May 2023

Ga(y)zing Backward: Queer Desire in Ovid, Shakespeare, and Scaimma

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By

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Bachelor of Arts – English
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
2019

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts – English

Department of English
College of Liberal Arts
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2023

UNLV | GRADUATE COLLEGE

Thesis Approval

The Graduate College
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas

March 27, 2023

This thesis prepared by

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entitled

Ga(y)zing Backward: Queer Desire in Ovid, Shakespeare, and Sciamma

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts – English
Department of English

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Abstract

As Ovidian myth is a central influence on queer stories throughout time, I am interested in how the female/sapphic gaze impacts the retellings of these narratives. In this thesis, I analyze the action of the gaze as an expression of desire and discuss its multiple meanings in both text and performance. Through tracing the gaze within the queer/sapphic narratives of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire,* I show that the gaze is an intersecting act through which non-normative desire is conveyed. In constructing the gaze as an ephemeral action of queer desire in practice, I also argue that it maintains a resonance within queer narratives throughout time, creating a historical account of non-normative attraction. Gaze captures both the passion and loss within love through informing the memory of the gazer. In the context of queer temporality, the memory of love transcends the inevitable loss that accompanies queer pasts in its refusal to be limited by straight notions of time. As the gaze operates against the traditional language of courtship, it creates sites of queer cultural memory through which the non-normative attraction is preserved. In tracing Ovidian narrative through its temporal transformation into queer culture, we see how the language of sexuality and desire transitions for the purpose of communicating unconventional acts of desire in coded/obscured ways.

Acknowledgements

Major thanks to Katie Walker for her guidance as the chair of my committee throughout this process. This endeavor would not have been possible without her generous encouragement, feedback, and overall excitement about my project.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Kaitlin Clinnin, Vincent Pérez, Timothy Erwin, and Margaret Harp for their service on my committee. Their patience and feedback were invaluable in this process.

I am deeply indebted to my fellow literary scholar, Lindsey Ouk. I am grateful for her continuous emotional support throughout this program, her generosity in taking me into her home, and her being the first to introduce me to the film at the center of this project.

I am also grateful to my classmates for their moral support, namely, Harrison, Oona, Rachel, Tanya, Chris, and Madina.

I would be remiss in not mentioning Brayden Marumoto, my loving partner and personal thesaurus throughout this project.

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Introduction

> "Have you ever tried it?"
> "No."
> "Do you want to?"
> "Now?"
> "She said it makes time last longer."
>
> –*Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (01.32.14-1:32.24)

Heloise presses her fingers into Marianne's underarm, rubbing a drug into her skin to enhance their sexual pleasure, and the image suggests her fingers in a vulva. As the women lounge in bed with one another experimenting with hallucinogenics, their cheeky language and the queer erotics of their bodily communication establishes the subversive modes through which they express their desire. Their explicit (yet concealed) methods of communicating their love are paradigmatic of historical representations of non-normative desire existing within the periphery. Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* operates within this periphery in its historicized examination into queer pasts, emphasizing the subtleties of sapphic love within the heteronormative constraints of 18th century France. Sciamma's presentation of the underarm as an erogenous zone through which Marianne and Heloise arouse one another is a moment that encapsulates how the queer female gaze extends beyond the heteronormative imperative of reproductive genitalia through the pair's queer acts of desire. *Portrait* emphasizes female sexuality and desire through romantic insinuations that construct the slow burn of Marianne and Heloise's love, thus exploring how subversive acts are representative of queer desire. As the cinematic lens accentuates these subtleties, Marianne and Heloise's gazes at one another are

emblematic of the transitory love within queer pasts in how they persist through a history of literary performance. Sciamma's *Portrait* employs the gaze as a conduit through which Marianne and Heloise communicate their attractions, exploring how historicized queer attractions function in marginal spaces.

Portrait also reconfigures Ovidian narrative as an approach for exploring non-normative actions of desire, and Sciamma's use of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice from Ovid's *Metamorphoses Book 10* is a framework that explores the gaze as charged with queer erotic desire. The centrality of Ovidian myth as a cultural trope, especially in queer stories, explores how performances of desire can be expressed despite historical obscurity. Within this first section of my thesis, I examine the story of Orpheus and Eurydice as it presents the gaze and argue that it is a significant expression of desire replicated within historicized queer narratives. I theorize the gaze as an inherently queer act of desire, and I claim that Ovidian themes of love and loss transfer within stories through time, with their adaptations emulating the transformative aspect of myth in conversation with histories of queerness.

Having defined the gaze through queer and feminist theory, I will analyze the gaze as it moves through queer pasts, beginning with Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in Section 2. In this section, I discuss how Ovidian myth influenced Early Modern performance through the subliminal acts of desire as they resonate within representation of queer love. As the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is adapted throughout history, both directly and indirectly, the lasting presence of gazing upon one's object of desire remains as a trope of queer attractions. Considering the queer desire between Olivia and Viola/Cesario, I focus on how their coded actions and language emulate Ovidian themes of non-normative attractions. *Twelfth Night* includes themes of desire and loss similar to the myth of Eurydice and Orpheus; Olivia and

Cesario/Viola's desire and loss through the heteronormative imperatives of comedy points to how Shakespearean adaptation of Ovidian narratives is signaled through themes, characters, and their actions. Because Ovidian works were fundamental to the way Renaissance writers considered sex and sexuality, *Twelfth Night* can be linked to Ovid in historicizing queer narratives through time in capturing the queer gaze.

Section 3 examines Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* as a historicized rendering of Ovidian myth. The shared gaze between Marianne and Héloïse serves as an alternative language between lovers who do not possess the social ability to express queer love within the time period into which they are written. *Portrait* centers the queer female gaze while evoking the story of Orpheus and Eurydice from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a means of illustrating the personal and social stakes of gazing upon one's subject of desire. Through invoking Ovid, Sciamma examines traces of queerness in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, reframing this onscreen through a sapphic relationship. In my close reading of *Portrait*, I explore the sapphic desire embedded within their actions, specifically focusing on how the impermanence of their gaze is preserved through objects of memory. The contradictory nature of the gaze as both temporary and lasting portrays how it acts as a queer symbol of desire in transcending temporal limitations. This contrasting nature allows the gaze to encompass multiple dimensions of expression despite the social limitations of heteronormativity.

As Ovidian myth is central to many stories, specifically queer stories, I am interested in how the female/sapphic gaze impacts the retellings of these narratives. In this thesis, I analyze the action of the gaze as an expression of desire and discuss its multiple meanings in both text and performance. Through tracing the gaze within the queer/sapphic narratives of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire,* I show that the gaze is an intersecting

act through which non-normative desire is conveyed. In constructing the gaze as an ephemeral action of queer desire in practice, I also argue that it maintains a resonance within queer narratives throughout time, creating a historical account of non-normative attraction. Gaze captures both the passion and loss within love through informing the memory of the gazer. In the context of queer temporality, the memory of love transcends the inevitable loss that accompanies queer pasts in its refusal to be limited by straight notions of time. As Orpheus turns back, he holds onto his memory of Eurydice through both love and loss, embracing both in his passions. The gaze represents this dichotomy, considering the imperative of loss associated with the historical queer experience of love due to heteronormative expectations of the period.

Olivia and Cesario/Viola in *Twelfth Night* and Héloïse and Marianne in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* communicate their love through the gaze, which, in being traced back to Orpheus's gaze at Eurydice, determines the stakes of these interactions as exploring differential desires within the social confines of heteronormativity. The gaze within these narratives destabilizes heteronormativity, allowing these characters to disclose their desires through non-normative acts to establish their attractions. As the gaze distances these characters from obligations of normative marriage/family life that follow the heterosexual life path, the impermanence of the act of gazing displays the social confines of heterosexuality within historical and historicized accounts of queer love. Heteronormative expectations in both Shakespeare's Early Modern period and Sciamma's historicized version of 18th-century France suggests traditional courtship, typically organized and supervised by parental figures and always between a man and woman (Dolan 19-20). As the gaze projects direct desire and passion beyond methodological unification of marriage, the gaze unsettles these traditions, and, in turn, destabilizes notions of straight time.

Section 1: Ovid and the Queer Gaze

Ovidian myth lays the groundwork for thinking about sexuality and desire, especially for Early Modern writers who were exploring these subjects in their own works. As Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is widely regarded as highly influential to the artists of the English Renaissance, Arthur Golding's 1567 English translation was the text read and referenced by writers and playwrights of the Early Modern period (Campbell)[1]. Considering the adaptations of Ovid's work throughout time, the *Metamorphoses* was specifically utilized as a story-telling frame through which early modern writers like Shakespeare and later writers could think through plots and characterizations of sex and sexuality by adapting similar thematic elements[2]. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* works through these problems of representing desire, placing a specific emphasis on the queer gaze as an indicator of attraction. Olivia and Orsino in *Twelfth Night* are drawn to the gender-queer Viola/Cesario, this attraction portraying how differential desire was being explored as a trope within Renaissance performance culture.

