, umerosque, ut lucus, obumbrat;
nec mea quod rigidis horrent densissima saetis
corpora, turpe puta: turpis sine frondibus arbor,
turpis equus, nisi colla iubae flaventia velent;
pluma tegit volucres, ovibus sua lana decori est:
barba viros hirtaeque decent in corpore saetae.
unum est in media lumen mihi fronte, sed instar
ingentis clipei. quid? non haec omnia magnus
Sol videt e caelo? Soli tamen unicus orbis
Surely I know myself and lately saw my image on the surface of a pool,
and I liked what I saw. Look how large I am: Jupiter in the sky does not
have a body bigger than this, for you often say that some Jupiter or other
reigns there. Much hair grows on my fierce face and it covers my shoul-
ders like a forest. And do not deem me ugly because my body is thick
with hard bristles. The tree is ugly without foliage, the horse is ugly if a
mane does not veil his golden neck. Birds are covered with feathers,
their wool is becoming to the sheep, a beard and thick hair on the body
suit men. There is only one eye in my forehead, but as big as a huge
shield. What? Doesn’t the mighty Sun see all these things from heaven?
Yet the Sun has only one eye. (Met.13.840–53)

The search for self-identity in the mirror here obviously recalls Narcissus,
but in a comic way. Just as Narcissus could not really ‘know’ himself, one
could suppose that if Polyphemus sees himself as ‘pretty,’ he cannot know
himself either and that his capacity to see is distorted. There is also
another peculiar problem. At the beginning of the tale Polyphemus rec-
ognizes that he has been robbed of his gaze. Thus, when he mentions that
he has one big eye like the Sun, this eye could be taken to be an empty
and blind one; therefore, the construction of his own image is under-
mined by his lack of ‘eye.’ In fact, in terms of narrative and focalization,
Polyphemus’s gaze in the mirror may not only be distorted by his visual
impairment by love, but also tainted by Galatea’s visual control.
The Cyclops soon emerges from his feminization and becomes ‘manly’
(or possibly ‘beastly’). Galatea now confesses that she has seen his wrath
and, as witness, gives away the fact that the whole story is tainted by her
own gaze (“talia nequiquam questus (nam cuncta videbam), / surgit”/ “‘Having
thus lamented in vain (for I saw everything), he rose,’” Met.13.870–71). It
is the visual discovery of Galatea in the arms of Acis that infuriates the
Cyclops (“cum ferus ignaros nec quicquam tale timentes/ me videt atque Acin
videoque exclamat et ista/ ultima sit, faciam, Veneris concordia vestrae” /
“‘When the savage creature saw us, Attis and myself, unaware and fearing
nothing like that, he exclaimed, ‘I see you. Let this be your last amorous
embrace,’” Met.13.873–75). Polyphemus also tries to show his strength
and sexual power in the image of the violence exercised against Acis:
sentiet esse mihi tanto pro corpore vires!
viscera viva traham divulsaque membra per agros
perque tuas spargam (sic se tibi misceat!) undas.

He’ll find that I have strength matching my size. I will tear apart his living entrails and scatter his rent limbs over the fields and over your waters (thus he will be joined with you!). (Met.13.864–66)

The phonic effect of -vi-, which recalls vis, is at play in vires, viscera viva, and divulsaque. The sparagmos that Polyphemus wishes to perform relates Acis to the dismemberments of Pentheus and Orpheus, which, as discussed, involve the dissolution of masculine integrity. Tissol points out that this final violence in the story constitutes a narrative disruption and that it provides the reader with a surprise, because while the reader is prepared to follow the Theocritean and Virgilian versions of a rather peaceful and inoffensive Cyclops who finds a cure for love in song, the story concludes with a violent act typical of the Homeric picture of Polyphemus.67

Galatea herself relates much more about the Cyclops than Polyphemus includes in his song. This is particularly relevant if one compares the male narrator of Theocritus’s Idyll 11 and Galatea as a female narrator in Metamorphoses. Farrell already notes this point, although he does not dwell on its gender-specific weight.68 What Galatea, like the Sibyl in her story, will do is offer a female perspective to a well-established masculine version. In her narrative, the Cyclops describes himself as a huge male, hairy and with one eye. The depiction that the Cyclops creates of his own image intends to convey a mighty masculinity comparable even to that of Jupiter, the most truly masculine god in Metamorphoses. Nevertheless, it is in Galatea’s discourse that Polyphemus is mocked and seen as an effeminate lover who pays too much attention to his image. The information given by each character is slightly different; in fact, there is nothing about the Cyclops’ toilette in his own speech. Thus Galatea knows more than what she hears in his song. But where did she learn this? She must have looked at him with some attention to be able to display such a complete picture. Or is she simply imagining it? The gender destabilizations in the episode, where Man is feminized like an elegiac lover and Woman is identified as a dura puella (cf. durior annosa quercu/ “harder than an aged oak,” Met.13.799) were mentioned before. To this inversion will correspond the reification of Polyphemus as a visual object.
Ovid and Galatea play with some element of surprise with the intrusion of Acis, who was probably an unknown character to Ovid’s audience. The jealous Cyclops throws a part of a mountain in an attempt to kill him (an obvious allusion to Odyssey 9.537–40); blood runs from under it and Galatea then transforms him into water (“fecimus, ut vires adsumeret Acis avitas”/ “We caused Attis to assume his ancestral powers,” 886). There are two possible ways of interpreting this transformation. On the one hand, the word vires may seem to point at virility and the fact that Acis gains strength, becomes a man, and therefore grows bigger through his transformation (maior, Met.13.895). On the other hand, the lengthy description of his change seems to be open to a different reading:

