

THE FEMININE OVIDIAN TRADITION

by

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ABSTRACT

While the growing body of literature on the relationship between feminist theory, classical myth, and classical scholarship has contributed to an understanding of general scholarly trends, there has not been a sustained examination of the relationship between feminist scholarship and classical receptions. Furthermore, the field of classical reception studies focuses almost exclusively on male authors and widely ignores female voices. This thesis addresses these lacunae through detailed discussions of the Ovidian receptions of four women writers active between 1950 and the present: Sylvia Plath, Timberlake Wertenbaker, Josephine Balmer, and Saviana Stănescu. The thesis tracks the ‘difference made’ by feminist scholarship on their varied receptions, and the ways in which recurrent concerns in their engagements prefigure, echo, or explicitly draw upon feminist theory and feminist Ovidian scholarship. This thesis poses the argument that women’s classical receptions offer a critical tool to advance feminist classical scholars’ attempts to ‘reappropriate the text’, by reclaiming female narrative authority from the male poet and interpellating the ‘resisting reader’. This diverse, yet characteristically feminine, Ovidian tradition challenges existing reception traditions based upon male practitioners alone, and reawakens the political and aesthetic critique at the heart of Ovid’s poetry.

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INTRODUCTION

A woman reading Ovid faces difficulties... Is his style a virtue, or a flaw? Like an audience watching a magician saw a lady in half, [critics] have stared to see how it was done. I would like to draw attention to the lady...

Why is it a lady in the magician's box?¹

As the third wave of feminism rolled into the postfeminist era, essays by Genevieve Liveley and Vanda Zajko asked of classical scholarship, *what difference was made?*² While the growing body of literature on the relationship between feminist theory, classical myth, and classical scholarship has contributed greatly to an understanding of general scholarly trends, there has not yet been a sustained examination of the relationship between feminist scholarship and receptions of classical texts.³ Furthermore, the developing field of classical reception studies which may evidence such a relationship focuses almost exclusively on male authors and widely ignores the contribution of female voices.⁴ Through detailed discussions of the Ovidian receptions of four women writers, this thesis will address these lacunae in the scholarship by both assessing the influence of feminist thought on classical receptions, and by redressing the lack of representation of women writers in reception scholarship.

¹ Richlin (2014, p. 134). All Latin and Greek quotations in this thesis are taken from the standard critical editions of the Oxford Classical Texts series, except quotations from *Heroides* (De Gruyter) and *Fasti* (Teubner). For the purpose of consistency with the text of the OCT *Metamorphoses* (Tarrant, 2004), from which the majority of quotations in this thesis are taken, spellings in editions of Latin texts using *j/v* have been amended to *i/u* where appropriate; all translations are my own unless otherwise acknowledged.

² Liveley (2006a); Zajko (2008).

³ On feminist theory and the classics, see especially Rabinowitz and Richlin (1993), McManus (1997); on classical myth and feminist thought, see Zajko and Leonard (2006).

⁴ On the lack of female voices in classical reception studies, see Theodorakopoulos (2012, p. 154) discussing deMaria and Brown (2007), whose anthology of classical literature and its reception omits Sappho and contains only two women writers. For general introductions to reception studies, with a focus on methodology, see Wiseman (2002), Hardwick (2003), Martindale and Thomas (2006), Hardwick and Stray (2008), Güthenke (2009), Brockliss, Chaudhuri, Lushkov and Wasdin (2012); on translation, see Lianeri and Zajko (2008), and Gillespie (2011).

To assess the interrelation between fiction and feminist scholarship over time, I have chosen four women writers active primarily in successive decades of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: Sylvia Plath (b. 1932, d. 1963), Timberlake Wertenbaker (b. 1946), Josephine Balmer (b. 1959), and Saviana Stănescu (b. 1967). While Plath produced her work before the advent of second-wave feminism, Wertenbaker, Balmer, and Stănescu respectively coincide with the second, third, and postfeminist eras. I have also chosen these four writers both for their exemplification of the Ovidian tradition in the range of the material to which they respond, from the opening lines of *Amores* to Ovid's last words in *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and for their shared thematic concerns and literary strategies, which exemplify Alicia Ostriker's formulation of 'writing like a woman', using myth in part to be taken seriously as writers, and in part radically, to tell stories both about and grounded in a female embodied subjectivity.⁵

Throughout this thesis I track the 'difference made' by feminist scholarship on the varied receptions of the four women writers and examine the ways in which recurrent concerns in their engagements with Ovid's poetry—with the figure of the muse, eroticized violence, and women's speech, for example—prefigure, echo, or explicitly draw upon feminist theory and feminist Ovidian scholarship.⁶ While Balmer and Stănescu consciously position themselves as feminist writers and employ overt feminist literary strategies, both Plath and Wertenbaker

⁵ Ostriker (1983). I employ the term 'women's writing' throughout this thesis to refer collectively to the work of the four writers discussed in the following chapters, at points where I wish to highlight issues of representation (that is, the absence of women writers from reception scholarship), or when discussing the work of second-wave theorists such as Ostriker whose concept of the feminine is grounded in a (biologically essentialist) female embodied experience; elsewhere, I have employed the term 'feminine writing' to refer more broadly to a feminine mode of writing that is not necessarily tied to gender or biological sex (see nn. 7 and 43, below).

⁶ Key terms and principal thematic concerns of feminist classical scholarship for the readings that follow include: the *scripta puella* (see especially Hallett, 1973; Richlin 1992a, b); the female voice and silence (see especially Joplin, 1984); the recuperation of female narrative authority from the male poet (see especially Farrell, 1998; Spentzou, 2003); the literary/ discursive construction of gender and sexuality (see especially Gamel, 1989; 1998); rape, the male gaze, and aestheticized sexual violence (see especially Richlin, 1992b); woman-as-art (see especially Sharrock, 1991a; 1994; Keith, 1994/5); the male poet and the figure of the Muse (Sharrock, 2002b). Comprehensive bibliographies are provided at the relevant points throughout the thesis.

protested the label of ‘woman writer’; the difference between these positions is productive for the hermeneutic possibilities of Ovid’s texts, and points to the multiplicity of women’s voices and their classical receptions. I suggest that the explicit use of feminist scholarship in the work of Balmer and Stănescu bridges the gap between feminist theory and feminist practice to enact classical reception as feminist praxis. In conclusion, I propose the existence of a diverse, yet characteristically feminine Ovidian reception tradition, a tradition which can offer one solution to Amy Richlin’s provocative foregrounding of the problem of Ovid’s ‘lady in the box’.⁷

My own readings of Ovid’s frequent representations of ‘bad women’ and gendered sexual violence build upon the theoretical framework of feminist classical scholarship, particularly Judith Hallett’s key reading of the mistress of Roman elegy as ‘counter-cultural’, and Liveley’s resistance to the pornographic model.⁸ In addition, I draw upon Romana Byrne’s feminist readings of fin-de-siècle representations of aestheticized deviant sexualities as political and social critique.⁹ Furthermore, I argue that women’s classical receptions offer an additional critical tool to advance feminist classical scholars’ attempts to ‘reappropriate the text’ by

⁷ I use ‘feminine’ throughout this thesis as a discursive category and an epistemological mode, figured against dominant, ‘masculine’ discourse and epistemology; in this respect I follow Cixous’ formulation of *écriture féminine* (1986) to describe writing which bears a feminine signature but is not tied to biological sex, see also n. 43, below. I use ‘feminist’ to refer both to the political movement of feminism and its evolving political concerns in its second-, third-, and fourth-wave (‘postfeminist’) incarnations over the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, and to instances where feminine literary strategies are employed to explicitly political effect; I use ‘feminine/ist’ at points where I wish to avoid anachronism or where I wish to incorporate a range of both ‘feminine’ and ‘feminist’ responses.

⁸ Foley (2004); Hallett (1973); Liveley (1999); see also Liveley (2006a), which in part includes her response to the earlier work of Richlin (1992b) and Culham (1990) by positing the moment of the constitution of meaning always and only at the point of reception (thus enabling the recuperative readings of the resisting feminine reader (Fetterley, 1978); see now Richlin’s less than confident response to Liveley’s article in Richlin (2014, pp. 32-34), which admits that the constitution of meaning (‘remembering’) is an ongoing process. The difference between these positions, as well as being one of field (history/ literature), seems inextricable from the debate surrounding the ‘reality’ of the elegiac *puella*; it seems to be a distinction drawn partly by the differences between US body-centred ‘essentialist’ feminisms, and British feminisms influenced by poststructuralist criticism; see chapter 2.1 n. 13 on the extent to which the elegiac mistress can be read as metaphor. As sites of the ongoing constitution of meaning, classical receptions offer a critical literary tool for the (feminist) classical scholar.

⁹ Byrne (2013).

reclaiming female narrative authority from the male poet (revoicing his women characters as women), and by interpellating a woman reader; that is, by constructing the reader's subjectivity in the feminine reading position and thus facilitating a 'resisting' mode of critical interpretation.¹⁰

My analyses of women's Ovidian receptions use a tripartite methodological framework comprising feminine modes of reading and writing, strategies of feminine/ist revisionary mythmaking (feminine modes of *rewriting*), and feminist translation techniques. Before establishing my theoretical and methodological frameworks in greater detail in chapter 2, I return to the question *what difference is made?* specifically in relation to Ovidian scholarship, by spotlighting key points of interrelation between feminist scholarship and Ovidian commentary traditions, translations of *Metamorphoses*, and Ovidian reception scholarship.

1.1 What difference was made?

Liveley and Zajko surveyed the 'difference made' by feminist theory to classical scholarship from the perspectives of third-wave feminism and postfeminism and built upon the earlier US-focused book-length surveys of Rabinowitz and Richlin, and McManus.¹¹ While Liveley provided a useful retrospective of the developments of feminist classical scholarship over the last forty years, Zajko considered the tentative future of 'feminism' in the light of

¹⁰ See Richlin (2014, p. 19) on 'Re-appropriating the Text: The Case of Ovid'; on the 'resisting reader' see Fetterley (1978). Not all writing by women is in the feminine mode; in contrast to the women writers discussed in this thesis, see, e.g., the Ovidian receptions by Jane Alison (*The Love Artist*, 2003) and Benita Kane Jaro (*Betray the Night*, 2009), two novels which, despite being marketed to women readers, interpellate a masculine reading mode, replicating the male gaze in their exoticized depictions of Ovid's women. See chapter 6.6 for further discussion of Alison's novel.

¹¹ Liveley (2006a), Zajko (2008); Rabinowitz and Richlin (1993), McManus (1997).

postfeminism, and posited classical reception as a site where feminist theory and classical myth may continue to interact.¹²

The work of feminist scholarship has been slowly registered in Ovidian studies in the inclusion of a ‘gender and sexuality’ chapter in each of the most recent Cambridge and Blackwell companions to Ovid, although explicit discussion of feminist theory is relegated to ‘further reading’ at the end of both chapters.¹³ In the Blackwell volume, Spentzou’s chapter on ‘Theorizing Ovid’ does contain a key survey of feminist thought, although no comparable chapter was included in *Brill’s Companion to Ovid* at all.¹⁴ There is also an increasing number of commentaries and student reading guides written by women classicists, often feminist scholars, which highlight issues of gender to a wider audience, and which are careful to problematize Ovid’s literary presentation of sexual violence.¹⁵

¹² On feminist theory and the classics, see also Skinner (1985; 1987a, b), Gutzwiller and Michelini (1991), Gold (1997), and Richlin (2014, pp. 4-35); also Zajko and Leonard (2006). For a more general overview of recent Ovidian scholarship, see Myers (1999; 2010).

¹³ See Sharrock (2002a), Keith (2009); cf. the chapter ‘Women’ in Volk (2010).

¹⁴ Spentzou (2009, pp. 382-385); Boyd (2002).

¹⁵ E.g. Fantham (1998), Myers (2009), Liveley (2011). More widely in the discipline, the 2012 Annual Meeting of Postgraduates Working in the Reception of the Ancient World (organised by Holly Ranger, Polly Stoker, and Sarah Wilkowski (Bremner), University of Birmingham, UK) focused on women’s voices in classical reception studies and aimed to democratize traditional academic conference formulae by hosting workshops led by feminist reception practitioners including Josephine Balmer and Gwyneth Lewis; 2015 saw the founding of the Women’s Classical Committee UK, launched in April 2016 to support women in classics and promote feminist and gender-informed perspectives in classics; the first WCC event was held in July 2016 and focused on feminist pedagogy. Additionally, Susan Deacy and Fiona McHardy are currently at work on a project stemming from their 2013 Classical Association conference paper ‘How to teach sensitive subjects in the classical classroom’; Deacy and McHardy consider the use and application of ‘trigger warnings’ on ancient texts which deal with domestic violence, abortion and sexual abuse, provide training on teaching sensitive topics and how to help students who may find such topics distressing, and offer training for academic staff on coping with the ‘emotional labour’ that supporting students may entail. Deacy has also authored a guide to embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum and classroom for classics practitioners (2015). On pedagogy and problematizing Ovid’s rapes in the classroom see also Kahn (2005). Recent major works of Ovidian scholarship include: on *Amores*, see Boyd (1997), Bretzigheimer (2001), and De Caro (2003); on *Heroides*, see Landolfi (2000), Jolivet (2001), and Spentzou (2003); on *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*, see Gibson, Green and Sharrock (2006); on *Fasti*, see Barchiesi (1997), Gee (2000), Herbert-Brown (2002), and Boyle (2003); on *Metamorphoses*, see Tissol (1997), Hardie, Barchiesi and Hinds (1999), Wheeler (1999, 2000), and Fantham (2004); on *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, see Videau-Delibes (1991), Martin (2004), Claassen (2008), and McGowan (2009); see also Barchiesi (2001), Hardie (2002a, b), Boyd (2002), Holzberg (2002), Liveley (2005), and Knox (2006; 2009a).

The impact of feminist thought can thus be measured qualitatively and particularly by the changing representations and discussions in Ovidian scholarship of sexual violence. As feminist literary critic Judith Fetterley argues, commentary traditions of texts provide ‘irrefutable documentation of the fact that literary criticism is a political act—that it derives from and depends on a set of values, usually unarticulated and unexamined, in the mind of the critic and that it functions to propagate these values’.¹⁶ In the same year (1978), classicist Leo Curran described rape as ‘the dirty little secret of Ovidian scholarship’; for, despite over fifty acts of rape in *Metamorphoses*:

one would scarcely guess the fact from reading most of the commentaries on the *Metamorphoses*, Ovidian scholarship in general, or the retellings of Ovid’s stories in mythological handbooks. Traditional scholarship, systematically ignoring this fact and refusing to take rape seriously, glosses over unpleasant reality and prefers euphemism to the word rape.¹⁷

From the perspective of 2016, the majority of scholarly articles now do ‘call it rape’, a rebuttal of Ovid’s own apparent nonchalance toward sexual coercion at *Ars Amatoria* 1.673: *uim licet appelles* (‘call it rape, if you will’).¹⁸

Despite its particular and frequent use in gendered and sexual violence, however, the Latin word *uis* indeed connotes and can be translated as a wide variety of types of ‘force’; the most recent edition of the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* contains 65 sub-definitions.¹⁹ It is defined secondarily—and euphemistically—as ‘force used to obtain sexual gratification’, with example usages provided from *Ars* 1.673 (quoted above), *Met.* 4.233 (Sol rapes Leucothoë), and *Met.*

¹⁶ Fetterley (1978, p. 101); a critic ‘has a vision of what a text *ought* to be about’ (p. 112 [my emphasis]).

¹⁷ Curran (1978, p. 214). Further important work on rape and the female body in Latin literature includes Joplin (1990) and Joshel (1992), collected in McClure (2002).

¹⁸ ‘[C]all it rape’ (Packman, 1993); see also Richlin (2014, p. 148). *uis* and its cognates appear 189 times in *Metamorphoses*, and 81 times across *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, *Remedia Amoris*, and *Heroides*.

¹⁹ Glare (2012, pp. 2286-2289); there are 28 primary definitions of *uis*.

9.332 (Apollo's rape of Dryope).²⁰ Similarly, none of the 31 sub-definitions of the verb *rapio*, *-ere* contain any explicit connotations of sexual violence (although the third definition provided for the noun *raptus* describes 'the action of carrying off, abduction, rape', citing the rape of Proserpina at *Fasti* 4.417 as an example usage).²¹

While the English word 'rape' is not yet associated with *uis* or *rapio* in the *OLD*, the 'difference made' by feminist scholarship and the demand to 'call it rape' has been registered in popular translations. In the case of Tereus' rape of Philomela, for example, Ovid uses *raptor* in a simile which precedes the rape (as Tereus watches her like a bird of prey guards its spoils, *spectat sua praemia raptor*, *Met.* 6.518), while the rape itself is described with the swift and euphemistic *ui superat* ('overcame by force', l. 525). Mary Innes' 1955 Penguin translation maintains Ovid's euphemism (and follows the dictionary) with 'he... by sheer force, overcame [Philomela]'; A.D. Melville's 1986 Oxford Classics translation provides 'ravished'; while

²⁰ Glare (2012, p. 2286); *at uirgo, quamuis inopino territa uisu, | uicta nitore dei posita uim passa querela est*, *Met.* 4.232-233, which Raeburn translates euphemistically as 'Shocked as she was by this sudden appearance, the girl was utterly | dazzled. Protest was vain and the Sun was allowed to possess her' (Raeburn, 2004, p. 142); *Dryope, quam uirginitate carentem | uimque dei passam Delphos Delonque tenentis | excipit Andraemon et habetur coniuge felix*, *Met.* 9.331-333: 'Dryope. Long in the past she'd been raped by Apollo, the god of Delos and Delphi. Although she wasn't a virgin, Andraemon made her his wife and the match was considered a good one' (trans. D. Raeburn, 2004, p. 355). See also Adams (1982, pp. 198-199) who notes the euphemistic nature of *uis* (pp. 198; 223); '[a] sexual act may be emotively spoken of as an act of violence' (p. 198). The connotations of the noun *stuprum* are closer to the modern term 'rape', although again the *OLD* definitions describe a wide range of behaviour and do not 'call it rape': *stuprum* (1) dishonour, shame; (2) illicit sexual intercourse in any form (whether forced or not) or an instance of it (Glare, 2012, p. 2020); cf. *stupro*: (1) to have illicit sexual intercourse with, violate the chastity of; (b) (transf.) to defile by licentious conduct (Glare, 2012, p. 2020); *stuprator*: a person who has illicit sexual intercourse (with) (p. 2020). See also Adams (1982, pp. 200-201): 'specialised of a sexual disgrace, i.e. an illicit sexual act, whether an adulterous liaison or a forcible violation' (p. 201). *stuprum* is the term most commonly used in Roman law; on Roman rape law, especially on the crime of *stuprum* in the Republic, see Fantham (1991); as it applies to women, see Gardner (1986, pp. 117-125); on *stuprum* under the *lex Iulia*, see Richlin (1993, pp. 562-563). Richlin notes that *stuprum* is a broader concept than the modern term 'rape', noting the vagueness of its application in law which allows for the suggestion of the volition of the victim (1993, p. 565). On rape in antiquity, see Deacy and Pierce (2002), although the volume does not contain a chapter on representations of rape in Ovid.

²¹ Glare (2012, pp. 1733-1734; 1734); there are 15 primary definitions of *rapio*; *raptus... uirginis*, 'the rape of the virgin', *Fast.* 4.417. Cf. similarly broad definitions for *rapto*, *raptor*, *raptum* (Glare, 2012, p. 1734); *rapina* is defined as 'the forcible carrying off of property, plunder; (b) the carrying off of a person, especially a woman [citing *Met.* 14.818, *Ars* 1.675 and 3.759 as examples] (Glare, 2012, p. 1733). See also Adams (1982, p. 175): '[t]he basic sense of *rapio* was 'drag off into captivity'... it tended to be weakened into a synonym of *uim afferre*, *uitiare*, etc., expressing an act of sexual aggression without a concomitant 'capture'.

David Raeburn's 2004 Penguin Classics version supplies the translation 'brutally raped'.²² Scholars have highlighted the ways in which euphemistic language works to uphold patriarchal rape myths, and Raeburn's choice of vocabulary here, while linguistically inaccurate, is an important recognition of an issue that feminist classicists have worked hard to foreground, and provides a concrete example of real impact.²³

Yet the influence of feminism and the growing numbers of women writers engaging with classical texts have yet to be registered in mainstream reception studies.²⁴ That is, while there has been growing attention paid to women's receptions by women scholars of classics and comparative literature in the last decade, the trend has not been reflected in the edited companions produced by the major publishing houses.²⁵ In these introductory volumes to ancient authors or to the classical tradition, women writers are often noted only in a passing reference or are discussed in a single chapter on 'women and classics'. This critical oversight is particularly conspicuous in scholarly volumes on Ovidian reception; for while the increased critical attention paid to Ovid in the late twentieth century has been in large part due to the work

²² Innes (1955, p. 148); Melville (1986, p. 137); Raeburn (2004, p. 235); although on Raeburn's use of euphemism at *Met.* 4.233 see n. 20, above. On translation and the classics, see Hardwick (2000), and Lianeri and Zajko (2008).

²³ On euphemism and rape myths, see, e.g., Curran (1978, p. 215); on euphemism in the Latin sexual vocabulary, see Adams (1981; 1982, *passim*).

²⁴ On women's historic access to the classics in the UK, see recent work by Cox (2015); on the US context, see Winterer (2007), Staley (2008), and Hallett (2013).

²⁵ On women's writing and classical reception, see Fowler (1983; 1999; 2009), Homans (1988), Wall (1988), Gubar (1996), Rohrbach (1996), Spentzou (1996; 2006), Cox (1999; 2011), Hardwick (2000, pp. 31-47), Murnaghan and Roberts (2002), Stevenson (2005; 2015), Murray (2006), Zajko (2006), Walters (2007), Bakogianni (2009), Hall (2009b), Torlone (2009, pp. 92-117), Verbeke (2009), Hurst (2006; 2009; 2015), Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2012a, b; 2013a), Theodorakopoulos (2012; 2013), Wilson (2012), Roynon (2013), Cole (2015), Fiske (2015), Minchin (2015), Wallace (2015), and McConnell (2016, pp. 138-146); on women classical translators, see Balmer (2013, pp. 41-56). See also Allen (1999), Bloomberg (2001), and Sellers (2001) on myth and fairy tale in women's writing. Discussing their own work, see also Wertenbaker (2002b; 2004; 2008), Balmer (1997; 2005; 2006; 2009b; 2012a; 2013), Almond (2009), and Jackson (2009). There has also recently been a conference on women's writing and classical reception at Exeter University (hosted by Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos, 2012), and an evening seminar series at Royal Holloway, University of London (organized by PhD students Francesca Kaminski-Jones and Ruth Macdonald, 2015). See also the innovative inclusion of short works of fiction by Terri Marsh in Richlin (1992a) and Elizabeth Cook in Zajko and Leonard (2006).

of women and feminist scholars, Ovidian reception studies are dominated by discussions of reception in the Middle Ages, Reformation, and Renaissance periods, and by repeated treatments of the same six modern male authors: Alexander Pushkin, T. S. Eliot, Joseph Brodsky, Christoph Ransmayr, David Malouf, and Ted Hughes.²⁶

For example, despite the broad diachronic focus of Sarah Brown's *The Metamorphosis of Ovid: From Chaucer to Ted Hughes*, Brown includes detailed discussions of the Ovidianism of Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) and Virginia Woolf; yet both of these writers' names are missing from the later *Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, a volume which references Brown's book but which contains the names of only seven women writers scattered throughout the text.²⁷ One of those writers is missing from the index, and in the three chapters dedicated to Ovidian receptions

²⁶ Cox (2017) will be an important exception to this trend. On women's writing and Ovid, see Kellogg (1998), Brown (1999, pp. 196-215; 2005a, *passim*; 2014, *passim*), Linklater (2001), Fowler (2006), C. N. Michalopoulos (2011), Cox (2012; 2013), Braund (2012), Hurst (2012), Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013b), Quintelli-Neary (2013), and Ranger (2016; forthcoming a, b). Current monographs and companion volumes on Ovidian reception which focus on the Middle Ages, Reformation, and Renaissance periods: Doody (1985), Barkan (1986), Martz (1986), Barnard (1987), Martindale (1986; 1988), Picone and Zimmermann (1994), Anderson (1995), Cheney (1997), Lyne (2001), von Albrecht (2003), Pugh (2005), Keith and Rupp (2007), James (2009), De Armas (2010), Clark, Coulson and McKinley (2011), McCabe (2011), Reid (2014), Stapleton (1996; 2009; 2014), and Wiseman (2014); see also Dimmick (2002), Martindale (2008), Fyler (2009), Hopkins (2012), and essays by Braden, Casali, de Armas, Desmond, Fumo, Hardie, James, Keen, and Kilgour in Newlands and Miller (2014); McKinley (2001) examines the feminine discourse of the Ovidian heroines in the medieval commentary tradition; Horowitz (2014) discusses five women writers in his survey of Ovidianism in the Restoration period. On Dante and Ovid, see Zambon (2011), and Clay (2014); see also the extensive scholarship on Ovid and Chaucer: Fyler (1979; 2009, pp. 416-422), Minnis (1982), Kiser (1983), Hanning (1986), Calabrese (1994), Paxson and Gravlee (1998), Brown (1999), Sadlek (2004), Desmond (2006), Edwards (2006), Fumo (2010), Galloway (2014). On Ovid and Shakespeare, see Carroll (1985), Martindale and Martindale (1990), Bate (1994), Enterline (2000), Taylor (2000), Brown (1999), Braden (2009), Lafont (2013), Keilen (2014); on Ovid and Milton, see DuRocher (1985), Green (2009; 2011; 2014), and Kilgour (2012). On Ovid in Pushkin, Eliot, Brodsky, Ransmayr, and Malouf, see Kennedy (2011), Kahn (2014), Hardie (2002c, pp. 326-337), Claassen (1999), Ziolkowski (1997; 2005, *passim*), A. N. Michalopoulos (2011), Matzner (2011), Ziogas (2011), and Godel (2014); see also Tomlinson (1983) on Ovid and the male Modernists. On Ovid and Ted Hughes, see Lyne (2002a, pp. 261-63), Talbot (2006), Ziolkowski (2005, pp. 200-203), Martin (2009, p. 482), and the collected essays in Rees (2009); cf. the scepticism of Henderson (1999), Cahoon (2005), and Hinds (2005, p. 65). On Ovidian reception, see also Brown (1999; 2005a; 2014), Hardie, Barchiesi and Hinds (1999), Kennedy (2002), Warner (2002), Harrison (2004; 2011), Ziolkowski (2005; 2009; 2014), Liveley (2006b), Claassen (2008, pp. 185-228), Gallagher (2009), Ingleheart (2011), Robinson (2013), and Akbari (2016); on translations of Ovid, see Percy (1984), Martin (1998; 2009), Lyne (2001; 2002a, b), Tissol (2005), Oakley-Brown (2006), and Hooley (2014).

²⁷ Brown (1999, pp. 196-215); Hardie (2002a).

women are wholly absent. Similarly, among the hundreds of authors, painters, and musicians discussed in Ziolkowski's comprehensive study, *Ovid and the Moderns*, only twenty-two women writers are named, nine of whom appear on a single page listing the contributors to Philip Terry's edited collection *Ovid Metamorphosed*.²⁸ Sylvia Plath and Lalla Romano are also named by Ziolkowski, only for their work to be immediately dismissed as 'hav[ing] nothing to do with Ovid or his *Metamorphoses*'; a further eleven women—whose own work is not acknowledged—are named merely as 'muses' to the male poets discussed in detail in the text, including, for example, 'Anna Akhmatova (to whom Mandelstam addressed his poem 'Cassandra' [No. 95])'.²⁹

Advances were made in Brown's slim volume *Ovid: Myth and Metamorphosis*, which includes twenty-five women writers (alongside many historical women), and in Jennifer Ingleheart's edited collection *Two Thousand Years of Solitude*, which included one chapter devoted to the Ovidian work of a woman writer.³⁰ The Blackwell *Companion to Ovid* increased the visibility of named women writers and translators in the history of Ovidian reception to twenty-nine, although this is a number surpassed when counting male writers before reaching 'De~' in the index.³¹ Again, however, eight of these women writers appear within nine lines of text, and most of the women named elsewhere in the volume receive little more attention than half a sentence.³² Most recently, however, and despite the work of the previous volumes, the number of women writers discussed in Blackwell's *Handbook to the Reception of Ovid* fell

²⁸ Ziolkowski (2005, p. 213); Terry (2001).

²⁹ Ziolkowski (2005, pp. 169; 150, 72). On the male poet and the figure of the Muse in classical literature, see Spentzou and Fowler (2002), especially Sharrock (2002b) on Ovid.

³⁰ Brown (2005a); Ingleheart (2011); C. N. Michalopoulos (2011); in the same volume the work of Eavan Boland is also briefly discussed by Dellner (2011).

³¹ Knox (2009a).

³² Ziolkowski in Knox (2009, p. 464).

from twenty-nine to twelve; a pointed reminder that perhaps only through carelessness, as soon as women are written into reception histories they can just as soon be written out.³³

This bias results not only in a starkly incomplete history of the Ovidian tradition; due to the inherently reciprocal nature of reception that encourages a return to the original, Ovidian scholarship has also been deprived of new ways of reading—and new interpretations of—the ancient poems themselves. By repeatedly discussing the same few male authors, their readings of Ovid’s texts are reiterated and over time become accepted as authoritative interpretations. This is particularly troubling from a feminist perspective as many of these readings are explicitly misogynist. In T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), for example, the rape of Philomela is one of many rapes in the text that are shown to occur as a consequence of, or as punishment for, active female creativity and female poetic expression.³⁴ Eliot’s use of rape also punishes ‘topsy-turvy’ gender expression as practised by the assertive brand of ‘new women’ who challenged prevailing stereotypes of femininity. *The Waste Land* thus transforms Ovid into a comment on ‘the horrors of’ female artistic expression, ‘transsexuality and... transvestism’.³⁵ In this thesis I argue that the Ovidian receptions of Plath, Wertebaker, Balmer, and Stănescu

³³Newlands and Miller (2014); cf. n. 26, above, for the disparity between the 14 published articles on women’s Ovidian receptions and the nearly 100 publications on male writers published in the last thirty years alone. This is not a phenomenon limited to classics; on the exclusion of women visual artists from the canon of Western art history, for example, see the stimulating essay by Nochlin (2003). The yearly statistical report produced by the Equality Challenge Unit on equality in higher education collects data on staffing at UK HE institutions, but it does not currently produce statistics on academic publications which would evidence representation by gender, race, or ethnicity by discipline. Available at: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2015> (Accessed: 16 April 2016). The VIDA (Women in Literary Art) Count tracks the representation of women in literary publications (although predominantly US-based), including articles, poetry and fiction, and interviews; for 2015 the count was expanded to include race and ethnicity, sexual identity, and ability as well as gender. Available at: <http://www.vidaweb.org/the-2015-vida-count> (Accessed: 15 April 2016).

³⁴ Eliot (1963, pp. 61-86). In *The Waste Land*, a painting which depicts Philomela’s rape is mirrored by the later rape of the typist, a sexually-liberated ‘new woman’ waiting at home for her evening’s date to arrive (p. 72). Rape is thus positioned as the necessary consequence of the woman’s behaviour, while Philomela’s rape is shaded retrospectively by the words, ‘Exploring hands encounter no defence’ (p. 72); Philomela’s song as a nightingale is no longer beautiful and mournful, but a ‘Jug Jug’ to dirty ears’ (p. 66).

³⁵ Gilbert and Gubar (1989, p. 338; pp. 338-339).

thus present a crucial challenge to any current conceptions of an ‘Ovidian tradition’ based upon Eliot and his peers alone.³⁶

1.2 Thesis overview

In chapter 2 I establish the theoretical and methodological frameworks for the thesis. After situating ‘the case of Ovid’ in feminist classical scholarship, I provide the theoretical background for my own readings of Ovid, and pose the argument that women’s classical receptions offer an additional critical tool for the feminist classical scholar.³⁷ I also detail the three methodological strands that inform my readings of women’s Ovidian receptions throughout the thesis: feminine modes of reading and writing, strategies of feminine/ist revisionary mythmaking (feminine modes of *rewriting*), and feminist translation techniques.

For the first of my textual readings, chapter 3 begins in the 1950s with a discussion of the sustained and sophisticated Ovidianism of Sylvia Plath. Plath’s frequent classical allusions in her work have been almost wholly ignored and her intertextual dialogue with literary history overlooked; this chapter seeks to highlight Plath’s previously undocumented work as a classical scholar.³⁸ After discussing Plath’s often ambivalent relationship to the classics and to the guardians of the classical tradition in her prose (drawing out how Plath borrows from the similarly under-recognized classicism of Virginia Woolf), I focus on three characters from

³⁶ For example, by rewriting Ovid and his imitators to combat rape myths, found in both *Ars* and *The Waste Land*, that women desire or deserve to be raped. Contemporary women writers engaging with the classics seem astutely aware of the ways in which interpretations of classical texts are dictated by ‘the classical tradition’; in interview with Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013a), both Alice Oswald and Barbara Köhler explicitly note that their rewritings of Homer were in part a reaction against earlier male translations shaped by the elite public school system.

³⁷ ‘The case of Ovid’: Cahoon (1990); Culham (1990).

³⁸ On intertextuality, especially its hermeneutic implications, see Kristeva (1969a, b).

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that Plath turns to repeatedly in her poetry: Daphne, Philomela, and Pygmalion. Plath responds to her literary model and rewrites Ovid in a particularly gendered way: using myth to speak of women's lives; questioning the role of the female muse; and frequently removing the male antagonist from the myth to create a female space for dialogue. Plath's insertion of the domestic and the personal within her classically-infused poems uses the cultural authority of the classics to lend power to her own poetic stories and characters. I argue that Plath updates mythic women's stories to a contemporary context in unique and politically prescient ways, using Ovid to point to the contemporary myths of femininity around her that still needed to be overcome. I discuss how Plath approached her classical models with characteristic irony, irreverence, and humour, and balanced a celebratory Ovidianism with a Woolfian scepticism toward the classical tradition.

Chapter 4 moves on to the 1970s and 1980s in my discussion of British-American playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker. I begin by identifying Wertenbaker's methodology of classical reception through a discussion of her approach to translation and adaptation, and I delineate the characteristic features of Wertenbaker's classical receptions: 'foreignization' and 'alienation' strategies, a strong feminist influence, and a focus on voicing female sexual desire. A feminist reading of Wertenbaker's revisionary mythmaking reveals a repeated interest in creating a feminine language that is fragmentary, irrational, and metaphorical (thereby implicitly following the work of French feminists Cixous and Irigaray, detailed in chapter 2.2). In her Ovidian play, *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988)—a creative adaptation of the tale of Philomela that follows Ovid's text as much as it deviates from it—Wertenbaker's additions to the text foreground an Irigarayan *parler femme* of a female chorus, and the desiring subjectivities of the two sisters. Wertenbaker uses Ovid's tale of Philomela to explode

contemporary rape myths, and to symbolize colonial oppression and silencing; and she uses the play's dense metatheatrical elements to meditate on her own processes of reception, and to highlight the audience's role as witnesses to the violence occurring onstage, foregrounding the interactive nature of the transmission of ancient texts.

In chapter 5 I discuss the feminist translation work of the contemporary poet Josephine Balmer. I begin with a discussion of Balmer's early translations of fragmentary ancient women's poetry in the 1990s, for which, as a trained classicist, Balmer explicitly drew upon feminist classical scholarship. I track Balmer's increasingly experimental feminist translation strategies through her 2004 collection, *Chasing Catullus*, and I detail how Ovid informs a number of these 'Catullan' poems. I then discuss Balmer's creative translations of Ovid's exile poetry, *The Word for Sorrow* (2009), an innovative work which mixes excerpted poems from *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* with Gallipoli war diaries to meditate on slaughter, exile, and grief over two thousand years. Balmer draws heavily upon third-wave and postfeminist concerns with language and power, and she uses Ovid's text to enter the dual masculine fields of classical literature and war poetry. The chapter discusses how Balmer's combination of literal and creative translations explores the national, social, and gendered factors that have traditionally enabled or restricted access to a classical education. By using a Latin dictionary as a character in her translation, and by placing dictionary entries within the text, Balmer literalizes women's active reclaiming of the classical tradition by the physical possession of the dictionary as she holds it in her hands and works on Ovid's text. Balmer's own presence in the text insists on the process of her engagement with Ovid; she presents the feminist translator's task as one not directed toward a finished product, but rather toward an open-ended fragment that is always-unfinished, inviting the reader to participate in and continue the translation task.

In the final chapter (6), I discuss the contemporary American-based Romanian playwright Saviana Stănescu, whose immigrant perspective casts a postcolonial eye over Ovid's poetry. Over the course of her career, Stănescu's play with language and theatrical form has expanded from exploring particularly gendered concerns to consider wider global issues of migration and exile in her attempt to capture the fragmented immigrant experience. After an introduction to the Romanian tradition of Ovidian reception, I set Stănescu's idiosyncratic take on the classical tradition in context through a discussion of her retelling of the myth of Jocasta in *YokastaS Redux* (2005). I detail her feminist theatrical praxis and use of second- and third-wave feminist literary theory to challenge her audience to question the transmission of ancient stories and to reconsider what they think they know about (in)famous mythical women. I then focus on Stănescu's Ovidian works: her early metamorphic poems that excoriate female mythic archetypes, and two imaginative works explicitly based upon Ovid's exile poetry and set in his place of exile, Tomis. Stănescu's ambivalent use of classical allusion and her incorporation of critical theory within her fictional texts offers a defence of the Black Sea environs and its inhabitants as found in what she terms 'stupid translations' of Ovid's ironic poetry. Stănescu also directly—and comically—responds to Ovid's *scriptae puellae* in her creation of a Tomitian slave-girl for Ovid named Tristia. Characterized by an astute critical awareness and a committed political engagement, Stănescu's classical receptions draw out the damaging real-world consequences of ancient and contemporary representations of women and 'barbarians'.

1.3 A feminine Ovidian tradition

In my readings of Plath, Wertebaker, Balmer, and Stănescu a number of recurring themes and common revisionary strategies begin to emerge, and suggest a particularly feminine Ovidian reception tradition. In all four writers there is a delight in the creation of ‘bad women’ whose complex characterization disrupts the archetypal binary of the whore-virgin paradigm (explored further in chapter 2); and all four writers employ heavy irony, ambiguity, and paradox as they negotiate an invocation of authoritative Ovidian myth with subversive readings and rewritings.³⁹ All four writers give voice to female characters who remain silent in the original tales, and all four write beyond the ending of their source texts by refusing to come to a ‘proper’ ending, telling the ‘other side’ of a story, or opening up their source texts to new readings.

The writers frequently focus on tales of rape, sexuality, the male gaze, female subjectivity and silence, and often find similar concerns in Ovid’s tales as some feminist classicists (see chapter 2). They blend philological work or explicitly critical theory into their fictional rewritings to create a space for dialogue, disrupting generic boundaries and hierarchies. Crucially, all four writers play with the deconstruction of patriarchal language and dictionary definitions, visually symbolized in their work by the presence of their dictionaries; and all four women writers use Ovidian mythography to critique the traditional guardians of Ovid’s texts and the male poetic tradition.⁴⁰

³⁹ On classical texts as a means of conferring authority on the woman writer, see Ostriker (1982, p. 72).

⁴⁰ Other examples of lesbian and feminist dictionaries include Wittig and Zeig (1980), Krameræ and Treichler (1985), and Daly and Caputi (1987); see also Stein (1997). On feminist dictionaries as a utopian genre, see Anderson (1991). Gilbert and Gubar also note that ‘the alphabet is at the heart of feminist concerns’ (1988, pp. 267, 268-270, 308 n. 94). See also the dictionary entries of jam ismail, who creates ‘definitions more sensible than those given in the *oxford & sheat’s etymological...*’ (quoted in Godard, 1994, p. 101): ‘**sex** a latin word meaning sex (6) which has been pared down to two (2)’ (p. 96).

Plath and Stănescu continually return to and rewrite the same myth several times, interrogating all its possibilities, writing alternative and simultaneous endings, and creating a polyvocal chorus through repetition and variation. Plath and Stănescu also focus on the representation of ‘woman’ in art, deconstructing what feminist classicists have identified as the *scripta puella*, and paradoxically harnessing Ovid in their attempts to write themselves as women artists who refuse to be a male poet’s muse. Plath and Wertenbaker in particular recognize the inadequacy of female classical archetypes to represent women’s lives, and they problematize women’s complicity in perpetuating those myths; and the figurations of subjectivity and the conceptions of feminine modes of writing and speaking in Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray, are echoed or explicitly invoked in the Ovidian texts of Wertenbaker, Balmer, and Stănescu.

Ovid’s style and stories lend themselves to women reflecting on themselves as writers in an inherently masculine literary tradition, and the four writers all literalize Ovid’s own ‘feminine’ self-fashioning, using his ironic self-positioning against the masculine epic tradition as a source of authority to write back to their own times and ‘myths’ in a specifically gendered way. In their representations of desiring women, the work of these women writers reawakens the ‘counter-cultural’ content of Ovid’s poems, a reading that has been elided in a focus on the receptions of male authors concerned with Ovid-the-man rather than Ovid’s work.⁴¹ In the texts of these women writers, Ovid’s own aesthetic and political rebellion against

⁴¹ Hinds (2005, p. 66) expresses his concerns about what he terms ‘décor fatigue’, that is, Ovid’s use as mere decorative background; he argues that modern receptions work best when there is not a simple grafting on of feminism, or psychoanalysis, etc., onto Ovid’s text, but when it elicits that which seems to be ‘already immanent’ in Ovid’s texts (p.71). I argue that feminine Ovidian receptions can enact both a radical defamiliarization of the original text at the same time as eliciting an immanent sexual and political critique; for example, Plath’s use of the Daphne myth to represent a woman running from her own sexuality radically reformulates Ovid’s text at the same time as it elicits an immanent critique of Augustan legal imperatives to feminine chastity and conservative resistance to change (the legislation of the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* was primarily to ensure chastity). At the same time, Plath resists and confronts a reception tradition that has

Augustan sexual *mores* becomes a contemporary critique of social imperatives to feminine chastity, and of the tradition of misogynist interpretations of classical myths. These feminine uses of Ovid, which challenge both prevalent patriarchal myths of female sexuality and the nature of ‘translation’ or poetry itself, reinvigorate the political and aesthetic critique at the heart of Ovid’s poetry at the same time as they stake their claim to feminine artistic autonomy.

While the similarities between the writers are striking, in conclusion I propose that the dissimilarities in focus and content, and the divergences in literary strategies between the receptions of Plath, Wertebaker, Balmer, and Stănescu, suggest the ‘difference made’ by feminist scholarship on women’s Ovidian receptions.

traditionally used the story of Daphne as a moral lesson to preserve female chastity at all costs; see Barnard (1987); on Plath’s Daphne, see chapter 3.4.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Reading male texts

In 1985, the Women’s Classical Caucus held an unofficial (that is, unapproved) panel at the APA annual conference entitled ‘Re-appropriating the Text: The Case of Ovid’ to consider how—or if—feminists should approach male-authored ancient texts.¹ In her paper, Phyllis Culham contended that feminist praxis fundamentally clashed with the work of (masculinist) classical philology; as the lives of real historical women cannot be found in male-authored texts, those texts should be abandoned.² Feminist classical scholars have frequently negotiated Culham’s objection by engaging feminist reading practices to read against the grain and recover female voices buried within male elite texts; Liveley, for example, argues that Ovid’s texts can be recovered by ‘reading like a woman’, following Fetterley’s imprecation to be a female ‘resisting reader’ of male-authored texts.³ For my own readings of Ovid, in addition to drawing upon the work of Fetterley and Liveley, I have been influenced particularly by cultural theorist Romana Byrne’s work on fin-de-siècle texts and their presentation of what she terms ‘aesthetic sexuality’.⁴ Byrne delineates two distinguishing concepts of ‘aesthetic

¹ See Richlin (2014, p. 19).

² Culham (1990); see also Richlin (1990); cf. Cahoon, who argues for a recuperation of Ovid’s female characters from the texts (1990; 1996).

³ Liveley (1999); Fetterley (1978); see also Desmond (1993), James (2003), Spentzou (2003; 2005); also Byrne (2013); cf. Gamel (1998) on ‘reading like a man’.

⁴ Byrne (2013). Byrne’s thesis refutes Foucault’s claim in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* that the Western tradition ‘possesses no *ars erotica*’; she rejects both his West/ East dichotomy between the *scientia sexualis/ ars erotica* and its concomitant repercussions on the modern construction of the history of sexuality. Byrne tentatively proposes the existence of ‘aesthetic sexuality’ since the eighteenth century; I would extend this back further to Ovid and his *Amores*.

sexuality': that sexual practice is a mode of freedom; and that pedagogy and cultivation is essential.⁵ One's choice in the cultivation of aesthetic sexuality as expressed through sexual practice points to a deliberate strategy of self-creation and is a mode of social communication; the choice of sexual practice is specifically tied to the practice's aesthetic value, and it is the aesthetic value of the practice that creates political meaning.⁶

Byrne elucidates her theory further through readings of the work of the Marquis de Sade and the representations of sexual violence and deviancy in the work of fin-de-siècle writers including Algernon Swinburne, Octave Mirbeau, J. K. Huysmans, and Rachilde (Marguerite Vallette-Eymery). In considering whether such texts are pornographic, Byrne notes that pornography (in its more recognizably modern form) emerged as a major phenomenon in the sixteenth century alongside the development of print culture.⁷ However:

pornography was primarily used to criticize and satirize the church and the state by representing public figures in scandalizing depictions of sex acts; pornography's capacity to sexually arouse the reader—which has since become the primary and often sole function of contemporary forms—was then an accessory to the imperative of critique.⁸

⁵ Byrne (2013, p. 4).

⁶ Byrne (2013, p. 8).

⁷ On the male gaze and aestheticized sexual violence, see especially Mulvey (1975; 1989) and Kaplan (1983) on sadistic voyeurism (representations of sexualized punishment) and fetishistic scopophilia (the fragmentation of the female body); also De Lauretis (1984; 1987); see especially Kappeler (1986) and Gubar and Hoff (1989) on pornography as any representation—visual or literary—of a woman fetishized under a male gaze. On Ovid's representation of rape and/ as pornography, see especially Richlin (1992b) and Enterline (2000); also Curran (1978), Fantham (1983), Cahoon (1985; 1988), Elsner (1991), Fredrick (1997), Segal (1994, 1998; cf. Barchiesi, 2006); cf. Hemker (1985), Myerowitz (1985; 1992), Verducci (1985). See also on sex work Myers (1996), Fear (2000); also James (1997). Liveley (1999) reads against the grain (see Fetterley, 1978; also Skinner, 1996); see also Fredrick (2002), Rimell (2005); Sharrock (2002c) considers 'resisting' the Roman gaze, but remains ambivalent. Salzman-Mitchell (2005a, b) similarly argues for the possibility of opportunities for Ovid's internal female spectators in *Metamorphoses* either to temporarily destabilize the male gaze by returning the gaze (Andromeda, Atalanta), or to act as *witness*, as in the stories of Arethusa, Iole, Cyane, and Procne and Philomela; on the feminine gaze in *Heroides* see Spentzou (2003, pp. 92-93). On the feminine gaze in ancient literature, see duBois (1978), and Stehle (1990).

⁸ Byrne (2013, pp. 31-32; Byrne refers her reader to Hunt, 1993).

Thus, Byrne argues, in the libertine and decadent works of writers such as de Sade and Rachilde, sexuality is constructed—and must be read—not only as having an aesthetic value that makes sexual practice a work of art in itself, but is also constructed inherently as a means of social critique.⁹ Byrne suggests here a feminist review of the definition of ‘pornography’ (that is, against the radical feminist definitions by Kappeler, and Gubar and Hoff), and a reawakening of pornography’s imperative to critique.¹⁰ In this reading of pornography as social critique, Mirbeau’s *Torture Garden* (1898), for example, a tale of sexual deviance and the spectacle of torture in a garden populated with abominable flowers, becomes both a parody of pre-Raphaelite aesthetics that associated femininity with flowers, and a harsh critique of petit bourgeois morality and the atrocities of French colonialism in China.¹¹ With regard to the work of Ovid, this would entail not a denial that his texts are pornographic but a re-evaluation of what pornographic texts can mean and do.

To me, *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria* in particular clearly fulfil Byrne’s two criteria for aesthetic sexuality of eroticism-as-art with a focus on pedagogy and cultivation; sexual practice as constructed in the poems of *Amores* is also clearly a deliberate strategy of self-creation and a mode of social communication. In my own readings, I thus view Ovid’s ‘pornographic’ representations of sexuality and sexual deviancy as both art and critique, as ‘aesthetic sexuality’, from Ovid’s self-representation of his own deviance from Augustan *mores* and ideals of masculinity in the *Amores*, to his more extreme depictions of deviance, sexual violence, ‘bad women’, and bestiality in *Ars Amatoria*, *Metamorphoses*, and *Fasti*. The presence of a cultural

⁹ Byrne (2013, pp. 4; 39). It is of note that the revival of interest in the work of de Sade was in part due to the positive criticism of Simone de Beauvoir, who celebrated the literary attack on bourgeois morality that his representations of sexual violence and perversion achieved.

¹⁰ See n. 7, above.

¹¹ Mirbeau (2010).

critique embedded within Ovid's poetry has, of course, been previously posited in scholarship. In addition to Hallett's 'counter-cultural' reading of the mistress, and Feeney's important essay on Ovidian aesthetics as politicized, Gamel, for instance, discusses Ovid's shocking openness on the topic of abortion in *Am.* 2.13 and 2.14 as both political and sexual critique; and Barchiesi notes that *Metamorphoses* reads as a comic actualization of Horace's list of 'improper subjects' for poetry—women with horses' manes, matrons sleeping with satyrs and bulls, et cetera—in his aesthetic guide, *Ars Poetica*.¹² However, as Richlin suggests with her recent retrospective essay collection, no satisfactory answer has yet been offered as to why it is always the mistress herself that acts as metaphor.¹³ To return to Richlin's question with which I opened: *why is it a lady in the magician's box?*

¹² Hallett (1973); Feeney (1992); Gamel (1989); Barchiesi (1997, pp. 250-251; see also Ovid's rejection of Augustan epic in *Am.* 1.1). On Ovid and Augustan cultural politics, see also Kennedy (1992), Feeney (1991), Hardie (1992), Habinek (2002), Tissol (2002), and Casali (2006b); see also the broader contextual works of Galinsky (1996), and Habinek and Schiesaro (1997).

¹³ On the elegiac mistress and the debate on the extent to which 'woman' can be applied as metaphor, see, e.g., the opposing views of Hallett (1973; also Myerowitz, 1985; Verducci, 1985; Downing, 1990) and Richlin (1992a, b; also Joplin, 1984; Greene, 1994; 1998; 1999); on woman-as-art, see especially Sharrock (1991a; 1994), Keith (1994/5); Richlin (1995) draws on Butler, gaze theory, and Wittig to consider 'making up a woman' in *Medicamina Faciei Femineae*; cf. Kennedy (1993); Henderson (1989) contends that 'satire is not "about" women'. Wyke (2002) collects her essays on the *scriptae puellae* of Latin elegy and provides a useful retrospective overview of the evolving scholarly debate on elegy's written women. On the representation of Roman women in different literary genres in comparison to 'real life', see Dixon (2001); on women in antiquity, see, e.g., Pomeroy (1975), Foley (1981), Lefkowitz and Fant (1982), Cameron and Kuhrt (1983), Peradotto and Sullivan (1984), Skinner (1987a), Stehle (1989), and Fantham, Foley, Kampen, Pomeroy and Shapiro (1994). O'Gorman (1997) and the overview in Sharrock (2002a) have also contributed important work on motherhood, discussing Ovid's representations of the pregnant or birthing body. Influenced by poststructuralist theory on the discursive and ideological construction of gender and sexuality (see, especially, Foucault, 1978; 1985; Wittig, 1981; in the ancient world, Winkler, 1990), more recent examinations of the literary woman in Roman elegy predominantly explore the literary construction of 'woman' and the interconnectedness of gender with constructions of genre; see, e.g., Nugent (1990), Wyke (1987; 1989a, b; 1994; 2002), Keith (2000), James (2003), Ancona and Greene (2005), Liveley (2005), Rimell (2006), and Ingleheart (2012); see also Hallett and Skinner (1997). Drawing upon queer theory on the discursive construction of sex (see, especially Butler, 1999; Parker and Sedgwick, 1995; as literary theory, see especially Sedgwick, 2008; 2015), Ovidian scholarship has also recently focused upon the performativity of gender in Ovid's many fluidly sexed, gendered, and dressed characters. See especially the early work by Gamel (1989; 1998); on Vertumnus-in-disguise and Pomona in *Metamorphoses*, see, e.g., Lindheim (1998, 2010); on the sex-changing Iphis, compare the differing readings of Ormand (2005; cf. 1996), Raval (2002), Hallett (1997), Pintabone (2002), Walker (2006), and Kamen (2012); on the similarly sex- and gender-fluid Tiresias, see Liveley (2003); and on intersexuality in the myth of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, see Zajko (2009). On gender subversion in *Fasti*, see Newlands (1995); on gender in *Met.*, see Nagle (1988a, b).

I have also found it useful to consider this problem via Byrne, who draws upon sadomasochism to consider in more detail the literary representation of sexual violence.¹⁴ Byrne defines sadomasochism as ‘the eroticized exchange principally of power’.¹⁵ The performance of power is constructed in the play of sadomasochism through an excess of signification: that is, sadomasochistic practice (and representation) is a semiotic performance.¹⁶ In its excessive play with representations of gender, gendered dress, sexual violence, and power—its ‘fetishism of the signifier’—sadomasochism points to the inherently constructed nature of reality and thus makes a mockery of power by revealing its contingency.¹⁷

While radical feminists argue that representations of asymmetric power relations simply replicate patriarchal power relations, feminists including Gayle Rubin have defended sadomasochism by countering that such readings are ‘inappropriately literal’ and ignore the important role of play and signification.¹⁸ Furthermore, the replication in play or representation of asymmetric power relations does not necessarily condone the existence of, or align the representation itself with those power structures. Byrne proposes that such representations in fact work to dismantle patriarchy:

In its capacity to show how power... functions as power *play*, a theatrical assemblage of signs, we may ask: in light of Butler’s premise that the destabilization of notions of truth and nature form the foundation of feminist political subversion, does sadomasochism encumber power’s ability to appear natural and universal, foiling, as Baudrillard states, ‘all systems of power and meaning’, and the social inequalities they create?¹⁹

¹⁴ Byrne (2013, pp. 5-7).

¹⁵ ‘... and often also of pain’ (Byrne, 2013, p. 6).

¹⁶ Byrne (2013, p. 154).

¹⁷ Byrne (2013, p. 165; see Baudrillard, 1998).

¹⁸ E.g. Rubin (1981), which argues for the politicization of sexualities; see also Liveley (1999), who argues that the pornographic reading of Ovid inadvertently traps the woman reader in a patriarchal narrative of a gendered hierarchy enforced by violence.

¹⁹ Byrne (2013, p. 157), quoting Butler (1999, p. xxxiv) and Baudrillard (1990, p. 21).

By extension, Ovid's oversignification of woman as submissive and passive, and man as dominant and violent thus work not only to highlight but to destabilize the Augustan patriarchal power relations they reflect. In their excesses of signification, Ovid's literary depictions of sexual violence against women are thus necessarily against women—already the weaker sign—to highlight the abuse of power; conversely, Ovid's masculinized 'bad women' highlight the constructed and artificial nature of the perverse signs of masculinity and power. Whether the hyper-masculine mistress in *Amores*, or the silenced hyper-feminine violated woman in *Metamorphoses*, it is necessarily the mistress who must be the metaphor for the critique to hit its mark.²⁰

However, while I read Ovid's infanticides, rapes, and mutilations as a necessary fetishizing of the signifier to mock the existing construction of 'woman' and 'man' in the Augustan culture in which he wrote, I cannot ignore feminist concerns with gendered sexual violence, real or representational, particularly when presented by a male author. Furthermore, the key distinction between sexual violence and sadomasochism is one of choice (consent); while Ovid's Daphne, for example, 'seems to' give her consent (*adnuit... uisa*, *Met.* 1.567), this verdict is delivered by her attacker Apollo, and the reader is not privy to Daphne's subjectivity, nor her consent or refusal.²¹ Additionally, one problem common to the counter-cultural reading, the employment of a resisting reading strategy, and the model of aesthetic sexuality is that they require a significant academic framework to enable the reader to 'read like a woman'; an untrained general reader without access to an academic framework may indeed find Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to be a 'handbook on rape', nor would they be able to read against the grain to

²⁰ On the masculine mistress in elegy, see Hallett (1973); on rape as the act that interpellates the female subject in *Metamorphoses*, see Enterline (2000, p. 158).

²¹ On the ambivalent nature of this *uisa* which may signal Daphne's refusal, see Liveley (2011, p. 28).

recover the many silenced women's voices in the epic poem.²² In addition to feminist reading practices, I thus suggest that a further strategy for reading problematic texts is to draw upon feminine/ist writing practices. I argue that women's classical receptions can offer both a resisting reading and a rewriting that constructs the subjectivity of their reader in the feminine mode, thus foregrounding, facilitating, or encouraging a resisting reading of the ancient text that their reader may not otherwise have access to.²³ This resisting reading is not presented prescriptively, however; as I will show in chapter 6, for example, Stănescu is careful to note that hers is only one reading of 'a million stories: they're all true'.²⁴

Classical receptions by women writers thus offer a way to replicate Ovid's political critique at the same time as they modify the context and meaning of representations of sexual violence by voicing that critique as women; the oversignified woman is no longer a fetish object but a self-aware political subject who offers her consent, complicity, or refusal.²⁵ Women's rewritings of myth are therefore critical literary tools for feminist classical scholars to negotiate the impasse between real and represented violence and to recuperate the subjectivities of Ovid's heroines. In the readings of Plath, Wertenbaker, Balmer, and Stănescu that follow, I examine the ways in which women writers fashion themselves both as Richlin's magician and as the lady in the box to parody constructions of power, femininity, and male creativity, at the same time as they expose the very real consequences of sexual violence and creative disenfranchisement outside the textual realm of aesthetic sexuality. I claim that women's reception work is ideally

²² 'Handbook on rape' (Kahn, 2005).

²³ In thus mediating between the academy and a general readership, women's classical receptions also aid the 'democratic turn' in classics; see Hardwick and Harrison (2013), especially Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013b).

²⁴ Stănescu and Schechner (2005); as Fowler reminds us, '[t]he critic has to be aware... that her readings... however sophisticated and however ideologically alive, are also just ways of seeing. It is not simply a question of giving up believing that Propertius was "really" in love with Cynthia: we have also to recognize that viewing her as an ideologically loaded trope for the poetic book is just another story' (Fowler, 1994, pp. 252-253).

²⁵ Discussing Roman invective, Richlin provides the example of Sarah Silverman's 'rape jokes' as an example of how context changes when the content is spoken by a woman (2014, pp. 64, 67).

placed to reawaken the aesthetic and political critique that lies behind Ovid's representations of violent and deviant sexualities, and offers a successful method for 'reappropriating the text'.

As an example of the readings that follow, I extend Byrne's concept of aesthetic sexuality back to Ovid via a work of Ovidian reception by the French decadent writer, Rachilde.²⁶ In Rachilde's novel *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), the cross-dressing protagonist Raoule de Venerande commissions an uncanny wax model of a lost lover, complete with hair and nails: a spring-loaded 'anatomical masterpiece'.²⁷ Raoule is morbidly obsessed with her statue, tending it and dressing it, and she constructs a special bedroom for the statue to live in as she cultivates her deviancy; the novel closes at the climactic moment that Raoule consummates her sexual obsession with the wax man. The sexually predatory *femme fatale* was a favourite trope of fin-de-siècle texts, such as Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* (1870), or H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887); yet these representations were frequently and explicitly misogynist. By voicing the perverse Raoule as a woman writer, however, Rachilde changes the context and framework of interpretation for her own *femme fatale*. By using and rewriting Ovid's story of Pygmalion, reversing the story to have a woman construct her perfect man, Rachilde uses the classical story to transgress contemporary boundaries of genre, gender, normative femininity, and normative sexuality.²⁸ At the same time, by drawing upon Ovid's own use of sexuality as aesthetic and cultural critique (the episode mocks Pygmalion's misogyny through its over-signification of the constructed, 'perfect' woman as smooth, white, and silent, *Met.* 10.243-297), Rachilde uses Ovid to launch a critique of bourgeois morality in her extreme inversion of literary

²⁶ Byrne does not discuss this text in her monograph, but focuses on Rachilde's use of de Sade's work through the woman protagonist of her *Marquise de Sade*.

²⁷ Rachilde (2004, p. 210).

²⁸ Sharrock (1991) notes the link in Ovid's Pygmalion episode between aesthetics and gendered power relations; cf. Newlands (2009) who describes the tale as 'the most troubling text where misogyny and aesthetics are closely linked'.

constructions of ‘woman’ as feminine, floral, and sexually passive; it is of note that after the publication of *Monsieur Vénus* Rachilde was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment for the production of pornography.²⁹ While Rachilde reversed Ovid’s story to take on the role of Pygmalion, in the chapters that follow I explore how women writers have variously figured the subjectivity of the man-made woman herself. To explore women’s rewritings of Ovid in further depth, I turn now to detail my tripartite methodological framework: feminine modes of reading and writing; strategies of feminine/ist revisionary mythmaking (feminine modes of *rewriting*); and feminist translation techniques.

2.2 Rereading male texts, rewriting male texts

In Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*—a novel filled with the songs of the nightingale and swallow—a character reads a euphemistic report in a newspaper of the rape of a young woman by soldiers; in her reading of the novel, Jane Marcus posits Woolf herself as Procne, reading the ‘text’ of society.³⁰ While there is a tradition in Ovidian scholarship of identifying the *notas* of Philomela’s tapestry as letters, feminist literary critics such as Rowe have argued that Philomela’s tapestry is an example of a female story that not even Ovid can read; only Procne can interpret the *notae*.³¹ While Procne has been taken to represent the first feminine

²⁹ The purity and whiteness of Pygmalion’s statue is particularly emphasized: *niueum... ebur... ebur... ebur... eburnea... eburnae*, 10.247-248, 255, 275-276. On Ovid’s Pygmalion, see Bauer (1962), and Hardie (2002c, pp. 173-226); Liveley (1999) offers a ‘resisting’ reading. Janan (1988), Elsner (1991), and Sharrock (1991) consider the Pygmalion episode as narrated by the misogynist Orpheus; also Makowski (1996), and Wheeler (1999); on receptions of Pygmalion see Miller (1988), Joshua (2001), Brown (2005a, pp.123-142), Stoichita (2008), and James (2011).

³⁰ Marcus (1984, p. 79).

³¹ *notas*, *Met.* 6.577; see Bömer (1969-86, *ad loc.*); Rowe (1986). Salzman-Mitchell (2005b, pp. 139-149) provides an overview of feminist criticism on Philomela’s tale. As well as Ovid’s extended account at *Met.* 6.424-676, the myth of Philomela, Procne, and Tereus also appears in Homer, *Od.* 19.518-23 (although the infanticide here seems inadvertent); Hesiod (fr. 312 MW); Sappho fr. 135, 136; Virgil, *Ecl.* 6.78; Ovid, *Am.* 3.12.32 and *Fasti* 2.629, 2.855, 4.482; Accius, *Tereus*; Horace, *Carm.* 4.12.5; Sophocles, *El.* 149; Aristophanes, *Birds* 212; Propertius 3.10.10; see also Dem. 60.28.

critical reader of Ovid's text—choosing between the competing narratives of Ovid, Tereus, and her sister—so Philomela has represented the first feminine rewriter.³² In arguing that storytelling is a particularly female art, Rowe is joined by Marina Warner; discussing the male co-opting of female genres, Warner argues that Ovid deliberately plays with the tradition of female storytellers, using the example of Ovid 'disguising' himself as a woman storyteller in his tale of Vertumnus, alongside that of Apuleius taking on the guise of an old woman to narrate the tale of Cupid and Psyche.³³

In weaving a tapestry that only her sister can read, Philomela thus breaks away from Ovid's (male) appropriation of her (female) voice. Patricia Klineinst Joplin argued that in weaving her tapestry and employing a traditionally feminine art to a subversive end, Philomela's use of 'the voice of the shuttle' symbolizes a specifically feminist poetics.³⁴ Denied language figuratively and literally, Philomela must be resourceful, weaving a narrative to tell her sister her tale. Drawing upon Joplin's argument, that myths of violence against women can be reappropriated to empower feminist classicists and women writers, the tale of Philomela has become emblematic for feminist theorists of speaking despite oppression and recovering the voice of the silenced woman.³⁵ Jane Marcus also used Ovid's Philomela—via Shakespeare's Lavinia, one of Shakespeare's two on-stage readers of Philomela's tale—to theorize women's

³² Richlin (1990, p. 80). (1995, p. 148).

³³ Warner (1995, p. 148); see also Doherty (2006), and Heath (2011).

³⁴ Joplin (1984). The phrase 'the voice of the shuttle' describes Philomela's tapestry in Sophocles' lost *Tereus*: *κερκίδος φωνή* (Radt fr. 595 = Nauck fr. 538); see also Aristotle, *Poetics* 1454b 30. On weaving as self-reflexive metaphor in Ovid's poetry, see Rosati (1999); Ford (1997) opens her monograph with the story of Philomela, and uses metaphors of tapestries and woven cloth for her analyses of the feminine poetics of excess.

³⁵ On female voice and silence in Ovid, see especially Joplin (1984), Marder (1992), de Luce (1993), Enterline (2000); also Segal (1994); see also the use of Ovid's tale of Echo (*Met.* 3.355-401), condemned to repeat the words of others but never to make speech of her own, drawn out by non-classicists Spivak (1993a), and Berger (1996); also Sharrock (2002a); on the polyphony of gender, narrative voice, and genre in *Metamorphoses*, see Gamel (1984), Janan (1988), and Cahoon (1996); see also Hallett (1990, pp. 191-194) on femininity in *Tristia*.

artistic expression and to posit a feminist aesthetic.³⁶ Margaret Homans has argued that Philomela's work at her loom, alongside that of her fellow weavers, Arachne and Penelope, has appealed to feminist critics because of the domestic, 'feminine' nature of the task, and that they have used it as part of an assertion and 'recuperation of subjectivity in the form of female identity as the best defence against androcentrism'.³⁷

In the chapters that follow, the myth of Philomela is an abiding concern of women's Ovidian myth(re)making, and their various emphases and interpretations of the tale frequently echo the concerns of classical and literary scholarship. Their fictional receptions offer, like Philomela's tapestry, creative ways out of patriarchal narratives. To achieve this, the women writers deploy a variety of strategies to retell, write back to, or open up the classical text, deconstructing the female literary archetypes they find, and using Ovid to find new ways of speaking and writing as a woman.³⁸

Two early pivotal feminist polemics both identified and discussed the ways in which feminine archetypes, the 'myth' of the feminine, are embedded in literature and culture: Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949; in English 1953), and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).³⁹ Both exposed the negative impact of men's images of women in classical and contemporary myths on the lived reality of women's lives, particularly the harmful

³⁶ Marcus (1984); on Philomela in the work of Virginia Woolf see Marcus (1982). On the nightingale motif in women's writing, see Gilbert and Gubar (2000, p. 43), Walker (1982), and Linklater (2001, p. 256). Shakespeare's only two readers of Ovid are both women: Imogen (*Cymbeline*, II, ii, 44-46), and Lavinia (*Titus Andronicus*, IV, i); both read the story of Philomela. On Ali Smith's use of the name Imogen in her Ovidian *Girl meets boy*, see Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013b).

³⁷ Homans (1988, p. 398).

³⁸ On feminist literary theory, see Fetterley (1978), Zimmerman (1981), Moi (1985), Showalter (1985), Wall (1989), Munt (1992), Morris (1993), Robbins (2000), Rooney (2006), and Eagleton (2011). On Ovid's texts as fiction, see Feldherr (2010).

³⁹ de Beauvoir (1997); Friedan (1992). Feminist archetypal theorists take cultural archetypes of women to be prescriptive not descriptive (as in psychoanalysis, for example).

consequences of the binary construction of woman as whore or virgin, Clytaemnestra or Mary (and the attendant yet impossible societal compunction to be a Mary). The work of de Beauvoir and Friedan suggests that myth is worthy of feminist study not for what it says about the past, but for what it says about the present and the contemporary societal structures and institutions that it upholds and justifies in their appeal to mythic authority.⁴⁰ In this reading, the enduring presence of classical myth in contemporary Western society is not due to any universal or timeless appeal, but because it is useful for justifying enduring patriarchal structures.⁴¹

In the 1970s, the French feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray were working to find ‘ways out’ of these mythic and literary representations of women.⁴² Critiquing the masculine ‘phallogocentric’ language of which culture and literature is constructed and in which female archetypes are embedded, they described subversive feminine ways of writing (*écriture féminine*) and speaking (*parler femme*).⁴³ In her essay ‘Sorties’, Cixous attacked the feminine

⁴⁰ On such a ‘functionalist’ approach to myth, see, e.g., Eliade (1963), and Honko (1984); although functionalism has been rightly superseded in anthropological studies, it is useful for feminist analyses of archetypes and patriarchal mythic narratives.

⁴¹ Wall (1988) examines rape as a literary trope symbolizing the maintenance of patriarchal power by tracking the character of Callisto from ancient to contemporary literature. Suzuki (1989) uses the Homeric Helen to examine the ways in which (literary) women are held accountable for epic conflicts; Suzuki also attempted to recover the female voice in these texts as a source of poetic power for contemporary women readers, drawing on the work on Sedgwick to construct a methodology for examining male authored texts through a feminist lens (see Sedgwick, 2015).

⁴² For the application of French feminist theory in elegiac and Ovidian scholarship, see, e.g., Gold (1993), Janan (1994), and Spentzou (2003).

⁴³ It is important to note Cixous’ distinction between ‘feminine’ and ‘female’ as she argues that ‘feminine writing’ (*écriture féminine*) can be found in male-authored texts, citing Jean Genêt and Shakespeare as examples of *écriture féminine* (that is, those whose writing is ‘inscribed beneath’ with the feminine) in ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ (Cixous, 1976, p. 885) and ‘Sorties’ (1986, p. 98), respectively; throughout her work Cixous frequently uses Genêt, Shakespeare, Joyce, and Plutarch as examples of this ‘feminine signature’, and she invokes Ovid’s Hermaphroditus as a figure for the ideal ‘bisexual’ writer (1986, p. 84). To highlight the epistemological—rather than biological—formulation of ‘feminine writing’, many of the Canadian and Québécoise feminist translators discussed further below thus prefer the formulation *écriture au féminin*—‘writing in the feminine’ mode, rather than ‘feminine writing’. While second-wave critics such as DuPlessis (1985a) expressed concern over the elision of gender enacted by Cixous’ formulation of ‘feminine writing’—DuPlessis wished to focus on the ‘no man’s land’ (Herrmann, 1976) of ‘women’s writing’—from my standpoint within fourth-wave feminism, which has significantly expanded the range of bodies it seeks to represent, I maintain Cixous’ epistemological formulation of ‘feminine’. On closure as masculine and open narratives as feminine, see especially DuPlessis (1985b, pp. 3-7), Miller (1988, pp. 32-33), and the essays in Booth (1993) on how narratives function ideologically; for feminist criticism on how the female narrators of the *Odyssey* slow—but cannot ultimately prevent—the forward

archetypes of women in patriarchal myths as sexually passive and silent (for example, in the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty), archetypes which continue to influence the myths of femininity in contemporary society; if phallogocentrism is exposed, she argues, all the old stories would have to be told differently.⁴⁴

In 'The Laugh of the Medusa', Cixous expanded her critique of the figuration of the feminine as passive to critique the proliferation of binary oppositions created by this figuration (woman is passive, man is active), and in particular, the association of woman with darkness.⁴⁵ Drawing on the classical figure of Medusa, obscured in a dark cave, Cixous urges women to explore Freud's 'dark continent' of female sexuality, and to find a space 'in between' discourse; in 'Coming to Writing' Cixous suggests a way to do this through a 'feminine' mode of writing that transcends female biology but which expresses the body, sexual pleasure, and feminine difference as a textual effect: *écriture féminine*.⁴⁶ As will be shown, this feminine mode of expression becomes particularly powerful when it is applied to retelling and rewriting the most culturally authoritative of patriarchal myths: those of ancient Greece and Rome, passed on through the classical tradition.

movement of the poem, see Doherty (2001). Ovid's *Metamorphoses* can thus be read as a feminine, open text, against Virgil's masculine epic of closure; on metamorphosis as closure and silencing in the *Met.*, see Theodorakopoulos (1999); cf. on closure in the *Aeneid*, see Theodorakopoulos (1997), and Fowler (1989; 1997). As an 'unfinished' story, Hardie suggests that Ovid's exile invites closure (2002c, p. 326), as seen in the receptions of Malouf and Ransmayr; in contrast, the women writers discussed in this thesis strive to 'open up' Ovid's texts and biography.

⁴⁴ 'Let us... imagine a general change in all the structures of training, education, supervision—hence in the structures of reproduction of ideological results... This cannot be accomplished, of course, without political transformations that are... radical. (Imagine!) Then "femininity" and "masculinity" would inscribe quite differently their effects of difference... What today appears to be "feminine" or "masculine" would no longer amount to the same thing... But we are still floundering... in Ancient History' (Cixous, 1986, p. 158; first published 1975); Cixous argues that women have been 'colonized' by phallogocentrism. On myth and fairy tale in Cixous' fictional writings, see Sellers (2001).

⁴⁵ Cixous (1976; first published 1975). Cixous draws upon the semiotic work of de Saussure on binary pairs in meaning, and Derrida on the privileging of the masculine half of that pair in language.

⁴⁶ Cixous (1991a; first published 1976). On Medusa in feminist critiques of psychoanalytic thought, see Zajko and Leonard (2006).

In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray similarly deconstructed key texts of Western culture from Plato to Freud to expose the systematic oppression of women in myth and culture; in *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray further argues for a feminist theory and praxis which expresses women's sexuality, and she describes a feminine mode of discourse that can deconstruct patriarchal language and culture.⁴⁷ Both Cixous and Irigaray foreground the expression of female sexuality through feminine modes of writing and speaking, which they suggest are irrational, fragmentary, and, as languages of excess, can combat the rational binary structures—and strictures—of patriarchal language and culture.⁴⁸

Contra Cixous and Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, who pioneered feminist critiques of psychoanalysis, denied the existence of any positive 'woman's' language; yet her work on the *sujet en procès*, a subjectivity constructing and renewing itself as a speaking subject, is enacted by women's rewritings of classical texts as they revoice the women of the tales they tell.⁴⁹ Looking back through Freud and Lacan, Kristeva also drew on classical myths and characters in the formulation of her theories, blending critical theory with fictional revisionary mythmaking; re-viewing Ovid's Echo and Narcissus via her deconstruction of Freud's formulation of the tale, for example, Kristeva reinserts Echo into the Freudian narrative.⁵⁰ In

⁴⁷ Irigaray (1985a, b; first published in 1974 and 1977, respectively). Monique Wittig aimed to achieve the same for lesbian modes of expression; see, e.g., Wittig (1975). On the 'feminine imagination', see also Woolf (2014a).

⁴⁸ On the fragment and the palimpsest as feminist poetics, see Keller and Miller (1994), DuPlessis (1996), Frost (2003), and Kinnahan (2004, pp. 41-47); Woolf (2004b) is often cited as an early example.

⁴⁹ Kristeva (1984); see also Janan (2001), drawing on Lacan, on the instability of the *amator's* subject position. On the recuperation of female narrative authority from the male poet within a male-authored text, Ovid's *Heroides* have proved particularly productive sites for the recovery of women's voices and feminine discourse; see Spentzou (2003), Desmond (1993), Lindheim (2003), Fulkerson (2005), and Reeson (2001); cf. Farrell (1998). See also Rosenmeyer (1997); on female voices in ancient literature more broadly, see Gilleland (1980), Adams (1984), and Lardinois and McClure (2001). On 'ventriloquizing Sappho' in Ovid and John Donne, the male poet's appropriation of the feminine voice, and its implications for the silencing of women's speech, see Harvey (1996). See now Clare Pollard's *Ovid's Heroines* (2013), a translation of *Heroides* and touring performance of spoken-word poetry that foregrounds voice and emphasizes the varied speaking personalities and subjectivities of Ovid's heroines.

⁵⁰ Kristeva (1987); also Spivak (1993a).

this respect, both Cixous and Kristeva critique the classical tradition and the uses to which myths have been put to support the patriarchal oppression of women, rather than the myths themselves. As Cixous noted, myths thus need to be told by new tellers and in new feminine ways.

2.3 Feminine/ist revisionary mythmaking

Poet Adrienne Rich explicitly called for feminist revisionary myth-making in her touchstone essay ‘When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision’. Rich identified, like Cixous and Irigaray, the ways in which, as women, ‘our language has trapped as well as liberated us’.⁵¹ Quoting the classicist Jane Harrison (‘why is Woman a dream and a terror to man and not the other way around?... Is it mere propriety and convention, or something deeper?’), Rich suggests that the only way to break free of masculine language, myth, and the literature of the past is by ‘looking back... seeing with fresh eyes, ... entering an old text from a new critical direction’. Rich urges her women readers to start rereading and rewriting as women: ‘We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on tradition but to break its hold over us’.⁵²

It is striking how frequently early feminist literary theory operates at the intersection of classical myth, feminism, and fiction, and how many of Ovid’s characters appear. In addition

⁵¹ Rich (1972, p. 18).

⁵² Rich (1972, p. 19). On women’s revisionary storytelling, see also Bahun-Radunović and Rajan (2011), Greene (1991), and Gilbert and Gubar (2000); Jane Caputi (1997) classifies feminist mythmaking into ‘patriarchal myth-smashing’ or ‘woman-identified myth-making’. Against this positive view of women’s recuperations of ancient texts, scholars Camille Paglia (1990) and Diane Purkiss (1997) contend that feminist revisionary mythmaking is both pointless and absurd; women should not and cannot remake myth as even a reversal of a story merely replicates the underlying patriarchal power structures embedded in narrative; Sellers (2001, p. 28) replies that reclaiming (male) mythic spaces is a more viable strategy than total rejection for those who are outsiders already.

to the emblem of Philomela as used by Joplin and Marcus, Claudine Herrmann's *Les Voleuses de Langue (Thieves of Language)* demanded of women writers that they be 'female Prometheuses', and Susan Gubar suggested recovering the myth of Demeter and Persephone as a positive myth for women writers.⁵³ Naomi Schor drew on the image of Ariadne's thread to represent feminine narrative, calling on women to 'break the chain'; and Nancy Miller's essay 'Arachnologies: The woman, the text, and the critic' drew on Ovid's rebellious weaver Arachne to consider the 'poetics of gender' in women's rewriting practices.⁵⁴

In 'What Was Penelope Unweaving?', Carolyn Heilbrun drew on the figure of Homer's Penelope, alongside Ovid's Arachne, Ariadne, and Philomela, to figure weaving as women's language, reading Penelope's acts of weaving, unweaving, and reweaving as representations of the woman writer trying out different stories: '[o]ut of old tales, we must make new lives'.⁵⁵ Rachel DuPlessis drew on Virgil's *Aeneid* to wonder how Creusa's story continued after Aeneas left her behind, practising the theory that she expanded in her own call for women's revisionist mythmaking to 'write beyond the ending'.⁵⁶ DuPlessis also suggests strategies of narrative displacement, narrative de-legitimation, and narrative realignment to tell the 'other side' of a story, advice which echoes Virginia Woolf's call to 'break' the sentence and the sequence.⁵⁷

⁵³ Herrmann (1979); Gubar (1979); cf. Paula Smith Allen (1999), who tracks the rejection of the Persephone motif in favour of the quest motif of Psyche as a figure for the woman writer.

⁵⁴ Schor (1985); Miller (1986).

⁵⁵ Heilbrun (1985; 2002, p. 109). On women writers making central the periphery, see Hall (2008a). Penelope's unweaving resists closure and is the unravelling of language (Hurst, 2009, p. 292-293).

⁵⁶ DuPlessis (1985a, b); on DuPlessis, see Liveley (2006a, pp. 60-61); on Creusa and feminist criticism, see also Homans (1987).

⁵⁷ DuPlessis (1985b, pp. 108-109); Woolf (2004a, p. 106).

In an important essay, Alicia Ostriker drew on Herrmann to posit H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* as the epitome of how women revisionary mythmakers can be 'thieves of language'.⁵⁸ As a form of 'high culture' that purports to be objective, classical myth confers authority on women writers who are otherwise accused of writing 'merely' of the private self.⁵⁹ In a discussion of H.D.'s classicism and Anne Sexton's use of fairy tale, Ostriker notes the depersonalizing effects of myth and feminine archetypes on contemporary women, but demonstrates how women writers can deconstruct and reconstruct classical myths in ways which foreground themselves as women.⁶⁰ She sets out four main characteristics of women's revisionary mythmaking: it enacts a feminist anti-authoritarianism; it is not simply a rewriting of a myth, but a re-evaluation of social values; it rejects nostalgia (that is, the male modernist poets nostalgically looked back to a classical golden age, but women writers see only the same oppression of their sex then as now); and it is formally experimental, particularly in its use of intertwining narrative voices (the aesthetic shock of formal experimentation emphasizes that the woman's text is an argument, as well as an act of rewriting).⁶¹

Ostriker argues that myth is not fixed but always to be (re)deciphered.⁶² Women writers frequently do not simply reverse myth, but critically engage with it to explore suppressed female

⁵⁸ Ostriker (1982); see also Ostriker (1987). On H.D.'s revisionary mythmaking, see Ostriker (1982, pp. 78-82); on H.D.'s classical translation work, see Hardwick (2000, pp. 45-47). Hardwick delineates how H.D. translated ancient women poets, male poets sympathetic to women, or focused on passages that dealt with feminine/ist issues. H.D. frequently changed the speakers of poems or narrative sequences to critique traditional interpretations of classical myths and the traditional literary 'canon'.

⁵⁹ Ostriker (1982, p. 72).

⁶⁰ Ostriker also discusses Plath's 'Lady Lazarus', Margaret Atwood's 'Circe/ Mud Poems', Erica Jong's 'Arse Poetica', and Alta's 'Euridice'. On feminism and fairy tales, see Dworkin (1974) on the ways in which fairy tales shape cultural values by figuring women as passive, evil, and beautiful; Brownmiller (1975) uses fairy tales as examples to show how women are acculturated to be rape victims; Daly (1990) also reads fairy tales as carriers of toxic patriarchal myths. For a similar critique of the narrative fate of heroines in novels as unfulfilled victims of social convention, see Kennard (1978); on the representation of women in fiction, see also Marcus (1982), and Heilbrun and Higonnet (1982).

⁶¹ Ostriker (1982, p. 87).

⁶² Ostriker (1982, p. 86).

relationships and characteristics. Furthermore, even when women writers do not change the endings of the tales they retell, their mobile position as storyteller within the text negotiates how the reader interprets the myth. The woman writer influences the amount of irony or distance with which we (re)read the old tale and encourages her reader to adopt a similarly critical eye when reading ‘classic’ texts. Ostriker is more cautious than Cixous or Irigaray and hesitates to posit the existence of a ‘female language’ or ‘mother tongue’ (referencing the milk ink, or ‘white ink’ of *écriture féminine*); Ostriker focuses instead on the poetic construction of a female self.⁶³ In the readings that follow, I argue that women rewrite Ovid not only to poetically construct a female self, but to construct an artistic female self, figuring themselves as women writers within—and against—the classical tradition.⁶⁴

2.4 ‘Fiction-theory’ and feminist translation strategies

The relationship between women’s fictional texts and feminist critical theory explored in this thesis is not always definite or explicit; Plath, for example, wrote a decade before the advent of second-wave feminism, and Wertenbaker has frequently distanced herself from the label ‘feminist’. I have therefore found the hybrid concept of ‘fiction-theory’ a useful framework for positioning the generic and critical boundaries crossed by feminine Ovidian texts. In the late 1970s the Québécoise writer Nicole Brossard began experimenting with a new writing style that she called ‘fiction-theory’, creating texts that combined both fiction and critical feminist theory.⁶⁵ As in the work of Cixous and Irigaray, Brossard aimed to make visible in language that which remained hidden or unspoken in masculine, patriarchal language—namely, herself

⁶³ Cixous (1976, p. 881).

⁶⁴ On ‘reclaiming the Muse’, see Murray (2006, p. 327); on Ovid’s Muse, see Sharrock (2002b); on Muses in ancient literature, see Spentzou and Fowler (2002).

⁶⁵ On Brossard and feminist literary theory, see Forsyth (1987).

as a woman and her lesbian sexual desires. Brossard's experimental works are densely metatextual; in *Le Désert mauve* (1987), for example, a book about translating and translators, the fictional narrative contained within the work is enacted on a physical level by the book itself, literalizing the critical theory that informs her work.⁶⁶

Exposing the linguistic mechanisms of patriarchy as they are encoded in language is easily done in French, which has clear rules about grammatical gender that can be visibly disrupted. Thus, to adequately translate Brossard's radical fictional-theoretical texts into English in a visually striking and interventionist manner, feminist translators Barbara Godard and Luise von Flotow developed feminist translation strategies (which were subsequently also applied to non-feminist texts).⁶⁷ In the last fifteen years, Translation Studies has almost wholly redefined the possibilities of translation, and pioneering feminist translators have foregrounded issues of gender and sexuality in both the process and product of translation.⁶⁸

In her article 'Theorizing Feminist Discourse/ Translation', Godard sets out the nature and purpose of feminist translation techniques: to create works which emphasize the polyphony of the translated text and which 'foreground... the self-reflexive elements of the translator's/

⁶⁶ Cf. Calvino (1998). On 'theorizing fiction-theory', see Godard, Marlatt, Mezei and Scott (1994); also Godard (1987).