While many of Ovid's myths were adapted for the purposes of discussing issues of gender, sex, and sexuality, I choose to focus on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice located in *Metamorphoses* 10 because the story includes queer elements that have been echoed and interpreted in interesting ways, especially when thinking about the gaze as a signifier of queer

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[1] "The *Metamorphoses* is the most common source of classical mythology in Renaissance literature, but Ovid's tales evolved over the centuries, and many Ovidian stories appeared in distinctive versions in the works of the Renaissance mythographers" (Campbell).

[2] As Goran Stanivukovic notes in the introduction of *Ovid and the Renaissance Body*,

> Another instance of the idiosyncrasy of Renaissance readings of Ovid is Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of the Metamorphoses…later English writers treated the Ovidian love stories in Golding as a domestic repository of topics, passions, and characters. As a result of such unbridled interpretation, Ovidian narratives of the body became particularly suitable vehicles for constructing new discourses of sexuality, discourses which countered the rigidity that characterized much of the religious writing on the body.

I argue that using Ovidian myth as a vehicle for these types of narratives reaches beyond the Early Modern period as mythology continues to be adapted in contemporary media.

desire. As their short narrative begins with marriage, Eurydice's immediate death causes Orpheus to journey to Hades in the hopes of returning with his wife. Orpheus pleads with the gods, using his musical talents to persuade his audience in his favor:

> The Furies being striken there with pitie at his song
> Did weepe. And neyther Pluto nor his Ladie were so strong
> And hard of stomacke too withhold his just petition long.
> They called foorth Eurydice who was as yit among
> The newcome Ghosts, and limped off her wound. (*Metamorphoses Book X* lines 49-53)

Orpheus's hopes are realized, allowing him to return with Eurydice on the sole condition that he may not turn to her until they are out of the Underworld. As Hades allows him to take Eurydice back to life, he breaks Hades' one rule that he cannot turn back to look at Eurydice,

> Too dowt him least shee followed not, and through an eager love
> Desyrous for too see her, he his eyes did backward move.
> Immediately shee slipped backe. He retching out his hands,
> Desyrous too bee caught and for too ketch her grasping stands.
> But nothing save the slippry aire (unhappy man) he caught. (*X*.59-63)

Orpheus's eager love causes him to break this condition, showing his immense passion for Eurydice. Despite his knowing that Eurydice would return to Hades, his curiosity informed his turn to her as he questioned the verity of his promised love. His desire to hold onto her expresses a "queering" of the gaze through which he chooses the path of eternal passion and longing over possession. Although this myth has been widely interpreted in a variety of ways, the queer resonances of this myth remain, whether that be through Orpheus's backward turn or his eventual turn to desiring young men in mourning his wife.

Orpheus's decision to embrace the loss of his wife, rejecting the advances of other women shows the ways in which his backward turn was informed by his true passion for Eurydice. While his attention was only directed towards young boys, his gaze rejected the heterosexual obligations through which the women he rejected tried to confine him. In his abandonment of traditional heterosexual roles following his backward turn, he is violently dismembered by them:

> And then with blurry hands
> They ran uppon the prophet who among them singing stands.
> They flockt about him like as when a sort of birds have found
> An Owle a day tymes in a tod: and hem him in full round,
> As when a Stag by hungrye hownds is in a morning found,
> The which forestall him round about and pull him to the ground. (*Metamorphoses* Book *XI*.23-28)

Orpheus's dismemberment by those trying to enforce marital and familial obligations upon him shows the societal rejection of his decision, leading to his violent murder. In his death, Orpheus joins his lost love, showing the lasting presence of his passionate gaze in transcending death through their reunification in the afterlife.

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice has been widely adapted[3] and analyzed over the course of centuries yet echoes of this story continue to be relevant in modern culture due to a collective fascination with the gaze of Orpheus and the choice he makes in turning back to Eurydice despite knowing that it will seal her fate. While the modern and early modern adaptations of this narrative are not ubiquitously queer (seeing the relationship between Orpheus

[3] See *Hadestown* (2006,2017), *Eurydice* (2003), *Black Orpheus* (1959), and Gaiman's *The Sandman* (2022)

and Eurydice is heterosexual), I argue that the action of gazing backward toward Eurydice is queer in the sense that Orpheus discontinues the heterosexual expectation of marriage, home, and family that society imposes on normative romantic relationships. This presence can ultimately be traced through many later narratives in the presence of "queer gaze" as an action that pauses/stops/reconfigures the expectations placed on desire to be conventional and in the direction of heterosexual reproduction.

As this project examines queer pasts and performances of queer desire through time, Heather Love's *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics in Queer History* provides insight into thinking about what is at stake in examining queer history through art and literature. Love's work explores how queerness is documented through loss, and Love employs examples including the story of Orpheus and Eurydice as an allegorical rumination to define the queer historical experience (Love 5). Through identifying these moments of "backwardness,"[4] Love offers a framework for thinking about historicized art as representations of the connection between the past and present:

> As queer readers, we tend to see ourselves as reaching back toward isolated figures in the queer past in order to rescue or save them. It is hard to know what to do with texts that resist our advances. Texts or figures that refuse to be redeemed disrupt not only the progress narrative of queer history but also our sense of queer identity in the present. We

[4] Love uses the term 'backwardness' to define the queer disengagement from heternormativite structures, saying,

> Accounts of queer life as backward are ideological, however backwardness has the status of a lived reality in gay and lesbian life. Not only do many queers, as I suggest, feel backward, but backwardness has been taken up as a key feature of queer culture… Over the last century, queers have embraced backwardness in many forms: in celebrations of perversion, in defiant refusals to grow up, in explorations of haunting and memory, and in stubborn attachments to lost objects (7).

As her historical project offers literary allegories as representations of the queer gaze into the past, Love asks us to gaze backwards to the past in search of understanding the politics of queer loss. Love's 'stubborn attachment' to this lost queer past is a refusal to progress in the queer political sphere without first commemorating queer histories through the suffered losses.

> find ourselves deeply unsettled by our identifications with these figures: the history of queer damage retains its capacity to do harm in the present. (Love 8-9)

While Love affirms the stakes of turning to the past in search of queer loss, the memory of this loss works to inform the queer political future. As I draw parallels between the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, *Twelfth Night,* and *Portrait, Feeling Backward* establishes the idea that queer history and loss is meaningful to trace through time as a culmination of the queer experience.

Love's *Feeling Backward* aids in constructing this idea of backward gaze in thinking through Orpheus's gaze as inherently queer in its performance. As Love considers Michel Foucault and Maurice Blanchot's meditations on Ovid's story of Eurydice and Orpheus, she examines the challenges of gaze and how it functions in queer space as an intrinsic complication. She considers this in relation to queer historicism and how this backward gaze is a "rescue effort that can only take place under the shadow of loss and in the name of loss; success would constitute failure" (Love 51). The Orphic gaze functions in a similar manner (as outlined by Blanchot[5]) as both gazing and not gazing at Eurydice are acts of betrayal. Through the perverseness of the gaze, the passion embedded within love and the loss of love defines how queer desire operates in heteronormative spaces. The queer historical project bargains with time in representing non-normative desires. The "turn back" that Love calls for highlights how

[5] Within Blanchot's essay, "The Gaze of Orpheus," he outlines how "Orpheus's mistake, then, should seem to be in the desire which leads him to see Eurydice and to possess her, while he is destined only to sing about her" (Blanchot 100-101). This explanation of the Orpheus story displays how his desire to look upon Eurydice was queer in the sense that it disrupted expectations of traditional love and loss. As Blanchot's essay validates Orpheus's desire to look back, he explores the ways in which these moments of inexplicable passion are when one is most true to their desires despite the ways in which these desires go against traditional values of love (i.e. marriage, family).

queerness can engage with the melancholy of queer pasts. Through Love's engagement with Valerie Traub's *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England,* Love is interested in how "Traub hopes to borrow some of the pleasure of psychic and historical identification and reinvest it in desire," especially considering how the queer male perspective often underplays the history of lesbianism (Love 41). When Love turns to the past in search of meaningful queer histories, she embraces how queer pasts become quasi-mythologies for queer presents.

Valerie Traub's *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* discusses the ways in which literature that centers sapphic desire in the Renaissance period was categorically disregarded by previous scholarship. While Latin literature such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* does not overtly center sapphic desire in any tangible way, the adaptations and interpretations of these stories often further the queerness that was originally embedded in the text. *Twelfth Night,* while not directly adapted from Ovid, provides a perspective into the manifestation of the queer gaze between female characters. Queer desire operates differently within heteronormative spaces; Traub draws attention to how Early Modern representations of queerness should be viewed through a different scope:

> By claiming a variety of representations as erotic, I enact a lesbian-affirmative analytic, one that begins with the assumption of the worth and variety of female emotional and physical ties, and moves from there to explore the ways such ties are portrayed. By "desire" and more specifically "erotic desire," I mean, quite simply, intense emotional investment and compelling erotic attraction - that which the early moderns referred to as love, passion, appetite, lust. Manifestations of erotic desire among women took multiple forms: they include caresses, kisses, bodily penetration, and passionate verbal addresses expressing longing, loss, devotion, frustration, pleasure, and pain. Although some such

> manifestations of affection and tenderness appear to be indifferent to the genitals, I maintain that they are no less erotogenic, no less engaged with the pleasurable resources of the body, for that indifference. (13)

Traub explores how desire may look the same and yet different to heterosexual relationships. However, her representation of these queer pasts as meaningful engagements with history shows how this gaze into queerness allows for more meaningful interpretations of what, at first glance, may appear to be a close female-female friendship. As desire remains significant to interpretations and re-interpretations of queer pasts, this concentration on how differential desire operates informs queerness as rooted in cultural antecedents. Similarly, the threading through of the Orpheus and Eurydice story throughout the plot of *Portrait* recenters the gaze as a motif of desire, specifically around a sapphic love story that maintains the Ovidian essence of bargaining with love and loss.