Crimson blood was trickling from the mass, and soon his ruddy color began to fade away. His hue became like that of a river swollen by early rains, but it cleared in a while. Then the mass that had been thrown split and through the cracks a tall green reed rose. The hollow opening in the rock resounded with leaping waves, and, a miracle, suddenly, a youth stood waist-deep from the water, his new-sprung horns woven around with winding rushes. He was Acis, except bigger and all blue in his face. But still he was Acis, turned into a river, and his waters kept their former name. (Met.13.887–97)

In comparison with the stories of Cyane and Arethusa, the description of Acis’ transformation does not stress the dissolution of each part of his body into water, but rather focuses on the transformation of his blood. The transformation concludes with an assertion that Acis is the same but bigger and blue (caerulus ore). But the passage is interesting from a gender standpoint, because the one who seems to hold the power is the woman. First, Acis is no more than a sixteen-year-old puer (like Narcissus)
Met. 13.753–54), whose power and masculinity are dubious and tenues, like his down, and weak in comparison with the hypermasculine Cyclops. He cannot fight them with his own means and needs the help of Galatea. Liquefaction seems to be somewhat feminine, and thus it is not an unbecoming end for a puer, in contrast with Galatea who is dura for her rejection of Polyphemus’s love (798–807). Acis was mollis, and as such, he is easily mollified. But by this very softening, that is, liquefaction, of his limbs and blood he becomes a man, unlike Narcissus and Hermaphroditus. We may also observe that normally males are transformed into rivers (in amnem, 896, and flumina, 897) while women become only pools or streams.

Up to now we have pointed out two possible readings of the passage. Either Acis matures as a man and achieves masculinity in his transformation into the river god or else he becomes mollis, like Arethusa. Though apparently contradictory, both interpretations can be easily reconciled. As noted, Acis is a sort of hybrid, not yet defined in his masculinity. This gender struggle is well illustrated in the partition of his body, his flowing water symbolizing the feminine and the half-body with its new horns (Met. 13.893–94) his masculine part. The solid element, the body that does not disintegrate, embodies the masculine, while the female dissolves. The phantasia that Galatea constructs of Acis is ambivalent. While in principle he is the object of the gaze and Galatea seems to look at him with a ‘male gaze,’ Acis is not exactly eroticized in his transformation. His fluidity seems to evade the fixation typical of the male gaze.

The audience of Galatea’s personal story is Scylla and other nymphs. It all starts with a reference to the monster Scylla who torments sailors. In a flashback, Ovid tells us that she was once a virgin nymph who fled from many suitors. This gives place to Galatea’s tale. The narrative circumstance is a reunion of nymphs in which Galatea is letting Scylla comb her hair. This detail is poignant when one thinks about Polyphemus combing his hair and arranging his beard. Galatea’s tale wishes to prove, as in various episodes of female narratives, that she suffered more than her interlocutor did. Her story of wooing by the horrid giant is expected to provoke sympathy in Scylla and the nymphs who will pity her. A witty paradox is likewise played out in the story. Scylla, who has listened and ‘seen’ the monster Polyphemus in Galatea’s tale ends up as a monster herself, probably exemplifying, in an extreme situation, how stories can affect, modify, and change the reader.

To sum up, the story told by Galatea, like that of Arethusa, shows
another instance of female perspective. There is a sense of gender destabilization in the tale, whereby Galatea tries to arrogate a powerful gaze for herself. But while she tries to feminize the pictures of both Polyphemus and Acis, she can only do it halfway, because Polyphemus, despite his hinted effeminacy, still has the strength of the hypermasculine. Acis, in his transformation becomes a river god in whose *phantasia* Galatea fuses masculine solidity and feminine fluidity. Finally, although Galatea tries to create a picture of herself as a *dura puella*, she can only do so in an oblique way, appropriating the discourse of Polyphemus to describe herself.

So what and how does Galatea see? As a reader of *Metamorphoses*, she sees a world where women are reified and transformed into landscape. She rejects such fixation, but, at the same time, she regards Polyphemus as effeminate. Galatea strives to have her own gaze and, at some level, to possess a somewhat masculine gaze that can objectify the male. Nonetheless, she is never completely successful, for her own creation—Polyphemus (just as in Pygmalion’s story)—comes alive and ceases being an object and becomes masculine and active. At the same time, her lover Acis, while a spectacle to be looked at, still becomes mobile and achieves a certain level of masculinity and, with that, independence.

