

Sensi: Embodied Storytelling in Ovid's Arethusa

Ovidian scholarship of the past few decades has greatly increased awareness of the importance of spectacle and its role within Ovid's poetry. In the *Metamorphoses*, the interplay between vision and desire is one of the most powerful mechanisms through which meaning and identity are constructed.¹ Readers quickly learn to orient themselves within this world through acts of looking: visual focalization not only structures the narrative but often implicates the audience in scenes of erotic pursuit and transformation.² Thus, the Ovidian reader becomes habituated to an external, objectifying gaze that mediates erotic experience in the poem. Yet, while Ovid's poetry is readily accessible when its visuals are fixed and directive, it becomes more elusive when that vision loosens, when it turns oblique, diffused, or, crucially, peripheral. Often, these moments pass unnoticed altogether.

To examine this phenomenon, this essay turns to *Arethusa*,³ an episode often overlooked in the *Metamorphoses*, due to its much more traditional modes in which it is recounted. I argue that *Arethusa* demonstrates an embodied and profoundly interoceptive narrative style (relating to the perception or awareness of the inner state of the body)⁴ that

¹ Philip Hardie, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). See also David Fredrick, ed., *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power, and the Body* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) for a broader consideration of "the gaze" within Roman literature, art and material culture.

² Gianpiero Rosati, *Narcissus and Pygmalion: Illusion and Spectacle in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 9.

³ See Ovid, *Met.* 5.572-641.

⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "interoception (n.)," accessed

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counters the sight-dominant, objectifying focalization characteristic in Ovid's erotic episodes, like *Apollo and Daphne*.⁵ This narrative style decentralizes the focal indicators with which the reader is accustomed to create meaning, necessitating the need to adapt the process of interpretation to a broader range of somatic, aural and visual focalizers. Through this process, the reader is compelled to read against the instinct of eroticization cultivated through much of Ovid's poetry. Visual focalization dominates much of the *Metamorphoses* and enhances the visual spectacle taking place. As Andrew Feldherr and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell observe, *Apollo and Daphne* offers a paradigmatic example of how verbs of seeing structure Ovidian eroticism. Salzman-Mitchell writes that in *Apollo and Daphne*, "[v]erbs of seeing like *specto* and *video* ... act as initiators of the narration, focalizers and boundary markers of visual images The visual construction of Daphne that we see here is focalized through Apollo's eyes."⁶ Likewise, Feldherr notes that these

November 13, 2025, <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/interoception>.

⁵ Andrew Feldherr, *Playing Gods: Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Politics of Fiction* (Princeton University Press, 2010), especially 49-51 and 108-14, provides the most comprehensive scope of visual focalization and eroticization in the *Metamorphoses*, particularly with respect to the *Apollo and Daphne* episode. However, little attention has been paid to the senses more broadly in Ovid, with the exception of Belayche's essay on the soundscape of processions in Ovid's *Fasti*. See Nicole Belayche, "Assiduo Sono and Furiosa Tibia in Ovid's *Fasti*: Music and Religious Identity in Narratives of Processions in the Roman World," in *Sensorium: The Senses in Roman Polytheism*, ed. Antón Alvar Nuño et al., *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World*, v. 195 (Brill, 2021). Nevertheless, there is growing interest in the synaesthetics of Greek and Roman Literature, including interoception and haptics. My argument is indebted to Alex C. Purves, "Haptic Herodotus," in *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses*, ed. Shane Butler and Alex C. Purves (Routledge, 2013) and Alex C. Purves, "Hands Know the Truth," in *Touch and the Ancient Senses*, ed. Alex C. Purves (Routledge, 2018).

⁶ Patricia Salzman-Mitchell, *A Web of Fantasies: Gaze, Image, Gender*

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verbs of seeing act as narrative “hinges” that propel the reader into Apollo’s visual experience.⁷ This dynamic is vividly exemplified in the following passage:

***Spectat** inornatos collo pendere capillos et, ‘Quid si comantur?’ ait. **Videt** igne micantes sideribus similes oculos, **videt** oscula, quae non est **vidisse** satis; laudat digitosque manusque brachiaque et nudos media plus parte lacertos; si qua latent, meliora putat.*⁸