The discourse surrounding the gaze in performance is vital to how I approach queerness and performances of desire. Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema" defines the straight male gaze as pivotal to how more recent scholars have formulated the idea of the queer and female gaze. Mulvey focuses on the male gaze, claiming that "The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect" (Mulvey 807). As she defines the male gaze through sexual imbalance and social power structures, she establishes viewing within the cinematic scope as reinforcing these norms in the cinema's portrayal of women and sexuality.[6]

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[6] As Laura Mulvey speaks to the social structures of gender, her definitions of the male gaze within the cinematic have opened conversations of the female gaze, queer gaze, and more within structures of media. Through her analysis of these structures, she speaks to the stylizing of media as fraught with sexual imbalance and fetishizations:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure looking has been split between active male and passive female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female future which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with

To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema by Sandy Flitterman-Lewis considers how the gaze operates in cinematic spaces, often using Mulvey's work as a foundation for her critiques. Flitterman-Lewis's discussions of the portrayal of female desire within French cinema offer a redefinition of film-viewing cognizant of female viewing pleasure. As she highlights the problematic voyeurism of the cinematic in conversation with Mulvey, Flitterman-Lewis quotes Mary Ann Doane's "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body" who "[posits] a feminist cinema that 'speaks' the female body differently, displacing the gaze in an effort which consists 'of reworking, rearticulating the specular imaging of woman.'" (Qtd. in Flitterman-Lewis 8-9). Considering how the gaze operates within performance and cinema, Flitterman-Lewis's consciousness of the spectator and their understanding of female desire in viewing offers a psychoanalytic approach to the gaze within the cinematic which is useful in considering feminine communications of attraction. The cinematic female gaze operates against the grain of traditional fetishistic/voyeuristic male gaze cinema, and this deepens the connection between the female gaze and differential desire through a spectral lens. In later sections, I argue that this type of gaze is necessary for uncovering the queer passions of *Twelfth Night* and *Portrait.*

Flitterman-Lewis's construction of the cinematic gaze in portraying female desire within French films such as *The Seashell and the Clergymen* and *Vagabond* displays a feminist counter-cinema that aligns closely with Sciamma's *Portrait* as it orients the viewer away from patriarchal dispositions. Through her analysis of the viewer within the cinematic structure, her focus on their gaze informs how she defines the female viewing pleasure. She takes inspiration from Chantal

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> their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness* (808-809).

While Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" has been expanded upon by other feminist film theorists and taken up by other disciplines as a mode for considering power structures in media, this article is foundational in considering the male gaze as a perpetual mode for assessing the female presence in media.

Ackerman's idea of "la jouissance du voir" and homes in on this sexuality of the gaze as it transcends the gender binary:

> In speaking of her own film work, Chantal Akerman acknowledges the sexual pleasure in viewing itself by suggesting the phrase "the ecstasy of seeing" (la jouissance du voir). This is a kind of looking undefined by gender hierarchies and dissociated from the objectifying power of the masculine gaze. (307)

As Flitterman-Lewis expands upon this "ecstasy of seeing" beyond male desires, she explores how this viewing component synthesizes counter-culture cinema by focusing cinematic desires beyond the "dominant look of masculinity" (306). Through "la jouissance du voir" that Ackerman posits, this form of gaze queers male spectatorship, emphasizing the visual components of cinema to characterize the passions of those on screen. Sciamma's attention to the female gaze within *Portrait,* both in spectatorship and the cinematic, shows how the female gaze disrupts conventions of desire.

Ovidian myth remains a template for adaptation and appropriation, and Douglass Lanier's application of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory[7] to Shakespearean stories provides an interesting framework for thinking about how these re-interpretations of classic stories are re-imagined through time. Lisa S. Starks takes this a step further in her compiled essay collection *Ovid and Adaptation in Early Modern English Literature,* where she addresses how rhizome theory can also be applied to Ovid in the ways his stories expand and grow through time. In

[7] As Lanier considers Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory in the perspective of Shakespearian narratives, his interactions with the "root-books" can be traced even further back to Ovidian narrative. Considering the arboreal structure that DG traces into historical literature the "'arborescent thoughts,' are organized into homogenous, vertically hierarchical schema and historical genealogies. In an arboreal structure, meaning is conceived in terms of a single root and myriad branches, its growth governed by an entelechy determined by that root" (Lanier 28) As Starks furthers this interpretation from Shakespearian to Ovidian cultural influence, the rhizome acts as a temporally fluid interconnection through which narratives of sexuality and desire can be traced.

considering the adaptation of Ovidian myth into Renaissance and modern performance, Stark's section "Gender/Queer/Trans Studies and Ovidian Rhizomes" provides insight for thinking about how specifically queer stories are regenerated throughout time in various ways.

In the context of this project, Stark's relation of rhizome theory to Ovidian studies provides a framework for thinking about the performance of queer desire through gaze as a "rhizome" that re-emerges in stories that center on non-normative relationships. As this idea of queer gaze maintains relevance in modern performances like *Portrait,* queer desire continues to be communicated through unspoken terms. This performance of queer desire is especially important in thinking about the ways in which sapphic love is less established in literature and art due to a lack of determinant language specifying lesbian attraction. In tracing how the story of Orpheus and Eurydice is present in *Twelfth Night* and *Portrait,* the queer gaze functions as an alternative to language in communicating attraction, specifically operating as an act of passion.

Within *Twelfth Night* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire,* the Orphic influence exhibited through gaze and differential desire shows how queer stories derive from narratives of the past. In tracing this influence through the temporal scope, the nuance within these acts of desire works to establish queer erotics through the codified past. As Orpheus acts as a queer trope within the literature of the past, his gaze remains an unsettling moment within myth as it moves against heteronormativity. As this gaze is adapted and reformulated within Early Modern and modern performance culture, this emphasis on the disruptiveness of queer gaze, especially in portraying sapphic love, explores the erotic anxieties of queerness within normative spaces and how these anxieties reoccur in the historical project through impossibilities.

Section 2: Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and the Queer Gaze

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* transcends the passage of time: Early Modern works echoed the subversive subjects and characters present in those myths, especially on the topics of sexuality and desire. The popularity of Ovidian narrative in Renaissance England as a cultural influence is due to its presence in English grade school curriculum (Campbell). Through this influence, many of these stories inspired Shakespeare and his contemporaries in literary explorations of sexuality and desire. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* portrays desire that extends beyond the realm of courtly love, motioning to the non-normative attractions within many of Ovid's myths. Although Ovidian influence could be traced through many themes and characters within *Twelfth Night*, analyzing the unconventional representations of desire through the queer gaze shows connections to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. *Twelfth Night* comedically gestures to the artificial traditions of love and relationships within the Renaissance period; the initial attraction between Olivia and Viola/Cesario demonstrates the queer gaze through their nuanced interactions. Olivia's interest in Cesario, while seemingly hetero-normative, is complicated through Cesario's true identity as Viola,[8] expressing the subversive relationships between characters within the play. As Shakespeare employs notions of transformative desire, the queer gaze embedded within *Twelfth Night* motions to the unconventionality of the Orphic gaze in *Metamorphoses* 10.

[8] Within this project, I will refer to Viola/Cesario using the pronouns she/they. I choose to do so due to their portrayal as existing beyond the gender binary through their dress and queer sexual attractions. This is informed both through the crossdressing aspect of Early Modern performance as well as Viola/Cesario's own character motivations in transitioning their gender performance within the plot. As the Early Modern stage would have used male actors for all female parts, I also suggest a queerness to all the female parts within the play, referencing Simone Chess's article, "Queer Residue: Boy Actors' Adult Careers in Early Modern England," in exploring the cross-dressing of boy actors which often continued into their adult careers, especially in portraying women's roles in a more nonbinary and/or trans feminine mode. Chess's insistence on the "queer residue" of Early Modern gendered performances shows possible evidence of early representations of queerness and/or transness in line with the gender portrayal of Viola/Cesario.