**Pregnant with Words**

Hercules’ mother, Alcmene, finds a confidante in Iole, who is herself pregnant, and tells her the story of her sufferings at Hercules’ birth. The interrelated stories of Alcmene and Dryope are particularly rich for the study of women in *Metamorphoses*, but they have suffered from an almost complete lack of critical interest.

**ALCMENE**

Alcmene’s is a story of pregnancy, childbirth, and creativity. When she was ready to give birth to Hercules, she called for the help of Lucina, but it was obvious that jealous Juno was set on preventing the delivery. In her self-depiction as a pregnant woman, Alcmene emphasizes her heaviness and effort:

```
namque laboriferi cum iam natalis adesset
Herculis et decimum premeretur sidere signum,
tendebat gravitas uterum mihi, quodque ferebam,
```
The birth of the labor-enduring Hercules was at hand and the tenth month was pressed on by its star. The weight of my womb was great, and what I was carrying was so huge that you could tell Jupiter was the father of the unborn baby. I could not bear the pain of labor any longer. . . .

(Met. 9.285–90)

Pregnancy is felt as a pressure and a weight. Stephen Wheeler suggests convincingly that “Alcmene’s labores (Met. 9.289) directly compete as subject matter for narrative with Hercules’ canonical labors (cf. Met. 9.277). Moreover, the narrator Alcmene concludes with an image of Juno’s wrath that supersedes the goddess’s better known persecution of Hercules.” Let us remember that Juno’s hatred toward Hercules is expressly stated by Achelous earlier in Book 9 (“tantum ne noceat, quod me nec regia Iuno/ odit . . .” / “‘Let it not be to my disadvantage that queen Juno does not hate me,’” Met. 9.21–22) and that she is addressed by Hercules at the time of his death (Met. 9.176ff.). The word auctor is here significant as it foregrounds issues of authority and authorship in the story. Hercules is a creation of Jupiter, yet woman as vehicle is needed to give birth to the hero and to the story as well. But although Jupiter is talked of as auctor, the voice we hear is a female one. The retrospective narration of Hercules’ birth right after his death may be read as an account of woman as creator both of the hero and of the story just narrated. In this sense a releasing reading of female voices does not necessarily imply women’s independence or that her voice is perfect, yet the alternative would be silence and the view that the only author is masculine. This episode is good to think with in these matters. Alcmene recognizes Jupiter as author, but she still has the narrating voice; in this way, she could be compared with a prophetess like the Sibyl. Although inspiration comes as an intrusion on the woman’s body and she becomes the ‘mouth’ of the god’s voice, the medium is always part of the expression, her mouth a vital element in the creative process. But Alcmene is more than a simple instrument like Syrinx. Although Jupiter seems to be envisioned as author, which may agree with ancient conceptions of sexuality and reproduction, Alcmene as a body and a mouth becomes essential in the creative process of giving birth to the hero and to the story. Alcmene is, then, an author, though a constrained one. A contrast with Plautus’s version of Hercules’ birth is thought-provoking. In the Amphitruo, the divine inte-
vention of Jupiter is marked precisely by the absence of pain and ease of delivery (1091–97 in particular). Juno is never mentioned in the parturition except for a very early reference (831–32) by Alcmena stating simply that Juno is a goddess to be revered by her. In a generalizing way, Alcmena is less active and less distinguished in Plautus than in Ovid. In Plautus the events seem to be controlled by Jupiter, while Ovid pays more attention to Alcmena’s sufferings and participation in the birth of her son.

Alcmena’s discourse stages a battle between the unborn hero and the hateful goddess Juno. Now, most critics, like Wheeler, think that Alcmena’s sufferings respond to Juno’s hatred of Hercules. But it is possible also to think that Alcmena, as concubine of Jupiter, is already the object of her anger, and it is because of this that Hercules is loathed by the goddess. This reading would prioritize the role and importance of women in the story rather than the figure of Hercules.