⁶⁷ See especially Godard (1990; 1984), von Flotow (1991; 1997; 2001; 2006; 2011), Chamberlain (1992), and Simon (1996); see also the detailed discussion of Balmer's feminist translation techniques in chapter 5. On women translating differently, compare the assertion in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*: 'I dare say, if I could read the original Greek, I should find that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misapprehended altogether. It would be possible, I doubt not, with a little ingenuity, to give the passage quite a contrary turn' (1979, p. 371).

⁶⁸ On translation studies, see, e.g., Bassnett and Lefevere (1990), and Bassnett (2014). Early 'gender inclusive' translation was pioneered in biblical translation; see especially Haugerud (1977). More recently, Shread (2011) has proposed 'metamorphic' feminist translation, drawing on the work of Ettinger (2006) on the 'matrixial' space; see also von Flotow (2012) on 'metamorphosis' and 'queering' translation; on lesbian translation, see Wolfe and Penelope (1993); on postcolonial translation strategies, see Simon (1999), and Simon and St.-Pierre (2000).

rewriter's discourse and flaunt... its work, its textuality'.⁶⁹ The key feature of a feminist translation is the visibility of the woman translator, who signals her presence through this self-conscious textuality:

The feminist translator, affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. *Womanhandling* the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest, self-effacing translator. Taking her place would be an active participant in the creation of meaning who advances a conditional analysis. Hers is a continuing provisionality, aware of process, giving self-reflexive attention to practices. The feminist translator immodestly flaunts her signature in italics, in footnotes—even in a preface.⁷⁰

Following Godard, von Flotow proposed three main strategies of feminist translation.⁷¹ The first is to supplement the text, which von Flotow also terms 'over-translating'; for example, the feminist translator may employ the graphic style of a dictionary entry, or use superscript and subscript simultaneously on the printed page to provide multiple translations for the same word. The strategy of 'over-translation' both avoids the closure of meaning (as closure is associated with patriarchal language), and provokes thought about alternative translations, inviting the reader to actively participate in the creation of meaning, thus highlighting the relationship between author, translator, and reader.⁷² Supplementing the text highlights the roles of the feminist translator and her scholarly tools, and draws attention to the choices in translation that are often already made for readers.

⁶⁹ Godard (1990, p. 92). Feminist political discourse is concerned with the creation of subjectivity(ies) through language, and feminist translation techniques strive to achieve this.

⁷⁰ Godard (1990, p. 93). This visibility is distinct from the self-referential metafictional elements of postmodern texts as it is employed explicitly as a political, feminist tactic. 'Womanhandling' a text may work to neutralize or to transform the violence contained in the term 'manhandling'; Balmer points to the difference between the two ways of 'handling' Sappho's poetry in her translations which redress male readings of texts (1992; see chapter 5.2).

⁷¹ von Flotow (1991).

⁷² On narrative (historical) closure as an expression of power, see Foucault (1979).

von Flotow's second strategy for the feminist translator is the use of clear and indiscreet prefacing and footnoting which 'flaunt her visibility' in the text, drawing attention to the text as translation, to the translator as woman, and to the work she has carried out on the text; this is often achieved through the addition of autobiographical commentary, or the insertion of the translator as a character within the translated text. The third strategy is the 'hijacking' of the text.⁷³ In hijacking a text a feminist translator enacts a political intervention between source text and target text to make woman visible in language and to challenge patriarchal structures as they are embedded in and reinforced through language. The finished products of these 'rewritings in the feminine' (*réécriture au féminin*) can thus be visually very different from one another in their combination of these translation strategies, but they are united by their foregrounding of methodology.⁷⁴ By 'womanhandling' a text in such a way, the feminist translator can combine a literary project with an activist one, and translation becomes 'production, not reproduction'.⁷⁵ I argue that the 'writerly' nature of these texts, in which the woman writer flaunts both her presence and the constructed nature of her text, aids the process by which the reader is encouraged to assume the 'resisting' feminine mode of reading Ovid's tales.⁷⁶

Feminist translation strategies have also been influenced by Lawrence Venuti's work on 'foreignizing' texts; that is, rather than 'domesticating' a source text by disguising its difference to the target text language, Venuti urges the translator to highlight and celebrate

⁷³ von Flotow (1991). Like the word 'queer', 'hijacking' is an example of Foucauldian reverse discourse—a reclaiming of a term that was first used as an insult in a newspaper review of an early work of feminist translation.

⁷⁴ '*réécriture au féminin*' (de Lotbinière-Harwood, 1991).

⁷⁵ von Flotow (1991); Godard (1990, p. 90).

⁷⁶ Barthes (1974).

those differences.⁷⁷ Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari's literary concept tools for discussing 'minoritarian' literature have proved useful for the feminist translator.⁷⁸ A 'minoritarian' text is one which refuses to speak in the voice of the dominant ('majoritarian') social narrative (for the purposes of this thesis, 'minoritarian' will be applied to the text produced by a feminine subject writing-speaking in a dominant language, English/ Latin, which is taken to be patriarchal).⁷⁹ According to Deleuze and Guattari, minoritarian texts employ three main formal techniques to subvert majoritarian languages: collage; autobiography; and the metafictional.

The collage technique can involve the mixing of genres and the transgression of generic boundaries, bringing together different texts and styles in one work with rich intertextual allusions. As well as very literal collage techniques, collage (*'bricolage'*) can also include experimentation with syntax, grammar, and incongruous generic conventions such as footnotes and indices.⁸⁰ The use of collage again highlights both the author's physical work on the text and the text's self-conscious constructed nature and textuality. Second, autobiographical elements allow the minoritarian writer to experiment with and explore her subjective position as author or translator, subtly questioning the production of knowledge in majoritarian cultures. Third, metafictional elements directly incorporate into the text a critical commentary on the writing process and meaning production; such metafictional elements facilitate the feminist translator's aim to 'flaunt' her presence.

⁷⁷ Venuti (1995; 1998).

⁷⁸ On Deleuze and translation, see Godard (2000).

⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari (1986).

⁸⁰ Such as the collection of textual and non-textual pieces seen in Anne Carson's translation of Catullus 101, *Nox* (2010); see Theodorakopoulos (2012).

While the palimpsestic collage or fragment is also a preoccupation of many modernist and postmodernist texts, Linda Hutcheon has argued that postmodern formal play, particularly when employed by women, can disrupt hierarchies and monolithic cultural narratives (that is, that ‘culture’ is white, male, Western).⁸¹ Hutcheon posits historiographic metafiction as a site where the postmodern fragment, parodic forms, and the ironizing of history becomes explicitly politicized; that is, as a site where historically-allusive texts are ‘not a nostalgic return... [but] a critical revisiting’.⁸² Extending Hutcheon’s analysis of historically-based self-reflexive novels to works of classical reception, the women writers’ play with form, language, and their Ovidian source texts becomes a strategy aimed at dismantling the classical tradition and encouraging new, active, and interrogative readings of the classics. Ovid’s own playful style has been associated with postmodern literary strategies, but re-viewing his work through the lens of women writers redeems his own intertextual play as an inherently critical revisiting of texts and ideology, rather than witty nostalgia alone.⁸³

Throughout the four chapters that now follow, I explore the interrelation between feminist classical scholarship, feminine/ist modes and strategies of reading, writing, and translating, and women’s Ovidian receptions. In tracking the relationship over time, I detail how both literary strategies change and hermeneutic possibilities proliferate as the women writers gain the tools and the confidence to write back to the classical tradition, flaunting their

⁸¹ Hutcheon (1987, p. 252). Hutcheon draws on Foucault to (re)politicize the postmodern, against critics including Jameson (1984) and Eagleton (1985), who saw only meaningless play in postmodern texts.

⁸² Hutcheon (1993, p. 244); that is, historical novels that play with the fictionality of characters, lives, and events. Hutcheon cites as examples of women’s historiographic metafiction Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora* (1975), Ruby Wiebe’s *The Scorched-Wood People* (1977), and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *China Men* (1980). Hutcheon continues: ‘When Eliot recalled Dante or Virgil in *The Waste Land*, one sensed a kind of wishful call to continuity beneath the fragmented echoing. It is precisely this that is contested in postmodern parody’ (p. 251).

⁸³ On Ovid as postmodern, see Fowler (1994, p. 252), Ziolkowski (2005, pp. 170-184), and Roynon and Orrells (forthcoming). Fowler notes that poetics are necessarily ‘contaminated by ideology’, and thus the political and the aesthetic cannot be separated in literary criticism (1994, p. 252); contra Martindale (e.g., 2008).

presences in Ovid's texts. By highlighting their characters' knowledge of themselves as constructed figures, and by (re)embodying and (re)voicing their characters as women writers with a vibrancy that scholarship cannot achieve, feminine/ist Ovidian receptions can aid scholars in successfully negotiating the key critical impasses of feminist classical scholarship: whether Ovid's women are 'real' or 'written', and the male ventriloquism of the female voice.⁸⁴ In addition to telling old stories in new ways and 'breaking the hold' of tradition, in their blend of fiction and theory, these feminine receptions also carry feminist (classical) scholarship to a wider audience, and thus have the potential to effect real social change.⁸⁵ Such feminine Ovidian receptions deserve to be recognized as serious literary work, and the work and insights of the women writers I discuss in this thesis are essential to advance both Ovidian scholarship and feminist scholarship. For my first example of this playful yet political feminine Ovidian tradition, I turn now to the classical reception work of Sylvia Plath.

⁸⁴ Harvey (1996).

⁸⁵ Ostriker argues that social change will follow from revisionist mythmaking (1982, p. 72).

SYLVIA PLATH

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the American writer Sylvia Plath and her sustained engagement with the classics throughout her prose and poetry. Plath's oeuvre is consistently examined by critics in biographical terms, with the result that the frequent classical allusions in her work have been almost wholly ignored. When the presence of mythological characters is noted, the focus falls on Plath's brief references to Greek tragedy and the figure of Electra, with the implication that Plath was only drawn to the Freudian 'family romance' of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* following the death of her father. Such biographical and psychoanalytic readings of Plath's work reduce her use of classical myth to a simple template upon which she mapped her life, and overlook Plath's sophisticated dialogue with literary history.¹

I therefore begin the chapter by highlighting Plath's work as a classical scholar and teacher, using her close textual work with Virgil's *Georgics* as a brief example of her classical engagement. Next, as a foil for my own readings of Plath's poetry, I provide an overview of the psychoanalytic and 'biomythographical' readings of Plath's use of myth that dominate the

¹ Rose (1991, p. 11) describes the construction of Plath-as-myth by critics as 'the worst of what has been done to Plath'; see n. 67, below. For a good overview of biographical treatments of Plath and the 'reading fallacies' that mar them, see Van Dyne (2006); Badia (2011) adds perspective on the way that Plath's readers are stigmatized. Feminist analyses tend to avoid the biographical and focus on Plath's work; see Bundtzen (1983; 2005), Axelrod (1990), Rose (1991), Van Dyne (1993), Britzolakis (1999), Brain (2001), and Bayley and Brain (2011); for new directions in Plath scholarship, see the essays collected in Connors and Bayley (2007), and Helle (2007). Throughout the chapter the following abbreviations are used for Plath's works: *LH* (*Letters Home*, 1976), *JP* (*Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, 1977), *CP* (*Collected Poems*, 1981), *J* (*The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, 2000), *BJ* (*The Bell Jar*, 2005).

existing critical scholarship, examining particularly her husband Ted Hughes' suggestion that the figures of Phaethon and Icarus provide the biographical 'interpretative key' for understanding Plath's *Ariel* poems. After offering alternative ways of reading Plath's Phaethon and Icarus that link her directly to Ovid, and to establish further context for her Ovidian reception work, I discuss Plath's wry and often ambivalent engagement with the classical tradition in her prose. I then focus in detail on three of Plath's 'tales from Ovid': Daphne, Philomela, and Pygmalion. I explore the particularly gendered way in which Plath responds to her literary model, *Metamorphoses*, and rewrites Ovid's text: using myth to speak of contemporary women's lives; questioning the role of the woman-as-muse; and challenging directly the literary archetypes of 'woman' that she found in male poetic texts. Furthermore, the various points of contact, echo, and allusion between the texts of Ovid, Plath, and Hughes suggest that the classical reception work of Hughes is more fully understood if viewed through the prism of Plath's own classicism.

While no anachronistic claims are made here regarding Plath's 'feminism', two pivotal feminist critiques of literary and cultural female archetypes bookend Plath's career: Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (translated into English by Howard Parshley, a professor at Plath's alma mater, Smith College, and published in the year that Plath joined the college, 1953); and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (published by a fellow Smith College graduate six months after Plath's death in 1963; the work was based upon research that Friedan had conducted by post with Smith alumna). The two works provide a useful frame to position both Plath's Ovidian engagement and her life and work in the context of pre-second-wave feminism. Friedan's representation of the isolation of women in the 1950s and 1960s before the advent of the sisterhood of the second-wave feminist movement is particularly pertinent for reading

Plath's poetry; writing before women began to take a political approach to theorizing their lives, Plath—using Ovid—takes a poetic approach.

3.2 Sylvia Plath and the classics

Plath was first introduced to Latin as a child by her father, who had majored in classical languages at Northwestern University and continued his Latin studies at doctoral level at Harvard, where it was compulsory for studying entomology; the young Plath would memorize and recite the Latin names of insects to amuse her father at home.² Later, Plath studied Latin at school, experimenting with Latin in her childhood journals.³ Latin is mentioned explicitly in several of Plath's poems, and repeated references to translation throughout her published journals and letters demonstrate a sensitivity to issues of translation and the transmission of classical texts.⁴ 'The Ghost's Leavetaking', for example, is densely classically allusive and closes with a knowingly bathetic retranslation of Catullus 101: 'Hail and farewell. Hello, goodbye'.⁵ Other allusions perhaps humorously recall Plath's school Latin days, as in her description of 'every foul declension', and her fears of miscomprehension: in her cycle of Virgilian bee poems (discussed further below) the 'unintelligible syllables' of her new bee hive are 'like a Roman mob... I lay my ear to furious Latin'.⁶

² Butscher (2003, p. 10).

³ *LH* 37; archive material quoted in Kirk (2004, p. 31); a letter from Plath to a German pen-pal describes studying Latin at school (Wilson, 2013, p. 87). Plath's childhood journals, which may detail the specific Latin texts Plath studied at school, are unpublished.

⁴ On translation see, e.g., *J* 233, 383-384, 399; *LH* 149, 256, 307.

⁵ *CP* 90.

⁶ 'Ouija' (*CP* 77); 'The Arrival of the Bee Box' (*CP* 212). Plath's working title for her poem 'Faun' (*CP* 35), a poem taking Hughes as its subject, was the more explicitly Latinate 'Faunus' (*J* 410; also *J* 163, 323). Plath visited Rome in the spring of 1956; her journals for this period are unfortunately missing (she refers back to 'my Roman time' at *J* 336), but glimpses of the city appear in her poetry and prose: the speaker of 'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.' (*CP* 170) admires the body as 'a Roman thing', likening the network of veins and organs to 'Aqueducts, the Baths of Caracalla'; she reads America in Gibbons' descriptions of the dying Roman Empire (*J* 32); she describes heartbreak for a woman as like giving up one's lares and penates (*J* 218; cf. Hughes' use of this image in 'Fingers', 1998a, p. 194); learning about ancient civilizations 'stimulates' her (*J* 523).

As well as Latin texts, Plath read Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in translation for her English class at school and studied Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides for the tragedy paper at Cambridge University.⁷ Plath later taught Sophocles to undergraduates as a teacher at Smith College (1958-1959); her journals for this period provide an invaluable insight into Plath as a classical scholar and her own readings of ancient texts.⁸ Plath's personal library contained a broad range of classical texts including Sappho, Aristotle, Augustine, Marcus Aurelius, Thucydides, Plato, and Quintilian (many in the Loeb editions), as well as a range of works of classical reception including Racine's *Phèdre*, Anouilh's *Antigone*, and Marguerite Yourcenar's *Hadrian's Memoirs*.⁹ Representations of mythological characters in visual art, in particular, the films of Jean Cocteau, and the paintings of Paul Klee, Rousseau, José Clemente Orozco, and Giorgio de Chirico also acted as key stimuli for Plath's classicism. Her classical imagery and tone is also frequently filtered through—or against—a variety of mediating literary texts; Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, Nietzsche, W.B. Yeats, James

⁷ Cassandra and Hector at Troy (*J* 192); Achilles (*J* 415); Leda (conception is likened to 'the great swan... | Coming at me', *CP* 176; 'Winter Trees', *CP* 257); Helen (*J* 134); Penelope (*J* 233; sketching out a heroine for a story, Plath describes her as a 'voyager, no Penelope' (Clark, 2010, p. 67n7); while Plath rejects Penelope, other women writers have used her as a figure to negotiate the competing claims of domesticity and art; see Hurst, 2009); Odysseus ('On the Decline of Oracles' meditates on de Chirico's painting of Odysseus, *On the Enigma of the Oracle*; Plath imagines herself as Ulysses in her short story 'Suburban Nocturne' (Wilson, 2013, p. 190)); in Plath's copy of *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, the description of repressed memories as 'like the shades in the *Odyssey* which awaken to a certain degree of life as soon as they have drunk blood' is underlined (Rose, 1991, p. 32); Charybdis (*J* 401; Clark (2010, p. 68) reads Hughes as Charybdis, Plath as Odysseus). Tragic characters and references in Plath's poetry include: 'goatish tragedians' in 'The Beggars' (*CP* 47); the 'black deus/ Ex machina' of 'Spider' (*CP* 48); Oedipal imagery in 'The Eye-mote' (*CP* 109); the speaker in 'Electra on Azalea Path' 'borrow[s] the stilts of an old tragedy' (*CP* 116); the avenging lioness of 'Purdah' as Clytaemnestra (*CP* 242); Gill (2006a, p. 95) notes a possible allusion to Sophocles' Oedipus and the influence of H.D.'s poem 'Calypso Speaks' on Plath's 'Full Fathom Five' (*CP* 92). In Plath's journals: life is living as if on stage in a tragedy written for somebody else (*J* 48, 203); psychoanalysis is like watching a Greek tragedy (*J* 455); on Freud's 'Electra complex' (*J* 512); 'O the tangles of that old bed' (Oedipus, *J* 520); on teaching Sophocles: *J* 329, 333-335; on Antigone: *J* 216, 222, 333, 340, 554.

⁸ On the Greek tragedians, see also *LH* 195, 209, 229.

⁹ Plath named her cat Sappho (*J* 360, 462; Sappho the cat's mother was Scylla, 442). As well as a sustained engagement with Sapphic imagery (bees, moons, lilies, poppies, roses), Plath's poem 'Years' reads as a version of Sappho fr. 16 ('What I love is | The piston in motion—| ... And the hooves of horses', *CP* 255); 'Three Caryatids' (uncollected; Middlebrook, 2007b) uses fragmented Sapphic metre, which reflects the decapitated figures of the women in the poem. Aristotle: *LH* 186, 228. Plato: 'Magi' (*CP* 148), 'Totem' (*CP* 264), *J* 144, 217, 517; *LH* 77, 242, 243, 251; Plath refers to the poet Auden as 'my Plato', and to meeting him as 'snatching... olive pits from the tables of the ambrosial gods!' (*J* 180). Plath's library is catalogued online at: <http://www.librarything.com/catalog/SylviaPlathLibrary/yourlibrary> (Accessed: 21 February 2016).

Joyce, H.D., T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Stevie Smith, and Anne Sexton all provide key intertexts for Plath's engagement with the classics, particularly with the works of Ovid, Virgil, Lucretius, and Apuleius.¹⁰ Yet Plath also repeatedly demonstrates in her poems an intimate knowledge of the original texts through close verbal echoes.

Plath's celebrated cycle of bee poems (*CP* 211-219), for example, play with Sappho fr. 13 ('Neither honey nor bee for me'), via the sexual undertones of the plundering bees in H.D.'s Sappho poem, 'Fragment 113'; the images of bees at flower to describe the bride's wedding and defloration in H.D.'s poem are strongly recalled in the opening poem of Plath's sequence, 'The Bee Meeting', where the speaker is white, veiled, and silent.¹¹ Yet the bee poems also innovatively translate and rewrite Virgil's guide to beekeeping in *Georgics* 4. At the biographical level, both Virgil and Plath had beekeeper fathers; yet the links between their work are more complex. Alongside the repeated references to the Latin language, Rome, Romans, and Caesar (cf. *Geo.* 4.506), each one of the five poems that form Plath's bee sequence corresponds directly to a section of Virgil's poem. In 'The Bee Meeting', the speaker describes her initiation into beekeeping (cf. *Geo.* 4.8-66); 'The Arrival of the Bee Box' recounts boxing

¹⁰ Plath read Yeats on Dryden's translation of Lucretius (*J* 175); Apuleius: Cupid and Psyche and The House of Eros inform 'Three Women' (*CP* 176), the echoing chambers and uncanny banquet of 'The Other Two' (*CP* 68), and 'Two Views of Withens' (*CP* 71). For Plath's classicism, see also, e.g., Aphrodite (*J* 415); classical statuary and sculpture as metonymies for the classical tradition in 'Three Caryatids' (uncollected), 'Conversation Among the Ruins' (*CP* 21), 'Letter to a Purist' (*CP* 36), 'The Colossus' (*CP* 129), 'Private Ground' (*CP* 130), 'Small Hours' (collected as 'Barren Woman', *CP* 157), 'Childless Woman' (*CP* 259), 'Morning Song' (*CP* 156), the 'White Nike' of 'The Other' (*CP* 201), and the colossus of 'Daddy' (*CP* 222); the 'gorgon' in 'Prologue to Spring' (*CP* 322); also *J* 142, 163, 370, 440, 502, 524, 525; I follow Axelrod (1990, pp. 46-47) and Britzolakis (1999, pp. 41, 60) in reading the figure of the colossus as representing literary not biological forefathers; on Toni Morrison's similarly subversive use of classical architectural tropes in her fiction, see Roynon (2013, p. 84). Plath's writing also contains a host of classical allusions, from mythological creatures, fauns, and Cerberus (*CP* 231), to the hydra (*J* 227; *LH* 301); 'The Manor Garden' (*CP* 125) uses a Callimachean image of poetry-as-fountain; there are 'Elegiac dryads' in 'November Graveyard' (*CP* 56); Neptune as the sea father-god muse (*J* 381); Prometheus (*CP* 62; also Gill, 2006, p. 98); an early drawing of Plath's depicts Pallas Athene, and she jokes about looking forward to throwing a 'Bacchanalian festival' when her broken leg heals, displaying the pieces of the plaster cast as 'relics of the Parthenon' (Connors and Bayley, 2007, pp. 11, 87, 89).

¹¹ See also *LH* 367; on H.D. and Sappho see Rohrbach (1996). On beekeeping as an analogue for writing poetry in the classical world, see, e.g., Plato's *Ion*.

the bees, the 'Roman mob' (cf. *Geo.* 4.8-50); 'Stings' describes the usurpation of the old queen bee and the 'bride-flight' of the new queen (cf. *Geo.* 4.67-102, 228-238); 'The Swarm' draws upon Virgil's account of the swarming bees (*Geo.* 4.103-108); and 'Wintering' describes the hibernation of the bees (cf. *Geo.* 4.231-250).

The similarities, however, are more than thematic. 'The Swarm', for example, borrows Virgil's extended war metaphor at *Geo.* 4.67-87, but updates his references to Caesar to describe the bees as the bee-emperor Napoleon and his troops battling at Waterloo; and Plath's imagery in 'Stings', which alludes to the myth of Procne at the end of her poem, flying away from 'The mausoleum, the wax house' that killed her, thus works into her text Virgil's own allusions to Procne at *Geo.* 4.15 and Philomela at 4.511. Plath's draft manuscripts for this poem suggest a stronger link to Procne, as the queen flies on her wings of glass 'over the deserted nurseries... The dead men at the lintel'.¹² Plath also follows the Latin closely in 'Stings', with her description of the old queen, 'Her wings torn shawls, her long body | Rubbed of its plush', and the 'Honey-drudgers' who 'thought death was worth it' (*saepe etiam duris errando in cotibus alas | attriuere, ultroque animam sub fasce dedere: | tantus amor florum et generandi gloria mellis*, 'Often they even wear down their wings as they bumble against the hard rocks, and freely give their lives under the load: so great is their love of flowers and the glory in making honey', 4.203-205).

¹² Drafts quoted in Van Dyne (1984, p. 162). That Plath's intertext for further detail on the Procne myth was Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (6.424-676) may be suggested by the queen's 'lion-red body', whose colour suggests the stains (*notae*) on the transformed birds' breasts. The speaker/ the old queen bee says: 'I am no drudge | Though for years I have eaten dust | And dried plates with my dense hair'; in Plath's drafts for the poem, she tries out 'six years' or 'seven years' for these lines (Van Dyne, 1984, p. 163), referencing the six years of Procne's marriage to Tereus (Ovid counts five autumns (6.439) plus a further year (6.571)). Near the end of the poem, the queen's bees attack the male figure, an attack in which they stand to lose far more than they will gain ('they thought death was worth it').

Across the bee sequence Plath's speaker must decide how to relate to those enslaved for her benefit. In 'The Arrival of the Bee Box' she considers whether to keep the bees, or to set them free: 'I am not a Caesar'.¹³ Plath's use of 'African hands' in the same poem to describe the bees reminds the classical reader of Virgil's own African bees, the Carthaginians (compared to bees building a new city for the queen bee, Dido, at *Aen.* 1.430-436); Plath may therefore be drawing on another of Virgil's texts here to comment on contemporary American politics in the pre-Civil Rights Movement era, alluding to the segregation and racial inequality in her home nation.¹⁴ Plath's speaker seems acutely aware of whiteness and blackness (particularly in the white imagery of 'Wintering'), and she documents her struggle in the poems to understand the 'other' while also admitting the temptation of power and privilege: 'They can die, I need feed them nothing, I am the owner'. Plath's bee poems craft a complex blend of Virgil's *Georgics* with contemporary racial anxieties in the US.¹⁵

Plath also uses Virgil's text to comment on the particularly gendered aspects of domestic slavery, that is, to foreground the woman who, Plath implies, is the necessary yet unspoken condition of Virgil's pastoral paradise. 'Stings' in particular implies that the man's idyll has come at the expense of the woman's cultural starvation and hard work: 'for years I have eaten dust | And dried plates with my dense hair'.¹⁶ By invoking the authority of Virgil's *Georgics*,

¹³ Caesar also appears in 'The Dead' (CP 320).

¹⁴ *qualis apes aestate noua per florea rura | exercet sub sole labor, cum gentis adultos | educunt fetus, aut cum liquentia mella | stipant et dulci distendunt nectare cellas, | aut onera accipiunt uenientum, aut agmine facto | ignauum fucos pecus a praesepibus arcent; | feruet opus redolentque thymo frag[r]antia mella*, 'Just as bees in a new season, busy at work through the flowery countryside when the newly matured of the race are led out, or when they are treading on the liquid honey and filling the cells with sweet nectar, or accepting the weight [of nectar] as it comes in, or rank in columns to keep the idle drones from the home fold; [the hive] buzzes from their work and the air is redolent with thyme-fragranced honey', *Aen.* 1.430-436. Racial segregation in the US did not end country-wide in law until 1964, over a year after Plath's death.

¹⁵ On the representation of race in Plath's work, see the critique by Curry (2000), and the response by Miller (2007).

¹⁶ Cf. life with Hughes in Devon was 'as if domesticity had choked me' (LH 466); 'I am and have been an intelligent woman, and this year of country life has been, for me, a cultural death' (LH 467). Cf. Wilkinson (1982, p. 320), who notes that the absence of any discussion of slavery in Virgil's *Georgics* is 'astonishing'. In

Plath challenges the male poetic tradition which unquestioningly praises the pastoral life, at the same time as she tests out her classical training, using old texts to explore new ways of representing herself as a woman, a wife, and a poet.¹⁷ Yet Plath problematizes Virgil's poem at the same time as she draws heavily upon it, an ambivalent response that both endorses and refutes her classical model. Plath challenges the power that the classics hold—literalized in her text through the dominating and dangerous presences of Caesars and Napoleons—by showing that it is a power that her speaker does not necessarily want to hold herself. The poems' use of Virgil thus allegorizes the ambivalent 'value' of a classical education in a period when women were still expected to abandon their university studies for marriage.¹⁸

The bee poems form part of Plath's larger engagement with Virgil; the imagery of 'pearl', 'ivory', and 'tusks' in 'A Birthday Present' (*CP* 206) may allude to the Gate of Ivory and the Gate of Horn at *Aen.* 6.893-896; 'Getting There' (*CP* 247) alludes to the souls who drink from the river Lethe before their rebirth (*Aen.* 6.749-751); Plath's 'Elm' (*CP* 192) 'inhabited by a cry. | Nightly it flaps out' reworks the *ulmus opaca* full of false dreams at *Aen.* 6.282-284; while 'Nick and the Candlestick' (*CP* 240) reimagines Aeneas' flight from Troy and journey to visit his dead father, as Plath describes a journey into the dark tunnels of a Virgilian Underworld ('I am a miner'), carrying her new-born child. In addition to her school Latin, Plath may have come across Virgilian images of Tartarus via Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, a book Plath's mother bought her for a university assignment, and which itself alludes to 'the golden bough' most famously found at the mouth of the entrance to the Underworld in in *Aeneid* 6. Plath also has

Ovid, a mention of women's hair always returns the reader to Daphne and to Apollo's wish to dress Daphne's hair (*Met.* 1.497-498); here, the speaker ironically laments the domestic fate of her once-lauded hair.

¹⁷ Hughes figures himself as a 'nature poet' throughout his work; on Hughes' sincere evocation of the Tibullan elegiac rural idyll, see Liveley (2009, pp. 225-226, especially 226 n. 33).

¹⁸ See Friedan (1992, *passim*).

Virgil on her mind as she plots a story about turbulent relationships between two couples, which she summarizes thematically as ‘House of Wind’; elsewhere, Plath picks ‘Sibyl’ for the name of the character who is a spirit ‘medium’, but decides a few days later that Sibyl is too ‘pretentious’ and settles instead on ‘Dido’.¹⁹

While Plath’s engagement with Virgil is clear and deep, Plath chooses to engage with classical themes and characters in her work most frequently via Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.²⁰ Plath displays a sustained thematic interest in images of metamorphosis, repeatedly meditating on insects and the changing moon, and using metamorphic imagery in a specifically gendered way to describe pregnancy and the ill or menstruating body.²¹ Mental ill-health is also repeatedly figured in Plath’s poems as a type of metamorphosis, most frequently represented by images of women overwhelmed by plant-life, as in the unsettling blur between woman and plant as a woman melts into the flower-patterned carpets in ‘Miss Drake Proceeds to Supper’, or the suffocating flowers of ‘Poem for a Birthday’, ‘Leaving Early’, ‘Tulips’, and ‘I Am Vertical’.²² More widely, Plath’s Ovidian metamorphic imagery can also be found in, for example, the man’s transformation to woodland beast in ‘Faun’ (initially titled ‘Metamorphosis’), the mix of animal and human throughout her journal writings (a ‘humanized tree stump, or something

¹⁹ *J* 303; *J* 311. For Dido see also ‘The Queen’s Complaint’ (*CP* 28) and *J* 123. On Virgilian presences in contemporary women’s writing, see Fowler (2009), and Cox (2011).

²⁰ A note on Plath’s source texts for Ovid and Virgil: Jacobsen (2009, pp. 159-160, quoting Sagar, 2006, n.p.) lists F. J. Miller’s 1916 Loeb (Harvard) translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as Hughes’ source text for his translations in *Tales from Ovid*. Hughes’ 6000-strong library, recently bought by Emory University, has not yet been fully catalogued, but Emory notes that the collection includes many volumes previously owned by Plath. Plath’s father studied Latin at Harvard in the 1920s (shortly after Miller’s Loeb was published), and it is tempting to speculate that Hughes’ Loeb’s once belonged to the Plaths. Sylvia Plath’s own library (dispersed between Emory, Indiana University, and Smith College) includes Loeb editions of Plato (*Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*, pub. 1953; *Lysis*, *Symposium*, *Gorgias*, pub. 1953), and Quintilian (*Institutio Oratio* Vol. III, pub. 1921). The Hughes library is partly available at: <http://guides.main.library.emory.edu/c.php?g=50459&p=325091> (Accessed: 20 February 2016).

²¹ See, e.g. ‘Metaphors’ (*CP* 116) and ‘Cut’ (*CP* 235); cf. Jo Shapcott’s use of Ovidian metamorphosis to meditate on her experiences of womanhood and breast cancer (2000; 2010); see Cox (2012).

²² *CP* 41, 131, 145, 160, 162. Plath’s use of flowers ironizes fin-de-siècle aesthetics and modernist tropes of femininity; Plath’s use of the rose, particularly, is ‘anti-pastoral’ (Britzolakis, 1999, p. 163).

equally improbable'), her description of the art of writing as metamorphosis, and Plath's instructions to herself when writing to be like a god who breathes himself into everything: 'Practice: Be a chair'.²³ Plath also evokes the *Metamorphoses* in letters to her mother which describe her transformation upon meeting Hughes, although her poetic account of the metamorphic power of lust takes a far more ironic stance in 'Love Letter'.²⁴

Plath uses metamorphic imagery throughout her writing to dissolve the boundaries between animal and human, and self and other, highlighting the fragility and permeability of such boundaries by juxtaposing the Ovidian with modern images of surgery and tattooing (as in 'The Courage of Shutting-Up').²⁵ Yet there are also allusions to or reworkings of many specific stories found together in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Daphne;²⁶ Io;²⁷ Syrinx;²⁸ Phaethon;²⁹ Callisto;³⁰ Europa;³¹ Diana and Actaeon;³² Semele;³³ Echo;³⁴ Narcissus;³⁵ Pyramus and

²³ *CP* 35; *J* 34, 51, 141, 307.

²⁴ *CP* 147; cf. Henderson (1999, p. 303).

²⁵ *CP* 209.

²⁶ *Met.* 1.452-567; see below.

²⁷ *Met.* 1.583-746; cf. 'The Bull of Bendylaw' (*CP* 108); *J* 594.

²⁸ *Met.* 1.689-712; cf. 'Virgin in a Tree' (*CP* 81); 'Flute Notes from a Reedy Pond' (*CP* 134).

²⁹ *Met.* 1.750-2.366; cf. *J* 184, 495.

³⁰ *Met.* 2.409-507; cf. 'The Fifty-Ninth Bear' (*JP* 94). Plath's recurring allusions to stars and constellations are interpreted in the criticism fatalistically, a reading emphasized by Hughes' reuse of Plath's 'fixed stars' in *Birthday Letters* as an image of the zodiacally-doomed poet; due to the strength of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a source text for Plath, I argue that these allusions should be linked back to the stories Plath is referencing. See also Orion at *J* 48, 199, 308; 'Stars Over the Dordogne' (*CP* 165).

³¹ *Met.* 2.843-3.25, cf. *CP* 108; *J* 594.

³² *Met.* 3.138-252; cf. 'The Snowman on the Moor' (*CP* 58); 'Burning the Letters' (*CP* 204); *J* 318; Gill (2008, p. 60) reads Actaeon in the dismemberment of 'Lady Lazarus' (*CP* 244), but does not link Plath with Ovid.

³³ *Met.* 3.259-315; cf. 'Pursuit' (*CP* 22); *J* 74, 91.

³⁴ *Met.* 3.356-401; cf. 'Hardcastle Crags' (*CP* 62), 'The Other Two' (*CP* 68), and 'Words' (*CP* 270); 'Lorelei' (*CP* 94) alludes to a German folktale about Echo-, or, siren-like spirits with an Ovidian influence (*LH* 346).

³⁵ *Met.* 3.402-493; cf. conception of a child as a Narcissus-like rapture ('Three Women', *CP* 176); admires reflection on a night out 'narcissus-like... in store windows, in the chromium on cars...' (*J* 22); as male vanity (*J* 391); the mother's image distils into the infant's watery face in 'Morning Song' (*CP* 156). Gill (2008, p.54) notes allusions to the nymph Echo but does not link Plath with Ovid.

Thisbe;³⁶ Clytie;³⁷ Salmacis and Hermaphroditus;³⁸ Danaë, Perseus and Medusa;³⁹ Atlas;⁴⁰ Cassiopeia;⁴¹ Ceres, Persephone and Dis;⁴² Arachne;⁴³ Philomela and Procne;⁴⁴ Boreas and Orithyia;⁴⁵ Jason;⁴⁶ Medea;⁴⁷ Theseus, Ariadne, Minos and the labyrinth;⁴⁸ Icarus;⁴⁹ Erysichthon;⁵⁰ Hercules;⁵¹ Charon and the Styx;⁵² Pygmalion;⁵³ Myrrha;⁵⁴ Adonis;⁵⁵ Atalanta;⁵⁶ Midas;⁵⁷ Ceyx and Alcyone;⁵⁸ Somnus' poppies and 'Sweet Lethe';⁵⁹ and Polyphemus.⁶⁰

³⁶ *Met.* 4.55-166; cf. 'Wreath for a Bridal' (*CP* 44).

³⁷ *Met.* 4.234-270; cf. the woman who 'vaporis[es]' in 'The Detective' (*CP* 208).

³⁸ *Met.* 4.285-388; cf. lovers merge in a pool of water (*J* 325); wishes to hide away in a stagnant pool (*J* 118).

³⁹ *Met.* 4.610-5.249; cf. conception of a child as a shower of gold (*CP* 176); 'Perseus' (*CP* 82); 'The Rival' (*CP* 166), *CP* 176, 'A Birthday Present' (*CP* 206), 'Medusa' (*CP* 224); writer's block as a Medusa head (*J* 401).

⁴⁰ *Met.* 4.627-662; cf. 'By Candlelight' (*CP* 236).

⁴¹ *Met.* 4.670-671; cf. *J* 329; *CP* 165.

⁴² *Met.* 5.391-571; cf. 'Two Sisters of Persephone' (*CP* 31); the revenant 'Lady Lazarus' (*CP* 244); a broken heart feels like Ceres (*J* 191-192); *LH* 446. Van Dyne (1993, p. 114) reads the Demeter and Persephone myth in 'Wintering' (*CP* 217).

⁴³ *Met.* 6.5-145; cf. *CP* 208; 'Widow' (*CP* 164).

⁴⁴ *Met.* 6.424-676; see below.

⁴⁵ *Met.* 6.681-721; cf. *J* 166.

⁴⁶ *Met.* 7.7-158; cf. *LH* 78.

⁴⁷ *Met.* 7.7-403; cf. 'Mother Medea in a green smock | Moves humbly as any housewife' in 'Aftermath' (*CP* 113); the murderess who flies 'into a heaven that loves her' in 'The Bee Meeting' (*CP* 211).

⁴⁸ *Met.* 8.152-182; cf. 'To Ariadne' (collected in *LH* 36), which rewrites *Her.* 10; *CP* 108; the maze and double pun of 'warp' of 'Magnolia Shoals' (*CP* 121); *J* 164; in the last sentence of *The Bell Jar*, Esther is led into a room where she might find her way out of the labyrinth of the psychiatric hospital 'as by a magical thread' (*BJ* 234; a wry comment by Plath, perhaps, on the 'myth' of the emancipated woman). On Ariadne in the work of Virginia Woolf (and thus as intertext for Plath) see Heilbrun (2002). On Hughes' biographical use of the Theseus and Ariadne myth in *Birthday Letters* see Liveley (2009, pp. 220-222); on Hughes' 'Minotaur complex' see Berry (2002; also 2001 on the Minotaur myth in Hughes' translation of Racine's *Phèdre*).

⁴⁹ *Met.* 8.183-235; cf. *CP* 318; *LH* 136, 177.

⁵⁰ *Met.* 8.738-884, especially ll. 837-839; cf. the insatiate appetite like fire in 'Pursuit' (*CP* 22).

⁵¹ *Met.* 9.182-199; cf. Plath's equally humorous account of her domestic 'labours' at *J* 373; *LH* 400, 435.

⁵² *Met.* 10.72-73; cf. 'Crossing the Water' (*CP* 190); *J* 153.

⁵³ *Met.* 10.243-297; see below.

⁵⁴ *Met.* 10.307-524; cf. *CP* 164; the tree whose 'sap | Wells like tears' (*CP* 270); on incest narratives in Plath's poetry emphasized by Hughes' choice of poems for the *Ariel* collection, see Bundtzen (2011a).

⁵⁵ *Met.* 10.503-559, 708-739; cf. *J* 326.

⁵⁶ *Met.* 10.560-704; cf. Plath must find a man to match her (*J*, *passim*; *LH* 221); a speaker hurls her heart like an apple to slow the chase (*CP* 22).

⁵⁷ *Met.* 11.97-149; cf. 'In Midas' Country' (*CP* 99); the woman's 'first gift is making stone out of everything. | I wake to a mausoleum; you are here, | Ticking your fingers on the marble table' (*CP* 166).

⁵⁸ *Met.* 11.382-748, especially ll. 471-473; cf. bird-women awaiting their husbands, or mourning them, in 'The Shrike' (*CP* 42), and 'Electra on Azalea Path' (*CP* 166).

⁵⁹ *Met.* 11.592-649, especially ll. 603-604; cf. *CP* 170, 178, 'Two Campers in Cloud Country' (*CP* 144), 'Amnesiac' (*CP* 233); 'Getting There' (*CP* 247); the drugs administered to 'deceive' a woman to forget the trauma of childbirth are 'the waters of Lethe' (*JP* 348).

⁶⁰ *Met.* 14.187-202; cf. *CP* 164. *Met.* 12 and 13 enrich Plath's references to the Homeric Greek heroes (notably Odysseus and Achilles); books 14 and 15 also filter Plath's Virgilian allusions to Aeneas, Rome, and Dido.

3.2.1 'Biomythography'⁶¹

Despite Plath's clear Ovidianism, her engagement with Latin literature and the classical tradition is rarely discussed. Scholarly focus falls on the few brief references to Greek tragic characters, with perceived autobiographical identifications with Freud's Electra, trapped in a cycle of perpetual mourning for her father, emphasized particularly.⁶² Such 'factual' psychoanalytic readings of Plath's life and poetry—as the two are often conflated in such a reading—ignore the ironical detachment with which Plath viewed both her psychoanalytic therapy and the classical myths which informed psychoanalytic templates. Plath was astutely aware of the limitations of myth to describe her life or emotions, and when a speaker in a poem does invoke myth, she knows that: 'You do not do, you do not do'.⁶³ Additionally, accepting the biographical reading momentarily, it becomes clear in Plath's notes on her psychoanalytic treatment that the dominant presence in her psychology was not her father, but her mother.⁶⁴ It might thus be more productive to turn from Electra-mourning-Agammemnon to explore Plath's attempts at creating an alternative 'feminine' Oedipus complex; Plath's interest in the archetypal figure of feminine rebellion, Antigone, suggests one route to exploring Plath's use of the classics to represent her relationship with 'Jocasta'.⁶⁵

⁶¹ The phrase was coined by Audre Lorde to describe her autobiography, *Zami* (1982); it has been adopted by readers of Plath to describe what they see as Plath's weaving of myth, history, and biography into an epic mythic narrative.

⁶² E.g. Bakogianni (2009) and Hurst (2009, p. 278); in *Howls and Whispers*, published as a limited edition complementary volume to the letter-poems addressed to Plath (*BL*, 1998), Hughes himself figures Plath directly as Electra; he laments in 'The Hidden Orestes' that 'Tragedies of the House of Atreus | Exclude Electra's husband' (2005, pp. 1175-1177).

⁶³ 'Daddy', *CP* 222; in her journals, it is clear that Plath views psychoanalysis as only a narrative ('[Do] I really think I killed and castrated my father...?', *J* 476); on Plath's parody and pastiche of psychoanalytic models, see Rose (1991) and Britzolakis (1999, pp. 7, 60-61, 160). For post-Freudian feminist psychoanalytic approaches to Ovid's work, see duBois (1988) on Ovid's depictions of women; Janan (2001) uses Lacan for her reading of the instability of the *amator*'s subject position; Spentzou (2009) provides a useful introduction to Lacanian thought and Ovid; also Miller (2004); on classical myth and psychoanalysis, see Zajko and O'Gorman (2013).

⁶⁴ See, e.g., on hating her mother, *J* 429-38; 446-451; especially on her 'grief reaction for something... [that] isn't there: a mother's love', 446.

⁶⁵ On Aurelia Plath as Medusa in Plath's poetry, see Kroll (2007, pp. 126-127, 252-254).

When Plath's personal and literary references to the characters of Oedipus and Antigone are noted, however, they are frequently downplayed. In his 1966 essay 'Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems', published three years after Plath's death, Hughes writes of Plath's poem 'The Eye-mote' (in which the blinded speaker dreams 'I am Oedipus') that: '[t]he mention of Oedipus, and the Greek Tragedians' figures elsewhere, may seem literary, but if one can take [Plath's] dream life as evidence, those personalities were deeply involved in her affairs'.⁶⁶ The critical trap that Hughes lays here of a biomythographical interpretation of Plath's use of myth has been followed by many of Plath's critics; Plath is variously described as an Electra, a Medea, a Clytaemnestra, a Phaedra, or a Dido, and thus the construction of Plath-as-myth in the scholarship has overshadowed the complex intertextual work that Plath is engaged in with her classical models.⁶⁷ Furthermore, fatalistic readings of Plath as a 'doomed' tragic heroine divert attention from the contradictory (and arguably more redemptive) critical reading of Sophocles' *Oedipus* and *Antigone* that Plath herself held: 'we have free will & must be responsible'.⁶⁸

Scholars of Hughes' classicism also mythologize Plath, reading classical allusions in the work of Hughes as representations of Plath-the-woman, rather than references to Plath's use of those myths in her work; traces of Plath in Hughes' Orpheus and Eurydice, or Pyramus and Thisbe, for example, are seen only in autobiographical terms.⁶⁹ While Silk notes the close verbal

⁶⁶ Hughes (1970, p. 190).

⁶⁷ Antigone: *J* 216, 222, 554; cf. 'Dido, Medea and Phaedra' (Lowell, 1966); Medusa (Malcolm, 1994); Electra, Clytaemnestra (conspicuously ignoring the figure of Agamemnon as the archetypally treacherous husband), 'Pythia, Cassandra, the Whore of Babylon—harbingers of the apocalypse' (Newman, 1970b, pp. 45, 55); 'a Nasikaa [*sic*] who wanted to be a Calypso, a Dido who verged on being a Circe, an Artemis who was not far from becoming an Aphrodite' (Lameyer, quoted in Wilson, 2013, p. 10); a 'vestal' 'initiate[...]' (Alvarez, quoted in Newman 1970a, p. 81); 'Isis' (Sagar, 2006; Rollyson, 2014); and even a work of feminist scholarship posits an autobiographical 'Medea cycle' in Plath's late poems (Wagner-Martin, 1999, pp. 204ff.); Axelrod sees an androgynous Tiresias (1990, p. 175).

⁶⁸ *J* 335.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., essays collected in Rees (2009).

echoes between Hughes' version of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (1999), *Birthday Letters* (1998a), and Plath's poetry (Hughes draws particularly on the vocabulary, sound effects, and rhyme scheme of Plath's 'Daddy' and 'The Rabbit Catcher' in the Iphigeneia episode of his *Agamemnon*), the allusions are again considered solely in biographical terms; that is, as relating to the Aeschylean 'family drama' of Plath and Hughes.⁷⁰ Yet Plath's sophisticated and wide-ranging classicism crucially informs that of Hughes.⁷¹ At the same time as Hughes was working on his translation of *Oresteia* and editing his 'birthday letters' to Plath, Hughes was also completing his translations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Tales from Ovid* (1997); while Hughes' explicit figuration of Plath-as-Electra has been much discussed, the implicit connection that Hughes appears to be making here between Plath and Ovid has not been explored. Hughes himself uses the word 'metamorphoses' four times in discussions of Plath's poetry (although he does not elaborate on this theme).⁷² Hughes is also the first reader of Plath's work to introduce a comparison to Ovidian figures (those of Phaethon and Icarus); although Hughes does not name the source as Ovid and once more encourages a biographical interpretation of the myth's use.

3.2.2 Phaethon and Icarus

In 'Sylvia Plath: The Evolution of 'Sheep in Fog'', Hughes expounds what he describes as the underlying mythic elements of Plath's poems 'Ariel' and 'Sheep in Fog'.⁷³ Hughes argues

⁷⁰ Silk (2009, pp. 253-261).

⁷¹ Although critics have noted a 'call and response' between the work of Plath and Hughes, the focus has been on Hughes' perceived influence on Plath; see, e.g., Uroff (1979), Faas (1983), Middlebrook (2003; 2006; 2007a), and Sagar (2006); Wagner (2000), Silk (2007, 2009), Clark (2010), and Bundtzen (2011b) provide a more balanced reading but interpret the allusions biographically; Plath's deep influence on Hughes' *Tales from Ovid* has been wholly overlooked. A full discussion of the ways in which Hughes' classicism draws upon the earlier classically-informed work of Plath is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the thesis, but I will highlight some avenues of future research.

⁷² Hughes (1970, p. 187); Faas (1980, p. 180); Hughes (1994, pp. 195, 197).

⁷³ Hughes (1994); *CP* 239.

that a key mythic figure for Plath was Phaethon, son of Apollo, who asked to drive the chariot of the sun, killing himself and scorching the earth when he lost control of his father's horses (*Met.* 1.750-2.366); Hughes diverts attention from the literary allusion to encourage a reading of Plath herself as the reckless child who dies in the process of attempting to impress the father.⁷⁴ In Hughes' reading, 'Sheep in Fog' represents a continuation of the Phaethon myth that first appeared in Plath's poem 'Ariel', written three months earlier.⁷⁵ 'Ariel' ostensibly describes a ride on a horse ('How one we grow, | Pivot of heels and knees!'), and the speaker imagines herself first as Godiva, before flying like an 'arrow', 'Suicidal... | Into the red | Eye, the cauldron of morning.'⁷⁶ Hughes writes that 'the speaker, the I, hurls herself free from all earthly confinement and aims herself and her horse—as the poem says, 'suicidal' directly into the red, rising sun'.⁷⁷ He sees this theme—'a dawn ride towards a kind of death'—continue in 'Sheep in Fog'.⁷⁸

While in 'Ariel' the speaker appeared as the triumphant 'spiritual hero, she is now the failed one, the one who disappoints, trudging towards a mournful dissolution in bottomless, starless, fatherless, darkness'.⁷⁹ Using the manuscript drafts of the poem, which contain the crossed-out lines, 'The world rusts around us | Ribs, spokes, a scrapped chariot', Hughes reads the retained word 'rust' in stanza two of the finished poem as referring to 'the rusty iron wreckage of a chariot'. Hughes now introduces the myth of Phaethon to link the two poems:

⁷⁴ Cf. Mary Zimmerman's version of Phaeton, which is staged as a Jungian dream narrated to a therapist (2002, pp. 62-68); on Zimmerman see Farrell (2002). The tale of Phaethon is particularly striking to a reader of the *Metamorphoses* as the longest single episode in the epic; on Ovid's Phaethon, see, e.g., Salzman-Mitchell (2005b, pp. 101-104).

⁷⁵ *CP* 239.

⁷⁶ Van Dyne (1993, p. 122).

⁷⁷ Hughes (1994, p. 199).

⁷⁸ Hughes (1994, p. 199). Contra Hughes, Van Dyne argues that the drafts make it clearer that the ride is sexual, not suicidal (1993, p. 121).

⁷⁹ Hughes (1994, p. 199); Hughes uses Plath's vocabulary here.

As an image of her Ariel flight in the chariot of the God of Poetry, which was also her attempt to soar (plunge) into the inspirational form of her inaccessible father, to convert her former physical suicide into a psychic rebirth, that myth [of Phaethon] is the parable of *Ariel* and of her life and death.⁸⁰

Hughes does not state a source for Plath's use or knowledge of the Phaethon story, but argues rather that it was a 'mythic force' trying to break into her consciousness, a 'submerged, struggling and certainly terrible large-scale psycho-mythological drama'.⁸¹ Hughes comments on the wilting flower of stanza four ('A flower left out') that replaced the original draft line ('Like a dead man left out'), that: '(like the flower which replaces the body of Adonis in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*), this metamorphosed flower now has a lively, coded meaning for us' [i.e. of a dead man].⁸² Although Shakespeare is a possible intertext for Plath's engagement with Ovid here (and as a favourite author of Hughes, one through whom Hughes may suggest his own influence on Plath), Hughes' use of 'metamorphosed' is striking, perhaps unconsciously betraying Plath's Latin source.⁸³

'Sheep in Fog' closes: '... the far | Fields melt my heart. || They threaten | To let me through to a heaven | Starless and fatherless, a dark water'. Hughes takes the word 'melt' to suggest that the myth of Phaethon here 'melts' into the myth of Icarus, a boy who, like Phaethon,

⁸⁰ Hughes (1994, pp. 200-201).

⁸¹ Hughes (1994, p. 207).

⁸² Hughes (1994, p. 203); a closer Ovidian allusion is to the simile of the cut poppy or lily stem which describes Hyacinthus' death at *Met.* 10.190-193. Based upon her engagement with Homer and Virgil elsewhere in her poetry, Plath may also be thinking here of the deaths of Gorgythion (*Il.* 8.306-308) and Euryalus (*Aen.* 9.433-437), both of whose heads droop like poppies weighed down by rain (Virgil adds, 'or cut by a plough'). Note how Plath adapts the simile to one of neglect rather than violence ('left out'), and moves from simile to metaphor; poppies are a favourite image of Plath's. The allusion may also be to the image of the flower struck by the plough in Catullus 11; compare Balmer's use of Catullus' simile in her poem 'Malvern Road, Station, Cheltenham' in chapter 5.4.1.

⁸³ Adonis is also one of the twenty-four Ovidian episodes chosen by Hughes for *Tales from Ovid*. Hughes' Ovidian collection was well-received popularly (winning the 1997 Whitbread Prize), but is generally ignored by Hughes critics; the initial response of classical scholars was lukewarm; see, e.g., Lyne (2002a, p. 262) and Henderson (1999, pp. 301-308); cf. more positive criticism by Jacobsen, Tatham, and Ingleheart in Rees (2009); see also McClatchy (1998).

ignores his father's advice and whose wings 'melt' when he flies too close to the sun.⁸⁴ Hughes writes: 'that word 'melt' has *metamorphosed* the sun's chariot and horses into the wax of the wings of Icarus' [my emphasis].⁸⁵ Instead of flying into the cauldron of morning as at the close of 'Ariel', the speaker now plunges into the 'dark water' of the sea that swallows Icarus (although in Ovid, Phaethon's journey in the chariot of sun also ends when Tethys welcomes him into her waves, *quae me subiectis excipit undis*, *Met.* 2.68). Hughes views 'Sheep in Fog' as a coda to 'Ariel' that 'admits' that Plath's biomythographical narrative project had 'failed'; he describes the 'doom-laden' conclusion of the poem (read: her life) as 'inevitable' and 'true'.⁸⁶

Hughes argues persuasively for the presence of the Phaethon and Icarus myths in these two poems; the transformation at the end of Phaethon's story in the *Metamorphoses* occurs when his grieving sisters are turned into poplar trees, and a close reading of 'Sheep in Fog' reveals that this additional detail is also suggested by Plath through the rhyme and repetition of 'morning' (mourning), and the 'dolorous bells' of the horse's hooves. Clark proposes that by providing the myth of Phaethon as the interpretative 'key' for Plath's poems, Hughes wishes to suggest her indebtedness to his own earlier 'Phaetons' poem, published in *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957); the relationship, however, is chronologically complex and reciprocal, as the allusions flow between Ovid, Hughes, and Plath.⁸⁷ Hughes' claim, for example, that Plath's use of Phaethon and Icarus in 'Ariel' and 'Sheep in Fog' expresses 'a wish to emulate her father and follow him into death' is restated by Hughes in Phaethon's 'idiot emulation' in *Tales from Ovid*,

⁸⁴ Hughes suggests that Plath's source for the story may be an art print she owned of Brueghel's painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (1560s; only Icarus' foot is visible in the painting).

⁸⁵ Hughes (1994, p. 206).

⁸⁶ Hughes (1994, p. 207).

⁸⁷ Clark (2010, p. 156). 'Ariel' is dated 27th October 1962; 'Sheep in Fog' is dated 2nd December 1962, edited 28th January 1963.

as Hughes now reads Plath back into Ovid.⁸⁸ Additionally, Hughes borrows Plath's vocabulary from the two *Ariel* poems for his alterations to Ovid's Latin: 'he hung on' to the chariot, Hughes adds, and the cities Phaethon flies over become 'black stumps of burnt stone'.⁸⁹

Hughes chooses to link 'Sheep in Fog' and 'Ariel' by two mythical episodes that both contain wayward children and their ultimately destructive relationships with their genius or divine fathers. Elsewhere, however, Hughes vehemently refutes the image of Plath as 'a young woman hurtling to disintegration shedding rags of poetry—leaping into Aetna [and] bursting into flames as she fell'; an erudite *praeteritio* that, of course, emphasizes the connection between Plath and spectacular self-destruction.⁹⁰ In alluding to Typhon (*Met.* 5.346-358), Hughes links Plath once more to a progeny rebelling destructively against the father.⁹¹ Apart from the fatalistic Phaethon, Icarus, and Typhon, however, Hughes notes no other classical myths or texts in Plath's poetry, a conspicuous omission for such a careful reader of Plath's densely allusive poetry. Indeed, the first poem that Hughes read of Plath's before they met was her study of neo-classical statuary and its disfigurement of women's forms, "Three Caryatids Without a Portico" by Hugo Robus. A Study in Sculptural Dimensions'. Curiously, Hughes did not include 'Three Caryatids' in his edited volume of Plath's *Collected Poems*, despite including two poems which 'reply' to this poem in his own *Birthday Letters*.⁹²

⁸⁸ Hughes (1997, p. 33).

⁸⁹ Hughes (1997, pp. 38, 37).

⁹⁰ Quoted in Sagar (2006, p. 69).

⁹¹ Or, perhaps, against herself; Typhon (Set) is the mythical enemy of the goddess Isis, who Hughes uses as a cipher for Plath in his poem 'Isis' (1998a, pp. 111-112); on Plath-as-Isis, see also Sagar (2006), and Rollyson (2014).

⁹² Hughes (1998a, pp. 4-6); see Middlebrook (2007b). Hughes' poem 'The Minotaur' (1998a, p. 120) figures Plath as a victim of the Minotaur (her own rage), thus rewriting her earlier poem addressed sympathetically 'To Ariadne (deserted by Theseus)' (*LH* 36), which reworks *Heroides* 10.

In both his analyses and editing of Plath's work, Hughes appears to deflect attention away from Plath's literary classicism, and to set up the two main critical reading fallacies of Plath scholarship: first, the biographical-teleological reading of her poetry as inevitably leading to suicide; second, that Plath's poems only relate to her 'fateful bond' with her father (or to Hughes himself).⁹³ In addition, by drawing on Phaethon, Icarus, and Typhon, Hughes also figures the speaker of the poems (and Plath's poetic voice) as male, figuring Plath's poetic ambition within his own male vatic paradigm. It appears that he has no language for discussing the woman poet, her creativity, or female literary models; feminist critics, especially Jacqueline Rose and Sarah Churchwell have addressed Hughes' attempts to replace Plath's voice with his own by providing the 'authorized' interpretation of her poetry.⁹⁴ While Hughes may wish to position Plath within a male literary tradition to protect her reputation, that is, to establish her as a poet not a 'poetess', his reluctance to 'see' female voices in Plath's work fails to do justice to the complex exploratory work on myth and gender evidenced by Plath's poetry.⁹⁵

Hughes encourages an autobiographical, 'mythic' reading of Plath's work throughout his various commentaries on her work, and this reading has been replicated by Hughes critics including Faas, Sagar, and Uroff when writing about Plath's work.⁹⁶ As well as the intentional critical fallacy this enacts, Plath's female poetic voice is overlooked in favour of Hughes' 'symbolic' interpretation of her work, reducing Plath's poetry to a male-authored mythic schema (typically Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*) that makes her work appear derivative.⁹⁷

⁹³ Hughes (1994, p. 199; 'father/ husband', p. 196).

⁹⁴ Rose (1991); Churchwell (1998).

⁹⁵ Plath, too, initially looks to male models (both authorial and archetypal) and attempts to disguise the influence of women writers or the presence of female mythic characters; on Plath's 'hidden mentors', especially Plath's near-silence on Woolf, see Connors (2007, pp. 118-128).

⁹⁶ See especially Faas (1983), Sagar (1978), and Uroff (1979).

⁹⁷ See especially Middlebrook (2003), and Kroll (2007).

If the ‘white goddess’ was influential upon Plath’s poetry, it has not been noted in the scholarship how Graves’ matriarchal mythic schema itself drew upon the work of classicist Jane Harrison, nor how Plath’s links to Harrison also run intertextually via Woolf, Joyce, and J. G. Frazer.⁹⁸ While Judith Kroll also links Plath’s poetic imagery to Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890), she does so only with the biographical suggestion that Plath, like Aeneas, is on a journey to the Underworld to meet her dead father.⁹⁹

An alternative reading of Plath’s use of Phaethon is to recall that in Ovid it is a story about establishing paternity; the poems may thus represent Plath’s attempt to establish a literary heritage and to insert herself into the paternal literary canon. Conversely, the speaker’s confidence in ‘Ariel’ suggests that she is ready to forge on ahead without any sense of literary anxiety: ‘fatherless’; it seems that Plath is not subject to the Oedipal pattern of a Bloomian ‘anxiety of influence’.¹⁰⁰ Reading ‘Ariel’ intertextually with Plath’s fiction, which frequently portrays a young woman caught at the moment of choosing between the seemingly mutually exclusive roles of ‘writer’ and ‘mother’, Phaethon and Icarus may also provide a metaphor for the difficulty facing a young woman in the 1950s attempting to negotiate the ‘middle path’ safely.¹⁰¹ The myth of Phaethon does appear in Plath’s journals, although not in the context that Hughes claims for it. Plath writes:

⁹⁸ On Harrison, see Beard (2000); on Harrison in Woolf see Woolf (2004a); on Frazer and Harrison see Beard (2000).

⁹⁹ Kroll (2007).

¹⁰⁰ Bloom (1973).

¹⁰¹ *medio... ibis*, *Met.* 2.137; *medio... limite*, *Met.* 8.203. Plath explores the tension between career and motherhood in 1950s construction of femininity in another classically-inspired poem, ‘Two Sisters of Persephone’ (*CP* 31), and she frequently depicts the conflict a young woman experiences between academic and romantic success in her short fiction (*JP*). This tension is also explored in Woolf’s sketch, ‘A Woman’s College from Outside’, about a new undergraduate at Newnham College, Cambridge (where Plath herself would later live and study); although at Newnham the young woman’s education is assured, so is her celibacy, and by speaking of her desire, Woolf’s character wonders if the price will be worth it (1992a, pp. 189-192).

Also, about Ambition: universal, driving Ambition; how to harness it, not be a Phaeton to its galloping horse. To keep in that state of itch which is comfortable: goals far enough ahead to be stimulating, near enough to be attainable with discipline and hard work, and self-generating enough to offer new goals and distances when one is achieved. And to work like a ditch-digger to spade up new areas of sensibility and knowledge and awareness.¹⁰²

For Plath, Phaethon represents specifically literary ambition and intellectual risk-taking; a meaning that she also intends in a separate reference to Icarus in a letter to her mother. Plath writes that the US suffocates her intellectually and personally, and she expresses her desire to challenge herself and travel to the UK to study at Cambridge University: ‘My wings need to be tried. O Icarus...’.¹⁰³ Plath uses her Ovidian models to express an ‘unfeminine’ desire to be a successful intellectual, using the authority of the classics to express an idea that would potentially be met with hostility by a mother who held 1950s views of propriety and femininity. Yet Plath’s invocation of classical authority against her mother here lies in counterpoint to her characteristically wry perspective on the classical tradition in her prose.

3.3 Sylvia Plath and the classical tradition

While there exists no explicit statement by Plath on her method of classical reception, her approach to the use of myth in contemporary poetry may be suggested in her review of C.A. Trypanis’ *The Stones of Troy*:

The weakest poems... are those where the gap between ‘contemporaneity and antiquity’ is uncomfortably straddled: where the mythic material remains inorganic and untransformed in the context of the modern poem; where the

¹⁰² J 495.

¹⁰³ LH 177; Plath also chimes closely here with Ovid’s self-figuration as both Phaethon and Icarus, albeit ‘after the fall’, in *Tristia* 1.1 and 3.4 (suggesting Plath drew on Ovidian sources additional to the *Metamorphoses*); Phaethon, *Tr.* 1.1.79-80 and 3.4.29-30; Icarus, *Tr.* 1.1.89-90 and 3.4.21-24. Wise (1977) similarly links the ‘flight myths’ of Phaethon and Icarus to Ovid’s poetic ambition.

parallel between old and new is pointed at, rather than realised in the poems' shape and texture.¹⁰⁴

Plath finds Trypanis' engagement with the classical past too self-consciously done ('pointed at, rather than realised'), and she comments that: '[t]here is always the danger [in classically-inspired texts] that the poet will not transform the material, will not, in some way, make it freshly his own or ours'. If the poet chooses metaphor to infuse classicism into the poem, she continues, then it must be 'intrinsic to the poem, working back and forth on itself, not expressed prosaically at the close, like the moral in a fable'. As will be seen in Plath's own classically-infused poems, her most complex engagements with Ovidian models are subtle and deeply embedded, and when classical tales are referenced explicitly in her poems, Plath uses them knowingly as 'props', observing herself in the process of engagement with a detached critical eye ('I borrow the stilts of an old tragedy').¹⁰⁵

To describe herself translating (here, Racine's *Phèdre*), Plath chooses two classical models, Arachne and Penelope: 'I sit, spider-like, waiting, here, home; Penelope weaving webs of Webster, turning spindles of Tourneur'.¹⁰⁶ Plath's empowering use of classical models of female authorship and her self-figuration as translator suggest some of the ways in which Plath viewed herself in relation to the canonized classical past: the figure of Penelope suggests working covertly at a (literary) task, while Arachne is the archetypal woman artist who strives

¹⁰⁴ Plath (1957); 'contemporaneity and antiquity' quotes T.S. Eliot's review of James Joyce, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth' (*The Dial*, November 1923). Available at: <http://people.virginia.edu/~jdc3t/eliotulysses.htm> (Accessed: 2 March 2016); see also Eliot (1997).

¹⁰⁵ *CP* 116.

¹⁰⁶ *J* 233. Plath's image of Penelope weaving words suggests that she may be aware (perhaps via Robert Graves' *Homer's Daughter*, 1955) of Samuel Butler's theory concerning 'the authoress of the *Odyssey*' (1897). Famous spinners of words, wool, and fate appear elsewhere in Plath's work: the Parcae in 'Heavy Women' (*CP* 158, *J* 575), 'Old Ladies Home' (*CP* 120), 'The Net-Menders' (*CP* 121), and 'Magnolia Shoals' (*CP* 121), four poems linked by their images of three knitters who 'revolve the whole town like a blue and green ball' and 'Twist old words into the web-threads'.

against ‘jealous gods | That would have the whole world flat because they are’.¹⁰⁷ Plath is beginning to explore here how she can experiment with stories and reuse classical myths to her own purposes, seizing power as a storyteller herself; compare, for example, the difference between Plath’s confident journal voice and the fictional young Esther of *The Bell Jar*, who, when she is depressed and cannot write, finds the ‘alphabet soup’ of *Finnegan’s Wake* intimidating.¹⁰⁸

Plath also strikes an intimate dialogue with her dictionary and thesaurus, addressing them here—and throughout her work—by name.¹⁰⁹ Hughes notes that Plath was reliant upon her dictionary and thesaurus ‘for almost every word’, but her relation to them was more sophisticated than the statement suggests.¹¹⁰ Plath writes in her journal that she ‘believe[s] in not being Roget’s trollop, parading words and tossing off bravado for an audience’, and she mocks male figures who wield language with self-important authority:¹¹¹

Dissect your sentence, oh professors! Point out verb and noun and participial phrase. Dry, dry, the word; creaking dry; hissing dry and imperfectly low. Dissect the word “church”, oh men with dictionaries in hand. Tell how it means “a building for public worship, esp., Christian worship.” Tell how it connotes a variety of things—white walls, song, childhood and Sunday chicken dinners. But no, I laugh at you all even as I listen.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ CP 176; if, of course, we read Minerva as Augustus in Ovid’s episode.

¹⁰⁸ BJ 119.

¹⁰⁹ See also J 48-49, 207, 233, 384, 503; ‘pristine alphabets’ (CP 90).

¹¹⁰ Hughes (1994, p. 161); Plath’s dictionary is heavily annotated (Sylvia Plath Collection, Smith College).

¹¹¹ J 207; Britzolakis reads ‘trollop’ as the ‘ironic use of prostitution as the figure of a particular kind of theatricalized self-consciousness—of the poet’, which in turn calls for a reading ‘which takes seriously what [Plath] does with, and to, literary history’ (1999, p. 152). On definitions in Plath’s work, see Gilbert and Gubar (1994, pp. 295, 297-298), and Wagner (1984, p. 91). For women writers experimenting with definition in classical receptions, see Balmer (2009a; chapter 5, below), and Carson (2010). Translator Sarah Ruden (quoted in Balmer, 2012, p. 268) similarly argues that women’s lack of a classical education can improve translations as women writers are more likely to refer to a number of dictionaries and different commentaries, enriching the text far further than any male poet who can read Greek or Latin by sight; on Ruden, see Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2012b).

¹¹² J 48-49. In her journals, Plath uses *Webster’s New International Dictionary* and *Roget’s Thesaurus* to encapsulate patriarchal authority over language (as she uses Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* to symbolize history, see below); in *The Bell Jar*, the medical textbook of Esther’s boyfriend, *Gray’s Anatomy*, and Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* (1939), are employed to similar effect, symbolizing the male wielding of medical and

Plath experiments here with language and definition, creating new meanings for the word ‘church’ that include personal associations and childhood memories. Instead of being in thrall to the power of the dictionary, or intimidated by the ‘gilt-lettered Websters’, Plath harnesses its authority to her own ends, just as she uses the images of Penelope and Ovid’s weaving storyteller Arachne to empower her image of her own use of the dictionary.¹¹³ This experimentation with definition, and the mixing of the domestic and personal with ‘official’ discourse and language, develops across Plath’s work until it is ‘realised’ in her use of Ovidian models.

In Plath’s early journals she experiments with classical models verbatim, casting herself as Semele, for example, to express classically-infused rape fantasies. While these are disturbing to a contemporary feminist perspective, they demonstrate how Plath was educated to believe that a woman’s sexual desire is shameful; rape fantasies become the only legitimate way for Plath—at 17 and inexperienced—to express her sexual appetite.¹¹⁴ Sunbathing on hot cliff-top rocks, Plath describes feeling like she ‘was being raped deliciously by the sun, filled full of heat from the impersonal and colossal god of nature... An orgiastic sacrifice on the altar of rock and sun, and I arose shining from the centuries of love, clean and satiated from the consuming fire of his casual and timeless desire’.¹¹⁵ Over time, Plath begins to rebel against her mother’s

academic knowledge over women. Plath may be influenced by Woolf here, too; at the end of Woolf’s *Between the Acts*, the protagonist Lucy calls upon a classical dictionary to settle a dispute of meaning (‘Lemprière will settle it!’, Woolf, 1992b); see Marcus (1982, p. 87).

¹¹³ *J* 503. On Penelope and Helen as ‘legitimate weavers’, and Arachne and Philomela as ‘defiant weavers’, see Heilbrun (2002); on weaving and domesticity in American women’s poetry through the figure of Penelope, see Hurst (2009).

¹¹⁴ ‘[I]n an article my mother cut out of the *Reader’s Digest* and mailed to me at college... called ‘In Defence of Chastity’... It gave all the reasons a girl shouldn’t sleep with anybody but her husband and then only after they were married... the one thing this article didn’t seem to me to consider was how a girl felt’ (*BJ* 76-77).

¹¹⁵ *J* 74; Axelrod (1990, p. 192) reads Leda here. Plath later repeats this sexualized imagery in her desire to be back in the sun and feeling its heat again: ‘God, for the sun, beating, beating, melting my body to gleaming warm bronze, bronze-thighed, bronze-breasted, ripe and full, glowing. And oh, for the thin copper threads of my hair, incandescent in the sun drenched wind’ (*J* 91). If the sun-god here is Apollo, the episode becomes a sexualized expression of Plath’s desire to be consumed by literature, becoming an ancient bronze votive statue. Plath’s early indoctrination in 1950s femininity troubled her throughout her life; Plath is equally ambivalent toward ‘cow-like’ maternity and childlessness.

bourgeois imperative to chastity; Plath's rejection of chastity is hinted at in this early episode when she unexpectedly swaps subject positions—and Ovidian stories—halfway through. Plath writes how her hand 'caressed the rounded contours of the sun-hot stone, and felt the smooth undulations of it. Such a heat the rock had, such a rugged and comfortable warmth, that I felt it could be a human body... Warm and perverse was the body of my love under me, and the feeling of his carved flesh was like no other...'. Plath breaks out of the woman-as-object position by seizing power as the storyteller herself; here, she is a 'feminine Pygmalion', enjoying the sculpted body of her marble lover beneath her.¹¹⁶

As Plath gains more confidence in reworking classical episodes, her receptions are also frequently humorous and ironic.¹¹⁷ An episode she describes in her journal from her first year at Smith College in 1950 illustrates her humour, and typifies her engagement with the classical tradition as well as the ancient texts themselves. Cramming for a history lecture, Plath feels 'faceless' before the 'centuries to comprehend before I sleep, millions of lives to comprehend before breakfast tomorrow... To stop with the German tribes and rest awhile: But no! On, on, on. Through ages of empires, of decline and fall'.¹¹⁸ Plath undoubtedly refers here to Edward Gibbon's six-volume *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789), and in invoking

¹¹⁶ *J* 191; on this scene's subversion of D.H. Lawrence, see Clark (2010, p. 35).

¹¹⁷ E.g., comparison of housework to a Herculean task ('I cleaned this Augean stable', *J* 373); description of gossipy neighbours ('Mrs Doom') that surround Plath and make her feel like she is being followed around by a 'Greek tragic chorus' (*J* 443; this gossipy Greek chorus reappears in her poem, 'A Secret'; Brain, 2001, p. 16); the gloomy British winter feels like Persephone during the six months she has to spend with Pluto (*LH* 446); see also Plath's punning play in her mix of the domestic and classical to describe 'a knot of laundry, with a classic bunch of sheets' (*CP* 90). Plath also makes a sharp classical joke after discovering Hughes flirting with a student, railing in her journal against 'this brand of male vanity': 'As Joan said: Ego and Narcissus. Vanitas, vanitatum' (*J* 391).

¹¹⁸ *J* 26-27.

this text specifically, Plath colours her reception with a distinctly Woolfian wry scepticism about the benefit of such rote classical learning.¹¹⁹

In Woolf's coming-of-age story, *The Voyage Out*, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* is a key prop in the text, as the socially-awkward Cambridge scholar Hirst tries to 'educate' the young Rachel Vinrace by lending her Gibbon (when we first meet Hirst in the novel he is deep in contemplation of volume three).¹²⁰ Hirst exclaims his shock upon learning that Rachel has reached the age of twenty-four without reading Gibbon, and believes that appreciating the work is 'the test' to establish a woman's intellectual 'capacity'.¹²¹ Rachel's guardian, however, the forty-year-old Helen Ambrose, argues that it is not Gibbon the naive Rachel needs, but 'the facts of life'.¹²² Later, the elder Mrs Thornbury adds:

‘*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire?*... A very wonderful book, I know. My dear father was always quoting it at us, with the result that we resolved never to read a line.’¹²³

Woolf's use of Gibbon here is thematically reprised in *Jacob's Room* and *Between the Acts*, where an elite classical education is humorously shown to be of no preparatory use for relations between the sexes: when met with the sight of Florinda's naked body, Jacob 'knew that cloisters

¹¹⁹ In *Three Guineas*, Woolf (2014) suggests that the libraries of male-authored classics may be best burned down; Plath may thus signal her Woolfian classicism in a literary joke contained within 'The Colossus' as the speaker who surveys the burnt, sooty fragments of her forefathers may stand in a literary landscape at an imagined point in time not long after Woolf's suffragist act of literary arson on the Cambridge college that Plath attended. On Ovidianism in Woolf's *Orlando* (2003b), see Brown (1999, pp. 201-215); on Woolf and the classics more broadly, see Alley (1982), Herman (1983), and Fowler (1983; 1999). For Woolf's non-classical influences on Plath, see Gilbert (1984), Brain (2001, pp. 141-149), Axelrod (1990, pp. 100-125), and Connors (2007, pp. 118-126).

¹²⁰ For an optimistic view of Woolf and the Greek classical past, 'untinged by belatedness or irony', see Fowler (1999; 2006, p. 382); Fowler (1983) is more sceptical.

¹²¹ Woolf (2009, p. 172).

¹²² Woolf (2009, p. 183).

¹²³ Woolf (2009, p. 224).

and classics are no use whatever'.¹²⁴ Compare Woolf's essay on Gibbon, in which she writes that for the historian '[m]uch that is important to other people loses its importance; the perspective is changed when the eyes are fixed not upon... a living woman but upon "my other wife, the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*"'.¹²⁵

For Woolf, Gibbon represented a particular kind of Victorian historicizing of the past into a series of 'lives of great men'; the writing of history is undertaken as a gentlemanly rite of passage and a repetitive act of emulation and rewriting between generations which aggrandizes the historian himself as much as his subjects.¹²⁶ Plath echoes and updates Woolf's humour in her observation that, of the rows of 'girls, girls everywhere' reading Gibbon's history together in the library, 'Huxley would have laughed. What a conditioning center this is!'.¹²⁷ Both Plath and Woolf suggest that it is not so much the classical past itself that is harmful, but its reduction to 'lives of great men', 'set texts' and rote-learning, and the ideologically-loaded way that classicism has often been used.

As a student, Plath can laugh at the banal indoctrination of the classics, but as a teacher at Smith College a few years later, Plath's disappointment in those entrusted with the classical past is palpable.¹²⁸ In her description of a faculty meeting, Plath's eyes and concentration flit about the room, mixing the contemporary with the classical:

¹²⁴ Woolf (1992a, p. 69). Plath may also be influenced by H.D., and Stevie Smith's feminist anti-bourgeois take on classical stories (Plath corresponded with Smith by letter and was an admirer of Smith's work).

¹²⁵ Quoting Gibbon, Woolf (1937).

¹²⁶ Woolf gently mocks her friend Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918); Woolf describes *Decline and Fall* as 'the autobiography, or rather the six autobiographies' of Gibbon (Woolf, 1937).

¹²⁷ Reference is to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932); *J* 26. Plath, now teaching the classics herself, later recalls this scene at *J* 328.

¹²⁸ On scepticism: see also Plath's ironic use of the title 'Lesbos' in a poem that recounts the difficulties and rivalries between two women, rather than the Sapphic friendship the speaker had been expecting (*CP* 227).

No eyes met mine... A roomful of smoke and orange-seated black-painted chairs. Sat beside a vaguely familiar woman in the very front, no one between me and the president. Foisted forward. Stared intently at gilt leaved trees, orange-gilt columns, a bronze frieze of stags, stags and an archer, bow-bent. Intolerable, unintelligible bickering about pluses & minuses, graduate grades. On the backcloth a greek with white-silver feet fluted to a maid, coyly kicking one white leg out of her Greek robe. Pink & orange & gilded maidens... Haven't you heard? Mr Hill has twins.¹²⁹

Plath's disillusionment is heightened by the contrast between the classical art and the 'unintelligible bickering' of the staff around her; she conveys a sense of loss and belatedness in recognizing that, as a woman in the 1950s who has finally gained access to the classical learning that men have controlled for centuries, she is too late—the classical greats have been reduced to 'pluses and minuses, graduate grades'.¹³⁰

If the neo-classical scene on the frieze is of Diana and Actaeon, then Ovid's story of trespassing and vision highlights Plath's sense of exclusion from academia—she is an outsider looking in—as well as her sense that in witnessing the behind-the-scenes bureaucracy of teaching, she has seen something she regrets being privy to. The scene also gains a Woolfian colour when this account in Plath's journals is compared to her account of the same meeting in a letter to her brother; in it she writes how disillusioning it is to find that those whom she admired as a student now 'gossip, especially the men... with those on tenure getting pot-bellies'.¹³¹ In her essay on Gibbon, Woolf describes the scholar as 'ridiculous' in body, 'prodigiously fat, [and] enormously top-heavy'.¹³² Plath also may observe the scene via Woolf's similar observation (with a more comic edge) of the portly classical scholar Erasmus Cowan in *Jacob's Room*, as the authorial voice wonders: '... what if the poet strode in? 'This my image?' he might

¹²⁹ *J* 318.

¹³⁰ Or, perhaps, it is a recognition that they have been always only pluses and minuses.

¹³¹ *LH* 341.

¹³² Woolf (1937).

ask, pointing to the chubby man, whose brain is, after all, Virgil's representative among us, though the body gluttonise, and as for arms, bees, or even the plough... But... [n]owhere else would Virgil hear the like'.¹³³ Again, both Woolf and Plath question the guardians of the classical tradition, rather than the texts themselves.

Plath also highlights the clash between classics and domesticity. In a journal entry, Plath describes teaching Sophocles to her undergraduates in between late nights and grocery shopping:

Woke after 9 hours sleep still exhausted & rebellious, not wanting to drag my drugged body to a lecture platform: a problem of identity... I dawdled over coffee in the thick brown pottery mug, waiting for the coffee-revelation, which didn't come, bang, into clothes, torn webbed stockings, out into the dull-mat-finished gray morning... Ran up ice path gritted with sand, bang, bell rang, into class in a daze, with faces looking up, expecting me to say something, & me not there, blank, bored, hearing my voice lead out blither on ironic structure of the Oedipus which I realize I don't understand myself: It is folly to try to outwit the gods. Or: we are all predestined—or still: we have free will & must be responsible. How glad I was, when bell rang. Free to shop.¹³⁴

Another entry similarly describes Plath's efforts to prepare class notes while running a house and cooking for dinner guests:

The apartment clean-carpeted and empty, bowls of sour cream & onion, pots of tomato & meat sauce, garlic butter, hot water, waiting, waiting. Soon the rude bell-buzz will sound & after, after, to hell with Sophocles, I shall pick you up & go on with you, to catch up. Last week, almost caught up I was, but night by night I, weary, dropped my pen and fell to sleep, aching, on to the pillow...¹³⁵

Plath wryly contrasts the high art and 'mysteries' of *Oedipus* with her own domestic tragedies, observing the mouldering apples in her fruit bowl which 'mock' her, and imagining that the

¹³³ Woolf (1992a, p. 33).

¹³⁴ *J* 334-335.

¹³⁵ *J* 329-330.

great demand the gods make of her is simply (in the face of Oedipus' trials) to get out of bed.¹³⁶ Plath struggles, clearly exhausted, yet berates herself for her 'sloth... & weakness', sardonically observing the male academics around her who effortlessly 'make a life' of this.¹³⁷

Plath recounts a dinner party where a male colleague expresses his hostility toward the women classicists of Smith College: 'Paul spoke of... Pat Hecht's 'Knowing more about Greek plays', or pretending to, than he'.¹³⁸ Both Paul Roche (English) and Hecht (Art History) were possible candidates for a Classics professorship, and Paul seems threatened by Hecht's classical credentials; well-versed in the classics herself, Plath clearly dislikes Paul's attempt to disparage Hecht's learning, and resents his suspicion toward the new wave of women scholars entering the 1950s (male) academy.¹³⁹ Plath describes Paul in her journals in ironically classical terms, which are beginning to have increasingly negative connotations in her writing when associated with male writers. Plath notes with a hint of fascinated disgust his face, 'adonis-boy looks lost, seedy, coarse-pored...', and his 'professionally dewy blue-eyed look and his commercially gilded and curled blond hair on his erect, dainty-boned aristocratic head looking as if it had been struck on a greek coin that since has blurred & thinned from too much public barter and fingering'.¹⁴⁰ Later, Plath discovers that Paul is a 'palpable sham':

what machinations lead him to set about doing Greek translations...? to impress [his wife's] parents, to stall (until they come across handsomely by leaving a fortune) under the aura of a specialist scholar's life work? One can't help wanting to know. He is 'successful' in getting money, getting an audience... [but] what does he do? The translations are a front: he uses a lexicon. Stanley claims to have

¹³⁶ *J* 334.

¹³⁷ *J* 507.

¹³⁸ *J* 326.

¹³⁹ Alongside Hecht, Plath names two further women classicists in her journals and letters, Eleanor Shipley Duckett (*LH* 252; Professor of Classical Languages and Literature, Smith College), and Christine Brooke-Rose (*LH* 369; author of *Amalgamemnon*, 1984). Plath may have looked to these three women as models to validate both her life as a writer and her gendered approach to the classics, as Woolf looked to Jane Harrison; for Harrison's influence on Woolf, see Shattuck (1987); also Heilbrun (2002) on Harrison as Ariadne to Woolf.