Within *Twelfth Night,* Olivia, Orsino, and Viola/Cesario's love triangle causes much confusion as their motivations of desire become entangled through their interactions. While Olivia loves Cesario, Viola's desire for Orsino is complicated by Orsino's infatuation with Olivia. These characters communicate their desires in circuitous ways, causing the confusion to grow through miscommunications and Viola's crossdressing, and ultimately showing how their indirect conveyance of desire disrupts traditional expressions of courtly love. While Viola exists as a servant in the court of Duke Orsino, her position as a subordinate furthers her role as not meeting the expectations of a traditional suitor for either Countess Olivia or Duke Orsino. Viola/Cesario's character is a woman disguised as a young man, deceiving the Duke and Countess to act on their non-normative desires with them as the object of affection. While Olivia goes on to marry Viola's brother, Sebastian, in a case of mistaken identity, Orsino's marriage to Cesario/Viola acts as a comedic moment through which Olivia and Orsino are permitted to act on their queer desires. While Olivia and Orsino are seemingly motivated through their heteronormative attractions, their veiled desires towards Cesario/Viola express how their gaze reveals their true interest in queerness.

Considering the presence of the gaze as a symbol of one's true desire, the gaze within *Twelfth Night* echoes the power of longing look in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in the sense that Orpheus's turn back to Eurydice despite knowing her fate expresses his true passions, disregarding the rules placed upon him. While the traditions of courtly love within the Renaissance period acted differently, the cultural expectation of heteronormativity placed upon the characters within *Twelfth Night* is destabilized through the comedic gender confusion and sexual passions of the characters. Court traditions of relationships were typically structured through power and familial lines, setting a heteronormative expectation of marriage as a social

obligation rather than a conveyance of desire. *Twelfth Night* eventually follows this expectation of heteronormative marriage but first shows the actual desire between characters through the queer gaze. As Olivia and Orsino's gaze reveals their true infatuations, their attractions are embedded within their actions rather than their words, mirroring the same passions that caused Orpheus to turn back. The queer gaze within *Twelfth Night* is signaled through the homoerotic desires between the characters; their gaze functioning in a similar manner to the gaze of Orpheus in the sense that it disrupts traditional representations of love in their trajectory toward conventionality.

Through the transference of queer essences from Ovid to Shakespeare, the deconstruction of gender norms through Viola/Cesario is reminiscent of Ovidian themes of love and transformation. As Shakespeare employs myth as a mode to be in conversation with histories of queerness, Lisa S. Starks explores how this interconnectivity lends tropes through adaptation and appropriation of Ovid. Within Starks' editorial essay collection, *Ovid and Adaptation in Early Modern English Theatre,* Simone Chess's "Queer Gender Informants in Ovid and Shakespeare" explores these themes of queerness and transformation, using Viola/Cesario as an example of a Shakespearian character that queers the gender binary. Considering how Viola/Cesario traverses the bounds of gender, Chess explores how Shakespeare's plays reproduce Ovidian tropes of queerness:

> Adapting less the details than the essence, Shakespeare uses the authority of Ovid to animate queer and trans tropes in his texts, even when the adaptation is abstract; in turn, we do the same to Shakespeare, reading his plays and poems with an eye for recognition of those same queer and trans types. (Chess 33)

As Viola/Cesario represents a gender-queer trope within *Twelfth Night* Chess relates Shakespearian characters to those within Ovid's Metamorphoses (i.e. Iphis and Viola, Tiresias and Mardian, and Caenus and Portia)[9] who also move across the gender binary to show the rhizomatic structure of Ovid's influence in queer adaptations (33). As Ovidian influence produces an interconnected web of stories, the residual Ovidian queerness shown through Shakespeare's plays exhibits how histories of queerness are in conversation with each other to reimagine queer pasts. Through focusing on Ovidian themes of desire and lovesickness, Viola/Cesario's "queer perspectives in matters of gender and love" reinforces the comedy of the love triangle between themself and Orsino and Olivia as their queerness reveals the true passions of their characters (Chess 33). Viola/Cesario's embodied representation of queer desires and non-normative gender identity within the play motions to heterosexual social incongruences in matters of sexual attractions.

As the plot centers the relationships between Duke Orsino, Countess Olivia, and Cesario/Viola, the queer attractions between Olivia and Viola/Cesario remain at the forefront of my analysis as Olivia's active pursuit of Viola displays her passions rather than her adherence to the social expectation that she wed Duke Orsino or another man. Through Olivia's explicit pursuit of Viola/Cesario and Viola's notice of Olivia's beauty and wit, their banter expresses a level of attraction between the two despite Viola's stated interest in Orsino. The queer female gaze shared between them portrays their differential desires as their words and actions express more passion than that of the passive male presence embodied through Orsino, Malvolio, and

[9] Within Simone Chess's "Queer Gender Informants in Ovid and Shakespeare," she traces Ovidian influence within what she terms Shakespearean gender/queer "informants" as they exist as sources of knowledge for informing conversations regarding sexuality and desire (21-22). Her chapter from *Ovid and Adaptation in the Early Modern English Theatre,* supposes that Shakespeare "anticipates our modern trans and gender theories, in which nonbinary and trans gender informants allow for a richer, more complex, queerer view of gender in general" (22).

Sebastian's character. As Olivia and Viola/Cesario's gaze represents their more action-forward desires, their position as female characters taking charge of their own romantic inclinations queers the traditional processes of love, desire, and relationships within the renaissance court. Although Olivia and Viola eventually are contained within heterosexual relationships, their expressions of desire towards one another indicates a level of attraction that is only permissible when the perceived relationship is between a woman (Olivia) and a man (Cesario).

Through their queer interactions, the lustful gaze between Olivia and Viola/Cesario is permitted by Olivia despite her decision to veil her face and reject marriage for seven years while mourning the death of her brother. As Olivia makes an active decision to communicate with Viola/Cesario given the information that they are a youth rather than an adult man, she displays her comfort with their presence despite rejecting all others that attempted to court her in Orsino's place. In Olivia's decision to permit him, "Give me my veil; come throw it o'er my face. / We'll once more hear Orsino's embassy," her decision to veil her face in the presence of Cesario expresses her desire to control who may gaze upon her (1.5.179-180). As she emphasizes the significance of gaze using a veil, this protects her from unwanted male attention as she mourns. While protecting her own image, she also disrupts her own gaze through placing a barrier between her own eyes and whomever she is speaking with. As Viola/Cesario and Olivia begin to converse, Viola requests to gaze upon Olivia's face in order to deliver Orsino's message:

> Viola: Good madam, let me see your face.
>
> Olivia: Have you any commission from your lord
>
> to negotiate with my face? You are now out of
>
> your text. But we will draw the curtain and
>
> show you the picture.

[Unveils .] Look you, sir, such a one I was this

present. Is't not well done? (1.5.223-228)

In Olivia's retort, her decision to allow Cesario to gaze upon her is motivated by her own attractions which she expresses by allowing a man to look upon her while she is engaged in her mourning period for her dead brother. Olivia's reference to herself as a "picture" insinuates that she is artwork for Cesario to gaze upon. In this reference, Olivia's objectification of herself as a site of memory suggests an artist/muse connection between herself and Cesario. Through the unveiled gaze between them, this action signifies their desire, especially Viola's wanting to see Olivia's face, showing that they must see her beauty to engage in romantic language. While Viola is romantically interested in Duke Orsino, the nature of her words and actions emphasizes a sense of attraction towards Olivia which is communicated through their mutual gaze.

As Olivia requests that Cesario/Viola court her in their own words rather than Orsino's, Viola/Cesario's attraction to Olivia allows her to transcend Orsino's poetics and develop her own speech to attract Olivia in place of her master. Viola/Cesario's courtship from her own words rather than Orsino's carefully crafted poetics displays more passion because they are directly influenced by her initial gazing upon Olivia. Viola, while maintaining a formalism to her speech, expresses her desire for Olivia in a more prose-like fervor that echoes the passion of her gaze. As Viola describes Olivia's beauty:

'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white

Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.

Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive

If you will lead these graces to the grave

And leave the world no copy. (1.5.231-235)

her artistic approach to courting Olivia places her in the position of muse seeing that Viola constructs her through a language of painting, mirroring Olivia's earlier reference to herself as artwork. As Viola/Cesario explains that Olivia's beauty is "truly blent" and that it would be wrong to "leave the world no copy," she explores the idea that Olivia is a work of art for which there should be reproductions, showing Viola's own fancies. Because Viola requested that Olivia reveal her face prior to her speeches, these romantic words are directly inspired by her appreciation of Olivia's beauty. As Olivia becomes the muse to Viola/Cesario's prose, the painting metaphor within these lines considers the erotic connection between an artist and their inspiration.

Through the muse/artist connection that develops between Olivia and Viola/Cesario in this scene, the references to painting and music establish the intimacy within the relationship as Viola employs these terms to describe how she would love Olivia. Viola's artistic metaphors in her courting of Olivia highlights the affection within the gaze shared between an artist and their subject, relating back to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Seeing that Eurydice inspired Orpheus's hymns, this establishes the passion within their mutual gaze. Through the connection between an artist and their subject, this unconventional relationship, while not overtly romantic, captures the true passions and desires within shared gaze and the art that is produced in the process. As Viola mirrors this relationship in her prose, this connects her desire to Ovidian constructs of alternative love and passion seen in Orpheus's decision to turn back.