The whole episode proposes a struggle between openness and closure. Lucina sits at the door of the house with arms and legs crossed, an action that by sympathetic magic affects Alcmena’s body:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{utque meos audit gemitus, subsedit in illa} \\
\text{ante fores ara, dextroque a poplite laevum} \\
\text{pressa genu et digitis inter se pectine iunctis} \\
\text{sustinuit partus. tacita quoque carmina voce} \\
\text{dixit, et inceptos tenuerunt carmina partus.}
\end{align*}
\]

And as she heard my complaints, she sat on the altar before the doors and crossing her right knee over her left, with fingers interlocked, she prevented my delivery. In whispering voice she chanted charms and the songs stalled the birth as it began. (Met. 9.297–301)

This closure and binding of Alcmena’s body embodies Juno’s desire not only to prevent Hercules’ birth but also the possibility of his life being narrated and incorporated in *Metamorphoses*. Similarities and parallelisms between mouth, female pudenda, and doors are well attested in classical literature. This appears clearly in the story. Alcmena’s only possibility of being creative is to open up and the house with its door acts as a clear metaphor for the female body. In this, the character of Galanthis is key, as this faithful attendant of Alcmena suspects that some injustice is being done by Juno. When entering and leaving the house through the door, she surprises Lucina by saying that Alcmena has given birth and provokes her to unbind her arms and legs:
She sensed that something was being plotted by unfair Juno, and while she was going in and out of the doors, she saw the goddess sitting on the altar, with her fingers linked and her arms crossed over her knees and said to her: "Whoever you are, congratulate my mistress. Alcmen of Argos has been freed from suffering. Her prayers are answered and her child is born." (Met. 9.308–13)

Doors are a central element in the story. The goddess sitting with closed arms and legs at the door implicates closure. What is more, Galanthis’ coming and going seems to be the first step in the final opening of Alcmen. Galanthis crosses the passage of the door. Then she opens her mouth to speak, and by opening her mouth she unchains the bindings of the goddess, an act that will lead to Hercules’ birth and ultimately to the possibility of his inclusion in Metamorphoses. By narrating the story, Alcmen has decided to ‘open her mouth’ like Galanthis rather than keep silence in a more conventionally feminine stance. The tale of Alcmen and Galanthis stages the struggle of women to create, a desire that Juno strives to impede. Because Galanthis has cheated the goddess with her mouth, she is changed into a weasel, condemned to give birth through her mouth (quae quia mendaci parientem iuverat ore, / ore parit/ “Because she had helped the woman in labor with her liar’s mouth, she now gives birth through the mouth,” Met. 9.322–33).75 The equivalence between speech and opening of the body is then finalized and completed. Nevertheless, sisterhood and women’s triumph always have their limits. Some trade-off is always expected, which is why Galanthis loses her human condition and is fixed in an animal behavior.

The audience here is Iole, also pregnant by Hyllus, Hercules’ son. Segal recognizes that Ovid “may be writing with an awareness of an audience of women readers.”76 This story demonstrates the sisterhood and help of one woman to another, and Alcmen’s words stage a moment of intimacy and confidentiality between women. It also asserts the magnitude of childbirth as a creative act that empowers women to—in a somewhat askew fashion—be co-authors of stories. Alcmen thus sees herself as a medium.
As such she is a participant in the creative process. Likewise, in her self-representation, Alcmene develops the visual metaphor of the locked house for her body, which needs to be opened. While the functions of speech and childbirth are merged in Galanthis, Alcmene narrating her story also opens up her female ‘interior,’ which could function as an encouragement to Iole to both give birth and narrate.

**DRYOEPE**

Now Iole responds with another tale: her sister Dryope. This odd story exemplifies most clearly the role of women’s gaze as ‘witness.’ A witness of woman's tragedy and arborization, Iole is at the same time a participant in the story (“spectatrix aderam fati crudelis, openque/ non poteram tibi ferre, soror” / “I was there, a witness of your cruel fate, and could not offer you help, sister,” Met. 9.359–60). The tale begins with a remarkable ekphrasis:

\[
\text{est lacus, adclivis devexo margine formam} \\
\text{litoris efficiens, summum myrteta coronant.} \\
\text{venerat huc Dryope fatorum nescia.}
\]

There is a lake, whose shelving sides form sloping shores. Myrtles crown the top. Here Dryope had come, ignorant of her fate. (Met. 9.334–36)

*Est lacus* recalls the lake of Enna in Sicily in Met. 5.385. As in other cases, *forma* is here playing with the double meaning of beauty and ‘shape.’ The circularity of the space is well signaled by the verb *coronat*, indicating how myrtle surrounds the pool. All these elements point again to a feminine space. But what is surprising is that, unlike the ekphrases of Actaeon or Thetis, which contain a woman as the central object of the gaze, what the reader sees here is a woman entering the space of the description, as in Arethusa’s story and like Minerva entering the space of the Heliconian fount. Most significantly, she enters into the closed space of the pool, which itself bears meaningful connotations in *Metamorphoses*. While in the first books of *Metamorphoses* it is only males who perform visual and spatial intrusions in ekphrastic landscapes, the poem gradually lets women enter these types of spaces. This ‘masculine’ act of intrusion will be important for the development of the story. Dryope is a mother bearing her young child in her bosom, and to please him, she plucks a flower standing by the pool:
haut procul a stagno Tyrios imitata colores
in spem bacarum florebat aquatica lotos.
carpserat hinc Dryope, quos oblectamina nato
porrigeret, flores, et idem factura videbar—
namqueaderam—vidiguttase florecruentas
decidereet tremulo ramos horroremoveri.