Apollo’s focalization enforces the reader’s complicity in erotic spectacle. As Apollo drags his eyes across Daphne’s *forma*, her features are revealed to us in fragments, as an amalgamation of loose parts that to the elegiac lover, signify the beloved. Later in the episode, focalization returns to Apollo with the use of *videre* as a narrative hinge:

*Tum quoque **visa** decens; nudabant corpora venti, obviaque adversas vibrabant flamina vestes, et levis impulsos retro dabat aura capillos; aucta forma fuga est.*⁹

The reader is left to view Daphne as Apollo views her, as active “seeing” slips into oblique and passive “seeming.” Ovid quite often uses male character focalizers to allow the reader to visualize and, to an extent, participate in erotic spectacle. For this reason, the reader becomes accustomed to expect visual erotic spectacle when reading episodes fitting the *fuga* genre.

In accordance with the genre, Ovid includes specific

in Ovid’s Metamorphoses (Ohio State University Press, 2005), 30.

⁷ Andrew Feldherr, *Playing Gods*, 41.

⁸ Ovid, *Met.* 1.497-502: He **sees** her hair hanging unadorned on her neck and wonders, ‘What if it were arranged?’ He **sees** her eyes glittering with fire like stars, he **sees** kisses, which are not enough just to have **seen**; he praises her fingers and hands and arms and upper arms, bare more than half way; if anything lies hidden, he thinks it better. All translations of Ovid are my own.

⁹ Ovid, *Met.* 1.527-530: Even then she **seemed/was seen** fitting; the winds were stripping her body, opposing breezes fluttered her dress and the light air drove back her hair; her beauty increased by flight.

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signposts in *Arethusa* that deliberately create erotic expectations. Calliope, an inset narrator of Book 5, first introduces Arethusa to the reader by stating that Arethusa will, “tell the old love affairs of the river Elis.”¹⁰ Next, Arethusa finds herself drawn to a *locus amoenus*, a setting which, through the tales of *Narcissus* and *Salmacis* and *Hermaphroditus*, the reader has learned to suspect as a hotbed of erotic trouble. Moreover, the phrase *aestus erat* in line 586 carries an erotic resonance that recalls *Amores* 1.5.¹¹ Throughout the beginning of the poem, Ovid tantalizes the reader with erotic indicators like these, leading them to expect similar content through the rest of the episode. However, at the same time Ovid establishes these expectations for the reader, Arethusa articulates an entirely opposite set of expectations. Arethusa tells her story to Ceres after the rape of her daughter Proserpina. Considering her audience, it is unlikely that Arethusa tells her story with an erotic purpose in mind. Additionally, Arethusa explicitly rejects her erotic image, telling Ceres, “*quamvis fortis eram, formosae nomen habebam./ Nec mea me facies nimium laudata iuvabat.*”¹² Although Arethusa tries as hard as she might to resist eroticization — a desire she clearly states in her opening monologue — the irony is that she is unable to escape eroticization from an audience she does not know exists, that

¹⁰ Ovid, *Met.* 5.576.

¹¹ Cf. Ovid, *Amores* 1.5.1, in which Ovid describes a midday tryst with his mistress, Corinna.

¹² Ovid, *Met.* 5.580-582: “Yet, although I never sought fame for my looks, although I was strong, I always had a name for beauty. My appearance, praised too much, never pleased me.” It is also important to note that a similar idea is expressed about Daphne: “*Multi illam petiere, illa aversata petentes/ inpatiens expersque viri nemora avia lustrat...*” (1.478-9) and “*Votoque tuo tua forma repugnat,*” (1.489).

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is, an audience that is reading — as opposed to listening to — her story. This caveat has caused trouble for readers who struggle to reconcile the seemingly amorous overtures of Arethusa's narration with her stated desire against her amatory image. Salzman-Mitchell claims Arethusa "auto-eroticizes"¹³ and Murgatroyd reads Arethusa as a self-aggrandizing and "inconsistent" narrator,¹⁴ yet neither considers the question of readership in the episode. Readers accustomed to visual spectacle may continue to eroticize Arethusa despite her explicit resistance. The challenge of her narrative lies in its demand that readers unlearn their habituated visual reflexes.