¹⁴⁰ *J* 326, 354 [*sic*].

seen the lexicon & Louis MacNeice's translation on his desk, open, and his own page a kind of elaborate synthesis. So he is a fraud. One suspects, one knows, this—and yet one wonders: how, so beautifully, does he keep it up?¹⁴¹

Plath sees through the neo-classical pretences of these male frauds, describing their classically decorated houses and classical poses as 'saccharine'—artificially sweet.¹⁴² In contrast, as I shortly discuss, Plath deploys her classical allusions with subtlety, and often to subversive effect.

Plath's approach to the classical tradition is characterized by irony, humour, subtlety, self-deprecation, and an antagonism toward male scholars. Like Woolf, Plath reserves her greatest scepticism for the pretentious guardians of the classical past and for the ways in which the classical past is transmitted, frequently mocking the classical pretensions of others, or interrogating the fetishized value assigned to signifiers of a classical education. This distinctive attitude is also found in Plath's poetry. In 'Private Ground', for example, the speaker mocks the unsuitability of 'those Greek beauties you brought | Off Europe's relic heap | To sweeten your neck of the New York woods', while 'The Colossus' renders male poets' classical allusions as 'carnavalesque animal noises: 'Mule bray', 'pig-grunt', and 'bawdy cackles''.¹⁴³ The speaker of 'The Colossus' is 'none the wiser' for her thirty years of labour in the 'conditioning center' reconstructing the fragmented colossus of the past, and in 'Insomniac' ineffective sleeping tablets are described as 'worn-out and silly, like classical gods... [they] do him no good'.¹⁴⁴ Yet Plath's work can also display an antagonism toward the classical past itself; 'lamp-headed Plato' is singled out for specific rebuttal in 'Magi' and 'Totem' ('What girl ever flourished in

¹⁴¹ *J* 383-384; cf. Hurst (2006, p. 13 n. 9) on the similar pretences of Victorian male scholars.

¹⁴² *J* 503.

¹⁴³ *CP* 130; 129; Britzolakis (2007, pp. 179-180).

¹⁴⁴ *CP* 163.

such company?’), and in ‘By Candlelight’, classical heritage, embodied by a ‘little brassy Atlas’, is a ‘Poor heirloom, all you have’.¹⁴⁵ In mixing the domestic with the classical, Plath also makes her receptions uniquely personal; I turn now to examine a selection of Plath’s poems in detail to explore how Plath develops this specifically gendered response to Ovid.

3.4 Daphne

As the first instance of attempted rape in *Metamorphoses*, the tale of Daphne and Apollo introduces two themes that recur throughout the rest of the epic: lustful pursuits; and woman-as-art (whether she is fleeing in terror, or fixed into the landscape).¹⁴⁶ While these themes recur in Plath’s work, her use of the Daphne motif is not a simple borrowing of a template, or a wish to tell Ovid’s story from Daphne’s point of view, but is a complex and wholly unique reworking of the tale. In her poems, Plath (or her speaker) is not the fleeing Daphne who rejects love; instead, Plath harnesses the myth to critique the patriarchal imperative for women to adhere to sexual and artistic chastity, and to deconstruct the ‘hocus-pocus’ of the male poet-magician.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, while Plath at first attempts to take on Apollo’s male poetic gaze, she finally removes him from the myth altogether. Plath’s engagement with Ovid’s Daphne is long-

¹⁴⁵ CP 148, 264, 236; Plath ‘feminizes’ Plato’s Cave allegory to describe a moment between mother and child in ‘Candles’ (CP 148), ‘By Candlelight’, and ‘Nick and the Candlestick’ (CP 240) to authorize ‘the textual space of the mother-infant relation’ (Britzolakis, 2006, pp. 116-117).

¹⁴⁶ *Met.* 1.452-567; in Ovid, Cupid fires a golden arrow into Apollo’s chest which makes him insatiably desire Daphne, and fires a leaden arrow into Daphne’s chest which makes her ceaselessly flee from love; Apollo chases Daphne, who, cursing her attractive form, prays that her beauty (*figuram*) be changed so that she can retain her chastity. On Ovid’s Daphne episode, see Parry (1964), Nicoll (1980), Davis (1983, pp. 39 ff.), Nagle (1988b), and Salzman-Mitchell (2005b, pp. 29-38); on the interplay of sexual violence, gender, and art in the episode, see also Curran (1978), Barkan (1986, p. 85), Knox (1990), Segal (1998), Farrell (1999, p. 133), and Richlin (2014, p. 139). On early receptions of Daphne, see Barnard (1987); in modern women’s writing, see Fowler (2006), and Brown (2005a, pp. 45-66).

¹⁴⁷ On the valorization of female chastity in patriarchal societies, especially in fascist discourse, see Macciocchi (1979); see also n. 114, above; on the tradition of using Daphne as a moral lesson (to preserve female chastity at all costs), see Barnard (1987). Plath’s use of Ovid to critique a contemporary imperative to chastity thus draws upon Ovid’s own poetic political critique: the legislation of the *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* was primarily to ensure chastity.

standing and detailed, and the myth arcs across Plath's career through the poems 'Pursuit' (1956), 'On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad' and 'On the Plethora of Dryads' (1957), 'Virgin in a Tree' (1958), and 'Elm' (1962). Plath's source text is clearly evidenced by the close verbal echoes of the Latin, her emulation of Ovid's punning play, and in her reading of Daphne-as-text. Plath's staging of the Daphne myth in these five poems provides an evocative example both of her Ovidianism, and of the ways in which she engages her source text.

3.4.1 'On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad' / 'On the Plethora of Dryads'

In her dryad diptych, Plath uses Daphne to explore the representation of women in art and the frustrations of a woman writer under cultural pressure to be muse, rather than poet. In Robert Graves' formulation, 'woman is not a poet: she is either a Muse or she is nothing.'¹⁴⁸ By figuring the woman as muse, the male poet denies woman both her subjectivity and her creative power, co-opting her poetic force to enrich his own art, and thus obliterating the real woman with a literary construct of his own imagining. Based upon Hughes' confirmation, Kroll argues that Hughes and Plath saw Graves' 'white goddess' as their common poetic model, viewing themselves as Graves and his muse, the poet Laura Riding.¹⁴⁹ In Graves' formulation, the poet is always male, and the woman takes the role of the Muse/ Maenad, for whom domesticity ends in death. Plath's journals do evidence a sustained concern with the figure of the muse; yet she recognises that the muse is only a fictional construct: 'Story: woman with poet husband who writes about love, passion—she, after glow of vanity & joy, finds out he isn't writing about her

¹⁴⁸ Graves (1983, p. 446).

¹⁴⁹ Kroll (2007, p. 42; see also chapter 3.2.2, above; Laura (Riding) Jackson was, however, a reluctant muse, and viewed her relationship with Graves rather more ambivalently. For Jackson's 'crushingly unsympathetic' response to Kroll's use of *The White Goddess* to read Plath's poetry, see Bundtzen (2005, p. 39); on Graves and Ovid see Liveley (2006b).

(as friends think) but about Dream Woman Muse'.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Plath's notes on the figure of the muse are frequently in the context of the need to reject both her role as muse in order to write and the notion that maleness alone equates to creativity.¹⁵¹ Across her two dryad poems, Plath thus tests out her art by attempting to write poetry both 'as a woman' and 'as a man', endeavouring to fashion new models of poetic inspiration and recover a female poetic self. Plath steps back from the Daphne myth to view it as a reader and rewriter of Ovid (rather than embodying one of his characters), revealing differing subjectively 'feminine' or 'masculine' reading/ writing experiences through the poems' juxtaposition.

'On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad' opens with the word 'Ravening', setting the scene for the sexual and literary violence that follows:

Ravening through the persistent bric-à-brac
 Of blunt pencils, rose-sprigged coffee cup,
 Postage stamps, stacked books' clamor and yawp,
 Neighborhood cockcrow—all nature's prodigal backtalk,
 The vaunting mind
 Snubs impromptu spiels of wind
 And wrestles to impose
 Its own order on what is.

'With my fantasy alone,' brags the importunate head,
 Arrogant among rook-tongues spaces,
 Sheep greens, finned falls, 'I shall compose a crisis
 To stun sky black out, drive gibbering mad
 Trout, cock, ram,
 That bulk so calm
 On my jealous stare,
 Self-sufficient as they are.'

¹⁵⁰ *J* 301.

¹⁵¹ For meditations on the figure of the muse in Plath's journals, see *J* 55, 132, 177 (on being a 'sylvan goddess'), 204, 208 (needs to not be a muse to write); 309, 333 (being a muse destroys), 401, 437 (must reject that maleness equates to creativity). Cf. the 'male muse' (*J* 365, 381); 'Alicante Lullaby' (*CP* 43) includes an invocation to the Muse 'Cacophony'. On 'reclaiming the Muse' in feminist literature, see Murray (2006); on Muses and gendered creativity in ancient literature, see the volume edited by Spentzou and Fowler (2002), especially Sharrock's essay on Ovid's Muse (2002b).

But no hocus-pocus of green angels
Damasks with dazzle the threadbare eye;
'My trouble, doctor, is: I see a tree,
And that damn scrupulous tree won't practice wiles
 To beguile sight:
 E.g., by cant of light
 Concoct a Daphne;
 My tree stays tree.

'However I wrench obstinate bark and trunk
To my sweet will, no luminous shape
Steps out radiant in limb, eye, lip,
To hoodwink the honest earth which pointblank
 Spurns such fiction
 As nymphs; cold vision
 Will have no counterfeit
 Palmed off on it.

'No doubt now in dream-propriety fall soon moon-eyed
Star-lucky sleight-of-hand man watches
My jilting lady squander coin, gold leaf stock ditches,
And the opulent air go studded with seed,
 While this beggared brain
 Hatches no fortune,
 But from leaf, from grass,
 Thieves what it has.'

The violent undercurrent runs through the poem's verbs ('ravening', 'stare', 'wrench', 'thieve'), with the sexual violence emphasized by Plath's title to the Ovidian reader mindful of the formulaic fate of dryads in Ovid's epic poem.¹⁵² Plath at first appears to reverse the Daphne myth in her attempt to metamorphose nature into woman, blurring the line between tree and woman as objects of the male poetic gaze. The desirable dryad is a readily available muse for the male poet; but, Plath writes, she is hard for the woman writer to envisage among 'the persistent bric-à-brac | Of blunt pencils, rose-sprigged coffee cup'. In a comic scene, the speaker visits another figure of the male establishment to diagnose her writer's block ('My trouble,

¹⁵² E.g. Tereus' vision of Philomela as like 'one of those naiads or dryads you hear about...', *quales audire solemus* | *Naidas et Dryadas* (*Met.* 6.452-453); on rape 'interpellating' the female subject in *Metamorphoses* see Enterline (2000, p. 158).

doctor, is... my tree stays tree'). Unlike the 'brag' (cf. *superbus*, *Met.* 1.454) of the parodied Hughesian poet in stanza two, for whom the dryad inspires animalistic nature poems ('rook-tongued spaces, | Sheep greens, finned falls... Trout, cock, ram'), the woman writer cannot imagine herself into the Apollonian subject position to 'stare' and 'wrench obstinate bark and trunk | To my sweet will'.¹⁵³ Plath's metapoetic device of a woman speaker pretending to be a man seeing a dryad, follows Ovid in foregrounding the act of storytelling in the episode, with Plath's exposé of the creation of the literary woman taking its cue from Ovid's own puns on *frons*, *liber*, and *figura*, which metamorphose Daphne literally into a book.¹⁵⁴

Plath's humorous comment that 'my tree stays tree' is also filtered through a Woolfian intertext. In *Orlando*, Woolf's most Ovidian work, her eponymous sex-changing hero/ine is at this point in the story a man, and so tries his hand at the male art of poetry:

So then he tried saying the grass is green and the sky is blue... 'The sky is blue,' he said, 'the grass is green.' Looking up, he saw that, on the contrary, the sky is like the veils which a thousand Madonnas have let fall from their hair; and the grass fleets and darkens like a flight of girls fleeing the embraces of hairy satyrs from enchanted woods.¹⁵⁵

As Fowler notes, *Orlando*'s is a distinctly Ovidian poetic imagination.¹⁵⁶

In 'On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad', the speaker's scorn for such 'fantasy' women as imagined by the male poet is evident: the process of 'conjuring' up a dryad is

¹⁵³ In Plath's short story 'The Fifty-Ninth Bear' (*JP* 94-105), it is clear that solitary contemplation of nature is a male luxury: it is often simply not safe for a woman to commune with nature on her own (Brain, 2001, p. 101). Compare Eavan Boland's 'Daphne Heard with Horror the Addresses of the God', which incorporates a feminist awareness of the implied violence behind poetry; in the poem, the speaker admires her garden 'so free of any need | for nymphs, goddesses, wounded presences—| the fleet river-daughters who took root | and can be seen in the wood in | unmistakable shapes of weeping' (1990, pp. 41-42).

¹⁵⁴ *Met.* 1.547-550; Farrell (1999, p. 133); Enterline (2000, p. 39).

¹⁵⁵ Woolf (2003b, p. 49); a tapestry hanging in *Orlando*'s house depicts Daphne in flight.

¹⁵⁶ Fowler (1999, p. 235); Woolf (2003b, p. 54); on Woolf see Brown (1999, pp. 203-210).

described as ‘hocus-pocus’, a ‘fiction’, and ‘dream-propriety’, and the figure of Pygmalion shadows the image of the male poet ‘conjuring’ his man-made muse. The female speaker ‘Spurns such fiction | As nymphs’, and her ‘cold vision | Will have no counterfeit | Palmed off on it’; here the speaker tries to assert her own gaze against the male, and she rejects the idea that she exists only to be looked at.¹⁵⁷ The poem also suggests that by virtue of being male, the poetic task is an easier one: all one has to do is imagine a dryad. The speaker mocks the ‘Star-lucky sleight-of-hand man’ who simply ‘watches’ the lady and makes his fortune.¹⁵⁸

Elsewhere, Plath figures the male poet as a ‘Snakecharmer’. Although he thinks of himself as a *uates*, Plath writes that the snakecharmer is no Orpheus; he can pipe ‘no rocks’ (cf. *Threicius uates et saxa sequentia ducit, Met.* 11.2), and he soon tires of playing a poet, yawning with boredom.¹⁵⁹ Plath explicitly links the fraud of the male poet and the real violence of his work in her journals: ‘No one wants to think: this guy can reach inside & yank my heart because he wants to keep his pot boiling. So when they ask where the writer gets his ideas: “I lie on my couch; God speaks to me. Inspiration.” That satisfies’.¹⁶⁰ Plath’s image of the sleight-of-hand man in ‘On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad’ suggests that even tricksters and frauds who can ‘pipe no rocks’ can make their names as great male poets through literary or actual violence against the woman muse, while the woman writer struggles to find a place for herself within the male-poet/female-muse paradigm.

¹⁵⁷ On woman’s ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’, see Mulvey (1975).

¹⁵⁸ In contrast, his muse ‘squander[s] coin’; Plath shows how the muse is also constructed by the male poet as the *belle infidèle*—beautiful but unfaithful. Clark (2010, pp. 81-84) argues that the poem reveals a self-confident view of the woman poet’s aesthetics against male ‘hocus-pocus’; see also Rose (1991, p. 114).

¹⁵⁹ CP 79.

¹⁶⁰ J 132. Poems such as ‘Purdah’, ‘Fever 103°’ and ‘Lady Lazarus’ similarly explore the violent consequences for the muse, as Plath ‘makes her distinctive black comedy by crossing orphic myths of the inspired poet with an ironic deployment of stereotypes of alienated or objectified femininity’ (Britzolakis, 2006, p. 114).

The second poem of the diptych, 'On the Plethora of Dryads', thus stages an experiment in taking the male subject position and playing Apollo (or perhaps Ovid himself):

Hearing a white saint rave
About a quintessential beauty
Visible only to the paragon heart,
I tried my sight on an apple-tree
That for eccentric knob and wart
Had all my love.

Without meat or drink I sat
Starving my fantasy down
To discover that metaphysical Tree which hid
From my worldling look its brilliant vein
Far deeper in gross wood
Than axe could cut.

But before I might blind sense
To see with the spotless soul,
Each particular quirk so ravished me
Every pock and stain bulked more beautiful
Than flesh of any body
Flawed by love's prints.

Battle however I would
To break through that patchwork
Of leaves' bicker and whisk in babel tongues,
Streak and mottle of tawn bark,
No visionary lightnings
Pierced my dense lid.

Instead, a wanton fit
Dragged each dazzled sense apart
Surfeiting eye, ear, taste, touch, smell;
Now, snared by this miraculous art,
I ride earth's burning carrousel
Day in, day out,

And such grit corrupts my eyes
I must watch sluttish dryads twitch
Their multifarious silks in the holy grove
Until no chaste tree but suffers blotch
Under flux of those seductive
Reds, greens, blues.

The speaker notes ironically that after ‘Hearing a white saint rave’ she sits underneath a tree like an ascetic shaman, ‘Without meat or drink... | Starving my fantasy down’.¹⁶¹ Although the tree-as-tree is ‘more beautiful | Than flesh of any body’ to the woman poet, she perseveres in her experiment in male poetic vision, ignoring (‘blind[ing]’) her physical senses (her common sense, perhaps). The experiment is a disaster, for now she sees only ‘sluttish dryads’ in ‘multifarious silks’ of ‘seductive | Reds, greens, blues’ wherever she looks, ‘no chaste tree[s]’ remain: ‘such grit corrupts my eyes’. There is a peak of violence halfway through the poem when the speaker fully assumes the male subject position, and the reader is assaulted by the words ‘battle’, ‘break’, ‘streak’, ‘lightnings’, and ‘pierced’. As well as highlighting the sexual objectification of the dryad, Plath emphasizes the violence of the fantasy: the speaker is ‘ravished’, ‘dragged’, and ‘snared’ by the male poetic gaze that seizes her, and the tree-dryad’s body is bruised but ‘beautiful... | Flawed by love’s prints’.¹⁶² At the close of the poem the speaker’s position is unresolved, and she is left in an in-between space, neither dryad nor sleight-of-hand man.

3.4.2 ‘Pursuit’

As the poem Plath wrote two days after first meeting Hughes, ‘Pursuit’ has attracted intense biographical scholarly attention.¹⁶³ The poem is narrated from the perspective of a female speaker chased by a (sexually) voracious and omnipotent panther; while the template of a woman pursued by a god-as-animal recalls *Metamorphoses* thematically, ‘Pursuit’

¹⁶¹ On Hughes’ self-fashioning as shaman-*uates*-poet in *Tales from Ovid*, see Jacobsen (2009); this line also works self-referentially (woman-as-dryad) with the speaker starving herself down into the ‘quintessential beauty’.

¹⁶² Cf. *Am.* 1.7; on bruises adding to the beauty of the elegiac *puella*, see Gold (1985, p. 158); on erotic violence in Ovid, see Cahoon (1988, pp. 296-297), Fredrick (1997, pp. 185-186), and Greene (1999, pp. 415-417).

¹⁶³ *CP* 22; Plath describes it as a ‘poem about the dark forces of lust... It is dedicated to Ted Hughes’, *J* 214.

specifically draws upon the Daphne and Apollo episode. In this respect, it is tempting to read the speaker of the poem as Plath/Daphne, and the panther as Hughes/Apollo. Yet Plath's refiguration of the episode is radical: the panther is not the pursuing lover, but her own lust.¹⁶⁴ Raised in the discourse of 1950s chaste femininity in which female sexual desire was shameful, Plath encodes her sexual desire in her journals as a black panther; the code is reused in 'Pursuit'.¹⁶⁵ After meeting Hughes, for example, Plath writes of her sexual desire: 'the panther wakes and stalks again'.¹⁶⁶ Plath explicitly connects the idea of sexual desire, fantasy, and guilt in another journal entry a few days later, and this is reflected in the sense of guilt and shame in the poem, and the speaker's ambivalent terror ('Appalled by secret want'; 'that dark guilt').¹⁶⁷

In Plath's letter to her mother, in which she encloses 'Pursuit', she writes that the poem 'is influenced by Blake, I think (tiger, tiger)... although [a]nother epigraph could have been from my beloved Yeats: 'Whatever flames upon the night, Man's own resinous heart has fed''.¹⁶⁸ At the same time as the Yeats quotation strengthens the reading of the panther as sexual desire fed by 'woman's own heart', Plath deceives her bourgeois mother about the true subject of the poem, writing that it is 'a symbol of the terrible beauty of death, and the paradox that the more intensely one lives, the more one burns and consumes oneself'.¹⁶⁹ Plath's journals detail

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Hughes' self-figuration as the panther in 'Trophies' (1998a, p. 18); Middlebrook separately notes the links between the metamorphic imagery in 'Trophies' and *Tales from Ovid*, and how Hughes' panther looks back to Plath's 'Pursuit' (2003, p. 280); Hughes may also be drawing on Plath's metamorphic description of him in her early poem, 'Faun'. The panther also appears in Hughes' 'The Hidden Orestes', see n. 62, above.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Plath's use of Semele, above.

¹⁶⁶ *J* 233, 235; Plath adds that the last time the panther appeared was while waiting for a boyfriend to arrive for a date—while waiting she wrote 'Mad Girl's Love Song', in which the speaker questions whether the man she is waiting for is real or a fantasy.

¹⁶⁷ 'Pursuit, guilt' (*J* 350).

¹⁶⁸ *LH* 222-223. The lines come from Yeats' 'Two Songs from a Play': 'Everything that man esteems | Endures a moment or a day. | Love's pleasure drives his love away | The painter's brush consumes his dreams | ... Whatever flames upon the night | Man's own resinous heart has fed'; it is a classically-infused poem which begins, 'I saw a staring virgin stand | Where holy Dionysus died'; another allusive clue to Plath's classicism.

¹⁶⁹ For Plath on her epistolary persona, see *J* 449; on Plath's letters, see Ellis (2011).

her resentment of her mother's instructions to her to remain a virgin until marriage and her subsequent rebellion against the double standard that allowed men sexual freedom:

She gave her daughter books by noble women called 'The Case for Chastity'.
She told her any man who was worth his salt cared for a woman to be a virgin if
she were to be his wife, no matter how many crops of wild oats he'd sown on his
own.

What did her Daughter do? She slept with people, hugged them and kissed
them.¹⁷⁰

This tension between sexual desire, guilt, shame, and 'appropriate' feminine behaviour plays out in Plath's *Daphne*, and may thus act as an attempt to rewrite *Daphne's* shame at her beauty in Ovid (*mutando perde figuram*, 1.547), and her repulsion by sexuality.¹⁷¹

'Pursuit' was composed while Plath was writing an essay on Racine's *Phèdre*, a play about lust and sexual shame, and which lends an epigraph and title to Plath's poem: *Dans le fond des forêts votre image me suit* ('In the heart of the forest, your image pursues me').¹⁷² The context of the line, which suggests that the image which pursues her is imagined by Phaedra, strengthens the interpretation of the 'panther' in the poem as the speaker's sexual desire, rather than an Apollo-pursuer. The quotation and echoes of Racine (via Euripides) in the lines of 'Pursuit' add layers of intertextual meaning to the pastoral setting and to the theme of destructive love. Plath records that she receives her marked Racine essay 'with the comment that passion is only one aspect and not the fatal holocaust I made it: also mixed my metaphors

¹⁷⁰ *J* 432; see also Plath's disdain for 'conventional morality' at 269, 432, 461.

¹⁷¹ In draft manuscripts of 'Nick and the Candlestick' and 'By Candlelight', the giant Atlas is also threatened by a panther (Van Dyne, 1993, pp. 162-165); the classical tradition itself seems threatened by Plath's sexuality and poetry.

¹⁷² Act 1, Sc. 2; in Hughes' *Phèdre*, he translates the line as 'Everywhere in the woods your image hunts me' (1998b, p. 28).

re flames and cancers and appetites: well, not in that poem: which I wrote for Ted'.¹⁷³ The essay, the woman's lust, and poem thus flow into one another, mixing the academic with the personal and the literary. The poem opens:

There is a panther stalks me down:
 One day I'll have my death of him;
 His greed has set the woods aflame,
He prowls more lordly than the sun.
Most soft, most suavely glides that step,
 Advancing always at my back;
 From gaunt hemlock, rooks croak havoc:
The hunt is on, and sprung the trap,
Flayed by thorns I trek the rocks,
 Haggard through the hot white noon.
 Along red network of his veins
What fires run, what craving wakes?

In tandem with the thematic allusions to Racine, 'Pursuit' draws verbal parallels with Ovid, following the Latin closely as the poem narrates the increasing speed of the chase and proximity of the panther. At first the panther 'stalks' and 'prowls' the speaker, but the pace and intensity of the poem grows in a crescendo of violence conveyed by the increasingly forceful vocabulary: 'insatiate', 'hurls', 'rush'.¹⁷⁴ Like the pastoral landscape through which Daphne flees (the characteristically treacherous Ovidian *locus amoenus*), Plath also creates a mountainous woodland setting for her poem.¹⁷⁵ The speaker runs through 'woods aflame', and 'snarled thickets', 'hills match menace, spawning shade; | Midnight cloaks the sultry grove', and she is 'Flayed by thorns', a scene which compares directly with the detail of the moment Daphne flees

¹⁷³ J 225.

¹⁷⁴ The insatiably voracious appetite of the panther also evokes Erysichthon, whose hunger, like Apollo's, is likened to fire, *Met.* 8.837-839.

¹⁷⁵ On the relationship between sexual violence and landscape in Ovid, see Segal (1969), Gentilcore (1995), and Bolton (2009).

in Ovid (Apollo shouts after Daphne to be careful not to scratch her legs on the brambles, *ne prona cadas indignaue laedi | crura notent sentes*, 1.508-509).¹⁷⁶

The panther's pursuit is described in terms of a 'hunt', referencing both the hunting imagery of *Phèdre*, and giving the lie to Apollo's attempt to stop Daphne's flight in Ovid by claiming his chase is not a hunt (*Met.* 1.504-507).¹⁷⁷ In Plath, the panther is 'Advancing always at my back', 'the hunt is on', 'On fluent haunches, keeps my speed'. As in Ovid, the hunt is neck-and-neck: just as the hound is about to bite, the hare leaps away (*Met.* 1.533-539, cf. 505-506), and Apollo calls to Daphne not to run so fast as he will slow down and match her speed (*moderatus, oro, | curre fugamque inhibe; moderatus insequar ipse*, 1.510-511). Plath's pursuing panther takes on further characteristics of Apollo as 'He prowls more lordly than the sun'; 'I rush | From such assault of radiance'.¹⁷⁸ As well as referencing Apollo's role as sun-god, the 'assault of radiance' also evokes the story of Jupiter and Semele that Plath had drawn on earlier in her journals (*Met.* 3.259-315, especially the heavenly fires of l. 309), an allusion strengthened by the speaker's description that 'In the wake of this fierce cat, | Kindled like torches for his joy, | Charred and ravened women lie'. Both Jupiter and Apollo leave a wake of charred and ravened women across the *Metamorphoses*, and Plath links the two episodes in 'Pursuit' to expand her poem beyond a retelling of the Daphne episode alone to encompass Ovid's epic more widely, and to emphasize her theme of the 'fatal holocaust' of lust.

¹⁷⁶ On the Ovidian narrator's humour in this scene, see Liveley (2011, p. 27).

¹⁷⁷ Especially *non insequar hostis*, 'it is not an enemy that pursues you'.

¹⁷⁸ Panthers are more frequently associated with Bacchus in mythology (and the only time *pantherarum* occurs in *Metamorphoses* is in this context, 3.669), but Plath reuses a pre-existing metaphorical association from her own writing (recall, however, her reference to Yeats' Dionysus).

The poem may also allude to the race of Atalanta in *Met.* 10, and the apples thrown to slow her down, as Plath's speaker 'hurl[s] my heart to halt his pace'. The cannibalistic imagery here, of woman-as-food or as consumable product ('To quench his thirst I squander blood; | He eats, and still his need seeks food, | Compels a total sacrifice'), references Erysichthon again, as well as the wolfish Lycaon.¹⁷⁹ If 'Pursuit' is read biographically, then Plath may also allude to Arethusa's flight from Alpheos (*Met.* 5.572-641); as well as the contextual setting of the tale and the woman's flight through woods and over mountains, the chase is again matched in speed, and Arethusa describes feeling Alpheos' breath on her hairbands, hearing his footsteps close behind her (*sed certe sonitusque pedem terrebat et ingens | crinales uittas adflabat anhelitus oris*, 616-617). Plath's poem includes the detail of the footsteps ('The panther's tread is on the stairs'), and it is difficult not to recall Hughes' theft of Plath's hairband at their first meeting.¹⁸⁰

'Pursuit' also incorporates Sappho's lovesick symptoms ('Blood quickens, gonging in my ears'); like the coded panther, Plath may be using Sappho here to facilitate and authorize her discussion of taboo female sexual desire.¹⁸¹ Alongside Sappho, Plath also draws on Ovidian tropes of the flames of love: 'Along red network of his veins | What fires run, what craving wakes?' with 'singeing fury' and 'parch[ing]' kisses, 'I run flaring in my skin'. Although the fiery nature of passion is a common elegiac trope, Plath deploys the imagery of lust in this poem specifically in terms of burning foliage: running through 'woods aflame', the pursuer's 'ardor... lights the trees', until finally 'The gutted forest falls to ash'.¹⁸² When Apollo first catches sight

¹⁷⁹ 'The Glutton', *CP* 40.

¹⁸⁰ *J* 212.

¹⁸¹ Sappho fr. 31. Plath may thus also use her desiring Daphne with Sapphic symptoms of love to draw upon and positively rewrite the doomed sexual passion of Sappho in Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) 'Sappho Crosses the Dark River into Hades' and Sara Teasdale (1884-1933) 'To Cleis (The Daughter of Sappho)'; both poets were favourites of Plath.

¹⁸² On Plath and the modern elegiac tradition, see Ramazani (1993; 1994, pp. 262-292).

of Daphne in Ovid, he too is like ‘the flimsy stubble which burns in a harvested cornfield’, or ‘a blazing hedgerow fired by a torch to which a traveller has carelessly brought a lamp too close or left behind’ (*utque leues stipulae demptis adolentur aristis, | ut facibus saepes ardent, quas forte uiator | uel nimis admouit uel iam sub luce reliquit, | sic deus in flammis abiit*, 1.492-495). A similar simile is used of Tereus at 6.455-457, whose lust sets him on fire like ‘yellow-white corn in a field, or the piles of leaves and the hay that are stored in a barn for a winter’ (*non secus exarsit conspecta uirgine Tereus | quam si quis canis ignem supponat aristis | aut frondem positasque cremet faenilibus herbas*); a second near-identical simile is also used of both Apollo and Tereus who chase their prey as a wolf does a lamb, a lion a deer, or an eagle a dove—although Apollo says he is definitely *not* any of those things as he chases Daphne.¹⁸³ Tereus may thus also shade the detail that the panther’s ‘insatiate’ lust can be explained as ‘condemned by our ancestral fault’: compare Ovid’s comment that Thracians are genetically lustful (*innata libido*, *Met.* 6.458).¹⁸⁴

At the close of ‘Pursuit’, the speaker brings about her own metamorphosis (as Daphne asks for hers), delaying the assault of the panther by enclosing herself in layers of wood (‘I shut my doors... | I bolt the door, each door I bolt’); she is still hesitant about expressing her sexuality and bolts herself away from the panther, repressing her desire. Plath goes on to develop the imagery of a woman shutting herself in a tree, but also her increased confidence in expressing her sexuality in a poem written two years later, ‘Virgin in a Tree’.

¹⁸³ For a comprehensive list of the similarities between the Tereus and Philomela episode and Daphne and Apollo in Ovid, see Jacobsen (1984); on Tereus in Plath, see Philomela section, below.

¹⁸⁴ Although Plath’s ‘hot white noon’ is in opposition to the sleepless night Tereus spends in Ovid’s poem, *ignes | ipse suos nutrit cura remouente soporem*, 6.492-493.

3.4.3 'Virgin in a Tree'

In 1958, Plath was commissioned by the journal *ARTnews* to write a series of meditations on paintings, for which she chose four works by Paul Klee alongside pieces by Rousseau and de Chirico; 'Virgin in a Tree' takes its title from Klee's Ovidian etching of the same name.¹⁸⁵ Klee intended his withered virgin to be an unflattering critique of bourgeois values, an intention that Plath maintains in her poem with its rejection of chastity. Yet while Klee's Daphne lies on (rather than in) the tree, staring back at the viewer with a defiant gaze, feelings of entrapment and enclosure dominate Plath's poem, as it departs from a meditation on an etching to critique the Daphne myth itself and its reduction of woman to 'the beauty of a garden bed... spectacularly painted'.¹⁸⁶ Plath's use of ekphrasis for these poems subverts her classical models by using a technique associated with militaristic male epic poetry to describe women through the eyes of a woman and to meditate on the representation of women in art.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ The etching is held by the Museum of Modern Art, New York; image is available at: http://www.moma.org/collection_ge/object.php?object_id=67142 (Accessed: 4 March 2016). As research for the poems, Plath audited the 'Modern Art' course at Smith College in 1958, which may have discussed Klee's Ovidianism; Plath's notes for the course detail that she read Klee's *Paul Klee on Modern Art* (1948, Faber and Faber), Werner Haftmann's *The Mind and Work of Paul Klee* (1954, Praeger), Will Grohmann's *Paul Klee* (1955, Harry N. Abrams), and G. Di San Lazzaro's *Klee, a Study of His Life and Work* (1957, trans. S. Hood, Praeger). Klee read and owned a bilingual German/ Latin version of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Ovid's work served as inspiration for his paintings throughout his life; Klee's diaries (first pub. 1957) note his fascination with Ovid (Klee, 1964, p. 168). The four Klee poems are 'Virgin in a Tree', 'Perseus: The Triumph of Wit Over Suffering' (*CP* 82), 'Battle-Scene' (*CP* 84, based on *The Seafarer*), and 'The Ghost's Leavetaking' (*CP* 90); see *LH* 336. On Plath and de Chirico see Britzolakis (2007). Plath's strategy echoes Keats ('Ode on a Grecian Urn', 1819) in using ekphrasis as a device for traditional 'outsiders' to the classical tradition to engage with the ancient world.

¹⁸⁶ 'I Am Vertical', *CP* 162.

¹⁸⁷ On the representation of women in art, and the female nude as 'the principal ever-recurring subject', see Berger (1972, p. 47; 'men *act* and women *appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at'), and Mulvey (1975); see also hooks (1995), and Robinson (2015, especially pp. 288-329, s.v. 'Representing Women') on the ways in which visual representations entrench gender and racial inequality. For feminist critiques of art history, see Duncan (1989), Nochlin (2003), and statistics compiled by Guerrilla Girls for the National Museum of Women in the Arts, available at: <http://nmwa.org/advocate/get-facts> (Accessed: 4 March 2016).

In taking her inspiration from an etching, Plath explicitly foregrounds the act of looking: ‘Here’, Plath calls the reader, ‘etch on the inner window of your eye | This virgin on her rack’. In the poem, Plath invokes three of the most frequently rendered women in art—Eve, Cleopatra, and Helen of Troy (women who all bear complicated histories of representation)—while the Daphne figure’s ‘incomparable back’ evokes yet another painting, Velasquez’s ‘The Toilet of Venus’ (Rokeby Venus). ‘Virgin in a Tree’ also alludes to a host of Ovidian women; the opening lines inform the reader that this is the kind of story ‘set in the proverbs stitched on samplers’, enabling Plath, via a reference to Ovid’s own *mis-en-abyme*, to include many other tales of rape as woven by Arachne in *Metamorphoses* 6. More specifically, the image of suckling in the poem recalls Ovid’s pregnant woman trapped in a tree, Myrrha, an allusion emphasized by Plath’s image of the bark as a mourning shroud.¹⁸⁸

The poem names three more of Ovid’s ‘Green virgins’, ‘that first Daphne’ (noting her placing in Ovid’s text), Syrinx, and Pitys; a sharp pun on ‘green’ by Plath that evokes freshness, youth and sexual naivety, at the same time as it foreshadows the green foliage of the woman-tree. All three women are metamorphosed into plants or trees to escape pursuers, and Plath would have found them together in *Metamorphoses* 1. Plath’s familiarity with her Ovidian source is evidenced by the fact that Pitys is only alluded to in an obscure passing comment as Mercury relates the story-within-a-story of Syrinx; here, Pan approaches Syrinx ‘bedecked with a garland of sharp pine needles’ (*pinuque caput praecinctus acuta*, 1.699): his previous victim on his head.¹⁸⁹ In Plath’s poem, the virgins flee ‘pursuers... goat-thighed or god-haloed’. The

¹⁸⁸ Myrrha perpetually weeps tears of sap, *Met.* 10.500-509; Myrrha may also inform the image of the ‘birth pangs’ of the trapped woman in ‘The Rabbit Catcher’ (*CP* 193).

¹⁸⁹ Syrinx flees Pan’s advances and escapes by praying to a stream’s nymphs, who transform her into marsh reeds (*Met.* 1.689-712); Brown (2005a, pp. 30-31) notes that in Ovid Syrinx’s story is used to bore Argus to sleep, ‘a grim reminder that male violence against women is an everyday occurrence’. Pitys also appears in the story of Orpheus in Virgil’s *Ecl.* 7.24.

close echoes of Ovid's text continue as Plath writes of the metamorphosed women that 'though age drop | Their leafy crowns, their fame soars', weaving into her poem Apollo's prophecy to Daphne that her leaves will be used as wreaths and victor's crowns, her evergreen leaves earning eternal glory and praise (*tu quoque perpetuos semper gere frondis honores*, 1.560-565).¹⁹⁰ As in her dryad poems, Plath thus expands the Daphne myth in 'Virgin in a Tree' to create a silent chorus of multiple female presences who bear witness to the violent representations of women in culture and art. Plath explicitly links aesthetics and misogyny at the same time as she offers a darkly witty précis of Ovid's epic poem.

The doors behind which Daphne encased herself in 'Pursuit' have now metamorphosed around her in 'Virgin in a Tree', enclosing her within the tree that is figured as the only method of escape 'which deflects | All amorous arrows'. Plath's description of the 'bark's nun-black || Habit', and the two images of bark as lingerie ('a fashion that constricts | White bodies in a wooden girdle, root to top | Unfaced, unformed, the nipple-flowers | Shrouded to suckle darkness'), expand and update the Ovidian image to explore means by which contemporary women's bodies are contained and constricted, and to draw out how modern fashion and religious dress-codes seem as restricting as the enclosing tree.¹⁹¹

Daphne's constricting bark is used differently again in 'The Rabbit Catcher', a poem that weaves Ovidian imagery of the uncanny pastoral, voices torn off, blowing hair, sexual undertones ('birth pangs', 'little deaths'), and Apollo chasing Daphne-as-hare through the

¹⁹⁰ Plath treats Ovid's Syrx episode further in a section of her 'Poem for a Birthday', 'Flute notes from a reedy pond' (CP 131). On Maureen Almond's allusions to Daphne and Syrx in her poem on her relationship with Ovid and his poetry, 'Hermetical', see Brown (2014, pp. 437-438).

¹⁹¹ On the allusion to *Hamlet* here, see Brown (2005a, p. 65).

spiked gorse (*Met.* 1.533-539, cf. 505-506): ‘There was only one place to get to’.¹⁹² In this poem, the constricting snares of the rabbit-trap close on the rabbit/ speaker in circles like ‘zeros... || Set close...’: ‘a hole’, ‘round’, ‘a mind like a ring | Sliding shut on some quick thing, | The constriction killing me also’. The piling up of rings of enclosing circles in this poem to suggest the suffocation of marriage may suggest the rings of Daphne’s bark, a reading strengthened by Plath’s detail that the snare’s ‘Pegs [are] too deep to uproot’ (*pes modo tam uelox pigris radicibus haeret*, 1.551).

Plath creates an ambivalent tension in ‘Virgin in a Tree’ between the poem’s evocation of the female victims of male art (and the inherent violence of the male artistic gaze), and her ironic view of the contemporary valorization of female chastity: ‘virgins for virginity’s sake’. Plath had read Anne Sexton’s Daphne poem ‘Where I live in this honorable house of the laurel tree’ (1960), which likewise disdains chastity, and directly links the myth to female sexuality through puns and play with language: ‘I live in my wooden legs and O | my green green hands’.¹⁹³ Plath echoes Sexton’s use of the myth here both in language and focus, as Sexton echoes Plath; the two women were each working on these poems when they met in Robert Lowell’s poetry class in Boston in 1958/1959. While the link between Lowell, Plath, and Sexton is usually figured in terms of the ‘confessional’ school of poetry, a more intriguing link between the three poets is their use of classical mythology; Plath’s classicism may have been encouraged and supported by both Sexton and Lowell, who drew on Catullus for his provocative *Life Studies* (1959).¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² *CP* 193.

¹⁹³ H.D.’s Daphne poem ‘If you will let me sing’ (1930) may be another intertext here. While Plath and Sexton reject Daphne’s fear of sexuality, Alice Fulton’s poem ‘Daphne and Apollo’ (1994) articulates Daphne’s fear (Brown, 2005a, p. 46).

¹⁹⁴ Talbot (2006) discusses Lowell’s and Hughes’ differing use of the classics.

Plath uses puns on chastity and virginity in the poem to mock her mother's 'tart fable', calling Ovid's myth of Daphne 'the parody of that moral mousetrap', and using homophones to mock the paradox of the 'chased girls', who must remain chaste, yet sexually desirous.¹⁹⁵ The word play is emphasized by Plath's Latin joke on the word *uagina*: 'to sheathe the virgin shape | In a scabbard of wood baffles pursuers'; the lines almost replicate a Latin dictionary entry.¹⁹⁶ Plath's obscene pun plays with dictionary definitions at the same time as it humorously emulates Ovid's own verbal play, and neatly looks back to the double meaning in the 'tart' fable of the opening line of her poem.

The parody of Daphne's vaunted chastity continues in a later poem, 'The Bee Meeting', where the speaker wishes to escape by metamorphosing—not into a beautiful tree but into the weed cow parsley.¹⁹⁷ In Ovid, Daphne blames her beauty for 'causing' Apollo's lust ('change this treacherous form which has pleased too much', *qua nimium placui, mutando perde figuram*, 1.547), and her metamorphosis into a tree does not mar her beauty as wished, nor allow her to escape from Apollo's lust ('only her shining beauty remained. Apollo still loved her [like this]', *remanet nitor unus in illa. | hanc quoque Phoebus amat*, 552-553). Plath may thus comically pre-empt Ovid's Apollo in 'The Bee Meeting' by asking to be turned into an unremarkable plant, unsuitable for decorating the heads of Roman victors. Plath describes the 'gullible head' of the cow parsley as 'not even nodding'; while 'gullible' suggests the speaker's complicity in the passivity and violence of the Daphne episode, the speaker also demonstrates a silent control

¹⁹⁵ Fowler, however, reads the poem as a 'now-classic poem of sexual demurral' (2006, p. 382); see also Ford (1997, p. 148), and Luck (2007, p. 292), who read a demurring Daphne in 'The Arrival of the Bee Box': 'would [they] forget me | If I... turned into a tree[?]' (CP 212).

¹⁹⁶ *uagina*: (1) the sheath (of a sword or sim.), scabbard; (2) (transf.) a natural structure resembling a sheath; (especially applied to the sheath that encloses an ear of corn before it emerges) (Glare, 2012, p. 2208); the standard US Cassell's New Latin Dictionary did not appear until after this poem was written, although the entry reads similarly: 'a sheath, scabbard' (Simpson, 1959, p. 629).

¹⁹⁷ 'I could not run without having to run forever' (CP 211); cow parsley, cf. Sappho fr. 96. Daphne's parodic appearance here in Plath's Virgilian bee poems also rejects the denunciation of sexuality in *Georgics* 3.

over her narrative actions. Where Ovid's Daphne seemed (*uisa*) to give her resigned assent to Apollo (*adnuit*, 567), Plath's speaker silently refuses.¹⁹⁸

The final lines of 'Virgin in a Tree' starkly return to the real violence perpetrated against woman's image by the male artistic gaze, hinted at by 'Pan's assault' in stanza four: 'Untongued, all beauty's bright juice sours. | Tree-twist will ape this gross anatomy | Till irony's bough breaks'. The 'tree-twist' that 'apes' the woman's form concludes the theme of the representation of woman in art and poetry that began with the dryad poems. Plath conveys both the inadequacy of such representations to describe a woman's lived experience, and points out the perversity of the male artist's sexualization of a woman, even in tree form. Plath's choice of 'untongued' evokes immediately (and anticipates Plath's use of) the myth of Philomela, but the poem's theme of the metamorphosis of women into trees and reeds, and the 'fixing' of women in art, suggests that the same result is achieved in Daphne's story—the woman is rendered silent.

3.4.4 'Elm'

Plath's thematic use of the Daphne myth to question bourgeois values of chastity finds its conclusion in her poem 'Elm'.¹⁹⁹ Plath has staged three parts of Daphne's story across her series of poems: in 'Pursuit', the speaker runs for her life; in 'Virgin in a Tree', the woman is caught mid-metamorphosis as she becomes encased in the 'bark's... habit' and 'wooden girdle'; finally, in 'Elm', the woman encased within the tree speaks, and she delivers a mournful message. 'Elm' is dedicated to the poet Ruth Fainlight, a neighbour of Plath's while she lived

¹⁹⁸ On the ambivalent nature of this *uisa* which may signal Daphne's refusal, see Liveley (2011, p. 28).

¹⁹⁹ CP 192.

in Devon.²⁰⁰ In her journals Plath recounts stories that Ruth tells of her youth, of ‘suspicious advances by monks’, and ‘retreating in blushes from the window and the ring of young men leaning from neighbouring windows’.²⁰¹ Plath fictionalizes these tales as the ‘incredible fixed reminiscences of a spinster’, but there is pathos and sympathy in this description of the reminiscing chaste woman, which Plath incorporates into ‘Elm’. As in the dryad and Klee poems, it is not Apollo that threatens Daphne, but the denial of her own sexuality. The elm-woman gently warns her younger interlocutor not to be afraid of her sexuality: ‘It is what you fear. | I do not fear it: I have been there’. Daphne must embrace love before it disappears (‘Listen: there are its hooves: it has gone off like a horse’), and before she is left only with ‘the isolate, slow faults | That kill, that kill, that kill’. As before, Plath also expands the Daphne myth in ‘Elm’ to include allusions to Echo, fading into the landscape (‘Till your head is a stone, your pillow a little turf, | Echoing, echoing’), and the pregnant Myrrha (‘I am inhabited by a cry... I am terrified by this dark thing | That sleeps in me’).

In a draft version of the poem, ‘Elm’ also contained the lines, ‘She pulses like a heart on my hill. | The moon snags in her intricate nervous system’.²⁰² The image of the nerves, senses, and the encased woman’s heart ‘pulsing’ within the tree alludes directly to Ovid (Apollo could feel Daphne’s heart pulsing underneath the new bark, *positaque in stipite dextra | sentit adhuc trepidare nouo sub cortice pectus*, 1.553-554); but Plath excised these lines in favour of a more subtle and embedded use of the myth.²⁰³ The reader of ‘Elm’ experiences the metamorphosis

²⁰⁰ On Fainlight’s classicism, which post-dates Plath’s work, see Cox (2011, pp. 47-68).

²⁰¹ *J* 640; Fainlight was only one year older than Plath.

²⁰² Draft described in editorial notes to *CP* by Hughes (p. 292).

²⁰³ Alongside ‘Elm’, an older Daphne also appears in ‘Widow’ (*CP* 164): ‘the compassionate trees bend in, | The trees of loneliness, the trees of mourning’—recall Daphne’s ‘nodding’ branches (1.566-567). The tragic loss of personhood these women have suffered in metamorphosis is beautifully expressed in Plath’s lines: ‘They stand like shadows about the green landscape—| Or even like black holes cut out of it. | ... a shadow-thing’, ‘a bodiless soul’.

from woman to tree as Plath shifts the narrative voice of the poem from an initial external observation of the tree ('she says'), to the voice of the tree itself ('I have suffered the atrocity of sunsets').²⁰⁴ Subject positions swap back and forth in the poem: 'Her radiance scathes me. Or perhaps I have caught her', suggesting the confusion of pursuer and pursued. Yet Plath has removed the pursuer Apollo from the myth and harnessed Ovid's story instead to create a space for dialogue between two women about female sexual desire.

In suggesting that Daphne's metamorphosis is not inevitable (the elm aims to avert Daphne's fate), Plath writes Daphne a way out of her story—if only she will embrace her sexuality. Reclaiming and embracing female sexuality may represent one strategy, if problematic, of recovering the subjectivity of Richlin's 'lady in the box'.²⁰⁵ Coincidentally to Richlin's formulation, in 'The Bee Meeting' Plath's speaker describes herself as 'the magician's girl who does not flinch'; recall also the 'sleight-of-hand man' in 'On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad'. Plath explores the potential of the figure of the magician's assistant as one that suggests control as well as secret knowledge and a hidden authority.²⁰⁶ The magician's girl knows that her poetic freedom relies upon her complicity, and she plans instead to 'write and show him nothing: novels, stories and poems... Smile, write in secret, showing no one'.²⁰⁷ Plath's own metamorphoses of the Daphne myth across the poems, however, may express her

²⁰⁴ 'I have suffered the atrocity of sunsets', suggests that the elm woman is also an older, wiser Semele; cf. in the same poem: 'scorched to the roots'.

²⁰⁵ Richlin (2014, p. 134).

²⁰⁶ As the speaker asks in 'The Jailer' (*CP* 226): 'What would he do, do, do without me?'. Images of female performers recur throughout Plath's poems, e.g., the 'Aerialist' (*CP* 311), the lion-tamer in 'Circus in Three Rings' (*CP* 321), and the burlesque performer in 'Lady Lazarus' (*CP* 244); this trope may in part allude to Marguerite Yourcenar's image of Sappho as an acrobat in *Fires* (1936). On Plath's parodic performances of femininity, see Britzolakis (1999); on Plath's 'costumes of femininity' and her emphasis on the skill these acts require of the female performer, see Bayley (2007).

²⁰⁷ *J* 421.

efforts to write a way out of this complicity, and to forge an independent identity as a woman writer; a struggle to construct a self against the whole history of representation in Western art.

Over this series of five Daphne poems Plath employs her characteristic irony and humour to treat classical myth, mixing the contemporary with the classical to critique both ancient and modern myths of chastity. Plath uses Ovid's Daphne both to meditate on the personal harm of running from sexuality, and to deconstruct the 'hocus-pocus' behind literary and visual representations of women, highlighting the very real violence experienced by women under the male gaze. I turn now to explore how Plath continues her critique of the male artist and the silent muse by drawing repeatedly upon the tale of Philomela to symbolize the difficulties of attempting to speak as a woman writer.

3.5 Philomela

Reading through the myth of Procne and Philomela can illuminate two of Plath's poems in particular, 'The Courage of Shutting-Up', and 'The Snowman on the Moor'.²⁰⁸ In *Metamorphoses*, the story explores rape, women's silencing, and a bloody infanticide when no other retribution lies open. The episode begins with Procne's betrothal to Tereus; the marriage is ill-omened; a son Itys is born. Five years later, Tereus travels to Athens on behalf of Procne, who misses her sister; Tereus sees Philomela and immediately and violently desires her; he persuades their father Pandion to let him take Philomela to see her sister. Arriving in Thrace, Tereus drags Philomela to a hut, rapes her, and after she eloquently confronts him, cuts out her tongue. Tereus lies to Procne that Philomela is dead. One year later, Philomela weaves a tapestry

²⁰⁸ *Met.* 6.424-676.

depicting the crime, sending this as a gift via a slave to her sister. Procne uses the festival of Bacchus as cover to find Philomela; Procne decides to take revenge by killing their son. She cooks Itys and feeds him to Tereus; when she and Philomela reveal what they have done, all three are metamorphosed into birds before Tereus can kill them. At the centre of the episode—the part of the story that Plath focuses on—is ‘a contest between narrators’.²⁰⁹ As well as its extended appearance in *Metamorphoses*, the myth of Philomela also appears in *Fasti* on February 26th—the date that Plath first met Hughes; Plath herself may thus temptingly suggest a biographical reading of her use of Philomela to portray a spousal contest of narration.²¹⁰

Philomela is a recurring mythic theme in Plath’s work, evidenced by a sustained focus particularly in her later poetry on images of blue and green bruise-colours, red and purple mouths, tongues, speech, and silence.²¹¹ Alongside ‘The Courage of Shutting-Up’ and ‘The Snowman on the Moor’, the story of Procne and Philomela shades many other poems.²¹² ‘The Shrike’, for example, is suggestive of both the myths of Tereus and Procne and Ceyx and Alcyone in its tale of a bird-couple (‘wing, sleep-feathered’, ‘taloned fingers’, ‘bird-racketing dawn’; the two opposing stories bookend the middle section of Ovid’s epic that narrates tales of love).²¹³ The allusion to Procne and Tereus is strengthened when the reader considers the Latin

²⁰⁹ Hardie (2002c, p. 86); also Segal (1994). On Ovid’s Philomela episode, see Curran (1978), Joplin (1984), and Richlin (2014, pp. 140-143). On recent receptions of Ovid’s Philomela, see chapter 4.4, n. 99.

²¹⁰ *Fast.* 2.629; Procne and Tereus appear again at ll. 853-856. If referencing the Loeb edition, Plath would have read J. G. Frazer’s translation (1931; 1996), the notes to which also document Aeneas and the Golden Bough (1996, p. 403).

²¹¹ The word ‘mouth’ and its cognates appears 67 times across Plath’s poems, ‘tongue’ 37 times; cf. ‘green’ (116), ‘blue’ (108), ‘red’ (111), ‘purple’ (16), ‘black’ (158), blood/ bleed (94). References to lips, mouth, and face (*os*) appear 250 times across *Metamorphoses*.

²¹² Poems linked by their close association of sisters, birds, tongues, and bloody mouths: ‘The Shrike’ (*CP* 42), ‘Blackberrying’ (*CP* 168), ‘Three Women’ (*CP* 180), ‘The Rabbit Catcher’ (*CP* 193), ‘Poppies in July’ (*CP* 203; a poem more explicitly about domestic violence in its draft form; see Van Dyne, 1993, p. 149), ‘The Detective’ (*CP* 208), ‘Stings’ (*CP* 214), and ‘Wintering’ (*CP* 217).

²¹³ *CP* 42. In ‘The Shrike’ the bride lies awake at night waiting for her ‘flown mate’, although unlike the faithful love of Ceyx and Alcyone, here the man has a ‘truant heart’. Such an ominous wedding night recalls Procne’s own cursed wedding in *Metamorphoses*, attended by Furies and a screech-owl.

genus name for the shrike: *Lanius*—the ‘butcher bird’. The shrike earns its name as the ‘butcher’ for its method of impaling the bodies of its prey onto spikes (bushes, branches, barbed wire, et cetera) in order to enable it to tear the prey into smaller pieces to eat. In the poem, the bride’s ‘shrike-face’ waits to ‘peck open’ and ‘Spike’ the truant heart of the missing husband; but the reader thinks also of Procne, who tears Itys into small pieces and roasts him on a spit (*membra | dilaniant... pars ueribus stridunt*, 6.644-646). In the later poem ‘Blackberrying’, the ‘blue-red juices’ of the blackberries (*purpureas... notas*, 6.577; *caedis... notae*, 6.669-670) stain the speaker’s hands in ‘a blood sisterhood’, while overhead ‘cacophonous flocks’ wheel: ‘Theirs is the only voice, protesting, protesting’, recalling also the Sophoclean tradition in which the metamorphosed sisters Procne and Philomela sing mournfully for eternity.²¹⁴

As with the progression of the Daphne myth across several poems, Plath uses her two main Philomela poems to track the stages of a woman silenced in a relationship. In ‘The Courage of Shutting-Up’, and in a departure from Ovid, Philomela has internalized her role as the passive, silent woman (an image Plath that will explore more fully in her use of the Pygmalion myth, below); ‘The Snowman on the Moor’ evokes a time when the speaker was defiant before her silencing by the man. The poems experiment with different subject positions and narrative perspectives as the speaker variously evokes Procne (the queen betrayed), Philomela (the silenced victim), or Tereus, taking on the man’s voice to demonstrate a woman’s complicity in her silencing. Plath harnesses the myth to focus on women’s mouths and tongues as particular

²¹⁴ *CP* 168. Plath would also be aware of the link Virgil makes between the nightingale’s mournful song and Orpheus’ months of weeping for Eurydice in *Geo.* 4.511-515. The berry stains also recall the berries of the mulberry bush, stained by Pyramus’ jet of blood (*Met.* 4.121-127), while the ‘cacophonous flocks’ may allude more directly to the Pierides, turned into magpies at *Met.* 5.669-678—more women who are punished for laughing by their metamorphosis into birds characterized by their ‘cacophonous’ noise (*rauca... garrulitas*, l. 678). ‘Poem for a Birthday’ (*CP* 131) also draws on repeated images of red and purple mouths and tongues, as well as images of silence, eating, maenads, witches, and ‘women who think they are birds’.

targets of male violence, expressing the punishment and silencing of the woman writer through the juxtaposition of mouthy images with those of muting and oppression, obstacles to speech, interruptions, or stuttering.²¹⁵ Through her own act of narration, Plath enacts a poetic, rather than a bloody, retribution.

3.5.1 'The Courage of Shutting-Up'

The shifting subject positions of 'The Courage of Shutting-Up' create an uneasy ambivalence that destabilizes a simple reading of Plath's use of the tale. It is uncertain whether Philomela has had her tongue cut out by a male antagonist, or whether she has cut out the tongue herself; and while she has learned not to speak 'in spite of artillery', the reader is not told whose artillery this is—Philomela's own words, or perceived or actual violence from a male opponent.²¹⁶ The poem was initially titled 'The Courage of Quietness'; by changing 'quietness' to 'shutting-up', Plath transforms 'a feminine virtue to the internalization of what is usually a command by another'.²¹⁷ This suggests both a hostile interlocutor for the poem's inner monologue, and that Philomela has fully internalized her role as the silent woman.

The poem opens:

The courage of the shut mouth, in spite of artillery!
The line pink and quiet, a worm, basking.
There are black disks behind it, the disks of outrage,
And the outrage of a sky, the lined brain of it.
The disks revolve, they ask to be heard—

²¹⁵ Prins (1996, p. 38): the (female) voice becomes 'gendered through its interruption'.

²¹⁶ Bundtzen reads an active reappropriation of silence here, rather than passive victimization (2005, pp. 11, 95-97); see also Wagner-Martin (1999, p. 128).

²¹⁷ Bundtzen (2005, p. 245 n. 36).

Plath recreates Philomela's stuttering tongue in Ovid's text, which quivers and murmurs on the floor (*micat... immurmurat... palpitat*, 6.557-560), by the doubling of 'outrage' and the triple repetition of 'disk', creating an image of a broken record, its black vinyl disc skipping or repeating, replaying old arguments and old myths.²¹⁸ The repeated 'outrages' the tongue wants to speak ('they ask to be heard') both translates the *indignantem* (6.555) that Philomela speaks of in Ovid, but also her tongue's continued attempt to voice outrages even after it has been cut out. Here, however, the sense of wanting to speak is given a new twist by Plath's emphasis that it is her narrator's choice *not* to speak; although Plath's irony suggests that the notion of 'choice' may be only an illusion.

With knowing bathos, Plath also modifies the snake simile that Ovid uses to describe Philomela's tongue lying on the floor like the tail of an adder (*utque... mutilatae cauda colubrae*, 6.559), to describe the woman's tongue within the mouth as a pink worm, quiet and basking. The shut mouth also suggests an Ovidian concern with the violable nature of language; the speaker remains quiet rather than have her words misunderstood like Daphne, whose words 'gallop off, like horses' and whose treacherous beauty is not changed as she intended but merely changed into another beautiful form.²¹⁹ The image of the shut mouth reappears frequently in Plath's later poems in which the speaker no longer even bites back words, but merely 'smiles'.²²⁰ In her journals, Plath also explicitly figures the silent, smiling woman as the *writing* woman; like Philomela, Plath finds another way to communicate.²²¹

²¹⁸ Cf. Sappho fr. 158: 'with anger spreading in the chest | to guard against a vainly barking tongue' (trans. A. Carson, 2003, p. 319).

²¹⁹ 'Words' (CP 270).

²²⁰ E.g., 'Purdah' (CP 242), 'Lady Lazarus' (CP 244), and 'The Munich Mannequins' (CP 262); the silent, disintegrating woman of 'Lady Lazarus' may also rework Sappho fr. 31. De Luce argues that Ovid recognizes the psychological consequences of remaining silent, and thus also the importance of speaking out (1993, p. 313).

²²¹ J 421.

In stanza two, the outrages the woman holds on her tongue are specified as ‘accounts of bastardies. | Bastardies, usages, desertions and doubleness’. The lies, desertions, and doubleness immediately evoke Tereus’ manipulations of language in Ovid’s text, first to convince Pandion to let him take Philomela away from Athens, and second in his lies to Procne about her sister’s death (Ovid emphasizes how convincing Tereus’ lies are: *tamquam... creditur*, 6.471-474). Yet in her own doubleness with language, Plath also looks back to her earlier questioning of the authority of dictionary definitions in her journals. For while the woman must remain quiet, her opponent not only ‘lies’ and ‘deserts’ in a literal sense, but manipulates (bastardizes) language and ‘usages’, wielding a power over language that she is told she cannot have. As Plath drew out in her dryad poems, woman is traditionally figured as muse, not poet, and Plath uses Philomela here similarly to draw a link between speech and authority, and to question the role of myth in cultural constructions of who has the right to speak.

The link to Ovid’s Philomela is most explicit at the centre of the poem, as the speaker views the scene of the glossectomy with a painfully ironic and resigned detachment:

Then there is that antique billhook, the tongue,
Indefatigable, purple. Must it be cut out?
It has nine tails, it is dangerous.
And the noise it flays from the air, once it gets going!

No, the tongue, too, has been put by,
Hung up in the library ...

...
It is a marvelous object—
The things it has pierced in its time.

The threat the woman’s tongue poses is figured in terms of weapons (a ‘billhook’ and a cat o’ nine tail), and the woman mocks the exaggerations of the male interlocutor, whose words appear in reported speech; she tragically repeats his words, Echo-like, while attempting to retain her

dignity through a sense of mock-epic humour ('The things it has pierced in its time').²²² That the tongue is 'antique', recalls both Plath's Latin source and suggests, via Shakespeare, that it is the woman's 'antic' witticisms in particular that are 'dangerous'.²²³ Shakespeare uses the word 'antique' to mean both 'old-fashioned, antiquated' and as the verb 'to make grotesque', that is, 'to make fools of'.²²⁴ Plath may be thinking of its use by Theseus in the metamorphic *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'More strange than true. I never may believe | These antique fables, nor these fairy toys', where 'toys' is glossed as 'old wives' tale', adding a further derogatory nuance to women's speech that ought to be curtailed.²²⁵

Plath reports the man's 'brag' at having captured such a fearsome 'marvellous object'. The woman's tongue is thus reduced to a sign of prestige, 'Hung up in the library with the engravings of Rangoon | And the fox heads, the otter heads, the heads of dead rabbits'. The library is figured here as a male space, perhaps the room of a Victorian upper-class gentleman with his books, hunting trophies and images of exotic foreign lands all signs of his learning and taste; his domination of a woman can now be added to the collection. Such a Victorian

²²² In Ovid, Tereus' words are reported wholly in indirect speech except for the chilling *uicimus! ... mecum mea uota feruntur*, *Met.* 6.513. Philomela and Echo similarly inform 'The Detective' (*CP* 208), which stages a domestic Sherlock Holmes mystery ('this is a man, look at his smile, | The death weapon?'). There is no body, however, and the woman seems to have metamorphosed into the walls of the house. As the detective soon realizes, 'The body does not come into it at all': 'It is a case of vaporisation. | The mouth first, its absence reported | In the second year. It had been insatiable | And in punishment was hung out like brown fruit | To wrinkle and dry' (we think also of Arachne, reduced to a wrinkled, brown spider; another woman punished for her creativity). In 'The Detective' the disappearance of speech is followed by the disappearance of the woman's breasts and vagina (all that is left is 'dry wood'), suggesting that first the woman's speech, then her sexuality is denied.

²²³ Gill (2008, p. 68) notes the allusion to the excised tongue of Philomela, but does not link Plath with Ovid, or detect the imagery elsewhere.

²²⁴ *The Arden Shakespeare* glossary, *s.v. antic*: *sb.* grotesque figure, fool; *v.* make grotesque (Proudfoot, Thompson and Kastan, 2011, p. 1349).

²²⁵ *MND* V.i.2-3. Theseus continues: 'Lovers and madmen have such seething brains, | Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend | More than cool reason ever comprehends. | The lunatic, the lover, and the poet | Are of imagination all compact'; we recall the nature poet in the dryad diptych who sees a woman in every tree. The works of Shakespeare are key intertexts for Plath's work, and while the tragedy of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* suggests the most striking narrative parallels with the tale of Philomela, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is important thematically as a highly Ovidian work of transformation and burgeoning female sexuality.

stereotype of manhood is surely parody on Plath's part (again signalling a Woolfian classicism that reacts directly against the Victorian male scholar), but it is a bitter parody with lived consequences for the speaker of the poem; it seems that the Philomela of 'The Courage of Shutting Up' must also be humiliated as well as silenced, displayed as an *objet d'art*, like a jade jewel to be admired in the sun, 'Priceless and quiet'.²²⁶

The poem ends with an image of woman as a conquered land, as Plath links imperialism and sexism to demonstrate their combined effect on women.²²⁷ The Victorian colonialist has now vanquished the 'obstinate' woman, who is 'folded like flags | Of a country no longer heard of, | An obstinate independency | Insolvent among the mountains'.²²⁸ And yet, like Tereus, the male interlocutor may be overconfident. Just as the mutilated Philomela finds an alternative means of communication and weaves a tapestry to send a message to her sister, the speaker of the poem here does not 'shut up', but writes a story for her reading audience.²²⁹

3.5.2 'The Snowman on the Moor'

'The Snowman on the Moor' is set in the aftermath of a lovers' fight, when an Ovidian *militia amoris* has arrived at a stalemate: 'their armies stood, with tottering banners'.²³⁰ The

²²⁶ 'Purdah' (CP 242).

²²⁷ Colonized lands and peoples are frequently feminized or personified as woman in colonial writing, and colonized lands are frequently described as 'raped' by the colonizing aggressor; see especially Said (1994), and Macciocchi (1979).

²²⁸ The poet-tattooist in 'The Courage of Shutting-Up' 'maps' male desire literally onto the woman's body (Van Dyne, 1993, p. 43).

²²⁹ On the tradition of identifying the *notas* (6.577) of Philomela's tapestry as letters, see Bömer (1969-86, *ad loc.*).

²³⁰ See especially *Am.* 1.9; on Hughes' use of elegiac tropes, including the *militia amoris*, see Talbot (2006, p. 148) and Liveley (2009, pp. 224-232, especially 226-227). Plath, however, commonly figures the *militia amoris* explicitly in artistic terms as a battle of representation; see, e.g., 'The Wishing Box', and 'Sunday at the Mintons' JP 48-55, 148-159.

battle of the sexes is here figured by Plath as playing out on an epic scale, and the speaker comes ‘To the world’s white edge’, to call ‘hell to subdue an unruly man | And join her siege’, repeating Philomela’s call to the trees, rocks, and the air to witness Tereus’ outrage (*implebo siluas et conscia saxa mouebo. | audiet haec aether*, 6.547).²³¹ In her working notes for the poem, Plath writes that she wishes to convey a ‘vivid sense of opposition... [to] post vast impersonal white world of Nature against small violent spark of will’.²³² Thus, as well as revising elegiac tropes, Plath’s poem also draws upon Ovid’s anti-pastoral literary landscapes; echoing the Ovidian *locus amoenus* that signals a place of violence, Plath places her speaker in a hostile male literary landscape to emphasize that both land and literature are places of violence, particularly for women.

In this early poem (written six years before ‘The Courage of Shutting-Up’), the speaker is at first defiant in the face of male force: ‘‘Come find me’—her last taunt’; perhaps repeating Procne’s taunt to Tereus that the son he seeks is already ‘inside’ (*intus habes quem poscis’ ait*, 6.655). The defiant taunt also alludes strongly to Ovid’s Diana, who instructs Actaeon to ‘Tell... if you can’ (*si poteris narrare, licet*, *Met.* 3.193), but the poem’s speaker soon finds herself in the role of Actaeon as the man ‘send[s] police and hounds to bring her in’. This switching of subject positions, from wielder of power to the hunted, anticipates the role reversal that the speaker will have undergone by the end of the poem, from defiant woman to a ‘girl bent homeward, brimful of... mild obeying’.²³³ A further dynamic runs through the poem between inside (figured in art, poetry, and rhetoric as a domestic, womanly space) and outside (a public,

²³¹ The snowy whiteness anticipates Plath’s use of the colour white in her Pygmalion poems to signal women’s commodification under capitalism; here, the snowy, flat whiteness symbolizes the male literary establishment and its ‘conservative obliterating snow’ (*J* 73).

²³² *J* 583.

²³³ Wagner notes how the narrator dehumanizes ‘that woman’ (1984, p. 114).

male space). The man of the poem ‘Warned her to keep | Indoors with politic goodwill’, and not to go outside into the animalistic, Hughesian poetic landscape, ‘Pocked by rook-claw and rabbit-track’.²³⁴ When the speaker defies him, his response is supernatural in force, until she returns to the house humiliated, ‘Humbled then, and crying’.²³⁵

The supernatural ‘corpse-white | Giant’ that dominates the second half of ‘The Snowman on the Moor’, adorned with the skulls and tongues of women—just as in *Metamorphoses* Apollo is adorned with laurel leaves, and Pan with pine leaves and pan-pipes—is suggestive of the figure of Tereus.²³⁶ As the giant advances towards the poem’s protagonist through a blizzard of snow:

Mournfully the dry tongues clacked their guilt:

‘Our wit made fools
Of kings, unmanned king’s sons: our masteries
...
For that brag, we barnacle these iron thighs.’

The macabre image of the clacking tongues and ‘chittering trophies’ that hang from the male figure’s belt instantly recalls the disembodied tongue of Philomela, which still attempts to voice its outrage of Tereus’ crime as it lies quivering on the floor (*radix micat ultima linguae, | ipsa iacet terraeque tremens immurmurat atrae*, 6.557-558). The Ovidian narrator notes that it was specifically Philomela’s speech after her rape that motivated Tereus to cut out her tongue (‘such words moved the tyrant to anger’, *talibus ira feri postquam commota tyranni*, 6.549); that the

²³⁴ Cf. ‘rook-tongued’ in ‘On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad’.

²³⁵ Plath’s journals contain frequent references to Hughes’ public humiliations of her, e.g. he upbraids her in front of friends for not sewing on buttons for him; she notes his hidden ‘conventional ideas of womanhood... pregnant and in the kitchen’ (J 444).

²³⁶ Or perhaps, the Snowman is Ovid himself; if rape is the action which interpellates the female subject in *Metamorphoses* (Enterline, 2000, p. 158), it may be said that the trophies of sexual violence against women interpellates the male poet.

punishment is also meted out in Plath's poem for the women's speech is emphasized by the words 'wit' and 'brag'. '[O]ur masteries', here, also suggests an eloquence or rhetorical skill that has shamed their male opponent, and anticipates the 'antic/antique' witticisms that made a fool of the male antagonist in 'The Courage of Shutting-Up'. After the threat of the giant, the speaker is now 'brimful of gentle talk' (woman's 'proper' speech); *murmurat*, like Philomela.²³⁷

The metamorphosis that concludes the myth can also be glimpsed in Plath's poem, as the giant's first appearance is accompanied by 'Ambushed birds' who 'by | Dozens dropped dead in the hedges'. Plath's poem in this sense hints at a darker conclusion to the tale even than in Ovid, where Tereus does not catch up with the bird-women; here, both dead birds and dead women adorn the giant. Elsewhere, Plath explicitly links poems and birds: burnt manuscripts are 'carbon birds' in 'Burning the Letters' and birds are imagined as 'bits of burnt paper wheeling in a blown sky' in 'Blackberrying'.²³⁸ Reading this bird-poem imagery back into 'The Snowman on the Moor' turns the *militia amoris* that opened the poem into a battle staged between man and woman explicitly—as it can be read in Ovid—as a contest of representation.²³⁹ Plath's narrator fears that the Snowman stalks triumphantly adorned with both her tongue and her poems. As Hardie notes of Ovid's text, however, Tereus may be a convincing narrator, but ultimately he will be no match for Ovid, or Philomela's tapestry.²⁴⁰ By similarly reading 'The Courage of Shutting-Up' and 'The Snowman on the Moor' as Plath's tapestry, a textual *corpus delicti*, the woman writer may win the battle of representation in art if not in life.²⁴¹

²³⁷ Ovid uses *murmurat* again at *Met.* 11.53 to describe Orpheus' (decapitated) murmuring head; Plath would also be familiar Orpheus' speaking head from Virgil, *Geo.* 4.523-527.

²³⁸ *CP* 204; 168.

²³⁹ Hardie (2002c, p. 86).

²⁴⁰ Hardie (2002c, p. 63).

²⁴¹ Bundtzen (2005, p. 89) argues that although the woman of 'The Detective' (*CP* 208) has 'vaporized', she has instead left behind a 'textual *corpus delicti*' in the form of the poem itself. On the Plathian corpus as *corps morcelé*, see Rose (1991), and the essays collected in Helle (2007); also Churchwell (1998).

Plath's sophisticated use of the Philomela myth explores in a specifically gendered way Ovid's concerns with poetic voice and artistic representation, integrating Ovidian allusions to 'realise' rather than 'point at' the myth.²⁴² As with her use of the Daphne myth, Plath also expands the story beyond its Ovidian confines, mixing the contemporary with the ancient, and the poetic with the domestic landscape. Plath's Daphne poems explored forbidden sexual desire and the role of the woman as muse, and her Philomela poems fought against the silencing of the woman writer. Finally, in her use of Ovid's story of Pygmalion, Plath turns her critical gaze on herself—examining both the construction of the perfect muse by the male poet, and women's deadly complicity in the 'myth' of the perfect woman.

3.6 Pygmalion

Plath's account of a real-life Pygmalion appears in 'Sculptor', a poem dedicated to the artist Leonard Baskin.²⁴³ In her journal Plath recounts a visit to Baskin's studio, describing a room littered with bronze and stone bodies. Baskin showed Plath and Hughes a half-finished statue with its outline drawn on wood; the rows of 'dead' and the eerie half-carved stone body left a deep impression on Plath.²⁴⁴ In Ovid's version, Pygmalion 'successfully carved ivory with miraculous skill and gave it a snow-white form, such a woman as has never been born, and he began a love with his own creation' (*interea niueum mira feliciter arte | scuplsit ebur formamque dedit, qua femina nasci | nulla potest, operisque sui concepit amorem*, *Met.* 10.247-249). In the Latin, the stress is laid on Pygmalion's skill and craft in making the statue. Plath's poem likewise describes the sculptor at work, but rather than witnessing an act of creation she

²⁴² Plath (1957).

²⁴³ *CP* 91. *Met.* 10.243-297.

²⁴⁴ July 17th 1958, *J* 407.

imagines that the sculptor communes with ‘bodiless’ spirits, who visit the sculptor and ‘barter endlessly | ... for bodies | Palpable as his’. The sculptor conducts the spirits (‘Hands moving move priestlier | Than priest’s hands’) into ‘sure station in bronze, wood, stone’. In the final stanza, the spirits take bodily possession of the sculptor:

Emulous spirits make discord,
Try entry, enter nightmares
Until his chisel bequeaths
Them life livelier than ours,
A solider repose than death’s.

The similarities with Hughes’ later version of Pygmalion in *Tales from Ovid* are striking. Hughes imagines Pygmalion dreaming and carving the statue in his sleep, possessed by spirits:

Though this dream
Was not so much the dream of a perfect woman
As a spectre, sick of unbeing,
That had taken possession of his body
To find herself a life.

She moved into his hands,
She took possession of his fingers
And began to sculpt a perfect woman.
So he watched his hands shaping a woman
As if he were still asleep...

So he had made a woman...²⁴⁵

Critics have argued that Hughes’ ‘pervasive and substantial alterations’ to Ovid’s Pygmalion episode act as ‘self-reflexive translation’, and emphasize Hughes’ self-figuration as poet-*uates*.²⁴⁶ Yet Hughes also clearly draws upon Plath’s Pygmalion. As well as the central image of a sculptor possessed by ‘bodiless’ spirits, ‘sick of unbeing’, who wish to find for themselves

²⁴⁵ Hughes (1997, p. 146).

²⁴⁶ Brown (2009, p. 287); Jacobsen (2009, pp. 173-175).

through the sculptor a ‘body palpable’ and a ‘life’, Hughes’ vocabulary directly draws on Plath’s poem in his emphasis on the moving hands, the physicality of the statue (‘livelier than any life’/ ‘lovelier than any woman’), and the detail of the night-time visitation (‘nightmare’ in Plath, ‘dream’ in Hughes).²⁴⁷ While *Birthday Letters* represents Hughes’ explicit dialogue with Plath and her work, a close reading of *Tales from Ovid* reveals an implicit dialogue with Plath and her Ovidianism.

An understanding of Plath’s classicism adds poignancy and sympathy to Hughes’ own work; his use of classical texts becomes an act of reinscription, returning again and again not to the classics or to Ovid *per se*, but to recall the words and works of his dead lover. I suggest that evidence of Plath’s own Ovidianism provides a model and starting point for what Lyne terms Hughes’ own ‘characteristic expansion’ of Ovid, and that Plath’s choice of episodes from Ovid may go some way to explaining Hughes’ own curious selections; Lycaon and Erysichthon, for example, draw on Plath’s insatiate panther in ‘Pursuit’, while Hughes’ use of Pyramus and Thisbe draws on Plath’s poem ‘Blackberrying’.²⁴⁸ Similarly, through an understanding of Plath’s classicism, Hughes’ choice of Orpheus as preferred vatic model is also shadowed by Plath’s—and Ovid’s—earlier work on *Georgics* IV in her bee poems. At times, however, Hughes’ Ovidianism seems in competition with Plath’s; perhaps Daphne and Syrinx are more suitable models for Plath and the afterlife of her poetry than Hughes’ Phaethon and Icarus, as, in death, Plath’s ‘leaves’ have been used as material by the surviving male poet (and her critics).

²⁴⁷ Additionally, Hughes’ version of Pygmalion driven mad by the ‘floating horror’ (p. 145) of the Propoetides owes its imagery to Coleridge (‘Beware! Beware! | His flashing eyes, his floating hair!’) via Plath’s famous reworking of ‘Kubla Khan’ in ‘Lady Lazarus’: ‘Beware | Beware. || Out of the ash | I rise with my red hair | And I eat men like air’ (CP 244).

²⁴⁸ Lyne (2002a, p. 262); on Hughes’ use of Pyramus and Thisbe to close *Tales from Ovid*, see Lyne (2002a, p. 263), and Hardie (2002b, pp. 1-3); Silk (2009, p. 262 n. 72) compares the lovers’ ashes in Hughes’ closing lines of *Tales from Ovid* with the close of Plath’s ‘Lady Lazarus’: ‘Out of the ash | I rise...’.

It is also of note that toward the end of his life Hughes was working on a translation of Racine's *Phèdre*—the very text that Plath was translating on the day they met in Cambridge, and the play which informs her poem written about their first encounter and dedicated to Hughes, 'Pursuit'.

In 'The Applicant', 'The Lady and the Earthenware Head', 'In Plaster', and 'Edge' Plath harnesses Ovid's Pygmalion again to explore the figure of the 'man-made woman'.²⁴⁹ As in the Daphne and Philomela poems, Plath's poetic speakers take on multiple narrative perspectives, shifting between the voice of the sculptor, the created woman herself, or a third person observing the act of artistic creation and fixity.²⁵⁰ This labile subject position between and within the poems reflects the dilemma of the female poet who is automatically aligned with Pygmalion's statue as a woman, yet as a writer is linked to the sculptor himself.²⁵¹ Plath gives voice to the woman within Ovid's silent statue at the same time as she launches a savage critique of the ways in which women participate in the construction of themselves as a 'living doll'.²⁵²

3.6.1 'The Applicant'

In 'The Applicant', Plath draws on Ovid's Pygmalion to cynically inspect the 'marvellous product' of the domestic ivory woman.²⁵³ Structured as a parody of sales

²⁴⁹ *CP* 221, 69, 158, 272. Pygmalion also informs (via Shakespeare) 'A Winter's Tale' (*CP* 86); also *J* 191, 510, 516.

²⁵⁰ On Pygmalion in Ovid, see Bauer (1962), Liveley (1999), and Hardie (2002c, pp. 173-226). Janan (1988), Elsner (1991), and Sharrock (1991) consider the Pygmalion episode as narrated by the misogynist Orpheus; also Makowski (1996), and Wheeler (1999); on receptions of Pygmalion, see Brown (2005a, pp.123-142), and James (2011).

²⁵¹ On the fragmentation of feminine subjectivity, see, e.g., Kristeva (1984). In H.D.'s poem 'Pygmalion', she asks, 'Which am I?'; see Brown (1999, pp. 196-198) on how this confusion of subjectivity problematizes the myth's paradigm of male creativity.

²⁵² 'I must be myself—make myself & not let myself be made by him' (*J* 401); Plath also likens being a woman to playing a role, or wearing a mask at: *J* 42, 105, 135, 145, 151, 169, 177, 201, 301, 320-321.

²⁵³ Written in October 1962, shortly after the dissolution of Plath's marriage, Gregson describes 'The Applicant' as 'Plath's most explicitly feminist poem' (2004, p. 47).

techniques, 'The Applicant' tells the story of a man who hopes to purchase 'the perfect woman'. In her introduction to this poem for a reading on BBC radio, Plath describes the speaker as 'an executive, a sort of exacting super-salesman. He wants to be sure the applicant for his marvellous product really needs it and will treat it right'; a description as understated as it is ironic.²⁵⁴

The 'marvellous product' is sold to The Applicant as 'A living doll, everywhere you look', and like Pygmalion's statue she steps 'naked as paper' out of her box.²⁵⁵ Plath's 'paper' signals the woman's value in paper money, humorously and accurately converting the jewels (*gemmas*, 10.264) with which Pygmalion adorns his statue in Ovid into modern currency: 'in twenty-five years she'll be silver, | In fifty, gold'. The reference to the traditional gifts given to mark wedding anniversaries also comments on the commodification of human relationships and their memorialization in explicitly economic terms.²⁵⁶ Yet the word 'paper' also signals the attractive whiteness of the woman, emphasized by the doll's comparison to white 'salt' (as Ovid's Pygmalion was entranced by the snowy, ivory whiteness of his statue, *niueum... ebur*, *Met.* 10.247-248), and it also suggests an image of the woman as a blank page upon which the man will inscribe his 'Dream Woman Muse', a paper doll a child can dress with paper clothes.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Quoted in notes on poems, *CP* 293. The poem is also a parody of the marriage ceremony, aligning and critiquing marriage alongside post-war American consumer culture (Wagner, 1984, p.131).

²⁵⁵ Ovid says euphemistically, 'you would think her alive and about to move, if honour did not prevent it', *quam uiuere credas | et, si non obstet reuerentia, uelle moueri* (*Met.* 10.250-251).

²⁵⁶ In the poem, marriage is thus figured as an economic transaction (Wagner, 1984, p. 131).

²⁵⁷ *J* 301. Plath's childhood cut-out paper dolls are held in archive material in the Lilly Library (PMII, Box 14, fol. 3; the dolls and outfits are dated 1945); photograph in Connors and Bayley (2007, pl. 15). The purity and whiteness of Pygmalion's statue is particularly emphasized (*niueum... ebur; ebur... ebur; eburnea... eburnae*, *Met.* 10.247-248, 255, 275-276. In 'Wintering' (*CP* 217), whiteness is also explicitly linked with consumer culture through the images of Tate & Lyle sugar and Meissen china; Plath's use of brand names in this poem is striking (Luck, 2007, pp. 302-303); the brands' associations with whiteness in 'Wintering' reinforces the economic connotations of the white woman-as-'product' in 'The Applicant'. On the blank page and the woman writer, see Gubar (1981), who draws upon Ovid's Pygmalion to argue that the myth demonstrates a man's attempt to evade humiliation at having been himself created by woman.

The doll is fragmented into sexualized prosthetic body parts ('rubber breasts or a rubber crotch'), dismembered and compartmentalized by the male gaze (as Ovid cynically notes, Pygmalion touches first his statue's lips and breasts, *admouet os iterum, manibus quoque pectora temptat*, *Met.* 10.282).²⁵⁸ Further shades of misogyny taint the salesman's pitch: the doll can 'talk, talk, talk' and need only be a basic model ('it works') to serve The Applicant, 'willing | To bring teacups and roll away headaches'; 'It can sew, it can cook', and ultimately, it will 'do whatever you tell it'.²⁵⁹ In another Pygmalion poem, 'On Deck', the man explicitly wishes to create a woman who will 'wait on him hand and foot'; together, the two poems form an amusing and ironic comment by Plath on Pygmalion's true motivation for his construction of the perfect woman (Ovid's Pygmalion, too, is certainly not presented without irony, framed as the tale is by Orpheus' misogyny).²⁶⁰

Dehumanized through the repeated use of 'it' to describe her, the woman is also infantilized and addressed in patronizing language ('doll', 'Come here, sweetie').²⁶¹ The disturbing relationship between the man and his doll is developed in the description of the 'crying' man with 'something missing', an 'empty' head and 'empty' hands, for whom the woman will function as a 'poultice' to his wounds (as in Ovid Pygmalion created his statue-woman to fill the gap made by his pathological hatred of living women). Throughout the poem

²⁵⁸ As is Ovid's Corinna in *Am.* 1.5; compare the controlled strip-tease of 'Lady Lazarus' (*CP* 244). Plath's half-prosthetic woman offers a grim counterpoint to Donna Haraway's positive proposition of the cyborg as a metaphor for the postmodern, multiple, feminist subject (Haraway, 1991); while Plath may recognise her existence as a man-made woman, she cannot yet celebrate this fragmented identity. On Pygmalion's statue as cyborg see Haraway (1997, p. 253); on Haraway's cyborgs and the classics see Liveley (2006c).