Not far from the pool a water lotus-tree of color like Tyrian dye was blossoming in hope of forthcoming fruit. Dryope had picked some of these flowers to please her child. I was about to do the same, for I was there, when I saw blood dripping from the flower and the branches moving with shivering horror. (Met. 9.340–45)

In this passage the narrator asserts her role of witness (vidi), which makes explicit the purpose and meaning of her narrative. There is also an interesting play on activity and passivity in terms of viewing. Iole affirms that she seemed/was seen to be about to do the same (et idem factura videbar). Videbar makes Iole not only grammatically passive but also turns her into an object of the audience's gaze. However, it is an immediate act of active seeing that changes the course of her life, saves her from transformation, and gives her a gaze, which she can then transform into narrative (unlike Actaeon) so as to become an author of stories and of human life—let's remember she is pregnant. As discussed before, the very act of picking a flower symbolizes defloweration in other contexts in Metamorphoses and Latin literature more generally. The color of the flower is also significant as it emblemizes the blood that will soon be spilled.77 Up to now, the text has presented a woman who has infringed on the limits of an ekphrasis and exerted some violence on a flower that begins to bleed. But it becomes more meaningful when Iole relates that the lotus tree was in actuality the virgin Lotis who had taken refuge in that form to evade rape by Priapus:

scilicet, ut referunt tardi nunc denique agrestes,
Lotis in hanc nymphem, fugiens obscena Priapi,
contuleratversos, servato nomine, vultus.

Certainly, as the slow rustics indeed now say, the nymph Lotis, fleeing from Priapus's sexual advances had changed into this form, transforming her appearance but keeping her name. (Met. 9.346–48)
Segal believes that Dryope's action “involves no sexual violence,” although he recognizes that there are sexual implications in the landscape of the scene. But one can disagree with Segal in that there is no sexual violence in the plucking of the flower, at least at the symbolic level if not at a concrete level. Likewise, while Segal’s observations about sexuality and violence in landscape were eye-openers, he often seems rather vague in his discussions of sexuality. What we have here is a woman who—unwillingly—destroys the integrity of a virgin. The dripping blood clearly symbolizes the loss of Lotis’ virginity and performs, figuratively, the act of rape from which she was escaping. By the violence she exerts on the flower, Dryope becomes like Priapus. As a ‘punishment’ (we are not sure from whom), Dryope is turned into a tree. Underscoring this episode there is again Daphne in Book 1 as a model. However, this ‘arborization’ is curious because, unlike the case of Daphne, it is not a welcomed and happy transformation. In fact, it is a negative outcome as it deprives Dryope of her role of mother and family life. In a sisterly wish that recalls Anna’s desire to die with her sister in the Aeneid, Iole desires to join in the creeping bark that is enclosing her sister (Met. 9362). This contrasts with the kisses later applied by men to the tree that eroticize the transformed body (365). When Dryope is about to disappear under the bark she delivers a speech declaring that she has lived and died innocently (Met. 9371–73). But she has accidentally committed a sort of figurative rape and for this, she is to be punished. Ovid tells us that when Andraemon married her, Dryope was no longer a virgin, having suffered the violence of Apollo:

\[
\text{... quam virginitate carentem}
\]
\[
\text{vimque dei passam Delphos Delonque tenentis}
\]
\[
\text{excipit Andraemon, et habetur coniuge felix.}
\]

Andraemon took her after she had lost her virginity and suffered violence from the god that holds Delphi and Delos; and he was counted happy in his wife. (Met. 9331–33)

Another version of Dryope’s myth is recorded in Antoninus Liberalis’ Metamorphoses 32, and adjudicated to Nicander in the first book of his Metamorphoses. This version records that Dryope was a daughter of Dryops, a former companion of the Hamadryades who taught her to sing and dance. Apollo, seeing her dancing, transformed himself first into a
tortoise, then into a serpent, and finally raped her. However, the girl said nothing to her family about the crime and married Andraemon. Soon, she gave birth to the boy Amphissus, who later built a temple to Apollo. One day as Dryope was approaching the temple, the Hamadryades abducted her and hid her in the woods; in her place they caused a poplar tree to grow out of the ground and made a spring gush forth. The oak as mark of rape (an odd sort of rape by women) suggests the hardness of the tree \(\text{robur}\), which is normally a mark of masculine sexual potency, contrasting sharply with the delicacy of the lotus flower. While it is clearly not the dryads who abduct Dryope, their act may function as a reminiscence of her previous rape by Apollo. Although Ovid gives a different angle to the story, he may still be playing on this other version, where the rape by Apollo is given greater weight. The personal rape suffered by Dryope lends a paradoxical twist to the symbolic rape that she is performing on the flower, and even perhaps implies a sort of vengeance. Both Lotis and Dryope have suffered the same toils—although Lotis escapes—but instead of sisterhood, the episode shows violence, even if unintentional, among women. One more question concerns the significance of Dryope's transformation into a tree. In *Metamorphoses*—it is not told exactly why this occurs—it seems clear that this is a punishment, while in Antoninus's version it actually becomes the source and emblem of her life. In Ovid, Dryope's transformation closely echoes that of Daphne, something with which Apollo may have had something to do. In this way, he keeps his mistresses in the form of a tree, which is in other contexts a clear symbol and fixation of rape and possession by a god.