While Olivia remains in a state of mourning, her refusal to show her face or entertain the idea of marriage following the death of her brother explores her notion that the male gaze simply desires her for her beauty alone. In controlling who may look upon her, she shows her disinterest in participating in the traditions of courtship as shown through her rejection of Orsino's advances

by proxy. Through Olivia's powerful rejections of the normative court structures, she protects herself from being coveted for her beauty alone; instead insisting on the passion she finds through her connection with Viola/Cesario. In reply to Cesario's notice of her beauty, Olivia jokes about conducting an inventory of her body; indicating that her beauty is all for which she is appreciated:

> O, sir, I will not be so hard-hearted! I will give out
> divers schedules of my beauty. It shall be inventoried
> and every particle and utensil labeled to my will: as,
> item, two lips indifferent red; item, two gray eyes with
> lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth.
> Were you sent hither to praise me? (1.5.236-241)

Olivia lists these parts of her face in a deconstructed manner, disembodying her features as a simple inventory to emphasize the violence of the male gaze.[10] Through conducting a metaphorical inventory of her beauty, Oliva emphasizes that for which she is valued in the courtship she has endured. As she satirizes her own position as a literal object of desire, she rejects the mechanical love that the male gaze offers because it does not regard her personhood and desires. Olivia's commentary on the perfunctory nature of courtly love through her self-inventory explores how male, heteronormative desire operates according to the social order rather than one's passions. As Olivia continues to be wooed by Viola/Cesario in this scene, Olivia's interest in what Viola/Cesario would do to win her love displays how she longs to experience true desire.

[10] Within Olivia's speech, her inventory of her body parts parallels the Renaissance trope of blazon poetry, which "typically lavished extravagant praise on the parts of a woman's body" (Campbell). While renaissance poetry would itemize body parts to focus on their beauty, Olivia adapts this in her speech to speak to the male objectification of women.

Considering the homoerotic charge embedded within Viola/Cesario's conversation with Olivia, their pleas to woo her in place of Orsino allows them to explore sexuality. Through Viola/Cesario's appeals, their lovesickness and active exercise of love and loss echo that of Orpheus upon losing Eurydice to the underworld for the second time. Within Viola/Cesario's speech exclaiming:

> Make me a willow cabin at your gate
> And call upon my soul within the house,
> Write loyal cantons of contemnèd love,
> And sing them loud even in the dead of night;
> Hallow your name to the reverberate hills,
> And make the babbling gossip of the air
> Cry out 'Olivia!' O, you should not rest
> Between the elements of air and earth
> But you should pity me. (1.5.260–269)

he/she emulates the lovesickness that Olivia causes Orsino, affirming that if they were in his position, they would write songs and call out to her from beyond her gates. As Viola/Cesario takes on this longing and loss, they experience a similar desire that Orpheus faces as he returns from Hades without his beloved. Through Orpheus's sorrow at the gates of Hell, his experience of mourning parallels the feeling of pity that Viola/Cesario evokes. Orpheus's grief is meant to show the true passion in his decision to turn back to look at Eurydice:

> He would have gone to Hell ageine, and earnest sute did make:
> But Charon would not suffer him to passe the Stygian lake.
> Seven dayes he sate forlorne uppon the bank and never eate

> A bit of bread. Care, teares, and thought, and sorrow were his meate. (*Metamorphoses X*.79-82)

In realizing the loss of his love and letting go, Orpheus's choice to wait at the riverbank crying out displays his true love for Eurydice even in his loss of her. As Orpheus and Viola/Cesario recognize how this loss emerges from experiencing love, Viola/Cesario's claim that they would still exclaim their love even after being cast out of Olivia's gates reaffirms the desire and passion within Viola/Cesario's gaze.

As Viola/Cesario emulates Ovidian themes of love, loss, and gender/queer expression, Olivia's gaze towards them as the object of her desire expresses the tension between the performativity of courtly love and true passions. Viola/Cesario takes on the role of both man and woman with ease, showing her own comfort with a more genderqueer embodiment just as Olivia desires them as a lover despite his being a young boy. Through this expression of differential desire, Valerie Traub explores the sapphic/homoerotic tensions of their interactions within *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England.* Traub notes the queerness within several of Shakespeare's plays, her analysis of Viola/Cesario provides insight into thinking about the relationship between Viola/Cesario and Olivia as sapphic-coded:

> It is as object of another woman's desire that Cesario finds her own erotic voice. Olivia's response to this wooing - "You might do much" (272) - marks the moment when the mournful lady gives her heart to the woman she takes for a man. The erotic tension between Cesario and Olivia (and the pleasure the audience takes in this tension) does much to explain why Cesario does not forsake her masculine costume when the confusions her impersonation have wrought threaten her with violence (Traub 57).

Traub's notice of the erotic charge between Olivia and Viola/Cesario shows how both of their characters can explore sexuality and desire within their connection with one another. Through Viola assuming the role of Cesario in her crossdressing, she explores sexual desire by embodying a space beyond the gender binary. Olivia's longing for the passion and action that Cesario promises fulfills her want to experience true love exceeding what Orsino promises her. In their ability to explore their true sexual inclinations through their queer/sapphic coded connection, they uncover the passion, love, and loss rooted within Ovidian mythos as existing out of the bounds of social expectations.

While Olivia and Viola/Cesario do not engage in a true romance, their subliminal attractions indicate a true connection between them that transcends heteronormative linearity. As Traub acknowledges the impracticality of locating lesbian relationships within Early Modern works, her project of unearthing implied sapphic desire works to historicize the queer experience. Through connecting Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to roots in Ovidian mythology, the essences of lesbianism and Ovid act similarly in the sense that, sometimes, their connections are encoded. Traub indicates the "Renaissance of Lesbianism" as

> …a rebirth of classical idioms, rhetorics, tropes, and illustrative examples that female homoeroticism gained intelligibility in early modern England. By renovating the discourses of the ancients, writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attempted to legitimize their own formulations, drawing on authoritative precedents such as Ovid… for risqué or troubling ideas (Traub 8).

Through invoking Ovidian thematics and tropes within his work, Shakespeare's transformation of classical works cultivates imaginative re-examinations of sexuality and desire as they are

reproduced through time. As these tropes of classical and renaissance works are emulated through time, the queer and sapphic notions continue to connect queerness to the past. Considering the expansive reach of both Ovid and Shakespeare in literature and arts, the adaptation of their work throughout popular culture creates an interconnected web of stories through which queerness can be traced. Through examining the function of queer gaze and differential desire through Ovidian rhizomes, we can engage with queer presents through historicizing queer pasts. As Ovid's *Metamorphoses* remains a significant mode for interacting with mythos, the stories that emerge through the appropriation of the homoerotic undertones of his work allow for queer readings of history embedded within literature, arts, and performance. As the relationship between Viola/Cesario and Olivia within *Twelfth Night* peers into the homoerotics of lesbianism, this representation is foundational in understanding the early modern implications of sapphic love in performance.

Section 3: Sapphic Gaze in Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*

"Do all lovers feel as though they are inventing something?"

– *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (1.23.53)

Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* explores the sapphic love between Marianne and Héloïse, who primarily utilize the gaze as a signifier of their desire. As this pair discovers their love and desire for one another, their looks, longing gazes, and looking away from one another effectively queer the Ovidian myth of Orpheus and Eurydice that this film so closely follows through reimagining the story through the sapphic gaze. Considering how queer narratives operate throughout history through implicit desires, Sciamma's appropriation of Ovidian myth centers sapphic desire in more explicit ways, using the idea of "gaze" as a resonance of Orpheus while exploring historicized queerness in more overt ways.

Throughout Sciamma's *Portrait,* the audience follows Marianne and Héloïse as they navigate queerness within a time and place that rejects sapphic love. Sciamma works to center the queer female gaze through cinematographic storytelling utilizing the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as a gateway, and by transforming the myth into a sapphic love story. The presence of gaze as a signifier of desire, especially that of queer desire, remains a signal for considering how love is expressed where language fails. Seeing that Sciamma stages this film within 18th-century France, she displays how queer relationships might have existed in a period that lacked the social vocabulary to traverse non-normative desire. Through this fictional performance, she historicizes the idea of queer female desire, centering the film around the female experience through Marianne's point of view. Marianne's position as a painter and narrator underscores the significance of her gaze within the film, showing how her gaze operates in a similar manner to

the Orphic narration throughout Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* As Orpheus tells stories/myth through song, these mediums of artistic storytelling represent communication through unspoken modes, ultimately emphasizing a methodology of expression that transcends language alone.

Sciamma's invocations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* point to how the male gaze is universally centered through mainstream storytelling given the ubiquitous reach of Greek mythology throughout time. As the director references the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice being commonly read as "how the male gaze can kill you" in her interview with Emily VanDerWerff for *Vox,* Sciamma explains how she was thinking about the myth in reference to popular culture and the discourse surrounding this story. *Portrait* pushes against the male gaze, framing the film through feminine desire. Sciamma explores the female gaze, transposing mythological Orphic narrative to center this queering of gaze. As displayed through the primarily female screen time, the film's concentration on women through their interactions with other women considers how female/queer desire operates within sorority.