When Arethusa begins her tale, it becomes immediately apparent that her narrative style is not visually dominant in the way readers have come to expect. After her brief biography, Arethusa brings her listener, Ceres, into her haptic world: "*Lassa revertabar (memini) Stymphalide silva;/ Aestus erat, magnumque labor geminaverat aestum.*"¹⁵ Arethusa begins her narrative within the body, describing her exhaustion from the heat and her physical movement returning from the grove. This haptic memory, in which her outside environment is translated to the reader through the body's internal response, involves her faculties of interoception: heat radiates through the skin, providing haptic feedback, and results in exhaustion; she perceives this and translates the sensation into words. The structure of her verse,

¹³ Salzman-Mitchell, *A Web of Fantasies*, 178.

¹⁴ Paul Murgatroyd, "Entertaining Arethusa," *Museum Helveticum* 69, no. 2 (2012): 179, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44081108>.

¹⁵ Ovid, *Met.* 5.585-6: "Exhausted, I was returning [I remember] from the Stymphalian grove; it was hot, and the great labor doubled the heat."

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as Stirrup observes, mirrors this embodied intensity: "The intensity of the heat is conveyed by the structure of line 586 where the doubling ... of the heat is conspicuously demonstrated in the polyptoton *aestus aestum* placed at either end of the line."¹⁶

Yet while Arethusa's description of her environment overflows with sensory detail, her description of the river itself curiously lacks perceptible sensory signifiers:

*"Invenio sine vertice aquas, sine murmure euntes/
perspicuas ad humum, per quas numerabilis alte/
calculus omnis erat, quas tu vix ire putares."*¹⁷

She describes the water through a series of absences: the river is *without* movement, *without* sound, and *without* visual color, shade or contrast, thus setting the stage for her (as well as the reader's) surprise when later on, the river does, in fact, make sound. At the same time, Arethusa constructs a synaesthetic world in which perception is layered and interdependent. She describes the river first through its corporeal quality (*sine vertice*), then through sound (*sine murmure euntes*), and last through sight (*perspicuas ad humum*). The result is a profoundly haptic mode of narration that contrasts sharply with the externalized, ocular narration characteristic of Ovid's primary narrator.

Yet erotic tensions resurface when Arethusa describes entering the river, telling Ceres:

*Accessi primumque pedis vestigia tinxi, poplite
deinde tenui; neque eo contenta, recingor molliaque*

¹⁶ Barbara E. Stirrup, "Techniques of Rape: Variety of Wit in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses,'" *Greece & Rome* 24, no. 2 (1977): 170, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/642702>.

¹⁷ Ovid, *Met.* 5.587-9: "I came upon waters without an eddy, moving without a murmur, see-through to the bottom, through which every pebble could be counted, which you would think scarcely to move."

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*inpono salici velamina curvae nudaque mergor aquis;
quas dum ferioque trahoque mille modis labens
excussaque brachia iacto...*¹⁸

Her narration moves from the foot to the knee to the removal of her garments, a structure that parallels the incremental unveiling of Daphne through Apollo's gaze. Ovid's own poetic voice seems to overtake Arethusa's, and a reader keen on crafting their own erotic spectacle from Arethusa's unintentional strip-tease may do so. However, when Arethusa begins to swim, plunging into the waters and delineating her rough strokes with *ferio*, *traho*, *iacto*, the erotic spectacle is dashed as she unelegantly strikes the water. This humorous touch jolts the reader from full realization of the erotic spectacle they expect to receive, and returns her narrative once again to the kinaesthetic body.

When Alpheus enters her narrative, Arethusa foregrounds somatic sensation and sound as focalizing senses, while sight is critically limited. From within the river's waters, Arethusa describes to Ceres that, "*Nescio quod medio sensi sub gurgite murmur.*"¹⁹ Arethusa does not see or even hear the murmuring threat; rather, she *senses*. The indeterminate *sensi* collapses distinctions between hearing, feeling, and knowing; it resists categorization into a single sensory register. Arethusa's perceptual vocabulary thus contrasts sharply with the precision of Ovid's visual narrators. Arethusa's broad *sense* is soon clarified as she introduces Alpheus to her audience for the first

¹⁸ Ovid, *Met.* 5.592-6: "I descended to the river and first dipped the sole of my foot, then went up to my knee; still not content, I loosened my soft clothes, and having placed them on a curved willow branch, I plunged into the water, now nude; I splashed and gathered the water to me, gliding in a thousand different ways, and threw my arms forth into the waves...."

¹⁹ Ovid, *Met.* 5.597: "I don't know what murmur I sensed from beneath the waters."