²⁵⁹ The salt image especially suggests the biblical and prosaically sinful Lot's wife; the pair's nakedness also suggests the first couple in the western tradition, Adam and Eve (the archetypally sinful woman).

²⁶⁰ *CP* 142. On Ovid's satirical comments on Pygmalion's self-delusion, see Enterline (2000, p. 71). In H.D.'s 'Pygmalion', the speaker is ultimately disappointed when the statue comes to life.

²⁶¹ On the dehumanization of women in marriage, cf. the prophecy made to Atalanta shortly after the tale of Pygmalion in *Metamorphoses* that in marriage she will not lose her life, but will lose herself: *fuge coniugis usum. | nec tamen effugies teque ipsa uiua carebis*, *Met.* 10.565-566.

The Applicant is asked five times if he will ‘marry it’; the frequently repeated and collocated word ‘empty’ seems to qualify both the relationship between the man and the paper woman, and the ‘empty’ imperative to marry.²⁶² Upon the man’s death, the living doll will ‘dissolve of sorrow’, suggesting that the perfect woman exists only as a construct in the man’s mind; without him, she disappears. Yet from the grains of the dissolved woman, the salesman disturbingly says, they will simply ‘make new stock’; the 1950s housewife is as interchangeable as she is faceless. Finally, the salesman’s pitch closes with a crescendo that emphasizes the woman’s role as art object to the male gaze: ‘You have an eye, it’s an image’. In this darkly comic poem, Plath thus imagines a salesman-Pygmalion, who, after his initial success in Ovid, appears now to be running a lucrative woman-statue business, with the reader in the position of audience for Pygmalion’s sales-pitch. In ‘The Lady and the Earthenware Head’, Plath engages with the myth of Pygmalion again but from an innovative perspective, as the speaker of the poem observes the created woman who both is and is-not herself.

3.6.2 ‘The Lady and the Earthenware Head’, ‘In Plaster’, and ‘Edge’

Plath had been given a clay model of her own head as a gift by a Smith College roommate who had made the sculpture in Baskin’s art class.²⁶³ As Baskin himself appears as Pygmalion in Plath’s poem ‘Sculptor’, this fact adds an intriguing frisson to Plath’s relationship with the earthenware head made literally under Pygmalion’s watch. Plath felt uneasy with this clay doppelgänger, admitting in a letter to her mother that although she had developed ‘a strange

²⁶² Plath’s short story ‘Sweetie Pie and the Gutter Men’ offers a sequel to Ovid’s Pygmalion story: we meet the sculptor’s wife after their marriage, emotionally distant from her husband and disillusioned by her marriage (*JP* 131-142).

²⁶³ Connors and Bayley (2007, p. 110).

fondness for the old thing', she had been considering disposing of it for a long time.²⁶⁴ Plath describes the earthenware head of the poem in more detail in her journals as 'a terrible and holy token of identity sucking into itself magnetwise the farflung words which link & fuse to make up my own queer & grotesque world... as the earth-flesh wears in time, the head swells ponderous'.²⁶⁵ Plath imagines the clay head sucking her into itself, growing in size and power as her own flesh withers through 'the sly nerve... | That knits to each original its coarse copy'.²⁶⁶ 'The Lady and the Earthenware Head' thus acts as the first in a series of poems that describe a woman's gradual disappearance or absorption into a created version of herself: instead of a perfect created woman who comes to life, the living woman is smothered by the perfect artifice of her stone double. The earthenware head may also suggest the golem of Jewish folklore, a figure Plath would have encountered in Grimm's fairy tales, or—given her family's Eastern-European roots—via childhood stories. A golem is a being made of clay and animated by inscribing words onto its forehead or by placing words written on a piece of paper into its mouth. The golem cannot speak, is of low intelligence, blindly obeys the orders of its creator, and returns to dust if the charmed words are removed; read in tandem with the image of the factory-built doll in 'The Applicant', Plath may suggest the man-made 50s housewife is like the golem, created and moulded for dumb, mindless servitude.

'The Lady and the Earthenware Head' imaginatively describes various unsuccessful attempts to dispose of the head. The protagonist of the poem first considers an 'ash-heap' as a place of disposal, but rejects this idea in case the head is found by 'Rough boys' and revived. Second, she considers throwing the head into a tarn, but still 'The simulacrum leered, | Lewdly

²⁶⁴ LH 336.

²⁶⁵ J 332.

²⁶⁶ Thus reversing the action of the painting in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).

beckoning, and her courage wavered'; the woman feels unbreakably tied to the model head. Finally, the woman places the head in a tree, but 'Despite her wrung hands, her tears, her praying', 'the grisly visage endured'... 'Refusing to diminish | By one jot its basilisk-look of love'. The woman's uncanny clay double has a deadly Medusan glance which she cannot escape, and at the end of the poem the woman has still not been able to free herself of the hated head; its image haunts her. Here, the woman fights her clay double, attempting to rid herself of her external constructed 'self', but over the course of two further poems the woman is slowly encased within and replaced by the created self.²⁶⁷

The speaker of 'In Plaster' describes her encasement in a plaster cast personified as a second self: 'There are two of me now'.²⁶⁸ The poem is at first narrated with an amused detachment, and the speaker is smug about her creation: 'Without me, she wouldn't exist'. The cast initially provides literal help to the speaker (helping her bones to heal), but it is also suggested figuratively that she is an emotional prop: her 'whiteness and beauty' has become a façade behind which the speaker hides to please others. The plaster woman is described as 'white' or in terms of her 'whiteness' five times in the first half of the poem, as well as 'porcelain' and a shining plaster 'saint', mirroring again Ovid's emphasis on the statue's ivory and snow-like whiteness (10.247-255).²⁶⁹ Further Ovidian echoes are found in the two women

²⁶⁷ CP 158, 272.

²⁶⁸ In his notes on Plath's *Collected Poems*, Hughes contends that the poem was written during Plath's stay in hospital for an appendectomy, and that the patient completely in plaster lay in the adjacent bed (1981, p. 291). Fragmentary notes written during her hospital stay note Plath's impression that 'Still whole, I interest nobody. I am not among the cheerful smilers in plaster & bandages'; Plath detects a preference in the visitors to the hospital for the silent, ivory-plaster encased patients. I argue below that the poem also draws upon Plath's own encasement in plaster after a skiing accident at university (*J* 157).

²⁶⁹ Plath's early poem 'Three Caryatids' more simply reverses the roles in Ovid's tale, and takes on the voice of Pygmalion's statue; Middlebrook notes how Plath 'endow[s] the female 'object' with a consciousness, a subjectivity', arguing that it is 'the first poem that makes use of classical sculpture of the idealized female body as a symbolic legacy with daunting relevance to the female onlooker' (2007b, p. 165). Plath's use of statuary to represent the imprisonment and petrification of women's bodies 'writes back' to the literary tradition that associates women with nature (Britzolakis, 2006, p. 109).

of Plath's poem who each represent the tension in Ovid's tale between the pure statue and the *obscenae* Propoetides (10.238), and in the speaker's description of the ivory woman 'in bed with me like a dead woman', at first 'so cold', but gradually 'she began to warm up' (*uisa tepere est*; Pygmalion lays the statue down in bed with him, and feels her start to warm beneath his touch, 10.267-269, 281).²⁷⁰ This image of the ivory woman feeling uncomfortable to wear at first but gradually warming up as the speaker begins to 'see her advantages', also suggests the speaker's increasing skill and confidence in—and accommodation to—playing the role of the perfect, silent woman.²⁷¹

The plaster woman's 'amazingly white torso' reflects the sun and dazzles the poem's speaker, yet despite the ivory woman's beauty, 'You could tell almost at once she had a slave mentality'.²⁷² The speaker initially mocks such a woman and, recalling 'The Applicant', thus mocks the type of man who wants such a slave: the ivory woman has 'no personality', makes 'no complaints', 'laps' up patronizing comments, 'adores' serving, and, most disturbingly, takes both verbal and physical abuse 'like a true pacifist'. And yet, the speaker admits, 'I was scared, because she was shaped just the way I was'.²⁷³ This ominous statement foreshadows the ivory woman's future dominance in the poem, but also reflects Plath's ongoing poetic problematization of the roles that women must play and her self-awareness of women's complicity in these roles. By admitting that the ivory woman is 'shaped just the way I was', the

²⁷⁰ *conlocat hanc stratis concha Sidonide tinctis | appellatque tori sociam acclinataque colla | mollibus in plumis tamquam sensura reponit. | ... uisa tepere est, Met. 10.267-269, 281.*

²⁷¹ Plath's presentation of the 'woman as artefact' in this poem is counterbalanced by her resistance to this idea in poems which use metamorphic imagery to represent the pregnant, bleeding, menstruating, or sick metamorphosing female body; see n. 21, above.

²⁷² Plath reverses back the ironically-inverted gender roles of the *seruitium amoris* in Ovid; see especially *Am.* 1.6.

²⁷³ Van Dyne reads the plaster double as Plath's mother (1993, pp. 77-90).

speaker betrays her own potential to be—and the role she plays in creating—the ‘perfect’ woman.

The sense of the speaker’s complicity in the creation of the ivory woman in ‘In Plaster’ is strengthened when read alongside Plath’s journal account of the event that superficially inspired this poem. Whilst at college, Plath broke her leg in a skiing accident, and spent six weeks in a full-leg plaster cast:

I would like to write a symbolic allegory about a person who would not assert her will and communicate with others, but who always believed she was unaccepted, apart. Desperately, in an effort to be part of a certain group she breaks her leg skiing...²⁷⁴

Plath continues:

I feel so much closer to several girls now. Instead of a dastardly hindrance, my leg has become a passport, a revelation... I AM GLAD I BROKE IT! I have never been so shocked into awareness of the fortunate exquisite life I lead as when suddenly I was unable to walk.²⁷⁵

What is of particular note in these journal entries (taking the plaster cast of the journals to be the ivory woman of the poem) is that the external self has been constructed for the female gaze. Plath expresses her desire to make friends with the women around her (her joke about deliberately breaking her leg implies consciously harming oneself to fit in), and she rejoices in the success that the plaster woman brings her. Reading this back into the poem ‘In Plaster’, Plath has completely removed Pygmalion from the tale to focus instead on the self-regulation of women’s self-projections under the female gaze of women around them.

²⁷⁴ J 157.

²⁷⁵ J 159.

Although at first the speaker of both Plath's journal entry and the poem flaunt their control over the plaster cast, in the second half of 'In Plaster' the ivory woman gains autonomy and begins to overpower the speaker: 'She wanted to leave me, she thought she was superior'. The speaker begins to notice the ivory woman 'criticising' the imperfect 'real' woman:

... secretly she began to hope I'd die.
Then she could cover my mouth and eyes, cover me entirely,
And wear my painted face the way a mummy-case
Wears the face of a pharaoh...²⁷⁶

The speaker now begins to doubt that she will be able to break out of her ivory encasement; she has relied on the created woman for so long that 'I wasn't in any position to get rid of her'. The speaker says that she takes care 'not to upset her in any way'; the woman thus begins to internalize the fiction of the ivory woman that she has encased herself within and the ivory role she is playing. 'Now I see it must be one or the other of us'; the speaker realizes now that she has started an irreversible process. The speaker ends the poem with the hope that one day she will gather her strength and 'manage without her', and that without the real woman inside, the ivory woman 'will perish with emptiness... and begin to miss me'; but this wish is ambivalent. At the close of the poem the woman remains encased within her ivory self.

Finally, in 'Edge' Plath imagines the woman's full encasement; as foreshadowed in 'In Plaster', both the real woman has disappeared and the ivory woman has perished with emptiness. 'Edge' chillingly concludes the Pygmalion imagery: 'The woman is perfected'.²⁷⁷ In the second

²⁷⁶ This detail of an encasement covering a woman's eyes is used by Hughes in his translation of the tale of Myrrha ('the bark... warps upwards | Reaching for her eyes', 1997, p. 128); cf. in Ovid, it is Myrrha who buries her face in the bark (*non tulit illa moram uenientique obuia ligno | subsedit mersitque suos in cortice uultus*, *Met.* 10.497-498). Hughes' Myrrha is particularly loaded with barbed commentary on Plath, especially in his description of Myrrha's attempted suicide, and his description of incest (an addition to Ovid's text): 'the bliss of infancy [is] a wedding present' (p. 115); Hughes reads the psychoanalytic Electra narrative into Ovid's text.

²⁷⁷ Cf. the Pygmalion-like surgeon in 'The Surgeon at 2 a.m.' (*CP* 170) who comments of his/her patient: 'I have perfected it'.

line of the poem the reader discovers that this perfect woman is a dead woman; the statue's 'white' ethereal gleam is emphasized by the dead whitenesses of 'milk', 'moon', 'bone', and static white-noise ('crackle').²⁷⁸ Plath's poem about the perfect(ed) woman also alludes most explicitly to its own mythic original as 'The illusion of a Greek necessity'; Plath's image of the dead woman is heightened by her use of imagery from Rilke's sonnet to Eurydice, another perfect (dead) Greek woman.²⁷⁹

The 'Greek necessity' also suggests that the imperative to womanly perfection is an ancient story, with the detachment of the moon who observes the dead woman suggesting additionally that it is one that repeats itself: 'She is used to this sort of thing'. The woman's 'toga' recalls both the restricting dress-codes of femininity critiqued in 'Virgin in a Tree' (the 'bark's nun-black habit'), and mirrors Plath's early poem 'Conversation Among the Ruins', in which the speaker is 'Composed in Grecian tunic and psyche-knot', the costume of femininity appropriate to a poetic muse 'Rooted to your black look'.²⁸⁰ The speaker of 'Edge' is thus no longer a living woman but is wholly muse, and the woman's metamorphosis into stone artefact and object of the male gaze is complete: 'it is over'. As well as creating the perfect statue of a woman, evoked in the image of a stone tableau, Plath has also created a perfected 'written

²⁷⁸ The whiteness of the moon also strikingly recalls Sappho fr. 96, where the moon is as white as a rose; on this simile in Sappho see Balmer (1992, p. 19).

²⁷⁹ Rilke, 'Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes' (1904). Smith (2012, pp. 133-134) notes the indebtedness of 'Edge' to Rilke's Eurydice and also reads the completion in Plath's poem as aesthetic, detailing Plath's ironic use of the feminine tropes of lunar and floral imagery, and the 'Cleopatra panache' with which the speaker flaunts them, refuting 'the moon and roses of all poetry' at the same time as she reclaims them. Zimmerman similarly refracts her Eurydice episode through Rilke, telling the story twice, once from each lover's perspective (2002). On Hughes' self-figuration as Orpheus 'mourning Eurydice', see Whitehead (1999), and Bundtzen (2000); for a feminist critique of this self-figuration, see Cahoon (2005).

²⁸⁰ CP 21. Hughes chose 'Conversation Among the Ruins' and 'Edge' to respectively open and close Plath's *Collected Poems*, perhaps inadvertently creating a neat ring-composition of Pygmalion poems. In draft, 'Edge' was originally titled 'Nuns in Snow'; recalling Plath's use of the Daphne myth, these chaste nuns who chose the intellectual or spiritual life perhaps pay homage to the woman of 'Edge' (with her dead children 'coiled' beneath her, Medea-like) who made the 'other' choice.

woman', with the woman's 'scrolls' and (metrical) 'feet' suggesting that like Ovid's Daphne she has been turned literally into a poem.²⁸¹

'Edge' was one of the final poems that Plath wrote and was placed by Hughes as the last of Plath's *Collected Poems*.²⁸² While Plath's 'final' poem suggests stony completeness, in contrast, the final lines of Ovid's exile poetry are of dismemberment (*Pont.* 4.16.51-52); yet both movements enact a silencing upon a poetic persona fatally mistaken for the living poet.²⁸³ As with Ovid, however, it may be unwise to trust Plath's admission of authorial defeat.²⁸⁴ For although the speaker has disappeared, like the magician's girl with her 'smile enigmatical', it is just a trick.²⁸⁵ Plath is in control of her poetic voice, the poem, and her self-representation, preemptively undermining her subsequent representation as the stone-woman-muse by doing it first herself.

3.7 Conclusion

Plath's deep engagement with the classics pioneered a gendered approach to myth in women's writing, and readings of Plath's work that have reduced her classical allusions to biographical clues alone deny and undo her complex intertextuality. Ovid's irony may have particularly attracted Plath, together with his humorous exposé of the 'hocus-pocus' of the poet-sculptor-*uates*, and a self-reflexive style that provided space for Plath to experiment with the

²⁸¹ See also Axelrod (1990, p. 219).

²⁸² 'Edge' is dated 5th February 1963; Plath died 11th February 1963. On the same day as 'Edge' was composed, Plath also wrote the charming 'Balloons', a poem about her infant son; on the order of Plath's poems, and the way that this has shaped narratives about her, see the overview by Brain (2007).

²⁸³ On poetic corpora and dismemberment, see Theodorakopoulos (1999) on Ovid (drawing on Melanie Klein to read the final lines of *Ex Ponto*), and Rose on Plath's *corps morcelé* (1991); also Brain (2007).

²⁸⁴ On Plath's 'self-subverting poetics of self-doubt', see Axelrod (1990, p. 74).

²⁸⁵ CP 242.

creation of a female poetic voice. Her personal style also echoes Ovid's own collage of high and low culture, ancient and contemporary. *Metamorphoses* especially enabled Plath to explore the relationship between 'literary form, cultural fantasy, and sexual violence', and she borrows Ovidian imagery and themes to explore the female body in metamorphosis—discovering one's sexuality, menstruating, lactating, bleeding, or swelling with a child.²⁸⁶ Plath's combination of the classical and the domestic used the cultural authority of Ovid to lend power to her own poetic stories and characters at the same time as she reinvigorated Ovid's humour and updated his irony to 1950s suburbia. Her engagement with Ovid spanned her whole writing life across her poetry and her prose, and an understanding of Plath's classicism encourages a reassessment of her own work as much as it encourages her audience to (re)read Ovid himself.

Plath's approach to specific tales from Ovid frequently removes the male antagonist to open up the myth and create a female space for dialogue: between the two female voices in 'Elm', for example, or the female gaze of 'In Plaster' (as Phaethon in 'Ariel' is 'fatherless').²⁸⁷ That this space was not unambiguously positive, however, demonstrates Plath's critical self-awareness and her interrogation of women's complicity in their own oppression, returning repeatedly to Ovid's myths of Daphne, Philomela, and Pygmalion to challenge contemporary myths of femininity. While not explicitly feminist, it is notable that Plath developed her personal classicism in dialogue with women writers from Virginia Woolf to Anne Sexton, and alongside women classical scholars Plath knew in the US and the UK. Plath approached her classical models, her poetry, and her life with characteristic irony and humour in an attempt to

²⁸⁶ Enterline (2000, p. 10).

²⁸⁷ On the 'openness' of Plath see Brain (2007); cf. Hughes, who frequently uses allusions at the close of his poems, or alludes to final lines of his classical models (Silk, 2009, p. 242).

create a place for herself in life and literature as a woman and as a writer.²⁸⁸ Plath lived before the advent of second-wave feminism and thus before she had the political framework to negotiate both the ambivalences of motherhood and the literary canon to which she responded. In her work, the woman writer is torn between domesticity and art, simultaneously rejecting yet drawing upon the classical tradition. In chapter 4, I discuss how Timberlake Wertenbaker expands Plath's personal poetic quest by similarly drawing on Ovid's *Philomela*, but uses the lens of second-wave feminism to harness the myth as a voice for all women.

²⁸⁸ Plath once described resolving an enmity with another woman (an enmity stirred up by mutual male acquaintances) as 'slaying the hydra: (Thank god.)' (*J* 227).

TIMBERLAKE WERTENBAKER

4.1 Introduction

British-American playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker's classical translations and adaptations include versions of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus at Kolonos*, and *Antigone* (published as *The Thebans*, 1992a), *Trachiniae (Dianeira)*, 2002b), *Elektra* (2010) and *Ajax (Our Ajax)*, 2013), and Euripides' *Hecuba* (1994) and *Hippolytus* (2009). Wertenbaker's play about a painter returning to the London art scene, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1992c), also reworks Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, while *Credible Witness* (2001), a play about exile and immigration, draws heavily upon Euripides' *Troades*.¹ In this chapter, I discuss *The Love of the Nightingale* (1996), Wertenbaker's creative adaptation of the Philomela episode from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The play is commonly read as a 'modern tragedy' and a reconstruction of Sophocles' lost *Tereus*; yet *The Love of the Nightingale* clearly follows Ovid's text as much as it also deviates from it.² Continuing my exploration of the interrelation between feminism, fiction, and Ovid, a close reading of the play reveals how second-wave French feminist concepts

¹ Taplin (2004, pp. 153-154); Freeman (2008). For dramaturgical discussions of Wertenbaker's 'translations and transformations', see Roth and Freeman (2008).

² On the play as Greek drama, see Soncini (1999), Rabillard (1999), and Monrós-Gaspar (2006); on Wertenbaker's plays as 'modern' tragedy, see Wagner (1995), and Freeman (2008, 2010). Babbage (2011, pp. 125-127) notes both Sophocles and Ovid as sources. Despite Wertenbaker's work on Latin and Greek texts her translations and adaptations have been widely overlooked by classical scholarship; see only Pedrick (2008) on *Antigone*; see also brief discussions by Brown (2005a, pp. 88-98), and Taplin (2004, pp. 153-154). Although Wertenbaker was invited to contribute to Hall, Macintosh and Wrigley (2004), the essay discusses her readings of Greek tragedy rather than her rewritings. Roth and Freeman (2008) was the first full-length study dedicated to Wertenbaker's work; while the volume aimed to foreground issues of translation across Wertenbaker's plays, of the four essays in the volume which treat her classical works, only one article is written by a classicist (Pedrick, 2008).

clearly mark Wertebaker's approach to Ovid's tale, particularly in her presentation of a fragmentary and 'irrational' feminine language, which can be read as a realization of Irigaray's *parler femme*.³

Wertebaker's plays characteristically centre on female characters and address issues affecting both historical and contemporary women's lives: female sexual desire, motherhood, sexual violence, and social and political disempowerment. Wertebaker's classical receptions similarly demonstrate a sustained interest in voicing the women of myth.⁴ Yet the playwright has repeatedly rejected any categorization as a feminist or a 'woman writer', and has deliberately distanced herself from readings of her work as feminist plays.⁵ Wertebaker's doubts about aligning herself explicitly with the feminist movement, despite making productive use of feminist ideas in her plays, may reflect a prescient unease with what she perceived to be the monolithic nature of popular second-wave feminism in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶ Wertebaker also displays a similar ambivalence toward her classical source texts, and I thus suggest that

³ See Irigaray (1985a, b).

⁴ On voicing mythic women as feminist literary praxis, see Rich (1972), Herrmann (1976), and Ostriker (1982).

⁵ See, e.g., Goodman (1993, pp. 33-34), and Wertebaker (2013, p. 5). Wertebaker explains that the focus on women characters in her plays is due to a frustration with existing female characters available to her as a reader-spectator of literature and theatre; as a writer, she felt a strong desire to thus create the women that she felt were missing, and particularly to create narratives for 'women on quests' (quoted in Stephenson and Langridge, 1997, p. 140). Her work, however, is treated by drama scholars almost uniformly as feminist. The differing attitudes in the scholarship toward celebrating or problematizing Wertebaker's relative feminism, however, are influenced by a number of factors, including the differences between American and British feminisms, the shifting 'waves' of feminism, and the feminist standpoint of the critic. Varty (1994), Wagner (1995), Winston (1995), Rabillard (1999), Aston (2003), Roth and Freeman (2008), and Babbage (2011), predominantly US or second-wave feminists, read Wertebaker's plays as unproblematically feminist; Gömçeli (2010) argues that Wertebaker's presentation of feminist issues on stage (e.g. motherhood, rape) evidences a 'radical' feminist standpoint. More recent third-wave, predominantly British scholarship has problematized any simplistic reading of Wertebaker as a feminist, critiquing what they perceive to be her 'essentialist' presentation of women, her valorization of liberal humanist ideals (i.e. the affirmation of Western culture and its institutions in her characteristic presentation of theatre as a redemptive space), and her representation of colonial 'others'; see Freeman (2012), and Bush (2013); also Wilson (1993).

⁶ Important critiques of 'universalist' second-wave feminism include Spivak (1988), and Butler (1999).

she encourages her audience to question alike all narratives that purport to contain the truth, mythic or feminist.⁷

I begin the chapter with a discussion of Wertebaker's methodology, examining her approach to translation and adaptation across her varied texts. Using the example of her creative translation of Sophocles' *Trachiniae* (*Dianeira*)—a 'translation' that draws heavily upon Ovid's own version of the tragedy in *Metamorphoses* 9—I delineate the characteristic features of Wertebaker's classical receptions: a tension between authorial voices; a strong feminist influence; metatheatrical elements; and 'foreignization' strategies.⁸ Turning to *The Love of the Nightingale*, I discuss how Wertebaker's use of two tragic choruses (one male, one female) represents each of her Ovidian and Sophoclean source texts, and I draw out the implications of her most substantial alterations to Ovid's narrative: the expansion of Procne's role; the addition of a nurse character; and the replacement of Philomela's tapestry with a puppet show.

4.2 Wertebaker and the classics: 'transforming' a text'

Wertebaker studied classical languages at St John's College, Annapolis, where the undergraduate syllabus focused heavily on classical authors for the main programme strands of literature, philosophy, and history. After university, Wertebaker taught at an English school in Greece before relocating to the UK in the late-1970s. Two incomplete plays from 1978 show that an engagement with the classics was present from the beginning of Wertebaker's career. 'Agamemnon's Daughter' offers a female perspective on the Electra plays of Sophocles,

⁷ Classics and feminism seem always to have been interrelated in Wertebaker's life; on delighting in the *Odyssey* as a child, but wishing she had read *The Second Sex* instead, see Wertebaker (1992b).

⁸ Venuti (1995).

Euripides, and Aeschylus in its detailed exploration of the mother-daughter relationship between Clytaemnestra and Electra.⁹ While Clytaemnestra is not a wholly sympathetic character, Wertebaker allows her character to poignantly explain her motives for killing Agamemnon.¹⁰ Wertebaker's focus in the play, however, is on the unsettling figure of Electra, 'dispossessed even in her [own] tragedy because no one knows what happens to her. The furies don't pursue her, she is not judged, and therefore never integrated into the State. That still bothers me'.¹¹ Wertebaker's ironic title ('Agamemnon's Daughter') signals Electra's dispossession even from her own identity. Yet Wertebaker resists writing Electra an alternative ending for her story and leaves her narrative open—an interest in the open feminine fragment that is developed further in the playwright's later reception work.¹²

The second incomplete play, 'The Upper World', is described in a synopsis as 'Orpheus and Eurydice in reverse'.¹³ This work may have been the seed for Wertebaker's plan to 'adapt' Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the mid-1980s; provisionally titled 'Metamorphosis', this comprised Wertebaker's earliest large-scale engagement with a classical author.¹⁴ Initially translating various episodes from the poem, the adaptation was subsequently reduced to a focus on the Philomela episode, from which Wertebaker created *The Love of the Nightingale*.¹⁵ Wertebaker's terminology shifts here from 'translation' to 'adaptation' to creation; in her

⁹ Bush (2013, pp. 48-52).

¹⁰ Wertebaker notes that some of the dialogue of 'Agamemnon's Daughter' was influenced by Robert Graves' account of early matriarchal societies (personal correspondence, quoted in Bush, 2013, pp. 48-49).

¹¹ Wertebaker (1992b).

¹² On the fragment as feminist/ine poetics, see Keller and Miller (1994), DuPlessis (1996), Frost (2003), and Kinnahan (2004, pp. 41-47).

¹³ Bush (2013, p. 32).

¹⁴ Personal correspondence (quoted in Bush, 2013, p. 285 n. 3).

¹⁵ Preparatory material for 'Metamorphosis' (c. 1985-1987) is stored in the Timberlake Wertebaker Archive, British Library Manuscripts Collection, Add. MS 79270, ff. 1-90.

critical writing she explores the distinctions between these terms, and thus in part reveals her self-figuration as a writer working with ancient texts.

Wertenbaker's essay 'First Thoughts on Transforming a Text' discusses 'the various ways we transform a text... [t]he action of changing in form'; she begins by defining and problematizing a series of common terms for the various technical approaches to reception work.¹⁶ While Wertenbaker does not experiment with her own autobiographically-tinged definitions (as, for example, Plath defined 'church' as 'Sunday chicken dinners'), Wertenbaker does draw upon, modify, and expand entries from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, displaying a similarly witty play with authoritative language:

... a **translation** not only changes something, but also moves it, displaces it. It then makes us ask all sorts of questions. How much is left of what was there before?

...

Adaptation: [OED:] 'the process of modifying to suit new conditions'... we might ask ourselves if many adaptations, by their modification of the parent work, may actually help a work survive. But we also have to ask, does the adaptation then supplant the original[?]

...

'Based on' in the OED means: 'to place upon a foundation or logical basis'. When we say a work is based on another, we mean it uses that work as the foundation but follows its own construction according to the imagination of the new writer. It builds something else, something different, but the foundation is the original. You may not see much of the foundation but you cannot take it away.

...

version: [OED] 'an account resting upon limited authority or embodying a particular point of view'. To me, that says it all: It is a version because the new writer doesn't know the original language and therefore has no authority to translate, but the play embodies his or her point of view, which may be quite interesting. Or not.

¹⁶ Wertenbaker (2008, p. 35).

I never use ‘Version’ for my translations, although my agent and the theatres keep trying to make me do so as it’s the most accepted phrase. But this is because I do not translate from languages I do not know.¹⁷

Wertenbaker’s definitions cleverly enact the definition of the words in the dictionary. In her first definition, ‘translate’, Wertenbaker quotes faithfully from the *OED* definition, ‘translating’ the word in its sense of ‘to carry over’—from the dictionary to her essay. Additionally (although not attributed), Wertenbaker also ‘carries over’ a few of the example sentences from the *OED* entry into her own text.¹⁸ Her second definition, for ‘adapt’, suitably adapts the dictionary entry by following the *OED* in supplying an example sentence from Darwin, but choosing two more ‘fitting’ Darwinian example sentences of her own. Her definition for ‘based on’ is likewise ‘based upon’ the *OED* definitions for ‘base/ based’ (as no dictionary entry for ‘based on’ exists); and her definition for ‘version’ is the most innovative and personal. For this last definition, Wertenbaker chooses the version of the definition she prefers, providing the reader with her own point of view by supplying the secondary meaning of version as ‘a particular point of view’ (meaning one in the *OED* is: ‘a translation’).¹⁹

Wertenbaker has stated that she prefers the term ‘writer’ to ‘adapter’, and she has experimented with all of the dictionary definitions quoted above to describe her classical

¹⁷ Wertenbaker (2008, pp. 35-37). Wertenbaker compares ‘adaptation’ to ‘conducting a relationship long distance: You reach out, but you also keep your own life’ (p. 39). For her translations of Greek texts, Wertenbaker frequently collaborates with classical scholars; Margaret Williamson is credited as ‘Greek Consultant’ for helping the playwright with literal translations of *Hippolytus*, *Antigone*, *Hecuba*, and *Trachiniai*, and Neil Croally is credited in *The Thebans* for his ‘help with Sophocles’ text’ (Wertenbaker, 1992a, n.p.). Wertenbaker is also closely acquainted with trained classicist Carey Perloff, artistic director of the American Conservatory Theater (ACT), which commissioned Wertenbaker’s *Hecuba*; Perloff worked with her on the US production of *Antigone* (Perloff studied Latin at school and took up ancient Greek for her degree at Stanford University). Perloff in turn introduced Wertenbaker to her university Greek professor Helene Foley, who acted as dramaturgical consultant for *Hecuba* and who wrote an introductory essay for the play’s printed programme.

¹⁸ Wertenbaker cites the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Available at: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/204841?rskey=Va0X4n&result=2#eid> (Accessed: 24 October 2015).

¹⁹ Available at: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/222734?rskey=NH3hJd&result=1#eid> (Accessed: 24 October 2015).

plays.²⁰ Yet the variety of terms carefully reflects her varied methods of transformation and the dramaturgical or narrative forms that she employs in the final work. For example, in her introduction to her Ovidian adaptation, *The Love of the Nightingale* (which closely follows, yet also vastly expands the features of the original text), Wertebaker describes the play as ‘based on’ the myth of Philomela.²¹ Wertebaker’s single three-act play, *The Thebans*, however, which retains the archaic setting of the original but which was created from heavily-edited translations of three separate plays by Sophocles, states simply that it is ‘translated by’ Wertebaker.²² *Hecuba* is ‘translated and adapted by’ the playwright; *Dianeira*, a highly original presentation of a classical play with multiple levels of narration and additional scenes, is described as ‘inspired by the *Trachiniae* of Sophocles’; and *Hippolytus* is ‘a new version’ that grew out of a ‘literal translation by Timberlake Wertebaker and Margaret Williamson’.²³ Similarly, *Our Ajax*, which updates the story of the Greek hero to a contemporary warzone, has ‘a Greek origin’ but is ‘a new play’ telling a story that the playwright says ‘superimposed’ itself on to the literal translation she was working on with Williamson; the title page of the published text notes that the play ‘was inspired by Sophocles’ *Ajax* and borrows freely from it’.²⁴

In her essay on ‘transforming a text’, Wertebaker also explains the variety of ways that she conceptualizes her work:

When I wrote *The Love of the Nightingale*, which is inspired by ten lines of Sophocles and looks at the Philomele [*sic*] myth as reported by Ovid and Robert Graves, people kept calling it an adaptation. But there was no ‘original’ work to adapt, although the work did ‘arise from something’... *Dianeira* is slightly more

²⁰ Wertebaker suggests instead that she might better be described as ‘a Hoover (of experiences and other books and history and newspapers. Isn’t that what a good writer does? Tries to get rid of the dust?)’ (quoted in Bush, 2013, p. 269).

²¹ Wertebaker (2008, p. 39).

²² Wertebaker (1992a, n.p.).

²³ *Hecuba* programme book quoted by McDonald (1995); Wertebaker (2002b, p. vii); Wertebaker (2009, n.p.).

²⁴ Wertebaker (2013, p. 5; n.p.).

problematic. I translated and used much of *The Trachiniae* by Sophocles, and then went somewhere else. It is not an adaptation because it does not [update] *The Trachiniae*... but I did use a lot of lines from another play [*The Trachiniae*]. But then so did Greek playwrights and they never worried about the notion of original. So I happily signed my name.²⁵

Although Wertebaker claims that her telling of the Philomela myth is an original and not ‘based on’ another work, this claim is modified by her assertion that ‘[a]n original can have a source’.²⁶ This slipperiness of technical terms suggests a concern on Wertebaker’s part with establishing both distance from and ownership of the authorial voice in the finished plays; that is, a hesitation about whether to speak with—or over—the voices of Ovid, Sophocles, or Euripides.

Wertebaker’s eagerness to assert her authorship of *The Love of the Nightingale* and *Dianeira* may be due to a concern that reception work is perceived as derivative or as simple rewritings of pre-existing texts; the frequent misogynist tint to such criticism may also explain the playwright’s reluctance to be labelled a ‘woman writer’.²⁷ Conversely, the expectation of misogyny may also drive Wertebaker to claim Sophocles rather than Ovid as source for *The Love of the Nightingale* (thus establishing an oscillating authority as both author and translator). That is, a Greek tragic, fragmentary ‘original’ bestows greater cultural authority upon the woman writer than the Latin version, enabling Wertebaker to ‘flaunt’ her scholarship and her ability to translate an ancient language traditionally less accessible for women (and thus eclipsing her earlier translations of *Metamorphoses*).²⁸ This is made explicit by Wertebaker’s

²⁵ Wertebaker (2008, p. 39).

²⁶ Wertebaker (2008, p. 37). Freeman argues that basing one text upon another requires a greater level of cultural competence from her audience, although it does enable Wertebaker to expand her play’s boundaries beyond Britain in drawing on (I add, problematically) ‘cross-cultural’ templates (2012, p. 216).

²⁷ On the disparity in scholarly treatments of classical receptions by men and women writers, see chapter 1; see Spencer in the *Daily Telegraph*, 25 August 1989 (quoted in Cousin, 1996, pp. 120-121) for a gleefully misogynist review of *The Love of the Nightingale*.

²⁸ On the similar privileging of Greek in the classical receptions of Victorian women writers, see Hurst (2006, p. 5); on women’s historic access to classical languages, see Winterer (2007), Staley (2008) and Hallett (2013) on the US context; see Cox (2015) on the UK. On the feminist translator who ‘flaunts’ her presence, see Godard

insistence that she does not translate from languages she does not know, and that a writer who does not know the original language of a text has ‘no authority to translate’; in her play *The Break of Day* (1995), a classics professor laments that her students now study Greek and Latin texts only in translation.²⁹ While together such statements suggest a cultural conservatism on Wertebaker’s part, the classics professor mourning the second death of two dead languages is not presented without irony (and Wertebaker herself has, of course, produced translations), so her assertion of authority here may be better read as a defensive strategy.

Wertebaker claims that she ‘belong[s] to the ‘faithful wives school’ of translation... faithful wives whose job is to put forward the husband... [to] be relatively invisible and serve’ the original text; yet her translations are often highly creative.³⁰ Wertebaker’s reception work thus embodies a tension between an anxiety to prove her ‘authority’ to translate the ancient texts, and a desire to assert creative authority; the playwright may feel freer to experiment after first establishing her proficiency.³¹ When translating *Hecuba*, for example, Wertebaker’s approach veered from her professed invisibility whenever ‘adaptation was necessary... to shift a focus... to emphasise the logic of Hecuba’s character’.³² Similarly, in her translation of *Antigone*, Wertebaker wholly omitted one particular speech in order not to detract from the reading of Antigone’s character that she wished to convey; in *The Break of Day*, the classics

(1990), von Flotow (1991), and Balmer (chapter 5). Anne Carson similarly ‘flaunts’ the scholarliness of her classical reception work; the use of classical Greek by both Wertebaker and Carson displays an ambivalent flaunting of privilege with self-doubt, that is, the fear of being perceived as ‘women writers’; see, e.g., Carson (2010; 2012); on Carson, see Theodorakopoulos (2012).

²⁹ Wertebaker (2008).

³⁰ Wertebaker (2008, pp. 37-38); see also comments by Ruden on being a ‘deferential’ translator of Virgil in Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2012b, pp. 229-232); on the gendered trope of the translator as ‘faithful wife’, and a problematization of this term, however, see especially Simon (1996); on the ethics or aesthetics of classical translation, see the debate between the essays contained within Lianeri and Zajko (2008).

³¹ That this tension is a particularly gendered one is also suggested by a comparison to Ted Hughes, who felt no need to demonstrate his proficiency in Latin or ancient Greek to authorize his classical translations, working, for example, from the Loeb translation of *Metamorphoses* to produce *Tales from Ovid*; see Jacobsen (2009, pp. 159-160, quoting Sagar, 2006, n.p.).

³² Wertebaker (2008, p. 38).

professor also hints at the necessary adaptive work of reception, describing the poems of Sappho as ‘fragments. Fragments every generation fills’.³³

In the introduction to *Our Ajax*, Wertenbaker provides an insight into her collaborative translation practice:

I had been intrigued for some time by Sophocles’ play *Ajax* but I found it hard to read. I asked my friend the Greek scholar Margaret Williamson if she would help me translate it as we’d already worked together on several Greek plays. We spent three weeks in the Basque Country, deep in dictionaries, fed by kind friends.

When I translate, I usually start with a literal and then make it less literal as I go along. However, I always try to stay close to the original text.³⁴

Wertenbaker’s foregrounding of the dictionaries highlights her careful scholarship and ‘authorizes’ her translation; at the same time, the women’s collaborative discussions over the dictionaries suggest a playful experimentation with language and definition. After producing a literal version and turning it into ‘decent English’, Wertenbaker writes that the process of adaptation begins, which she describes as removing any markers of the text’s own historical context ‘to make it more universal’.³⁵ Yet she often retains Greek words and phrases in her adaptations for aural effect, thus contrarily ‘foreignizing’ the translation by highlighting the cultural and temporal differences between source and target texts, and signalling its artificially authentic antiquity.³⁶

³³ Wertenbaker (2004, pp. 364-365); Wertenbaker (2002a, p. 13).

³⁴ Wertenbaker (2013, p. 5).

³⁵ Wertenbaker (2008, pp. 38-39).

³⁶ Venuti (1995); looking at the plays dramaturgically rather than as translation, the use of Greek words acts as a strategy of Brechtian alienation (*Verfremdungseffekt*, Brecht, 1936, quoted in Willett, 1964, p. 91).

In *The Thebans*, Wertebaker retains Greek phrases in the choral odes that are spoken concurrently with their English translations, creating an echo-effect that verbally highlights the English words as literal echoes of the past. Individual characters in the play also speak transliterated or phonetic Greek phrases for emotive effect; for example, Tiresias' '*Feu, feu*'; Oedipus' groans of tragic recognition, '*Aiai, aiai*'; Ismene's cry of '*Oimoi talaina*'; and Kreon's repeated '*Eeoh... Eeoh... Eeoh*' upon seeing the bodies of his son and wife.³⁷ Wertebaker repeats this emotive technique in *Hippolytus* by retaining the Greek sound-effects of '*oimoi*' and '*aiai*', and writing dialogue with alternate lines of Greek and English; the chorus sing Greek phrases with the English translation in the following line. The effect is employed sparingly in the more clearly contemporary *Our Ajax*, but the play retains fragments of Greek for moments of heightened emotional or dramatic tension. In his madness, for example, Ajax cries '*IO... Io*', while Tecmessa desperately cries, '*Io moi moi!*'; the soldiers who discover Ajax's body speak a transliteration of the Greek line from the original play, '*Ponos pono ponon ferei*'.³⁸

These foreignizing elements explicitly and metatheatrically mark the plays as translations; yet Wertebaker may also employ this technique to emphasize the 'untranslatable' nature of emotion and to align it with an Irigarayan *parler femme*.³⁹ In her essay 'The Voices We Hear', Wertebaker implicitly follows the work of Cixous and Irigaray to argue that the heroines of Greek tragedy are associated with the irrational, the incomprehensible, and the illogical, positing that, contra the male characters, the women of Greek tragedy *feel* rather than know themselves.⁴⁰ In her translations and adaptations, characters (both male and female) thus slip into a 'feminine' mode of speaking to express emotions that a simple dictionary definition

³⁷ Wertebaker (1992a, pp. 12, 23, 109, 134).

³⁸ Wertebaker (2013, pp. 30, 67; 65); 'Toil follows toil bringing toil', Soph. *Ajax* l. 866.

³⁹ On metatheatricity in Wertebaker's plays, see Dymkowski (1997), and Soncini (1999).

⁴⁰ Wertebaker (2004, pp. 362, 366).

or translation cannot convey or contain. The incongruous fragments of Greek text embedded within the main English narrative heighten the fragmentary ‘feminine’ nature of the characters’ speech and emotions at the same time as they physically embody a fragmentary *parler femme* as it breaks through and works within a dominant representational discourse.

At a linguistic level, Wertenbaker’s translations and adaptations are thus characterized by a tension between authorial voices, a deep scholarliness, creative translation, and an interest in feminine modes of speaking signalled particularly by emotive foreignization strategies. To examine Wertenbaker’s approach to classical reception more broadly, her radio play *Dianeira* provides a useful comparison and introduction for the key characteristics of her Ovidian play, *The Love of the Nightingale*.⁴¹

4.3 *Dianeira*

Sophocles’ *Trachiniae* tells how Deianeira mistakenly kills her husband Heracles. The play opens with Deianeira detailing how Heracles defeated the river-god Achelous for her hand in marriage. She now lives mostly alone in a Trachis, a land foreign to her; Heracles has been away longer than expected and she awaits his return. Deianeira learns that the captured slaves sent ahead of Heracles include his new concubine, the silent Iole. While Deianeira is sympathetic to Iole, she resolves to win back Heracles’ love by sending him a cloak anointed with a poison she believes is a love potion, given to her by the centaur Nessus when Heracles killed him. Learning of the true effect of the poison, Deianeira commits suicide and the dying

⁴¹ *Dianeira* was originally broadcast as a radio play on BBC Radio 3 in 1999 (published in Wertenbaker, 2002b). I use ‘Deianeira’ to refer to the character as she appears in Sophocles, ‘Deianira’ to refer to the character as she appears in Ovid (using ‘Deianeira’ for simplicity when referring to both her Ovidian and Sophoclean incarnations simultaneously), and follow Wertenbaker’s spelling of Dianeira when referring to her play.

Heracles forces their son Hyllus to promise to marry Iole in Heracles' stead. At *Metamorphoses* 9.1-395, Ovid rewrites *Trachiniae* but refocalizes the story with characteristic contractions and expansions of Sophocles' text.⁴² Ovid opens with an extended account of the fight between Hercules and Achelous narrated retrospectively by Achelous himself, followed by the story of the death of Nessus and his gift of a blood-soaked tunic to Deianira (told by the Ovidian narrator, 9.1-88; 101-133). The poem cuts to Deianira years later, who has learned of Hercules' love for Iole; Deianira debates various courses of action (whether to speak out, remain silent, resist Hercules, or kill Iole), but settles on the unwittingly poisoned gift; Deianira disappears from the narrative (9.134-157). Hercules' death is described in gruesome detail (9.157-238, especially 166-175), and on the orders of his father, Hyllus takes Iole 'into his bed and his heart' (9.279). After a digression by Hercules' mother recounting the difficult birth of her son (9.280-323), Iole herself speaks, telling the story of her sister Dryope transformed into a tree (9.325-397).⁴³ Deianira also appears in *Heroides* 9; her letter details Hercules' extended absence due to his many extra-marital affairs and his servitude to Omphale dressed as a woman (9.53-117). The letter ends as Deianira bids farewell to the world, repeating four times *in pia quid dubitas Deianira mori?* ('Wicked Deianira, why do you hesitate to die?', 9.146, 152, 158, 164).⁴⁴

While Wertenbaker closely follows the plot, scene divisions, and dialogue of Sophocles' play, she clearly borrows details from Ovid. In her play, the herald Lychas tells Dianeira that Heracles served Omphale dressed in women's clothing, a detail not mentioned in Sophocles, and for which her source must be *Heroides* 9.⁴⁵ Similarly, Dianeira's debate with herself as to

⁴² On Greek tragedy in Ovid, see Curley (2013); Hercules also appears in Ovid at *Ars* 2.215-222, and *Fast.* 2.303-358.

⁴³ *thalamoque animoque receperat Hyllus, Met.* 9.279.

⁴⁴ On how *Heroides* 9 rewrites the *Trachiniae* see Barchiesi (1993), and Casali (1995).

⁴⁵ Wertenbaker (2002b, p. 337). See also *Fast.* 2.317-348; see Fantham (1983). Dianeira repeats: 'Dressed as a woman... humiliating' (p. 337). Apart from the account in Ovid, the story of Heracles in women's clothing

how to react to Iole's arrival is borrowed from *Met.* 9.134-157, and indeed hints at the transformations of her Ovidian textual sisters: 'What am I to do? Kill her now[?]. . . sit here meekly and watch my own disappearance?'.⁴⁶ Before her suicide, Wertenbaker's Dianeira (like her precedent in *Heroides* 9) also repeats a single line of dialogue four times: 'The things I cannot say'.⁴⁷ Strikingly, Wertenbaker also follows Ovid in structuring her story with a complex framing device of multiple narrators consciously engaged in the act of storytelling. In Ovid, the story is started by Theseus, who questions Achelous, followed in turns by 'Ovid', Alcmena, and Iole; in *Dianeira*, the external narrator 'Timberlake' introduces the internal narrator 'Irene', who voices 'Dianeira'.

Again, Wertenbaker's emphasis on a Greek source text may aim to establish her 'authority' to engage with the classics; but by borrowing from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, Wertenbaker can expand Dianeira's dialogue and give her a louder voice and a greater presence in her play. *Dianeira* opens with the comment: 'you probably won't have heard of Dianeira and that's part of her story. . . Listen to Dianeira'; such a statement at the beginning of the play draws specific attention to Wertenbaker's treatment of women's voices and her intention to tell women's stories that have been forgotten.⁴⁸ Yet Wertenbaker also supplements the Sophoclean and Ovidian versions of Deianeira's story; one scene imagines an intimate conversation between Nessos [*sic*] and Dianeira, and a final fragmented monologue before

appears in a fragmentary Greek comedy *Omphale* by Ion of Chios (collected in Nauck, fr. 18-33). On Ovid's Hercules as a subversion of an Augustan symbol, see Galinsky (1972, pp. 126-165).

⁴⁶ Wertenbaker (2002b, p. 345).

⁴⁷ Wertenbaker (2002b, pp. 359-360).

⁴⁸ Wertenbaker (2002b, p. 328). In *Antigonick*, Anne Carson introduces Eurydike's monologue in a similar way: 'This is Eurydike's monologue it's her only speech in the play. You may not know who she is but that's ok. Like poor Mrs Ramsey who died in a bracket of *To the Lighthouse*...' (2012, n.p.); Woolf (2011).

Dianeira's suicide explores her intentions and culpability, 'writing beyond the ending' of both Sophocles and Ovid.⁴⁹

The premise of *Dianeira* is that Timberlake (a fictionalized version of the playwright) is telling listeners a story that she was once told by a professional storyteller (Irene). As in Ovid, this framing device explicitly foregrounds not only the issue of telling stories but of *retelling* stories; an acknowledgement of the play itself as reception.⁵⁰ Irene also nests small digressions and hints of proliferating possibilities for stories within the main narrative of Dianeira's story: 'This is the story of the anger of Nessos'; 'Now [Hyllos'] story begins, his own terrible story'; '[Iole's] story isn't finished yet, although it could be'.⁵¹ In this respect, Irene functions like the Ovidian narrator, steering the listener between episodes, directing the listener's focus or pointing at alternative narratives not taken, or, as Ovid does at *Met.* 9.101 (*at te, Nesse ferox*, *Met.* 9.101) directly addressing Nessus. The super-narrative character Timberlake is also periodically drawn down into the internal narrative when Irene punctures the fictional illusion she has created to ask Timberlake for money or brandy as payment for continuing her story; repeated imprecations to 'listen' similarly puncture the boundary between narrator and audience.⁵²

Irene frequently intersperses her story with metatextual commentary ostensibly addressed to her internal listener Timberlake, but which enables the playwright Wertebaker to

⁴⁹ Wertebaker (2002b, pp. 359-360).

⁵⁰ The issue of *retelling* is highlighted by the fact that as a radio play, the listener is hearing the story rather than watching it; the listener must participate in the oral culture of storytelling if the story is to be passed on again.

⁵¹ Wertebaker (2002b, pp. 348; 355; 347-348).

⁵² Wertebaker (2002b, pp. 347; 362); the character Timberlake also interrupts the narrative in her role as a 'modern' listener to demand the expected resolution to the tale (p. 347); see also: 'listen to a slight tremor in the tale Lychas tells' (p. 338); 'Listen to the gasp from Hyllos' (p. 369); 'Now the story takes a right-angle turn... Listen' (p. 362).

guide the external listeners and invite their participation in interpretation of the story. Irene's metatextual comments create anticipation and signal to the contemporary listener what to pay attention to in this unfamiliar story. She explains features of Greek tragedy ('some of the women of Trachis... keep [Dianeira] company, a chorus, whose job is mostly to listen and occasionally to echo'), and she provides witty instructions for spotting stock character-types such as the Nurse and Messenger: 'a woman always had a nurse to advise her. Obvious advice and often disastrous as obvious advice must be'; 'A messenger is a strange being. He has no name, he is the messenger. He comes running, always breathless, and brings news. Sometimes good, sometimes bad, but mostly often seemingly good but really bad'.⁵³ At times, even characters within the narrative seem aware of their role as players in an antique drama: 'Dianeira knows better than to trust the first [messenger]'.⁵⁴

Irene's metatextual comments also elucidate customs and myths of the classical past.⁵⁵ By drawing attention to these odd, archaic features of the text so explicitly, and by contrasting them with contemporary life in the super-narrative through anachronistic similes of gunfire and politicians, Wertenbaker foreignizes her translation, signalling both its artificial antiquity and her use of the classics as a metaphor to meditate on relationships between men and women, and the victims of war.⁵⁶ Anachronistic references also highlight Wertenbaker's own authorial creativity, marking the text as her own and not simply a verbatim retelling of a story. This subtle

⁵³ Wertenbaker (2002b, pp. 328; 330, 336).

⁵⁴ Wertenbaker (2002b, p. 336).

⁵⁵ 'Now I must tell you this is what you call a likely story. The rules of hospitality were so stringent in those days...' (Wertenbaker, 2002b, p. 338); 'There were a lot of centaurs in those days... There were all other kinds of monsters too... but they belong to other stories' (p. 348), Ovidian ones, perhaps, thus referencing her secondary source.

⁵⁶ Irene compares Lychas' lie to Dianeira to 'the man who goes on television and appeals for the discovery of the child he has himself killed... We feel such fury when our politicians deny all wrongdoing the day before their crimes are revealed' (pp. 339-340). At the end of the play, the story returns to the level of the external narrator Timberlake, driving silently away from the mountains and the war-torn region to the north. On 'history as metaphor' in Wertenbaker's *After Darwin*, see Freeman (2010).

assertion of authorship is more than a postmodern mixing of ancient texts with contemporary television news-reports, but can be read as a feminist act and a feminine reclaiming of the classical tradition.

Borrowing the technique from Ovid, Wertenbaker also troubles the reader-listener's suspension of disbelief through intertextual cross-references which shatter the illusion of the storytelling. Immediately before the messenger and the herald Lychas argue over whether to tell the truth to Dianeira about Heracles and Iole, the narrator makes a digression to invite the listener to draw a comparison: '[i]n that great story by Sophocles, *Oedipus*, two messengers [also] argue about the facts of Oedipus' birth...'.⁵⁷ By inviting the listener to draw a comparison with another tragedy mid-play, the playwright can provide an interpretation of an element of the story whilst also encouraging active and participatory listening and spectating. The sustained play throughout *Dianeira* with levels of reality and storytelling, flashbacks and interruptions, introduces an ambiguity that allows space for the listener to disagree with the narrator who claims that 'Dianeira is dead, dead in anger', or: 'I can't tell you if Dianeira knew what she was doing. How can I know? Anger could have paralysed her but made her hands more active than ever. That's not unusual in these women'.⁵⁸ Together with Dianeira's own self-questioning ('I felt no surprise. I knew it was poison'), Wertenbaker complicates a simple presentation of Dianeira as an unwitting catalyst of Heracles' death; a refusal to rehabilitate her heroine that is characteristic of many feminist classical receptions, and which Wertenbaker will develop further in her characterization of Procne.⁵⁹ Wertenbaker asks her audience to question both stories and tellers.

⁵⁷ Wertenbaker (2002b, p. 340).

⁵⁸ Wertenbaker (2002b, pp. 362; 352).

⁵⁹ Wertenbaker (2002b, p. 359); Theodorakopoulos (2013, p. 278). A similar refusal to rehabilitate can be observed, for example, in the representations of Helen by Margaret Atwood, Anne Carson, and Elizabeth Cook,

Unlike her expansion of Dianeira's character and words, however, Wertenbaker's Iole remains silent throughout the play and is narrated only in the third person. Iole is also silent in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, appearing on-stage only as a mute captive, although she narrates her own story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁶⁰ Wertenbaker may wish not to simply imitate Ovid, who, although 'ventriloquizing', has already given Iole her missing voice; her different approaches to the two women also creates variation within the performance and expands the possibilities for presenting mythic women.⁶¹ Instead, Wertenbaker stages Iole's silence to represent the historic and ongoing silencing of women and marginalized groups. Iole and her fellow captives are 'refugees', victims of 'war, ravage, rape, and servitude'.⁶² Iole thus functions as a synecdoche for the silent victims of wars occurring off-stage whose voices are not heard in the play; poignantly, Iole's scene closes with the stark narratorial comment: 'Iole's city was never rebuilt... Eventually, people stopped telling the story'.⁶³

This final scene of the play, which has no precedent in *Trachiniae* or *Metamorphoses*, provides a window into the hate-filled marriage of Hyllos [*sic*] and Iole many years after Heracles' death. Iole not does speak, but—we are told—merely smiles; the audience hears only Irene's interpretation of the events in this scene: 'Iole never said a word. She never said a word when she married Hyllos. She never said a word to her children. What was there to say? the bitterest anger is silent. And so anger threads its way through generations'.⁶⁴ Hyllos attempts

and may be traced back via the Modernist poet H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* to Sappho, whose Helen in Fragment 16 is justified in her actions by simply following that which she desires the most—her lover to Troy: 'the loveliest sight | on this dark earth... I say is what- | ever you desire: | and it is perfectly possible to make this clear | to all; for Helen... | ... left her husband—| the best of all men—| behind and sailed far away to Troy', trans. J. Balmer (1992, p. 39).

⁶⁰ Soph. *Trach.* ll. 225-334; Ov. *Met.* 9.325-397.

⁶¹ On Ovid's 'transvestite ventriloquism', the male poet's appropriation of the feminine voice, and the implications for the silencing of women's speech, see Harvey (1996) on Ovid voicing Sappho in *Her.* 15.

⁶² Wertenbaker (2002b, p. 339).

⁶³ Wertenbaker (2002b, p. 374).

⁶⁴ Wertenbaker (2002b, p. 372).

to break the cycle of violence begun by his father by arguing rationally with Iole, but his argument does not permeate the anger of his wife. Wertenbaker may present Iole's emotional silence as a form of 'irrational' feminine expression beyond masculine comprehension, and thus an attempt to rehabilitate the traditional silencing of mythic women. Alternatively, Wertenbaker may wish to problematize the way in which women are presented in ancient texts without a voice of their own; the listener has only Irene's interpretation of the scene. Yet Wertenbaker has provided space for disagreement with the narrator throughout the rest of her play, and her female narrator Irene may represent an attempt to rewrite Ovid's own ventriloquized presentation of Iole's voice. The interplay of intricate levels of female narratorial authority throughout the play suggests the potential difference made by a female narrator, and highlights the importance of telling 'the other side' of the story; but Wertenbaker refuses to provide a definitive alternative ending to her ancient source texts, and instead encourages her audience to engage critically with the story at all levels, and via multiple perspectives.

The play closes with a return to the super-narrative level of the character Timberlake, who—the story over—leaves in silence. By writing the play, however, Timberlake/Wertenbaker has chosen not to remain silent but to bring Dianeira's and Iole's stories alive once more in the act of retelling. *Dianeira* exemplifies the characteristics of Wertenbaker's classical reception work that will now be explored in further detail in *The Love of the Nightingale*: the blending of Ovidian and Sophoclean source texts; a sustained metatheatrical and metatextual play with her ancient sources; an imaginative expansion of the 'original' text; anachronisms which unsettle a contemporary audience; a strong focus on presenting women mythic characters; a thematic concern with feminist issues; and an insistence on active listening, participation, and interpretation.

4.4 *The Love of the Nightingale*⁶⁵

Wertenbaker claims that her version of the myth of Philomela was ‘inspired by’ Sophocles, but retells the story ‘as reported by Ovid and Robert Graves’; she also refers to the play as a ‘Greek myth’ which ‘answered [her] passion... for the Greeks’.⁶⁶ Wertenbaker’s ambivalence about and distancing from the Ovidian basis of her play has been reflected in the scholarship, which commonly reads the play as a ‘modern tragedy’ and a reconstruction of the Sophoclean fragments.⁶⁷ Yet only twenty-four lines of Sophocles’ lost tragedy *Tereus* are extant; while Wertenbaker may wish to align herself with the fragmentary Sophoclean text for the way in which it materially represents a fragmentary ‘feminine’ narrative, as in *Dianeira* Wertenbaker clearly draws on Ovid’s version of the story at *Met.* 6.424-676.⁶⁸ Before discussing *The Love of the Nightingale* in detail it will be useful to provide a survey of the Philomela myth as it appears in Graves, Sophocles, and Ovid.

Seventeen fragments of Sophocles’ *Tereus* are collected in Radt, although none have survived with any explicit context.⁶⁹ The play opens with a speech by a Thracian male character

⁶⁵ *The Love of the Nightingale* was first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, 28 October 1988.

⁶⁶ Wertenbaker (2008, p. 39; 1996, p. viii). Wertenbaker also recalls from her childhood Hans Christian Andersen’s ‘The Little Mermaid’, ‘cutting out her tongue for the sake of a boring prince who didn’t even notice her. I wonder sometimes if it disturbed me so much it eventually drove me to write *The Love of the Nightingale*... How can one trace those influences?’ (1992b, p. 236).

⁶⁷ On the play as Greek drama, see Soncini (1999), Rabillard (1999), and Monrós-Gaspar (2006); on Wertenbaker’s plays as ‘modern’ tragedy, see Wagner (1995), and Freeman (2008, 2010). Babbage (2011, pp. 125-127) notes both Sophocles and Ovid as sources; Hall (2009a) criticizes Sellers (2001) for ignoring the Sophoclean elements of the play. On tragedy in Ovid’s Philomela episode, and how it reworks Sophocles’ *Tereus* and Euripides’ *Bacchae*, see Larmour (1990), Dobrov (1993), Gildenhard and Zissos (1999), and Curley (1997, 2003).

⁶⁸ On Sophocles’ *Tereus*, see Fitzpatrick (2001; 2007), March (2003), and Coe (2013); also Curley (1997) who discusses both Ovid and Sophocles. Philomela, Procne, and Tereus also appear in Ovid at *Tr.* 2.389-390, 3.12.9-10, and *Fast.* 2.629, 853-856.

⁶⁹ I follow Fitzpatrick’s suggestion for the plot based upon the extant fragments (Fitzpatrick, 2007); see also Fitzpatrick (2001). For the fragments of *Tereus* see Radt (fr. 580-595b ≈ Nauck fr. 523-538); for the

(Herald) returning from Athens ahead of Tereus.⁷⁰ Procne enters during the prologue and remains on-stage for the majority of the play. A chorus of Thracian women are sympathetic to Procne.⁷¹ Tereus returns from Athens; he claims that Philomela is dead, but he is accompanied by a mute slave who is the forcibly disguised Philomela.⁷² Procne laments her isolation in Thrace and comments more broadly on the abused social position of married women.⁷³ The ‘voice of the shuttle’ refers to the woven cloth with which Philomela reveals the truth.⁷⁴ The recognition sequence reveals both Tereus’ rape and mutilation, and Philomela’s real identity. An unnamed male character confirms the truth to Procne.⁷⁵ There proceeds an *agon* between Procne and Tereus.⁷⁶ Procne plans and executes her revenge. Tereus learns about his act of cannibalism and attempts to exact revenge on the sisters; he pursues them.⁷⁷ A messenger returns from Tereus’ pursuit of the women.⁷⁸ The audience learns about the metamorphoses of the sisters and Tereus via a *deus ex machina*, Apollo.⁷⁹ The play concludes with a conventional closing coda spoken by the chorus.⁸⁰

In Ovid, the episode begins in Athens with Procne’s betrothal to Tereus; she is given by her father to form a military alliance with Tereus. The marriage is ill-omened; a son Itys is born

reconstructed text and commentary see Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick and Talboy (2006); also Sutton (1984, pp. 127-132).

⁷⁰ Fr. 582.

⁷¹ Fr. 584.

⁷² Fr. 585; followed by a choral ode, fr. 591. In Antoninus Liberalis’ *Metamorphoses*, which post-dates both Sophocles and Ovid, Tereus returns to Thrace with Philomela and installs her in the palace disguised as a slave; Fitzpatrick (2007).

⁷³ Fr. 583.

⁷⁴ Fr. 595; *κερκίδος φωνή*; Aristotle, *Poet.* 1454b 30.

⁷⁵ Fr. 588; followed by a choral ode, fr. 593 and 592.

⁷⁶ Fr. 587.

⁷⁷ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* l. 563 suggests a chase-scene in *Tereus*; Fitzpatrick (2007).

⁷⁸ Fr. 586.

⁷⁹ Fr. 581, 582.

⁸⁰ Fr. 590. Fitzpatrick (2007) suggests that, despite the title, Procne was the main character of the tragedy (positing Sophocles’ *Electra* as a comparable female character who enacts an ambivalent revenge), and that Philomela would have been present on-stage as a central but silent character, similar to the silent Iole in *Trachiniae*.

in Thrace. Five years later, Procne asks Tereus if she can see her sister, Philomela, whom she misses. Tereus travels to Athens, sees Philomela and immediately and violently desires her; he persuades Pandion to let him take her to Thrace. Tereus watches her greedily during the sea-voyage. Arriving in Thrace, Tereus drags Philomela to a hut, rapes her, and after she eloquently confronts him, cuts out her tongue. Tereus lies to Procne that Philomela is dead, but returns to rape Philomela repeatedly in the hut. One year later, Philomela weaves a tapestry depicting the crime, sending this as a gift via a slave to her sister. Procne uses the festival of Bacchus as cover to find Philomela; Procne decides to take revenge on Tereus by killing their son. She cooks Itys and feeds him to Tereus; when she and Philomela reveal what they have done, Tereus chases the women to kill them; the three are metamorphosed into birds mid-flight.⁸¹

In Graves' version of the Philomela myth (collected under 'Tereus'), it is Procne, not Philomela, who is concealed in a wood cabin and whose tongue is cut out by Tereus. Procne weaves a bridal robe to send to Philomela, whom Tereus has raped and is about to marry by force, having told her that Procne is dead.⁸² An oracle warns Tereus that his son will be killed by the hand of a blood relative; Tereus kills his brother Dryas. After the sisters are reunited, Procne kills and cooks her son, feeds him to Tereus, and the story ends with the metamorphoses of the three characters (Procne into a swallow, Philomela into a nightingale, and Tereus into a hoopoe).

The action of Wertebaker's play begins with Procne's betrothal to Tereus, exchanged as a token of gratitude by her father King Pandion of Athens for Tereus' military assistance,

⁸¹ On tragedy in Ovid's Philomela episode, and how it reworks Sophocles' *Tereus* and Euripides' *Bacchae*, see Larmour (1990), Dobrov (1993), Gildenhard and Zissos (1999), and Curley (1997, 2003).

⁸² Graves (1985, pp. 64-65).

after two scenes which separately introduce the male and female worlds of *The Love of the Nightingale* (represented by a male chorus of soldiers, and a witty exchange between the two sisters). In Thrace, a son Itys is born, and Procne misses Philomele [*sic*]. Procne is attended by a female chorus of Thracian women with whom she cannot communicate. Tereus travels back to Athens to fetch Philomele and watches a performance of Euripides' *Hippolytus* at the Athenian court; the characters analyse the message of the play. Wertebaker has Philomele accompanied to Thrace by a nurse Niobe; Philomele attempts a romance with the ship's captain en route. Tereus kills the captain out of jealousy, before lying to Philomele that Procne is dead. Tereus' advances are rebuked by Philomele who insists on her consent; he rapes her and tells Procne that Philomele is dead. Niobe and Philomele discuss the consequences of the rape. When Tereus returns, the imprisoned Philomele angrily ridicules him; Tereus cuts out her tongue. Procne and Philomele are reunited during the festival of Bacchus; Procne finds Philomele publicly dramatizing her rape with puppets. Itys arrives at the festival, spies on the women, and Philomele kills him with his own sword as he attempts to attack her. Itys' death is revealed to Tereus, and the characters are metamorphosed. The play ends with a conversation between Philomele-as-nightingale and Itys; the nightingale sings.

While Wertebaker borrows formally from Greek tragedy with her use of choruses and choral odes which punctuate the scenes, the arc of the play follows Ovid, beginning in Athens and closing in Thrace. Specific details are also taken from Ovid rather than Sophocles, including Procne's betrothal, Tereus' time at the Athenian court, Philomele's imprisonment, and the sisters' reunion at the festival of Bacchus. Tereus' murder of the ship's captain may be transposed from Graves' account of Tereus' murder of his brother; the detail for the specific birds into which the characters are metamorphosed may also come from Graves, as Ovid does

not specify.⁸³ As in *Dianeira*, however, Wertebaker also makes significant variations and additions to her Ovidian source text. The roles of the sisters are vastly expanded; there are additional characters, most notably the nurse and the queen of Athens (both absent in Ovid's version); time within the play expands and contracts as existing moments of the myth are delayed or expanded (for example, the time spent at the Athenian court, the lengthy journey to Thrace); Philomele and her nurse analyse the rape in a scene after the act but before Philomele confronts Tereus; Philomela's tapestry is replaced with a puppet show; and a final scene adds a coda to the tale that takes place after the characters' metamorphoses.

4.4.1 'Metamorphosis'

Prior to writing *The Love of the Nightingale* Wertebaker had been working on a larger project to adapt *Metamorphoses*. Ten draft manuscript pages of 'Metamorphosis' remain; these pages detail Wertebaker's elaboration on the scene of Procne and Philomela's killing of Itys, and her ideas for staging Procne's confrontation with Tereus.⁸⁴ This suggests that Wertebaker did not translate—nor adapt her translation into play form—chronologically or in a linear fashion, but began near the end of the myth as it appears in Ovid. Wertebaker may see Tereus' realization of the consequences of his actions as the potential scene of 'metamorphosis' rather than the characters' transformations into birds; nor does she focus on Philomela alone, but sees the confrontation between Procne and Tereus as the emotional and dramatic highpoint of the

⁸³ *Met.* 6.667-670; Tereus is named as a hoopoe, *epops*, but the line is contested (Tarrant, 2004, p. 177). In Greek literature Procne is metamorphosed into a nightingale (her song eternally mourns her son, Itys), and Philomela into the swallow; in Roman literature this order is usually reversed (Raeburn, 2004, pp. 648-649 n. 668-669). *Tr.* 3.12.9, *hirundo*, suggests that Procne is the swallow although Ovid maintains the mythological ambiguity of the specific metamorphoses in his version contained in *Met.* Cf. in Catullus 65, Procne is a nightingale.

⁸⁴ 'Metamorphosis' (c. 1985-1987), Timberlake Wertebaker Archive, British Library Manuscripts Collection, Add. MS 79270, ff. 1-90.

play. These few draft pages provide an intriguing glimpse into Wertebaker's working method and her approach as a dramatist to adapting the Latin text. Although she refocalizes Ovid's tale, Wertebaker's careful translation work on *Metamorphoses* is evidenced by the finished play, which follows closely not only Ovid's plot, but also contains verbal and thematic echoes, borrowing phrasing, imagery, and similes. *The Love of the Nightingale* also explores and expands the Ovidian themes of metamorphosis and adaptation; both the nurse and Procne demonstrate the ease—or rejection—of adapting to new circumstances or environments, for example, and characters repeatedly say 'metamorphosis' and 'transformation'.⁸⁵

Although Wertebaker does not incorporate any Latin explicitly within the text (as she included Greek phrases in her Greek adaptations), Ovidian language and imagery permeate the play. Images of birds and wings run from scene to scene and anticipate the final metamorphoses of the characters ('beating of wings'; 'my caged bird'), and a final chorus of birds appears at the end of the play to create the illusion on-stage of the metamorphoses.⁸⁶ The recurring imagery of earthquakes also thematically links the play to two further episodes of sexual violence in Ovid, evoking both the earthquake at *Met.* 5.356-358 which precipitates the rape of Proserpina (in Wertebaker's play *The Break of Day*, a character specifically recalls this myth), and the earthquake caused by Boreas as he flies to kidnap Orithyia—the Ovidian episode which directly follows the story of Philomela (*Met.* 6.699 ff.).⁸⁷ *The Love of the Nightingale* also alludes to many other Ovidian episodes; the members of the female chorus are named Hero, Echo, Iris, June (Juno), and Helen, and the story of the pure love and transformation into trees of Philemon and Baucis serves as an ironic foil to Procne and Tereus' own unhappy marriage.⁸⁸ The spider-

⁸⁵ Emphasized particularly in the final scene; see Wertebaker (1996, p. 352).

⁸⁶ Wertebaker (1996, pp. 300, 305, 307; 338; 352).

⁸⁷ Wertebaker (1996, pp. 316, 319; 2002a, pp. 70-71).

⁸⁸ Wertebaker (1996, p. 340).

web in which Hero feels trapped, unable to prove her knowledge in the face of greater authority, alludes to Arachne's own struggle to prove her skill, and Narcissus is repeatedly evoked as an image of self-knowledge ('on a clear day, we see our own reflections'; 'If you bend over the stream and search for your reflection, Tereus, this is what it looks like').⁸⁹ There are also references to the stories of Lycaon, Prometheus, and Medea.⁹⁰

Most striking of the Ovidian images, however, are the translations and transformations of phrases taken from the Philomela episode in *Metamorphoses*. Wertenbaker's line, 'In the cold dawns, Tereus burns', for example, suggests that her Tereus awakens after his sleepless night of burning lust spent in Ovid's text (*ignes | ipse suos nutrit cura remouente soporem*, 6.492-493), while Philomele's 'wandering tongue' translates Ovid's 'quivering tongue' (*radix micat ultima linguae*, 6.557).⁹¹ The male chorus in part voice Ovid's narrative, describing Tereus' wonderment at Philomele's beauty and the bad omens they witness; the 'unspeakable' nature of the crimes they witness ('we cannot rephrase it for you') also evoke Ovid's repeated play on *fas/ nefas* in the Latin (holy/ unholy/ unable to be spoken).⁹² Wertenbaker also transforms Ovid's similes of horror and predatory hunting in the original text to reclaim them as metaphors of a positive and inquisitive female sexual desire. In the Latin, Tereus preys on Philomela like an eagle (*Iouis ales*, 517), a wolf (*lupi*, 528), and a bird of prey (*auidos... unguis*, 530); Philomela's tongue quivers on the floor like a snake (*colubrae*, 559); and Procne is like a tiger by the river Ganges as she kills Itys (*Gangetica... tigris*, 636-637); in *The Love of the Nightingale*, however, these metaphors are used by a woman to speak of her sexual desire, as

⁸⁹ Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 316; 297; 351).

⁹⁰ Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 332; 348; 349).

⁹¹ Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 308; 329).

⁹² *profanus* (431); *fassusque nefas* (524); *fasque nefasque* (585); *nefandam* (601); *nefas* (613); *fas* (649).

Philomele twice describes her lust as ‘tigers, rivers, serpents’ writhing below her stomach (an echo of Plath’s own voracious panther).⁹³

Further intertextual references run throughout the play. There are Homeric sirens and witches who turn men into beasts, and the sea-voyage over the ‘wine-dark sea’ from Athens to Thrace stages a mini-*Odyssey*, including a catalogue of islands passed along the way and accounts of wild men living on strange mountains.⁹⁴ Wertebaker explicitly references Euripides via the performance of *Hippolytus* at the Athenian court, and, like Ovid, by drawing on *Bacchae* for the play’s gory denouement; Wertebaker’s play also alludes to Aristophanes’ *Birds*, which itself parodies Sophocles’ lost *Tereus*. Wertebaker’s most important intertext for her engagement with Ovid, however, is Shakespeare (*The Love of the Nightingale* was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company). As well as drawing on *Hamlet* for the play-within-a-play scene, Wertebaker’s choice of the Philomela myth looks back to Shakespeare’s own use of Ovid’s Philomela in *Titus Andronicus*.⁹⁵ In addition, eight of the sixteen actors in the first production of Wertebaker’s play were concurrently rehearsing *King Lear* for the RSC, and thus a ‘subterranean intertextual conversation with *King Lear* cradled *Nightingale*’s production’.⁹⁶ Wertebaker’s engagement with the Philomela myth may be also be filtered through the work of Virginia Woolf, who employs the song of the nightingale as a trope throughout her essay on women’s readings of Greek texts.⁹⁷ Furthermore, Woolf’s *Between the Acts* can be read as a rewriting of Sophocles’ *Tereus*, structured thematically by

⁹³ Wertebaker (1996, pp. 293, 294).

⁹⁴ Wertebaker (1996, pp. 326, 327; 307-308; 310); also ‘dawn, so loved by the poets. | Rosy-fingered, female’ (p. 307).

⁹⁵ ‘the play’s the thing | Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king’, *Hamlet* Act 2, sc. 2, ll. 605-606; McDonald (1994) also notes the reference to Hamlet; on Shakespeare’s Philomela, see Newman (1994); on *Titus Andronicus* as a reading of Seneca’s *Thyestes* as a reading of Ovid’s Philomela episode, see Schiesaro (2003, pp. 70-89); cf. *The Rape of Lucrece*.

⁹⁶ Freeman (2012, p. 214).

⁹⁷ E.g. ‘On Not Knowing Greek’ (Woolf, 2003a).

the images of the swallow and the nightingale and ‘dramatic’ in form.⁹⁸ Wertenbaker thus knowingly places her play within a complex dramatic tradition of reception, using Aristophanes, Shakespeare, and Woolf as often subversive lenses through which to view the texts of Sophocles and Ovid.⁹⁹

Wertenbaker’s play, like Ovid’s original, readily invites a feminist interpretation of its story of sexual violence and the silencing of women, and scholarly criticism has tended to focus on the implications for gender relations in the play, particularly as it relates to the play’s representation of language.¹⁰⁰ Wertenbaker writes in the introduction to the play that ‘[a]lthough it has been interpreted as being about women, I was actually thinking of the violence that erupts in societies when they have been silenced for too long’.¹⁰¹ Wertenbaker notes that the play was written against the backdrop of late-1980s Apartheid-era South Africa and the upheaval of political systems in Eastern Europe, as well as following years of cultural and social deprivation under Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government. Wertenbaker argues that her play must be understood in terms of the violence committed against silenced and oppressed groups; recent criticism has examined the play’s postcolonial implications, arguing that the silence of the play represents racial as well as gendered oppression.¹⁰² Throughout the play Wertenbaker explores the themes of silence and language as characters variously choose not to

⁹⁸ Marcus (1982, p. 67); Woolf (2003a; 1992b). Marcus also suggests that Woolf’s ‘A Society’ reads as a modern version of *Lysistrata*, mocking the institutions of the men of her class (1982, p. 84).

⁹⁹ Following Wertenbaker’s play, there has been a cluster of new plays, poetry, and prose works by women writers, which draw on the Philomela myth; e.g. Kane (1995, pub. 2001), Iizuka (1999), Fitzgerald (2000), Laurens (2000), Shields (2011), Winterson (2012), Mills (2013), and Harvey (2014); on Winterson see Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013b, pp. 287-290). For scholarly work on the use of the Philomela myth in contemporary poetry, prose, and drama more widely see Huggan (1990), Cutter (2000), Linklater (2001), Hinds (2005), Goldenhard and Zissos (2007), Trivellini (2012), Teruel (2013), Ue (2013), and Hardy (2014).

¹⁰⁰ See Varty (1994), Wagner (1995), Winston (1995), Rabillard (1999), Aston (2003, pp. 149-168), Cousin (1996, pp. 113-121), Roth and Freeman (2008), Gömceli (2010), Babbage (2011), and Freeman (2012).

¹⁰¹ Wertenbaker (1996, p. viii).

¹⁰² See Roth (2009), and Bush (2013), although both may be committing a critical fallacy by following Wertenbaker’s own thoughts about the trajectory of her work (e.g. Wertenbaker, 2002c). Carlson (1993) discusses feminist and postcolonial readings in theatre reviews of *The Love of the Nightingale*.

speak, feel that they cannot speak, are ignored, or tell others to be silent (key themes in Ovid's Philomela episode and *Metamorphoses* more widely).¹⁰³ Wertenbaker may use these themes to rewrite or to reconcile the problematic divisions drawn between 'civilized' Athenians and 'barbarian' Thracians in both Sophocles and Ovid; but the sexual and psychological violence perpetrated against women in the play is never symbolic or metaphorical alone. In *The Love of the Nightingale* Wertenbaker again foregrounds women's stories and feminine modes of speaking and understanding the world.¹⁰⁴

4.4.2 Procne and Philomele

In *Metamorphoses* Procne only appears as a subject in the final violent third of the episode. Until the moment she learns of her sister's supposed death (*Met.* 6.563), Procne is described only in relation to the men around her: as Tereus' bride, or her father's daughter.¹⁰⁵ After Philomela's rape, however, Ovid figures Procne as Philomela's sister; the theme of sisterhood is emphasized by the repetition of *soror* nine times.¹⁰⁶ In this way Ovid shows Procne's gradual shift in obligation from husband to sister; in the middle of the episode the poet visually and semantically pulls Procne between Tereus and Philomela through close juxtaposition in the Latin: *coniuge... germanam* (564); *matrona tyranni | germanae* (581-582).

¹⁰³ On language in Wertenbaker, see Rabey (1990), Wilson (1993), Carlson (2000), and Bush (2009).

¹⁰⁴ Feminist critics have noted the political implications of Ovid's myth of Philomela. Joplin (1984) links Philomela's rape to three other tales of rape in Ovid's *Fasti* that are explicitly analogous to crises of boundaries (the sacrifice to Terminus, the rape of Lucretia, and the perpetual flight of Procne from Tereus). Political anxieties are thus transformed into sexual violence; the sisters are surrogate victims for the city's walls, and their bodies the body politic, a reading that is heightened by Wertenbaker's play. See also Enterline (2000, *passim*).

¹⁰⁵ *conubio Procnes iunxit*, 6.428; *coniuncti Procne Tereusque*, 433; *Pandione nata*, 436; *uiro Procne*, 440; Tereus invokes her name falsely at ll. 468 and 470.

¹⁰⁶ Note the double end-line positions of *sororis* at ll. 535 and 537, and again at ll. 604 and 606; *sororis* appears singly at ll. 610, 630, 633, all three in end-line positions again; Procne also says 'sister' three times in three lines when she asks Tereus to bring Philomela to visit (*sorori... soror... germanam*, 441-444), the missing sister embraced by the last and first word-order line positions of *sorori... germanam*.

Finally, seizing subjectivity in speech, Procne invokes both her former titles of ‘daughter of Pandion’ and ‘wife of Tereus’ only to violently reject them, and Tereus-as-husband now becomes object to her avenging subject.¹⁰⁷

As in Ovid, the theme of sisterhood is emphasized throughout the play but here it also suggests the feminist notion of sisterhood that extends beyond blood ties: Procne and Philomele make repeated references to each other when they are apart; an additional scene staged before the main Ovidian narrative imagines a long conversation between the two sisters; nurse Niobe recalls her lost sisters; and the female chorus repeatedly attempt to appeal to Procne as fellow women.¹⁰⁸ Procne and Philomele both play a greater role in Wertebaker’s play than they do comparatively in Ovid, and the playwright foregrounds the experiences of her female characters and their interiority (in *Metamorphoses*, events are described by the authorial narrator or through Tereus’ eyes). The focus on the experience of women mythic characters is also emphasized by the two epigraphs to the play; the first from poet Eavan Boland’s ‘The Journey’, a work of feminist ‘re-vision’ that retells an episode of Irish folklore from the woman’s perspective, and the second a translation of Sophocles fr. 583 and 584.¹⁰⁹ The fragments lament the experience of women married off to ‘strange husbands’ in foreign lands, who, ‘after the yoking of one night, | We are bound to like, and deem it well with us’; the speaker contrasts this situation with the happy naivety of a girl’s youth, and expresses her envy of those who have ‘never had experience | Of a strange land’.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *Met.* 6.647 (*coniunx*), 649 (*uiro*).

¹⁰⁸ Sophocles’ interest in sisters is also a notable feature of his work (e.g. the conversations between Antigone and Ismene), so Wertebaker’s expansion of the sisters’ dialogue may be to speculatively explore what the two sisters would converse about in the lost tragedy. However, as Philomela would have been a mute on-stage character in *Tereus* (much like Iole in *Trachiniae*), Wertebaker takes her Philomele’s eloquence from Ovid.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Listen. This is the noise of myth. It makes the same sound as shadow. Can you hear it?’ (Boland, 1987, p. 322).

¹¹⁰ ‘Now, by myself, I am nothing; yea, full oft | I have regarded woman’s fortunes thus, | That we are nothing ... thrust out and marketed abroad, | Far from our parents and ancestral gods, | Some to strange husbands, some to

Just as Deianeira's obscurity was 'part of her story', in *The Love of the Nightingale* Procne is introduced as 'the motor of a myth that leaves her mostly absent'.¹¹¹ This description may stimulate the audience's expectation that Wertebaker will tell Procne's missing story as a feminist act of reparation; while Procne's larger role acts to resituate her in the audience's mythic consciousness, Wertebaker excludes Procne from the majority of the play's scenes. Wertebaker's resistance to writing Procne back into the myth despite explicitly drawing attention to her highlights Procne's conspicuous absence in the Latin text; an absence that Wertebaker stages in the play. Rather than providing a fixed, alternative ending for Procne's story, the playwright instead encourages her audience to pay attention to this woman who disappears and to engage actively with the myth, to return to the original and to take note of her silences. Wertebaker's insistence on this strategy of revisionary mythmaking, that is, to stage the absences and silences rather than fill them in, and her refusal to provide neat endings for her characters, may again be a mode of feminine expression that resists masculine closure, allowing Wertebaker to stage forgotten mythic women in a way that keeps them pointedly fragmentary and unfinished.