Portrait provides a modern access point in showing how Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a foundational text for tracing how stories involving queerness evolve through time, forming a rhizomatic structure through which Orphic tropes are mirrored in performances to this day. The film's "backward glance" at a sapphic love story in 18th century France utilizes a pervasive mythological framework to imbue the relationship between Marianne and Héloïse with characterizations of Orpheus and Eurydice as well as other reconfigurations of Ovidian themes that may have been informed by this myth. This idea of gaze as a rhizomatic feature of performance that traverses temporality displays how Orphic notions of love and loss are commonly reproduced in stories that center on queerness as a means of representing queer pasts. As Sciamma seeks to explore the female gaze, I argue that this film reconceptualizes the Orphic

gaze as being inherently queer because it rejects "straight temporality;" instead, opting to embrace the perverseness of both love and loss.

The opening scene of *Portrait* begins with a painting class for which Marianne is the portrait model and the instructor. Marianne teaches young women how to paint, emphasizing the gaze with her opening line "take time to look at me" (00.01.48). Since she is the subject of the portrait the students are painting, studying her appearance is important to capturing her essence. With Marianne as the subject of the portrait and the center of the scene, viewing her gaze then shift to the "Portrait de la jeune fille en feu" (or portrait of a young lady on fire) establishes nuance within the scene that prepares the audience for the flashback that is to come. The audience views Marianne gazing at a portrait of a woman on fire, with her back turned to Marianne as the painter and viewer of the portrait. Within the painting, the audience sees a blonde woman in the middle of a field with the bottom of her dress on fire. Through this shot, the narrative transitions to the past as the portrait acts as a window to the moments that led to the conception of this piece. The audience sees how Marianne longingly looks at the portrait that her students draw attention to and how her gaze towards this piece establishes some semblance of a connection between herself as the artist to the subject of the portrait. While Marianne seems unwilling to discuss the portrait with her students, her reluctance indicates a feeling of loss associated with the deeper meaning behind the portrait.

As the narrative shifts backwards in time to explore the connection between Marianne and Héloïse, this temporal shift to the past disrupts linear modes of storytelling. The flashback mirrors Sciamma's intention to view the past as a frame for exploring queer desire. When considering this flashback as a temporal disruption, this analysis is deepened through relations to Heather Love's *Feeling Backward* through turning to the past in search of a space for

constructing the queer experience through a history of loss. Love's construction of queer culture as being imbued with a past of loss aims to embrace queer pasts, offering a method for recontextualizing the queer experience through time:

> "I am particularly attuned to the queer historical experience of failed or impossible love and have tried to make this feeling the basis for my own approach to the past. It is this disposition toward the past – embracing loss, risking abjection – that I mean to evoke with the phrase 'feeling backward'" (Love 30).

Love shows how this turn to the past reconstitutes the present through a queering of temporality to redefine queer love and desire. As this idea of backwardness persists, the historical lens through which *Portrait* exists provides an interesting period to insert a sapphic love story, especially considering the lack of representation in historical/canonical texts. Love's gaze backward as it connects to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice further aids the construction queer desire as gaze propels the interconnectivities of queer love through time.

As the film contextualizes Marianne's relationship with Héloïse, Marianne's journey begins with her arriving on the coast of France where she is hired to paint the portrait of Héloïse. She first encounters Sophie, a servant girl, and Héloïse's mother, who both mystify Héloïse's character through hinting at her sister's fate, her own hesitancy towards marriage, and her refusal to sit for her portrait. The two women build Héloïse's personality to be adversarial, especially seeing as Marianne is revealed to be the second painter to attempt Héloïse's portrait. Considering Héloïse's control over who is able to view her and for what reasons, this emphasizes the power that the gaze itself holds, especially because she must be gazed upon for her marriage portrait. In Héloïse's apparent refusal to be painted and married, her control over her gaze mirrors that of Olivia in *Twelfth Night* in the sense that Olivia allows few people to see her without her

mourning veil. Héloïse and Olivia's restrictions of who may look upon them stresses the significance of how gaze can be a direct means of expressing desire.

Héloïse's introduction to Marianne involves a veil of her own in the form of a cloak that she wears. Marianne and Héloïse are set to take walks together as the premise for Marianne's sudden appearance at their home, concealing Marianne's clandestine task to paint Héloïse without her posing. In the scene where they first meet, no words or glances are exchanged between the two; instead, Marianne follows Héloïse from a short distance as they venture towards the sea. Their lack of pleasantries and glances upon meeting for the first time presents oddly in the sense that the pair never truly "meet" according to social norms. Their walk begins with Marianne following Héloïse, positioning Marianne's gaze towards Héloïse's back, then reversing to Marianne's face whilst gazing. In this shot-reverse-shot of Marianne's gaze and the subject of her gaze, the cinematographic mode emphasizes the communicative nature of a glance as a form of desire, especially in building Marianne's sense of curiosity regarding Héloïse. As Héloïse's cloak falls to reveal her hair, Marianne's gaze mirrors that of the audience in the sense that this is the first moment where any physical feature of Héloïse is seen on screen. This shared gaze upon Héloïse's hair coupled with the anxieties of the scene temporarily satiate the yearning to look upon her while simultaneously building the desire to do so even more. Héloïse's arrival at the edge of the sea cliff signals the first view of her face to the audience and Marianne as she turns back to meet her gaze, their glances at one another express a level of intimacy despite not formally introducing themselves. In this initial gaze, their immediate familiarity portrays an unspoken bond between the two; their later stolen glances indicating a curious attraction. The little amount of dialogue between the two displays the ways in which these women, existing in

18th-century France, lack the social frameworks and vocabulary to express the reasoning behind their queer desire.

The pair's initial contact emphasizes their desire and curiosity through the gazes they share, the cinematographic technique of using shot-reverse-shot places an emphasis on Marianne as the primary gazer, especially as the story is framed through her own flashback. Through this positionality, her gaze is at the center of the audience's perspective, showing the audience her growing interest in Héloïse. Because this story is told through the frame of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in *Metamorphoses 10,* this initial emphasis on gaze expresses the stakes of gaze as a signifier of desire because Orpheus's gaze in the original myth brings about Eurydice's eternal place in Hades. Through the cinematic techniques that center the sapphic gaze between Marianne and Héloïse the continuity editing emphasizes how the gaze between these two remains unbroken as the line of Marianne's eyes follows directly to the subject in the following shot. This continuity in shots not only displays the unspoken bond between the two, but it also represents the fluidity of time, showing how the story of Orpheus and Eurydice transcends temporality into modern interpretations of queer pasts.

The film establishes the gaze as the primary way of communicating their attraction towards one another. Marianne's status as a painter mirrors that of Orpheus's as a songster in their artistry, thus drawing parallels between how their aesthetic fixations and inspirations are derived from that which upon they gaze. The cinematographic emphasis on the gaze shows parallels between Marianne and Orpheus as artists that absorb inspiration through that which they look upon displays how gaze exists as a rhizome embedded within stories through which Orphic tropes are present. The gaze acts as an inter-connected mode for signifying attraction that words cannot explain, subversive to traditional inclinations of love and relationships because

gaze acts as a performance of love that transcends these archetypes. The gaze being emblematic of queer desire ventures to show the love between characters where traditional words and actions fail to capture their passions.

The film continues by showing Marianne's fragmented constructions of Héloïse through her sketches that she forms through memory. Upon their next outing, Marianne and Héloïse veil below the eyes at the request of Sophie due to the harsh weather. They continue their outing as usual, their eyes being the only part of their face visible to one another, emphasizing how gaze is central to displaying the connection between the two women. The construction of the scenes in which Marianne and Héloïse's faces are partially covered with veils mirrors that of Olivia's in *Twelfth Night* as she mourns the loss of her brother. Olivia's use of veiling as a means of controlling who may view her face parallels Héloïse's own protectiveness over who may see her and paint her. This connectivity of the veil as a symbol for controlling gaze traces back to Orphic notions of gaze as an intentional performative action to display one's desire; an action that both Olivia and Héloïse maintain through choosing the circumstance of the gaze. The veil allows for both Olivia and Héloïse to control the eyes of others, mirroring how Orpheus has control of his gaze when he looks back to Eurydice, ultimately preserving the memory of her over her physicality.

The first half of the film tracks Marianne as she pieces together Héloïse's wedding portrait from memory and ultimately destroys it before Héloïse and her mother gaze upon it. Prior to Marianne's destruction of the portrait, she decides to show Héloïse for the purpose of being open with her about her dishonesty as a simple companion. Upon Marianne's reveal of the portrait, Héloïse's disapproval is rooted beyond her objection to being married off as she is unhappy with the portrayal:

Héloïse: Is that me? … Is that how you see me?

Marianne: It's not only me.

Héloïse: What do you mean, not only you?