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time: “*Quo properas, Arethusa?*’ *suis Alpheos ab undis/ ‘Quo properas?’ iterum rauco mihi dixerat ore.*”²⁰ Arethusa’s first representation of Alpheus is not visual, but rather aural. She describes Alpheus’ voice as “hoarse” and repetitive, which to the reader, notably lacks Apollo’s overbearing eloquence. Alpheus makes no pretenses to woo her. Arethusa quite notably never provides a definitive or precise visual representation of Alpheus to the reader at any point in her narrative. Yet Arethusa’s ambiguity here is not simply a stylistic choice, but a key aspect of her story’s genre. In the *fuga* episodes of the *Metamorphoses*, the reader often never sees what the fleeing nymph sees; visual focalization is limited to pursuers like Apollo and Pan. Likewise, without access to Alpheus’ perspective, Arethusa’s narrative retelling is confined to her restricted perspective. Arethusa cannot see the source from which the murmur or the voice originated, and as a result, the reader is also left visually in the dark. In the absence of visual focalization, the reader is confined to Arethusa’s limited sensorium, thus creating suspense by only allowing the audience access to the same sensory signifiers she had in the moment. This creates an especially uncomfortable interpretive situation for the reader, since deprived of the organizing function of sight, the reader must instead interpret through aural and somatic cues.

Arethusa’s description of the chase further expands this theme. During the chase, Arethusa allows her audience to

²⁰ Ovid, *Met.* 599-600: “‘Where are you going, Arethusa?’ said Alpheus from his own river, ‘Where are you going?’ he said to me again in a hoarse voice.” Again, Arethusa’s narrative draws a parallel with *Apollo and Daphne*. Apollo voices nearly the same expression at 1.510-1: “*Aspera, qua properas*, loca sunt: moderatius oro, curre fugamque inhibe! Moderatius insequar ipse.”

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"see" Alpheus for the first time. However, her visualization of Alpheus still subverts the reader's expectation of visual spectacle. Arethusa narrates:

*Sol erat a tergo: vidi praecedere longam ante pedes
umbram, nisi si timor illa videbat; sed certe
solitusque pedum terrebat et ingens crinales vittas
adflabat anhelitus oris.*²¹

The sun is setting, and in this dusky zone, the sun casts Alpheus' shadow ahead of Arethusa as she runs. Yet Arethusa never names this shadow Alpheus; the reader must infer. Arethusa instead chooses to leave Alpheus' shadow as an ambiguous spectacle, a metamorphic, changing blob that can grow and shrink with the angle of the sun and the proximity of its referent to the viewer. The shadow is not a direct visual representation of Alpheus himself, but rather a visual "trace" or an "imperfect copy" that *could* represent Alpheus; Arethusa sees his form not as a man, but as one (of many) signifiers of a man.²²

While telling her story, Arethusa complicates the reception of this image even further by calling attention to the integration (or mis-integration) of mind, body, and sensory perception. She alludes that perhaps her *fear* saw the shadow, that her psychosomatic state could have hijacked her sense of sight. Here, Ovid dramatizes not an external metamorphosis of form but an internal metamorphosis of a sensory faculty. Vision becomes unstable and subjective. Ovid has not only dramatized metamorphosis as a change of form, but extended

²¹ Ovid, *Met.* 5.614-7: "The sun was at my back: I saw a long shadow stretching before my feet, unless it was my fear that saw it instead; but certainly, the sound of his feet terrified me and his heavy exhalations were fluttering the ribbons in my hair."

²² Lewis & Short, "umbra (*n.*)," II.A.

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that transformation to the act of storytelling itself. Through Arethusa, the body becomes an epistemological battleground, destabilizing the relationship between perception and knowledge. Perception is refracted through her exhaustion and fear and authenticated through the body's interior sensations, like the chill of sweat and the liquidity of fear.