Yet Wertebaker's Procne is no facile feminist heroine. Procne frequently refuses to engage in dialogue with other women, either with the female chorus or her sister when she broaches an uncomfortable topic ('Don't say that, Philomele').¹¹² One particularly dismissive response to the female chorus ('What are you women muttering about this time?'), closely

barbarous, | One to a rude, one to a wrangling home; | And these, after the yoking of a night, | We are bound to like, and deem it well with us. || Much | I envy thee thy life: and most of all, | That thou hast never had experience | Of a strange land', trans. G. Young, quoted in Wertebaker (1996, p. 285); fr. in Radt (1977).

¹¹¹ Wertebaker (1996, p. 316). In contrast, Wertebaker's Clytaemnestra does not worry that she will be forgotten, but is all too aware of how her story will be mis-told in the future; as Bush writes of another of Wertebaker's characters, she is 'aware of the danger of being *post-determined*' (2013, p. 64).

¹¹² Wertebaker (1996, p. 292); Procne 'turns her head away' (p. 297) from the female chorus and rejects their offers to initiate her in local rites, calling them '[b]arbarian practices' (p. 299).

echoes Tereus' own remark that his wife and her handmaids talk about '[w]hat[ever it is] women talk about' (recalling Philomela's own murmuring, *immurmurat*, *Met.* 6.558).¹¹³ Over the course of the play, Wertebaker uses Procne to highlight the pathos and dangers of women's complicity in patriarchal culture. At first Procne is lonely, lamenting that 'I cannot talk to my husband. I have nothing to say to my son'; Wertebaker makes it clear that Procne's marriage to Tereus is the first act of silencing (and violence) in the story.¹¹⁴ Yet as Procne becomes increasingly isolated, she increasingly accepts the dominant masculine narrative around her. When the sisters are reunited, Procne has lived for so long in the masculine culture of Thrace that she at first doubts Philomele's story, and repeats verbatim misogynist myths about rape:

You were always wild. How do I know you didn't take him to your bed?
He had to keep you back from his soldiers. Desire always burnt in you. Did you play with his sailors? Did you shame us all? Why should I believe you?

There's no shame in your eyes. Why should I believe you?¹¹⁵

Here, Procne argues that Philomele must be guilty of seducing Tereus if she has been previously sexually active or if she displays 'no shame' (compare Ovid's Philomela, who cannot lift her face from shame and self-blame: *sed non attollere contra | sustinet haec oculos, paelex sibi uisa sororis, | deiectoque in humum uultu*, *Met.* 6.605-607). It might be easier to disregard such statements if they were spoken by a male character; delivered by a woman, however, such lines encourage the audience to question their own complicity in believing and perpetuating rape myths, both ancient and contemporary. Wertebaker's complex presentation of Procne

¹¹³ Wertebaker (1996, pp. 316, 312).

¹¹⁴ Wertebaker (1996, pp. 299); on marriage as symbolic death, and as figured in the Persephone myth, see Foley (1994, pp. 104-112); on Roman marriage, see Treggiari (1991); on marriage in the ancient world, see Cameron and Kuhrt (1983, *passim*); Zeitlin (1996, p. 10) notes that one function of patriarchal marriage is to separate women from each other and thus prevent the 'threat' of mother-daughter (or in Wertebaker's play, sisterly) bonds.

¹¹⁵ Wertebaker (1996, p. 343).

facilitates a demonstration in the play of women's ability to abandon sisterhood and become complicit in male violence; an important feminist critique of women.¹¹⁶ Procne's ambivalent feminism may also be a cipher for the playwright's own hesitations about aligning herself explicitly with a sisterhood; Wertebaker carefully shows that Procne's wish for solitude is understandable, and her self-distancing from the female chorus expresses Procne's resistance to joining a homogenous group and her fear of losing the little voice and individual identity she has been able to assemble in masculine culture.

Wertebaker retains the infanticide that concludes Ovid's story, although she makes some significant alterations. There is no dismemberment or cooking of the child, nor do the sisters exult in his death as they do of Itys' cannibalization in Ovid (*dissimulare nequit crudelia gaudia Procne*, 6.653). Spencer jibes that '[g]ood feminist that she is, Miss Wertebaker cannot permit such womanly barbarism'; yet this alteration may represent a feminist rejection of the particularly domestic nature of Procne's revenge in Ovid (just as Wertebaker will also reject Philomela's domestic act of weaving).¹¹⁷ After the killing there is a final scene of resolution between Philomele and Itys. Procne's absence from this scene is unsettling, and exposes the suggestion in the original story that a mother who assists in the murder of her own child is too monstrous for absolution: she can only be metamorphosed. By retaining the act of infanticide, but also staging the mythic consequences of this for Procne—her disappearance—Wertebaker problematizes the traditional gendering of violence and the expectations placed upon

¹¹⁶ On women's complicity in male fascism (political and domestic) and the 'myth' of the feminine, see Macciocchi (1979); also de Beauvoir (1997), and Woolf (2014).

¹¹⁷ Spencer, theatre review in the *Daily Telegraph*, 25 August 1989, quoted in Cousin (1996, p. 120). Brown (2005a, pp. 101-102) suggests that Wertebaker changes the ending of Ovid's episode to redress the usual 'scapegoating of society's female victims', where the sisters' deed is made to eclipse Tereus' own crime. On the commonplace opposition of Greek and sewing in Victorian women writers, see Hurst (2006, p. 195).

motherhood in patriarchal cultural, both ancient and contemporary.¹¹⁸ The playwright suggests that the binary division of men and women into ‘active’ soldiers and ‘passive’ mothers must be broken, even if this requires the portrayal of ‘bad women’.¹¹⁹ In her play it is the gendered judgement of Procne’s action and the mythic treatment that she receives for that action simply because she is a woman and a mother that is shown to be the most disturbing element of the myth.

Helene Foley, with whom Wertenbaker has collaborated, argues that feminist translations and adaptations of classical works can detract from feminist interpretations of the original text in their lack of subtlety, or in their too obvious deviations from the plots or characters of the classical texts.¹²⁰ That is, that feminist revisionary mythmaking can be marred by its eagerness to rewrite problematic female characters and ‘change the ending’.¹²¹ In her article, Foley quotes Wertenbaker on the personal appeal to her of mythic ‘bad women’:

[the Greek poets] didn’t look down on women and didn’t give them small, stupid roles. The great flaw of modern plays is that they always try to make women nice. These women are terrible, and they have the courage of their horror.¹²²

The feminist potential of the courageous horror of the women of ancient myth (including those of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*) can be revealed if they are read through a feminist lens, as a ‘resisting reader’, for example; yet without a feminist lens, there is a danger that the women

¹¹⁸ On motherhood and feminist adaptations of Medea, see Rose (2014).

¹¹⁹ Foley (2004). On the gendering of violence in Ovid, Segal wonders if Procne is at first silent like a woman and then *acts* like a man (1994, p. 271).

¹²⁰ Foley (1999).

¹²¹ On ‘changing the ending’: there are still differences in approach to feminist revisions of classical texts nearly thirty years after *The Love of the Nightingale* was first produced; two recent feminist adaptations, for example, Marina Carr’s *Hecuba* (2015, Royal Shakespeare Company) and Rachel Cusk’s *Medea* (2015, Almeida Theatre) both controversially removed the heroines’ acts of violence from their plays. On Cusk’s *Medea* and ‘changing the ending’ see Warner (2015).

¹²² Foley (1999, p. 4).

simply remain in the retelling the archetypes of sexual deviants, treacherous lovers, hysterical daughters, and monstrous mothers.¹²³ Perhaps Wertebaker's anxiety to assert authorship as 'writer' not 'adapter' and to 'sign her name' to her classical reception work is one way of ensuring that the feminist lens is in place. The potential for the replication of misogyny in the depiction of infanticide, for example, is reduced by virtue of having a woman writer present that story; nuance and focus changes when Ovid's story is delivered in a feminine voice.

The figure of Philomele is more easily read as a feminist character than her sister Procne. Drawing on Ovid's characterization of her as rhetorically skilful, Philomele is characterized from the beginning of the play by her love of theatre, language, and logic. The scene in which she is introduced neatly reverses the process by which she appears in *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid, Philomela enters the narrative through the eyes of her future rapist Tereus; she is described only in terms of her outer appearance, and Ovid draws attention to her as an objectified target of the male gaze.¹²⁴ In *The Love of the Nightingale*, Philomele is introduced mid-conversation with her sister and is subject, not object, of the story. The sisters engage in a lively discussion about sex and men precipitated by Philomele's desire for an object of her female gaze, a man the audience is not introduced to ('Look at the sweat shining down his body...'); the equal dialogue between the two sisters disrupts the authorial, Ovidian, omniscient narrative voice of the original story.¹²⁵ Philomele is portrayed as a desiring young woman ('he's so handsome I want to wrap my legs around him'), and her desiring subjectivity is reinforced by Wertebaker's addition to the Ovidian plot of a scene of attempted seduction by the active Philomele of the

¹²³ On the feminist 'resisting reader', see Fetterley (1978).

¹²⁴ *ecce uenit magno diues Philomela paratu, | diuitior forma; quales audire solemus | Naidas et Dryadas mediis incedere siluis, | si modo des illis cultus similesque paratus*, 'Look! Philomela! She came, adorned with great jewels, yet more sparkling in form; she was like one of the Naiads and Dryads you hear about who walk the woods, if only they, too, were so beautifully arrayed', *Met.* 6.451-454. Tereus is characterized by his active gaze.

¹²⁵ Wertebaker (1996, pp. 292-295; 292).

ship's bashful captain. Yet Philomele is also tragically naive and uneducated about men and the act of sex itself ('What are they like: naked?').¹²⁶ While she has received an Athenian education in logic, drama, and philosophy, her conceptions of sex and her own sexual desire are still controlled and codified by male language: she can only speak in Ovid's metaphors of 'tigers, rivers, serpents' in an attempt to express her desire. Philomele's confusion about female sexual desire, mixed with a sense of shame (emphasized by watching the 'shame' of Phaedra on-stage within the play), leads her to believe that: 'fear, desire, they're the same'.¹²⁷ In this respect, Philomele chimes with Plath's connection between sexual desire, fantasy, and guilt, and echoes the speaker's confusion of lust and terror in her poem 'Pursuit': 'Appalled by secret want'; 'that dark guilt'.¹²⁸

Wertenbaker has commented that the strong desiring subjectivity of her Philomele was in part a reaction against the notion that 'women don't desire', and the play is full of desiring women, young and old, married and unmarried (this also reverses the most frequent representation of women in *Metamorphoses* as object to another's lust).¹²⁹ A feminist reading of Wertenbaker's intention to portray desiring women is invited, and the play also presents the unhappy consequences of the assumption that 'women don't desire'.¹³⁰ The old nurse Niobe laments, for example, 'I wouldn't mind a soldier. They don't look at me now. All my life I was afraid of them and then one day they stop looking and it's even more frightening', and Procne's pain is palpable when Tereus rejects her sexual advances:

¹²⁶ Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 292; 293). On female sexuality in Ovid's and Wertenbaker's Philomela respectively, see Brown (2004; 2005a, pp. 85-104).

¹²⁷ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 325).

¹²⁸ Plath (*CP* 22); cf. Plath's early journal entries ('Pursuit, guilt', *J* 350); on 'Pursuit' see chapter 3.4.2; like Plath, Wertenbaker has also translated Racine's *Phèdre* (2009, unpublished).

¹²⁹ Wertenbaker, quoted in Carlson (1991, p. 245).

¹³⁰ And yet, at the same time, the older virgin is abhorred; de Beauvoir (1997, p. 187).

Procne ... I am a woman now. I can take pleasure in my husband.

She approaches Tereus, but he puts her away from him and leaves. When he is gone, she holds the bottom of her stomach.

Desire. Now. So late.
Oh, you gods, you are cruel.¹³¹

In Wertebaker's play it is Tereus' sexual rejection that precipitates Procne's transformation into a Bacchant—a rejection by the male world that sends her back to her sister.

Wertebaker's portrayal of women's and particularly Philomele's desiring subjectivity also counters prevalent societal rape myths (such as those expressed by Procne, above) which cast doubt on the possibility that a sexually active woman can be raped; Wertebaker questions 'the tendency to see rape as a violation of chastity and virginity, rather than simply a violation of a woman's right to choose her sexual partner'.¹³² Before Tereus rapes her, Philomele explicitly insists on her right to consent to sex (to which Tereus chillingly replies, 'no, you don't have to').¹³³

Philomele's rape occurs off-stage, while her subsequent mutilation is bloody and graphic.¹³⁴ This staging decision emphasizes Ovid's own presentation of the two acts (Philomela's rape is described metaphorically and euphemistically in the Latin in two words, while her mutilation is described in eleven lines of macabre detail); but it also allows

¹³¹ Wertebaker (1996, pp. 330; 340).

¹³² Bush (2013, p. 101).

¹³³ Wertebaker (1996, p. 329).

¹³⁴ Wertebaker (1996, p. 337).

Wertenbaker to avoid sensationalizing the rape, a strategy which refuses to visually objectify the rape victim (as Tereus views Philomela in Ovid).¹³⁵

After her rape, the audience next see Philomele being washed down by her nurse, Niobe; Philomele's bloodied body both visually echoes Lavinia's shocking reappearance after her rape and mutilation in *Titus Andronicus*, and draws upon Ovid's description of Philomela as bloody and torn, like a wounded lamb or a dove with bloodied feathers (*agna... saucia; columba... madefactis sanguine plumis*, 6.527, 529). Philomele's conversation with Niobe and the sentiments of her subsequent confrontation with Tereus also closely echo Philomela's monologue in Ovid (6.533-548), but include significant variations. While Ovid stresses Philomela's fear before and after the rape (*pallentem trepidamque et cuncta timentem... cum lacrimis... tremit... pauens... horret... timet*, 6.522-530), Worthenbaker turns Philomele's initial fear and 'trembling limbs' into disgust: she says to Niobe 'wash me' four times consecutively, and she refuses Niobe's suggestion that she become a passive, 'grovelling' victim: 'No... Never'.¹³⁶ Nor does Philomele accept that she should be personally ashamed of what has happened, in direct contrast to Ovid's Philomela who cannot lift her face from shame and self-blame.¹³⁷ As does Procne, Niobe also expects Philomele to feel shame; after the rape Niobe comments that it is 'her cheeks... where it hurts most. The shame'.¹³⁸ Yet despite her sexual naivety, Worthenbaker's Philomele correctly apportions blame for the rape to Tereus alone.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ *ui superat*, 'overcomes with force', *Met.* 6.525; cf. 551-562; on woman-as-spectacle, see Mulvey (1975); Worthenbaker thus avoids the pornographic implications of staging Philomela's rape; for the anti-pornographic stance of much second-wave feminism, see, e.g., Kappeler (1986), and Gubar and Hoff (1989).

¹³⁶ Worthenbaker (1996, pp. 330; 333-334; 334). In contrast, Ovid's Daphne blames her own beauty for Apollo's lust, *qua nimium placui, mutando perde figuram*, *Met.* 1.547.

¹³⁷ *Met.* 6.605-607; cf. Procne's accusation that Philomele must be guilty as she has 'no shame' in her eyes (Worthenbaker, 1996, p. 343).

¹³⁸ Worthenbaker (1996, p. 330).

¹³⁹ Although in Ovid Philomela also rightly reminds Tereus of his violence and broken oaths. Earlier, Niobe calls Philomele 'girl without shame' for talking to the ship's captain (p. 325).

This nuance of disgust and the rejection of shame fundamentally changes the tone of Philomele's speech to Tereus. As in Ovid, Wertenbaker's Philomele emphasizes the violence of the act, calls upon the gods, wishes that she was dead, reminds Tereus of Procne's trust in him, and (like Ovid's Philomela who defiantly calls on the woods, the stones, and the trees to witness her oath of vengeance) threatens to tell the men and women of Thrace about Tereus' deed. Yet rather than simply upbraid Tereus for his *diris... factis* (6.533), Philomele at first attempts to engage him in dialogue, asking Tereus thirteen unanswered questions (Why...? What...? Was...? Is...?) before changing tactics. Now, rather than threatening only to make his deed known (as in Ovid), Philomele threatens to expose Tereus' 'embarrassing' 'dribbling lust', and his 'puny manhood' which he had to 'stretch... to [her] intimacies'.¹⁴⁰

Did you tell [Procne] that despite my fear, your violence, when I saw you in your nakedness I couldn't help laughing because you were so shrivelled, so ridiculous, and it is not the way it is on the statues? Did you tell her you cut me because you yourself had no strength? Did you tell her I pitied her for having in her bed a man who could screech such quick and ugly pleasure... did you tell her that?¹⁴¹

Philomele's threat of sexual humiliation and her mockery of his virility rhetorically deconstructs the phallic power that Tereus holds over her.¹⁴²

Yet despite the articulacy of the sisters in the play (Procne says it is specifically the conversations with her sister that she misses the most), and Philomele's demonstration of Socratic dialogue and logic with Tereus, women are shown repeatedly to be ultimately powerless in the strictly hierarchical patriarchal society in which they live.¹⁴³ They are objects

¹⁴⁰ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 336).

¹⁴¹ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 336).

¹⁴² Varty (1994) establishes a connection between a woman's eloquence and her sexual power; read thus, Tereus cuts off Philomele's desiring subjectivity as well as her language, the two characteristics that define her as a person in the play.

¹⁴³ Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 299, 310).

of exchange to and victims of the men in the play, and their speech is either ignored or incomprehensible to the male characters. The female chorus ‘mutters’, for example, and Philomele is constantly rebuked by those around her for speaking out of turn, or for speaking in what is deemed to be an inappropriate manner to those more powerful than her in the hierarchy of gender and social position (‘Don’t say that Philomele’; ‘Philomele, you are talking to a king’; ‘Quiet, child’; ‘That’s enough... Quiet, woman’).¹⁴⁴ The irrelevance of women’s speech to the male characters is heightened by Wertenbaker’s addition to Ovid of a wife for King Pandion, identified only as ‘Queen’; her words are consistently ignored, powerless and ineffectual, or spoken over. When her daughter Procne unsuccessfully attempts to protest her betrothal, the Queen replies: ‘What can I say?’¹⁴⁵

After Tereus mutilates Philomele and cuts out her tongue, he explains that it was because she ‘threatened the order of [his] rule’; he finds her ‘more beautiful in her silence’ because she is evidence of his power over her.¹⁴⁶ ‘How could I allow rebellion? I had to keep you quiet. I am not sorry. Except for your pain. But it was you or me... You should have kept quiet. I was the stronger’.¹⁴⁷ Wertenbaker exposes in this scene the importance of language in the maintenance of social hierarchies, a point which is later reinforced when Niobe considers abandoning the ‘idiot’ Philomele, who, without a tongue, can no longer instruct her and maintain the mistress-servant hierarchy (‘She can no longer command me. What good is a servant without orders?’).¹⁴⁸ Power, language, and gender relations are inextricably linked throughout the play; by highlighting the link between knowledge and speech, or, the authority

¹⁴⁴ Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 316; 292; 303; 297; 336).

¹⁴⁵ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 297).

¹⁴⁶ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 338).

¹⁴⁷ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 338). Joplin (1984) on Ovid’s Philomela: ‘the political hierarchy built upon male sexual dominance requires the violent appropriation of the woman’s power to speak’.

¹⁴⁸ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 337).

to speak (that is, who has the power to know and tell) Wertenbaker weaves into her reception of Ovid an awareness of late-1980s feminist concerns with language and power invigorated by Foucauldian discourse theory.

4.4.3 Tereus and Itys

Although Wertenbaker certainly does not make the character of Tereus sympathetic or excuse his actions, she has created a more complicated Tereus than his incarnation in *Metamorphoses*. Ovid writes that Tereus came from a race of men innately predisposed to excessive lust, and that he is a product of a barbarian culture.¹⁴⁹ Wertenbaker removes the genetic connotations but shows instead that Tereus is a product of his social environment, the colonial and patriarchal system of the highly masculine culture of Thrace. Tereus struggles to communicate, particularly with women; his sentences are short, he avoids answering questions, he stalls conversation and creates silence in others, and when words fail him he can respond only with violence.¹⁵⁰ After his son's death Tereus attempts to excuse his past crimes, but language fails him once again: 'I had wanted to say... If I could explain... Beyond words... I can't say'.¹⁵¹ Tereus' lack of words is linked throughout the play with his lack of compassion;

¹⁴⁹ *digna quidem facies, sed et hunc innata libido | exstimulat, proumque genus regionibus illis | in Venerem est; flagrat uitio gentisque suoque*, 'Although her beautiful face was enough [to excite him], Tereus was spurred on by his innate lust—for people of his country are predisposed to sex; he blazed from the vice that was as much his people's as his own', *Met.* 6.458-460.

¹⁵⁰ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 337). Varty, a feminist linguistic theorist, suggests that as violence is more tolerated of men, they are able to avoid learning to communicate through dialogue and thus continue to respond with violence (1994, p. 89). For Tereus' speech, see, e.g.: '**Philomele** Tell me about my sister, Tereus. | **Tereus** I've already told you. | **Philomele** Tell me more. How does she occupy her time? | **Tereus** I don't know... I didn't ask you to grill me, Philomele' (pp. 311-312); when Philomele addresses him in long speeches of protest after her rape, Tereus cannot engage in dialogue with her; he is initially silent, and then can only reply in short sentences (pp. 335-337); on freezing conversation: 'You were talking easily enough [before]' (p. 311).

¹⁵¹ Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 350-351).

while he generally only speaks one-line sections of dialogue, an exception occurs when he lies to Philomele about Procne's death (the lie comprises fifteen lines of dialogue).¹⁵²

Yet it is also made clear that in a play in which issues of language, silence and communication are so integral, Tereus' inability to communicate as a result of his environment (rather than a simple refusal to communicate) places him at a narrative disadvantage. By opening up Tereus' characterization in this way from his simplistic representation in Ovid as a 'barbarian', Wertebaker produces a new, albeit complex, perspective on an old myth. Given Sophocles' eponymous title—*Tereus*—Wertebaker may wish to show that Tereus' tragedy is his inability to communicate, and it is a sophisticated feminism that can accept that Tereus suffers, too.¹⁵³

Wertebaker also significantly expands the character of Procne and Tereus' son, Itys. Although his name is introduced early in Ovid's episode (*Met.* 6.437) Itys only enters the story physically as his mother is considering how she will exact revenge on Tereus (*Met.* 6.620). Itys runs up to her and embraces her, and Procne wavers in her resolve; but when she looks again upon her sister she curses her husband, rapist of her sister and violator both of their marriage and of the bonds he made with their father, Pandion.¹⁵⁴ Ovid describes Procne dragging off Itys like a tiger (an animalistic simile that mirrors his use of a double simile to describe Tereus

¹⁵² Wertebaker (1996, pp. 322-323).

¹⁵³ De Gay argues that Wertebaker's adaptation 'may ultimately be more powerful than a simple rejection of old myths and female archetypes' (2003, p. 36). Similarly, Oliver Taplin writes in his introduction to Wertebaker's *Hippolytus* that 'the play is more powerful if Hippolytus is allowed some understanding' (2009, n.p.).

¹⁵⁴ *Met.* 6.624-635.

raping Philomele), killing him as he cries out *mater, mater*: ‘nor did she turn away her face’ (*nec uultum uertit*, 6.642).¹⁵⁵

Scholarship has focused on Procne’s refusal at line 642 to turn away her face while she kills her son as evidence of the brutality of the mother; and yet in the preceding lines Ovid takes care to distinguish an important psychological insight and potential motive.¹⁵⁶ The crucial lines 6.621-622 detail Procne’s sudden apprehension of the similarity between father and son, ‘Ah! How like your father you are’ (*a! quam | es similis patri*). Although Ovid does not specify in which respect Itys is similar to Tereus (her son also symbolically represents her marriage with the hated Tereus), a resemblance at least in appearance can be presumed. By explicitly highlighting the resemblance between father and son, Ovid makes it clear that Procne does not see her son’s face as she drives the sword home, but only the face of her rapist husband, the adulterous Tereus.¹⁵⁷

While Wertenbaker removes the crucial and explicit psychological motive present in Ovid’s tale, her expansion of the character of Itys implicitly increases the son’s likeness to his tyrant father, and this similarity is developed and reinforced over several scenes of the play. The connection between father and son and Procne’s perceived alienation from them is first

¹⁵⁵ *Met.* 6.636-637 (Tereus at 516-518, 527-530); *Met.* 6.640; *Met.* 6.642. Wertenbaker may also be thinking of Titus’ words, entering Rome to save his two sons from execution: ‘Rome is but a wilderness of tigers’, *Tit.* III.i.57.

¹⁵⁶ On Procne not turning away her face, see, e.g., Segal (1994, p. 274; 1998, p. 26), and Gildenhard and Zissos (2007, p. 8), who omit the preceding Latin lines to make their case against Procne. Discussing the destructive female gaze and the gendered nature of ‘shame and sight’ (women should not look), Barton suggests that this not looking away is what is so horrific about Procne’s action (2002, p. 225). Feminist critics tend to note Procne’s realization of the resemblance between father and son (see, e.g., Marder, 1992, p. 157, and Linklater, 2001, p. 256), as do feminist poets, e.g., Françoise Harvey’s vivid line: ‘Father-eyed no son of mine’ (Harvey, 2014).

¹⁵⁷ Medea also explicitly notes the similarity between the father and his children in her letter to Jason, *Her.* 12.189 (*et nimium similes tibi sunt, et imagine tangor*).

expressed by her words, 'I cannot talk to my husband. I have nothing to say to my son'.¹⁵⁸ Procne's alienation here is linguistic, but later in the play the distance between them is also constructed as cultural and gendered. During the scene in which Itys is first introduced in the play, mother and son have the following exchange:

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Procne | ... Your aunt, Itys. You would have liked her... |
| Itys | I have uncles. They're strong. |
| Procne | She could speak with the philosophers. She was bold and quick. |
| Itys | What's a philosopher? |
| Procne | A man who loves wisdom. |
| Itys | What is wisdom? |
| Procne | It brings peace. |
| Itys | I don't like peace. I like war. ¹⁵⁹ |

When Procne suggests that he needs wisdom to be a good king, Itys replies that he wants only to fight.¹⁶⁰ Itys is shown through his speech and actions to have been moulded by the Thracian patriarchy, and even at age ten is becoming increasingly like his violent father and increasingly unwilling to listen to the speech of women.

Itys appears again two scenes later when he finds two soldiers spying on the women-only Bacchanalia. He at first attempts to tell the two men that this is 'not allowed': 'Mother, said no one's to see'.¹⁶¹ The soldiers dismiss Itys ('[i]t's just women'), and proceed to shame the boy for being 'un-manly' ('Do you know how to...? Are you strong enough?... You're too small to reach the window, aren't you?'). They encourage Itys to act 'like a man' and spy on the women with them ('A king has to be informed'; 'You'll make a soldier yet').¹⁶² Itys' death in the play is thus precipitated by his rejection of his mother and disregard for her authority,

¹⁵⁸ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 299).

¹⁵⁹ Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 338-339).

¹⁶⁰ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 339).

¹⁶¹ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 346).

¹⁶² Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 346-347).

and his attempt to gain acceptance in the masculine sphere.¹⁶³ That issues of gender and hierarchy are both at play here are revealed in the nature of Itys' outrage when he spies Philomele holding his sword: 'That's my sword. That slave girl. A slave, a girl slave holding my sword'.¹⁶⁴ It is therefore understood that it is Itys' own need to regain authority as well as his property that causes him to rush into the women-only space of the Bacchanalia.

As Itys runs toward Philomele he says, 'Give me my sword, slave, or I'll kick you. Kill you all. Cut off your heads. Pick out your eyes. [*Itys goes for Philomele. Procne holds him... Philomele brings the sword down on his neck*]'.¹⁶⁵ In contrast to Ovid, in *The Love of the Nightingale*, Itys is no innocent child; after his violent threats to the women his subsequent death could be staged as an act of self-defence, particularly given his intrusion into the female space and Wertebaker's stage direction: *Itys goes for Philomele* (in Ovid, the killing is premeditated to a certain extent). The threat of violence here, and the attempted silencing of women by Itys himself was made more forcefully in a draft version of the play which also had Itys threaten to 'Cut out your tongues!', thus explicitly replicating the violence of his father Tereus.

Through the male characters of Tereus and Itys it is shown over the course of the play that '[t]he whole culture of Thrace is... guilty of reproducing the oppressive tendencies that contribute to the play's tragedy'.¹⁶⁶ Procne makes this point herself when she reveals the body of Itys to Tereus and tells him to see himself in his son: 'If you bend over the stream and search

¹⁶³ Mirroring the action in Ovid of Procne's rejection of her role as wife: 'It is a crime to respect a husband like Tereus', *scelus est pietas in coniuge Terei*, *Met.* 6.635. Rabillard draws out the gendered implications for Itys-as-Pentheus in this scene (1999, p. 105).

¹⁶⁴ Wertebaker (1996, p. 347).

¹⁶⁵ Wertebaker (1996, p. 349).

¹⁶⁶ Bush (2013, p. 108).

for your reflection, Tereus, this is what it looks like'.¹⁶⁷ Tereus' response, 'I loved my country, I loved my child', explicitly and fascistically links nationhood and children, thus suggesting that destroying the son was necessary to break the father's pattern of male national-colonial violence.

4.4.4 Niobe

Wertenbaker nods to both Euripides and Shakespeare in her addition of a Nurse-figure to Ovid's tale named Niobe. While the contemporary external audience at the RSC production of *The Love of the Nightingale* may think most immediately of Juliet's nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, Niobe also has a double within the play in the form of Phaedra's nurse when Euripides' *Hippolytus* is performed as a play-within-a-play; from Wertenbaker's Ovidian source text, a further parallel is drawn with the character of Myrrha's nurse.¹⁶⁸ Wertenbaker thus invites her audience to consider the figure of Niobe in relation to her textual precedents and encourages a close analysis of Niobe's advice. In *Hippolytus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Metamorphoses* the nurses advise their mistresses to submit to passion; yet the advice has disastrous consequences, and the nurses ultimately betray their mistresses. The nurses of Juliet, Phaedra, and Myrrha thus inform the characterization of Philomele's nurse; but by taking pains to reveal Niobe's backstory, Wertenbaker also shows the ways in which Niobe's status as a slave influences the bad advice that she gives.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 351). Babbage suggests that Wertenbaker uses Itys' body on stage as an additional theatrical spectacle as the sight of Philomele's mutilated body alone 'is not sufficient for Tereus to comprehend the enormity of his offence... To shock him into language, Procne reveals the body of his son' (2011, p. 134).

¹⁶⁸ *Met.* 10.298-518, especially 382-464.

¹⁶⁹ Contra Winston (1995), who argues that Phaedra's loyal nurse acts as a foil for Niobe. Importantly, however, unlike Phaedra and Juliet, Philomele rejects Niobe's advice.

As Philomele's rape occurs off-stage, the audience's attention is focused on Niobe's monologue; her words direct her listeners to the rape's wider implications by providing an insight into her own life history and the day that she was taken captive as a slave. Punctuated by Philomele's screams, Niobe describes her home island's invasion by Athens:

She should have consented. Easier that way. Now it will be all pain. Well I know.
We fought Athens. Foolish of a small island but we were proud... Power is
something you can't resist... Countries are like women.¹⁷⁰

Niobe's speech is dispassionate and weary, and a stark contrast to the brutal sexual violence occurring simultaneously, an unsettling contrast that serves to highlight the extent to which such acts of violence against women and countries are linked and normalized in patriarchal, colonial societies.¹⁷¹ Niobe argues that one becomes accustomed to sacrifice and compromise, and even to sexual violence: 'So it's happened. I've seen it coming for weeks. I could have warned her, but what's the point?'.¹⁷² Niobe is resigned to the hierarchical nature of power and to the inevitability of sexual violence against women; when faced with those more powerful than her she can only advise Philomele to be equally submissive: 'Entertain his lordship, Philomele'; 'All is well when power smiles'; 'Don't make him angry!'.¹⁷³ Niobe's allegiance to Philomele thus necessarily shifts after Philomele's rape (as Philomele is now powerless), and Niobe guards her under payment from Tereus.

While Ovid divides the act of sexual violence and the act of silencing with Philomela's eloquent speech, Wertenbaker stages a conversation between Philomele and Niobe in which the

¹⁷⁰ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 330).

¹⁷¹ Niobe's behaviour may evince the 'colonized mind' (wa Thiong'o, 1986).

¹⁷² Philomele has previously ignored the words of Niobe: 'Niobe [will] tell me all wrong' (p. 293); 'Niobe, go to bed' (p. 312).

¹⁷³ Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 311, 314, 322).

audience witnesses both the immediate after-effect of the rape, and the two women's opposing viewpoints on the act. While Philomele speaks with disgust and anger ('I can still smell it. Wash me'), Niobe speaks with a blank emotional detachment ('Some women get to like the smell').¹⁷⁴ Niobe attempts to convince Philomele to smile and beg as she is now a victim reliant upon Tereus' continued 'interest': 'We must eat', she says. That the rape was not about lust but about exerting power over Philomele is made explicit when Niobe tells her: 'Don't be so mighty Philomele. You're nothing now. Another victim. Grovel. Like the rest of us'.¹⁷⁵ Splitting the two acts of violence with this extra scene highlights Philomele's double violation and foregrounds the silencing, as it does in Ovid, but Wertenbaker also highlights how Niobe silences Philomele, too.

Niobe's complicity in the patriarchy is underlined by her language, which shares the same sharp syntax and short sentences of Tereus, even in her long monologue. Niobe's statement that 'I've seen it coming for weeks' echoes the acceptance by the male chorus of the 'inevitable' rape ('Could we have done something? And now?'); together, such statements foreground the issue of the play's internal spectators' passive complicity in violence.¹⁷⁶ The character of Niobe illustrates how women who do not speak out in protest can be used as tools to subjugate other women: 'You. You are worse than him', says Philomele.¹⁷⁷ Niobe actively and repeatedly tells Philomele to be quiet and to accept the status quo ('Keep silent... hold back your tongue') as Wertenbaker demonstrates that the silencing of dissenting voices is not a

¹⁷⁴ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 333).

¹⁷⁵ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 334).

¹⁷⁶ Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 330, 308).

¹⁷⁷ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 334).

specifically masculine act (Philomele, however, is as prone to silence Niobe as Niobe is prone to silence Philomele).¹⁷⁸

Yet Niobe's acceptance of authority and her facilitation of the patriarchal culture suggests that she may have a mythic memory of Ovid's Niobe, whose story also appears in *Metamorphoses* 6 (ll. 146-312). In a metatheatrical touch, Wertebaker's Niobe knows too well the terrible consequences of the vengeance of the powerful against the weak who dare to speak out.¹⁷⁹ The Niobe of *The Love of the Nightingale*, however, has lost sisters rather than children as in Ovid ('Sisters, sisters... I had sisters... Yes, I had many sisters... Too many... They died'); Niobe's lack of sisterhood stands in contrast to Procne and Philomele's own strong sisterly bond and poignantly emphasizes Niobe's enforced isolation from other women.¹⁸⁰

4.4.5 Choruses

On the influence of Greek tragic form in *The Love of the Nightingale*, Wertebaker says that she 'was attracted to the idea of the Chorus because it enables [the playwright] to embody thought on stage without having to put it inside a character' (in the play, the Queen instructs the internal audience watching *Hippolytus*, 'Listen to the chorus. The playwright always speaks through the chorus').¹⁸¹ This metatheatrical instruction is complicated, however, by Wertebaker's employment of two choruses—one male, one female—each with a very

¹⁷⁸ Niobe says: 'I only want to help... But I'll be quiet now, very quiet' (p. 315).

¹⁷⁹ Both Procne and Niobe are paradigms of mourning in classical literature; on the importance of Ovid's Niobe for African-American women writers, see Spigner (2014). Procne and Niobe appear together at *Tr.* 5.1.57-60, suggesting a further possible Ovidian source for Wertebaker's choice of name for her nurse. Wertebaker may also be drawing on Hamlet's description of his mourning mother as 'Like Niobe, all tears', *Hamlet* I.ii.149.

¹⁸⁰ Wertebaker (1996, p. 314).

¹⁸¹ Wertebaker quoted in Bush (2013, p. 109); Wertebaker (1996, p. 304).

different character and purpose.¹⁸² The female chorus speak in a fragmentary, metaphorical *parler femme* which also represents the Sophoclean fragments embedded within the super-narrative of the play; in contrast, the male chorus narrate the events of the play as they occur in Ovid and speak in his omnipotent authorial narrative voice.¹⁸³ Wertebaker uses the two choruses to dramatize a dialogue between her Ovidian and Sophoclean source texts, and to structure the larger thematic concern in the play with the processes of myth-making and the telling and retelling of stories and history. As the audience watches the two choruses retrospectively rewrite the events of the play, Wertebaker encourages an active interrogation of mythic narratives.¹⁸⁴

The female chorus is comprised of five Thracian women who act as Procne's handmaids. Rather than the homogenous identity of a Greek tragic chorus, however, Wertebaker's female chorus comprises individualized characters.¹⁸⁵ In this respect, the female chorus may represent an idealized feminist sisterhood that embraces the individual differences

¹⁸² Wertebaker may take her cue from *Hippolytus* itself, in which the last choral ode appears to require two choruses, one of men and one of women (W. S. Barrett, *Euripides Hippolytos* [Oxford 1964], ll. 1115 ff. *ad loc.*). In *The Thebans* (1992a) Wertebaker has mixed gender choruses, played by equal numbers of male and female actors. For the possible influence of the double chorus of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* see Monrós-Gaspar (2006), who also argues that the two choruses offer two ways of approaching the classical past: Wertebaker may be pitching the sympathetic female chorus of Euripides *Medea* against the disapproving male chorus of Seneca's *Medea* (p. 2).

¹⁸³ On embedding the Sophoclean fragments within the Ovidian super-narrative, Josephine Balmer takes a similar approach to translating Aeschylus fr. 134. Balmer notes that 'the translation of ancient fragments has long been problematic. Should they be elongated to provide a contextual framework?'. Her approach to translating a one-line fragment of Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* (2012) was to embed the translation within the fictional poetic narrative of a longer piece, in order to 'enact not just the fragment's literal meaning but also the complexity of its reception, even within the ancient world... In this way, the confusion (and also wonder) of the fictional characters [upon reading this fragment of Aeschylus] reflects our own. In addition, the alluring opaqueness of the fragment can be preserved, alongside its integrity, as well as a narrative context for modern readers'. Available at: <https://thepathsofsurvival.wordpress.com/2012/11/23/translating-fragments-iii> (Accessed: 17 March 2016).

¹⁸⁴ The choruses also help to 'foreignize' Wertebaker's reception, explicitly signalling its antiquity by drawing on a form that is alien to modern theatre audiences.

¹⁸⁵ Individualized choruses increasingly feature in modern adaptation of Greek tragedy, e.g. the chorus of Corinthian women in Deborah Warner's *Medea* (2000), each distinguished by dress and separate lines of dialogue; see Foley (1999) on the variety of choruses found in modern adaptations of Greek tragedy; on gender in the ancient chorus see Foley (2001; 2003).

of women at the same time as it unites women by their shared gender identity. The female chorus members also speak in dense metaphorical and fragmented language, as Wertenbaker draws on the work of Cixous and Irigaray to physically stage a feminine, irrational mode of expression.¹⁸⁶ Wertenbaker highlights the inability of male language to describe the female experience which lies beyond itself in the contrast between the speech of the female chorus and the flat, factual style of the male chorus; the different styles of discourse in the play thus create a collage of voices that metatextually foreground issues of gendered knowledge, translation, and reception.¹⁸⁷

The members of the female chorus are each distinguished by a densely intertextual and frequently Ovidian name and character. ‘Hero’ appears to be the leader of the female chorus; of the five women of the chorus, Hero has the most lines of dialogue and she tends to speak the most forcefully, making statements rather than asking questions.¹⁸⁸ Her role as choral leader references her mythic counterpart who led Leander across the water to her each night by the light of her lamp.¹⁸⁹ ‘June’ is unsympathetic and speaks harshly to Procne, often displaying hostility or attempting to shut down dialogue; through her speech, June likewise reflects her mythic counterpart Juno, generally portrayed as hostile in ancient literature, especially in her relations with other women. ‘Iris’ is talkative and friendly and is the most likely to act as a go-between for Procne and the negative June, neatly playing on Iris’ mythical role as the brightly-coloured messenger of the gods. ‘Helen’ is the anxious member of the female chorus, expressing fearful and pessimistic thoughts; a residual mythic echo of the woman who has

¹⁸⁶ See Wertenbaker (2004).

¹⁸⁷ Echo also represents myth as defined by the male chorus, a story ‘reverberating through time’ (Wagner, 1995). The speech of the female chorus always follows the same pattern: Procne or Hero introduces a question or idea, which the women then debate (Monrós-Gaspar, 2006, p. 6).

¹⁸⁸ Monrós-Gaspar has Iris as choral-leader (2006, p. 4).

¹⁸⁹ *Her.* 18-19.

witnessed before the fatal results of dysfunctional relationships between nations and sexes.¹⁹⁰ Helen cannot imagine the future, although she always speaks of it.¹⁹¹

The fifth member of the female chorus, 'Echo', speaks repetitive, fragmented lines which subtly change the meaning of the words she repeats (as does her Ovidian self at *Met.* 3.339-510); yet in echoing Procne's words back to her, she is the choral member who demonstrates the importance of listening in communication.¹⁹² In contrast to her Ovidian incarnation, however, Wertebaker gives Echo greater agency and action, as it is Echo who starts off the imagery of birds and beating wings that recur throughout the play, and which are ultimately expressed in the characters' metamorphoses (although fittingly, she also has the last line of dialogue the female chorus speaks). In contrast to Helen, Echo is the most prescient member of the women's chorus; and as the chorus member who perseveres in her attempts to communicate with Procne, Echo also retains a memory of her Ovidian precedent, sympathetically understanding—as a woman who disappeared completely—Procne's resistance to the chorus and her wish to hold on to her individual identity.

In contrast, the male chorus are a homogenous group of unspecified number (Wertebaker does not specify whether they should equal or outnumber the female chorus). At times the male chorus takes the role of soldiers or sailors under Tereus' command, while at others they fulfil a narratorial function outside the immediate temporality of the play that the

¹⁹⁰ Procne: 'Iris, I have seen you look at me with some kindness. You could be my friend, possibly?' (Wertebaker, 1996, p. 331). Wertebaker may have chosen Iris as she appears in Aristophanes' *The Birds* (which parodies Sophocles' *Tereus*). In *The Birds*, Iris is threatened with rape for trespassing into the male land of *Nephelococcygia*.

¹⁹¹ Helen may be metatextually 'trapped' in the *Iliad*, unable to ever reach the end of the Trojan War.

¹⁹² Monrós-Gaspar suggests that Echo's repetitions represent the appropriation of classical texts by female discourse (2006, p. 5). Wertebaker's Echo also acts an analogue for Philomela as she too suffers a double silencing in *Metamorphoses*, losing first her autonomous speech, and then her body.

other characters occupy ('We are only here to observe, journalists of an antique world... We choose to be accurate, we choose to record').¹⁹³ In their role as the Ovidian narrative voice, the male chorus members move freely in time and space, conversing both with audience members (thus functioning as the external narrators), and with characters on stage, permeating the various narrative levels of the play. At one point, they break the theatrical illusion completely by drawing attention to the physical stage set ('ruins') that they walk around, a symbolic representation of the Ovidian literary landscape through which Wertebaker leads her audience over the course of her play.¹⁹⁴ Despite the male chorus' claim to be producing an objective historical record, however, Wertebaker undermines this authoritative voice at several crucial points. On three separate occasions the male chorus claim not to have seen the events that they themselves introduce, their hypocrisy thereby problematizing their reliability as witnesses:

Male chorus: We asked no more questions and at night, we slept soundly, and did not see:
[*Tereus lies to Philomele that Procne is dead*]

Male chorus: Nor did we see, still sleeping:
[*Tereus murders the Captain*]

Male chorus: [*carrying the body off*] We saw nothing.¹⁹⁵

The male chorus are also completely silent during the scene in which Philomele is raped, and remain silent until they reach Thrace, commenting only then, 'We said nothing... It was better that way'.¹⁹⁶ With these incidents, Wertebaker invites the audience to read the male chorus not as the dominant narrative voice which writes history, but which *rewrites* history to their own advantage.

¹⁹³ Wertebaker (1996, p. 308).

¹⁹⁴ Wertebaker (1996, p. 292).

¹⁹⁵ Wertebaker (1996, pp. 321, 323, 326).

¹⁹⁶ Wertebaker (1996, p. 333).

In an early scene of the play the male chorus specifically discuss the nature of myth. They provide the audience with four definitions of ‘myth’: ‘the Greek meaning... simply what is delivered by word of mouth...’; ‘public speech’; ‘the content of the speech’; and an ‘unlikely story... a remote tale’.¹⁹⁷ These definitions act as a metacommentary on the nature and transmission of myth, revealing how ideology becomes hidden over time and myths distorted: an ‘oblique image of an unwanted truth, reverberating through time’.¹⁹⁸ Notably, however, when the chorus recount the myths they have told, they are the myths of patriarchy: ‘Fathers and sons, rebellion, collaboration, the state...’.¹⁹⁹ Delivered by the male chorus, this discussion on the nature of myth literally stages the absence of women’s voices, not only in myth but in the transmission and interpretations of mythic narratives.²⁰⁰ Wertebaker’s play may work to reverse the process of myth that the male chorus describes, as she turns Ovid’s ‘unlikely story’ into a modern play which foregrounds the experiences of women.

4.4.6 The play-within-the-play

The Love of the Nightingale is an immensely metatheatrical play and repeatedly asks its audience to consider critically the nature of storytelling, mythmaking, theatre, and the act of spectating.²⁰¹ As in a reading of Ovid’s text, attention must be paid to the play’s representation

¹⁹⁷ Wertebaker (1996, p. 315).

¹⁹⁸ Wertebaker (1996, p. 315).

¹⁹⁹ Wertebaker (1996, p. 315).

²⁰⁰ In ‘Agamemnon’s Daughter’ (1978), Wertebaker’s Clytaemnestra sees ‘the Trojan War as [a] male plot to create a narrative’, to advance themselves by propagating male ideas of heroism. Yet the men myth-make not only to celebrate men, but to vilify women: ‘And then, they invented stories. That it was a woman who caused all the evil in the world. And now, that it’s a woman who caused the war, not their own greed and the glitter of Troy’s wealth. It’s another woman who caused the terrible fight between Agamemnon and Achilles which caused more deaths. Not Agamemnon’s pride and his insistence he was the best commander’ (quoted in Bush, 2013, p. 49).

²⁰¹ On spectating and/ as pornography in Ovid, see Richlin (1992b). On the aesthetics of violence in *Metamorphoses* and the reader’s complicity in reading violence, see especially Segal (1994; 1998).

of narrating figures and audiences and to the comments they make on the interactive process of interpretation. The metatheatricality of Wertenbaker's reception of Ovid is foregrounded particularly in the scene in which the external audience watch an internal audience view a performance of *Hippolytus* (a scene which may foreshadow the sisters' own 'performance' of Euripides' *Bacchae* within the Ovidian narrative).²⁰² The scene acts both to guide the audience's interpretation of Philomele's story and to suggest what Wertenbaker may hope to achieve in transforming Ovidian narrative into dramatic public performance.

The four characters watching *Hippolytus* (King Pandion, the Queen, Philomele, and Tereus) each provide the audience with an approach to viewing and interpreting not only the interior play *Hippolytus*, but also Philomele's own puppet-performance later in the play as well as the exterior play, *The Love of the Nightingale*.²⁰³ The Queen views Phaedra's story 'like a soap opera', and is interested only in details of plot; King Pandion looks to the play as a metaphor for life, and sees theatre as an enlightening, mystical experience.²⁰⁴ Tereus, however, dislikes the play 'ironically, on moral grounds'; and Philomele reacts to the story romantically, as pure tragedy: she can 'read' from all perspectives and empathizes with every character.²⁰⁵ Tragically, although Philomele can empathize with all of the characters, she can draw no life lessons from the play herself. The playwright uses Philomele as a synecdoche for the external audience, reminding the audience that spectatorship should not be a passive experience. This

²⁰² Dobrov (1993, p. 223). Winston (1995) analyses *The Love of the Nightingale* through its dialogic relationship with the Phaedra myth.

²⁰³ The four internal spectators of Wertenbaker's play mirror the four main characters watching the play in *Hamlet*: the King, the Queen, Ophelia, and Hamlet. In *Hamlet*, the internal performance is preceded by a puppet show, but Wertenbaker reverses this order; on Philomele's puppet show, see below (4.4.7).

²⁰⁴ Winston (1995, p. 516); the Queen: 'There's Phaedra... Phaedra's fallen in love with Hippolytus' (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 302); King Pandion: 'I find plays help me think' (p. 301), 'Perhaps [plays] show us the uncomfortable folds of the human heart' (p. 303); 'The play's coming to an end, and I still haven't reached a decision... | That's the phrase. Philomele, you must not leave your father's lands' (p. 306).

²⁰⁵ Winston (1995, p. 516); Tereus: 'Her own stepson! That's wrong' (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 302); 'These plays condone vice' (p. 303).

warning to the external audience is emphasized by the fact that Philomele's interpretation of the play here sets up a savage dramatic irony when she is later raped; it is from watching plays like *Hippolytus* which she reads 'romantically' (but which she is encouraged to interpret as depicting the shamefulness of female sexuality), that Philomele is unprepared for life and female experience in a patriarchal society. Yet the external audience should also not take what they see or read too literally: lines of dialogue from *Hippolytus* are repeated by characters later in the external play to justify their actions (for example, Tereus says 'I am Phaedra' before he rapes Philomele), thus demonstrating an Ovidian concern with the fragility of language and the liability of stories, myth, and history to be corrupted.

The four different methods for interpreting Philomele's story mirror the four definitions of myth offered earlier in the play by the male chorus; yet no one definition or method of interpretation is offered as the 'correct' way. Wertebaker does not provide the audience with answers to the questions she raises; her aim as playwright is instead to encourage her audience to question endlessly the nature of myth, and the role of myth and theatre in culture. By creating multiple perspectives and multiple possibilities, Wertebaker opens up Ovid's narrative and urges the importance of questioning not only who 'makes' myths and the ideologies that may underlie canonical interpretations of myth, but also how to 'read' myths, insisting on the interactive nature of classical reception.

4.4.7 Philomele's puppets

The most significant alteration to Ovid's story in *The Love of the Nightingale* is the transformation of the device by which Philomele communicates with her sister. The gap

between lived experience and discourse is a recurring concern in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Io, for example, terrified by her own lowing), and Philomela's severed tongue literally draws attention to the rupture between 'access to language' and 'lived experience'.²⁰⁶ Raised in patriarchal discourse—at the start of the play Philomele displays her love of 'masculine' forms of language such as logic and rhetoric—Philomele's experience of rape exceeds any language or linguistic form that she knows to express it. Even if she had not had her tongue cut out, she would have needed to invent a new form of communication to speak of her rape—a *parler femme*. In Ovid, Philomela weaves a tapestry to send to her sister; in Wertebaker's play, this feminine mode of expression is the theatre itself.

Wertebaker retains Ovid's setting of the Bacchanalia for the reunion of the sisters, but instead of weaving a tapestry to send to Procne in secret (in Ovid, even the servant who carries the tapestry to Procne does not know what it is), Philomele has sewn together life-sized cloth dolls that she uses to re-enact the rape scene in a public performance.²⁰⁷ Philomele's puppet-theatre is darkly comic and almost farcical, again recalling *Hamlet's* blackly comic inner metatheatrical performance, and creating a strong *Verfremdungseffekt*.²⁰⁸ Wertebaker's stage directions for the scene read:

... *Philomele throws the dolls into the circle. Niobe grabs one of them and tries to grab Philomele, but she is behind the second doll. Since the dolls are huge, the struggle seems to be between the two dolls. One is male, one is female, and the male one has a king's crown... the crowd applauds... The rape scene is re-*

²⁰⁶ Marder (1992, p. 157).

²⁰⁷ *nescit quid tradat in illis*, *Met.* 6.580. On changing Philomela's tapestry to puppets, Bush suggests that this demonstrates both the necessity of eschewing the language and violence of one's oppressors, and the importance of opening communication within one's own community if oppressors are to be overthrown (Bush, 2013, p. 114); Cousin argues that the double-self represented in the Philomele-puppet foregrounds the experience and presence of the female body, as well as reflecting the double silencing that Philomele has undergone (1996, pp. 116-117).

²⁰⁸ On Philomela's puppets as 'spectacle', see Wagner (1995); on Wertebaker and Brechtian alienation, see n. 36, above.

*enacted in a gross and comic way, partly because of Niobe's resistance and attempt to catch Philomele... The crowd laughs.*²⁰⁹

Wertenbaker's alteration rejects both the Ovidian and Sophoclean versions of the recognition scene.²¹⁰ Perhaps Wertenbaker may be looking to Shakespeare's Philomela, Lavinia, who—her hands brutally cut off—cannot weave a tapestry but points to a physical copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* instead. As Shakespeare does in *Titus Andronicus*, Wertenbaker uses a physical prop device (here, a Philomela doll) to metatextually draw her audience's attention to the performed presence of *Metamorphoses* on-stage, at the same time as she alters a noted detail of the story.

Wertenbaker's decision to change Philomele's private tapestry to a public performance is also striking given the wealth of feminist literature on Philomela's tapestry and its symbolic status as a particularly female mode of communication.²¹¹ While Wertenbaker maintains the detail that the message is communicated between the two sisters, her distancing from the tapestry may be a deliberate attempt to distance herself from a type of feminism which celebrates the domestic, or emphasizes victimhood; compare Philomele's earlier rejection of Niobe's suggestion to be a grovelling victim.²¹² Despite the presence of powerful 'illegitimate' weavers in classical mythology such as Penelope or the Parcae, Wertenbaker may also view Philomela's task negatively through the lens of the fairy tale tradition, where a pricked finger

²⁰⁹ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 342).

²¹⁰ Aristotle praises Sophocles in particular for the device of the woven cloth and his invention of 'the voice of the shuttle', *Poetics* 1454b 36-37; see Fitzpatrick (2007).

²¹¹ See especially Joplin (1984), Marcus (1984), Marder (1992), and De Luce (1993).

²¹² A 'resisting' reading of Philomela's story; cf., e.g., 'to focus on women's suffering rather than on their suffrage is to focus on their powerlessness rather than their potential for acquiring power' (Fetterley, 1978, p. 136).

from working as a spinner represents a girl's 'fall into female gender'.²¹³ Wertebaker may thus wish to get past the feminine task and back to the woman herself. As Rabillard suggests:

The substitution of play for tapestry in some respects seems designed to undo past silencings of the voice of the shuttle by insisting upon the woman behind the work (Philomele is literally visible behind the dolls she manipulates) and dramatizing the need for an audience that acknowledges her presence.²¹⁴

By making Philomele a dramatist, Wertebaker performs a characteristically Ovidian move by placing a cipher for herself within her work at the same time as she reclaims for women the conventionally male-dominated Greek tragic space.

As well as emphasizing Wertebaker's own chosen medium for retelling Philomela's tale, the puppet theatre is also suggestive of the dolls used in therapy sessions with child victims of sexual abuse. The comedic nature of the scene could therefore represent Philomele's attempts to deal with the trauma of her rape by dissipating the fear and breaking its hold over her, just as she made a mockery of Tereus' 'puny manhood' (Wertebaker is not making a joke out of rape in this comic puppetry, but attempting to dissolve the power of rape by deriding men's use of sexual violence against women to assert authority).²¹⁵ The use of mime by Philomele also points to a new method of dramatic communication that Philomele has had to invent herself; her blackly comic performance in this scene forms a sharp contrast to the high tragedy of *Hippolytus* that she saw performed at the Athenian court. Philomele's puppets are no longer theatre-as-entertainment, but theatre-as-communication; her puppet play thus act as mirror and

²¹³ I.e. it symbolizes a girl's sexual initiation. On 'illegitimate weavers' see Heilbrun (2002); on spinning in fairy tales see Gilbert and Gubar (2000, p. 520), who also note that for, e.g., George Eliot, sewing represented the acceptance of a woman's inferiority and domestic confinement.

²¹⁴ Rabillard (1999, p. 104).

²¹⁵ Winston sees in Philomele's puppet-show echoes of Artaud's 'theatre of cruelty', that is, theatre-as-political-act to shock the bourgeoisie out of complacency (1995, p. 516); on *The Love of the Nightingale* as agitprop/Brechtian history play see Freeman (2012).

frame for the whole play, a mise-en-abyme through which Wertebaker invites her audience to view *The Love of the Nightingale* as a political act or testimonial. The puppets also importantly allow Philomele to ‘speak’ for herself, and her message is conveyed directly to her sister who watches the performance (rather than through an agent, as in Ovid), showing a postcolonial awareness of the importance of creating public space for oppressed voices to speak.²¹⁶

Wertebaker’s transformation of the domestic art of weaving into the public act of theatre may also aim to confront her audience with the need to publicly discuss issues that are often hidden in silence: *The Love of the Nightingale* dramatizes how sexual, racial, and colonial violence are silenced by dominant societal narratives. By witnessing Philomele’s public performance the external audience is now as culpable as witnesses as are the internal audience and the choruses within the play.²¹⁷ Bearing witness, particularly to acts of rape, can be read as an important theme in *Metamorphoses* and Wertebaker may nod to this theme here (for example, in the tales of Arachne, whose tapestry testifies to the rapes of the gods, 6.5-145, and Arethusa, who tells of Proserpina’s abduction, 5.487-508). After witnessing the tragic consequences of the non-action of Niobe and the male chorus (who remained silent and pretended they could not see the violence around them), the audience feels the urgency and necessity of speaking out against oppression. Through Philomele’s determination to testify despite being robbed of her voice (in contrast to Niobe and the male chorus who refuse to speak out even though they are physically able to), both Ovid and Wertebaker press the point that protest must always be made. By constructing her audience as witnesses rather than mere spectators, Wertebaker also avoids placing the audience in the position of the male gaze; the

²¹⁶ Spivak (1988).

²¹⁷ As this is now the second time the audience sees/ hears a rape occur, surely it cannot be ignored again; the importance of remembering, testifying and bearing witness is also an important theme of Ovid’s exilic poetry.

audience are witnesses to the violence on stage, not voyeurs. Yet Wertenbaker stresses that the blame for rape (and by extension in this play, war) lies not only with the perpetrators but also with the passive society that allows it to happen.²¹⁸

Philomele's puppets perhaps offer the most explicit guidance from Wertenbaker on how to respond to myth and theatre. After the four definitions of myth and the four methods of passively interpreting myth, Philomele's act encourages direct action and social intervention. This is emphasized by the stage direction:

*[enter] a third doll, a queen. At that moment, Procne also appears... she has been watching. The Procne doll weeps. The two female dolls embrace. Procne approaches Philomele, looks at her and takes her away.*²¹⁹

When the Procne doll appears on stage and enters Philomele's puppet play, so does the real Procne, and Philomele acts out for her sister how to respond to the story she is witnessing: with empathy and direct action. Wertenbaker also suggests in this change to Ovid's text that is the act of receiving the message that is important, rather than the medium by which it is transmitted: tapestry or puppet, poem or play. Philomele's puppet-play clearly emphasizes and foregrounds Philomela's active and inventive subjectivity in Ovid's tale, and makes her act an explicitly feminist one.

4.5 Conclusion

After the metamorphoses of Philomele, Procne, and Tereus into birds, a fantastical conversation is staged between Itys and his aunt Philomele-as-nightingale. In this final scene

²¹⁸ Wertenbaker quoted in DiGaetani (1991, p. 272).

²¹⁹ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 342).

Philomele suggests that the metamorphoses of the story were necessary to break the cycle of violence: ‘we were all so angry the bloodshed would have gone on for ever. So it was better to become a nightingale’.²²⁰ In adding this final scene and its attempt at resolution, Wertebaker ‘writes beyond the ending’ of Ovid’s version of the tale, using the theme of metamorphosis to express her wish for social change.²²¹

After the gender segregation of the world of the play, male and female elements come together in this additional scene and attempt to communicate once more. The dialogue of questions between Philomele and Itys here is in stark contrast to the gendered divide that marked the act of questioning in earlier scenes of the play.²²² Here, Philomele encourages Itys to ask her questions about the events of the play.²²³

Philomele Do you understand why it was wrong of Tereus to cut out my tongue?
Itys It hurt.
Philomele Yes, but why was it wrong?
Itys (*bored*) I don’t know. Why was it wrong?
Philomele It was wrong because—
Itys What does wrong mean?
Philomele It is what isn’t right.
Itys What is right?

The Nightingale sings.

Didn’t you want me to ask questions?

*Fade.*²²⁴

²²⁰ Wertebaker (1996, p. 353).

²²¹ DuPlessis (1985b; 1996).

²²² E.g., while Philomele argued that a good conversation is comprised of questions, Tereus responded: ‘I didn’t ask you to grill me’; and throughout the play Philomele is also constantly rebuked for—and thus characterized by—asking questions (Wertebaker, 1996, pp. 312; 302, 324).

²²³ Wertebaker (1996, p. 353).

²²⁴ Wertebaker (1996, pp. 353-354); cf. Zimmerman, who also narrates the various tales of her *Metamorphoses* through questions and answers, suggesting the importance of interrogation in feminist theatrical practice; on Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses* see Merten (2004, pp. 243-326). On second-wave feminist theatrical praxis as characterized by collaboration, collage, rejection of ‘masculine’ hierarchical dramatic form and realism, lyricism, ritualism, surrealism, and as multiply-climactic, see Leavitt (1980, pp. 98-101).

Philomele does not mention her rape here, but instead asks Itys to think about why her silencing was wrong. Earlier in the play, the male chorus had encouraged the audience to watch the play and ‘think of countries, silence’; this ending may thus emphasize a wider consideration of the implications of silencing, using Philomele’s story to symbolize the silencing of all minority groups, and positing the play as an attempt at resolution and revoicing.²²⁵

Although Wertenbaker offers a sophisticated metaphorical reading of the Ovidian episode as one of colonial rather than gendered violence, the sexual and physical violence perpetrated against Philomele appears unresolved in this final scene. Additionally, if Wertenbaker aimed to encourage dialogue and new ways of communication between men and women, or between perpetrators and victims, both Tereus and Procne are conspicuous in their absence from this conversation. Perhaps Wertenbaker wishes to suggest that it is the younger generation specifically that must be encouraged to think and communicate differently if cycles of violence (gendered or colonial) are to be broken. Earlier in the play the male chorus describe the act of questioning as a ‘child’s instinct suppressed in the adult’; similarly, Procne invokes ‘the justice we learned as children’.²²⁶ The culturally gnomic link between children and an inquisitive nature may explain Wertenbaker’s choice of symbol here of children as the representative hope for the future, although she is careful not to make any essentialist assumptions about motherhood. When Tereus refers to Itys as ‘Your own child’, Procne corrects him, ‘Ours’; Wertenbaker emphasizes that children are the responsibility of every member of the community.²²⁷ The playwright offers no answers to the questions posed in this final scene (*what is wrong? what is right?*), and indeed the final line could be a metatheatrical

²²⁵ Rubik expresses dissatisfaction with the play’s final song, expressing concern that ‘the female voice, like the nightingale, might be... in danger of becoming a myth itself’ (1996, p. 184).

²²⁶ Wertenbaker (1996, pp. 318, 343).

²²⁷ Wertenbaker (1996, p. 351).

comment by Wertebaker herself to her audience—*didn't you want me to ask questions?* Wertebaker's refusal to offer a solution embraces feminine openness and avoids the closure of meaning and interpretation.

Philomele's encouragement of Itys to ask questions also demonstrates the importance of perseverance; even though she herself was repeatedly chastised for asking too many questions, and her attempted dialogue with Niobe failed, Philomele understands that she must continue to search for new ways of communication and understanding. This perseverance and love of questioning may be the 'love' of the play's title. The importance of questioning is also raised after Itys' murder when Procne protests against Tereus, 'Did you ask?', to which he responds with violence, not words. Similarly, the male chorus tell each other not to ask so many questions; and while Itys freely asks questions when he is with his mother, with the soldiers he is coerced to 'be a man' and to act, not to ask.²²⁸ In Aristophanes' *Birds*, having found nowhere suitable on earth to live, the characters fly off to live in 'Cloud Cuckooland'; Rabillard suggests that the final scene in Wertebaker's play likewise takes place in this 'Cloud Cuckooland', where Philomele and Itys can be free of myth and free of the patriarchy of gods, men, and *polis*.²²⁹ It is only in this imaginative space that dialogue can open.

Wertebaker notes that she was drawn to *Metamorphoses* because of its theme of change and adaptation, and in working notes for her versions of Ovid she writes that the poem's 'message, such that it is, is that it is when people can no longer take in new ideas, new ways of

²²⁸ Wertebaker (1996, pp. 352; 318; 339; 346-347).

²²⁹ Rabillard (1999, p. 106). Rabillard also suggests that Wertebaker's birds are the 'nomadic subjects' that Rosi Braidotti posited as 'a political hope for a point of exit from phallogocentrism' (Braidotti, 1994, p. 32).

being, that decay sets in'.²³⁰ The playwright's alteration of what is arguably the most celebrated detail of Philomela's story in Ovid—her tapestry—perhaps intends to combat this decay, a decay she sees both in stagnant forms of storytelling and in the complacency of modern audiences. Ovid's own play with form and narrative may have granted Wertebaker permission to adapt creatively and to lay claim to authorship as she saw fit; but Wertebaker also extends the Ovidian metaphor of transformation to the effect that she wishes her translations and adaptations to have, hoping that 'a play is not only itself an act of transformation, but that it transforms the audience in some way and that they, we, in turn use our experience of theatre to transform'.²³¹

The Love of the Nightingale is a densely metatheatrical play that meditates on its own processes of reception at the same time as it retells Ovid's story, frequently and simultaneously providing both translation and commentary. Alongside postcolonial concerns, Wertebaker's classical reception work is clearly influenced by second-wave feminist ideas about feminine modes of knowledge and expression, with a particular interest in how this is expressed through female sexual desire and a feminine language. In her sympathetic portrayal of the married Procne—mostly silent in Ovid—and her complex characterization of 'bad women', the playwright also evidences a consistent concern of many feminist revisionary mythmakers with voicing the women of myth. Despite her protestations of 'fidelity' to the original, Wertebaker's reception of Ovid is characterized by the alterations and additions she makes to his text.²³² Placing complex intertextuality and metatheatricality alongside a close echoing of

²³⁰ Wertebaker quoted in Bush (2013, pp. 301-302 n. 185). Bush notes that Wertebaker celebrates mutability, fluidity, and adaptability across her oeuvre (2013, p. 268).

²³¹ Wertebaker (2008, p. 39). Brecht's influence on Wertebaker's thought here is significant; Brecht fundamentally believed that theatre should transform an audience, and inspire an audience to politically engage with society (Willett, 1964); on Brecht and political theatre, see also chapter 6.6.

²³² On being a 'faithful' translator, see Wertebaker (2008, pp. 37-38).

the themes and language of the Ovidian original, and inviting her audience to actively participate in the creation of meaning, Wertebaker foregrounds the interactive nature of reception and transmission, using Brechtian alienation techniques to reawaken the political implications at the centre of Ovid's tale of Philomela.

JOSEPHINE BALMER5.1 Introduction

In chapter 3 I discussed Sylvia Plath's use of women characters from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to problematize the figure of the muse and to create a space for herself in literature as a woman writer in the 1950s and 1960s. In chapter 4, I examined Timberlake Wertenbaker's adaptation of Ovid to stage domestic and sexual concerns foregrounded particularly by second-wave 1970s and 1980s feminisms, and to dramatize an Irigaraian *parler femme*. In this chapter I turn from texts more readily categorized as 'fiction' to consider the work of Josephine Balmer, whose creative feminist translation strategies interrogate both the tradition of male, elitist classical scholarship, and her own privilege as a contemporary woman trained in ancient Greek and Latin.

Balmer studied Classics and Ancient History at University College, London before working briefly as a lecturer in classics and comparative literature. Her poetry collections include *Sappho: Poems and Fragments* (1984; 1992), the anthology *Classical Women Poets* (1996), *Catullus: Poems of Love and Hate* and *Chasing Catullus: Poems, Translations & Transgressions* (2004a, b), and selections from Ovid's exile poetry, *The Word for Sorrow* (2009a). Balmer regularly posts new work on her website, *The Paths of Survival*, which has recently featured creative translations of Petronius, Tacitus, Pliny, fragments of Aeschylus and

Palladas, and original poems inspired by Romano-British inscriptions and statues.¹ Balmer's creative output also comprises critical reviews of works of classical reception (including, for example, Anne Carson's *Men in the Off Hours* and Ted Hughes' *Tales from Ovid*), and she has contributed chapters to academic volumes and journals including Stephen Harrison's volume on classics and contemporary poetry, *Living Classics*, and Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos' special issue of the *Classical Receptions Journal*; Balmer has also published a monograph on translating classical poets, *Piecing Together the Fragments*.² Balmer's work is characterized by a scholarly approach which produces innovative translations that display a third-wave feminist concern with language and power and a keen sensitivity to issues of gender and class.

To begin the chapter I discuss the influence of feminist classical scholarship on Balmer's translations of Sappho and her use of feminist translation techniques in her treatment of extant fragments of work by classical women poets.³ Second, I discuss Balmer's collection of creative Catullan 'transgressions'; I track her increasingly experimental translation work and detail her nascent Ovidianism. Finally, I consider in depth her Ovidian collection, *The Word for Sorrow*. I explore Balmer's combination of literal and creative translations of *Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto* to open up her source texts to new readings, and I discuss the implications

¹ Available at: <https://thepathsofsurvival.wordpress.com> (Accessed: 15 November 2015). On monumental inscriptions as the predominant sites of translation in the ancient world—and on the politics of multilingual inscriptions—see Larson (2011), and Papaioannou (2011); on the orality of ancient translation, however, see Baltussen (2011).

² Balmer (2009b; 2012a; 2013).

³ On translation studies, see Bassnett and Lefevere (1990), and Bassnett (2014); on feminist translation, see especially Godard (1990), von Flotow (1991), Chamberlain (1992), and Simon (1996); see chapter 2.4. Early 'gender inclusive' translation was pioneered in biblical translation; see especially Haugerud (1977). More recently, Shread (2011) has proposed 'metamorphic' feminist translation, drawing on the work of Ettinger (2006) on the 'matrixial' space; see also von Flotow (2012) on 'metamorphosis' and 'queerying' translation; on lesbian translation, see Wolfe and Penelope (1993); on postcolonial translation strategies, see Simon (1999), and Simon and St.-Pierre (2000).

and effects of Balmer's incorporation of her own original poems within the collection. I consider Balmer's innovative use of Ovid's exile poetry both to meditate on the experiences of World War One (a war that is traditionally filtered through allusions to Homeric epic), and to explore the national, social, and gendered factors that have traditionally enabled—or restricted—access to a classical education.⁴

5.2 Translating classical women poets

Balmer's first published poetry collection *Sappho: Poems and Fragments* contains selections from Sappho chosen and edited by Balmer.⁵ The volume's academic paratextual features include a detailed and researched scholarly introduction, occasional footnotes which guide the reader through the poems (detailing and explaining classical allusions), a list of ancient sources, and an appendix with a scholarly key to the fragments in Lobel and Page. Yet Balmer combines this careful scholarly research with a literary translation in a readable monolingual format of a single poem or a few small fragments per page. By blurring the traditional boundaries between scholarly and literary editions, Balmer creates a text that can be read in either of two ways; while the paratextual elements provide a layer of thorough

⁴ On classical reception in the poetry of WWI, see Vandiver (2010). On women translators and the classics, and translating as a means to access privileged cultural knowledge, see Hardwick (2000, pp. 31-40, 45-47), Hurst (2006), and Balmer (2013, pp. 41-56); Simon (1996) provides a history of women translators, often engaged with classical texts; see also Brown (2005b), and Hall (2008b). On the cultural politics of translation—and the interrelation between languages, translation, and imperialism—in the ancient world, see the collection edited by McElduff and Sciarrino (2011), especially the essays by Spencer on translation as cultural appropriation in Horace's *Odes*, and Young on fears of Greek 'contamination' as staged in Catullus' Latin version of Sappho fr. 31. Young's metapoetic reading of Cat. 50 astutely highlights the cultural and linguistic 'contamination' the Roman translator risks when reading Greek poetry; to me, however, that Catullus is threatened specifically by a *woman's* voice seems equally pertinent. On the male poet 'ventriloquizing' Sappho, see Harvey (1996).

⁵ Balmer (1992); for a discussion of this work by the poet, see Balmer (2013, pp. 73-99). In 2004, a new fragment of Sappho was discovered at the University of Cologne which 'fills in the gaps' of her previous translation of fr. 58; Balmer published an updated translation on her blog in 2013. Available at: <https://thepathsofsurvival.wordpress.com/2013/11/26/a-new-fragment-and-a-new-translation-sappho-the-cologne-fragment> (Accessed: 15 November 2015).

scholarship for an informed reader or student, readers can choose to pass over the academic introduction and endnotes to focus on reading the poems in English. The collection was also reissued via a poetry press (Bloodaxe Books) rather than an academic imprint; while a poetry readership may expect to work harder than a general readership at unpacking a poem as part of the enjoyment of the reading experience, in choosing to include such academic features in her collection Balmer makes academic scholarship available to a wider reading public (the volume is also relatively inexpensive in comparison to an academic crib).

Balmer's work on Sappho thus forms part of a recent trend of contemporary women writers engaging with the classics in a characteristically 'democratic' way.⁶ While Balmer's scholarliness shares characteristics with Wertebaker's thorough approach to the classics (see chapter 4), she is considerably more cautious than Wertebaker about laying primacy on the ability to read the original languages to grant 'authority' to translate. Instead, Balmer notes that 'of course it helps [to be able to read Greek and Latin as a translator], but it will only create a *different* version to someone who can't'.⁷ As a classicist herself, Balmer is aware of the traditionally privileged status of classical learning and the difficulty in accessing texts in the original language, particularly for women; a theme she will continue to explore throughout her classical translations. Balmer's 'democratic' translation of Sappho is a form of feminist praxis, disseminating academic knowledge to those at a greater distance than Balmer from the dominant culture and without as privileged an educational background. Balmer's democratic approach gains a deeper political nuance from the strong influence of feminist classical scholarship on her readings and presentation of Sappho's poems.

⁶ See Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013b).

⁷ Quoted in Hardwick (2010).

Throughout *Sappho: Poems and Fragments* Balmer cites key early texts of feminist classical scholarship (such as Sarah Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*) and draws explicitly upon the work of feminist classical scholars including Page duBois, Judith Hallett, Mary Lefkowitz, and Maureen Fant.⁸ Balmer uses the work of these scholars of ancient women both for her introductory discussion of the status and roles of women in ancient Greece and to aid the stated purpose of her translation: to resituate Sappho's work as accomplished poetry in a way that acknowledges the importance of Sappho's gender and sexuality, but which avoids the distraction of male scholars' 'obsessions' with determining and defining that sexuality.⁹ As Balmer argues, the 'problem' of Sappho's eroticism is only 'a problem because so many translators and commentators have found it so'; Balmer is acutely aware of the ways in which Sappho's reputation has suffered as a result of the classical tradition, which embodies a history of 'inherited literary and social convention'.¹⁰ Balmer takes care to highlight the impact of male scholarship and misogynist readings on previous translations of Sappho, drawing the reader's attention to past conjectural translations that were clearly influenced by discourses of femininity and propriety conceptions of female sexuality.¹¹ She provides as examples past instances where a desire to deny Sappho's non-normative sexuality has led to translations of *pothos* as 'longing' (ignoring the specific sexual context in which it is used to

⁸ Pomeroy (1975), duBois (1978), Hallett (1979), Lefkowitz (1981), and Lefkowitz and Fant (1982).

⁹ Balmer (1992, pp. 11-14). See especially Lefkowitz (1981) on how biographical obsessions are typical of (male) critical treatments of women poets; Lefkowitz establishes a balanced reading of Sappho that does not reduce all content to autobiography, and which places Sappho in her social context without diminishing the literary achievement of the poet herself; see also Hallett (1979). On the ancient status of women, see especially Pomeroy (1975).

¹⁰ Balmer (1992, pp. 7, 8). Balmer draws comparisons with similar patriarchal scholarly treatments of the work of Charlotte Brontë, Emily Dickinson, and Virginia Woolf.

¹¹ E.g., the footnote for Balmer's translation of fr. 137 reads: 'Aristotle claimed that this fragment was a dialogue between Sappho and her male contemporary, Alcaeus... There is no other evidence to support this claim and here, as in other translations, I have concentrated on the actual evidence of the text rather than later interpretations' (Balmer, 1992, p. 49). See also on fr. 110a and 111: 'cited by scholars as evidence of Sappho's heavy-handed sense of humour and lack of subtlety... they are[, rather,] important evidence of Sappho's celebration of women's experience... [which] satirizes male values' (p. 57); 'Modern commentators cite [fr. 55] as an example of Sappho's bitchiness. However, as the fragment stands, its tone is as much elegiac as satirical' (p. 80).

indicate desire or lust), or translations of ‘bed’ (*stromne*) ‘as anything from a ‘mat’ to a ‘couch’’.¹² These mistranslations affect not only representations of Sappho’s sexuality, but also of the woman as artist; Balmer notes her deliberate translation of Sappho’s *gryta* (fr. 179) as a ‘writer’s bag’, for example, where previous translators have ‘make-up bag’: ‘I realised that, just as gaps in the fragments could be filled by the prejudice and assumption of male commentators, both ancient and modern, so a feminist translator could subvert them’.¹³ Balmer’s translations of Sappho thus display both a feminist concern with foregrounding the voice of a desiring woman (revoicing the women of the past), and a sophisticated and scholarly understanding of the ways in which women’s stories (and stories of women) are shaped by literary and social traditions.

Balmer is explicit about her intention to ‘correct’ past mistranslations, and her translator’s preface informs the reader that she has deliberately chosen ‘intense’ translations of Sappho’s vocabulary to counteract the tendency for translators to use ‘a rather florid language perhaps thought appropriate for the work of a woman poet’.¹⁴ Similarly, Balmer displays a feminist concern with emphasizing Sappho’s self-presentation as an actively desiring woman, quoting duBois on Sappho fr. 16 (‘Some men say... but I say...’), which ‘breaks the silence of women in antiquity’ as ‘an instance in which women become more than the objects of men’s

¹² Balmer (1992, p. 29).

¹³ Balmer (2012, pp. 261-263, 264). Carson (2003) translates *gryta* as ‘makeup bag’ (p. 351); however, she makes special note of her decision to translate *hetairai* in fr. 126, 142, and 160 (commonly: ‘courtesans’) as ‘friends’ to connote a close female friendship that is not commoditized (p. 378); Balmer also translates *hetairai* as ‘friends’ (pp. 34, 76, 78). On Carson’s Sappho see Prins (1996, pp. 39-42).

¹⁴ Balmer (1992, p. 29). Prins (1996) argues for the engendering of Sappho as a particularly female voice by a history of translators.

desire'.¹⁵ In short, Balmer declares, 'I have attempted to allow Sappho to speak for herself', a self-aware admission that this 'attempt' is also inherently an interpretation.¹⁶

While Balmer describes her translation strategy as an attempt 'to reproduce Sappho's poetry as faithfully as possible... to capture [it], without embellishment', she counterpoints this clarity of voice with a formal technique influenced particularly by the poet H.D..¹⁷ Following the fragmentary and palimpsestic style of H.D.'s translations of Sappho, the interrupted printed text of Balmer's translations visually evokes the fragmented scraps of papyri on the page; a visual 'foreignization' strategy that reminds the reader of the distance between ancient source and modern target text, and which acts as a physical metaphor for the torn papyri.¹⁸ Balmer also notes the influence of H.D.'s Imagist poetic technique which reduced language down to pure image, 'metaphor in its purist form, crystallized into a single line or even word, echoing the broken nature of the text'.¹⁹

At the same time as creating a visually 'foreign' translation with strikingly condensed images, however, Balmer also sought to create a new, accessible version of Sappho for a new generation (as, of course, every generation aims to achieve). When Balmer first translated

¹⁵ duBois (1978, p. 89).

¹⁶ Balmer (1992, p. 30). Prins (1996) uses Sappho fr. 31 (in which Sappho explicitly loses her voice with desire: *γλωσσοῖα ἔαγε*, 'tongue breaks') as a case study for how translators have attempted to recover Sappho's broken voice, to reclaim a female subjectivity and feminine voice.

¹⁷ Balmer (1992, p. 29); also Balmer quoted in Hardwick (2010). On H.D. and Sappho, see Rohrbach (1996); see also Hardwick (2000, pp. 45-47); on H.D. and revisionary myth-making, see Ostriker (1982; 1983).

¹⁸ On 'foreignization' (as opposed to 'domestication'), see Venuti (1995; 1998). Similarly, Carson notes in her translator's preface to her translation of Sappho that she has taken licence with the layout of the fragments to make single lines (for example, as quoted by later authors) appear more like lyric poems (2003, p. xii). Carson notes that her use of square brackets] [is intended more to remind the reader that they are viewing a fragment of papyrus than as an accurate record of lacunae in the text ('an aesthetic gesture toward the papyrological event', 2003, p. xi). 'Brackets are exciting', Carson continues, an invitation to 'a space of imaginal adventure' (p. xi); thus Carson also invites her reader to participate in the construction of meaning and to speculate about the missing content, although she warns against conjecture about 'everything you ever wanted her to write' (p. xiii).

¹⁹ Balmer (2013, p. 94).

Sappho in the 1980s, only Mary Barnard's and Willis Barnstone's 1958 and 1962 translations were commercially available in English, and in the UK only if imported from the US. While Balmer draws positively upon H.D., she engages more ambivalently with Barnard and Barnstone.²⁰ Both Barnard and Barnstone added titles to their translations of Sappho's fragments to create an 'implicit narrative', inspiring Balmer to take licence with her own arrangement of Sappho's fragments and to group them into thematic sections headed 'Love', 'Desire', 'Religion', for example, titles which guide the reader's interpretation of the poems and provide Balmer's own critical interpretation of the fragments.²¹

Yet Balmer rejected the ways in which both Barnard and Barnstone imaginatively 'filled in the gaps' of the papyrus fragments by which Sappho's poems have survived to create full, readable poems in English; Yopie Prins suggests that such historic filling in the gaps of Sappho is 'symptomatic of the desire for a stable referent'.²² With the advent of second-wave feminist theory, however, and particularly the work of Cixous and Irigaray, the instability of the speaking subject has been recognized, celebrated, and maintained or reused as a political statement.²³ Balmer is thus perhaps more comfortable with leaving Sappho's fragments unfinished; although she is careful to signpost via footnotes or editorial marks if and where she has made conjectures to the text.²⁴

²⁰ On Barnard's Sappho, see Prins (1996, pp. 62-66); Barnard herself rejected the antiquated language of earlier translations of Sappho and aimed to enliven Sappho's voice with colloquialisms and the modern speech of 1958.

²¹ Prins (1996, p. 66); on titles, see Barnstone (1985).

²² Prins (1996, p. 41 n. 11); on the history of Sappho translation as a history of filling in the gaps, see the essays collected in Greene (1996). Prins describes Barnard's translation as 'poised between the continuity of a speaking voice and the discontinuity of a fragmentary text' (1996, p. 63). That is, the translations are visually fragmented on the page but employ a strong use of 'I' to create a 'broken image of unbroken speech' through multiple enjambments; Barnard locates Sappho's voice at the moment of its interruption (p. 64).

²³ See especially Cixous (1976), and Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) on the irrational, unstable feminine writing/speaking subject; see also chapter 2.

²⁴ Cf. the fragmented layout of Carson (2003).

Balmer's use of footnotes takes a deliberately anti-modernist stance against Barnard, who set her Sappho firmly in the modernist tradition by imitating the style of poetic translators Ezra Pound and Richard Aldington who took 'no concern with glosses, or notes or any of the apparatus with which learning smothers beauty'.²⁵ While Balmer is certainly not unconcerned with beauty, her use of footnotes does have a political motivation that is made explicit in her second collection, *Classical Women Poets*; that is, that as well as sharing, or 'democratizing' knowledge, Balmer's paratextual features also demonstrate the often hidden scholarship behind a translation and foreground the intellectual work and presence of the woman translator.

By engaging both with and against a history of translations of Sappho through her use of allusive formal features and in specific 'corrective' details of language, Balmer distinguishes her work as 'Balmer's Sappho'. At the same time, she consciously situates her translation within an intertextual history of English translations, looking back to Sappho through Barnard, Barnstone, and H.D. (who herself used Renée Vivien's 1903 French translation, *Sappho*); Balmer's Sappho is unique, yet part of an ongoing tradition. While *Sappho: Poems and Fragments* drew implicitly upon the work of French feminist theorists, Balmer's second volume, *Classical Women Poets*, draws explicitly upon feminist theories of feminine language and feminist revisionary mythmaking.²⁶

Classical Women Poets is itself an invaluable contribution to feminist classical scholarship; Balmer collects and translates extant fragmented work from sixteen named classical women poets (with an additional section titled 'Anonymous'), and includes a

²⁵ Aldington's translator's preface to *The Poems of Anyte of Tegea* (quoted in Zilboorg, 1991, p. 90).