Marianne: There are rules, conventions, ideas

Héloïse: "You mean there's no life? No presence?

Marianne: Your presence is made up by fleeting moments that may lack truth.

Héloïse: Not everything is fleeting. Some feelings are deep. The fact it isn't close to me, that I can understand. But I find it sad it isn't close to you. (49.35-50:34)

Through their disagreement, Marianne realizes that the portrait she painted lacked authenticity caused her to destroy it, rubbing off the face in a similar manner to which the original painter left his first canvas. The parallels of the missing face in both Marianne and the first painter's portrait display how both portraits were constructed according to or using conventions created by the male gaze. In Marianne's recognition of these conventions, her destruction of the portrait symbolizes her rejection of these aesthetic rules, showing a transformation of her character to recognize the presence that the queer female gaze brings to her art. The destruction of the portrait establishes a level of trust and understanding between Héloïse and Marianne, and Héloïse agrees to pose for her portrait so that her mother does not send Marianne away.

Within the scene where Héloïse poses for Marianne, the tension of their gazing at one another displays their astute observations of one another despite their recent acquaintance. Their gazing at one another and notice of slight behavioral changes through their actions demonstrate their connection through gaze as they fall in love. Through their observational connection, Marianne's status as a painter allows Héloïse to be portrayed through the art of someone who

cares for her. As the pair exchange looks in painting and being painted, Héloïse reveals their shared perspective of one another:

Marianne: Forgive me, I'd hate to be in your place

Héloïse: We're in the same place. Exactly the same place.

…

Héloïse: If you look at me, who do I look at? (*Portrait* 1:04:53-1:05:36)

As Marianne returns to her spot behind the canvas, she is now aware that they are both studying one another. While Marianne views Héloïse through a more museal lens, Héloïse maintains a space where she observes the painter watching her. Héloïse and Marianne's connection is deepened through an understanding of the relationship between the artist and the muse, the artist seeking to capture the subject before them while the subject simply gazes back. Héloïse's perspective displays her agency as a muse, showing that the artist is not alone in their observations. Through her mutual control of their gaze, Héloïse and Marianne foster a means of connecting through their actions rather than traditional notions of courtship. Their exchange of gaze allows them to communicate through this space of art, demonstrating their connection to one another through their positions on either side of the canvas.

Héloïse and Marianne form a relationship within the subtext of their interactions, using their discussions with Sophie about the Orpheus and Eurydice myth to display their subliminal connections. Héloïse reads the myth aloud to Marianne and Sophie, pausing along the way for a brief commentary. Each of their commentaries shows their reaction to the myth in accordance with their personalities. Sophie's youthful objection to Orpheus's decision to turn back to look at Eurydice, her reasoning being that he should have simply followed the rules, shows her more conventional approach to the myth because she does not understand why Orpheus would look

back while knowing the consequence of never seeing Eurydice again. Before reading the passage once more, Héloïse wonders aloud if Orpheus may have looked back because he was too madly in love to contain himself. Through Héloïse's initial perspective, she shows the more romantic conventional reading of the myth, displaying her inclination to the love embedded within the story. After re-reading the story, the secondary discussion that follows emphasizes their female perspective on Orpheus's actions and the meaning of the myth. While Sophie remains mostly disappointed in Orpheus's decision, Marianne offers the analysis that, "He chooses the memory of her. That's why he turns. He doesn't make the lover's choice, but the poet's" (1:13:58-1:14:06). Marianne's perspective aligns with the artist, portraying her understanding of Orpheus's choice to preserve her memory rather than her physicality. Marianne's distinction between a poet and a lover indicates the poet's investment in the coexistence of love and loss as equally important feelings. Héloïse takes a different approach in her second reading, gesturing to the possibility that Eurydice called out to Orpheus to make him turn back. Her supposition explores Eurydice's own agency in the myth as an active character rather than Orpheus's muse/lover. Héloïse's interpretation of the myth mirrors her own position as Marianne's portrait subject, paralleling their earlier conversation about how Héloïse is an active participant in gazing while being painted. Marianne and Héloïse's own understandings of the myth shows how their queer/sapphic perspective transcends a traditional reading of the myth in considering the motivations of Orpheus and Eurydice. As Ovid's *Metamorphoses* takes on many interpretations and adaptations through time, Sciamma employs the myth and the self-conscious discussion of Orpheus and Eurydice to explore a queer female reading. In portraying these women's varying perspectives on the myth, mainly focusing on reasoning Orpheus's decision to turn back, this emphasizes how the female gaze operates in an analysis of the unspoken.

Following their analysis of the myth through which this film is derived, the women attend a nearby bonfire. Within the scene, the women also in attendance begin to sing a haunting melody that adds to the erotic tension between Marianne and Héloïse. As this scene is one of few moments in the entire film to include music, this distinction indicates the climax of the film, and Marianne and Héloïse's desire for one another. As the pair gaze at one another with the fire between them, the shot-reverse-shot tracking of their eye contact with one another emulates the fervent energy between the two that they circled until this moment. The fire along with the choir's crescendo symbolizes the emerging passion that was, at first, only visible through their gazing at one another. Héloïse then begins to walk away from the flames, maintaining eye contact with Marianne. As the audience follows Marianne's eye line, her view of Héloïse shows the bottom of her dress on fire as she continues to walk. Marianne watches this occur and Héloïse stops to look down at her dress on fire, both maintaining an absurd level of calmness. Their composure at this moment displays their acceptance of fate, ultimately showing how Marianne and Héloïse are destined to exist in spaces that do not accommodate queerness. Héloïse's acceptance of her circumstance, both in marriage and potential death displays how these are equal conditions because they both do not allow her to exist as her true self. When Héloïse is tackled to the ground by other women attempting to put out the fire, Marianne pulls her back to her feet, triggering a match shot into the next scene.

As the scene of Héloïse on fire epitomizes the entire film, the significance of this scene as being mirrored through the portrait at the beginning of the film displays how these motifs of loss characterize the historicized queer experience. Through the dual presence of the image of Héloïse on fire, both in the opening scene portrait and within Marianne's flashback, this moment signifies Marianne and Héloïse's connection to one another because the portrait captures a

moment of love and loss. Because the film is closely tied to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, the connectivity of desire and loss throughout performances of queer history seeks to recover the past as an anthology of the queer experience. Within Love's discussion of Orpheus, the connections she draws between queerness and the historical project explores how Orpheus acts as a figure of queer history in his performance of desire:

> Clearly, Foucault throws in his lot in with Orpheus, who offers an apt emblem of the practice of queer history. The failed attempt to rescue Eurydice is a sign of the impossibility of the historical project per se: the dead do not come back from beyond the grave, and this fact constitutes the pathos of the historical project. But we might also read the Orphic lament as an effect of the particular losses suffered by queer historical subjects. We can trace the aftereffects of that history in the characteristically minor key in which Foucault's desire for the past is played. (Love 50)

Through Love's analysis of Orpheus as symbolizing the practice of queer history, she offers the myth as representative of the failures of historicizing the queer experience and the significance of documenting the loss embedded within queer pasts. Orpheus represents the dichotomy of queer historicization, the effects of said history being traced through the failures and impossibilities of queer love within the confines of a historicized space that inherently rejects non-normative desire. Sciamma's connection to Orpheus and Eurydice explores the perpetuation of these historical failures as she looks back to portray sapphic love in 18th-century France; ultimately queering the cinematic performativity of desire through the female gaze.

The audience's captivation between Héloïse, the flames, and the evocative score elicits commotion within the scene, Marianne's hand grabbing Héloïse's arm being the climax to this moment that matches the shot of the pair traversing the face of the cliff (1:18:33-1:18-36).

Through the chaos of these two scenes, Marianne and Héloïse grasping one another's arms remains the focal point of this match-shot transition, demonstrating the more physical connection that arose from the preceding scene. As this transition works to emphasize the physical interactions between Marianne and Héloïse, it also displays the transformation of their gaze into more tangible communications of their desire. They continue down to the shore, their faces once again veiled to protect them from the elements as Héloïse leads Marianne into the alcove. Upon Héloïse and Marianne pulling their veils below their chin, they kiss. As this scene depicts their first kiss in the film, it displays how the climax precipitated the metamorphosis of their attraction by compounding their imminent loss of one another. Their lack of conversation within the scene gestures to the lack of conventions for discussing sapphic feelings in 18th-century France.

When Héloïse and Marianne see each other again after their kiss, they confront the erotic desire that is present in their interactions. Héloïse is shown waiting in Marianne's room following their kiss on the beach, their attraction towards one another being depicted through their actions, more specifically, their gaze. Héloïse and Marianne show a slight apprehension before they begin to kiss again. They navigate the tension of their queer desire, giving into caressing one another despite not knowing how to explain their love. As Héloïse attempts to navigate this unfamiliar territory, she asks Marianne, "Do all lovers feel they're inventing something?" as she tries to make sense of the passion she feels (01.23.53). Because they both are unaccustomed to the queer attractions, their giving into the pleasure of the moment evokes sensuality in their journeying into the uncharted together. As their kisses lead to more, the scene cuts and returns to them lying together in bed covered by their sheets. Through the cut in a moment where the audience can assume more is to come of their kissing, Sciamma jumps to the more sensual aftermath of Héloïse and Marianne's assumed intercourse. In this cinematic choice,

the male gaze is disregarded seeing that the presence of the nude female body engaging in sexual acts is omitted from the film. Through the allusion to their intercourse in showing the pair in bed after, the female gaze of the film is centered by focusing on their closeness aside from the realm of sex alone.