There are two ways of reading this embedded tale. From a female-oriented perspective, one can see that it is one of sisterhood and denunciation of rape. The women in the story all lose something: Lotis her virginity and her humanity, Dryope her humanity and her family, Iole her sister. This is also a clear example of how a woman can actually 'act upon her gaze,' for she can definitely do something with it, by transforming what she has seen into story and by giving other women the possibility to enjoy and learn from her own experience. Kaplan may object that Iole cannot "act upon her gaze" in the same violent way as the male gaze does. That is precisely the point. If she could, Iole would be another Salmacis whose gaze is almost a 'male gaze.' A female gaze is not actively violent, yet she can still produce and perform in a different, alternative way. Here the monolithic 'male gaze' should again be deconstructed, as it is not sufficient to explain the power relationships in the episode. The importance of Iole's gaze is that of being a witness. She sees herself as a sister who can remember and tell. Although hers is a 'helpless' gaze that cannot modify
the images it sees and the facts of her sister’s fate, Metamorphoses allocates room for Iole’s testimony, her point of view, and her narrative, for it is precisely in her story that she can modify, influence, and act upon what she has seen. For all the personal loss in the tale, there is some gain in the possibility of telling what has happened: to communicate with a female audience, to fix it as a testimony of female suffering, which strengthens bonds among women. Now, if one resists the text and assumes the author as male overall, one can see punishment for two women who have defied male authority. Lotis has tried to avoid possession and ends up symbolically raped; Dryope has tried to hide her rape and ends up losing her humanity and committing violence. The male power finally imposes his authority and prevents sisterhood. But thanks to a woman we can still read the story and reflect on its visual wealth.

**Warning Adonis**

In Book 10 of Metamorphoses, Venus advises her young lover Adonis to fear wild beasts, and to illustrate her hatred of them the goddess narrates the story of Atalanta and Hippomenes while lying comfortably under the shade of a tree. To take Venus’s narrative as an example of women’s creation and phantasia is problematic because not only is Venus a goddess and not a human female, but also, at some level, she actually embodies a male ideal of what the erotic female is. This problematic character of the goddess of love and passion makes her often act against sisterhood and justify male desire. But the episode here discussed is particularly engaging because the goddess and her own desire are involved.

As with the Sibyl’s story, the audience of Venus’s narrative is masculine—though problematically: the boy Adonis, Myrrha’s child. One can recognize some identification between the goddess and Atalanta. In the erotic relationship, both Venus and Atalanta are women in power. Venus clearly overmasters the *puer*, being herself a goddess. Now, although Atalanta is really not free to choose and ‘fate’ is imposed on her, her physical strength surpasses her contestants’ in the race. In a way, she still holds the power of life and death over Hippomenes. Like Venus in love with a young boy, Atalanta says that what truly attracts her about Hippomenes is that he is still a boy: “nec forma tangor, (poteram tamen hac quoque tangi)/ sed quod adhuc puer est; non me movet ipse, sed aetas” / “I am not touched by his beauty (though this could also touch me), but by the fact that he is still a boy. He himself does not move me, but his age does” (Met. 10.614–15). This is an intriguing statement, followed by praise of Hippomenes’ virtus
and *mens interrita* (Met. 10.616). It is somewhat odd that Atalanta is enamored of this *puer* who has virile qualities, but the situation serves as a model of a woman in power that mirrors Venus's relationship with Adonis. She is also a more powerful woman who is finally vanquished by an inferior man. Despite the anachronism—Atalanta and Hippomenes are previous to Venus's affair with Adonis—this background permits the reader to link Venus's inclination to help Hippomenes to her own sympathetic feelings for boys in general and for Adonis in particular. Venus's choice of narrative material is appropriate to her present narrative circumstances. One could even think of Venus as a sort of lover/mother figure to the boy, thus inverting and reenacting the incestuous sexual story of Adonis' family.