Instead, Arethusa relies upon a patchwork of dislocated sensory signifiers which she deems more "certain:" the sound of Alpheus' feet and the sensation of his breath. In line 616, she inverts the paradigm of the previous line, where the mind affects the sensory perception, so that now her sensory perception — the sound of Alpheus' feet — influences her psychosomatic state. She also includes a second signifier, the sensation of his breath fluttering the ribbons in her hair, a frighteningly invasive sensory detail that embodies her audience within her experience. Throughout the ensuing chase, Arethusa reconstructs Alpheus not as a visible form but as a collection of sensory traces — sound, breath, and movement. Arethusa creates suspense through a second series of dislocations, separating her adjectives from the nouns they describe; *longam* precedes *umbram* and *ingens* comes before *anhelitus*. By withholding visual detail, she compels the reader to experience pursuit through sensation rather than sight. The habitual erotic gaze dissolves into empathetic embodiment; the reader feels as she feels, rather than sees from an external vantage.

While readers could eroticize Arethusa at the beginning of the text, the desire to do so has long waned. The reader has become far too enmeshed with Arethusa's embodied experience to see her as an "other" or as a "beloved." The reader has again been forced into an uncomfortable

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interpretive position since Arethusa has destabilized and decentered visual signification in her own interpretive process and creative retelling. Through Arethusa's focalization, the reader experiences the chase within the same hierarchy of sensory signifiers as Arethusa. Throughout the passage, Arethusa never concretely describes Alpheus' physical appearance, leaving the reader to wonder and imagine what form Alpheus takes, whether man, beast or some amalgamation of the two. Alpheus' indeterminate appearance leaves his form open to interpretation, inviting the reader to form their own mental image of him as scary, rough or rustic as can be created within the imagination. Thus, leaving Alpheus' appearance "blank" serves a creative function within her tale that could not be achieved through the use of a conventional Ovidian spectacle.

Finally, when Diana envelops Arethusa in a cloud, the spectacle of pursuit diffuses into sensory obscurity. Sight is severed, and Alpheus cannot see Arethusa hidden in the cloud while Arethusa only hears him, heightening the unfolding psychodrama. She recounts,

*... lustrat caligine tectam/ amnis et ignarus circum
cava nubila quaerit/ bisque locum, quo me dea
texerat, inscius ambit/ et bis, 'Io Arethusa,' vocavit,
'Io Arethusa.'*²³

From the aural memory of Alpheus calling her name, Arethusa ascribes values, qualities and motivations to Alpheus, yet refrains from providing a definitive or visually coherent representation of Alpheus' physical qualities. Instead, she describes how he moves through and senses his environment.

²³ Ovid, *Met.* 5.622-5: "...the river encircled me, hidden in the mist, and he, ignorant, sought me in the hollow cloud. Unaware, twice he walked past the spot in which the goddess had hidden me, and twice he called, 'Arethusa! Hey, Arethusa!'"

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The verb *lustrare* fuses sight and motion, producing a synaesthetic gesture that parallels Arethusa's earlier sensory blending; he scans the cloud with his eyes while encircling it with his body.²⁴ Furthermore, whereas Arethusa had either described Alpheus as a *flumen* or simply as *aquae* she now labels him an *amnis*, a torrent or a rapidly flowing stream, to describe the growing aggression of his movements.²⁵ This also may give readers the terrifying impression that the way Alpheus moves isn't entirely human. Arethusa's projection of Alpheus functions for her audience as a collection of inferred movements that make up for what she does not know and cannot see. Within the visual void of the cloud, Arethusa narrates the kinetics of his body.

Arethusa's ensuing simile extends her somatic narration into the psychological realm. She engages her audience rhetorically, asking:

*Quid mihi tunc animi miserae fuit? Anne quod agnae
est, si qua lupos audit circum stabula alta frementes,
aut lepori, qui vepre latens hostilia cernit ora canum
nullosque audet dare corpore motus?*²⁶

In this simile, Arethusa again invokes the connection between mind, body and perception. Here, common predator/prey pairings no longer engage in chase, rather, the prey senses the environment in which her predator prowls. Each prey animal has its own refuge, just as Arethusa has her cloud, and Arethusa subtly heightens the stakes by supplying multiple

²⁴ OLD, "*lustro* (v.)," II.A and V.A.

²⁵ Lewis & Short, "*amnis* (n.)," I.A.

²⁶ Ovid, *Met.* 5.626-9: "What was my mind like at that moment? Was it like that of the lamb, if ever she hears wolves growling around her high stable, or like the hare, who, concealed in the brambles, discerns the hostile mouths of dogs, and dares not give any movement with her body?"

