

Visualizing Speech and Speaking about Vision: Focalization in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 1 and 6

Ovid's varying levels of narration in the *Metamorphoses* create a matrix of speakers, addressees, and relationships that have fascinated scholars like Gianpiero Rosati, who argues against the view that Ovid as omniscient narrator possesses the only voice that matters: "to ignore the poem's framework and change of voices obliterates shades of meaning important for the comprehension of the poem" (Rosati 2002, 283). This narratological interest in the poem comprises several aspects, including focalization, the study of the perspectives from which a story is viewed and narrated and the shifts between them. Though some scholars have investigated the effects of focalization in limited episodes of the *Metamorphoses* (Peek 2002, Libatique 2015) or more broadly in other Classical texts (de Jong 1987, Fowler 1990), this paper seeks to establish a theoretical foundation upon which we can investigate shifts in focalization within the *Metamorphoses* more broadly and nuance the definition of such shifts with specific lexical markers.

In this paper, I argue that shifts in focalization are often marked by the collocation of words or phrases of speech and vision. Previous scholarship tends to privilege the analysis of one or the other (e.g., Salzman-Mitchell 2005) with regard to narratological structure, but rarely are they studied simultaneously, let alone analyzed as markers of shifts in focalization. To illustrate the frequency with which these collocations occur, I provide and explicate a digital visualization of Books 1 and 6 of the poem. I then focus my analysis on the Daphne, Arachne, and Niobe narratives as case studies for my larger argument: at climactic moments of each narrative, collocations of speech and vision words determine the reader's perception of events by causing the reader to view the story's action through a certain perspective and in a certain voice.

In the Daphne narrative, the narrator uses one such collocation (*spectat ... ait ... videt ... oculos, videt ... vidisse*, 1.497-502) to mark a shift in focalization from himself to Apollo, whose vision and speech work in concert to objectify his intended victim Daphne and place him, as the aggressor, in a position of power. The polyptoton and anaphora of forms of *videre*, the verb of speech and the direct utterance “*quid, si comantur?*” (1.498), and the obsession over Daphne’s individual body parts (*oculos, oscula, digitos, manus, brachia, lacertos*) turn her into an aesthetic object, and the focalization through Apollo causes the audience to be complicit in this dehumanization.

In the Arachne narrative, two such collocations (*simulat* plus an ephrasis of Minerva’s disguise ... *loqui*, 6.26-28; *adspicit ... vultibus ... dictis*, 6.34-36) shift the focalization first to Minerva and then to Arachne. The first lets the audience enjoy the dramatic irony of Arachne disparaging the goddess Minerva to her face, while the second allows the audience access into Arachne’s thought process and inner reaction to the disguised Minerva. The speech introduced by the collocation heightens Arachne’s hubris and sets the audience up for Arachne’s eventual downfall.

A similar alignment of audience and focalizer occurs in the Niobe narrative. The narrator shifts focalization to Niobe with a collocation (*oculos circumtulit ... superbos ... inquit*, 6.17) which serves to characterize her negatively. The narrator forces the audience to align with Niobe by presenting the narrative through her “haughty eyes” (*oculos ... superbos*) and in her own direct voice; this alignment causes the audience almost to be complicit in Niobe’s haughtiness, thereby increasing the pathos and magnitude of the loss that she is about to suffer.

The shifts in focalization that we can trace through these lexical coincidences generate a narrative structure which has largely been understudied in previous scholarship. This paper aims

to set the groundwork for further analysis and constructions of narratological structures that help us appreciate more fully Ovid's complex story-telling technique.

Bibliography

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