At first Venus shows herself a benevolent and assisting goddess. She describes how the prayers of Hippomenes touched her heart (*motaque sum*, Met. 10.643—note here that Atalanta is also moved by the boy's age and beauty). She also appears as a teacher who instructs Hippomenes on how to use the golden apples. Yet soon the story turns into one of revenge on impertinent humans for neglecting the gods. It is remarkable that Venus destroys the lovers with the very element she cherishes so much: love and sexual passion. Hippomenes, inspired by the goddess, feels an uncontrollable lust and has sex with his wife in a sacred temple. They are punished with transformation into lions, beastly animals that Adonis should fear. But why tell this story to Adonis? Obviously, it is a warning to him that he should fear these uncontrollable beasts, but also an assertion of Venus's power and the consequences of defying it. Perhaps with this story Venus wishes to scare and control Adonis, though with the loving purpose of protecting him. Furthermore, she wishes to preserve him as a *puer*, since daring to fight and defeat wild beasts would imply a manly enterprise. All to no avail. Venus's narrative is not effective and she does not manage to impress upon her lover the perils of disregarding her or the danger of wild beasts. Adonis dies trying to fight a huge boar, for he is not ready for manhood. Venus preserves Adonis' memory forever as a flower, the anemone, and perhaps with this image she also keeps him eternally a boy.

Venus's gaze should be considered in different terms from the gaze of other females because, as stated above, she is a powerful goddess who often embodies a male conception of desirable woman. Nevertheless, some common features can be observed. Venus's story acts as testimony to her power. She is a witness of her own success and vengeance, and by transforming this vision into narrative she hopes to do something productive for the fate of Adonis. In this sense, like other women, Venus wishes to 'act upon' her gaze. But the reception of her story is not successful, for Adonis cannot 'read' the *phantasia* in a productive way and loses his
humanity and masculinity. Perhaps, as a product of incest, this puer is, with so many others in the poem, stuck on the threshold of masculinity but unable to achieve full manhood. Having Venus as lover, a more mature, protective, almost motherly figure, he wishes to revert to the incestual relationship that gave him origin, unable to transcend the limits of the self needed for sexual maturity.

The Last Testimony

We end with a discussion of the Ovidian Sibyl, who has commonly been relegated by the critics to a place behind the traditional Virgilian prophetess. Here her voice, her gaze, and her testimony are brought to the spotlight, for she is not only the last woman to narrate a story in the first person in the poem but she is also, in a metanarrative way, at the end of her life. It is true that the Sibyl still has to live three hundred years. In this sense her life is not finished, but she identifies herself as an old woman and her voice can be taken as an expression of the concerns of the aged ("sed iam felicior aetas / terga dedit, tremuloque gradu venit aegra senectus, / quae patientia diu est"/ "But now the more joyous time of life has gone by, and weak old age to be endured for a long time comes with its unstable step," Met. 14.142–44). The Sibyl is also given a voice and a gaze in Metamorphoses. Whether this voice is a personal endowment or simply a tool, a 'mouth' of the god Apollo remains a matter of discussion, but against other accounts of the Cumaean Sibyl, especially Virgil's version, the Ovidian prophetess is allowed a voice and a gaze of her own. In Book 14, Ovid reworks the Virgilian scene by presenting a new interaction between Aeneas and the Cumaean Sibyl. This is an attractive story because the audience is here a man, and not any man but the legendary father of Rome. After she assists him, the hero wonders whether the Sibyl is human or a deity, to which she responds, "nec dea sum"/ "I am not a goddess" (130) and goes on to tell her personal story. Apollo, trying to persuade her to join him in love, offers precious gifts and even asks her to "choose anything" and he will give it. The voice of the prophetess narrates:

. . . ego pulveris hausti
ostendens cumulum, quot haberet corpora pulvis,
tot mihi natales contingere vana rogavi.

Pointing at a gathered heap of sand, I vainly asked to live as many years as the grains of sand in the mount. (Met. 14.136–38)
Ovid compresses the Virgilian story of Book 6; yet what is truly remarkable is that Aeneas’ descent to the Underworld, which plays such a decisive role in the *Aeneid* and in Roman history, is only given about fourteen lines, while the personal yarn of the Sibyl is allocated twenty-three. This is all we have of the Virgilian scene in *Metamorphoses* because after the hero’s encounter with the Sibyl he swiftly continues his journey. To the overwhelming weight of masculine stories in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the feminine voice prevails in *Metamorphoses* 14. It is also noteworthy that in the *Aeneid* the Sibyl tells the stories of others, while in *Metamorphoses* she centers on her own fate. Segal argued that in the narrative art of *Metamorphoses*, one salient characteristic is ‘humanization’ of the characters.\(^8^5\) He refers to Apollo, Pyramus and Thisbe, Andromeda and Perseus, and other characters, but he does not mention the Sibyl, which, following Galinsky, represents one of the clearest examples of Ovid’s tendency to introduce the human side of his characters. The effect of this humanization is the undermining of the epic and propagandistic aspects of *Aeneid* 6. Nonetheless, as Galinsky suggests, Ovid still preserves the Sibyl’s respectfulness and serious status.\(^8^6\) Furthermore, issues of divine possession and oracular inspiration have been long discussed from a gender perspective. In particular, women prophetesses are seen as ‘mouths’ of the god that act as media for his own expression and messages to the world.\(^8^7\) It is also well established that ‘mouths’ are ‘female things,’ an analogy favored by sexuality and female anatomy.\(^8^8\) A direct comparison with Virgil’s *Aeneid* is required here. Book 6 of the Virgilian epic presents the Sibyl mainly as a ‘mouth’ of Apollo and thus her divine possession and inspiration are highlighted:

ventum erat ad limen, cum virgo, “poscere fata tempus” ait: “deus, ecce, deus!” cui talia fanti
ante fores subito non voltus, non color unus,
non comptae mansere comae, sed pectus anhelum,
et rabie fera corda tument, maiorque videri
nec mortale sonans, adflata est numine quando
iam propiore dei. . . .