While Marianne lays in bed with Héloïse, drawing her image in a locket, Héloïse requests Marianne to draw an image of herself that Héloïse can keep with her once they go their separate ways. Upon her agreement, Marianne uses a mirror to draw her own full nude image within page 28 of *Metamorphoses 10*, a page that will appear again later in the film. As Marianne draws herself for Héloïse, the mirror she is using is propped against Héloïse's pelvis, adding to the erotic charge in her gaze. Marianne's drawing of herself, on the last page of *Metamorphoses 10,* includes the last few lines of the Orphic hymn about Venus and Adonis:

> some sparkle in less than an hour, it grew a red flower, resembling that of the pomegranate, This flower lasts a short time because the same winds that make it bloom, make it fall too. (01.43.58)[11]

The text details a red flower that both thrives and falls by the wind, the lines symbolize the beauty in Marianne and Héloïse's fleeting romance. To contextualize these lines within the myth of Venus and Adonis, Venus transforms the blood of her dying lover into a flower, memorializing him through a vessel of beauty. Through this metamorphosis, the myth displays how love transcends loss through memory; a fitting end to *Metamorphoses 10,* which began with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. As Marianne sketches herself onto this last page, her image

[11] French as displayed in the film: "*quelqu'éclat, en moins d'une heure, il en fortit une Fleur rouge, qui ressembloit à celle de la Grenade. Cette fleur dure peu de tems puifque les mêmes vents qui la font éclorre, la font auffi tomber.*" Although this moment in the film is not translated, Sciamma's repositioning of the lens to show these words on the page poses that they are meant to be read by the audience. Pausing at this moment, I translated these lines using a French to English dictionary and comparing it with the Golding translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that I used in my analysis of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.

embodies a parallel meaning to the flower of memory that represents Adonis; their love and beauty being immortalized through objects of memory.

Upon the unveiling of Marianne's final wedding portrait, Marianne is set to say her goodbyes to Sophie, Heloise's mother, and Heloise. Their goodbye scene replicates Heloise's reading of the Orpheus myth in the scenes that she asks Marianne to turn back. As Marianne runs away from Heloise after saying her public goodbye to her, Heloise follows her to the door. In a quick shot-reverse-shot, Heloise calls after Marianne to turn back. When Marianne turns back, we quickly see Heloise in a white gown, then back to the door closing behind Marianne. In this quick gaze that they share, their goodbye directly mirrors Orpheus and Eurydice, who, in their final moments together, choose the passion of their love over the permanence. As this moment symbolizes the deep connection between Marianne and Heloise, their gaze signifies the longevity of their desire as it exists through mythological memory. As this goodbye does not signal the end of the film as it may in traditional cinematic tropes, Sciamma's decision to show Marianne's life post-Heloise in her continuation of love shows that, even after their loss of one another, their love lives on in the art they once shared.

Years later at an art auction, Marianne is showing her painting of Orpheus and Eurydice. Upon showing her painting, a man observes her interesting choice in depicting Orpheus and Eurydice as saying goodbye to one another. Within the painting, Orpheus and Eurydice are shown waving goodbye to one another as Eurydice is swept back into the underworld. In his remark, he expresses that the convention of painting this myth is to show Orpheus before he turns back to her or after, in both instances they cling to one another, but Marianne's choice to capture them mid-turn demonstrates an alternative view. In her artistic choice to display Orpheus and Eurydice in this way, her unconventional perspective is derived from her earlier discussions

of the myth with Héloïse and Sophie in which Héloïse believes that Eurydice called out to him to turn back. As Marianne and Héloïse acknowledged the potential reasonings of Orpheus and Eurydice's actions in their interpretations, Marianne's painting acts as a tribute to their female gaze in viewing the story. Marianne's adaptation of the story through her painting signals the transformation of Orpheus and Eurydice as choosing to memorialize their love through the moments they did share in life.

At this same art auction, Marianne happens upon a portrait of Héloïse with a book in her hand alongside her child. Within this image, Héloïse holds the book with her fingers suggestively between the pages in the top corner of the book. The figure present in the top corner of the page is the number 28, the same page that Marianne drew her nude portrait on in Héloïse's copy of *Metamorphoses* in an earlier scene. In assuming If we assume that Héloïse is holding her copy of *Metamorphoses,* her erotic grasp of the book resembles fingers in a vulva, which in turn suggests that she continues to think of Marianne in a sexually charged manner. Marianne's amusement at this shows the fondness and love she continues to have for Héloïse. As this portrait captures Héloïse's concealed message to Marianne, this demonstrates how they both hold a space of memory for one another. Through Marianne's portrait of Orpheus and Eurydice at the same art auction, their connection to one another is explicitly linked to Ovidian myth. Because their love is reinforced through Ovid's myths of love, loss, and transformation, Marianne and Héloïse adapt the framework to communicate their subliminal desire even as it moves to the space of memory.

Marianne's final gaze at Héloïse occurs as they both attend the symphony in the last scene of the film. Marianne and Héloïse take their seats on opposite sides of the hall, Marianne sees Héloïse, and makes it clear in her narration that Héloïse does not, at any point, turn to see her. Marianne gazes at Héloïse across the theater, watching her expressions as the music begins.

As the orchestra begins to play Vivaldi's "Summer,"[12] This section from *The Four Seasons* resonates against an earlier moment when Marianne plays the piece for Héloïse as they are getting to know one another. In watching Héloïse's expressions as the song plays, Marianne sees Héloïse experience immense sorrow and profound joy as she cries and then smiles. Through Marianne's visual experience of Héloïse's emotions as she likely recounts their time together, this gaze into their past that they both experience through linking their memories to song displays how a look backwards allows them space to engage with their queer desires. As the film closes onto a dark screen, the audience is left with the missed connection of two past lovers, showing how Marianne makes the decision to not engage with Héloïse, leaving their love safely within their memories of one another. Marianne's gaze at Héloïse throughout this scene emulates how Orpheus gazes back at Eurydice despite his awareness that he will never see her again. Orpheus and Marianne's decision to preserve their love, both in its passion and its loss displays how the queer gaze operates in recognizing the immense desire within both experiences. As both love and loss signify the complexity of their desire, gaze is emblematic of queerness in disrupting heteronormative consistencies.

Marianne and Heloise's engagement in queer desire allows them to transcend traditional ideas of marriage that Heloise is made to conform to, allowing them, for just a moment, to share in their true passions. Although Marianne and Heloise were fated not to be together, just as Orpheus and Eurydice upon Hymen not blessing their wedding, the power of their love surpasses their short time together as it occupies the music, art, and culture around them. As Marianne and

[12] In the earlier scene where Marianne plays "Summer" for Heloise, this is her attempt to show her the great music that she will hear in Milan once she marries. As she plays the song, Marianne explains the notes as they are portrayed in the sonnet from which the song is composed. Marianne's explanation of the song as it captures the beauty and chaos of the coming storm mirrors that of Marianne and Heloise's love. In this moment where they both revisit the music, they are reminded of the loss of one another, but also the tranquility before the storm. In the song's commemoration of both beauty and loss, this acts as a symbol of memory through which they can recount the tragic dichotomy of their love.

Heloise maintain their love and desire for one another after their goodbyes, the symbols of Orpheus and Eurydice remain a connection through which they can still engage with the memory of each other. Through their mirroring of Orpheus and Eurydice's positions of artist and muse, Marianne and Heloise operate within this space of gaze through their queer desires, using portraits to transcend the impossibilities of their relationship.

Just as Marianne and Heloise reminisce to hold onto the memory of each other, Love's *Feeling Backward* calls for a similar turn back in gazing at queer history. Considering Love's historical project in gazing at queer pasts as they seep into the present, Sciamma's film does interesting work in adapting mythology to be in conversation with these pasts. Through exploring Orpheus as a figure of queer history, Sciamma emulates the queer discourse of historicizing the queer experience as a connection to pasts of love and loss. *Portrait* traces the mythos of the queer experience through Marianne and Heloise's lesbian relationship, using cinematography to capture how gaze as an act of desire moves beyond time. Because Marianne and Heloise mirror the love, desire, and loss of Ovidian myth, their relationship recomposites queer history in a contemporary space.

The gaze creates a space for non-normative desire in the past, acting as a direct line between the love and loss embedded within queer histories. As the gaze operates against the traditional language of courtship, it creates sites of queer cultural memory through which the non-normative attraction is preserved. In tracing Ovidian narrative through its temporal transformation into queer culture, we see how the language of sexuality and desire transitions for the purpose of communicating unconventional acts of desire in coded/obscured ways.

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