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predators for each prey. This also reflects Arethusa's inability to set Alpheus' eyes in any one place; for her, it's as if his eyes are everywhere. Both prey figures are immobilized, perceiving danger through non-visual means: the lamb through hearing, the hare through the synaesthetic *cernit*, "to distinguish by the senses."²⁷

Yet while vague "discernment" is typically reserved for the pursued, Arethusa's cloud has an equalizing effect: Alpheus can no longer see Arethusa clearly, and must also "discern" as well. Both characters experience an alteration in how they experience the sensory world. Entering back into her narrative, Arethusa explains that, "still, Alpheus didn't leave, for he couldn't discern (*cernit*) any footprints (*vestigia*) moving off; he guards the cloud and the place."²⁸ Yet, while the cloud protects Arethusa from Alpheus' penetrative gaze, ending the spectacle of her flight, the erasure of spectacle becomes itself spectacular, drawing attention to absence as a mode of representation. The void of signifying material instead signifies her presence, just as the *vestigia* Alpheus searches for, which in line 593, signified the foot itself, now signifies only the trace of the foot. Realizing she is trapped, Arethusa's transformation begins, concluding this process of sensory internalization:

*Occupat obsessos sudor mihi frigidus artus,
caeruleaeque cadunt toto de corpore guttae, quaque
pedem movi, manat lacus, eque capillis ros cadit, et
citius quam nunc tibi facta renarro, in latices mutior.*²⁹

In full psychosomatic spectacle, the reader experiences the

²⁷ Lewis & Short, "*cerno* (v.)," II.A.

²⁸ Ovid, *Met.* 5.630-1.

²⁹ Ovid, *Met.* 5.632-6: "Frigid sweat seizes my besieged limbs and blue droplets fall from my entire body. Wherever I move my feet, a pool trickles and dew falls from my hair, and faster than I am able to tell you now, I am transformed into water."

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corporealization of Arethusa's fear into sweat and the sensation of her body's dissolution as it liquefies. Arethusa draws her audience completely into her experience by dramatizing her sense of interoception, describing the sensation and temperature of sweat on her skin. At this moment, the body ceases to function as it should; Ovid most often uses the word *guttae* to describe bodily fluids which bridge human and non-human psychosomatic experiences.³⁰ Here, the word signals the transformation from human "sweat" in the previous line to non-human "dew" later on. Human locomotion transforms as the body "trickles" and "falls" like the liquid she becomes. Instead of footprints, she leaves behind "pools" as she walks. The body and how it experiences itself are defamiliarized through metamorphosis.³¹ The reader is left alone with Arethusa to experience the foreignness of these new sensations and to "feel" the breakdown of normal, human somatic expression. Metamorphosis becomes not something *seen*, but something *experienced*.

Through Arethusa's narrative, Ovid deconstructs the hegemony of the visual within the *Metamorphoses*. Arethusa's haptic, kinaesthetic, and interoceptive storytelling contrasts the ocular dominance of earlier episodes, forcing both character and reader to inhabit a world perceived through sensation rather than sight. Where Apollo's gaze renders Daphne a spectacle to be externally viewed and possessed,

³⁰ Ovid, *Met.* 2.360, 9.659, 10.500.

³¹ No to mention that this kind of "sudden, arbitrary loss of human form" inflicted on an innocent victim is in of itself a profoundly disorienting and discomforting experience (Charles Segal, "Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies: Art, Gender, and Violence in the 'Metamorphoses,'" *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 5, no. 3 (1998): 9-41).

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Arethusa turns that gaze inward, revealing perception to be an embodied, internalized process with the capacity to build empathy between narrator and audience.

Through her story, Ovid experiments with narrative focalization. Arethusa's voice dislocates the reader from the stable vantage of the external observer and relocates them within the fluctuating boundaries of the somatic self. Earlier episodes such as those of Daphne or Syrinx invite the reader's complicity in acts of voyeuristic pleasure, aligning the audience's gaze with that of the desiring god. Arethusa, by contrast, disrupts this dynamic. Her first-person account denies the reader the position of the detached onlooker. Instead, Ovid situates his audience within the immediacy of the pursued body. The reader experiences pursuit not as spectacle, but as somatic participation. Thus, through *Arethusa*, Ovid subverts the very interpretive habits that his poem has previously encouraged: the reflex to eroticize, visualize and dominate through the gaze.

Lily MacDonald
Oberlin College
lmacdona1@oberlin.edu

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