They had come to the threshold, when the maiden said: “It is time to ask the oracles, the god, look, the god!” Having said this suddenly before the doors, neither her countenance nor her color was the same, her hair did not remain braided, but her chest heaves and her wild heart swells with madness. She is taller to behold and does not sound mortal when the spirit of the god is nearer and breathes in her. . . . (Aen. 6.45–51)
The Sibyl here is entirely possessed and dominated by the god. Let us now compare her brief description in Ovid:  
\[ \textit{at illa diu vultum tellure moratum/ erexit tandemque deo furibunda recepto} / \]  
“But after fixing her eyes on the ground for a long time, she lifted them at last and possessed by the god’s mad inspiration” (Met. 14.106–7). To the six-line detailed description of divine madness in Virgil, Ovid opposes three words (\textit{deo furibunda recepto}). While her eyes fixed on the ground could be taken as a sign of possession, they could also be seen as a mark of sadness, given the general character of the Sibyl that Ovid proposes. Likewise, it is noteworthy that while in Virgil the prophetess is described as something horrific and fearful (\textit{horrenda Sibylla, Aen.6.10}), Ovid humanizes her character. The focus of Ovid’s story is not so much her divine possession by Apollo, but the sufferings of an old woman who expressively avows that she “is not a goddess.” Furthermore, while in Virgil she only performs the prophetic commands of the god, in \textit{Metamorphoses}, she takes time to tell her personal story in her own voice without any divine intervention.\textsuperscript{89} It is also a story much like that of plaintive women who lament their own suffering. Likewise, the Sibyl tells a story of attempted sexual possession by Apollo, which recalls many other human and semi-divine maidens in Ovid’s epic. But the Sibyl escapes rape, though like Daphne she loses something. She has become old and powerless, losing her youthful beauty. A peculiar trade-off is seen in the passage. The Sibyl preserves her voice and is able to narrate her own testimonial story, but she loses her body in a way that recalls Echo, although Echo—one could say—really loses her voice as well, as she cannot utter her own words but simply repeats the speech of others. The humanity of Ovid’s Sibyl is seen also in her intimate conversation with Aeneas. It gives her a personal voice and the possibility of recalling her sad fate and her relationship with Apollo.

Greek and Roman writers often portray older women in a negative light. What the gaze of the Sibyl offers is a perspective rarely found in classical literature, that of an old woman for whom youth and beauty are lost and who finds herself disintegrating and banished from the erotic gaze of others (\textit{... nec amata videbor/ nec placuisse deo, Phoebus quoque forsitan ipsa/ vel non cognoscer, vel dilexisse negabit:/ usque adeo mutata ferar nullique videnda/ vocem tamen noscar”/} “And now I will not seem to have been loved, neither to have pleased the god; perhaps even Phoebus himself will not recognize me or will deny that he loved me. To such an extent shall I change and, though nobody may recognize me when they look at me, I will be known by my voice,” Met.14.149–52), but who is not presented in negative terms.\textsuperscript{90} The Sibyl is left in an uncodified and marginal place for women in antiquity, in which elder women are usually
inscribed. However, as Anastasios Nikolopoulos suggests, storytelling may be a way for old women to cope with their invisibility. It is interesting that Ovid does not register any response from the audience (Aeneas) which could point to the isolation of the Sibyl's life and story. Despite this displacement, loneliness, and isolation, her story still has a point: to leave a testimony of her life and sufferings as emblematic reflection of the lives of old women.

This chapter was a search for a female gaze, or at least, an attempt to find *indicia* of what a ‘female gaze’ might be. We cannot and do not want to establish any restrictive definitions, for we would fall into the same shortcomings as the theorists of the monolithic male gaze. However, the journey undertaken has been in itself productive. One thing to consider is the variety of female gazes and that the female gaze is not a homogeneous entity. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* gives testimony of women not only as erotic objects but also as mothers, goddesses, and aged human beings. Likewise, assigning a voice and a gaze to women does not necessarily mean that they will be perfect or unproblematic, as they can even be ‘unsisterly.’ Overall, this and the previous chapter have shown that Kaplan’s argument that women cannot ‘act upon’ the gaze is valid only if taken in a very restrictive sense. While it is true that women like Cyane cannot return the violence of the male gaze, they can, however, find a more ‘feminine’ and alternative gaze, by turning what they have seen into narrative and visual testimony for other women to read, to decode, and to learn.