²⁶ On feminist revisionary mythmaking, see especially Rich (1972) and Ostriker (1982); see also chapter 2. On *Classical Women Poets*, see also Balmer (2013, pp. 103-140).

comprehensive list of the twenty-nine currently known ancient women poets. As with her Sappho translations, Balmer groups the fragments of each author by theme, additionally providing each ‘new’ poem she creates with a title to frame the texts. Balmer’s titles are taken from, or inspired by information provided in ancient commentaries, thus creating a palimpsest of voices and consciously placing her translations again within a tradition of commentary and scholarship.²⁷

In this collection Balmer displays an increasing confidence in her play with genre and her use of paratextual apparatus. The text is supplemented by an extensive bibliography, a glossary of characters and places, an introduction to each of the poets, an introductory essay (which details ancient women’s lives, women poets, ‘women’s language’, and women in translation), and a heavy employment of footnotes (which appear on every page of translation, rather than Balmer’s more sparing use of notes in *Sappho: Poems and Fragments*). Balmer explicitly links her striking use of paratextual apparatus in *Classical Women Poets* to feminist translation techniques. In her introduction, Balmer invokes feminist translators Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, Carol Maier, Barbara Godard, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Susan Bassnett as specific influences on her translation technique, and the poet discusses how she found the theory and practice of feminist translators of particular use when approaching fragmentary classical texts.²⁸

²⁷ Balmer (1996, pp. 20-21).

²⁸ Diaz-Diocaretz (1985), Maier (1985; 1986), Godard (1990), Levine (1991), Bassnett (2014). See also on Godard: Balmer (2006, p. 194). Balmer notes her indebtedness to the feminist translator Luise von Flotow’s 2011 volume *Translating Women* (Balmer, 2012a, p. 264), and Balmer takes her title ‘a woman in transgression, reflecting’ (2012a), from Maier’s ‘A Woman in Translation, Reflecting’ (1985). On feminist translation techniques, see also chapter 2. Baltussen’s (2011) account of Cicero’s translation techniques when writing his *Consolatio ad se* draws striking parallels to Balmer’s own feminist translation techniques; Cicero felt free to adapt and intrude upon the text as a ‘visible’ translator, for example, and he frequently coins neologisms or provides multiple translations for the same Greek philosophical term at different points in his text. However, while Balmer and her fellow feminist translators employ similar strategies to defamiliarize language and ‘trouble’ majoritarian discourse, Cicero employs his translation strategies to gain (re)acceptance into elite Roman society through an erudite literary display.

Balmer defends her dense use of paratextual features via Godard's exhortation to women translators to 'flaunt' their presence in the text; Balmer argues further that her translation techniques of collage and recontextualization required her use of footnotes:²⁹

With *Sappho: Poems and Fragments*, I had restricted [footnotes] to the mythological or historical, to cultural references in the text which could best be captured by external rather than internal expansion. Here [*Classical Women Poets*], I have also included a commentary on many of the processes of translating, recording the original textual strategies alongside those of my translation... on the basis that if different strategies were being employed the reader should be kept as informed as possible. My purpose was to help monolingual as well as bilingual readers, to give them the experience of comparison, of judgement more usually reserved for the scholar.

Such devices aim to free both reader and translation from the illusion that reading these poems is the same act as reading their originals; to throw off... the shackles of feminine 'fidelity'.³⁰

Balmer's aim to 'throw off the shackles' of feminine fidelity draws a sharp contrast with Wertembaker's claim of fidelity to the original.³¹ In addition, her gentle denial of an explicitly political motive, insisting instead that she wishes simply 'to keep her readers informed', is belied by her feminist practice throughout the collection. Balmer's reticence is understandable, given, for example, the debate surrounding the ethics of translation within Lianeri and Zajko's edited collection *Translation and the Classic*.³² Venuti's contribution to volume discusses the necessarily subjective and interpretative nature of translation, and notes the ways in which classical texts are canonized through the insertion of contemporary dominant ideology within

²⁹ Godard (1990, p. 93): 'The feminist translator, affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. *Womanhandling* the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest, self-effacing translator. Taking her place would be an active participant in the creation of meaning who advances a conditional analysis. Hers is a continuing provisionality, aware of process, giving self-reflexive attention to practices. The feminist translator immodestly flaunts her signature in italics, in footnotes—even in a preface'. von Flotow (1991) lists the three main strategies of feminist translation as: over-translating; prefacing and footnoting; hijacking the text; see chapter 2.

³⁰ Balmer (1996, p. 22).

³¹ Wertembaker (2008, pp. 37-38).

³² Lianeri and Zajko (2008).

the translation, and how translations become canonized ‘by fashioning... [themselves] so as to support an authoritative interpretation’; likewise, Hall urges an investigation of embedded cultural values contained within historical translations of classical texts; yet Martindale’s essay vehemently disagrees, arguing instead for a Bloomian ‘aesthetics’ of translation against Berman’s ‘ethics’ of translation.³³

The scholar should maintain caution, however, when reading the demurral of Balmer’s introduction; in her monograph on her varied translation work, *Piecing Together the Fragments*, Balmer highlights the necessarily ‘creative writing’ that makes up a translator’s preface, and the subjective nature of her own prefaces. Indeed, Balmer uses footnotes not only to highlight the ‘textual strategies’ of the original text or her translation (the visibility of the translator is evidenced by repeated notes that: ‘I decided’), but to highlight the particularly gendered nature of those strategies. For example: to note women poets’ subversion of male poetic tropes in their use of Homeric metaphors; to note their engagement in revisionist myth-making; to note the translator’s specific use of gendered vocabulary to emphasize aspects of gender or the gender of the poem’s speaker; to signal the translator’s insertion of women’s names directly into poems to replace obscure topographical or mythic references; or to note points in the text where Balmer rewrites previous (male) translations and misinterpretations of women’s poems. Balmer’s notes invite her reader to participate in the act of translation, democratizing both access to knowledge and the process of meaning creation.³⁴

³³ Venuti (2008, p. 39); Hall (2008b, p. 331); Martindale (2008); Berman (1995).

³⁴ E.g. ‘With ironic bathos, she applies [*iachein*, roar] to a more domestic setting’ (p. 72 n. 29); ‘teasing’ as ‘a meaning I followed here—but without Hesiod’s sense of censure’ (p. 36 n. 15); ‘while retaining their ‘gender identification’, flowers denoted not frailty but force’ (p. 86 n. 21); ‘Nossis has been criticised by Gow and Page for her ‘stilted’ language here (1965, p. 440)... However, Nossis’ use of grand Homeric language throughout this epigram only seems gently mocking’ (p. 88 n. 30).

Balmer's emphasis on the necessity of sharing scholarly information in part also preemptively counteracts potential accusations of 'over-translation'.³⁵ She pointedly notes the 'incompetence' of which women translators are frequently accused:

Such tampering might appear as cultural arrogance, casting the freshness of classical poetry as 'inferior' to the more tortuous semantic complexities of modern (and particularly modernist) poetry. In the case of women poets, there is also the danger of implying—as has often been the case—an ineptitude based on gender.

Yet fragmentary poetry can be frustrating for the reader—how can the translator persuade them that a string of seemingly unconnected lines is worth their attention?³⁶

Balmer reiterates her justification for her paratextual apparatus and feminist interventions in the text as devices for facilitating understanding and interpretation (while admitting that, of course, 'this is of necessity a highly subjective task, reliant on individual readings of ambiguous texts').³⁷ Balmer's lengthy translator's preface thus highlights the necessarily subjective task of the translator, cautiously flaunting at once her presence, the constructed textuality of her work, and her feminist interventions in the source text.

Balmer also situates her work as feminist translation by delighting in the use of her dictionary, incorporating alternative meanings or versions simultaneously, and alluding to or incorporating ancient and modern commentaries within the final translations.³⁸ Visually and formally, Balmer also explains how she 'strung together stray words or quotations into a single piece', creating single poems 'stitched together' from a collage of many fragments.³⁹ In addition

³⁵ On hostile reactions by critics to her hybrid translation work, see Balmer (2013, pp. 196-197, 226).

³⁶ Balmer (1996, p. 20).

³⁷ Balmer (1996, p. 20).

³⁸ Balmer (1996, p. 21).

³⁹ Balmer (1996, pp. 20, 44 n. 48).

to disrupting dominant, linear, and ‘phallic’ forms of language—and thus evoking visually through the collage a Cixousian and feminine, fragmentary discourse—Balmer’s collage technique also facilitates a feminine mode of thinking and reading. As the reader pieces together the fragments of Balmer’s text in the process of the reading experience, she is invited not only to participate in the production of meaning but to participate in the intellectual practice that Balmer herself demonstrates.⁴⁰

Pioneering translation theorist Susan Bassnett cites Balmer’s *Classical Women Poets* as an example of how paratextual material serves to highlight the agency of the feminist translator and to indicate points in the text where she has directly intervened, thus evincing Luise von Flotow’s feminist translation technique of ‘hijacking’.⁴¹ In tandem with feminist translation strategies, Balmer’s techniques also draw upon the work of feminist classical scholars and feminist ancient historians. As well as referencing essays by feminist classical scholars on individual poets or poems, throughout *Classical Women Poets* Balmer cites the important volumes of women’s history and feminist classics by Foley, Pomeroy, and Rabinowitz and Richlin, noting especially in the latter volume, *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, the essays by Cole, Skinner, and Hallett on the French feminists Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva.⁴² Balmer also cites Amy Richlin’s article ‘Sulpicia the Satirist’, of particular note for Richlin’s technique of

⁴⁰ I am indebted to Rust (2009) and her work on the ‘radical chaos’ of Aulus Gellius for this formulation. Rust argues that the miscellaneous structure of the *Noctes Atticae* invites the reader to actively participate in the kind of lateral thinking and citation practice that Gellius’ own characters display in battles of wit against interlocutors who display a linear, hierarchical mode of thinking modelled on Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis*. Although Gellius espouses an epistemology of chaos as a means of attaining and maintaining intellectual control in a chaotic world, Balmer uses her fragmentary translation strategies and structure to destabilize power relations and encourage feminine modes of thinking; for the purposes of my argument in this thesis, it is also of particular note that Gellius’ literary model for such a chaotic (‘feminine’) miscellany is a woman writer, Pamphile, whose 1st-century CE Greek ‘memoirs’ (a mix of biography and erudite excerpts) unfortunately have survived only in fragments. On genre and Pamphile as source for Gellius, see Vardi (2004).

⁴¹ Bassnett (2013, pp. 118, 79).

⁴² Foley (1981), Pomeroy (1991), and Rabinowitz and Richlin (1993); see also n. 8, above.

‘piecing together the fragments’, reconstructing the lives of real historical women by drawing upon as many types of sources as possible, from quotations to inscriptions to graffiti.⁴³ In *Classical Women Poets*, Balmer employs the same technique to reconstruct texts, broadening her translation work to cover non-literary texts, and consequently expanding the generic boundaries of what a book of ‘translations’ can be.

After gathering her disparate source materials in the manner of a feminist historian, Balmer turns to theorists of feminine language and feminist revisionary mythmaking to revoice those fragments. Seeking to make amends for the ‘silences’ of the past, Balmer draws explicitly upon the work of feminist literary critics Tillie Olsen and Alicia Ostriker; to reconstruct the missing feminine voices Balmer draws upon the *écriture féminine* of Hélène Cixous and the *parler femme* of Luce Irigaray, via feminist socio-linguists Sally McConnell-Ginet and Deborah Tannen, whose work identifies the ways in which language use and dialect is defined by gender.⁴⁴ Balmer uses these feminist theorists to explore the revisionary myth-making that ancient women poets were already engaged in (Sappho’s Helen poem is perhaps the most famous example), and to discover whether a particular ‘feminine’ voice can be positively distinguished and conveyed in translation.⁴⁵

Due to the fragmentary, ambivalent nature of many of the fragments of women’s poetry she translates, Balmer proposes that in the ‘absence of a collaborative author’ the translator can look instead to the work of her own contemporaries—women poets—for guidance toward this

⁴³ Richlin (1992c; reprinted in Richlin, 2014, pp. 110-129; especially pp. 110-112). *Piecing Together the Fragments* is the title of Balmer’s monograph on her classical translation work (2013).

⁴⁴ Olsen (1980), Ostriker (1982); Cixous (1976), Irigaray (1985a, b); McConnell-Ginet, Borker and Furman (1980), Tannen (1995).

⁴⁵ On citing literary foremothers as ‘providing expert witnesses to speak for the defence’, see Balmer (2013, p. 233, quoting Rabinowitz, 1993, p. 8).

‘feminine’ voice. Balmer uses poetic images from the work of Adrienne Rich, May Sarton, Marianne Moore, Stevie Smith, and Wendy Cope (among many others) to create a prism through which both translator and reader view and re-view the classical texts.⁴⁶ Balmer notes for example, that her alliterative translation ‘Mormo the monster’ in a poem by Erinna was inspired by two different women-as-monster images found in Adrienne Rich’s ‘Planetarium’ and a line from May Sarton; Balmer italicizes her borrowed lines, or indicates allusions with detailed footnotes.⁴⁷ Balmer also uses a translation of Rich’s poem ‘Pierrot le Fou’ by feminist translator Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz as inspiration to expand and update an ancient proverbial reference to a modern context: ‘[h]ere, too, are further acts of collaboration—between women in translation and women translators’.⁴⁸ In this way, Balmer establishes a tentative canon of women’s literature (including both writers and translators), tracking thematic echoes through the centuries and situating her work directly in this intertextual chain.

Balmer uses translation as a feminine, feminist mode of reception which makes amends for the mistranslations and silencings of the past. While this early translation work experimented with the blurring of literary and scholarly texts through the use of paratextual apparatus and framing devices, the translations themselves remained within the boundaries of literal translation. Balmer employed her feminist ‘hijacking’ in a subtle manner, hijacking rather the history of translation and commentary on a particular text than the text itself. In her next collections, however, Balmer begins to create experimental versions of the classical texts

⁴⁶ Carson similarly compares Sappho fr. 96 to a letter written by Emily Dickinson (2003, p. 371).

⁴⁷ Balmer (1996, p. 18).

⁴⁸ Balmer (1996, p. 19); cf. Gubar (1996, p. 202), who suggests that the fragmentary nature of Sappho’s text inspires collaboration between women artists, rather than imitation. Balmer’s statement may also allude to Godard’s 1994 volume, *Collaboration in the Feminine*. Balmer notes that Stevie Smith and Wendy Cope provided examples of how to use rhyme in a darkly comic way (rhyme is often denigrated in contemporary poetry but was frequently employed by ancient women writers), while Marianne Moore’s syllable counting (a technique also influential on Plath) helped Balmer to reproduce ancient poetic metre.

themselves; and this increasingly interventionist translation strategy coincides with a shift of attention from women poets to men poets. While her translations of women poets gave voice to forgotten women of the past and aimed to allow Sappho to ‘speak for herself’, Balmer now turns to subvert the voices of Catullus and Ovid.

5.3 Chasing Catullus with Ovid

In 2004 Balmer simultaneously published two volumes of Catullan poetry. The first, *Catullus: Poems of Love and Hate*, comprised translations of the complete shorter poems of Catullus; the second, *Chasing Catullus: Poems, Translations & Transgressions* ‘ventures into the border territory, the no-man’s-land between poetry and translation, juxtaposing new poems with fresh versions of ancient texts, brazenly reimagining classical literature... [and] subverting epic works, overwriting the past like a palimpsest’.⁴⁹

The first volume of literary translations includes a scholarly introduction and full glossary, as well as a key to the poems; but the footnotes of the previous publications appear now as discreet endnotes. In her introduction to *Poems of Love and Hate* Balmer writes of her translations that:

... just as Catullus subverted Sappho’s essentially female poetics in his cross-gendered versions, so there might have been a temptation here, as a 21st century woman, to subvert Catullus’ male Roman sensibilities, overwriting them with an implicit, if playful, challenge to his imagery of domination and submission... However, it seemed to me that the poetry was already quite subversive enough. And perhaps, as a woman, I could not take his belligerent posturing too seriously.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Balmer (2004b, back matter). On Balmer (2004a) see Balmer (2013, pp. 141-168); on Balmer (2004b) see Balmer (2013, pp. 171-199); on both volumes, see Bassnett (2008, pp. 78-81).

⁵⁰ Balmer (2004a, p. 24).

The feminist translator again engages in a playful rhetorical denial here, skilfully foregrounding gender and the gender of the reader and translator, at the same time as she denies doing so in her translations. While Balmer may not alter the gender of any pronouns or speakers (as do radical interventionist feminist translators such as Suzanne Jill Levine), her endnotes do explicitly and frequently comment on issues of gender in Catullus' poems.⁵¹ As with her Sappho translations, Balmer also formally experiments with the arrangement of Catullus' poems to emphasize her own readings of the poems and to guide her reader, titling each of the poems to provide context, and grouping the poems into sections, often by addressees; the reader is introduced, for example, to 'Good Friends' and 'Bad Poets'.⁵² Again, Balmer signals her democratic approach to translation, claiming that the reordering of the poems into thematic groups stems 'most importantly' from 'a desire for the poetry to be as accessible as possible, as enjoyable—but most of all as funny—to those with no prior knowledge of Latin or of the poet'.⁵³

Balmer experiments more dramatically, however, with the poems she reserves for the complementary collection, *Chasing Catullus: Poems, Translations, Transgressions*, in which she movingly uses translations, classically-inspired poems, and 'transgressions' to retell the story of the death of her young niece from cancer. Balmer poignantly frames the poems chronologically into the sections 'Before', 'During', and 'After'.⁵⁴ The poet notes that she was

⁵¹ On subverting Catullus' male poetic voice, see Balmer (2003).

⁵² Balmer notes that her reordering of the 'Lesbia' poems aimed to capture the fluctuating nature of their relationship rather than a chronological pattern; cf. Anna Jackson's reordering of Catullus' poems to create a narrative which traces the love affair between Catullus and Clodia (2014); on the debate surrounding the arrangement of the Catullan corpus, see Skinner (2007).

⁵³ Balmer (2004a, p. 26).

⁵⁴ On Balmer's use of the classical past to articulate grief in *Chasing Catullus*, see Cox (2011, pp. 38-44), and Balmer (2013, pp. 183-189, 193-196), especially on classical translation as a distancing metaphor ('shifting filter') to deal with horror (p. 186; cf. Wertenbaker's use of the classical past as metaphor, chapter 4). On Cicero's turn to translation to cope with the death of his daughter, see Baltussen (2011).

inspired to see how far she could explore the relationship between translation and poetry: in her previous work on fragmentary, disputed texts, her reconstruction work often already seemed to go beyond literal translation. Defining ‘transgressions’ as poems in which the dialogue with their classical precedent is not as explicit as a ‘translation’, Balmer variously refers to her ‘perversions’ of the text, or to poems ‘inspired by’ or ‘based on’ an original source; Balmer also uses the terms ‘quotes’ or ‘via’ to signal an intertext through which she engages with the classical text. Balmer experiments with recontextualization and juxtaposition of original and translation ‘both in the structure of the collection as a whole, as well as in individual poems; a poetic device in its own right, allowing translation and original to inform each other, tossing layer upon layer of meaning back and forth across the two’.⁵⁵

Across the collection, Balmer pieces together a collage (‘palimpsest’) from textual, visual, and material sources as varied as critical commentaries, newspaper headlines, gravestones, notebooks and diaries, church architecture and tapestries, paintings, and estate agent notices, ‘fusing the strategies of translations and ‘found’ poetry’.⁵⁶ The collage of sources also reflects on a structural level the dense intertextual work that Balmer carries out on a narrative and symbolic level, manipulating and reappropriating the classical poems through subtle contextual allusions. Intertextuality and autobiography become increasingly important in this volume as Balmer blurs classical texts with private recollection, taking her inspiration from the ‘personal classicism’ of H.D., Elizabeth Bishop, and Louise Glück. Balmer argues that such dense thematic, semantic, and formal intertextuality ‘acts as a reassuring force, a means of anchoring’ her formal experimentation within a feminine literary tradition.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Balmer (2004b, p. 9).

⁵⁶ Balmer (2004b, p. 9); for a list of Balmer’s varied sources, see ‘Notes’ (2004b, pp. 59-64); Balmer’s source texts ‘are not confined to the canon of classical literature’ (Cox, 2011, p. 39).

⁵⁷ Balmer (2013, pp. 184, 199).

Despite Balmer's title, *Chasing Catullus* contains only two poems that are linked directly to Catullus, positioned face-to-face on the printed pages of the open book: 'After Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*' and the titular 'Chasing Catullus', an ironic meditation on the act of translating that uses Catullan puns to explore the art of 'sleep[ing] with the dead'.⁵⁸ The collection does, however, include versions, translations, and transgressions of Propertius, Juvenal, Sulpicia, Claudian, Euripides, Sophocles, Plato, Virgil, and Homer, and several 'original' poems which are covertly informed by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. As well as drawing upon the work of classical authors, Balmer also references the (canonized) classical tradition via Eliot, Pound, and Cavafy, in playful contrast to poems such as 'Feminine Endings' that pun on 'the traditional male ownership of the classical literary tradition'.⁵⁹ Original poems such as 'WC1' are influenced by the fragmented lines of Sappho, Corinna, and Telesilla, and Balmer employs a modernist formal technique with visually striking broken lines that reference her own translations of their poems in the earlier collection *Classical Women Poets*.⁶⁰ Balmer's blurring of the lines between translation and creative response ensures that although her poems can be read in the light of close textual scholarship, they also stand alone as original works.⁶¹ Balmer makes no demand on the reader of a necessary knowledge of the source text to enjoy her 'transgressions'.⁶²

While Balmer's use of paratextual apparatus in this volume is subtle, the poet has experimented more dramatically with the content and editing of her translations. In the poem

⁵⁸ Balmer (2004b, pp. 20-21). See Balmer (2013, p. 196) on the naming of this volume. Poetic meditations on the art of translating appear more frequently and boldly in the translations of Ovid, *The Word for Sorrow*.

⁵⁹ Balmer (2013, p. 176). On the presence of Virgil in *Chasing Catullus*, see Cox (2011, pp. 38-44).

⁶⁰ Balmer (2013, p. 174).

⁶¹ Cf. Bassnett, who mixes translation and creative response, citing her source as co-author (Bassnett and Pizarnik, 2002).

⁶² Balmer (2013, p. 183).

‘Fresh Meat’, for example, Balmer condenses 350 Greek lines of Homer’s *Iliad* 22 into fifty lines of English, using her editorial choice to foreground issues of gender and sexuality in the finished translation.⁶³ In ‘Creusa’, Balmer retells the story of Aeneas’ flight from Troy from his wife’s perspective as she watches her husband, son, and father-in-law disappear into their ‘quintessentially male future’ (the final stand-alone line of the poem reads, ‘It was then I knew I’d been left behind’).⁶⁴ Balmer notes that although she deliberately placed herself in the tradition of women poets writing revisionary versions of female mythic archetypal characters in *Chasing Catullus*, she also aimed to go beyond second-wave approaches which simply reversed the myths.⁶⁵ Balmer’s consciously ‘post-feminist’ response allows her to identify with characters more fluidly; in the poem, ‘Greek Tragedy’, for example, Balmer experiments with shifting subjectivities to first voice Medea, steeling herself for the child’s death ahead, before taking on the perspective of the chorus, watching helplessly from the wings. In a series of *Odyssey* poems (‘via Cavafy’), Balmer also takes on the voice of Odysseus rather than Circe (perhaps the more obviously appealing figure to a revisionary feminist translator), and creates a subversively ‘sinister rather than a domestic Penelope’.⁶⁶

⁶³ Balmer (2013, pp. 177-183).

⁶⁴ Cox (2011, p. 44). In this poem, Creusa notes the physical link between father and son by their identical, if differently sized hands; another instance where, like Procne (see chapter 4.4), a mother sees the moment she loses her son to the male world. Balmer has more recently written a sonnet about this moment from Aeneas’ point of view, ‘Lost (after *Aeneid* 2.735-55)’; the poem is published alongside a second sonnet which ‘ghosts’ lines 112-196 from Aeschylus’ *Suppliants*, and uses classical precedents as metaphors to express her grief at the loss of her mother (Balmer, 2015). In her recent versions of Palladas, titled ‘The Other Half Speaks Out’, Balmer explicitly takes on the point of view of ‘the other half’ to answer back to the often misogynist content of the poems, and to the scholarship which takes the poems to be complaints about the poet’s wife. Available at: <https://thepathsofsurvival.wordpress.com/2014/09/17/palladas-the-other-half-speaks-out-i> and <https://thepathsofsurvival.wordpress.com/2014/09/30/palladas-the-other-half-speaks-out-part-ii> (Accessed: 15 November 2015). Balmer employs a similar technique in her translation of Pliny (*Ep.* 3.16), which retells the story of the archetypally dutiful Roman matron Arria, but presents ‘Arria’s own version of events’. Available at: <https://thepathsofsurvival.wordpress.com/2012/05/01/arrias-wound> (Accessed: 29 March 2016).

⁶⁵ Balmer (2013, p. 184).

⁶⁶ Balmer (2013, p. 190).

The Ovidian poems in *Chasing Catullus* engage with and transform the Ariadne, Philomela, and Hercules episodes from *Metamorphoses*; despite her careful source notes elsewhere in the text, however, Balmer does not explicitly signal the poems' Ovidian sources. Balmer's omission of the Latin source attribution here seems of a different kind to Wertebaker's hesitance about aligning herself with Ovid as discussed in chapter 4; Balmer notes in her translator's preface that the voices of original and translation throughout the collection blur to the point where it is 'unimportant, until the reader—or even the writer—can't distinguish between the two'.⁶⁷ Balmer may thus be initially testing the limits of her experimental blurring of subjectivities and authorial voices, and her success in these poems may have inspired her later experimental work on Ovid's exile poetry in *The Word for Sorrow*.⁶⁸

5.3.1 'After Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*'

The first Ovidian poem in *Chasing Catullus* is Balmer's ekphrastic description of Titian's painting *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1520-1523). The poem imagines the artist reading 'his Catullus' for inspiration; although Ovid (*Met.* 8.172-182) is as likely a source for the tale as Catullus 64, particularly given Titian's frequent use of the *Metamorphoses* as sources for painting subjects.⁶⁹ The painting depicts the moment of Bacchus' arrival to rescue Ariadne after her abandonment by Theseus; the god is accompanied by his entourage of satyrs and maenads clashing cymbals. In the middle of her poem, Balmer includes an italicized verse that draws

⁶⁷ Balmer (2004b, p. 10).

⁶⁸ On the blurred line between 'translating' and 'writing' for the feminist translator, see Bassnett (2006).

⁶⁹ The National Gallery holds *Bacchus and Ariadne* in its collection and lists both Catullus and Ovid as inspirations for the painting; Titian's work clearly blends details from both. Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* can be viewed online, available at: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/titian-bacchus-and-ariadne> (Accessed: 29 March 2016). The National Gallery's exhibition 'Metamorphosis: Titian 2012' used three of Titian's other Ovidian paintings as the point of departure for a multi-faceted and collaborative literary, visual, and performance project. Available at: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/metamorphosis-titian-2012-11-july-2012-0000> (Accessed: 29 March 2016).

upon details of Catullus' description of this entourage at 64.251-264, but is also highly original. The Latin *quae tum alacres passim lymphata mente furebant* ('who, then, running about, raging with a frenzied mind', 254), for example, becomes 'Beyond, the faithful, fired by frenzy, | The passion that can alter words and minds...', as Balmer manipulates Catullus' words to describe the visual depth in a painting he never saw.

Yet Balmer's Ovidian source is also present from the opening line of her poem: 'Already she's pointing to the stars'. While this line describes Titian's Ariadne, who gestures toward the crown-shaped constellation at the top left of the painting, the detail is from Ovid's text, and at the start of her poem Balmer herself thus strikingly gestures toward the closing lines of Ovid's episode that describe the star-crown flung into the sky by Bacchus (8.178-181).⁷⁰ Balmer's poem also details Ariadne's trick of the thread by which she helped Theseus escape the maze (noted by Ovid at ll. 172-173). Balmer departs from both her sources, however, in her foregrounding of Ariadne's subjectivity. Balmer portrays Ariadne as a woman tired of men's games, and metatextually looking to the end of her story: 'She's had enough of earth-bound schemes, | of mapping out the boundless maze, | disentangling all their secret themes, | to be called faithless, traitor, tart'.

5.3.2 'Philomela'

The blending of translation, commentary, and original material seen in the poem 'After Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*' is explored further in Balmer's Philomela poem. 'Philomela' is

⁷⁰ 'Taking the crown from her forehead, [Bacchus] threw it into the heavens; it flies far through the air, and while it flies the gems turned into sparkling fires and were set in place in the sky to remain in the shape of a crown', *sumptam de fronte coronam | immisit caelo; tenues uolat illa per auras | dumque uolat gemmae nitidos uertuntur in ignes | consistuntque loco, specie remanente coronae*, *Met.* 8.178-181.

the last poem of the ‘Before’ section of the collection and is a complex revoicing of Ovid’s episode; the speaker opens the poem with the startling announcement: ‘One way or another, I’d have done it myself’.⁷¹ Although Ovid is not named as Balmer’s source for the poem, her Philomela’s self-mutilation closely follows details of the Latin in the description of the ‘bloody stump’ of Philomela’s tongue (compare the ‘the tongue root-tip’, *radix... ultima linguae*, *Met.* 6.557), and the image of the woman willingly stretching out her ‘own throat’ to slit it herself (‘when she saw that [Tereus] had taken up his sword, Philomela prepared her neck [stretched it out ready] and hoped for death’, *iugulum Philomela parabat | spemque suae mortis uiso conceperat ense*, 6.553-554). Balmer also directly revoices Philomela in the poem as she describes stitching the tapestry, ‘weav[ing] my words with crimson thread’ (Ovid’s *purpureas... notas*, 6.577); ‘my stunted songs’ making oblique reference to the history of feminist scholarship on Ovid’s Philomela and ‘the voice of the shuttle’.

As well as referencing Philomela’s mutilation and stunted tongue, Balmer’s ‘stunted songs’ also suggest that the poet hesitates or experiences writer’s block when she attempts to write about her niece’s terminal cancer (although *not* to write feels like cutting out one’s own tongue).⁷² Balmer uses the weaving imagery in the poem to evoke emotional states (‘my soul frays’, ‘my heart knots’). ‘Philomela’ also casts a link to the later poem ‘In Coventry’, where the speaker’s inability to have children is contrasted to the savage irony that the fertile sister’s child has died; in ‘Philomela’, the speaker stitches the ‘husband dropped, wife I’ll never make... my heart knots at the thought of kids’. Yet the crimson thread itself is associated heavily throughout the collection *Chasing Catullus* with lies and untruths. In an earlier poem, “‘78

⁷¹ Balmer (2004b, p. 22); cf. Sylvia Plath’s ‘shut mouth’ in chapter 3.5.1.

⁷² An additional allusion may be detected here to the feminist reclamation of the weaving figures of Penelope and Arachne; see especially Heilbrun (2002), and Miller (1986).

Nights (after Cavafy)', for example, Balmer refers to the 'red, red lies' told to her by a lover; in 'Philomela', the speaker refers to the words she weaves with crimson thread as her 'traitor speech', and in the final stanza the speaker hesitates to 'stitch' (speak) about children.⁷³ Balmer uses the figure of the tongueless Philomela to stutter her own metatextual doubts in this last poem 'Before' the poems begin to detail the child's illness; Balmer hesitates, not a mother herself, whether to use her niece's trauma as material for her own poetry and continue with the collection (the reader stutters and stumbles over this poem alongside the poet as the reading experience is delayed). With an awareness of Ovid's version and the fate of the child Itys, Balmer's 'Philomela' thus foreshadows the tragedy about to unfold: the figure of the child in crimson stitches—and the hope that the child brings—may be a red lie, too.

5.3.3 'Demeter in Winter (31/10)'

A further poem also unattributed to Ovid is 'Demeter in Winter (31/10)' (forming a pair with the poem 'De raptu Proserpina', a translation of Claudian that recounts the death of the young niece).⁷⁴ The tale of Demeter-Ceres and Persephone-Proserpina is a common mythic trope in women's writing, favoured particularly for its presentation of the mother-daughter relationship and the separation from or loss of the mother or daughter through rape and marriage. Many contemporary women writers interpret the episode metaphorically rather than literally and read Proserpina's rape by Dis as a tale of sexual awakening and a young girl's journey into womanhood.⁷⁵ The versions thus do not 'translate' the episode, but instead 'write

⁷³ Balmer (2004b, p. 17).

⁷⁴ Ovid *Met.* 5.341-571; cf. *Fast.* 4.393-620, especially 423-620; on the myth in Ovid, see Hinds (1987), and Zissos (1999); see also Cahoon (1996). On Balmer's Claudian translation, see Bassnett (2011, pp. 166-167).

⁷⁵ On the importance of the tale of Demeter and Persephone in women's writing, see Gubar (1979), and Hayes (1994); cf. Allen (1999), who tracks a shift from Demeter and Persephone to the myth of Psyche in women's writing. Hayes (1994, pp. 170-194), Walters (2007), and Greenwood (2009) discuss the particular appeal of the

back' to Ovid—who focuses in greater detail on the experience of Ceres—and present Proserpina's version of events, smothered by her mother's love and happy to escape to live with Dis (as in Stevie Smith's 'Persephone').⁷⁶ When Ceres is the subject of the poem, she is often presented ironically, and her grief is cast as selfish and stifling (as in Rita Dove's *Mother Love*; although Carol Ann Duffy narrates a guileless version of Ceres' side of the story, and Eavan Boland's 'The Pomegranate' presents a wistful but wiser Ceres accepting her daughter's future departure).⁷⁷

Balmer's poem 'Demeter in Winter (31/10)' is a sincere account of a woman's grief for a lost child, although the poem refocalizes the mother-daughter relationship to reflect on the grief of the aunt for the lost girl. Balmer admired Eavan Boland's 'The Pomegranate'—a poem as much about the nature of reception and the changing reading experience as one returns to a text over time as it is a modern retelling of Ovid's episode—and Balmer may thus consciously look back to Ovid via Boland, inspired to play with her subject position in the poem in relation to the myth.⁷⁸ In *Metamorphoses* the episode ends with Jupiter's pronouncement that Proserpina must spend six months each with mother and husband; the reader does not see Ceres in the months that follow, or experience her grief. Balmer's poem continues Ceres' story 'beyond the ending' that she has in Ovid's epic poem, but draws closely upon Ovid's Latin to do so (although the poet chooses the Greek 'Demeter' rather than 'Ceres', as in Ovid).⁷⁹ Balmer also

myth in the work of African-American women writers; Hurst (2012) discusses versions of the Demeter and Persephone myth in the work of thirteen women poets. See also Duncker (2001), who steals Proserpina back from the Underworld, and Namjoshi (2001), who blends the stories of Ceres and Eurydice.

⁷⁶ Smith (1950; reprinted in Smith, 2015, pp. 283-284).

⁷⁷ Dove (1995); Duffy (1999, p. 76); Boland (1994); cf. 'Demeter' by Olga Broumas (1977); see Hurst (2012).

⁷⁸ See Balmer on Boland: Balmer (1996, p. 69 n. 18). Hurst (2012, pp. 187-188) notes how many women writers engage with the Demeter myth 'in relation to', rather than as a reaction to the work of earlier women writers; she tracks the links Rachel Hadas self-consciously makes back to Boland and Christina Rossetti, and the links Shara McCallum draws in her work on the myth to Boland, Rita Dove, and Louise Glück (all the poets are concerned with the mother-daughter relationship in the myth, positively or problematically).

⁷⁹ Balmer (2004b, p. 35).

mixes the ancient with the contemporary as the speaker reads a newsagent advertisement for a girl's bike, yet she also seems to be the same Ceres found in Ovid's own story, 'centuries on'.

Perhaps following Carol Ann Duffy's earlier version, whose Demeter sits in a 'cold stone room' next to 'ice' and a 'frozen lake', Balmer's poem imagines this time as a perpetual winter of 'ice', 'sleet', and 'snow' (in Ovid, Ceres' grief brings a time of famine, *Met.* 5.479-486). A child's frosty 'stiff glove spiked on garden walls' evokes the lost girdle, the only trace of Proserpina left on earth, while the yearly loss that her mother suffers is evoked by the speaker's description of waking up and realizing 'again' that the little girl is gone, a repetition of grief emphasized by the doubled 'how... how' of the penultimate line.⁸⁰ The final lines of 'Demeter in Winter' poignantly reverse the final lines of Ovid's episode, where Proserpina's return to her mother is likened to the sun reappearing victoriously from behind rain clouds (*ut sol, qui tectus aquosis | nubibus ante fuit, uictis e nubibus exit*, 5.570-571); here, the speaker describes the fading of the disappeared small child as snow obliterated by the rain: 'an uncertain fall of rain-washed snow'.

5.3.4 'Cutting the Hydra (27/3): AM' / 'Herculean Task (27/3): PM'

Balmer's transformation of the classical into the uniquely personal continues in a pair of poems which document an unsuccessful surgical attempt to remove her niece's cancer via the story of Hercules as told in *Metamorphoses*.⁸¹ The poems' titles and dated subtitles, as in 'Demeter in Winter (31/10)', give the impression of diary entries (Balmer drew on personal

⁸⁰ *Persephones zonam*, *Met.* 5.470; in Ovid's version in *Fasti* Ceres finds Proserpina's footprints (*uestigia*) rather than her girdle (4.463-464; 463).

⁸¹ Balmer (2004b, pp. 25, 26); Balmer's endnotes for 'Cutting the Hydra' point the reader to Hercules' account at *Met.* 9.67-74.

notebooks and her journal entries of that time as source materials), and thus the poet wholly recontextualizes the poems' use of classical sources; a technique that Balmer will develop in the 'translator's diary' sequence in *The Word for Sorrow*.⁸²

The first of the pair, 'Cutting the Hydra (27/3: AM)' creatively translates *Met.* 9.67-78, in which Achelous recounts to Theseus his defeat at the hands of Hercules in a contest to win Deianeira. In Ovid, the lines quote Hercules' taunts to Achelous, who attempts to escape Hercules' grip by shape-shifting into a snake; Hercules boasts that after beating the Hydra the single snake of Achelous will prove no challenge. In Balmer's poem, the boasting Hercules becomes a surgical oncologist, boasting that he will be able to remove the 'snake in the grass' that is her niece's cancer: 'He said: "*It's child's play... cradle work...*"' ('He said "beating snakes was work I did in my cradle!"', "*cunarum labor est angues superare mearum*" | *dixit*, 9.67). Balmer employs italic script to signal the translated lines, before returning to roman font for the four lines she appends to the translation, jolting the reader out of the mythical landscape with the blunt, almost colloquial, 'Afterwards he couldn't even look us in the face'. The translation is thus retrospectively set in context (the shift from myth to reality is signalled by the alternation of font styles throughout the collection).⁸³ Balmer complicates and personalizes Hercules' boast; in Ovid, Hercules boasts that he will have no trouble killing Achelous, but in 'Cutting the Hydra (27/3: AM)', the surgeon's boast that he will kill the cancer contains the unspoken boast that, conversely, he will save the life of the young girl. The surgeon fails at his

⁸² Balmer discusses the personal context of these poems in her monograph (2013, pp. 185-186); on the personal voice in *Chasing Catullus*: 'For Balmer... the intertextual labyrinth doubles as an autobiographical structure', Nikolaou (2006, p. 22). On the 'literary artificiality' of her personalized voice in the poems, however, see: Balmer (2013, pp. 197, 208, 217). On the personal voice in classical scholarship, see Zajko (1997, p. 55).

⁸³ Balmer notes that the use of the embedded quote stimulates and articulates a dialogue between source text and original poem, creating internal juxtaposition within the poem as well as juxtaposition between poems in the collection as a whole (2013, pp. 185, 188).

task; yet he can forget that he was ‘playing’ Hercules in Balmer’s poem as he returns ‘home to his own Deianira’ and hangs up the surgeon’s heroic costume, a white coat instead of Hercules’ lion-skin. The speaker is left at the end of the poem helplessly watching Hercules depart.

After the failure of the surgeon, the fictionalized Balmer takes on the role of Hercules herself, shifting narrating subjectivities across the two poems. ‘Herculean Task (27/3: PM)’ immediately follows ‘Cutting the Hydra (27/3: AM)’ (printed overleaf in the first edition), and appears to be an original poem, albeit one which draws on the Herculean imagery of the previous poem. By placing the poem overleaf, Balmer does not immediately draw the reader’s attention to the juxtaposition of the two poems (as when original and translation are placed on facing pages), although the poems’ timed and dated subtitles signal to the reader that they refer to events which took place in the morning and afternoon of the same day; furthermore, the poem almost directly continues the translation of Hercules’ story from *Metamorphoses* 9 begun in ‘Cutting the Hydra (27/3: AM)’.

In ‘Herculean Task (27/3: PM)’ the speaker describes driving to her parents’ house as messenger after the unsuccessful operation, with the terrible news of the failure that she carries likened to Hercules’ poisoned arrows polluted with the Hydra’s blood: ‘careful... | in case it slipped and pierced my heart’ (Ovid describes the arrows shortly after Achelous’ story when the narrator turns to recount Nessus’ death, shot by the poisoned arrows: ‘the poisoned point stuck out of his chest... and his blood sprang out from both holes, mixed with the gore of the poisonous Hydra’, *exstabat ferrum de pectore aduncum. | ... sanguis per utrumque foramen | emicuit, mixtus Lernaevi tabe uenini, Met. 9.128-130*). As well as the translation of Ovid, the poem alludes to Hercules’ other labours, as, in a piling up of ancient and modern similes, the

cancer is likened to a bomb, a precious new purchase, a perishable item, and the sleeping Cerberus. Again, the poem blends the contemporary with the ancient, punning on contemporary uses of ‘hell’ to evoke a journey through an experience rather than Hercules’ journey to a physical place. In the final lines, the speaker describes settling into her car for the difficult journey, evoking an epic arming-sequence as the heroine dons her armour for the battle ahead: ‘[I] belted up, pulled down my shield’.

Chasing Catullus is a bold work of classical translation. Balmer argues that the poems are united by their existence within ‘a range of interpretative positions’, but she betrays a quiet confidence in her decision to publish these radical versions under the title ‘Catullus’.⁸⁴ Balmer is also keen to point out that her collection is more than simple literary experiment, but is a way of exploring how classical translation can provide the translator with ‘other voices... with which to say the unsayable’.⁸⁵ This need to ‘say the unsayable’ becomes a broader theme in Balmer’s next collection as she turns from the domestic to the public, and from Catullus to Ovid, using Ovid’s exile poetry to expand her meditation on private grief in *Chasing Catullus* to address the horrors of WWI.⁸⁶ Balmer’s additional move into the male tradition of ‘Great War poetry’ is accompanied by the poet’s most experimental translation work and her most explicit feminist interventions in the classical source text to date.

Balmer’s use of Ovid to write about Gallipoli subtly addresses two absences in studies of the literature of WWI: women writers, and Ovid. Women writers are frequently excluded

⁸⁴ Balmer (2004b, p. 9).

⁸⁵ Balmer (2004b, p. 9).

⁸⁶ On fictional and poetic responses to Ovid’s exile poetry, see Claassen (1999), Ziolkowski (2009), Ingleheart (2011), and Balmer (2013, pp. 202-203); on Ovid’s exile poetry, see Nagle (1980), Williams (1994), Claassen (2008), and McGowan (2009).

from war narratives as if they did not experience the war at all. Yet H.D.'s *Bid Me to Live*, and Virginia Woolf's *Diaries*, for example, document air-raids and the privations of rationed food and supplies (Woolf humorously suspects that her neighbours call round for afternoon tea more for the socially-obligatory free cake than for her conversation); and Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* both describe their time in active service as ambulance drivers and auxiliaries in France. Elizabeth Vandiver's recent monograph on classical reception in the poetry of WWI is mostly excellent; however, while Vandiver's study states her aim to expand the definition of 'war poet' to signify more than 'soldier poet', despite a chapter dedicated to non-combatants Vandiver includes only three women poets in her four-hundred-page work: Una Ellis-Fermor, Mildred Huxley, and Geraldine Robertson Glasgow.⁸⁷

While scholars of women's writing have worked to redress the lack of representation of women in the scholarship of war literature, works such as Josephine Balmer's *The Word for Sorrow* and Alice Oswald's *Memorial* are also retrospectively reinserting women into the canon of war poetry.⁸⁸ Notably, both Balmer and Oswald have chosen to use the classics to do this; as in the work of Plath, women writers may look to the classical past to authorize their 'intrusion' into this male territory while concurrently drawing upon the densely classically allusive tradition of WWI poetry. While both Oswald and Balmer arguably convey an anti-war stance,

⁸⁷ Vandiver (2010); Vandiver (2010, pp. xi; 77, 259, 395-397). Hurst (2006, pp. 193-219) details classical reception in women writers of WWI, especially May Sinclair and Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*; Hurst details Brittain's 'anguished rejection of the Homeric values of the First World War' (p. 193). The use of the classics to critique the horrors of war is not, of course, restricted to women writers; Christopher Logue also aimed to critique the violent imperialist and sexist ideology that Homer was employed to bolster; see Hardwick (2000, pp. 57-61). On classical reception in WWI poetry see also Hardwick (2000, pp. 49 ff.); also Greenwood (2007).

⁸⁸ Oswald (2012). For women writers of WWI, see Gilbert and Gubar (1989, pp. 259-307) on Katherine Mansfield, Alice Meynell, Isabel Ecclestone Mackay, Iris Barry, Jessie Pope, May Sinclair, Mrs Humphrey Ward, Edith Wharton, and Virginia Woolf; for women poets of WWI see Khan (1988). On Oswald see Harrop (2013), and Minchin (2015).

Oswald's subversive translation of the *Iliad* still draws upon the Homeric tradition of war poetry; Balmer, however, innovatively draws upon on Ovid's exile poetry. Balmer thus stakes her claim for a place for herself as a woman writer in the classical tradition, and a place for Ovid in the tradition of WWI poetry.

5.4 *The Word for Sorrow*

The Word for Sorrow meditates on experiences of grief, exile, and language across two millennia. It contains selected translations of Ovid's exile poetry, *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, alongside original poems which blur the line between fiction and translation. Balmer describes her translations as 'versions' or 'Ovidian renditions', noting that she did not intend for her poems to form a 'standard' translation.⁸⁹ Following the 'transgressions' of *Chasing Catullus* Balmer discovered for her Ovidian translations new ways in which to 'intervene even more directly in the text, to 'flaunt our presence' as Barbara Godard has urged, not just through prefaces or marginalia or even transgressional translations, but also by becoming a translator/protagonist within the narrative drive of a collection'.⁹⁰ Thus, instead of a chronological series of translations taken from Ovid's exile poetry which track the Roman poet's story alone, the narrative of *The Word for Sorrow* is structured by Balmer's own progress on her translation work. As *Chasing Catullus* was structured by dated diary entries of grief, so *The Word for*

⁸⁹ Balmer (2009, p. xv).

⁹⁰ Balmer (2012, p. 268); 'just as Ovid's often ironic poetic voice interposes itself into his narrative, so could my own' (Balmer, 2009, p. xvii). On *The Word for Sorrow*, see Balmer (2013, pp. 201-227). On Balmer's appearance within the narrative as translator rather than as Ovid (as in the exilic work of Pushkin or Brodsky, for example), see Brown (2014, pp. 446-448). See also the interviews with Balmer in Hardwick (2010), and Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013a).

Sorrow takes on the form of a translator's diary, and the reader follows Balmer's successes and struggles with her task.⁹¹

Indeed the reader of *The Word for Sorrow* is confronted with the lives and stories of four protagonists: the translator Balmer, whose poems meditate on the act of translation; Naso (Ovid), who details his life in exile; an old Latin dictionary, a 'character' whose appearance in the text nods to Ovid's own anthropomorphized poetry books; and a group of soldiers sent to fight at Gallipoli at the end of the First World War and commanded by Geoffrey, the previous owner of Balmer's Latin dictionary.⁹² 'Geoffrey' is an anonymizing pseudonym for the dictionary owner, and his character is an amalgam of several soldiers, as fictional a character in the text as the translator herself. Balmer also plays investigator within the narrative, tracking down this previous owner of her dictionary as she tracks down Ovid's Latin definitions. Ovid describes himself as *lusor* in his epitaph at *Tr.* 3.3.73, translated by Balmer as 'player', and while Balmer puns here on the modern idiom of 'a player' as an unfaithful lover, an intriguing tension is also set up between the additional senses of 'player' as a 'gambler' or a 'professional', and the reader is also reminded of the Shakespearean sense of a player as 'actor'; Balmer creates a persona in the text as slippery as Ovid's own.

The four narrative strands intertwine across time and throughout the collection, and each of the four stories offers new perspectives on the others as voices are juxtaposed and blended on the physical and philological journeys that each character makes. Balmer intended her Gallipoli poems and *Tristia* poems to 'follow on almost seamlessly from one another in order

⁹¹ Cf. the translator's journal of Godard (1995), and the similar technique in Bassnett and Pizarnik (2002).

⁹² Brown notes the 'cross-contamination between the two voices of Geoffrey and Ovid' (2014, p. 446); I also delineate the translator and the dictionary as two further characters within the narrative. On the layers of topography in the narrative (Rome, Turkey, Gloucester), see Balmer (2013, p. 214).

to maintain dramatic tension, not just in each internal narrative as their story developed, but in the interaction between the two'.⁹³ By opening up Ovid's exilic poems to multiple speaking subjectivities, including the translator herself, Balmer inserts a female voice in the male poetic text and stages dialogues between past and present, engaging in metatextual conversations with Ovid as fictionalized protagonists set equally within the text. By including herself within the narrative as a protagonist Balmer also blurs the boundaries between herself and Ovid, producer and reproducer, author and imitator; in this way, she dismantles the traditional hierarchy between source text and translation and embodies within the narrative a feminist insistence on translation as creation. As the fictionalized translator and her dictionary progress through Ovid's texts, Balmer (re)frames Ovid's poems and guides the reader's understanding, creating a forceful, moving narrative, and a work that is both a translation and commentary.

Of the thirty-nine poems which comprise *The Word for Sorrow*, the translations treat twenty-four poems selected from the two collections of Ovid's exile poetry, representing approximately two fifths of Ovid's total ninety-six exilic poems (Balmer notes that her choice of poems was for the purpose of narrative drive, to find a selection that would complement, supplement, or contrast with her original poems about the Gallipoli soldiers).⁹⁴ The first and last translations within the main body of *The Word for Sorrow* are the first and last poems of Ovid's exile (*Tr.* 1.1 and *Pont.* 4.16); Balmer structures the collection internally by dividing it into three sections with six stand-alone translations in each (that is, translations which feature no additional original material or blended voices). The opening and closing poems of each of the three sections also mirror the first and last poems of *Tristia* books 1, 3, and 4, respectively,

⁹³ Balmer (2013, p. 211).

⁹⁴ Balmer (2009, p. xv). Balmer translates: *Tr.* 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.10, 1.11; 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.8, 3.10, 3.14; 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10; 5.7, 5.10; *Pont.* 4.2, 4.16. Translations of *Tr.* 1.7 and 3.7 not included in *The Word for Sorrow* have been published separately; see Balmer (2005, pp. 66-67; 2010, p. 137).

although the translations included within each section do not necessarily follow the sequential order of Ovid's poems as they appear in *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*.⁹⁵ Balmer also titles her three sections: 'One: The Journey Out' contains translations predominantly from *Tristia* 1 and original poems which describe the soldiers setting out for war and the beginnings of Balmer's translation project; 'Two: Landed' contains translations from *Tristia* 3 and original poems which describe the struggles of trench warfare or Balmer's writer's block; and 'Three: The Way Home' contains translations from *Tristia* 4 and original poems which document the end of WWI and the completion of Balmer's translation task.⁹⁶

The section titles and thematic groupings of the translations refocus the reader's attention away from Ovid's journey into exile toward the journey of the translator, particularly the incongruous title of the final section, 'Home', to which Ovid and many of the young soldiers at Gallipoli never did return.⁹⁷ Indeed Balmer's translator poems continue after both the last Gallipoli poem and the last translation of Ovid included in the volume, going further than DuPlessis' call to 'write beyond the ending' of ancient texts to write her own ending as a woman writer beyond Ovid's last known words.⁹⁸ Balmer again invents often playful titles for individual poems to present and emphasize her personal readings of Ovid, thereby branding her versions with her translator's signature and creating poems that are both translations and interpretations of the text.⁹⁹ The poem titles enable the translator to (re)contextualize a poem

⁹⁵ In order of inclusion: *Tr.* 3.4 (epigraph); 'The Journey Out' includes *Tr.* 1.1, 1.2, *Pont.* 4.2, *Tr.* 1.3, 1.4, 1.10, 1.11; 'Landed' includes *Tr.* 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.8, 3.10, 3.14; 'The Way Home' includes *Tr.* 4.2, 4.1, 4.8, 4.3, 4.4, 4.10, 5.7 and 5.10, *Pont.* 4.16; *Tr.* 4.9 (epilogue).

⁹⁶ On the trope of journeying to Gallipoli as sailing to Troy in WWI poetry, see Vandiver (2010, pp. 241-245).

⁹⁷ W. B. Yeats' 'Sailing to Byzantium' (1928) may be another intertext here, a poem which describes a journey toward a land 'That is no country for old men'.

⁹⁸ DuPlessis (1985b).

⁹⁹ Balmer may have been influenced in this strategy by Wheeler, who also created individual titles for his Loeb edition of Ovid's exile poetry, and which Balmer drew on in her preparation for *The Word for Sorrow*, although only her title for *Tr.* 1.11—'Naso Sees the End of the Beginning'—appears to allude in any direct way to Wheeler's titles (his *Tr.* 1.11 is titled 'Epilogue'); see Wheeler (1996).

(‘Naso’s Last Word’), set the scene (‘Naso Sees Hell Freeze Over’), guide the reader’s interpretation of a poem (‘Between the Lines’), or draw the reader’s attention to aspects of a poem that specifically recall Ovid (‘The Horses’). Balmer’s titles also ease the reader through the text by negotiating the sharp changes in tone found in Ovid’s exile poetry and which have the potential to jar the modern reader; Balmer’s titles and her interplay between dark and light from the beginning of the collection thus prepare the reader for the sudden cloak of darkness that descends in *Tr.* 1.3 after the light-heartedness of the opening poems.¹⁰⁰

Some of Balmer’s translations are ‘condensed’ line-for-line renderings of the Latin; due to modern publishing constraints and formats, however, concisely editing Ovid’s poems was a practical decision as well as a creative one.¹⁰¹ For example, the eleven-line poem ‘Seeking Quarter: Naso’ selectively translates lines 49-54 and 61-64 of the eighty-eight line poem *Tr.* 4.4, while ‘Naso Off the Shelf’ condenses lines 1-82 from the one hundred and two lines of *Tr.* 3.1 to twenty-eight English lines. In these relatively literal translations Ovid speaks in strong rhyming couplets; Balmer may have chosen this form both for the forcefulness it creates for Ovid’s voice in the collection, and to suggest the pair-form of Ovid’s own elegiac couplets in a more contemporary style. Other poems, however, take specific linguistic inspiration or imagery from an Ovidian precedent but contain predominantly original material. ‘Dancing in the Dark’, for example, expands three lines at *Pont.* 4.2.32-34 to twenty lines of English, and ‘Naso the Barbarian’ expands two lines at *Tr.* 5.7.64-65 to twelve lines in English; in these poems, the couplets disappear and Ovid’s voice disintegrates together with the form of the poem as

¹⁰⁰ On titles, see Balmer (2006, p. 187; 2013, p. 211). Other translators have struggled with Ovid’s dark poems, particularly the sombre *Tr.* 1.3 which follows two playful poems; Slavitt’s translation of this poem, for example, jars with the reader because of its abrupt change in tone (1990, pp. 10-13); see also on Slavitt’s tone as translator, n. 150 (below).

¹⁰¹ Balmer (2013, p. 210).

Balmer's own voice intrudes and blurs with his.¹⁰² Balmer thus uses complex variations in rhyme scheme, poetic metre, and form to subtly distinguish or blur the voices of the four protagonists; while this break-down of voice, metre, and subjectivity crescendos in the chaos of war and exile, at the end of the collection as Balmer moves on to her next translation project, the voices separate again and the final translation of Ovid returns to the couplet form ('Naso's Last Word').

Balmer frequently reorders or reverses Ovid's line-numbers to create nuance or emphasis within poems, or to create smooth segues between sequential translation and original, omitting obscure mythological allusions and formulaic scenes for the ease of her contemporary reader. In 'Naso Jumps Ship', for example, Balmer replaces Ovid's twenty-line topographical catalogue in *Tr.* 1.10 'with the tongue-in-cheek three words, "exotic sounding [*sic*] places"'; while such omissions 'domesticate' her translation, Balmer simultaneously 'foreignizes' the text by flaunting her presence as translator.¹⁰³ Other poems contain only a few translated lines of Latin to provide 'prologues' or 'codas' to Balmer's original poems, while poems that on first reading appear to be 'original', upon closer inspection closely echo Ovid's Latin; for example, the stormy weather outside Balmer's house in 'Hail' draws on Ovid's description of his stormy journey to Tomis in *Tr.* 1.2.¹⁰⁴ Balmer blurs the traditional boundaries of genre throughout the collection by creating translations of Ovid that are highly original, and original poems that are highly Ovidian. Furthermore, as the narrating subjectivities of Balmer and Ovid become confused across the collection, the language of Gallipoli and Rome blur just as Ovid's own Latin language felt the *contagio* of Getic in exile (*Tr.* 3.14.17): in Balmer's narrative world,

¹⁰² Balmer (2009, p. xv).

¹⁰³ Balmer (2013, p. 207).

¹⁰⁴ Ingleheart quoted in Balmer (2013, p. 208).

geese fly like ‘mortars’ and leisure boats dot lakes like ‘mines’; Ovid ‘desert[s]’ the ship at Tomis and finds it a ‘no-man’s land’ where he feels ‘disengaged’—an ‘empty shell’ who complains of the ‘rations’; and the world of Gallipoli is full of ‘tesserae’, ‘ancient maps or manuscripts’, and labyrinthine trenches, a place where flies drink sweat off the bodies of soldiers ‘like lovers’: ‘We had felt Hades’ breath’.¹⁰⁵ Balmer’s use of the terminology of modern warfare to translate Ovid’s words and her use of classical allusions to shade the WWI poems stimulates dialogue between the narrative layers.

Balmer also skilfully encourages dialogue between the different stories in *The Word for Sorrow* with a visual strategy. In addition to titling and reordering the sequence of lines and poems, Balmer recontextualizes her translations by their physical juxtaposition on the printed page opposite or above original poems.¹⁰⁶ ‘Naso Writes his Own Epitaph’, for example, is a line-for-line translation of *Tr.* 3.3, but Ovid’s request to his wife to honour his name with an inscription and to ‘give the dead their due’ is retrospectively shadowed by the dark pathos of its facing poem, ‘Among the Graves: Green Hill, Gallipoli’, in which the speaker describes the memorials to WWI soldiers that contain no bones and which are carved with ‘off-the-peg words from those that never came’.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the poem ‘Seeking Quarter’ is split into two parts; while the first part translates Ovid’s plea for ‘a milder place of exile, a little nearer [Rome]’ in *Tr.* 4.4 (*mitius exilium pauloque propinquius*), the second part invites a comparison with the Gallipoli soldiers, ‘sick of heart—or stomach’ but granted ‘no reprieve, no respite’.¹⁰⁸ The pairings act as framing devices throughout the text, structuring the layers of narrative, creating

¹⁰⁵ Balmer (2009, pp. 25; 10, 20; 19).

¹⁰⁶ ‘[R]econtextualisation and juxtaposition [become] central to the creative process, the dialogue between text and translator, writer and subject, between original and version, poetry and translation’ (Balmer, 2005, p. 61).

¹⁰⁷ Balmer (2009, pp. 20-21).

¹⁰⁸ Balmer (2009, p. 36).

dramatic irony or emphasizing mood, and foregrounding Balmer's relationship with—and manipulation of—both her source text and her reader.¹⁰⁹ Balmer thus creates new readings of Ovid's poems by frequently presenting them as part of a pair, with Ovid's story to be read and reread with reference either to Geoffrey's story or her story as translator; and in poems such as 'Thread', the four narrative strands meet in a single poem. Balmer's juxtapositions disrupt the linear flows of the various narratives and move the reader backwards and forwards through the text, mimicking the journeys of the protagonists within the text and encouraging her reader to enact the two-way process of reception.

While Balmer limits her characteristic feminist paratextual apparatus in *The Word for Sorrow* to a translator's preface and endnotes, her free translations and editing of Ovid's poems are still a bold flaunting of her presence in the text. In addition, Balmer's combination of a variety of 'versions' of Ovid's poems with original poems and metapoetic commentary, as well as her incorporation of a broad range of visual and material sources, produces a complex translation collage.¹¹⁰ Balmer's sources include photographs, war diaries, letters, digital and physical archive and reference material, inscriptions and war memorials, eyewitness accounts, a travel diary, her translation notebooks, and conversations with relatives of the Gallipoli soldiers. Dictionary entries and intertextual allusions to previous translations and commentaries add further to the palimpsestic nature of her text, as Balmer situates her translation within a tradition of Ovid's translators by referencing or recalling John Keats, Virginia Woolf, A. L. Wheeler, and Peter Green.

¹⁰⁹ Balmer's juxtaposition technique also works to maintain the contrasting tones of Ovid's originals; cf. the 'Ovidian tension between darkness and lightheartedness' in Jo Shapcott's *Of Mutability* (2010), which uses Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to explore the poet's changing body during the ravages of breast cancer (Cox, 2012).

¹¹⁰ On the palimpsest as feminist poetics, see Keller and Miller (1994), DuPlessis (1996), Frost (2003), and Kinnahan (2004, pp. 41-47).

Balmer's translation of *Tr.* 1.2 ('Naso All at Sea'), for example, is appended by two additional lines, 'in searching out light | I'm staring at darkness', which allude to Keats' description of poetic drive as 'straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness'; and the icy imagery of *Tr.* 3.10 ('Naso Sees Hell Freeze Over') draws on the 'Great Freeze' sequence in Woolf's *Orlando*.¹¹¹ A number of intertexts also inform 'Naso's Book Back in Rome', Balmer's translation of *Tr.* 1.1: following Ovid, Balmer references Horace *Epodes* 1.20, Catullus 1, and Ovid's own earlier *Am.* 3.8.6; in addition, she alludes to Wheeler's Loeb introduction, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, and Hillaire Belloc's 'On His Books' to 'overwrite the Latin' with English literary texts.¹¹² Similarly, 'Dancing in the Dark' takes its title from a line of Green's translation of *Pont.* 4.2.32-34, and Balmer's line 'poetry... should... smell of the lamp' in 'Naso's Book Back in Rome' (translating *otia* at *Tr.* 1.1.41) borrows Wheeler's phrasing (via Plutarch) in his introduction to the Loeb edition of Ovid's exile poetry: 'Ovid was a very careful artist... He toiled over his work and his verse smells of the lamp'.¹¹³ Where Plutarch's Demosthenes reacts against the accusation that his arguments smell of lamp-oil (that is, his literature is over-wrought), Wheeler uses the phrase in a positive way, to foreground the hard work and scholarship of the poet. Balmer transforms the sense of the phrase again, using it in a subversive manner to refer specifically to the hard work of the feminist translator: her work, too, 'smells of the lamp'.

¹¹¹ Keats quoted in Cook (2001, p. 106); on Woolf in this poem see Balmer (2013, p. 217 n. 43). On Woolf's frost as Ovid's flood at the beginning of the *Met.*, see Brown (1999, p. 203); read thus, Balmer's imagery neatly circles back to Ovid via Woolf; see Woolf (2003b).

¹¹² See Balmer's discussion (2013, pp. 205-207). Balmer also notes the influence on her 'impressionistic' technique of translation of Paul Batchelor's poem 'Tristia II', a 'version' of Ovid which combines elements from poems 3.3, 3.10 and 4.1 (2012, p. 268; Batchelor, 2008). Balmer's intertextuality also references her own work: her translation of *Tr.* 3.1, for example, echoes the semantics of her translation of *Tr.* 1.1 earlier in the collection, while her use of the phrase 'youth's green passion' explicitly references her own translations of Sappho (fr. 31), Anyte (AP 7.486), and 'Letchworth Crematorium' from *Chasing Catullus*; see Balmer (2013, p. 217).

¹¹³ Green (1994, p. 176); Balmer (2009, p. 51) via Wheeler (1996, p. xxxi).

Balmer's dense intertextuality emphasizes her scholarly preparation before translating; but it is also an acknowledgement of the intertexts that Geoffrey's men would themselves have read and used to engage with the texts of Homer or Ovid. In her discussion of WWI poetry, Vandiver notes the particular importance of mediating texts to lower-class poets without an education in Latin or Greek as a means of accessing classical texts; a classical allusion may as likely be a reference to Shelley or Keats as it is to Homer or Ovid.¹¹⁴ Balmer's intertextual work thus incorporates these original acts of homage, situating her translation in a series of moments of the classical text's transmission, including the fictionalized account of Balmer's dictionary work on the text, which the reader now holds in her hands.¹¹⁵

While the allusions to Keats, Wheeler, and Green stake Balmer's claim to a place in the traditionally male canon of classical translation and commentary, intertextual references to feminist writers such as Woolf and Godard strengthen both Balmer's feminine response to Ovid and her authorial voice within the text. Balmer's Ovidian translations thus become not only a history of Ovidian reception and translation, but a history of women's receptions and translations. As well as staging fictional dialogues between herself and Ovid, Balmer evokes within her text a fictional study group of women comparing translations and discussing the classics (having been excluded from the men's classrooms), incorporating the work of other women writers within *The Word for Sorrow* to explore her 'sense of separation as a classical scholar and translator'.¹¹⁶ Balmer's allusions and citation practice thus work to insert the

¹¹⁴ Vandiver (2010, p. 95).

¹¹⁵ Cf. Balmer's translation of the fragment of Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* (fr. 134), which imagines a moment in the text's transmission, embedding the fragment itself within a description of Alexandrians reading Aeschylus' text. Available at: <https://thepathsofsurvival.wordpress.com/2012/11/23/translating-fragments-iii> (Accessed: 2 April 2016). Cf. also H.D., who chooses as epigraphs for her translations of Sappho the fragments that are all preserved as quotations in classical handbooks on writing, thus situating herself in a tradition of reception and intertexts (Rohrbach, 1996, p. 194).

¹¹⁶ Balmer (2013, p. 227). On citation practice as establishing an intellectual genealogy in Aulus Gellius, see Rust (2009).

feminine into a traditionally masculine intellectual tradition and to create an intellectual community of women writers united by their shared relationship to Ovid's texts. Balmer notes that she also names her Ovid 'Naso' for a similar reason: 'to distinguish my character from the 'Ovid' of literary tradition... [and] from that of the western canon'.¹¹⁷ Balmer asserts her place within the canon at the same time as she asserts the difference in her approach.

Balmer also highlights the task of the feminist translator by borrowing Ovid's punning play on 'feet' to signal his own work, to signal her translation work in the text. Balmer translates Ovid's 'every letter' (*littera*, *Tr.* 1.11.1), for example, as 'every tense, each letter', an addition to the Latin which completes the last line of the preceding poem: 'past, future, present'; and in a translation of *Tr.* 1.7 not included in the final collection, 'Burning Books', Balmer puns 'for better or verse'.¹¹⁸ Similarly, Ovid's complaint that in Tomis there are 'none whose ears can comprehend Latin words' (*nec qui | auribus accipiat uerba Latina suis*, *Tr.* 4.1.89-90) becomes none '[w]ho can... follow Latin syntax'; and just as Ovid imagines picking out weeds from his garden (*nec dubitem longis purgare ligonibus herbas*, *Pont.* 1.8.59), Balmer 'picked out a weed like editor | adjective... guiding my path between fallen stars | before language, semantics, divide us'.¹¹⁹ Balmer also describes her struggles with translation as 'chasing down words... searching for agreement, unpicking order', turning Ovid's poem about his 'writer's block', *Pont.* 4.2, into a poem about her 'translator's block'; and caught in Ovid's poetic 'tangle of laurel', Balmer

¹¹⁷ Balmer (2009, p. xvi).

¹¹⁸ Balmer (2009, pp. 11, 10; 2005, p. 67).

¹¹⁹ Balmer (2009, pp. 32, 46). The translation of Ovid's disclaimer in *Tr.* 3.3.1-2 ('if you wonder why this letter is written by another hand', *haec mea si casu miraris epistula quare | alterius digitus scripta sit*) also thus becomes a metatextual joke about the translator's own hand; see also Brown (2014, p. 447) on Balmer's puns on 'between the lines' and 'in the cracks' as suggestive of the space in the text where she creates new meaning—in Ovid's gaps and differences.

puns twice on the homophones ‘Gloucs’ (short for Gloucestershire where the regiment are from) and ‘gloss’ (‘to translate’).¹²⁰

5.4.1 Translation or original?

‘The Horses’ is on first reading an original poem which describes a stormy sea-crossing made by the WWI soldiers from the UK to Alexandria in Egypt (a place Ovid recounts visiting himself as a student at *Tr.* 1.2.79-80).¹²¹ The poem opens with a short four-line stanza which quotes in italics a conversation between Balmer and the daughter of her dictionary’s previous owner; the daughter recounts how her father Geoffrey was in charge of the horses on board as the only man on ship who did not suffer from sea-sickness. A description of a stormy sea-journey immediately recalls and echoes thematically Ovid’s sea-poem *Tr.* 1.2 (cf. *Tr.* 1.10); but Balmer also notes that the poem’s imagery was ‘inspired by’ and ‘ghosted’ by the charioteer simile in *Tr.* 1.4.13-16.¹²² In Ovid, the image of a charioteer too weak to hold on to the reins describes the storm-tossed ship at the mercy of the billowing winds:

*utque parum ualidus non proficientia rector
ceruicis rigidae frena remittit equo,
sic non quo uoluit, sed quo rapit impetus undae,
aurigam uideo uela dedisse rati.*

(*Tr.* 1.4.13-16)

... as a rider who is not strong enough lets the ineffective reins fall loose upon the stubborn neck of the horse, so not where he wishes but where the billow’s power carries him, our charioteer, I see, has given the ship her head...

(Wheeler)

Geoffrey slithered across their sweaty backs;

¹²⁰ ‘Dancing in the Dark’ (*Pont.* 4.2) has been published in two versions; ‘tangle of laurel’ appears in the initial version (Balmer, 2005, p. 64) but is omitted in the 2009 published collection.

¹²¹ Balmer (2009, p. 9).

¹²² Balmer (2013, p. 215).

a teetering punch-drunk charioteer,
harnessing terror and then letting go
the reins. Seas reared...

(Balmer)

Balmer thus literalizes Ovid's simile, harnessing it to create an original poem about Geoffrey struggling to control the war horses on a pitching ship.

On closer reading, the whole poem draws heavily upon Ovidian imagery, using the vocabulary of *Tr.* 1.4 both allusively and directly. The reference to sea-sickness in the opening stanza recalls Ovid's description of the fearful, pale face of the sailor (*nauita confessus gelidum pallore timorem*, 1.4.11), as well as allowing Balmer to establish the theme of class and status that she will explore in further detail later in the collection: that is, as a man of higher social status than the infantry soldiers, Geoffrey was the only one on board ship with previous sailing experience. Balmer's line 'A tilted world, Bear tipped upside down' is a close approximation of Ovid's opening line (*tingitur oceano custos Erymanthidos ursae*), while Balmer's 'spiralling clouds like splintered spines' subtly evokes the battered pine planks of Ovid's ship (*pineae texta sonant pulsu*, 9). While Ovid is thrown far off-course and thinks he sees 'forbidden Italy... the forbidden land' (*interdicta mihi cernitur Italia... uetitas... terras*, 20-21), Balmer's soldiers see 'shimmering on the edge of sight, | forbidden cities, unknowable lands'. Balmer also borrows Ovid's description of the sea as high as a mountain (*monte nec inferior... unda*, 7-8) for her phrase 'Seas reared, distant ranges', and the sailors in her poem look down upon pebbles on the sea-bed as Ovid sees the waves draw up the sand from the deep (*erutaque ex imis feruet harena fretis*, 6).

Balmer draws on Ovid most explicitly in the final stanza of ‘The Horses’, the first line of which directly translates the final line of Ovid’s poem, *si modo, qui perit, non periisse potest* (*Tr.* 1.4.28):

*But how can you kill the already dead?
Lined and waiting on the shore,
warrior-ghosts of three millennia.
Now the only passage through was fear.*

Balmer signals the explicit Latin quotation with italics; yet the final line of her poem also reads as a translation of line four of Ovid’s poem, *sed audaces cogimur esse metu*: ‘forced to boldness through fear’. The image of warrior-ghosts waiting upon a shoreline in the middle lines anticipates both the fatal outcome of the doomed Gallipoli mission and the ghosts that Balmer senses watching over her shoulder while she writes (as she describes in the titular ‘The Word for Sorrow’).¹²³ The image also strikingly recalls Virgil’s description of ‘the helpless crowd of the unburied’ crowding the banks of the river Lethe at *Aeneid* 6.325 (*inops inhumataque turba est*).¹²⁴ The ferryman Charon repels the unburied from the shore and the disturbed Aeneas pities their cruel fate, *multa putans sortemque animo miseratus iniquam* (6.332); both Virgil and Balmer also look back to *Odyssey* 11.36-43, where ‘warriors killed in battle’, *ἄνδρες ἀρήϊφοι* (l. 41), are named among the souls that rush out at Odysseus from the Underworld. The allusion to *Aeneid* and *Odyssey* in ‘The Horses’ suggests that Balmer is making her own journey to the Underworld in her collection by recovering the voices of Ovid and Geoffrey; yet it also alludes to Ovid’s own figurations of himself as Aeneas in the exile poetry that Balmer has not directly

¹²³ On Ovid’s own ‘word for sorrow’, *tristitia*, cf. *Her.* 3.90; *Met.* 9.397; *Tr.* 5.4.7, 14; *Pont.* 1.10.38 and 2.1.10; Balmer may also be retranslating *Pont.* 3.2.100 in which Ovid writes that the local people know ‘the word for friendship’, *nomen amicitiae barbara corda mouet*. Balmer may also be thinking of Virgil’s *lacrimae rerum* (*Aen.* 1.462).

¹²⁴ On the presence of Virgil, especially *Aen.* 2 and 6, in *Chasing Catullus*, see Cox (2011, pp. 38-44).

translated or included within her collection (see, especially, *Tr.* 1.3, and 3.2, although Ovid tends to figure himself as Aeneas leaving Troy behind, rather than descending to the Underworld).¹²⁵

Introduced in ‘The Horses’, *Aeneid* 6 recurs as a mournful motif throughout *The Word for Sorrow*. ‘The Penny Pot’ is a collage of memories, materials, and classical intertexts that enrich an ekphrasis upon an old metal cup in Balmer’s childhood home, a cup hand-made by her grandfather from empty bullet shells, ‘its triple legs... || ... a Sibyl’s tripod suspended in miniature, | deciphering its sulphur dreams in the dark’, holding ‘pennies saved for Charon’s fare’.¹²⁶ In the poem, it is now Balmer’s grandfather who takes on the role of Aeneas as a Merseyside coal miner travelling back to Europe after the war to dig out the unburied dead from the abandoned trenches; a man haunted, Balmer suggests, by dreams of sulphur-yellow mustard gas. Together, the Virgilian imagery of ‘The Horses’ and ‘The Penny Pot’ subtly embeds a version of the opening third of *Aeneid* 6 within the superstructure of Balmer’s Ovidian translations.

As well as Virgilian motifs, Balmer also includes two allusions to Catullus 11 and its image of a flower struck by a plough in the original poems, ‘The Word for Sorrow’ and ‘Malvern Road Station, Cheltenham’.¹²⁷ The inclusion of the flower enables Balmer to enact both a very Ovidian manoeuvre, by playfully alluding to her own earlier translations of Catullus, and, by referencing the specific poem which describes the *horribile... uli- | mosque Britannos* (11-12),

¹²⁵ Although, as Oliensis reminds us of Aeneas losing Creusa and looking back—like Orpheus, only too late (*Aen.* 2.711 ff.)—‘Troy has become an Underworld, a place of dead mothers’ (1997, p. 305). On Ovid’s exile poetry as response to Virgil’s *Aeneid*, see Barchiesi (1997, pp. 15-44). On the *katabasis* trope in WWI poetry (Wilfred Owen and Robert Graves), see Vandiver (2010, pp. 302-321); on Owen’s ‘Strange Meeting’ as *katabasis*, see also Hardwick (2000, p. 53).

¹²⁶ Balmer (2009, p. 43).

¹²⁷ [*amorem*] *cecidit uelut prati | ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam | tactus aratro est*, ‘[my love] has fallen, just like a flower on the edge of a meadow, after it has been touched by a plough going by’, Cat. 11.23-24. Compare Plath’s possible allusion to this simile in her image of ‘A flower left out’ in ‘Sheep in Fog’, chapter 3.2.2 n. 82.

bring Catullus to Cheltenham. Homer also appears in *The Word for Sorrow*, first thematically, via Ovid and his Ulyssean sea-poems, and second via a specific addition to the Latin in Balmer's translation of *Tr.* 4.2 (used as an epigraph in the poem 'Dictionary Definitions'). In her version, Balmer translates Ovid's description of the river Rhine 'full of slaughter' (*plena ferae caedis, plena cruoris erant*, 4.2.38) as 'flesh-clogged... dammed with bodies', just as the river Skamandros laments in the *Iliad* that his water is so clogged with Trojan bodies slain by Achilles that he cannot flow (*Il.* 21.218-221).¹²⁸

Yet the Homeric allusion is more than a mere knowing reference to the epic poem, as its use by Balmer dramatically alters the tone and context of Ovid's original. *Tr.* 4.2 imagines a Roman triumph for Tiberius and describes the colourful procession and carnival floats which depict the now-bloody mountains and rivers of conquered Germany. By shading Ovid's celebratory words with Skamandros' lament, Balmer can tell 'the other side' of the imperialist story: the senseless 'landscape of slaughter' that has become a holiday spectacle in Rome. By implying a critique of war-as-spectacle in Rome, Balmer's use of Homeric allusion offers a metapoetic comment on her own ethics of translation and her hesitation about using the horror of Gallipoli for her art. As 'Philomela' similarly functioned in *Chasing Catullus*, in the final poem of the collection, 'The Word for Sorrow', Balmer wonders 'If this new life isn't a new death | if they'd hate this fresh shroud of flesh'.¹²⁹ Balmer thereby avoids the triumphal tone of Ovid's poem that would sound discordant in her collection, and uses the translation instead to meditate darkly on the great losses incurred by war.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ πλήθει γὰρ δὴ μοι νεκύων ἐρατεινὰ ῥέεθρα, | οὐδέ τί πη δύναμαι προχέειν ῥόον εἰς ἄλα δῖαν | στεινόμενος νεκέεσσι, σὺ δὲ κτείνεις ἀϊδήλωσ, 'my lovely stream is full of corpses, nor can my waters flow through them to the heavenly sea, crowded with corpses as you slay murderously', *Il.* 21.218-221.

¹²⁹ Balmer (2009, p. 46).

¹³⁰ In *Memorial*, a translation of the *Iliad* that focuses on each of the deaths recounted by Homer in the poem, Alice Oswald effects a similar aim: to wrest Homer away from an imperialist tradition which has read the epic

Balmer may also view her Homeric source through the lens of the anti-imperialist war poetry of Wilfred Owen.¹³¹ Balmer's description of the 'flesh-clogged' river recalls Owen's blood-clogged chariot wheels in 'Strange Meeting', a reference to Keats referencing Chapman's translation of Homer (*Il.* 20.498-503).¹³² Her use of Homer in 'Dictionary Definitions' to critique the imperial war machine thus draws upon classical tropes in WWI poetry, but in choosing an alternative Homeric allusion to Owen, she evokes a similar image that is distinctly her own. At the same time as flaunting her presence in the canon of war poetry, it is in this poem that Balmer most explicitly inserts Ovid into a poetic tradition that traditionally figures Gallipoli as the second Troy.¹³³ In choosing Ovid to poetically meditate on Gallipoli, Balmer aligns herself with a poet himself historically excluded from both the canons of high classical literature and twentieth-century war poetry, a poet who can represent the exclusion she feels from those two (male) poetic traditions.¹³⁴ Balmer uses Ovid—via Owen and Homer—to question traditional literary canons at the same time as situating herself within them, creating a complex and ambivalent engagement with her literary models.

poem as a glorification of war, and to focus instead on the characters that are forgotten in such readings, and the pathos of unnecessary deaths (quoted in Cox and Theodorakopoulos, 2013b). Cf. Plath's 'Letter in November' (*CP* 253-54), which writes against the 'arms and the man' of western literary history to feminize Thermopylae (Britzolakis, 1999, p. 212); on Thermopylae in WWI poetry, see Vandiver (2010, pp. 177-178).

¹³¹ In contrast, Vandiver's study concludes with a survey of receptions of Horace's phrase *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (*Odes* 3.2.13), arguing that scholarship should not be restricted by Wilfred Owen's denunciation of it (Vandiver, 2010, pp. 393-403); she argues for the unironic deployment of the quotation.

¹³² Vandiver (2010, pp. 133-135); *αἵματι δ' ἄζων | νέρθεν ἅπας πεπάλακτο καὶ ἀντιγες αἶ περι δίφρον, | ἄς ἄρ' ἄφ' ἰππείων ὀπλέων ραθάμιγγες ἔβαλλον | αἶ τ' ἄπ' ἐπισσώτρων*, 'the axles and the edges around the chariot-board were spattered with blood from beneath, thrown up in clumps from the horses' hooves and the chariot wheels', *Il.* 20.499-502. On women writers using the figure of Helen to interrogate Homeric/ military ideology see O'Gorman (2006).

¹³³ On Gallipoli and Homer, see Vandiver (2010, pp. 241-263); also Greenwood (2007) on Gallipoli in Christopher Logue's translation of the *Iliad*, *War Music* (2001); on 'the second Trojan war' in WWI poetry see Vandiver (2010, pp. 228-280). Vandiver's study argues that the classical allusions aim to convey nobility and prowess, not pathos or an anti-war sentiment (see, e.g., pp. 228-229, 232).

¹³⁴ Vandiver's study of classical reception in WWI poetry details receptions of epic and elegy (predominantly Homer, Virgil, and Horace), but notes only one poem with an Ovidian precedent (*Ars* 1); Vandiver focuses, however, on the poem's use of the figure of Achilles himself, rather than its Ovidian nuances (2010, p. 370).

5.4.2 *Metamorphoses*

Balmer chose not to include *Tr.* 1.7 in *The Word for Sorrow*, the poem in which Ovid describes burning his copy of *Metamorphoses* before departing Rome for exile.¹³⁵ Instead, like Ovid himself, Balmer includes subtle yet specific allusions to the many transformations within *Metamorphoses*; and while her translations of Catullus were ‘transgressions’, in *The Word for Sorrow* Balmer plays with the metaphor of ‘metamorphosis’. Ovid’s hope for eternal fame at the end of *Metamorphoses* is explicitly linked to the task of the contemporary translator, for example, as Balmer translates *uiuere me dices* in Ovid’s first poem of exile (‘say that I live’, *Tr.* 1.1.19) as: ‘through me he still lives’; and her translation of the final poem of Ovid’s exile poetry, *Pont.* 4.16, ‘Naso’s Last Word’, includes an additional line which looks back at Balmer’s work within the collection: ‘this twisting, transforming journey from life to art’. Translating Ovid’s claim that poetry should be written in quiet contemplation (*otia*, 1.1.41), Balmer writes that poetry ‘[s]hould taste of the stars’, echoing the starry ring composition of the *Metamorphoses*; and recurring imagery of stars, birds, insects, flowers, and trees populate *The Word for Sorrow* with a host of Ovidian characters in their transformed states as constellations, spiders, daffodils, butterflies, poplars, pines, rosemary, crows, and storks.¹³⁶ Marsyas appears in ‘Among the Graves: Salonica’ in the ‘shadows like flayed skins’; and in ‘Knocking at the Door’ the reader meets both Theseus and Pentheus in Gallipoli, as soldiers

¹³⁵ Published separately in *Modern Poetry in Translation* as ‘Burning Books’; see Balmer (2005, pp. 66-67). Wheeler titles *Tr.* 1.7 ‘The Metamorphoses’ (1996, p. 37).

¹³⁶ Callisto (p. 9), *Met.* 2.409-507; poplars (p. 10): Dryope, *Met.* 9.350-362; Heliades (p. 35): *Met.* 2.346-366, *Am.* 1.7.54; poppies (p. 10): the Cave of Sleep (*Met.* 11.590-611) and Triptolemus (*Fasti* 4.393-620); corn, roses, and vines (p. 10): Flora, *Fast.* 5.263, 336, 264; pine (p. 21): Attis, *Met.* 10.104-105; cedar (p. 21): Ovid’s book oiled with cedar, *Tr.* 1.1; rosemary and frankincense (p. 21): Leucothoë, *Met.* 4.252-255; daisy (p. 21): Alceste (via Chaucer); lily (p. 33): Hyacinthus, *Met.* 10.206-216; oak (p. 35): maenads, *Met.* 11.67-84; daffodils (p. 35): Narcissus, *Met.* 3.510; primroses (p. 35): Proserpina, *Met.* 5.390-400, *Fasti* 4.393-620; crocuses (p. 35): *Met.* 4.283; ash-tree (p. 35): Canace, *Her.* 11; crow (p. 8): *Met.* 2.531-565; stork (p. 21): Antigone, *Met.* 6.93; swans (p. 33): *Tr.* 4.8.1-2; Leda, *Met.* 6.109; spider (p. 28): Arachne, *Met.* 6.140-145.

recovering bodies from the trenches ‘follow the screams like unwinding thread, | down, down, into the hill’s planked labyrinth’, to find ‘stray limb, hewn torso, severed heart’.¹³⁷

‘Naso Off the Shelf’ (*Tr.* 3.1) also adds a mythological reference to Proteus that does not appear in the original text:

I dreamt my book went home again,
transformed, reformed, shuddering
like Proteus on the turn, changing shape,
no longer versed in youth’s green passion
but old age’s brown and shrivelled hate,
bound in sadness, grief’s dark script.
And I walked with it through my city’s
empty squares, footsteps soft as leaf-
fall on glittering autumn streets,
unfolding the faded map of my past life...¹³⁸

The addition of the character of Proteus to the translation of *Tr.* 3.1 is all the more striking as Ovid does not reference the shapeshifting sea-god in his exile poetry.¹³⁹ Yet by choosing for her translation a character from his *Metamorphoses* that metapoetically embodies the transformations she is in the act of creating with Ovid’s poems, Balmer playfully mimics Ovid’s own tendency to self-referential allusions.

‘Naso Off the Shelf’ also mirrors ‘The Horses’; while ‘The Horses’ is an original poem which includes a great amount of translation, ‘Naso Off the Shelf’ is a translation that contains a great amount of original material. The poem comprises an ‘edited’ translation of *Tr.* 3.1 that

¹³⁷ Balmer (2009, pp. 40, 19). The dismembered body of ‘Knocking at the Door’ may also allude to Mettus, torn apart by horses and found at *Tr.* 1.3.73-76, but omitted from Balmer’s translation of the poem, ‘Naso’s Last Night’.

¹³⁸ Balmer (2009, p. 16).

¹³⁹ Proteus’ transformations are described at *Met.* 8.731-737; cf. 11.249-256, when Proteus advises Peleus how to rape the shapeshifting Thetis.

brackets a near-literal translation of lines 61-70 of the poem in between two far freer Ovidian-influenced passages. The first major alteration that Balmer makes to Ovid's poem is to change its narrative voice from the anthropomorphized poetry book wandering the streets of its author's former home, to Ovid himself ('I dreamt my book went home again'); while this change may be due in part to Balmer's use of her Latin dictionary to take the place of Ovid's speaking book within *The Word for Sorrow*, changing the voice of the poem also strengthens the presence of the speaking 'I' in the text, and creates a smooth transition from the preceding poem, the last line of which voices the WWI soldiers' day-dreams: 'We thought of home. It seemed a happy place'.¹⁴⁰

As with 'The Horses', the opening lines of 'Naso Off the Shelf' also incorporate close verbal echoes of the source text, *Tr.* 3.1. The 'shuddering' shapes suggests the fearfully shaking letters of Ovid's book (*quatitur*, 3.1.54), while 'youth's green passion' translates *uiridi... aeuo* (7), and the dreamed-of book is now coloured brown with Ovid's hate (*odit*, 8). 'Bound in sadness, grief's dark script' both elaborates *triste* (9), and condenses Ovid's description of his book in the Latin ('I am neither golden with cedar-oil nor polished with pumice-stone... [but] have blurred letters smeared by edits', *neque sum cedro flauus nec pumice leuis... littera suffusas... maculosa lituras*, 13-15). Balmer edits down the Latin, yet conveys an impression of the omitted lines through close verbal echoes, thus avoiding the repetition that may tire a modern reader (particularly as Balmer included this formulaic sequence in her translation of *Tr.* 1.1.3-14, 'Naso's Book Back in Rome').¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ 'Landed', Balmer (2009, p. 15).

¹⁴¹ On 'Naso's Book Back in Rome', see also Brown (2014, p. 447).

Balmer's 'Footsteps soft' rework Ovid's *pari gradibus* (3.1.59), a metrical joke about approaching Augustus' temple to Apollo 'with the right [epic] step' emphasized by Balmer's description of the book as 'no longer versed'; the book's limping metre (*clauda quod alterno subsidunt carmina uersu... pedis hoc ratio... facit*, 11-12) appears in the 'tip-toe' and 'dragging feet' of Balmer's poem.¹⁴² Balmer chose to remove all direct references to Augustus in *The Word for Sorrow* and so omits from 'Naso Off the Shelf' Ovid's elaborate description of Augustus' house, decked with oak and laurel (*querna*, 36; *lauro*, 39; *arbor opaca*, 40; *laurus*, 45); yet a hint of the triumphal foliage remains in Balmer's 'leaf- | fall on... autumn streets', and, if a reference to the vast number of the souls of unburied dead at *Aen.* 6.309-310 ('as many as the leaves that fall in the woods with the first frost of autumn', *quam multa in siluis autumnni frigore primo | lapsa cadunt folia*), thus links the two mirrored poems 'The Horses' and 'Naso Off the Shelf' with Virgilian imagery.

The opening lines of 'Naso Off the Shelf' are thus a collage of original, translation, and intertextual allusion.¹⁴³ After condensing the tour of Rome that Ovid's book describes at 3.1.27-32 to a one-line tourist hit-list ('the Forum, the Sacred Way, the Palatine'), the translation follows the Latin line-for-line, describing the great library of Rome from which Ovid and his book are barred (61-70). For the final seven lines of the poem, Balmer returns to her creative collage technique:

The shame is mine, of my *Ars Amatoria*;
it stains each new page, sins of the father.
I talked too long of love, that was my 'crime'
yet my error was to see and not speak out.
And so my book is closed, my heart has died.
Poetry must, poetry *can* only tell the truth.

¹⁴² 'If the limping poems fall in alternate verses, it is because of the metre of its feet'.

¹⁴³ Latin lines in order as they occur in the opening lines of Balmer's version: 54, 7, 8, 9, 59, and 36-45 condensed to 'leaf-fall'.

In life we have to lie to stay alive.

While the ‘stains’ and ‘sins of the father’ imaginatively translates *in genus auctoris miseri fortuna redundat* (‘the fate of our unfortunate sire overflows upon his offspring’, 3.1.73) in Christian terminology, the remaining lines of the poem bear little resemblance to the poem they purport to translate. The allusions to *Tristia* 2, however, are striking.

Balmer does not provide a separate translation of the single, 578-line poem *Tr. 2* in *The Word for Sorrow*, yet by close allusions to the poem within her translation of *Tr. 3.1*, Ovid’s major poem that appears to have been omitted can be included (as the first translation of the second section of Balmer’s collection, and as the poem immediately succeeding it in the Latin text, *Tr. 3.1* is the most fitting poem in which to incorporate allusions to *Tr. 2*). In *Tr. 3.1* Ovid only references his *Ars Amatoria* as *id*, ‘that book’ (7); Balmer fleshes out the reference using the opening lines of *Tr. 2*, although she reverses the direction of blame. While Ovid ‘lay[s] the charge of guilt against my verse’ (*acceptum refero uersibus esse nocens*, 2.10), Balmer’s Ovid claims, ‘the shame is mine’.¹⁴⁴ Balmer’s distinction between ‘crime’ and ‘error’ echoes Ovid’s continual effort throughout the exile poetry to delineate the two, and her line which imagines the death of the poet coinciding with the closing of his book looks back to her translation of *Tr. 1.11*, where Ovid repeats his sense that life and art will end together: ‘poem first, then poet’.¹⁴⁵ The final two lines of ‘Naso Off the Shelf’, however, are wholly original: ‘in life we have to lie to stay alive’. The lines provide an introduction to the following poem in *The Word for Sorrow*, ‘Between the Lines’, which recounts cheery letters home from soldiers in the trenches

¹⁴⁴ Although, of course, Ovid goes on to present a lengthy defence of the *Ars* at 2.237-314.

¹⁴⁵ See, e.g., *Tr. 1.3.75-76; 2.103-106; 3.5.49-50; and 3.6.27-28; Tr. 1.11* is translated in ‘Naso Sees the End of the Beginning’, Balmer (2009, p. 11).

attempting to find flashes of beauty amongst the horror; but they perhaps also suggest the translator's sympathetic interpretation of Ovid's repeated pleas for clemency and forgiveness.

5.4.3 Dictionary definitions

Throughout *The Word for Sorrow* Balmer transforms recurring concerns in Ovid's exile poetry for her own narrative. Ovid repeatedly makes reference to the fact that he is not able to enjoy gardening in Tomis, for example, and writes that he misses the trees and crops of Rome (*Pont.* 1.8.41-60; cf. *Pont.* 2.7.69 and 4.2.44); in Balmer's collection these images become the overgrown fields of 'By the Dardanelles: Samothrace' ('corn tosses like pikes.... poplars for sentinels, poppies... roses'), the pine-tree 'cathedral' that arches over the war memorial in 'Among the Graves: Green Hill, Gallipoli', and the 'trampled crocuses' and 'crushed primroses' of 'Among the Graves: Ampney Circus'.¹⁴⁶ In this new context Ovid's flowers and trees evoke funeral wreaths, remembrance poppies, and the battlefields of France, Greece and Turkey. Ovid also repeatedly uses the colours black and white to describe the alternately ice-white or pitch-black environs of his place of exile, Tomis, in stark contrast to his technicolour daydreams of Rome.¹⁴⁷ In *The Word for Sorrow*, the connotations of this black and white imagery are expanded when employed by different protagonists; while the soldiers of 1915, like Ovid, experience the snow and darkness of a winter in eastern Europe, for the contemporary reader

¹⁴⁶ Crushed flowers recall Catullus 11 and Sappho again, and the primroses which spill from Proserpina's dress as she is carried off to the Underworld.

¹⁴⁷ See 'Naso's Book Back in Rome' (*Tr.* 1.1); 'Naso All at Sea' (*Tr.* 1.2); 'Dancing in the Dark' (*Pont.* 4.2); 'Welcome Note' (*Tr.* 4.8). In her study of classical reception in WWI poetry, Vandiver notes that Rome could represent either Germany or Great Britain: 'Rome's symbolic value was not fixed; what was fixed was its primacy as a point of reference' (2010, p. 25).

and the translator the imagery evokes the grainy photographs and ‘old footage flickering’ in which WWI seems only to exist in black and white.¹⁴⁸

The monochrome imagery of *The Word for Sorrow* also forms a metapoetic comment throughout the collection on Balmer’s translation process by the tempering of the black and white imagery with references to shade, obscurity, shadows, and blurred images.¹⁴⁹ In *Tr.* 1.1, for example, Ovid pleads with his readers to judge his poetry kindly and to forgive the words on the page that are blurred by tears, but Balmer strikingly translates Ovid’s ‘blots’ (*liturarum*, 1.1.13) as ‘words left undefined’. Balmer’s use of shade and obscurity in the collection symbolizes her ‘impressionistic’ approach to translation, and she playfully transforms Ovid’s plea to his readers into a caveat for her own: these are not ‘academic’ translations but ‘versions’ of Ovid’s poems, so do not expect definitions to be ‘black or white’.¹⁵⁰ Yet Balmer’s foregrounding of the task of the translator is made most explicit in three poems in which dictionary entries are incorporated directly within the text: ‘Among the Graves: Green Hill, Gallipoli’, ‘Thread’, and ‘Dictionary Definitions’.¹⁵¹ In these poems Balmer uses the Ovidian

¹⁴⁸ Balmer (2009, p. 25). Christopher Logue likens Agamemnon’s soldiers to sepia photographs of troops at Gallipoli in his translation of the *Iliad*, *War Music* (2001, p. 27); on Logue and Homer, see Greenwood (2007).

¹⁴⁹ In her introduction to her translations of Catullus, Balmer notes that uncovering a joke in the text during the process of translation was ‘like colour seeping into a black and white film’ (Balmer, 2004a, p. 22). On women writing and darkness see Duras (1980, p. 174). Cf. Carson, who likens translating to groping for a light-switch in a pitch-black room (2010, section 7.1); Balmer’s Ovid ‘gropes’ for his few Getic words (2009, p. 27).

¹⁵⁰ Translation as ‘impressionistic’, Balmer (2012, p. 268). Elsewhere, she explains her approach to translating Ovid as ‘like an abstract painter... using figurative sketches and constructions as a basis for refining image into pure form or colour’ (Balmer, 2005, p. 61); also quoted in Hardwick (2010). Balmer first uses this metaphor in *Chasing Catullus* in an epigraph to the poem, ‘After Titian’s *Bacchus and Ariadne*’ (2004b, p. 20); Balmer uses a quote by the eighteenth-century German translator J.C. Gottsched equating a translator’s training with that of a painter (Balmer, 2013, p. 175). Balmer also describes her translation as existing in ‘border territory, the no man’s land between poetry and translation’ (Balmer, 2012, p. 269); this is a specific reference to Gilbert and Gubar (1988/94) and Bassnett (1992). On the third-wave/ queer feminist refutation of ‘black and white’ binaries, especially of gender and sexuality, see Butler (1999). For context on the blurred line between ‘writer’ and ‘translator’: in ancient texts, see the editors’ introduction to and essays collected in McElduff and Sciarrino (2011); in modern texts, see especially Lefevere (1992), Venuti (1995), and Bassnett (2006).

¹⁵¹ Balmer (2009, pp. 6, 21); Balmer puns further on language in the same poem, using a metaphor for headstones as the ‘milk teeth’ sown by Cadmus, the man credited with introducing the written alphabet to Greek (Balmer, 2009, pp. 21; 2013, p. 222).

interplay between light and dark literally to mimic the printed form of a dictionary.

The first, ‘Among the Graves: Green Hill, Gallipoli’, appears at an intense emotional peak in the collection, when the translator visits the war memorial that commemorates the Gloucestershire regiment she has been researching. The dictionary definition appears in the final line of the poem, when the speaker wishes she had taken home a flower from the site in memorial to press in the pages of her dictionary ‘between **calamitas**. *hurt* and *healed*. **consanatus**’.¹⁵² Balmer mimics the instantly recognizable graphics of a dictionary with the word entry in bold font in nominative form, and its italicized definition, but she manipulates the definitions themselves to create a poetic dichotomy. The ‘definitions’ do not translate a particular poem of Ovid’s; no forms of *calamitas* or *consano* appear in any of the books of *Tristia* or *Epistulae ex Ponto*. Instead, Balmer chooses the Latin words to create her own epitaph for the dead soldiers and to replace the neglected ‘mossed inscription[s]’ she sees in Gallipoli; a reading emphasized by the placing of the translation of *Tr.* 3.3 on the facing page: ‘Naso Writes his Own Epitaph’. The poem thus functions as a memorial in miniature, as Balmer considers the lives of the men who did not get to choose the words above their empty tombs.¹⁵³ The insertion of ‘false’ Latin dictionary entries into an original poem also blurs the lines between the translator’s private and professional lives, mixing (auto)biography with poetry, and blurring the layers of narrative as the reader is pulled from the main narrative to the

¹⁵² Balmer (2009, p. 21). Simon notes of another feminist translator that ‘[a]lthough these explicit graphic interventions are not quantitatively important (they are scattered sparsely throughout the text), they clearly mark the presence of the translator within the text’ (1996, p. 27). *calamitas*: (1) disaster to or failure of crops, etc., blight, disease; (2) misfortune, disaster, ruin, calamity; (3) a defeat, disaster (Glare, 2012, p. 280); *consano*: to make whole, heal (Glare, 2012, p. 450).

¹⁵³ Although, of course, while Ovid expresses a choice of epitaph, it was probably not achieved. Green also notes the epitaph’s function as ‘a determination to set the record straight *in extremis*’ (Green, 1994, p. 238), an interpretation which shades Balmer’s meaning here.

metanarrative level of the translator.¹⁵⁴

The bold dictionary entry recurs in the original poem ‘Thread’, in which Balmer’s ‘thread’ as translator and investigator has been lost (the poem closes the second section of *The Word for Sorrow*). Geoffrey’s ‘trail has gone cold’ and the translator is struggling at her task, choked by a ‘lump that’s lodged in my throat’ and struck dumb by ‘the stone Naso has dropped on my tongue’.¹⁵⁵ Balmer’s struggles with language as she ‘stumbles’ after Ovid echo the Latin poet’s own loss of language at *Tr.* 3.14.43-46 (‘often I am at a loss for a word, a name, a place... words fail me: I have unlearned my power of speech’, *saepe aliquod quaero uerbum nomenque locumque... uerba mihi desunt dedidicique loqui*); her claim ‘I’m too distracted to translate’ also recalls Ovid’s wonderment in the same poem that he could write anything at all in his appalling present circumstances (*inque tot aduersis carmen mirabitur ullum | ducere me tristi sustinuisse manu*, 31-32). Unlike the ‘false’ Latin dictionary entries of ‘Green Hill’, however (that is, definitions of Latin words not found in Ovid’s original text), the dictionary entry in ‘Thread’ specifically translates *dedidici* in line 46 of the Latin: ‘**de-disco, didici**, to unlearn, forget...’.¹⁵⁶ Again, Balmer follows the dictionary entry style, providing the first person and infinitive forms that translate Ovid’s *dedidici* (the definition matches that provided by the Latin Word Study Tool on the Tufts Perseus website, which Balmer describes using in the poem ‘Hail’).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Slavitt also interjects in his translations of Ovid, but his metatextual asides flaunt his privileged role as a learned mediator of the text, rather than acting as a questioning reader like Balmer. For example, in *Tr.* 1.10, Slavitt summarizes and condenses Ovid’s catalogue of locations passed along his mock-epic journey into exile and adds the comment: ‘Wonderful fun, although a little showy, the boast | not being that one had actually gone | to all those places but rather a library’ (1990, p. 23). On mixing translation and autobiography, compare Carson (2010).

¹⁵⁵ Balmer (2009, p. 28).

¹⁵⁶ *dedisco*: to put out of one’s mind, unlearn, forget (Glare, 2012, p. 544).

¹⁵⁷ Available at: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=dedidici&la=la> (Accessed: 30 November 2015).

Balmer's incorporation of the visually-striking dictionary entries is formally experimental, and she uses their appearance on the page to flaunt the tools of the translator in the text.¹⁵⁸ In 'Thread' Balmer expands a single word of Ovid's Latin into an original poem that meditates on the difficulties of the translator's task, using the dictionary entry again to highlight an emotional peak in the story and the frustrations of the translator: 'As for Naso, he's... no bloody help'. The inclusion of the dictionary definition foregrounds the interdiscursive and collaborative process between reader, translator, and Ovid by inviting the reader to participate actively in interpretation and meaning production; Balmer provides a space in the text for the reader either to translate Ovid's text alongside her, or to translate the text independently.

The lost thread is immediately picked up, however, by the opening poem of the final section of *The Word for Sorrow*, 'Dictionary Definitions'.¹⁵⁹ The poem begins with a five-line translation of *Tr.* 4.2.37-43 (Ovid imagines a triumph for Tiberius), followed by a deconstruction of the Latin vocabulary of those lines, creating a hybrid poem that develops from a translation into a metatextual consideration of the translation issues within its opening lines:

My job now to distinguish **caedes** from **cruor**;
the one *carnage, slaughter, a battle massacre*
and the other simply *blood, that which flows*
from the wound. And then there's **lugubria**
—almost comic in English—but solemn here,
of or belonging to mourning, and in the plural,
substantive, *mourning clothes, weeds for widows*.

This shroud of Latin: **amissus. mortuus**.
The dragging, leaden cloak of language:
missing in action, presumed dead.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ On Carson's dictionary entries, see Theodorakopoulos (2012, pp. 158-159).

¹⁵⁹ Balmer (2009, p. 31).

¹⁶⁰ See also Balmer (2013, p. 222). *caedes*: (1) killing, slaughter; (2) the killing or slaughter (of beasts); (3) the corpses of slaughtered persons, dead bodies; (4) blood from a slain or wounded body, gore; (5) a cutting off or

Balmer takes *caedes* and *cruor* from the section of Ovid's poem that she translates (*plena ferae caedis, plena cruoris erant* 'filled with wild slaughter, filled with gore', l. 38), alongside *lugubria* from later in the same poem (*mea qua lugubria ponam*, 'I will lay aside my gloom', 73), a gloom which Balmer reimagines physically as a 'shroud' and 'dragging cloak'.¹⁶¹ Again, as in 'Among the Graves: Green Hill, Gallipoli', Balmer manipulates the definitions slightly, imaginatively elaborating on the definitions found in Lewis and Short (which provides the definitions Balmer would find online on the Perseus Latin Word Tool). Balmer explores the fluidity and ambiguity of meaning as well as emphasizing the translation decisions that occur 'behind-the-scenes' in order to 'distinguish' which definition will appear in the finished poem; Balmer again forestalls closure of meaning by including the dictionary definitions here, and invites active participation from her reader.¹⁶²

Yet Balmer also includes two invented definitions that do not follow Ovid, which translate from English into Latin the official military designation of soldiers 'missing in action', those whose bodies were never found (a comparison with the mystery of Ovid's own death is also suggested). Balmer's '**amissus. mortuus.**' acts as another epitaph for the dead (alongside that of Ovid and the WWI epitaphs Balmer visits), and in tandem with the allusion to Skamandros' 'flesh-clogged river' at the beginning of the poem, works to memorialize the

cutting down; (6) a beating (Glare, 2012, pp. 274-275). *cruor*: (1) blood (fresh or clotted) from a wound; (2) the shedding of blood or an instance of it, slaughter, etc.; (3) blood in general, = *SANGUIS* (Glare, 2012, p. 507). *lugubris*: (1) indicative of mourning or sorrow; mourning garments; (2) (of conditions, events, etc.) inducing or characterized by sorrow, sad, grievous (Glare, 2012, p. 1154). *amissus*: the fact of losing, loss (Glare, 2012, p. 130). *mortuus*: (1) deprived of life, dead; (2) having no strength or vitality, limp, insensible, etc.; (3) having no movement, still, fixed; (4) (of things) no longer in existence, over and done with; (5) naturally lifeless, inanimate; (6) (of goods, perh.) yielding no revenue, unproductive (Glare, 2012, p. 1250).

¹⁶¹ Balmer's emphasis on slaughter recalls the poetry of Wilfred Owen, who believed that fidelity to the dead required demythologizing their deaths (Vandiver, 2010, p. 284).

¹⁶² On closure as expression of power in *Aeneid*, see Theodorakopoulos (1997), contra subversion of closure in the *Metamorphoses* (Theodorakopoulos, 1999); see also on 'feminine refusal' to come to a 'proper' end, Fowler (1997, p. 10). On women writing 'beyond the ending', see, e.g., DuPlessis (1985b); feminists often construct their own discursive practices as 'open' or incomplete and fragmented, e.g., Cixous (1976), and Irigaray (1985a, b); see also chapter 2.

victims of imperialism rather than replicate the imperial ideology suggested by Ovid's triumphal poem (Balmer's Latin epitaph may also reference the work on inscriptions and material culture by the feminist classicists who inspired her early strategies for translating women's poetic fragments).¹⁶³ The link between ancient and modern imperialism in 'Dictionary Definitions' is given further nuance by Wheeler's title for *Tr.* 4.2 in the Loeb edition: 'A Triumph Over Germany' (Balmer used Wheeler's Loeb as a comparison text while translating); throughout *The Word for Sorrow* Balmer thus reuses Ovid's thematic concern with language to explore the historical link between imperialism and Latin.¹⁶⁴

In the exile poetry Ovid claims that in his town on the edge of the empire no one speaks Latin and he is surrounded only by barbarian languages (for example, *Tr.* 3.14, 'Naso Lost for Words'); in Balmer's versions, lexicons and maps recur as explicitly linked motifs: '[D]ictionaries [are] swapped for map' in 'Last Orders', for example, and the wings of swans (an image taken from Ovid's description of his greying hair, as white as swan's feathers at *Tr.* 4.8.1-2) 'unfold... like ancient maps or manuscripts'.¹⁶⁵ Balmer explores this relationship further by introducing the dictionary as a character within the narrative and telling its story and journey from owner to owner; Balmer uses the very different experiences of each of its owners to explore the implications of gender and class that have traditionally determined access to a classical education and the ability to read Ovid's poems in the language in which they were written.

¹⁶³ The author photograph on the inside back cover of the hardback edition of *The Word for Sorrow* depicts Balmer at an (unnamed) war memorial.

¹⁶⁴ Explored in further detail in chapter 6; see also Venuti (1992) on translating discourse, subjectivity and ideology.

¹⁶⁵ Balmer (2009, pp. 26, 33); 'Already my temples are imitating the plumage of a swan, and white old age has coloured my black hair', *iam mea cycneas imitantur tempora plumas, | inficit et nigras alba senecta comas*, *Tr.* 4.8.1-2. See also: the 'business' of 'empire... dominions' equates to 'maps redrawn with each retreating wave' (p. 12); 'the faded map of my past life' (p. 16); 'Lives shrunk to map' (p. 40); the maps and dictionary of 'The Word for Sorrow' (pp. 45-47).

In the proem to the collection Balmer recounts the day she bought the dictionary second-hand, ‘a Latin lexicon pulled from dust pile, | mildewed, battered, pock-marked, ingrained by luck’; but the dictionary remained forgotten until a power cut forced Balmer to abandon Perseus’ online lexicon and slide the dictionary from the shelf, discovering Geoffrey’s signature on the front page, ‘dual initials, double-barrelled surname... scrawled in schoolboy boredom’.¹⁶⁶ The poem’s title, ‘Hail’, suggests both the Catholic ‘Hail Mary’, or *ave Maria* (‘... pray for us sinners now and *at the hour of our death*’ [emphasis mine]), and plays on the homophone ‘hale’, used particularly of an old man (‘hale and hearty’) to suggest Geoffrey in old age, or perhaps the personified aging dictionary. The title thus prefigures the ‘hail’ of bullets at Gallipoli and is suggestive of last prayers, and puns both on the stormy weather outside Balmer’s window and the ‘greeting’ from Geoffrey, as well as recalling Catullus 101’s ‘hail and farewell’. In her versions of Catullus, Anne Carson translates *ave atque uale* as ‘farewell and farewell’ (2010), thus avoiding the modern fascist, imperialist associations with the word ‘hail’; given her exploration of language and imperialism in the collection, Balmer may conversely intend this association here.¹⁶⁷

The double-barrelled surname suggests a person of high-status, and Balmer sketches the privileged life and education of the dictionary’s previous owner in the poem ‘Up for Auction (1919)’.¹⁶⁸ Balmer imagines how the dictionary came to leave Geoffrey’s ‘two grand houses, Cotswold estates’ and end ‘up for auction: unread libraries... value unseen’. Balmer uses an auction-house term to denote a price offered for an item that is ‘unseen’ to punningly suggest that the ease of access to Latin for Geoffrey was unappreciated: the dictionary is only ‘thrown

¹⁶⁶ Balmer (2009, pp. xix, 4).

¹⁶⁷ Carson (2010); Theodorakopoulos (2012).

¹⁶⁸ Balmer (2009, p. 42).

in for good luck'. The unseen, unrealized value of the dictionary when possessed by Geoffrey (bored schoolboy) is contrasted throughout the collection with the hard work of the translator, who descends from a family of miners, 'footmen or under-kitchen maids', for whom access to Latin did not come automatically: 'we'd never have spoken the same language'.¹⁶⁹

Balmer further considers the ways in which class and gender have historically affected access to Latin learning in the final poem of the collection, 'The Word for Sorrow'. Forming a duet with Ovid's long 'autobiographical' poem, *Tr.* 4.10 ('Naso's Back Story'), the opening lines also mirror the poem 'Hail', in which the Latin dictionary was first introduced; in 'The Word for Sorrow', Balmer now writes her name in the dictionary beneath Geoffrey's, staking her claim to Latin and her right of ownership, both of the dictionary and the hard-won right to translate Ovid's poems. Balmer thus repeats the earlier acts of inscription and memorial in the poem, and mirrors Ovid's writing of his own epitaph in *Tr.* 3.3, placing her name in a history of male ownership of language and scholarship, and physically inserting herself into this (male) memorializing tradition.¹⁷⁰

'The Word for Sorrow' stages a frank discussion of language, authority, gender, and translation. Balmer describes herself as 'a restless Celt in the land of the Saxon, Latin, | learning these new lines of dominion'; in relation to the ancestrally-Cornish translator, Latin and Anglo-Saxon (English) are positioned in this poem as dominant languages.¹⁷¹ 'The Word for Sorrow'

¹⁶⁹ Noting the difference between herself and her subjects, Balmer wonders of Ovid and Geoffrey 'would I like them if we'd met. ...?' (2009, p. 45). On women's education and the classics, and the burgeoning of women's reception since the 1980s (the delayed effect of increased access to classical languages for girls in schools), see Cox (2015).

¹⁷⁰ In her translation of *Tr.* 3.3, 'Naso Writes his own Epitaph', Balmer notes Ovid's reference to Tibullus' epitaph at *Carm.* 1.3.55-56, and adds in her own reference to Yeats' literary epitaph in 'Under Ben Bulbin' and his famous poem, 'He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven' (Balmer, 2013, p. 220).

¹⁷¹ Balmer (2013, p. 192).

may also ‘reply’ to Ovid’s exile poetry as Balmer aligns herself with the Tomitians as a descendant of speakers of a minor language (Getan, Sarmatian, Cornish) mourning a linguistic history erased first by Latin, then by English. In contrast to Balmer’s Celtic ancestry, the dictionary’s previous owner Geoffrey is described as:

... retired Major, double-barrelled,
Master of the Hunt, local magistrate,
for whom Latin meant status, gender,
but never learning, love, literature.
And when the old order disappeared,
let it go for the rest of us to scavenge—
the mark of power for two millennia—
leaving our speech forever scarred,
like the taint of Naso’s barbarian burr...

Balmer here reverses the ‘scarred... taint’ of Ovid’s Latin at *Tr.* 3.14 (*contagia*, 17; *inmixta*, 49), just as she disarms Ovid’s claim in the poem ‘Naso the Barbarian’ (an amalgam of *Tristia* 5.7 and 5.10), *barbarus hic ego sum* (‘here, I am the barbarian’, *Tr.* 5.10.37); in Balmer’s version, she turns Ovid’s sardonic comment on his inability to communicate in Latin with the Tomitians into ‘a transgressional, postcolonial act of self-knowledge’: ‘a thought occurs: who is the barbarian here?’.¹⁷² As well as associating Geoffrey’s access to Latin with his status and authority, however, Balmer also considers her own educational privilege and her ability to read an ancient language that her ancestors, the house maid and the labourer, could not; as well as noting her ‘luck’ in learning Latin (in both ‘Proem’ and ‘Up for Auction’), in a separate poem Balmer reads the Latin inscription on the grave of a seventeenth-century woman, who most probably would not have been able to read the inscription herself: ‘Latin lettering... strange, unknown as yet, waiting to be learnt’.¹⁷³ Balmer thus also uses Ovid’s thematic concern with

¹⁷² Balmer (2012, p. 268; 2009, p. 41).

¹⁷³ On classics and public school culture as context for the production of classical receptions in WWI poetry, see Vandiver (2010, pp. 33-92); Vandiver is careful to note how public school learning of Greek and Latin was already mediated through Edwardian imperialist readings of classical texts (2010, especially pp. 28, 72, 78). On

language to consider the linguistic alienation in dominant cultures of colonial subjects, the working classes, and women, and the long wait by women to gain access to a classical education.¹⁷⁴

The particularly gendered nuances of linguistic alienation, and thus alienation from power and authority, notably appear in a translation that Balmer cut from the published version of *The Word for Sorrow*. Published separately in the poetry journal *Agenda*, ‘Ovid’s Pupil’ and ‘Perilla’s Legacy’ form a pair that first translate, then respond to *Tr.* 3.7, Ovid’s letter to his daughter.¹⁷⁵ Balmer takes an ironic approach to Ovid’s faint praise of his daughter and his recommendation that she should cultivate her ‘modest talents’ (*opes modicae*, 3.7.39) as old age will soon hit her face hard (*ista decens facies longis uitabitur annis*, 33). Just as Balmer emphasizes her own role as translator, her translation of *Tr.* 3.7 emphasizes Perilla’s work as poet. In the Latin, Ovid instructs his letter to find Perilla ‘among her books’ (*inter libros*, 4), but Balmer’s Perilla is found in the first line of the poem specifically ‘among dictionaries, lexicons’; similarly, Ovid’s *doctissima* (31) is expanded to ‘Perilla, Poet, Scholar’. Balmer perhaps figures herself as Ovid’s ‘daughter’ here, dictionary in hand.

In the responding poem, Perilla speaks, calling out Ovid’s barbed ‘feint praise’ and replying to his letter—humorously, in the manner that Ovid explicitly tells her not to in the Latin poem—by drawing on elegiac tropes (‘Still I burned with the same flame’). ‘Perilla’s

classics as a marker of status and a means of social recognition, see Stray (1998). On the classical educations and receptions of lower class and middle class male war poets, see Vandiver (2010, pp. 93-162); see also Hall (2007; 2008b).

¹⁷⁴ On the complex links between languages, translation, and imperialism in the ancient world, see the essays collected in McElduff and Sciarrino (2011); and in the modern world, see especially Venuti (1993; 1994). On teaching classics in colonial contexts, see Goff (2005).

¹⁷⁵ Balmer (2010, pp. 137-138); on Perilla as *puella* see Ingleheart (2012).

Legacy' may also respond to another poem that Balmer does not translate, *Tr.* 1.6. In this poem to his wife, Ovid argues that if only his wife had been married to Homer, then her loyalty and virtue would exceed even Penelope's (*tu si Maeonium uatem sortita fuisses | Penelopes esset fama secunda tuae*, 1.6.21-22); the implication of this statement is that it is not the woman's virtue *per se* that is to be lauded, but the male poet's skill at celebrating this virtue in verse.¹⁷⁶ Yet Balmer draws out the real-life impact for the woman poet excluded from this male poetic economy: 'In the end his conceit left only this: | the stale kiss of indices, appendix, | *Classical Women Poets, Non-Extant*'.¹⁷⁷

5.5 Conclusion

By tracking the past and present owners of her dictionary, Balmer is able to contrast the gendered differences in historical access to Latin learning; the presence of the dictionary may therefore be the physical mark, or cipher, of the self-taught woman classicist (compare Virginia Woolf detailing in *Between the Acts* women's necessary recourse to and use of *Lemprière's Classical Dictionary—Bibliotheca Classica*). Balmer's dictionary thus draws attention to the feminist translator's acknowledgement and disclosure of the intellectual effort and cultural dialogue involved in reading classical texts, and acts as a foil to the performance of effortless by privileged (male) scholars, who, through a sense of male ownership of language and male ownership of culture, often approach classical texts with 'schoolboy boredom'.¹⁷⁸ David Slavitt's nonchalant interjections into his translations of Ovid's exile

¹⁷⁶ Green (1994, p. 213).

¹⁷⁷ Although this final line hints at a new canon and references Balmer's own work on forgotten classical women poets.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Plath's scorn for male scholars with classical pretensions, see chapter 3.3.

poetry, for example, are designed also to flaunt his privileged role as a learned mediator of the text, rather than a questioning reader like Balmer.¹⁷⁹

The male ownership of language and culture also creates translators who do not feel—as many women do—that the lack of a classical education prevents them from translating ancient texts. Ted Hughes, for example, provides no explanatory footnotes in *Tales from Ovid*, nor a preface that details his work on Ovid’s text, despite the fact that he had no formal classical training and was working from a translation of the *Metamorphoses*. Hughes claims the versions are ‘his own’, yet ‘underestimates the degree to which he has been influenced by Ovid’.¹⁸⁰ This male poetic hubris sits in stark opposition both to Wertenbaker’s insistence on her ‘authority’ to translate ancient texts, and to Balmer’s carefully considered, at times almost nervous translations; both Wertenbaker and Balmer—although in different ways—express an awareness of women’s hard-won right to learn Greek and Latin and express an anxiety about the opposition historically faced—and still anticipated—by women who wanted to read the classics.¹⁸¹ Indeed Virgil’s most recent translator Sarah Ruden argues that women’s lack of a classical education can improve translations as women writers are more likely to refer to a number of dictionaries and to different commentaries, enriching the text far further than any male poet who can read Greek or Latin by sight.¹⁸² The device of the dictionary in *The Word for Sorrow* both highlights Balmer’s philological preparation and literalizes women’s active

¹⁷⁹ Slavitt (1990).

¹⁸⁰ Brown (1999, p. 219). On the omission of women writers and translators from scholarly treatments of classical reception work, see chapter 1, and Theodorakopoulos (2012, pp. 152-155).

¹⁸¹ On women’s historic access to the classics in the UK, see Cox (2015); see also Hurst (2006, pp. 52-57), who notes that Victorian parents were advised that the classics ‘were of no obvious use to girls, since “reading the Latin poets will not make her more attractive”’ (Charles Eyre Pascoe’s *Handbook for Female Education* (1879), quoted in Hurst, 2006, pp. 53-54).

¹⁸² Ruden, quoted in Balmer (2012, p. 268); see also Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2012b) on Ruden’s *The Aeneid* (2009).

reclaiming of the classical tradition by the physical presence of the dictionary as she holds it in her hands and works on Ovid's text.

As Balmer demonstrates, the task of the feminist translator is to maintain fidelity to the practice and method of the translation project rather than the source text. Balmer's presence in the text insists on the process of her engagement with Ovid and the always-unfinished nature of translation; the final thought in the collection that 'loss drives us on' highlights this continual process of translation and meaning-production. As Balmer notes in her preface, her 'aim was that presence of the Ovid poems should seem like pages from a translator's notebook, detailed sketches before the finished original to present snap-shots of the work in progress'.¹⁸³ Balmer's translations are an on-going exercise, inviting the reader to participate in and continue the translation task by the inclusion of the dictionary definitions; Balmer presents the feminist translator's task as one not directed toward a finished product, but rather toward an open-ended fragment that is yet to be finished. The final lines of the collection also emphasize the provisional nature of meaning in the shift from 'dictionary' (definitive definition) to 'thesaurus' (group of concepts); while Balmer does not argue for the 'untranslatability' of 'the word for sorrow', she does acknowledge the multiple and necessarily subjective experiences of her protagonists, both of language and sorrow, and she refuses to close meaning or definition. Balmer also challenges narrative closure in the collection, both by her non-linearity and by her ending that is in fact another beginning; the final poem of *The Word for Sorrow* anticipates Balmer's next literary project as she finds a new name in another second-hand book.

¹⁸³ Balmer (2009, p. xvi).

With regard to elite male Latin texts, the visibility of the female translator and her politically motivated interventions in translation are particularly pertinent; Balmer demonstrates how feminist translation strategies can question ancient texts that have perpetuated damaging discourses of women and female sexuality. In Foucauldian terms, feminist translation strategies are thus a recognition of and interrogation of power as it is expressed and transmitted through language and literature. The ‘I’ of a feminist translation that speaks ‘as’ Ovid or Catullus can subvert the male voice; but it can also offer the woman translator an opportunity to rewrite history, to tell the other side of the story, and to rewrite the (masculine) language and literary systems that have constructed the literary ‘canon’, reassessing the status and ‘authority’ of source texts at the same time as she translates them. In her translations of male poets, Balmer can also reclaim the first-person ‘I’ in texts which ventriloquize women’s voices.

The repetition of words and images to link the translations and original poems evidence the translator’s task and Balmer’s careful scholarship, her reading and rereading of Ovid’s text; the repetition of words and phrases is also a very Woolfian tactic of reception, subverting Ovid’s words by revoicing them as a woman.¹⁸⁴ Yet *The Word for Sorrow* does not simply invert male for female poetic voice, but is a complex exploration through a dialogue with her source text of the production of language, knowledge and power. Balmer blurs the boundaries of genre and language to open up Ovid’s texts to new meanings and readings by translating with a characteristic sensitivity to gender and class. Moving beyond second-wave feminist responses which sought to recover women’s voices from the past, Balmer also moves from the domesticity of her Catullan transgressions; she uses Ovid’s poetry to function as a politicized reflection on

¹⁸⁴ ‘Woolf’s dialogue with Ovid is a gendered one. Well-established Ovidian stories and tropes acquire an additional edge when reappropriated by a self-consciously female voice’ (Brown, 1999, p. 201).

women's education and imperialism and to meditate on the horrors of war and exile, using interventionist feminist translation strategies to insert herself into two male poetic traditions.

SAVIANA STĂNESCU

6.1 Introduction

As a poet, dramaturgist, and creative translator, Saviana Stănescu's classical receptions thematically and strategically echo the work of Plath, Wertebaker, and Balmer. Stănescu shares with Plath a concern with the roles of the woman poet and muse, and by drawing particularly on the women of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to problematize female mythic and literary archetypes. At the same time, Stănescu's explicitly politicized theatrical practice suggests parallels with Wertebaker's interrogative dramatic style, and she displays a similar interest in staging 'bad' heroines; and Stănescu's exposure of 'stupid translations' of Ovid's exile poetry and the links between Latin and imperialist ideology echoes Balmer's postfeminist translation work. As in the work of Wertebaker and Balmer, Stănescu also explicitly or implicitly draws upon the work of second-wave feminists Cixous and Irigaray to experiment with feminine language and to represent a fragmented female experience. Yet Stănescu's feminist play with language and theatrical form additionally considers wider global issues of migration and exile as she attempts to capture a fragmented immigrant experience. While both Wertebaker and Balmer also used Ovid to consider global imperialism and colonialism, Stănescu's Romanian voice offers a particularly pertinent response to her country's former exiled Roman inhabitant.¹

¹ On subjectivity, and individualism and/ as imperialism in women's texts, see Spivak (1989). Important responses to and surveys of Ovid's exile poetry, particularly in relation to his pre-exilic works, include Hinds (1985), and Claassen (2008). For the Roman conception of 'barbarians', and their construction of 'the barbarian' as an epistemological category, see Dauge (1981). Sections of this chapter have been published in Ranger (2016).

In this chapter, I discuss Stănescu's sustained engagement with Ovid, and track the feminist methodology which links her varied work. To set Stănescu's work in context I begin with an overview of the distinct and rich Romanian tradition of Ovidian reception that is characterized by its mix of history and folklore. After an introduction to Stănescu's life and education in Romania, I explore her feminist, political, 'confrontational' theatrical practice through a discussion of her retelling of the myth of Jocasta in *YokastaS Redux* (2005), a play in which Stănescu consciously draws on the theatre practice of Grotowski and Cixous to challenge her audience: to question the transmission of ancient stories and to reconsider what they think they know about (in)famous mythical women. I then focus on Stănescu's three explicitly Ovidian works: the poetry collection, *Diary of a Clone* (2003); the poetic cycle 'TRISTIA: Letters of a Barbarian Woman' (in *Google Me!*, 2006); and the play that developed from the Tristia poems, *For a Barbarian Woman* (2011a). I detail Stănescu's idiosyncratic take on the classical tradition and her unique contribution to the Romanian tradition of Ovidian reception by discussing her ambivalent use of classical allusion and her ironic incorporation of critical theory within fictional texts; I draw on feminist postcolonial theory to illuminate how Stănescu's work offers a defence of the Black Sea environs and its inhabitants as depicted by Ovid.² Characterized by an astute critical awareness and a committed political engagement, Stănescu's Ovidian receptions draw out the tangible consequences of both classical and contemporary discourses of women and 'barbarians'.

² On Ovidian reception in Eastern-European literature see Ziolkowski (2005, *passim*) and Torlone (2013). For the expansion of the postcolonial framework to include postcommunist nations see Spivak, Chernetsky, Condee, Kujundžić and Ram (2005).

6.2 The Romanian tradition of Ovidian reception

Ziolkowski's chronological and geographical survey of Ovidian reception provides a comprehensive introduction to 'the Romanian connection'; he details ancient local folklore that recounts 'a stranger from the other end of the world' from whose lips 'honey flowed', and tracks a strong lineage of literary works of reception that date to 1679.³ Romantic poet Vasile Alecsandri established the modern Romanian tradition and flavour of Ovidian reception with a play that contained key details replicated in later texts. In Alecsandri's *Ovidiu* (1885), Ovid converts to the local cult of Zamolxis and dies in Tomis from an arrow-wound obtained while defending the walls of the city alongside the 'barbarians' with whom he is now reconciled. Notable Romanian works in this tradition include: Nicolae Iorga's *Ovidiu* (1931), a reception that also introduces the element of a love affair with a local woman; Grigore Sălceanu's *Ovidius*, a tragedy produced for the national Romanian cultural festival in 1958 that celebrated the two-thousand-year anniversary of Ovid's birth and which portrays Ovid as a communist freedom-fighter; Vintilă Horia's *Dieu est né en exil (God was Born in Exile)*, which won the 1960 Prix Goncourt; and Marin Mincu's *Il diario di Ovidio* (1997).

Horia's *God was Born in Exile* chronicles Ovid's final years on the Black Sea coast through his relationships with three local women, his growing skills in the Getic language, and a religious quest for spiritual salvation.⁴ Increasingly disillusioned by the Rome he was forced

³ Ziolkowski (2005, pp. 112-113; 2013); for Ovid's presence in Romanian culture and his status as Romania's first national poet, see Mitescu (1972); see also Fenechiu and LaCourse Munteanu (2013). In an imaginative retelling of the local folklore, Jo Shapcott's poem 'The Gypsies' Tales of Ovid: *after Pushkin*', tells of a man whose 'voice was like the sound of rushing water' (2010, pp. 24-25); on Shapcott see Cox (2012); on Pushkin and Ovid see Ziolkowski (2005, pp. 71-72, 109-10), Kennedy (2011), and Kahn (2014).

⁴ On Horia's novel and Horia's fascist sympathies see Godel (2014). Mincu's novel is currently available only in Italian and Romanian.

to leave behind, Ovid meets a disparate band of Roman deserters who have fled the army to live on the land and seek a higher spiritual truth; they have converted to the cult of Zamolxis who has prophesied the imminent arrival of ‘the one true god’.⁵ Horia claims to draw on important archaeological and historical work and peppers his novel with topographical and ethnographical detail, creating a more accurate representation of the ancient Black Sea climate and local Greek culture than that found in Ovid’s exile poetry.⁶ Likewise, language learning and Ovid’s new knowledge of Getic are described in a positive light. However, Ovid still views the locals condescendingly as ‘barbarians’; the Dacians are depicted by Horia as romanticized ‘noble savages’, while the Tomitians live in a Romanian ‘golden age’, childlike and naive in their simple agricultural lives and spiritual beliefs.⁷ From a postcolonial perspective, this is highly problematic and compounded by the unsubtle plot device of Ovid’s salvation at the news of a messiah born in Bethlehem; through his damning critique of the Roman(ian) totalitarian state, Horia simply negates one patriarchal discourse (the Roman Empire) in order to justify another (Christianity).⁸

God was Born in Exile employed a perceived anti-Augustan strain in Ovid’s exile poetry as a thinly-veiled indictment of the Romanian communist government; comparisons can be drawn between Horia’s novel and the Australian writer David Malouf’s *An Imaginary Life* (1978), and Austrian Christoph Ransmayr’s *Die letzte Welt* (1988; *The Last World*, 1990),

⁵ Horia employs a variant spelling (following Alecsandri) to the usual ‘Zalmoxis’, as at, e.g., Herodotus 4.93-6; also Mincu (1997).

⁶ Horia, ‘Author’s Postscript’ (1961, n.p.).

⁷ ‘I am also tempted to translate the Georgics into Getic, because it is a language well fitted to describe the charms of nature’, Horia (1961, p. 52); ‘[D]ignity tempered with a sort of barbarian kindliness’ (p. 141).

⁸ ‘[F]or what the Messiah will destroy as soon as He shows Himself to men will be the Empire’, Horia (1961, p. 217). On the Catholic Church as a system that has traditionally used Latin as a means of maintaining power, see, e.g., Waquet (2001, pp. 41-79); on Horia’s treatment of Ovid’s religious conversion, see Christensen (1995). Ovid was also ‘christianized’ by Hughes (1997, pp. x-xi); for a similar approach in scholarship, see Fränkel (1945).

novels which have both received respectable attention from classical scholars and in which Ovid is also depicted as a victim of the power and spite of Augustus' totalitarian regime.⁹ In Malouf's novel, Ovid finds salvation in the figure of a wild boy, 'the Child' (recalling Horia's messiah), who teaches Ovid the language of nature. Horia and Malouf share an image of the local 'barbarian' languages as 'natural' and reflecting the unsophisticated childlike concerns of the 'noble savages'; in both novels Ovid holds a romanticizing view of the 'other', and only learns a new language in his personal search for higher spiritual understanding. Similarly, Horia and Malouf paint the relationship between the imperial centre and the colonized periphery as a mutually exclusive dichotomy, although the novels thus follow Ovid's statements in the exile poetry that he is either Roman or barbarian, either a Latin speaker or a Getic speaker.¹⁰

Malouf and Ransmayr both follow Ovid in their bleak descriptions of the local climate and inhabitants of Tomis. In Malouf's novel, Ovid can only find salvation away from the superstitious 'barbarians' of Tomis; in Ransmayr, Ovid lives in the secluded and mountainous Trachila, perhaps punning on the Romanian 'Dracula', and the Ovidian episodes that Ransmayr chose to include in *The Last World* are suitably bloody (the butcher Tereus, for example; Ransmayr's novel was banned in Romania under the dictator Ceaușescu and an unedited version did not appear in the country until after Ceaușescu's execution).¹¹

⁹ Malouf (1999); Ransmayr (1991). On Malouf see Matzner (2011), and Godel (2014); see also Nagle (1985); for a detailed placing of Malouf's novel in the history of Australian exile literature see Grigorescu Pana (1996). On Ransmayr see Ziolkowski (2005, pp. 176-181), and Godel (2014).

¹⁰ *Pont.* 4.13.18, 4.14.55-56.

¹¹ A. N. Michalopoulos (2011, p. 282 n. 27). Ovid himself provides a grisly etymology for Tomis as the site where Medea dismembered her brother, *inde Tomis dictus locus hic, quia fertur in illo | membra soror fratris consecuisse sui*, *Tr.* 3.9.33-34; on the Greek etymology of Tomis (τέμνω, 'I cut') see Nawotka (1994), and Ingleheart (2011, p. 3 n. 7).

Read from a postcolonial perspective, Ovid's account in his exile poetry of the Tomitians, albeit as civilization's last line of defence, is a deliberate act of 'othering' in its conscious allusions to earlier literary descriptions of Scythians familiar to his audience from Propertius, Virgil, and Horace.¹² While it is now generally accepted in classical scholarship that Ovid's descriptions of Tomis are rhetorical hyperbole and are not to be taken seriously, the sceptical view of scholarship toward the factual element of Ovid's descriptions of Tomis has not been reflected in popular works of Ovidian reception; novels such as Ransmayr's and Malouf's repeat Ovid's assessment of Tomis in their descriptions of the hostile climate and savage locals, thus further entrenching this now problematic discourse in the minds of readers.¹³

In sharp contrast to these popular 'biographies of Ovid's exile', the Romanian tradition of Ovidian reception, as seen in the works by Alecsandri, Iorga, Sălceanu, Horia, and Mincu, presents Tomis and its inhabitants in a positive light.¹⁴ Romanian authors attempt to rescue Tomis from the imperial viewpoint of fear and loathing by 'writing back' to Ovid, Malouf, and Ransmayr; they counteract the negative implications of unrealistic representations of the Black Sea coast as a frozen and barren landscape by disrupting both Ovidian tropes and dominant popular discourses about Romania. They imagine instead Ovid's relationships with the local people, his assimilation into the local culture, and his transformation into Romania's first national poet. Furthermore, contemporary women's voices have recently added a nuanced gendered perspective to this rich, alternative Romanian tradition.¹⁵ Alongside Stănescu, the

¹² *Tr.* 3.4.52; cf. Propertius 3.16.13; Virgil, *Geo.* 3.349-383; Horace, *Odes* 3.24.9-24.

¹³ On Ovid's sincerity or irony in his attitude toward Augustus, see Nagle (1980), Williams (1994), Barchiesi (1997, especially pp. 15-44 on the exile poetry), Hardie (2002c), Claassen (2008), McGowan (2009), and Ingleheart (2010, pp. 26-27). On the dangers of 'reading more' into Ovid's exile poetry see Casali (1997), and Barchiesi (2001, pp. 85-86).

¹⁴ 'Biographies of Ovid's exile' (Godel, 2014).

¹⁵ In the Eastern-European tradition of Ovidian reception, see also Julia Kristeva's *Le vieil homme et les loups* (1991; *The Old Man and the Wolves*, 1994) which sets Ovid in a fictionalized Bulgaria (Kristeva was born in Bulgaria and moved to France in her twenties); on Kristeva and the classics see Merten (2004, pp. 243-326).

Canadian-Ukrainian-Romanian poet and translator Erin Moure, for example, uses Ovid's exile poetry in 2012's *The Unmemntioable [sic]* (a title that plays with 'untranslatability') for a poetic 'investigation into subjectivity and experience' that explores 'the trauma of war and emigration'.¹⁶

Moure was a member of the pioneering feminist translation movement in Canada, and has previously collaborated with translators and poets including Barbara Godard, and Nicole Brossard.¹⁷ Like Balmer, Moure uses experimental feminist literary techniques to create translations and original poetry that are collages of text, material culture, literary and visual styles, and languages.¹⁸ In the Ovidian *The Unmemntioable*, Moure alternates passages in English with phrases written in Latin, French, Ukrainian, Romanian, German, and Hebrew; the book includes poems, diary entries, photographs, handwritten notes, quotations from Ovid and from the Romanian exile Paul Celan, and a photocopied page of passport immigration stamps. The prose poetry of *The Unmemntioable* weaves together the stories of two women attempting to find—or perhaps avoid—each other across continents, writing poems, letters, and leaving notes, yet always only catching a glimpse or vestige of the 'other'.

E.S. (Elisa Sampedrin, a character who has previously appeared in two of Moure's earlier poetry collections), writes allusively Ovidian poems as she sits in a café in Bucharest and waits for E.M.; E.M. is a fictionalized version of the author Erin Moure herself, whose diary entries in the collection track her journey to return her émigrée mother's ashes for burial

¹⁶ Moure (2012, p. 121; 2012b, p. 5). Due to post-WWII border changes, the territory that is now southern Ukraine was previously Romania. Moure's novel was published one year Stănescu's play *For a Barbarian Woman* was first performed.

¹⁷ See chapters 2 and 5 on feminist translation and feminist translators.

¹⁸ On collage as a feminist translation strategy, see chapter 2.4, above; on the collage or palimpsest as feminist poetics, see Keller and Miller (1994), DuPlessis (1996), Frost (2003), and Kinnahan (2004, pp. 41-47).

in Ukraine, travelling back to Canada via Bucharest and a visit to Tomis, now Constanța ('I have a message for Ovid').¹⁹ As Ovid gazed upon the Black Sea from his place of exile, in *The Unmemntioable* E.M. traces her mother's path back to the Black Sea, where she finds E.S. gazing upon the water from Constanța's promenade. Moure uses Ovid's poetry to focus on local Ukrainian-Romanian women and the role of the female muse in poetry, achieving this in her text by exploring the complex relationships between three generations of women in E.M.'s family, and the tense relationship between the woman poet and her fictional female character.

The poems that E.S. writes in Bucharest take their titles either directly from the names of Ovid's books ('Remedia Amoris', 'Medicamina Faciei Femineae', 'Fasti', 'Heroides', 'Amores', 'Halieutica', 'Epistulae', and 'Ars Amatori'), or use falsely-Ovidian Latinate titles ('Somnium', 'Consolatio ad L'vivium'), and the poems are sensual compositions which meditate on the body, language, and history.²⁰ Thematic concerns with lost or stuttering language, translation, and the alphabet run throughout the text and Moure draws particularly on the work of lesbian feminist poets Monique Wittig and Brossard in these explorations of language and the 'mother-tongue': 'If, in translation, there is a difficulty with 'je', isn't there even more so with 'I?'; '*A mother is the unmemntioable boundary*'; 'Ache is our alphabet, it has jewels and jewels.... I walk on Strada Plantelor in Bucharest, exiled, lonely in three languages'.²¹

¹⁹ Moure (2012, p. 110). Moure has also published her work under the heteronym 'Elisa Sampedrin'.

²⁰ Moure (2012, pp. 15, 21, 22, 26, 30, 58, 60, 72; 24, 73).

²¹ Moure (2012, p. 37, a reference to Wittig's 'j/e' (see Wittig, 1975); pp. 45; 102). See also: 'One alphabet I could not read, they did not teach it in Canadian schools' (p. 51); 'my surprise was that i write in english' (p. 89); 'i sew the alphabet shut too | a to b, facing | ab to cd, facing | o to a, facing | i to u, o, un | faced' (p. 98).

As Balmer does with her bold-font dictionary entries in *The Word for Sorrow*, Moure also plays with font size and gradations in colour of grey-scale text, and she includes within the text paratextual marks that give the poems the appearance of having been run through translation software, with alternative translations or ‘untranslatable’ omissions provided within the body of the text:

what ordinary translator <translate> outlasts human fear?
completely incinerate my _____;

I have reached a place <affirm> of sorrow

Was the ~~postcard~~ photograph one of those stones?²²

E.S. steals E.M.’s notebook (the act of theft is described by E.M. as ‘a kind of translation’), and she sends E.M. a copy of Ovid’s *Tristia*, ‘*Tristele* in Romanian (1957), bearing a library stamp from Suceava near the border with Ukraine’.²³ Later in the text Moure references Peter Green’s translation of Ovid’s *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and E.M.’s diary entries quote from Ovid’s *Tristia* (in translation) as she puzzles over her experience of Romania: “‘My offence was that I had eyes”, wrote Ovid long ago, from Tomis on the Black Sea. Sometimes we are blinded by what we cannot see’. E.S. also uses a quotation in one of her poems in Latin, two lines taken from *Ars Amatoria* 3.345-346, *uel tibi composita cantetur EPISTULA uoce: | ignotum hoc aliis ille nouauit opus* (‘Or, for dramatic recitation, [read] one of the *Heroines’ Letters*—an art-form he [Ovid] invented himself’).²⁴ In these lines Ovid recommends his innovative *Heroides* as a suitable text for cultivated women readers; an apt choice of quotation for Moure’s book of letter-poem-writing women, and a playful recommendation of her own text.

²² Moure (2012, pp. 22, ‘Fasti’; 72, ‘Ars Amatori’; 65).

²³ Moure (2012, pp. 113, 104).

²⁴ Moure (2012, p. 75, trans. P. Green, 1982, p. 224).

Moure also uses her two protagonists to highlight and critique the orientalizing view of Eastern European women and Romania itself by poets and tourists alike. E.M. uncritically visits tourist sites, observes the locals, and sentimentalizes exile: ‘Ovid’s antique anguish is palpable here...’.²⁵ E.M. also romantically blurs the subjectivities of Ovid and the fictional Ukrainian-Romanian poet E.S., yet ‘unlike Ovid, Elisa is not one for *Tristele*. She knows what she sees’.²⁶ That is, E.S. observes both herself and E.M. in Bucharest with a critical postcolonial eye:

I came to this Eastern capital with my preconceptions and had no idea what it is to live here. I wanted to be awed or horrified...

What is [E.M.] writing at her café table?... Bucharest is a city of contradictions, she is thinking. As someone does, not recognising that she herself is contradictory.²⁷

Moure notes that her concern with language in the book mourns a lost hybridity, and attempts to recover the voices of the ‘erased presence of those of mixed culture’ in the borderlands of Ukraine (formerly Romania), where three generations ago those who spoke Russian with an accent or spoke ‘the banished tongue’ were killed and their villages burned or seized.²⁸ As the daughter of immigrants to Canada, Moure describes a belated exilic experience as she returns to a home she encounters as an outsider. Thus, while using Ovid’s poetry in a book that is definitively about women and women’s particular experiences of war and exile, Moure—and Stănescu, as I shortly discuss—expands her gendered critique to address global political issues; together, their receptions and new readings of Ovid’s exile poetry question concepts of ‘home’, ‘exile’, and ‘barbarians’. Their contributions to the Ovidian tradition seem all the more urgent in light of growing nationalist movements in 2015 and 2016 and the ongoing global refugee

²⁵ Moure (2012, p. 110).

²⁶ Moure (2012, p. 110).

²⁷ Moure (2012, p. 20, 28).

²⁸ Moure and Pato (2012, p. 1).

crisis. I return now to Stănescu herself, and her politicized theatrical approach to the classical tradition.

6.3 Stănescu

Stănescu was born in Bucharest during the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu. In contrast to other communist nations such as Russia that had abolished the teaching of classics (the Bolsheviks removed Latin from the school curriculum when they came to power in 1922), Romania maintained a strong link to its classical and Dacian past.²⁹ The claim for Romania's Latin roots was supported in the ethnographic studies of the early twentieth-century historians Vasile Pârvan and Nicolae Iorga, and Latin continued to be taught in schools alongside a strong emphasis on Romania's Roman ancestors; in Stănescu's play *Waxing West*, for example, the Romanian character Daniela, adjusting to her new life in New York, asserts her old identity with the words: 'Sic transit gloria mundi... I was good at Latin!'.³⁰ Additionally, Ovid in particular has been an enduring and important cultural figure in Romania for centuries, and since 1887 a statue of the poet has stood in the town of his exile, 'Tomis' (Constanța). Stănescu learned Latin in the seventh and eighth grades at school, but from a young age she was also familiar with the story of Ovid from his statue.³¹ Constanța today is a popular sea-side holiday destination for the inhabitants of Bucharest and so every childhood holiday for Stănescu also 'mean[t] a little encounter with Ovid'.³²

²⁹ For classical pedagogy and classical reception under communism see Karsai, Klaniczay, Movrin and Olechowska (2013). For the classical tradition in Russia, see Ziolkowski (2005, pp. 67-111, 206-207), Torlone (2009), and Kennedy (2011); in central and Eastern Europe see Torlone (2013).

³⁰ On classics in Romanian schools, see Boia (2001, p. 120). *Waxing West* was the first play Stănescu wrote after arriving in America (Stănescu and Gould, 2007, p. 104); collected in Stănescu (2010).

³¹ A replica of Constanța's statue was later erected in Ovid's home-town of Sulmona in Italy in 1925.

³² Stănescu (email to the author, 25 September 2014).

Although theatre enjoyed a privileged position of cultural importance in Romania throughout the years of dictatorship, under Ceaușescu all theatres were state-run and subject to government censors (this was also true of plays in Britain until 1968, however, when the Theatres Act banned governmental censorship); as a result, classical Greek tragedies or new plays set in the Greco-Roman classical past were often performed as they were more likely to be approved for production than contemporary works.³³ At that time, Romanian theatre artists ‘filled their work with pointed clues (which they called ‘lizards’) to guide audiences in recognising the codes or hidden metaphors for current social affairs and to keep alive a kind of subtle resistance through a collective understanding of the madness that surrounded them’.³⁴ Censorship ironically helped foster the developing Romanian avant-garde and absurdist theatrical traditions, which eluded censorship with seemingly nonsensical plays, a tradition which Stănescu draws upon heavily in her work.³⁵ In 1989 the Romanian Revolution led to the deposition and swift execution of Ceaușescu alongside his wife, Elena, on Christmas Day; within weeks of the executions UNITER (Uniunea Teatrala din Romania), the Romanian Theatre Union, was formed. As a twenty-two-year-old student and radical feminist performance poet, Stănescu was actively involved in the Revolution, although it would be fifteen years before she could write explicitly about her personal experience of the horrors she had witnessed.³⁶

³³ Duncan (2008, p. 85); ‘Romanian artists and dissidents often utilised a furtive strategy for discussing the political situation through theatre that was based on reinterpretations of the classics, because it was too dangerous for them to criticise their society directly’, Stănescu quoted in Eisner (2010, p. 10). This was also the case, e.g., in Nazi-occupied France, and in Greece under the Junta; see, e.g., on Greece, van Steen (2001).

³⁴ Stănescu quoted in Eisner (2010, p. 10).

³⁵ On Stănescu’s work in the context of the Romanian tradition of Dada (Tristan Tzara), Eugène Ionesco’s theatre of the absurd, and Ceaușescu-era ‘oneirism’, see Radulescu (2015, p. 44).

³⁶ Stănescu says, with characteristic dark humour, that post-Revolution Romanians were ‘too busy with dramatic living to be able to focus on dramatic writing’ (2013c, p. 319). Stănescu’s underground performance poetry was ‘active and theatrical, featuring characters in conflict, centering [*sic*] on the struggles of women’ (Eisner, 2010, p. 11).

After graduating from university in 1990 Stănescu quickly became one of the leading members of the new generation of Romanian playwrights, and in 2000 she won the prestigious UNITER Play of the Year Award for *Inflatable Apocalypse*, a work she had submitted under a male pseudonym as no woman had yet won the prize; she revealed her true identity to a stunned audience at the award ceremony.³⁷ As well as strong feminist concerns in her work, Stănescu also notes the particular influence on her style of dramatists Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Sarah Kane, and Caryl Churchill.³⁸ Churchill, a celebrated British feminist playwright, travelled to Romania shortly after the Revolution and worked in collaboration with local artists to produce the play *Mad Forest*; Stănescu recounts watching this performance and the profound effect Churchill's play had on her as a young woman (Stănescu was later to take part in a return trip of Romanian artists to the UK, where she held a summer residency at The Royal Court theatre).³⁹

Stănescu completed her PhD thesis 'Reconfiguring the Classics in Contemporary Drama' at the National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest before moving to New York in 2001, where she currently lives in 'self-imposed "exile"'.⁴⁰ Arriving in the city mere days before the destruction of the World Trade Centre, Stănescu notes that she did not miss the irony of witnessing the fall of communism in the East only to arrive in the West to witness the fall of capitalism; explorations of such destructive relationships between imperial centre and the 'barbarian' periphery are central to Stănescu's work.⁴¹ Together with the influence of

³⁷ Eisner (2010).

³⁸ Stănescu (2015, p. 85); the playwright stresses 'the need for a political theatre'. See also nn. 54, 55, below.

³⁹ Stănescu (2013c, pp. 319, 320); see also Stănescu quoted in Eisner (2010, pp. 15-16).

⁴⁰ Stănescu (2012b).

⁴¹ Stănescu (2009).

feminist and agit-prop theatre, Stănescu's political dramatic focus can also in part be illuminated by the 'revelation' she had upon immigrating to America:

It is in America that I understood what discourses of power mean: on the radio, in public speeches, American leaders speak about a people destined to lead. Undoubtedly, each discourse varies depending on political coordinates, but it only varies in relation to 'how' this hegemony is imposed on people... not to 'why'.⁴²

Stănescu's work thus draws on her own experience of living 'in between' discourses both to challenge perceptions of immigrants (and the resulting issues encountered by Eastern-European women migrants in particular) and to affectionately critique Romanian identity.⁴³ Her early tragi-comic American plays (*Waxing West*, *Aliens with Extraordinary Skills*, and *Lenin's Shoe*), comprise a collage of genres and theatrical styles within one work to create a multiplicity of voices and perspectives which capture a fragmented female (immigrant) experience, as characters romanticize the American Dream despite the harsh realities for non-English-speaking migrants of menial labour and sex work. Using her 'immigrant I' informed by feminist and post-communist perspectives, Stănescu destabilizes language and deconstructs the cultural preconceptions held by host nations and guest aliens alike.⁴⁴ As a Romanian living and working in New York, Stănescu writes predominantly in English for her American audience; by writing in the dominant language of her host nation Stănescu can bring minoritarian values and perspectives to a larger audience and embody in her plays the hybridity she celebrates, mediating between the two languages and cultures (in her Ovidian receptions, Stănescu thus

⁴² Mihăilă (2010, p. 305).

⁴³ On the space 'between' in postcolonial contexts, see Bhabha (1994). Stănescu notes that she was disappointed by the Romanian identity that emerged post-1989 which 'embraced the trappings of a Western-style market economy without creating an accompanying ethos to support it', quoted in Eisner (2010, p. 25).

⁴⁴ 'Immigrant I': Stănescu (2009); plays collected in Stănescu (2010). On destabilizing language as a politicized strategy of resistance, see Bassnett and Trivedi (1999, p. 15), and Deleuze and Guattari (1986). Radulescu argues that fractured, ruptured contemporary theatre and aesthetics reflects the ontological nature of the experience of exile and displacement (2015, p. 37). On Stănescu's early 'American plays', see Radulescu (2015, pp. 44-58).

tells the ‘other side’, in language and narrative, to the story told by Ovid, who wrote in Latin to an audience in the dominant culture).⁴⁵ Passionately committed to the role of drama in stimulating social change, Stănescu argues for the ‘clear and loud’ need for and importance of theatre in raising issues of freedom and democracy in all nations (including the US and UK) ‘as long as there still is injustice, inequality, discrimination, [and] pain’ in the world.⁴⁶

Currently Assistant Professor of Playwriting and Theatre Studies at Ithaca College, NY, Stănescu teaches courses on reimagining the classics on stage, feminist theatre and women playwrights, experimental theatre and the theatre of the absurd, performing autobiography, and writing the immigrant experience. She is also Associate Artistic Director at Richard Schechner’s East Coast Artists, curates the experimental women’s theatre group playgroundzero, and founded the creative collective Immigrant Artists and Scholars in New York (IASNY), which supports and celebrates the work of immigrants in the city. In 2007 Stănescu co-edited the first professional anthology of new Romanian drama published in the US, *roMANIA after 2000*, and she works to support and promote the next generation of Romanian playwrights and dramatists.⁴⁷ Alongside her teaching and artistic activism, Stănescu continues to write plays, working with performance groups who sometimes radically transform

⁴⁵ On ‘minoritarian’ languages and cultures, in relation to dominant, ‘majoritarian’ languages and cultures, see Deleuze and Guattari (1986). On Stănescu’s ‘hybrid transnational’ dramatic style, which embodies artistically her straddling of two cultures, see Manole (2009, p. 66).

⁴⁶ Available at: http://saviany.blogspot.co.uk/2011_03_01_archive.html (Accessed: 11 December 2015). Stănescu regularly updates her personal website (saviany.com) and her two blogs with information about her latest projects and thoughts on her creative process. Available at: <http://saviany.blogspot.co.uk> and <http://www.saviany.blogspot.co.uk> (Accessed: 11 December 2015). ‘I am... interested in [creating] vibrant theatrical plays about something bigger than the ordinary commerce of emotion, plays that make larger/ bolder comments on socio-political issues, existential turmoil, the irony of history, the global world and its flaws. Yes, big words that might sound bombastic. But if theatre doesn’t fill [these words] with meaning and depth, politics will never fail to fill them with rhetoric and demagoguery’, Stănescu, quoted in Szymkowiec (2010). Elsewhere, Stănescu has argued that playwrights should be ‘artist-citizens’ (2013c, p. 324). Hardwick (2000, pp. 63-78) discusses innovation in theatre and its role in challenging political and cultural orthodoxy; while translations are frequently criticized for bringing something new to a text, theatrical adaptations are expected to do so.

⁴⁷ Stănescu and Gerould (2007); on the plays in this volume, see Stănescu (2013c).

her written text, and writing both by herself and in collaborative projects with peers and students. Stănescu's most recent production, for example, 'The Others' (2016) is a collaborative performance project created with her students at Ithaca College that explores racial injustice and sexual abuse on US college campuses.⁴⁸

Stănescu's poetry and plays have frequently engaged with ancient texts, and her classical reception has drawn on the works of the Greek tragedians and Homer, alongside her sustained engagement with the Roman(ian) poet Ovid. Stănescu has noted how, as a woman 'with Greek roots and Balkan branches', she feels the presence of classical stories in contemporary life:

I've always believed that a specific political situation resurrects the classic story/text/character that resonates best with the current social context. In Romania, during the communist regime, for instance, we had lots of Hamlets, sunk in their subtext, philosophically declaiming that something was rotten in the country. It was a Hamlet-time of subtle reflective opposition to the totalitarian system. Our Antigone-time would come while "surfing" the ruins of the Berlin Wall.⁴⁹

A recent project, *Back to Ithaca: a Contemporary Odyssey* (2013a), conceived by the playwright and developed with students from her 'Re-Imagining the Classics' class, combined Homer's *Odyssey* with the home-coming experiences of American military veterans returning to Ithaca, NY from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The project was based upon interviews with men and women soldiers renarrated 'through the lens of' the *Odyssey*, and it aimed to create a 'polyphonic dramatic/visual "poem" that pays tribute to the service of veterans while

⁴⁸ Available at: <http://www.broadwayworld.com/article/Ithaca-College-Department-of-Theatre-Arts-to-Present-THE-OTHERS-20160325> (Accessed: 12 April 2016).

⁴⁹ Stănescu (2004).

raising questions relevant to the global community today'.⁵⁰ *Back to Ithaca* is a melancholic and tragic work, yet is ultimately optimistic in its hopes for recovery from the psychological and physical trauma inflicted by war, and in its narrative of a future life beyond the soldiers' *nostoi*—and beyond the ending of Homer's *Odyssey*. Stănescu's works of classical reception are characterized by a deep political engagement and by a strong belief in the power of drama to highlight political issues and to critically engage her audience with the world. To exemplify Stănescu's avant-garde methodology and to situate her politicized theatrical approach to Ovid, I now discuss for comparison her earlier play, *YokastaS Redux*, in which Stănescu rereads and reclaims the classical myth of Jocasta, mother and wife to Oedipus.

6.4 *YokastaS Redux* and feminist theatrical praxis

Stănescu's retelling of the myth of Jocasta was co-devised with her former teacher Richard Schechner, director of the ground-breaking performance of Euripides' *Bacchae*, *Dionysus in 69* (1968).⁵¹ In *YokastaS Redux* Schechner and Stănescu retell the myth of Oedipus from Jocasta's perspective by 'sampling' the texts of Sigmund Freud, Euripides, Sophocles, and Seneca, and by structuring the play around moments of Jocasta's life that are never seen in the ancient tragedies: the night her first child is taken away from her; the night she seduces her new husband.⁵² Four separate Jocastas destabilize the classical texts in which their character

⁵⁰ The interviews with veterans have been compiled creatively with photographs and drawings, alongside details of the process of turning the material into the play; available at: <http://backtoithaca.blogspot.co.uk> (Accessed: 23 January 2014).

⁵¹ On *Dionysus in 69*, see Zeitlin (2004). *YokastaS Redux* was first performed in March 2003 as *YokastaS*. For a performance review of *YokastaS*, see Calzadilla (2003); also Scharffenberger (2012). For a performance review of *YokastaS Redux*, see Horn (2005).

⁵² A video of *YokastaS* performed at the 4th Encuentro of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics (NY), 'Spectacles of Religiosities', can be watched online. Available at: <http://hidvl.nyu.edu/video/001001268.html> (Accessed: 11 December 2015). A filmed recording of *YokastaS Redux* is available at: <http://hidvl.nyu.edu/video/000032083.html> (Accessed: 11 December 2015). 'Sampling': Schechner quoted in Horn (2005). Scharffenberger also notes the textual presences of Machiavelli's *Prince*, and

features by quoting from and then disputing each version of the story; in its rejection of the existence of any ‘true’ story, the play challenges its audience to consider both how classical texts have traditionally been used to perpetuate misogynist discourses, and to reconsider what they think they know about ‘Tragedy’s Baddest Mama’.⁵³

The aim of *YokastaS Redux*, writes Stănescu, was to create ‘a full-scale feminist text/spectacle’:

In traditional theatre the changes [to the ‘original text’] are limited to tiny adjustments, or maybe re-writing the words of the author. In environmental theatre, it is not possible for a principal author to exist, for plays are collages of classical texts, or a mix of several sources and periods. In such cases, ‘change’ does not fully describe what is happening. Grotowski’s ‘confrontation’ is a more appropriate term.⁵⁴

At the same time as the play ‘confronts’ the ancient myth and the literary canon with experimental collage and rewriting, Stănescu also confronts her audience by drawing on Grotowski’s dramatic techniques to disrupt audience identification with her characters, to break down social and physical barriers between actor and audience, and to highlight the strangeness of the ancient text (drawing also, like Wertebaker, on Brechtian techniques of alienation and thus ‘foreignizing’ the text).⁵⁵ Stănescu draws upon Grotowski and Schechner to confront the

Plato’s *Republic* in the scene in which Jocasta advises Oedipus on kingship, as well as the prophecies of the Delphic Oracle (2012, p. 60); in the initial production of *YokastaS* there were also allusive musical numbers including an aria from Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex* (Calzadilla, 2003, p. 711).

⁵³ Stănescu and Schechner (2005, unpublished).

⁵⁴ Stănescu (2013b, pp. 31, 25, trans. H. Ranger). Note: Jerzy Grotowski (b. 1933, d. 1999) was a Polish theatre director known for his experimental, political theatre. Here, Stănescu is referencing his theory on ‘confronting’ myth: ‘As social groupings are less and less defined by religion, traditional mythic forms are in flux... The spectators are more and more individuated in their relation to the myth as corporate truth or group model, and belief is often a matter of intellectual conviction. This means that it is much more difficult to elicit the sort of shock needed to get at those psychic layers behind the life-mask [as ancient tragedy did]. Group identification with myth—the equation of personal, individual truth with universal truth—is virtually impossible today. What is possible?... confrontation with myth rather than identification’ (Grotowski, 2002, p. 23).

⁵⁵ On Brecht see Willett (1964); Venuti (1995). Grotowski frequently employed nudity to break down social barriers between actors and audience and prevent aesthetic concerns from obscuring the dramatic art (see, for example, Schechner’s use of nudity in *Dionysus in 69*). On Brecht’s influence on Heiner Müller’s political use of

expectation that theatre is predominantly a form of entertainment, encouraging instead the political engagement of her audience.⁵⁶ Yet Stănescu also experiments with a particularly feminine form of confrontation by drawing on the feminist theatre of Cixous and Ariane Mnouchkine.

Stănescu was inspired in her telling of Jocasta's story by Cixous' refiguration of the myth, *Le nom d'Œdipe: Chant du corps interdit* (1978; *The Name of Oedipus: Song of the Forbidden Body*), a version which gave voice to Jocasta's desiring female subjectivity and which Stănescu admired for its polyphony (a technique she mirrors in her use of four Jocastas; Cixous has two Jocastas).⁵⁷ Cixous' subtitle, 'the song of the forbidden body', suggests the ways in which the play thematizes attempts to speak as a desiring woman in feminine language; in this respect, the play is a theatrical realization of Cixous' essay, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', and an experiment in feminist, *feminine* theatre.⁵⁸ Mnouchkine, a feminist playwright and director central to the revival of Greek tragedy in the 1960s, collaborated with Cixous at Théâtre du Soleil, directing both *Le nom d'Œdipe* and Cixous' version of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, *La Ville perjure on le réveil des Erinyes* (1994; *The Perjured City, or, the Awakening of the Furies*), a version which used Aeschylus' play to comment on a recent French health scandal.⁵⁹ Mnouchkine's direction is characterized by her non-hierarchical, anti-patriarchal approach,

classical translation as a social protest see Hardwick (2000, pp. 63-74). Compare Grotowski's 'confrontation' with Hardwick (2004, p. 224) on the 'theatre of transformation' in Caribbean and African postcolonial contexts. Hardwick argues that Greek theatre performed in postcolonial contexts is characterized by self-emancipation, civic participation, and a theatre of transformation that creates an autonomous space; Hardwick also notes that 'ambivalence of response is characteristic of politically interventionist refigurations of Greek drama' (p. 224).

⁵⁶ Cf. Wertenbaker's insistence in *The Love of the Nightingale* on the active participation of her audience as witnesses, chapter 4.

⁵⁷ Stănescu (2013b, p. 30).

⁵⁸ On Cixous and *Le nom d'Œdipe* see Babbage (2011, pp. 162-174), and Foley (2004, pp. 86-87). On feminist theatrical praxis, see also Leavitt (1980, pp. 98-101).

⁵⁹ Mnouchkine and Cixous collaborated for Théâtre du Soleil's series *Les Atrides* (1992-1994); Mnouchkine wrote new versions of *Agamemnon*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and *Choephoroi* to complement Cixous' version of *Eumenides*. On *Les Atrides* and 'reading Aeschylus', see Goetsch (1994); on Cixous' Greek theatre, inc. *Les Atrides*, see Leonard (2000).

rejecting the traditional raised stage of theatre, for example, and asking her actors to ‘write with the body’. Stănescu borrows this non-hierarchical staging for her own interactive theatrical presentations of Sophocles and Ovid, a visual representation of her democratic belief that the classics should not be imparted to the audience from above for their edification, but rather discussed and reinterpreted on an equal plane. Stănescu was also inspired by Cixous and Mnouchkine’s feminine ‘multi-climax structure as opposed to the traditional ‘phallic’ one in which dramatic events build toward the well-earned culmination’.⁶⁰ By drawing on the classical reception work of Cixous and Mnouchkine, Stănescu consciously positions herself within a tradition of French feminist physical political theatre.

In Stănescu’s version, Jocasta (Yokasta) is characterized positively as a desiring mature woman who is unashamed of the sexual pleasure she enjoys and who rejects ancient and contemporary taboos concerning women’s behaviour.⁶¹ Stănescu’s Jocastas directly ‘confront’ their ancient authors by frequently disputing the narratives of the texts, and Jocasta is presented in the unapologetic manner that has become a feature of contemporary receptions by women writers: ‘I don’t need to be forgiven’.⁶² The Jocastas frequently confront the audience by addressing spectators directly, breaking the ‘fourth wall’ and the theatrical illusion, and disrupting the audience’s gaze with their own. In Stănescu’s version, Jocasta has not committed suicide and she displays no regret or guilt over her relationship with Oedipus, admitting that

⁶⁰ Stănescu (2015, p. 85).

⁶¹ ‘To be sure, spectators may not wish to follow Yokasta’s lead in assenting to the propriety of mother-son incest. But her refusal to sacrifice her sexual satisfaction and to feel regret over her relationship with Oedipus demand that we interrogate how our perceptions regarding ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ sexual behaviour derive from the judgments of ‘expert’ authorities, whether scientific, philosophical, or religious’ (Scharffenberger, 2012, pp. 60-61).

⁶² Theodorakopoulos (2013, p. 278).

she has always known Oedipus' identity (reasoning that, as Zeus had warned her that this was fated to happen, she ensured that it at least came to pass happily).

Four actors play Jocasta at different stages of her life in the play, creating a multi-faceted heroine reflecting on her many inner stories. As Stănescu explains:

My choice was to create a multiple character: four Yokastas at different ages, knowing parts of the story, like smaller Russian dolls hidden inside the big one—the conceptual persona. Each Yokasta had her own way of penetrating our world: pop culture, the internet world, domestic dailyness (Yokasta—the kitchen robot), TV talk-shows, and even... Star Wars (Yokasta—the librarian). Each Yokasta represented a truth, and by this staging we set out to reveal the multiplicity of Truths.⁶³

Yoyo is an adolescent Jocasta who plays with action figures to imagine her escape from cosseted female life; Yoko is a fifteen-year-old Jocasta married off to King Laius, a disgusting old man who rapes her on their marriage night; Yono is newly married to Oedipus and radiantly pregnant, smiling and silent; and Yokasta is the mature woman who has seen all that life has to offer and looks back with self-awareness on her actions, refusing to submit to her tragic ending.⁶⁴ Over the course of the play Stănescu uses the four Jocastas to deconstruct then reconstruct her (anti)heroine, enabling Jocasta to break free of the suicidal narrative ending she seems cursed to repeat.⁶⁵ The Jocastas interact with each other on stage, at times collaborating to out-wit Laius or to fight over plot details: 'We're a lot like sisters'. They offer retrospective advice to each other, or anticipate and rewrite the future; yet although they frequently appear

⁶³ Stănescu (2004).

⁶⁴ Despite ancient variations on the plot of Jocasta's story, no author allows her to escape suicide.

⁶⁵ Cixous' Jocastas do not ultimately escape their narrative fate; on written characters already doomed by their previous literary fates, see Barthes (1967), and Eagleton (2003, pp. 101-103); Brown reminds us that Seneca's Medea, too, displays a conscious metatheatricality, and 'seems weighed down by a sense of *déjà lu [sic]*... *Medea nunc sum*, 'now I am Medea' (l. 910)... for her, as for us, Medea was already a legend' (Brown, 2007, p. 3). See Spentzou (2003, pp. 28-29) on Ovid's heroines waking up from their past literary histories to attempt to rewrite their stories.

on stage concurrently, they each speak from their own relative position in Jocasta's narrative, offering conflicting metatheatrical opinions as to how the play—and their life—should progress.⁶⁶ The desire of the Jocastas to rewrite their ending is set in contrast to Oedipus' 'blind' obedience to his classical text; when Oedipus puts out his eyes at the end of the play (the actor mock-dramatically puts on a pair of dark sunglasses), the Jocastas ridicule him: 'Why did you do that? Because Sophocles told you to?'. While Stănescu has created a Jocasta who takes control of her own narrative, she has not simply replaced Freud's version of Jocasta—or the versions of Jocasta in Sophocles, Euripides, or Seneca—with her single version; instead, the play leaves Jocasta's story open-ended: Yoyo says that she will tell 'a million stories: they're all true' (a 'multiplicity of Truths').

Jocasta is thus embodied on stage as a palimpsest or collage of overwritten texts and simultaneous alternative endings that reference both ancient tragic drama and modern psychoanalytic texts via pop cultural references to Jocasta's afterlife in the classical tradition.⁶⁷ The mirrored 'interviews' with Yokasta and Yono at the beginning and end of the play, respectively, elicit modern comparisons with celebrity interviews on gossip-laden entertainment television; here, Jocasta is cast as a disgraced politician's wife granting a long-anticipated interview after a sexual scandal. The play displays a sophisticated awareness of the ancient source texts and the afterlives of characters in the classical tradition, as well as an

⁶⁶ At the end of the play the actors look through a 'family photo album': 'Here is Yoyo, angry because I married too young'; 'Here is Yono, happy because she got to do it again and do it right'.

⁶⁷ Stănescu refers to the character named Jocasta in *Star Wars*, and on stage Yoyo plays with the action figure of the Marvel Comic creation Avenger Jocasta (this is comically referenced in a metatheatrical scene near the close of the play in which the character Media, a TV-show interviewer, asks Yokasta if she is aware that she is now a cyborg superheroine in contemporary mythologies). Despite Jocasta's archetypal status as a tragic heroine in the ancient texts, in her modern incarnations in contemporary mythologies she is an archetypally 'good' character. Calzadilla suggests, however, that the presence of 'Avenger Jocasta', the action figure with which Yoyo violently dominates a pliant 'Ken doll', hints at a darker version of the story hidden within the play (2003, p. 711).

awareness of the mechanisms of modern mythmaking. It is to the transmission of texts and myths over time that *Yokastas Redux* primarily responds and critiques; a theme that Stănescu will reprise in her Ovidian receptions.

The play's thematic concern with the nature of storytelling and the manipulation and transmission of stories by 'authoritative' canonical texts is introduced in the opening scene, in which an interviewer-host, 'Media', asks Yokasta what she thinks of Freud's use of Jocasta in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Yokasta replies: 'That's not about me. That's about Oedipus and Laius. I'm here to set the record straight' (a statement subsequently complicated by the play's postmodern refusal to conclude with a 'proper ending').⁶⁸ When all four Jocastas first appear together on stage, the dialogue's exposition of Jocasta's story playfully evokes the frequently competing nature of mythic traditions, at the same time as the four characters angrily rail against, and distance themselves from, the 'authorized' version of Jocasta's story as told by 'those rats Sophocles and Seneca'.⁶⁹ This first joint scene begins the 'collaborative effort of revision' that will take place across the play.⁷⁰

Although Stănescu's Jocastas repeatedly 'confront' their ancient authors, they are equally adept at quoting 'what my author wrote for me' to their personal advantage. In a darkly entertaining pastiche of salacious contemporary US television chat-shows, Jocasta appears alongside Medea and Phaedra in a 'Tragedy's Baddest Mama' special, each wielding physical texts in their hands and attempting to out-quote the other women (Phaedra tells the host that

⁶⁸ For feminist critiques of psychoanalysis (which frequently note that Freud's theories say more about Freud himself than about any of his patients (or Jocasta), see, e.g., de Beauvoir (especially 1997, pp. 38-52), and Irigaray (1985a, b).

⁶⁹ On competing traditions: e.g., in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Jocasta kills herself when Oedipus discovers that she is his mother; in Euripides' *Phoenissae*, Jocasta does not commit suicide until she learns that Eteocles and Polynices have killed each other in battle; Jocasta narrates a great part of Euripides' play.

⁷⁰ Scharffenberger (2012, p. 59).

Clytaemnestra is ‘pissed off’ that she could not attend as she is under contract to another television network).⁷¹ The scene satirically comments on the patriarchal representation of ‘bad women’ and the ways in which women are encouraged to compete with each other under patriarchy; here, women even compete to be crowned the ‘worst’ mother. In a perverse version of warring celebrity ‘divas’, Phaedra is offended when Yokasta suggests that her passion for Hippolytus was not technically incestuous (‘My Hippolytus was as good as my own flesh and blood!’, she protests), and their exchange descends into chaos as Phaedra wrestles Medea to the floor for the insult. Medea, swaggeringly confident as the ‘baddest’ mother, says to Yokasta contemptuously, ‘[Your son] *survived*... No one knows who you are... Everyone knows [about me]... There are so many plays about Oedipus, but not one of you. You don’t count’.

In this scene of quotations and counter-quotations, Phaedra performs a monologue from Euripides’ *Hippolytus* in a melodramatic burlesque (Phaedra’s speech is a part-improvised ‘sampling’ of approximately lines 393-421 from the 1955 translation by David Grene).⁷² Next, Medea holds up a tape recorder and plays an audio recording of Euripides’ *Medea* in ancient Greek. When Yokasta rips the device out of her hand, Medea says: ‘Do you have any idea...? That is *Euripides*! In Greek! The blinking original!... Anyway, I know my lines in English’.⁷³ Medea proceeds to give a virtuoso performance and bows theatrically for canned applause when she finishes; like the Jocastas, Medea and Phaedra are clearly aware of themselves as ‘characters’. Finally, Yokasta reads from Ted Hughes’ violently bloody adaptation of Seneca’s

⁷¹ Mary-Kay Gamel also used the television chat-show formula to elicit the female-only sacred space of the Thesmophoria in her 2002 feminist production of Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazousai*, *The Julie Thesmo Show*; see Gamel (2002). On ‘bad women’, and the ways in which representations of archetypally bad women were used on the Greek stage to reinforce patriarchal norms, see Case (1985), and Foley (2004).

⁷² Grene and Lattimore (1955, pp. 209-210). The host then assumes the role of Phaedra’s Nurse, taking the translation of Euripides out of Phaedra’s hands and continuing the text from where Phaedra finished reading, thus answering her as the Nurse does in Euripides’ original (he reads out lines 440-441 and 467-468 of the translation in Grene and Lattimore (1955, pp. 210-211).

⁷³ Medea performs an unidentified translation of lines 1040-1041 and 1069-1074 of the Greek.

Oedipus.⁷⁴ The heroines' debates over the interpretations and canonical impact of each other's stories in this scene, alongside the host's framing introduction to the women and his interjections during the 'show', enables *Yokasta Redux* to act as a commentary on, as well as a retelling of, the various stories found in Sophocles, Seneca, and Euripides; a double movement that Stănescu employs again in her Ovidian play, *For a Barbarian Woman*.

Beneath the comic surface, however, Stănescu is making an important critical point by exposing how myths and discourses are transmitted between generations; throughout the play the women characters pointedly reference the ancient sources by vocally framing them with 'quote' and 'unquote', highlighting their constructed nature and the distance between text and character. In contrast, Oedipus and Laius simply and unthinkingly replicate the words of the ancient tragedy/ discourse; this sets up a tension in Stănescu's play between the narrative's thematic concern with patrilineage and male literary transmission (and, perhaps, also the Freudian 'family romance' of classical scholarship, reiterating the words of the fathers of the discipline), and feminine modes of storytelling and transmission as the Jocastas take control of their speech and stories.⁷⁵

Stănescu is also more specifically highlighting the representation of women in such constructed discourses. Throughout her plays and poetry Stănescu characteristically blends comedy with horror, and at the end of the chat-show scene, the sparring tragic heroines are replaced on stage by the heavily pregnant Yono, who delivers her first monologue of the play in the character of a woman who drowned her five children in a bath. Speaking in the style of

⁷⁴ Hughes (1969, pp. 16-18); Schechner directed Hughes' version of Seneca's *Oedipus* in 1977, so the presence of the physical text on stage is also a self-referential nod to Schechner's earlier classical adaptation.

⁷⁵ On storytelling as a female art, and the role of women in transmitting folklore to children, see especially Warner (1995); see also chapter 2.2.

televised courtroom testimony, a comparison with Medea most immediately presents itself as this modern infanticide narrates how she killed her children.⁷⁶ Classical drama, gossipy entertainment television programmes, and sensationalist television news reports thus blur into one, destabilizing the traditional hierarchy of low- and high-culture, and suggesting a close link between modern television narratives and classical myths which effect the same damage to women in their simplistic narratives of ‘bad mothers’. Stănescu does not judge this contemporary Medea, but merely tells her story, commenting rather on the ways in which women’s stories are presented in ancient and contemporary narratives.⁷⁷ By linking authoritative classical texts with the disreputable contemporary mythic narratives of television, *YokastaS Redux* invites its audience to apply the same critical eye to ancient texts as it would to gossip. In this way, the play takes the thematic concern with uncovering ‘truth’ from the original texts, but denies its possibility at the same time as multiplying truths infinitely.

After Yokasta quotes the final words that Jocasta speaks in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, ‘Oh, Oedipus, unhappy Oedipus... These are the last words you will hear from me’

⁷⁶ Scharffenberger suggests that Yono’s monologue recalls the actions of Andrea Yates, a Texas woman who drowned her five children in the bath in 2001 in the depths of post-partum psychosis (2012, p. 60). While Yono speaks, a video plays on screens behind her showing Yono washing Oedipus in a bath of blood; Stănescu may be drawing here on the bloody climax of Brian De Palma’s *Carrie* (1976)—a film which similarly depicts a young woman’s deadly power—particularly as De Palma filmed her co-director Schechner’s *Dionysus in 69*. Cf. Catherine Vilpoux’s 1999 film version of Cixous’ *La Ville perjure on le réveil des Erinyes*; Vilpoux’s film includes stage footage cross-cut with news footage, newspaper cuttings, and legal testimonies, mixing theatre and reality; on the film’s emphasis on the importance of *remémoré* in feminist politics see Michelakis (2004, pp. 204-205).

⁷⁷ In her analysis of the play’s initial incarnation, *YokastaS*, Scharffenberger notes that these features of popular culture in the play are in fact ‘posited as the vehicles responsible for circulating the myths that have been handed down to us from antiquity... These anachronisms... ‘unmake’ myth by associating it with quotidian forms of discourse—particularly gossip and rumours—that court distrust. At the same time, these anachronisms also invite spectators to reflect on their own participation in, and vulnerability to, the phenomenon of mythopoesis, as it manifests itself in the twenty-first century... [to] encourage spectators to embrace active, responsible roles in every act and process of communication, and to see a direct connection between the myth-making of ancient times... and the discursive practices that still hold sway today’ (Scharffenberger, 2012, p. 53). Scharffenberger reminds us that this ‘unmaking’ of myth can also be found in Stesichorus’ witty palinode to Helen, and suggests that Stesichorus’ statement, ‘That story is not true’ (fr. 192 PMG), resonates in Stănescu and Schechner’s *YokastaS* (2012, pp. 50, 52).

(ll. 1037-1038), Yoko and Yono object: ‘But not from me...’; ‘It’s an absurd story, and it’s not even my story’.⁷⁸ Stănescu opens up the original texts by adding multiple alternative endings for Jocasta to choose for the story that is now definitively her own. *YokastaS Redux* blurs the boundaries between the ancient and contemporary, tragedy and comedy, and creates a complex heroine in a Jocasta who seizes control of her own story, refuses to be judged by her audience, and dares to question their version of her story.⁷⁹ I turn now to Stănescu’s Ovidian reception to track both the increasing confidence of her Ovidian women in rejecting ‘what my author wrote for me’, and Stănescu’s development from exploring particularly gendered concerns to considering wider global issues of migration and exile.

6.5 *Diary of a Clone* and *Metamorphoses*

At the same time as *YokastaS* was first produced, Stănescu published her first poetry collection in English, *Diary of a Clone*. The book complements her two collections published in Romanian, *Love on Barbed Wire* (1994) and *Advice for Housewives and Muses* (1996), and presents a disturbing host of Ovidian women variously metamorphosed under the male gaze: into a flower bed (‘each strand of hair | ... metamorphosed into a petal’); an ‘artesian well’;

⁷⁸ Over its three-week run, the play was performed with three alternative endings. In the version available to watch online (‘Yoyo’s ending’), the play has no formal end, but instead dissolves the boundaries between performance and reality; as Yoyo finishes her speech encouraging the audience members to seize their own narrative agency and create their own stories, too, the other three Jocastas break role and loudly express their dissatisfaction with Yoyo’s ending as they dismantle the set around her. There is also a fifth Jocasta in the play, who stands silently on stage in every scene and is dressed in white to camouflage into the background of the white set (she breaks the fourth wall at the end of the production and introduces herself to the audience: ‘People of Thebes: I am The Understudy!’). This silent fifth Jocasta suggests a further version of Jocasta’s story yet to be told, or perhaps a version still untold.

⁷⁹ In his review of *YokastaS*, Calzadilla noted the coincidence of the play’s opening night with the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003; in this light, the play’s invitation to its audience to question both authoritative and television narratives gains an added political nuance to its existing feminist concerns (‘Yoyo’s open invitation to the audience put responsibility about many things back into our hands: women’s oppression, the war, democracy, peace, and defending our truth’, Calzadilla, 2003, p. 713).

stones, rocks, and statues; and a medley of animals with fur, scales, and feathers.⁸⁰ The most strikingly Ovidian poems in *Diary of a Clone* are ironically and humorously grouped into a cycle titled ‘Bad Girls’ Bed-Time Stories’: a reading of *Metamorphoses* which casts the epic poem as a cautionary fairy-tale to police feminine behaviour. Throughout the collection Stănescu mixes contemporary imagery with classical and Eastern Orthodox motifs, using a feminist lens to repeatedly focus on the metamorphosis and reduction of ‘woman’ throughout time and European culture into a consumable, marketable product: women are turned into loaves of bread and cookies ‘greased with butter and set in the oven’, and parents now ‘sell tickets’ for ‘passersby tourists | to see feel smell... look at’ their transformed daughters.⁸¹

In *Diary of a Clone* Stănescu creates a black and white concrete landscape of damp tower blocks and flickering televisions populated by dryads and nymphs, *infantas*, virgins, and housewives. The poems draw upon Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* thematically as well as recalling specific tales, and the poems mix mythological and folk traditions, drawing parallels to historical and contemporary women. The stories of characters such as Daphne, Myrrha, and the Heliades, for example, inform Stănescu’s ‘Florina’, who ‘burst[s] into bloom... each and every strand [of her hair] metamorphosed into a petal’, and whose name draws upon Flora of *Fasti* 5 (Stănescu’s focus on women’s hair throughout the collection plays with elegiac tropes of women’s hair as poetry).⁸² Florina ‘combs | her chrysanthemums, dahlias... you should gaze upon her hands | ... fleshy sinuous fresias’; although ‘others say’ her legs are ‘too thin and bony

⁸⁰ Stănescu (2003, pp. 14, 36, 40, 52).

⁸¹ Stănescu (2003, pp. 10, 14).

⁸² Cf. *Met.* 1.452-567 (Daphne), 2.346-366 (Heliades), 10.307-524 (Myrrha); in Ovid it is male characters who are more likely to be turned specifically into flowers (for example, Adonis, Hyacinthus, Narcissus), while Daphne, Myrrha, and Heliades become laurel, myrrh and poplar trees. On women, hair, and poetry in Ovid see Myerowitz Levine (1995), and Keith (2009, p. 356); on Ovid’s puns on *frons*, *liber*, and *figura*, which metamorphose Daphne literally into a book, see Farrell (1999, p. 133), and Enterline (2000, p. 39).

| like daisies'. Yet even once she is wholly flower, Florina is still sexualized under the male gaze:

young dandies the mature gentlemen
all the bachelors... line up
to smell Florina's feet
to caress the daisies
sprouted from her thighs
to water
Florina's flowers
with saliva sweat tears
to make an offering
of seed

The Ovidian reader recalls Apollo, still aroused by Daphne's bark, caressing her and planting unwanted kisses on her recoiling wood (*hanc quoque Phoebus amat | positaque in stipite dextra... complexusque suis ramos, ut membra, lacertis | oscula dat ligno; refugit tamen oscula lignum, Met. 1.553-556*).⁸³

The stories of Arethusa and Cyane also clearly inform Florina's subsequent dissolution into a pool of water. Like Cyane, no longer able to speak as her mouth and tongue have been metamorphosed (*sed et os et lingua uolenti | dicere non aderant, nec qua loqueretur habebat, Met. 5.466-467*), it is said of Florina that:

at the very moment
she gave up the ghost
water gushed from her mouth
water kept flowing
and an artesian well
remains right there
in the middle of the garden⁸⁴

⁸³ Stănescu (2003, p. 15).

⁸⁴ Cf. *Met.* 5.409, 632-636 (Arethusa), and 5.409-437, 465-470 (Cyane),

Now transformed, and like the famous Cyane herself (*celeberrima*, 5.412), Stănescu's Florina is fixed into the landscape ('she stays exactly like that') and becomes a modern scenic tourist attraction.

The tale of Niobe is also transformed in Stănescu's tale of the Infanta Isabella, a girl who 'gradually... turned hard as stone' (*deriguitque malis... intra quoque uiscera saxum est*, 'she turned stiff with grief... her insides too are now stone', *Met.* 6.303, 309). Isabella turns to stone as her sense of self disappears after she is punished for reaching out 'for a forbidden fruit... a forbidden thought', a story which mixes the Christian Eve reaching for an apple with Ovid's Proserpina tasting the pomegranate seeds, two stories which can both be read as allegories for the attainment of sexual maturity and knowledge.⁸⁵ Now stone, the Infanta 'became | the clapper of a bell ISABELLLLLAAAAA', reverberating Io's onomatopoeic mournful lowing as a cow, a sound that terrifies her (*et conata queri mugitus edidit ore. | pertimuitque sonos propriaque exterrita uoce est*, *Met.* 1.637-638); but rather than 'set on a mountain' like the stone Niobe (*ibi fixa cacumine montis*, 6.311), Isabella is 'hung... in the chapel, high above the castle'.⁸⁶

Isabella turns to stone when she is denied sexual knowledge; recalling Plath's Daphne poems, Stănescu comments on the psychological damage wreaked on girls by classical and Orthodox imperatives to chastity that are mixed with fantastical tales of horror and rape. Thus, in a further poem:

⁸⁵ Stănescu (2003, p. 40); cf. *Met.* 6.303-309 (Niobe), 5.341-571 (Proserpina); see also *Fast.* 4.393-620. On the importance of the tale of Ceres and Proserpina (Demeter and Persephone) in women's writing see Gubar (1979), and Hayes (1994).

⁸⁶ Io's transformation at *Met.* 1.611-612.

for twenty years francesca has awaited
the moment of her deflowering
obscene dreams haunt her
like a sword a crucifix pierces
her breast her sex her brain.

To escape the nightmares that have pursued her, however, Stănescu's Francesca is not enclosed by bark (as is Daphne in Ovid and Plath) but walled 'into the foundation of a church': 'all in a sweat she awakes | the room looks like it has shrunk | its walls have crept another step | toward her'.⁸⁷

As in the work of Plath, Stănescu draws on the theme and imagery of Ovidian metamorphosis in *Diary of a Clone* to critique patriarchal norms of beauty and virginity. She exploits such cultural tropes *ad absurdum* by charting within and across her poems a sliding scale of escalating violence that begins with the policing of women's appearance and clothing, and ends with the literal transformation of women into taxidermied trinkets. At first, 'blond... tresses' and 'brocaded hoopskirt[s]' 'immortalize' the women of the poems, although an element of danger is omnipresent: 'he rolled my curls | around the fat green grenades | ... you've got the most beautiful hair | he told me'.⁸⁸ The young women are also punished for behavioural and sartorial transgressions: 'how could an infanta wear a whore's | hat a cloche [?] ... [so] she was walled up | inside a hoopskirt'.⁸⁹ Finally, like Plath's Philomela, whose purple tongue is

⁸⁷ Stănescu (2003, p. 38). Cf. Walter Scott's epic poem *Marmion* (1808), which includes the story of the nun Constance, walled-up alive in Lindisfarne convent in 1513 for breaking her vows. Stănescu may also reference here Leucothoë, buried alive by her father for unchastity after her rape by Sol: *ille ferox immansuetusque precantem | tendentemque manus ad lumina Solis et 'ille | uim tulit inuitae' dicentem defodit alta | crudus humo tumulumque super grauis addit harenae... nec tu iam poteris enectum pondere terrae | tollere, nympa, caput corpusque exsangue iacebas*, 'he was ferocious, and savage, and even as she was praying and lifting her hands up to the light of the sun, saying 'he raped me against my will', he buried her deep in the ground and piled up a mound of heavy sand above her... nor were you able, nymph, to lift up your head, exhausted by the weight of the earth, and your body lay lifeless', *Met.* 4.237-240, 243-244.

⁸⁸ Stănescu (2003, pp. 36, 39, 43).

⁸⁹ Stănescu (2003, p. 40).

hung up to dry as a trophy in ‘The Courage of Shutting-Up’, the speakers of Stănescu’s poems variously stuff, frame, and mount their daughters to freeze and capture their ‘great worth’:

under lock and key
shut tight in a music box its walls lined
with the finest silk they nailed her foot
to the gold velvet floor
round and round she turns

manola had to be stuffed
... they couldn’t
put it off a moment longer any wrinkle
any crease in her skin would decrease
the great worth of the infanta.⁹⁰

Stănescu also explores the violent reality of everyday metaphors by updating Ovid’s images of transformation to contemporary settings and materials; a woman repeatedly abused by an unfaithful lover literally becomes a carpet, crushed underfoot, and in ‘Ruxandra’, a neglected daughter treated as mere background in her mother and lover’s new home wilfully fades into the concrete walls, cursing them as she goes.⁹¹ Stănescu draws out the sinister implications of the particularly Ovidian trope of the woman transformed into art by reversing Ovid’s tale of Pygmalion and literalizing Edgar Allan Poe’s assertion that ‘the death... of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world’.⁹² Here, Stănescu’s Pygmalion-figure comments darkly that:

... love is nothing compared
to cement thickly poured
on the shoulder a cold brick
mortared to the thigh a course of stone
pressed against the belly
... no kiss can be

⁹⁰ Stănescu (2003, pp. 36; 39).

⁹¹ Stănescu (2003, p. 16, as the hyacinth is crushed underfoot in Sappho fr. 105b; pp. 19-20).

⁹² *Met.* 10.243-97 (Pygmalion); Poe (1846), ‘The Philosophy of Composition’. Available at: <http://www.eapoe.org/works/essays/philcomp.htm> (Accessed: 28 December 2015). For a feminist response to Poe’s dictum, see Bronfen (1992).

sweeter than the mouth stopped up
by a wall that feels warm from the fresh mist
of breath buried only a few moments before...⁹³

As in Ovid, the stone woman is constructed as an alternative to real love (Pygmalion rejects the ‘vices’ of ‘natural’ women, *offensus uitiiis quae plurima menti | femineae natura dedit*, *Met.* 10.244-245), and is compartmentalized under the male gaze: Stănescu’s woman is only ‘shoulder’, ‘thigh’, ‘belly’, ‘mouth’, ‘breast’, as Pygmalion sees only mouth and breast (*os... pectora*, 10.282).⁹⁴ In a macabre turn, while Ovid’s Pygmalion admires the ivory stone that warms and softens beneath his touch and kisses (*dedit oscula; uisa tepere est... temptatum mollescit ebur positoque rigore | subsedit digitis ceditque*, *Met.* 10.281-284), Stănescu’s sculptor enjoys the sensation of warmth slowly fading from cold walls which ‘taste good and smell | like milk’.

The troubling images created by Stănescu’s feminist critique of classical and religious archetypes of women are alleviated by her wry, dark humour; the sinister words of the Pygmalion-figure take on an ironically self-aware tone when the reader realizes that his words are cynically repeated by the female speaker of the poem (a technique also employed by Plath in her Ovidian poems).⁹⁵ Similarly, although the character ‘Ruxandra’, who ‘torques herself into the walls’ presents a troubling image of female escape through self-destruction, she also suggests a hope of autonomy for women to reclaim and to rewrite their myths like the Jocastas of *YokastaS Redux*. In her next poetry collection, Stănescu moved from feminist considerations

⁹³ Stănescu (2003, p. 38).

⁹⁴ On women’s compartmentalization under the male gaze see Mulvey (1975), and Kaplan (1983). Cf. Ovid’s description of Corinna in *Am.* 1.5; for feminist responses to *Am.* 1.5, see Cahoon (1988, p. 296), and Keith (1994, pp. 30-31). Similarly, on Corinna-as-statue in *Am.* 1.7 see Greene (1999). Segal (1994) examines the reader’s implication in Ovid’s violent male erotic gaze; Salzman-Mitchell (2005a, b) provides a more sympathetically ‘resisting’ reading.

⁹⁵ On the role of dark humour in exploring Romanian identity in the post-communist period and redefining its relationship with the West, see Stănescu (2013c).

of cultural archetypes of women to address the literary and artistic construction of woman-as-muse. In these poems, her original character Tristia, a poetic embodiment of Ovid's work in exile, imaginatively voices a woman who rejects her role as *scripta puella* and talks directly back to Ovid.⁹⁶

6.6 Tristia's poems

'TRISTIA: Letters of a Barbarian Woman' is a cycle of ten poems which feature or are spoken by the character Tristia, and which are written in direct response or 'confrontation' to Ovid's Tomis poems, taking 'the perspective of the Barbarian... [and] writing for a people without writing'.⁹⁷ The poems form part of the collection *Google Me!*, which Stănescu describes in the preface as a meditation on the themes of identity and language as a Romanian living in America:

GOOGLE ME! aims to capture my creative response to the immigrant experience and my on-going love relationship with the English language. All the texts in this book were written directly in English except for... two poems... which were originally written in Romanian... I took the risk of not asking an English native speaker to revise my texts because writing is not only about a language or another, but also about that vibrant space in-between languages and cultures. GOOGLE ME! inhabits that space created by the global gods of internet and migration. Welcome!⁹⁸

Stănescu shares with Ovid's exile poetry a concern with language, language learning, and the cross-pollination of languages, yet unlike Ovid she rejoices in new hybrid forms, demonstrated

⁹⁶ As a neuter plural form of the adjective *tristis*, 'Tristia' is an impossible female name in Latin; yet Stănescu's choice of character name chimes nicely with the other conveniently metrical trisyllabic mistresses of elegiac poetry, Corinna, Cynthia, Lesbia, and Delia.

⁹⁷ Available at: <http://indietheaternow.com> (Accessed: 12 August 2013).

⁹⁸ Stănescu (2006, p. 7).

by her melding of English, Latin, and Romanian throughout her poetry and plays.⁹⁹ Her hyper-awareness of language may stem from her experiences of writing in a language that is not her mother tongue, revealing to her the ways in which reality can be shaped by culturally-informed language. In the poems, the character Tristia's struggles with Latin comment on the difficulty faced by any woman to speak of herself in phallogocentric language where she is always constructed as 'other'; like Stănescu's Jocastas, Tristia must fight against more powerful languages and narratives to tell her version of her story.¹⁰⁰

Such play with language can also be read as a 'resisting' strategy: misusing a dominant language—through the embedding of minoritarian words and phrases within the text, through idiomatic speech and neologisms—can realign power structures between languages by challenging definitions and creating new meanings.¹⁰¹ Yet Stănescu's critique is always self-aware and self-examining, striving toward the 'in-between' hybrid meeting space whilst noting the difficulty of doing so: while Tristia says that Ovid is 'trapped | inside your Latin language | and your past', she admits that 'I'm trapped too'; and Stănescu herself, while interested in 'hyphenated identities', also admits a longing 'for the stability and comfort of living in just one language. And that home-language is English now for me'.¹⁰²

The opening poem of the Tristia cycle, 'OVID (quote from Ex Ponto, a stupid translation found on the internet)', is a translation of *Tristia* 5.10.13-37 by A.S. Kline that Stănescu has

⁹⁹ In Stănescu's short play *White Embers*, learning English and forgetting one's native language is presented as a volatile issue (2011b, p. 27).

¹⁰⁰ Cixous (1986); see also Irigaray (1985a, b).

¹⁰¹ On majoritarian and minoritarian languages, see Deleuze and Guattari (1986); on resisting strategies, see Bassnett and Trivedi (1999, pp. 33-35), and Kramtsch (1997, p. 368).

¹⁰² Available at: <http://blog.kanjy.co/writer-of-the-week/saviana-stanescu> (Accessed: 28 December 2015).

taken directly from the website poetryintranslation.com.¹⁰³ In this poem, which Kline titles ‘Harsh Exile in Tomis’, Ovid describes the appalling conditions at Tomis, a place of rough languages and barbarian men of unkempt and hairy appearance, and a place where he lives in constant fear of barbarian raids: where ‘the man who dares to farm the fields is rare | one hand grips the plough, the other a weapon’.¹⁰⁴ *Barbarus* and its cognates appear forty times throughout Ovid’s poems from exile, the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*; indeed, nine of these instances are used as illustrative citations for the definitions of *barbaria*, *barbaricus* and *barbarus* in the *OLD*, where *barbarus* is defined as: (1) of or belonging to a foreign country or region, foreign; (2) ignorant, uncivilized, unpolished, uncouth; (3) cruel, fierce, savage.¹⁰⁵ As a Romanian and descendent of the ‘barbarians’ that Ovid is describing here, Stănescu offers her indictment of Ovid’s label for her ancestors through her new title (‘stupid translation’). Stănescu may have chosen this ‘incorrect’ title for a passage from *Tristia*—‘quote from Ex Ponto’—to emphasize Ovid’s description of place in this poem and to situate her own poetic defence of Pontus Euxinus. In addition, this deliberate mistitling pointedly makes an error as ‘stupid’ to the classical scholar as the scholar’s misapprehension of Romania is to Stănescu. The title

¹⁰³ Kline (2003). Available at:

http://poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/OvidTristiaBkFive.htm#_Toc34217368 (Accessed: 30 November 2013).

¹⁰⁴ Trans. A.S. Kline (2003); *est igitur rarus, rus qui colere audeat, isque | hac arat infelix, hac tenet arma manu*, *Tr.* 5.10.23-24.

¹⁰⁵ Glare (2012, p. 247); see: *Tr.* 1.11.31; 2.1.206, 526; 3.1.18, 62; 3.3.46; 3.9.2; 3.10.4, 34, 54; 3.11.7; 3.14.30; 4.1.22, 82; 4.4.78, 86; 5.1.46, 72; 5.2.31, 67; 5.7.20, 52, 60; 5.10.28, 30, 37; 5.12.55; *Pont.* 1.3.38; 2.1.38; 2.7.70; 3.1.5; 3.2.38, 78, 100; 3.3.26; 3.4.109; 4.2.38; 4.5.34; 4.9.93; 4.13.20. Ingleheart (2010, p. 202) notes that *barbarus* is used twenty-seven times in the exile poetry to refer specifically to Tomi and its inhabitants (seventeen occurrences in *Tristia* and ten in *Pont.*); on *barbarus* see also Dauge (1981, pp. 164-165). There are forty occurrences in the OCT text of *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*; the count increases to forty-two if the *Consolatio ad Liviam* (ll. 18, 72) is included (as in the Packard Humanities Institute concordance data), with a further occurrence at *Fast.* 6.374; on the provenance of the spurious *Consolatio*, see Knox (2009b, p. 213); the PHI Latin Texts concordance data for *barbar~* in Ovid is available at: <http://latin.packhum.org/search?q=%5B0v%5D+barbar> (accessed 26 October 2016). As an indicator of how significant this frequency is, Hardie cites thirty-six examples of the phrase *ante oculos* as one example to illustrate the importance of presence/ absence in Ovid’s poetry, a figure calculated from the whole of the Ovidian corpus (Hardie, 2002c, p. 290); corresponding entries for *barbarus* in Lewis and Short (2002) use six citations from Ovid’s exile poetry.

‘stupid translation’ also echoes Ovid’s own indictment of his *Ars Amatoria* as a ‘stupid poem’ at *Pont.* 3.3.37 (*stulto... carmine*); while Ovid calls his own work ‘stupid’ for the bad reputation it has earned him, Stănescu draws a parallel with the bad reputation his poems have earned her country. Her new title for the poem signals not only Stănescu’s intention to retranslate the poem, but acts as a comic deflation of a classic text and scholarly pretensions.

Stănescu does, however, recognize the potential for irony in Ovid’s original poem; the final line of the translation she quotes is Ovid’s statement that *barbarus hic ego sum* (‘here, I am the barbarian’, *Tr.* 5.10.37). Her new title for this poem thus provides a postcolonial comment on the imperial eyes of ‘stupid’ translations that have missed Ovid’s irony, and unthinkingly translated Ovid’s words literally; the self-aware titles for their translations of *Tr.* 5.10 chosen by poets such as Stănescu (‘Stupid Translation’) and Balmer (‘Naso the Barbarian’), contrast sharply to the choices of title by Kline (‘Harsh Exile in Tomis’), or the striking title of Wheeler’s Loeb edition, ‘The Evils of Tomis’.¹⁰⁶ However, while this apparent realization that here he is the barbarian hints at Ovid’s awareness that ‘barbarism’ is both linguistically constructed and culturally relative, he still expresses shame at speaking the ‘barbarian’ languages of Tomis (*Tr.* 3.14.49-50, 5.7.55-56; *Pont.* 4.13.17-23). In her *Tristia* poems that follow the ‘stupid’ *Tr.* 5.10, Stănescu rejects Ovid’s self-construction as a barbarian—a powerful Roman from the dominant culture could never be a barbarian—and ‘writes back’ to his presentation of the Tomitians.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Balmer (2009a, p. 41); Wheeler (1996, p. 245). Many translations and commentaries continue to replicate without question or note the ideologically-loaded language of ‘barbarians’ and ‘tribes’; see ‘barbarians’ in, e.g., Williams (1994, pp. 5-8, 10), Gaertner (2005, pp. 19-24), and McGowan (2009, pp. 148, 196); cf. Ingleheart’s discussion of *barbara* at *Tr.* 2.206 (2010, *ad loc.*), which refers her reader to Dauge (1981, pp. 146 ff.).

¹⁰⁷ On this line in *Tr.* 5.10 and Ovid’s linguistic self-construction in exile see Stevens (2009).

Stănescu explores what it feels like to be one of the objectified ‘barbarians’ of Ovid’s exilic world in nine original poems written from the perspective of one of the local women of Tomis. Indeed, as a poet famous for delighting in the varied charms of all women (for example, his catalogue of lovers at *Am.* 2.4), the local women of Tomis are conspicuously absent from Ovid’s poems from exile; Stănescu’s poems imaginatively fill in this gap in Ovid’s poetic record. The opening lines of the first of these original poems, ‘TRISTIA I (when Tristia can’t help it anymore and starts writing)’, respond directly to the final lines of the preceding translation placed on the facing page (*per gestum res est significanda mihi. | barbarus hic ego sum, qui non intellegor ulli, Tr.* 5.10.36-37), beginning a conversation between Ovid and Stănescu’s speaker, who interjects in the translation and interrupts Ovid mid-sentence:

I have to make myself understood by gestures.
Here I’m the barbarian no one comprehends...

||

I’m the barbarian you don’t comprehend Ovid
*Nu mă înțelege Ovidiu*¹⁰⁸

Tristia says in Romanian: ‘You don’t understand *me*, Ovid’. This strong opening signals Stănescu’s initial direction and her intention to follow the objective of second-wave feminist responses to classical texts: to give a voice to the barbarians, and to (re)insert women into history.¹⁰⁹

In the second poem, ‘TRISTIA II (she’s too direct now but she’s gonna learn the use of metaphor soon)’, Tristia similarly ‘answers back’ to an intertextual web of Ovid’s exile poems:

¹⁰⁸ Stănescu (2006, pp. 26, 27).

¹⁰⁹ On the politics and the importance of ‘voice’ in postcolonial contexts, see Spivak (1988).

you don't see me Ovid you don't hear me
 you listen to the rain and to the snow
 you write letters that I can't read but I know
 what's in there I can read in your eyes
 you're complaining about us
 you're praising your King
 Cesar or whatever you call him
 Your hand squats on my breasts
 But your mind runs on Rome's streets
 Your fingers walk on my belly
 But your thoughts hurry to Cesar's palace¹¹⁰

The lines demonstrate Stănescu's close knowledge of Ovid's exile poetry in their direct response to specific elements of several poems; for example, 'you write letters that I can't read' answers *Pont.* 4.2.33-34 (*siue quod in tenebris numerosos ponere gestus, | quodque legas nulli scribere carmen, idem est*, 'to write poems no one reads is like making numerous gestures in the dark'). Stănescu's line 'you're complaining about us' alludes to *Pont.* 4.14.15-16 (*talia suscensent propter mihi uerba Tomitae, | iraque carminibus publica mota meis*, 'for such words [complaints] the anger of the Tomitians rises against me and the anger of the town is roused by my poems'); while the details of Ovid's daydreams ('your mind runs on Rome's street') draws on *Tr.* 1.1 and 3.1, the poems which imagine Ovid's poems returning to the streets of Rome and gazing upon Augustus' house. Tristia's accusation that Ovid's letters praise Caesar reference *Tr.* 4.2, in praise of Tiberius, *Pont.* 4.6 and 4.9 in praise of Augustus, and *Pont.* 4.13, in which Ovid describes the eulogy to Augustus he has written in Getic. Stănescu's poem also responds to Ovid's wider thematic concerns with (what Ovid claims to be) the perpetual snowy winters of Tomis, and linguistic alienation, as in the poem's subtitle ('she's gonna learn the use of metaphor soon'), which suggests the incremental stages of the language-learning process.

¹¹⁰ 'Cesar' [*sic*]; Stănescu (2006, p. 29).

Across the Ovidian cycle—as glimpsed in this poem’s juxtaposition of Tristia’s body with Ovid’s written words (‘Your hand squats on my breasts | But your mind runs on Rome’s streets’; drawing on colonial and elegiac narratives which link landscapes and the female body)—Stănescu’s poems spiral darkly from a simple poetic response to Ovid’s poems to enact a nuanced postcolonial analysis of language and power through the character of Tristia, a ‘barbarian woman’. A bitter homage to Ovid’s poetic women, Stănescu’s own literary *puella* deconstructs and challenges his constructed elegiac *scriptae puellae*.¹¹¹ Stănescu’s Tristia has a voice, and with it she defies both the Western exoticization of the colonial subject, and the suppliant and eroticized witches or sorceresses in earlier receptions of Ovid’s exile, for example, in Jane Alison’s *The Love Artist*.¹¹²

In Alison’s novel, Ovid first catches sight of the barbarian woman Xenia as she bathes, and it seems to him that she is a figure from his *Metamorphoses* brought to life, a Narcissus gazing into his pool.¹¹³ However, to the knowing reader, Ovid here assumes rather the role of Actaeon gazing upon Diana at her bath.¹¹⁴ It remains unclear whether it is Alison herself or her fictionalized Ovid that has missed the Diana allusion, but in omitting this reference it allows Ovid to evade the guilt and destructive consequences of his male imperial gaze. Alison’s personal reaction upon first reading Ovid was ‘almost sexually charged’; as a result, through her presentation of Xenia her novel romanticizes the troubling relationship between the imperial self and colonial other.¹¹⁵ By incorporating this fantasy into her reception of Ovid, Alison

¹¹¹ See, e.g., Wyke (1989b; 2002), Gold (1993), and Ingleheart (2012).

¹¹² Alison (2003). As a commercial product, Alison’s novel has reached a larger audience than Stănescu’s avant-garde interrogation of Ovid; on Alison see Ziolkowski (2005, pp. 217-219), and C. N. Michalopoulos (2011).

¹¹³ Alison (2003, p. 35).

¹¹⁴ On the Actaeon myth in Ovid’s poetry and its significance to his exile, see Williams (1994, pp. 174-177), and Ingleheart (2009, pp. 201-202; 2010, especially pp. 121-132 on *Tr.* 2.105-8).

¹¹⁵ Alison quoted in Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013a). See Konstan (2002) on the queen of Colchis, Pythodoris, and the interrelation of power, ethnicity, and gender in the Roman Empire.

appears to be recreating a colonial stereotype of a suppliant barbarian woman. This is also evident in the choice of the ‘fantasy’ exotic name of Xenia, compared, for instance, with the complex associations contained in Stănescu’s choice of ‘Tristia’ (an embodiment of the literary *puella*; the absent beloved, Rome; Ovid’s melancholy), or Horia’s ‘Dokia’ (the name of Ovid’s slave-girl in *God Was Born in Exile*), a name comprising allusions to Dokia, daughter of Decebalus, ancient king of the Dacians, and Dochia, who represents the return of the spring in Romanian mythology.¹¹⁶ Alison depicts Xenia for the most part only through Ovid’s eyes as a sexually charged and exotic object; Xenia’s already tiny voice in the novel is drowned out by this reduction.

Stănescu’s Tristia is thus an important confrontation of such representations as she meets the gaze of Ovid (and his modern fictional avatars) and answers back: she will no longer be his passive victim. Tristia mocks representations of the suppliant barbarian woman through the repetition of the phrase ‘teach me’, and asks Ovid instead to meet her and talk to her ‘out of this time’ in a ‘no man’s land’. Given Stănescu’s critical and theoretical awareness, this no man’s land must allude to the notion of a female literary space first theorized by Claudine Herrmann in her essay on women writers as the ‘thieves of language’.¹¹⁷ It is a space away from the patriarchal hegemony of language (here, Latin) and a space repeatedly referenced in feminist classical receptions.¹¹⁸ In this space, Stănescu’s Tristia will no longer be ‘the Gypsy-Venus of your dreams’.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Horia’s novel also features Lydia (the treacherous *puella*) and Artemis (a wise prostitute).

¹¹⁷ Herrmann (1976); see also the ‘no man’s land’ of Gilbert and Gubar (1988/94), and Bassnett (1992).

¹¹⁸ See, e.g., Balmer (2004b, p. 9; 2009a; see chapter 5), and Marie Cosnay (2012), whose translations of Ovid also interrogate the immigrant experience; on Cosnay see interview in Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013a).

¹¹⁹ Stănescu (2006, p. 28).

Stănescu further explores the devastating consequences for a purely eroticized view of women in ‘CHORUS OF MEN (playing chess with Ovid)’. As in Stănescu’s Pygmalion poem in *Diary of a Clone*, Tristia is dehumanized and her body compartmentalized under Ovid’s gaze; she becomes a chess board, her body ‘in squares’, ‘divided... numbered’, becoming simply ‘A5 B3 C7 the square I9 | was his favourite’, ‘B7’, ‘C5’, ‘A1’.¹²⁰ This division of the female body also suggests the numbered squares of cartography, evoking the territorial encoding of women in patriarchal language as land to be conquered and colonized.¹²¹ Through the use of the personified Tristia, Stănescu’s poem functions on multiple figurative levels; here, the title ‘CHORUS OF MEN’ may refer to the litany of male scholars and authors who have interpreted Ovid’s body of work and perpetuated colonial stereotypes, or to a chorus of men who objectify and dissect the ‘barbarian’ female body.

As the dehumanization of Tristia develops in ‘TRISTIA VI (oh, boy, Tristia gets suicidal)’, the imagery becomes disturbingly and explicitly violent under Ovid’s colonial gaze. She is:

a golden butterfly the masterpiece
of your insect collection
prick me through the heart and exhibit me
on red velvet behind the glass wall
still warmed by the mist of your laughter...¹²²

¹²⁰ This division of the female body into eroticized parts recalls Ovid’s compartmentalized description of Corinna in *Am.* 1.5; for feminist responses to Ovid’s poem, see n. 94, above.

¹²¹ Compare the conclusion of Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, where the body of a female slave is used as a map to divide land and negotiate the treaty between Athens and Sparta, ll. 1161 ff.

¹²² Stănescu (2006, p. 37).

Ovid ‘slic[es] open her breast with [his] razorblade’, until finally Tristia internalizes this violent imagery and describes herself as a catalogue of historical barbarian ‘others’, concluding with a familiar contemporary media construct, the barbarian terrorist:

here I am
the goddess of kamikaze butterflies
the queen of guillotine memory
the suicide bomber
of your 2001 arabian nights¹²³

The violent and unsettling misogynist imagery reaches its disturbing climax in the penultimate poem, ‘CHORUS OF MEN (fair-y-tale)’. The barbarian woman Tristia is finally objectified to the extent that she has lost her first-person narrative voice and her appearance is announced in the hyperbolic style of a fairground attraction:

...step right up
ladies and gentlemen and try your luck
...
that’s right one hundred points—THE GRAAAND PRIZE
for a bullet in TRISTIA’s chest¹²⁴

In a final act of humiliation, Tristia is mounted on a target:

one hundred points for Tristia
it’s not difficult to hit her all you’ve gotta do
is squeeze the trigger when
she screams *nooo* with women this always
means *yessss*

In its adoption of a prevalent rape myth (‘no means yes’), the poem ‘CHORUS OF MEN (fair-y-tale)’ also directly ‘writes back’ to *Pont.* 4.2.16, in which Ovid describes his struggles to write

¹²³ ‘arabian’ [*sic*]; Stănescu (2006, p. 37).

¹²⁴ Stănescu (2006, p. 38). Cf. Plath’s ‘Lady Lazarus’ as circus spectacle, and the doll of ‘The Applicant’, fragmented and stripped by the male gaze; see chapter 3.6.

poetry while isolated in Tomis as ‘tilling a dry shore with a sterile plough’ (*sed siccum sterili uomere litus aro*).¹²⁵ The ploughing metaphor can be linked simply to writing; however, it is a metaphor prevalent in colonial narratives.¹²⁶ Colonized lands and peoples are often feminized or personified as woman in colonial writing, and colonized lands are frequently described as ‘raped’ by the colonizing aggressor, a recurring metaphor that postcolonial theory and feminism have observed and problematized.¹²⁷ Therefore, as well as representing Eastern European trafficked women and ‘mail-order brides’ as prizes to be won, it is also possible to read Tristia here as Romania personified as a woman, displayed like a fairground freak-show attraction for Western eyes after the fall of communism; the imagery echoes the cartographic connotations of ‘Playing Chess with Ovid’, in which Tristia was mapped like a country.¹²⁸

In a recent article on contemporary Romanian theatre, Stănescu specifically attacked British media representations of Romania, arguing that it was part of her role as a poet and

¹²⁵ Stănescu (2006, p. 38). The trope ‘no means yes’ recalls Ovid’s account of his ‘fight’ to ‘vanquish’ and coerce the unwilling Corinna into sex at *Am.* 1.5.13-16; the reader is also reminded of Ovid’s advice to men at *Ars* 1.665-706 that women ‘enjoy’, even ‘prefer’ being ‘raped’ (*uim licet appelles: grata est uis ista puellis*, 673); women are ‘pleased by those who rape them’ (*et gratus raptae raptor uterque fuit*, *Ars* 1.680). For feminist readings of rape in Latin literature, see Curran (1978), Hemker (1985), Joplin (1984, 1990), Richlin (1992b), and Packman (1993); on rape in antiquity see Stewart (1995), and Deacy and Pierce (2002).

¹²⁶ On ploughing as a metaphor for writing in Ovid, see Habinek (1998, p. 162); on colonization as rape, see Hulme (1986). On this metaphor see also Keith (2009, pp. 360-364); also Carson (1990) on the implied link between women and dirt in ploughing metaphors, and how discourses of gender and sexuality foster misogyny.

¹²⁷ On the Western construction of the colonized ‘other’ as feminine see Said (1994). Just as the woman Tristia in the poems is turned into a mapped and colonized land, so here is the colonized land figured as a woman.

¹²⁸ On ‘orientalism’, see Said (2003). On the orientaling of Eastern European women under the Western gaze, see Glajar and Radulescu (2005); on Romania as ‘victimized woman’, see Stănescu (2013c, quoting Drace-Francis, 2000). In Stănescu’s short play, *White Embers* (2011b), an American couple travel to ‘Bechnya’ to adopt a child; they take home a different child, with whiter skin than the Muslim girl they were due to adopt (‘so... white... and... luminous’, p. 25). The characters’ Orientalism is exposed in their view of Bechnya as a ‘Sad, very sad country. Ethnic conflicts, wars, invasions...’ (p. 15); when choosing a name for their prospective daughter they decide that they need a name that is ‘exotic but not too exotic’ (p. 21); by comparing purchasing a foreign daughter to purchasing a dress (i.e. desiring the one that looks the best), Stănescu savagely critiques both the consumer culture of empty aesthetics and ‘value’, and the objectification of colonized nations as feminized. Later in the play, more fitting names such as ‘Sabrina’ are dismissed as ‘Whores’ names. Or transvestites’ (p. 22); the ways in which proudly liberal people can ignore the experience of race is highlighted neatly in a scene in which one of the couple rebukes their partner for taking bottled water on their trip as ‘they’ will find it offensive, segueing unthinkingly into the following statement: ‘You know that woman Fahida who works for the Taylors...’ (p. 16); the presence of immigrant workers is taken for granted in their world.

playwright to be ‘responsible for offering a more complex and nuanced portrait of that allegorical ‘victimized woman’ Romania, so that Romanian hi/stories can be read, seen, and understood beyond stereotypes, labels, compassion and sex appeal’.¹²⁹ ‘CHORUS OF MEN (fair-y-tale)’ thus replies to *Pont.* 4.2 as both Tristia and Romania; while Ovid’s literary plough is struggling to pacify (rape) the dry shore (a reading strengthened by Ovid’s use of the same imagery at *Pont.* 1.5.33-4, *qui, sterili totiens cum sim deceptus ab aruo, | damnosa persto condere semen humo?*), the Tomitians and Romanians answer that they are unwilling to act the suppliant victim to Ovid’s and the UK media’s plough.¹³⁰

Two further poems in the TRISTIA cycle explore issues of language and power that are developed in greater detail in the play, *For a Barbarian Woman*. ‘TRISTIA V (dead language class)’ uses a double juxtaposition of language and silence against knowledge and loss to stage a ‘writing back’ to Ovid’s own fears about forgetting his Latin at *Tr.* 5.12.57 (*ipse mihi uideor iam didicisse Latine*).¹³¹ Stănescu weaves in the double concern of feminism and postcolonial theory regarding the silencing of the ‘other’, opening the poem with the lines, ‘my body speaks | the ancient language of silence | a dead idiom’, and asking Ovid, ‘did you come for the lesson one on silence?’.¹³² Tristia tells him to start by forgetting everything he knows, beginning with the letters of the alphabet; an exhortation also to the reader to drop any preconceived prejudices

¹²⁹ Stănescu (2013c, pp. 318-319). Stănescu opens her essay with a quote from an article by Alex Drace-Francis, ‘Sex, Lies and Stereotypes: Romania in British Literature Since 1945’, which discusses the cultural portrayals of Romanians as either vampires or superstitious village-folk: ‘Romania is portrayed synecdochically as a helpless, victimized woman, equally let down by the sympathetic but uncommitted West and the brutal, abusive man that is the communist state’ (Drace-Francis quoted in Stănescu, 2013c, p. 317). Cf. Stănescu’s portrayal of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu as camp vampires that haunt Romanian émigrés (2010; 2012a).

¹³⁰ For a list of ploughing metaphors for sexual intercourse in ancient literature see duBois (1988, p. 65).

¹³¹ Ovid also claims to be forgetting his Latin at *Tr.* 3.14.43-46: *saepe aliquod quaero uerbum nomenque locumque, | nec quisquam est a quo certior esse queam. | dicere saepe aliquid conanti (turpe fateri) | uerba mihi desunt dididicique loqui* (‘often I am at a loss for a word, a name, a place... words fail me: I have unlearned my power of speech’); and *Tr.* 5.7.57-58: *iam desuetudine longa | uix subeunt ipsi uerba Latina mihi* (‘now, after long neglect, I have scarcely any Latin words’).

¹³² ‘one’ [*sic*]; Stănescu (2006, p. 34).

about the ‘barbarians’ (at the conclusion of the play, Ovid at last falls silent to listen to the voice of the other). Over the course of the poems, Stănescu has encouraged her reader (and Ovid) to forget those ‘stupid translations’, and to attempt to find new hybrid ways of speaking; retrospectively, Stănescu’s opening poem now comments on the transmission of texts over time, and the old method of literally repeating quotations is contrasted with new experimental methods of collaborative, and politically-aware translation.

In contrast to the feminist translation work of Wertenbaker and Balmer, however, who took care to foreground their scholarliness and ‘authority’ to translate classical texts, Stănescu rejects over-theorization, playfully flaunting her scholarly knowledge at the same time as she rejects it. In ‘TRISTIA VII (after Ovid won the Nobel prize)’, a poem set two further books of *Tristia* and many years later, Tristia now sounds weary of ‘stupid translations’, telling Ovid that he has:

claimed the copyright
of my thoughts and registered ownership of my desires
as the writer
of my body text rolandbarthes of my pleasures
austin of my performative utterances phd academic scholar researcher
nobel laureate for inventing
me¹³³

In this poem, Tristia, or the muse, seems to have been finally and fully subsumed into Ovid’s poetry; she exists only as a literary construct or thesis and, like the stuffed *infantas* of *Diary of a Clone*, the ‘real’ woman has been reduced to a Nobel trophy on the author’s shelf (the reader recalls the ‘grand prize’ of Tristia in the preceding poem). Despite Stănescu’s playful erudition,

¹³³ Stănescu (2006, p. 39); see Austin (1962); Barthes (1980).

the character Tristia's rejection of theory suggests a depressing acknowledgement of the futility of attaining knowledge as an objectified 'other'.

Yet the final word of the poem 'me' is visually and emotively striking as the final word in the poem, a single word in the final line which suggests a return to the first-person voice that the reader feared lost in the fairground poem. The 'me' is assertive—as Ovid's final word in *Metamorphoses*, *uiuam*, asserts authorship—and looks forward to a new beginning. Now that Tristia has been fully deconstructed, dehumanized, over-analysed by theory and torn apart, Stănescu can begin to rebuild her and redress the wrongs of previous receptions, creating new representations of Romanian (immigrant) women.

6.7 For a Barbarian Woman

The play *For a Barbarian Woman* developed from Stănescu's Tristia poems; while the letter-poems more brutally 'explore the commerce of imperialism and... the conflicting embrace of East and West', the play subtly incorporates within the classical reception contemporary issues such as the high number of women trafficked out of Romania to become sex-workers.¹³⁴ On developing the poems into the play, which she sees as 'plac[ing] the individual in the vortex of history and socio-political context', Stănescu writes:

¹³⁴ Stănescu (2012b). In 2013, Romania was the most likely country of origin for victims of human trafficking to the UK (307 persons out of a total 2,744 identified victims). According to the National Crime Agency's Strategic Assessment of the Nature and Scale of Human Trafficking in 2013, most of those victims had been sexually exploited, and of those sexually exploited, nearly all were women. Romania is the most prevalent country of origin for victims of sexual exploitation. Available at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/news/news-listings/452-nca-human-trafficking-report-reveals-22-rise-in-potential-victims> (Accessed: 30 September 2014). According to statistics provided by the Romanian National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons, in 2011 around 1048 identified victims were subjected to human trafficking outside the country, although the real figure is probably far higher. Data from 2011 and 2012 reveal the most common forms of exploitation experienced by trafficked persons were sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and forced begging; statistics taken from the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, available at:

last summer I went back to Constanța, the city of my childhood summer vacations and of my first poems, and went to the statue of Ovid to have a “chat” with him. I began to think about the power-relationship between empires and the small nations they conquered and assimilated; between major/ influential/ colonialist cultures and minor cultures; and more specifically: about the relationship between a Western man and a woman from the poor East. A woman objectified by her history, by her upbringing, by her “luck” of having been born in a powerless country. All these issues resonate for me in the current social and political context, when sex-traffic from Eastern Europe flourishes and Balkan women still have to struggle to get a voice and life of their own.¹³⁵

In keeping with Stănescu’s earlier work, *For a Barbarian Woman* demonstrates a concern with exposing the constructed nature of discourse. The play explores the themes of exile and colonialism and the ‘self’-‘other’ dichotomy imposed by imperialism through two interwoven narratives set on the shores of the Black Sea; by placing her narrative in Romania and focusing on Ovid in exile, Stănescu is able to neatly reverse her own experience of migration and set up an intertextual dialogue with her earlier plays that focus on Romanian immigrants in ‘exile’ in America.¹³⁶ The first narrative strand of the play details the growing erotic relationship between the exiled Ovid and his slave-girl, Tristia, in the year 9 CE; the second updates the colonizer-colonized dynamic to modern-day Romania, sketching a budding romance between an American NATO general, Rich, and his young interpreter, Theo.¹³⁷ In the slave-girl Tristia, Stănescu develops the character of Tristia first voiced in her poems; in the play, Tristia is an assertive young woman in control of her sexuality, no longer the victimized fair-ground attraction. Her comic turn as the cunning local Getic slave-girl, constantly

http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=718:asociatia-pro-refugiu-romania-new-members-work-on-anti-trafficking-in-romania&catid=95:member-profile&Itemid=67 (Accessed: 23 January 2014).

¹³⁵ Stănescu (2012b).

¹³⁶ *For a Barbarian Woman* was directed by Niegel Smith, co-produced by Fordham Theatre and Ensemble Studio Theatre; see Cohen (1990) for a review of the performance. The play is unpublished; I am grateful to the author for her generosity in forwarding me a copy of the script via email.

¹³⁷ Although Tristia at first rejects Ovid’s forced sexual advances, by the close of the play the relationship has become mutually erotic (Stănescu, 2011a, p. 63); on sexual relationships with and sexual abuse of slaves in the ancient world, see Joshel and Murnaghan (1998), and Cohen (2014); on sexual violence in ancient conflict zones, see Gaca (2011).

outwitting and teasing her master Ovid, also plays with Roman comedic conventions and the stock character of the proverbial cunning slave, the *astutos... Getas* (Prop. 4.5.44). Tristia also embodies Ovid's advice to women in the *Ars Amatoria* to learn passages from Menander on the *arte Getae* (*Ars* 3.332), and she brings the comic dynamic to the play's moments of melancholy.¹³⁸

The narrative threads of Ovid-Tristia and Rich-Theo run parallel throughout the play, at times overlapping via monologues which cross-cut or occur simultaneously, creating a multiplicity of voices and merging of subjectivities; to emphasize the parallels and to invite further dialogue between the two time periods the script notes that the same actors can play the roles of Ovid-Rich and Tristia-Theo. Although the characters of Ovid and Rich at first draw the most immediate parallels—both are in 'exile' and write letters home to Rome or the US—by drawing out the similarities between Ovid and Theo, two lonely figures losing a grip on their identity in the liminal space 'in between' identities, Stănescu deconstructs the relationship between colonizer and colonized.¹³⁹ The four protagonists form a matrix across time and space, with the two love stories acting as the dramatic mechanism which enables an exploration of the dynamic relationship of knowledge and power between imperial 'self' and colonized 'other' (in one scene, Ovid rebukes his slave with the words 'stop being so knowledgeable!').¹⁴⁰ As in Shakespearean comedy, Theo and Ovid each move from misunderstanding to reconciliation through a growing recognition of the 'other', their perception of difference destabilized by the

¹³⁸ Radulescu (2015, p. 37) argues that Stănescu's use of the tragicomic and carnivalesque is a way to overcome the experience of exile figured in Said's words—and Ovid's—as 'a sadness which can never be surmounted' (Said, 2003, p. 172).

¹³⁹ Both Theo and Ovid can be read as analogues for Stănescu herself.

¹⁴⁰ Stănescu (2011a, p. 25).

love and exile experience.¹⁴¹ Theo's symbolic suicide at the end of the play represents a sloughing off of her past and the necessary step she must take to be reconciled with the imperial other, her lover Rich. Through interweaving stories, parallels, and mirroring techniques, Stănescu uses form and narrative to celebrate the hybridity and two-way understanding of a postcolonial world.¹⁴²

The two narratives of the play are linked by a lost poem composed by Ovid in the Getic language, which Theo is searching for two thousand years later. Ovid makes reference to this poem in *Pont.* 4.13.17-38, where he describes a eulogy for Augustus and his family written 'shamefully', he says (*a, pudet*, 19), in Getic: *paene poeta Getes* ('I am almost a Getic poet', 18).¹⁴³ Stănescu subverts this imperial eulogy to have her Ovid pen an elegy for Tristia, a love poem 'for a barbarian woman'. At the end of the play, Ovid throws this poem into the sea before the Muses drag him off-stage to write more poems in Getic, continuing the inversion of dominant and minor languages: 'The Barbarian woman deserves better poems!'.¹⁴⁴ Similarly,

¹⁴¹ On exile as an experience that has the potential to unite two characters, compare Stănescu's suggestion that at the end of her play *Waxing West* the Romanian Daniela and American Charlie may be united (although it kills him) by their shared experience of unexpected collective trauma (Stănescu, 2013c, p. 324). A similar suggestion is made by Balmer in *The Word for Sorrow* (2009a), in which her characters are united across time by their shared experience of the 'sorrow' of literal and figurative exile.

¹⁴² On hybridity as a technique of postcolonial translation see Simon (1999, p. 72). On Ovid continuing to employ his former frames of reference in his exile poetry, see Habinek (1998, pp. 154-155).

¹⁴³ On Ovid as 'Getic poet', see especially Barchiesi (1997, pp. 38-39). Ovid claims that he has learned Getic and Sarmatian at *Pont.* 3.2.40 (*nam didici Getice Sarmaticeque loqui*), and converses with an old man, although Ovid expresses shame at acquiring these 'barbarian' languages at *Tr.* 3.14.49-50, 5.7.55-56, *Pont.* 4.13.17-23; at *Tr.* 3.14.17 Ovid describes Getic as a pollutant, or 'contagion' to his Latin (*contagia*); see Videau-Delibes (1991, p. 73) on the prevalence of the word *mixta* in *Tr.* 5 to represent pollution, especially linguistic. On Roman attitudes to the study of 'barbarian' languages, see Syme (1978, pp. 16-170; on Ovid and language in exile see Stevens (2009), and Hinds (2011). That Ovid writes a eulogy for Augustus has been disputed by some scholars, e.g., Williams (1994, p. 91), noting the ambiguity in *laudes*, *Pont.* 4.13.23 (pp. 95, 99); Wheeler translates the line (*materiam quaeris? laudes: de Caesare dixi*) as 'You ask my theme? You would praise it: I sang of Caesar' (1996, pp. 476-477), while Green chooses an idiomatic translation that captures the potential irony of the statement: 'You want to know my subject? You'll love it...' (1994, p.195); see also Casali (1997). Cf. *Pont.* 2.9.51-52, in which Ovid praises the Thracian king Cotys for writing poetry that does not betray his barbarian origins. In the play, this pollution of languages gains a modern twist as Rich mocks the way that Romanians speak English (Stănescu, 2011a, p. 42).

¹⁴⁴ Stănescu (2011a, p. 65).

Stănescu subverts and literalizes the ancient apotropaic term for the Black Sea, Pontus Euxinus, ‘the kindly one’ (as Ovid calls it, ‘false-named’, *Euxini mendax cognomine litus*, *Tr.* 5.10.13). In her play, the personified Black Sea is a kindly character who cares for the people who visit her shore and refuses to let Theo drown herself in her waters at the end of the play. The character of the Black Sea is also a visual representation of the feminization of colonial subjects under the imperial eye and a gender-queer embodiment of Stănescu’s commentary on the ‘barbarian other’ and the intersections of gender and race; the production notes for the play suggest that the Black Sea is to be played by ‘a beautiful and powerful black man, in a long flowing dress’.¹⁴⁵

The play fuses quotations from *Amores* and *Tristia* with allusions to earlier Romanian receptions, using a typically feminist literary methodology to create a polyvocal collage. Extracts from Ovid’s poems are performed by the character Ovid either in the original Latin (*Am.* 1.7.1-2 and *Tr.* 4.8.23-30), or in English translation as stylized monologues (*Tr.* 5.10.13, 13-37, and *Tr.* 5.2.47-78), pointedly demarcating Ovid’s words from the colloquial dialogue of the rest of the play, and thus highlighting the constructed nature of its discourse (in the same way as the ‘quote’ and ‘unquote’ technique worked in *YokastaS Redux*).¹⁴⁶ There are also references to *Ars Amatoria*, as Ovid attempts to mould *Tristia* into an elegiac *puella* using tips from his own poems, and his descriptions of Tomis in the play draw upon details in *Epistulae ex Ponto*.¹⁴⁷ In one comic scene, Ovid tells how he misses Corinna, ‘my favourite mistress...

¹⁴⁵ Stănescu (2011a, p. 2).

¹⁴⁶ *Am.* 1.7.1-2 (Stănescu, 2011a, p. 15); *Tr.* 4.8.23-30 (p. 58); *Tr.* 5.10.13 (p. 15), *Tr.* 5.10.13-37 (p. 22), and *Tr.* 5.2.47-78 (pp. 35-36). The translations of the Latin in the play appear loosely based upon the Kline translation, but are not direct quotations as in the poetry collection *Google Me!*; Stănescu has made some minor alterations to create stage dialogue.

¹⁴⁷ Stănescu (2011a, pp. 5, 50); on Tomis (pp. 5, 20).

What a woman! Strong, witty, well-cultured, beautiful... She'd give the best full-body massage ever... She'd entertain the most sophisticated conversation'.¹⁴⁸

The first Latin quotation that appears in the play (*Am.* 1.7.1-2, *adde manus in uincla meas (meruere catenas) | dum furor omnis abit, siquis amicus ades*, 'O friend, if any friend be here, put the shackle upon my hands—they have deserved the chain—till my madness all is past!') is taken from the poem in which Ovid describes himself as a 'barbarian' for striking his mistress (*barbare*, *Am.* 1.7.19); this choice of line foreshadows a later scene in the play, in which Stănescu stages Ovid's poem, thus embedding the elegiac narrative within the exilic superstructure.¹⁴⁹ The slave-girl Tristia scratches Ovid for kissing her against her will; Ovid responds by slapping Tristia and calling her a barbarian.¹⁵⁰ The second (untranslated) Latin quotation comprises six lines taken from *Tr.* 4.8.23-30, in which Ovid describes his aging body, too weak for the harsh conditions of Tomis, and claims that he no longer wishes to live into old age.¹⁵¹ Near the end of Stănescu's play, Ovid throws away this poem with the angry shout, 'Words!'; but at the moment Ovid is about to give up his life and art, Tristia enters with a gift for him. The conclusion of the play suggests that the consequence of this scene is that Tristia has saved Ovid, who will now go on to write Getic poems 'for a barbarian woman'. Stănescu's editorial and narrative manipulation, employing quotation, retranslation, and imaginative writing beyond the ending in *Epistulae ex Ponto*, reclaims and recontextualizes her source materials, redirecting the male poetic voice in a demonstration of female literary power.

¹⁴⁸ Stănescu (2011a, p. 50).

¹⁴⁹ Stănescu (2011a, p. 15); in the script, Stănescu provides the English translation from Showerman's Loeb edition of *Amores* (Showerman, 2002, p. 341).

¹⁵⁰ Stănescu (2011a, p. 23); on sexual violence in the *Amores* see Cahoon (1988), Fredrick (1997), and Greene (1999).

¹⁵¹ Stănescu (2011a, p. 58); *Tr.* 4.8.23-30: *sic igitur, tarda uires minuente senecta, | me quoque donari iam rude tempus erat. | tempus erat nec me peregrinum ducere caelum, | nec siccam Getico fonte leuare sitim, | sed modo, quos habui, uacuos secedere in hortos, | nunc hominum uisu rursus et urbe frui. | sic animo quondam non diuinante futura | optabam placide uiuere posse senex.*

Stănescu's playful demonstration of her scholarly knowledge and effort continues in her characterization of Ovid. The actor playing Ovid frequently burlesques the melodrama of the exilic poetry as he reads quotations from *Tristia* aloud, playing up Ovid's self-proclaimed urbane reputation in the affected style of a New York intellectual. In a slippage of dramatic time, the character also exhibits an impishly tongue-in-cheek self-awareness of his future *fama* and mythologized status. Stănescu's dialogue uses a cut-and-paste technique to reuse lines from Ovid's exile poetry, and her Ovid voices specific concerns found in his poems; complaining, for example, that the locals only speak 'the vulgar-Latin' (*in paucis remanent Graecae uestigia linguae, | haec quoque iam Getico barbara facta sono*, 'a few retain traces of the Greek tongue, but even this is rendered barbarous by a Getic twang', *Tr.* 5.7.51-52), and wishing that *Tristia* was able to read his poems: 'Oh, Apollo, oh gods, I need some feedback'.¹⁵² Ovid also humorously 'rewrites' some of his poems in the play: 'I do miss my friends, my fellow poets, my kids, my wife. Well, to be honest, I don't really miss my wife. But I do miss my home, my library, my bed... I miss... Corinna... What a woman!'.¹⁵³

Stănescu also incorporates a critical perspective on Ovid's poetry within her play that suggests a knowledge of feminist readings of his texts; in a comic scene, Stănescu plays with the poetic trope of woman-as-muse, and the Roman elegiac trope of woman-as-book. Stănescu stages Ovid's various attempts to mould *Tristia* into an elegaic *puella* by giving her advice from his own *Ars Amatoria* on how to talk, how to style her hair, and what to wear:

¹⁵² Stănescu (2011a, pp. 15, 22); On having no audience in Tomis see *Tr.* 3.11.9, 3.14.39-40, 4.1.89-91, 5.12.53-54; *Pont.* 4.2.33-38. A similar cut and paste technique is used by Zimmerman (2002) in her selection and juxtaposition of selected episodes to heighten rhythm, musicality, and emotion in her theatrical adaptation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; on Zimmerman's postmodern feminist aesthetics, see Nouryeh (2009).

¹⁵³ Stănescu (2011a, pp. 49-50). In the exile poetry Ovid writes nine letters to his wife while 'Corinna' is named only once in the autobiographical poem, *Tr.* 4.10; for Ovid's letters to his wife, although not uniformly tender, see *Tr.* 1.6, 3.3, 4.3, 5.2, 5.5, 5.10, 5.14, and *Pont.* 1.4, and 3.1; cf. *mouerat ingenium totam cantata per urben | nomine non uero dicta Corinna mihi*, 'My genius had been moved by she who, sung through the whole city, I called, not by her true name, Corinna', *Tr.* 4.10.59-60.

No offence, but look at your hair... A Roman woman wouldn't wear it like that... there are rules you know... of fashion... you can't just walk around the way you do, you can't wear that green gown with yellow sandals...¹⁵⁴

At first, Ovid attempts to fashion Tristia into a Daphne or Corinna and turn Tristia literally into pliant material for his poetry: 'try to be witty, say something intelligent'.¹⁵⁵ Ovid never does convince Tristia to adorn her hair in the correct style (and poetic metre), and over the course of play it is Ovid who is changed by Tristia; he learns to admit that he is afraid of loneliness, and he comes to see Tristia as more than a slave or a 'barbarian'. In the final scene, Ovid addresses the audience directly, full of self-doubt but richer in self-knowledge: 'Have you heard of me? Have you? Have you?'.¹⁵⁶ Despite the colonial and political implications of his letter-writing back to Rome, Ovid is portrayed more sympathetically in the play *For a Barbarian Woman* than the 'TRISTIA' poems; although Stănescu certainly questions the extent to which Ovid's irony can be taken.

The play interweaves realism with fantasy, tragicomedy and cabaret to 'metaphorically touch... on the contradictions of civilization and the primitive, conquered and conqueror, power and poverty, rational and irrational'.¹⁵⁷ The play is thus a collage of theatrical forms, drawing on the dramatic devices of Greek tragedy for its overall structure; it also features a chorus of three Muses dressed as 1950s 'pin-up girls' who comment on and occasionally intervene in the action. Following Greek theatrical convention, the Muses and the personified Black Sea, who delivers a long verse prologue and epilogue to the play, occupy an orchestra space slightly lower down and in front of the main stage, and remain visible and active for the duration of the play.

¹⁵⁴ Stănescu (2011a, p. 14), cf. *Ars* 3, especially ll. 129-168 on hairstyles and ll. 169-192 on dresses to best suit one's features. On hair in Ovid see Myerowitz Levine (1995), and Keith (2009, p. 356).

¹⁵⁵ Stănescu (2011a, p. 50).

¹⁵⁶ Stănescu (2011a, p. 65).

¹⁵⁷ Stănescu (2012b).

As well as signalling the tone and themes for the play, the verse prologue also provides exposition for the play's setting, the history of Romania, and the history of Ovidian reception in Romania to which Stănescu responds.

Like the four Jocastas of *YokastaS Redux*, the three Muses discuss scholarly interpretations of Ovid and the 'barbarian woman' ('he doesn't strike *me* as sincere'), disagree about past stories and events ('I don't remember that'), and fight about how the play should end.¹⁵⁸ By introducing the Muses at the beginning of her play and explaining that they have been too distracted by modern life recently to inspire any poets, Stănescu both mimics the formulaic poetic invocation of the Muses, and playfully inverts Ovid's own excuse for not writing epic poetry in *Am.* 1.1 (that Cupid had distracted *him*). Stănescu also uses the Muses to emphasize the play's thematic concern with language and translation. The Muse Verba (Latin, of course, for 'word') relaxes by reading an 'Oxford Dictionary' [*sic*], and throughout the play she aptly comments on matters of language and power, spouting neologisms and modern turns of phrase which represent the changes of language that accompany the changes of empires.¹⁵⁹ The other Muses mock Verba's pretensions, calling her 'an opportunist. A snob. Into the Oxford dictionary now. Latin and Greek don't suit her anymore. Last century she was into French...'; '[n]ow she's into feminism'.¹⁶⁰

As an encoding of discourse, a dictionary can be interpreted as inherently ideological, as exemplified by the frequent appearance of dictionaries in feminist writing and women's classical receptions to highlight the power of logocentrism to impose meaning and create

¹⁵⁸ Stănescu (2011a, pp. 25, 10).

¹⁵⁹ Stănescu (2011a, pp. 38, 40, 41).

¹⁶⁰ Stănescu (2011a, p. 41).

narrow definitions and discourse.¹⁶¹ Although Stănescu does not play with dictionary definitions *per se* in *For a Barbarian Woman*, the playwright does distinguish the distance between discourse and reality, and comments on the nature of ‘translation’, playing with the rewriting of ‘stupid translations’ and definitions thematically. Verba reads out the new English words and slang that she is learning, rejecting the Muse Ponta’s suggestion that Theo should marry Rich with the words: ‘Fuck all that patriarchal bullshit!... She’s just an old-fashioned... (*reading from the dictionary*) anorexic aboriginal anachronistic/ ancient... aggressive acrimonious abhorrent anakonda!’ [*sic*]; the Muse Verba may act as a self-ironizing cipher for the poet-translator herself within her play. While Verba plays humorously with language, Theo, however, is aware of the darker implications of discourse: she comments of the casual American use of military words such as ‘strategy, attacks, bombs’ that ‘[they are words] that can be translated into corpses in real life’.¹⁶²

6.7.1 Romania

Horia’s *God Was Born in Exile* forms a key intertextual foil to Stănescu’s *For a Barbarian Woman*; as is characteristic of feminist literary works, the intertextuality is employed as a political strategy to expose and interrogate ideology rather than as a simple erudite display of Stănescu’s knowledge of the Romanian tradition. Stănescu’s play ‘confronts’ Horia’s text by challenging the descriptions of the ‘noble savages’ in the novel, and the use of Ovid’s story to perpetuate colonial attitudes toward the Romanian people. Contra Horia, in the prologue to Stănescu’s play there is a dismissal of a Christ, and in a later scene Tristia explains to Ovid how

¹⁶¹ See, e.g., Carson (2010, *passim*), and Balmer (2009a, pp. xiii-xix, 4, 6, 21, 28, 31, 42, 45-47).

¹⁶² Stănescu (2011a, p. 34). Similarly, in Stănescu’s short play *White Embers*, the ‘Bechnyan’ character Shari says that she worked with Americans to “‘build a new democracy”. From our rubble and their bombs’ (2011b, p. 21).

his imperial gaze has misread the worship of the god Zamolxis for an excitingly exotic and barbarian celebration of death; Stănescu also surely deliberately follows Horia's spelling here, rather than Herodotus' Zalmoxis.¹⁶³ Stănescu also references the arrows that mortally wound Ovid in Sălceanu's tragedy, and incorporates the love story with a local woman characteristic of the Romanian Ovidian tradition; her love story, however, becomes a mechanism for mutual understanding rather than simply another stage on the hero's quest for enlightenment.¹⁶⁴ By recalling and incorporating the Romanian Ovidian tradition into her play, Stănescu's Ovid embodies a reflection on the twentieth-century construction of Romanian identity and the reclamation of Ovid as a foundational Romanian poet.

In contrast to the presentation of language in Horia and Malouf's novels, in Stănescu, language learning is a route to understanding the 'other'. Similarly, rather than paint the relationship between the imperial centre and the colonized periphery as a mutually exclusive dichotomy, Stănescu uses her postcolonial perspective to create a sophisticated exploration of the dynamic relationship between centre and periphery and to depict an emerging hybridity that disrupts the traditional hierarchical relationship.¹⁶⁵ *For a Barbarian Woman* is thus a crucial work of Ovidian reception as, unlike earlier Romanian receptions, Stănescu is unapologetic for the ancient Romanians. She does not attempt to create a colonial 'noble savage' to redeem the Tomitians, but instead investigates the power structures that perpetuate the notion of 'barbarians' in the eyes of the imperial self. In the play, Trista even attempts an act of reclamation:

¹⁶³ Stănescu (2011a, pp. 4, 16-17); Hdt. 4.93-6. Erín Moure also references this cult in *The Unmemntioable*: 'There are people just north of Bucharest never conquered who still laugh at death...' (2012, p. 105).

¹⁶⁴ Stănescu (2011a, p. 36).

¹⁶⁵ On the advantages on inhabiting marginal spaces to view the centre objectively, and on 'choosing the margin as a space of radical openness', see hooks (2015).

OVID: Barbarian!

TRISTIA: Yes.¹⁶⁶

Like Horia, however, Stănescu also attempts to rescue Tomis by ‘writing back’ to Ovid’s descriptions of the Black Sea coast as a frozen and barren landscape to counteract the negative implications of such representations.¹⁶⁷ In direct opposition to the freezing conditions described at *Tr.* 3.2.8, 3.10.13-16 and *Pont.* 1.3.49-50, for example, Stănescu has her lovers take a balmy evening stroll along the coast; similarly, Theo has fond memories of childhood holidays at Tomis learning how to build sandcastles with her father, and the Muses are seen playing on the beach with buckets and spades.¹⁶⁸

Stănescu has stated repeatedly that redressing the stereotypes of Romanian people and culture is part of her poetic mission. She notes how the Romanian view of Vlad III as a folk hero who saved Romania from the invading Ottoman Empire contrasts dramatically with the ghoulish Western view of Romania as the home of Transylvania and the vampire Dracula.¹⁶⁹ This attitude is alluded to in Stănescu’s play when Theo drunkenly admonishes the American Rich with the words, ‘Beware, Romanians are losers and vampires!’; ‘losers’ also reminding the audience of the Western media reports of Romania in the 1990s as a post-communist wasteland.¹⁷⁰ Earlier in the scene, Rich voiced contemporary stereotypes of Eastern European

¹⁶⁶ Stănescu (2011a, p. 23).

¹⁶⁷ Cf. the frozen landscapes in Malouf’s and Ransmayr’s novels.

¹⁶⁸ Stănescu (2011a, pp. 47, 12, 19). See also Ovid’s accounts of Tomis as bleak and cold (*Tr.* 3.12), primitive (*Tr.* 5.7), and exotic (*Tr.* 4.6.47).

¹⁶⁹ Stănescu quoted in Szymkowitz (2010).

¹⁷⁰ Stănescu (2011a, p. 45). In Stănescu’s short play *White Embers*, the ‘Bechnyan’ character Fahida asks an American couple if they think Bechnyans are ‘barbarians’ who have no hot water; Stănescu jokes: ‘of course we had hot water: Tuesday and Saturday from 6-8PM’ (2011b, p. 16). Stănescu also plays with Western stereotypes of her country in *Waxing West*, in which Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu appear as vampires. Stănescu is equally alert to stereotypes of other cultures and in a recent interview noted that she is currently researching for a potential theatre project about the Roma population in Eastern Europe. Available at: <http://blog.kanjy.co/writer-of-the-week/saviana-stanescu> (Accessed: 28 December 2015).

women (apparently unaware of how they sound to the Romanian Theo he speaks with), admiring Romanians as ‘beautiful. A unique combination of Latin temper, Slavic melancholia and Oriental sensuality’.¹⁷¹ Stănescu exposes the alternately orientalizing, or fearfully disgusted imperial viewpoint of her country and people.

Stănescu directly voices her frustrations at the Western stereotype of Romania and at earlier receptions of Ovid’s exile that have appropriated local mythology and ‘othered’ the Romanian people in Theo’s angry monologue:

A pretty American girl doing her PhD. Does she know anything about death, suffering, passion, exile? Does she know anything about leaving your country? About leaving your land whose history and secrets you haven’t had enough time to discover? Does she understand anything about leaving this Sea? About already missing its smell? She doesn’t. How can she understand Ovid then? Or the Barbarian woman? She can’t. Can she...?¹⁷²

Theo reverses Ovid’s complaints at *Tr.* 5.10.37 (*non intellegor mihi*) and *Pont.* 4.2.34 (*legas nulli scribere carmen*) that no one can understand him or read his poems, with a plea for the imperial other to attempt an understanding of the barbarian, too.¹⁷³

Through an intertextual web, Stănescu’s play anchors itself firmly both in the history of Ovidian exilic reception and the Romanian tradition, whilst also ‘writing back’ to them and daring to break free of the harmful narrative discourse in which the Romanian people seem trapped. Stănescu has an astute critical eye and is clearly well-versed in feminist and postcolonial literature, often writing with a knowing wink to the audience. As Stănescu ironically invoked Austin and Barthes in *Google Me!*, in *For a Barbarian Woman* the

¹⁷¹ Stănescu (2011a, p. 45).

¹⁷² Stănescu (2011a, p. 64).

¹⁷³ On having no audience in Tomis see also *Tr.* 3.11.9, 3.14.39-40, 4.1.89-91, 5.12.53-54.

playwright gently mocks the PhD student over-analysing Ovid's texts (or, indeed, her own), and playfully exhibits her knowledge and subversion of Ovid's oeuvre. In the following exchange between the Muses on Ovid's literary women, for example, Stănescu makes her own self-referential Ovidian pun:

EUXINA: Oh, I loved the Barbarian woman, what was her name?

VERBA: Tristia. She was no joke that gal!¹⁷⁴

6.7.2 The politics of language

The encoding of ideology in Ovid's exile poetry has been addressed in the important works of Kennedy and Habinek, which explored the political implications of Ovid's depiction of the Tomitians.¹⁷⁵ Influenced by poststructuralist and feminist discussions of discourses of power, they demonstrated that the characteristics of Latin literature can be attributed to its production by and for an elite in whose interest it was to control discourse. Through language regulation—that is, by establishing a prestige dialect of Latin at the top of a linguistic hierarchy—Latin literature validated other forms of social control and authority (such as patriarchy, culture, and religion), and hierarchically regulated class, behaviours, ethnicities, languages, and land. By controlling what it is possible to read, elites control what it is possible to think; Ovid played an integral role in Augustan literary, and consequently discourse, production.

¹⁷⁴ Stănescu (2011a, pp. 9-10).

¹⁷⁵ Kennedy (1992), Habinek (1998); on the relationship between political power and literature in the Augustan age see especially Barchiesi (1997).

Read thus, the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* serve Rome's imperial mission by perpetuating disdain for non-Roman peoples through their depiction of the Tomitians.¹⁷⁶ This both reinforced the need for Rome's 'civilizing' project and reasserted Augustus' threatened authority in the northern extreme of the empire; indeed Horace makes the case for the 'civilizing' benefits of literature to Augustus in *Ep.* 2.1, albeit in a domestic context.¹⁷⁷ The work of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss can also inform a psychological reading of the exiled Ovid's concerns about the loss of his identity. In *Tristes Tropiques* Lévi-Strauss argued that there is no real 'barbarian other', rather that the construction of an 'other' is necessary for the maintenance of one's own identity and sense of 'self' (the title *Tristes Tropiques* is consciously recalled in Marie Darrieussecq's French translations of Ovid's exile poetry, *Tristes Pontiques*; Darrieussecq also notes the absurdity of learning 'the way in which we, the Gauls, were viewed as barbarians' by the Romans).¹⁷⁸ By deconstructing the discourse of the 'other' created in Ovid's exile poetry Stănescu exposes the mechanisms of imperial ideology still active today, and investigates the extent to which each member of her English-speaking audience, as users of a dominant language, is implicated in this ideology. Against Ransmayr and Malouf, Stănescu inverts the trope of Ovid-as-victim in the tradition of Ovidian reception by aligning him firmly (at first) with the majoritarian culture. In her play, despite her sympathetic portrayal of the poet himself, Ovid is the puppet of imperialism accused of writing sincere letters of praise to Augustus, consolidating Rome's status as the centre and source of power by the very act of writing.

¹⁷⁶ See Said (1994, especially p. 67) on the mechanisms of imperialism.

¹⁷⁷ *Pannonia est... domanda*, *Tr.* 2.225; Pannonia is modern-day Transylvania. On this reference to Pannonia at *Tr.* 2.225 undermining Augustus' imperial project, see Ingleheart (2010, *ad loc.*); see also Horace on the Getae, *Odes* 4.15.21-24.

¹⁷⁸ Similarly, Dauge (1981) argues that if there had been no 'barbarians', the Romans would have had to invent them; Darrieussecq (2008, p. 11); see interview in Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013a). From France, Darrieussecq is able to view this account of the Gauls as 'amusing'; the difference in power on the world stage between France and Romania (and as reflected in contemporary discourse) allows this liberty.

Alongside the Muse Verba's dictionary definitions, Stănescu's concerns with language as power are explicitly signalled in the opening lines of the play. In her prologue, the Black Sea says that she speaks English now and gave up Latin a long time ago, changing languages with the empires; later, Theo says that she is studying 'English and Latin. Two powerful languages, two languages of power'.¹⁷⁹ The Getic language spoken by Tristia, however, is described as a language 'full of silences', referencing both the fragmentation of feminine language in Cixous and Irigaray, and Stănescu's concern with representing the experience of language-learning by immigrants.¹⁸⁰ In contrast to Ovid's self-portrayal in the exile poetry, in which he feels his Latin is tainted by Getic and falling into disuse in his barbarian environs (*siqua uidebuntur casu non dicta Latine, | in qua scribebat, barbara terra fuit, Tr. 3.1.17-18*), Ovid is characterized in the play as self-assured both in his superior status as a Roman ('I've never EVER had a slave who responded like that to me and got to live afterwards'), and the superiority of the Latin language.¹⁸¹

OVID: I really wish you could understand my language. Its subtleties. The play on words. The cultural references. The jokes. The wit. The poetry.¹⁸²

In the play Ovid embodies the imperial self who believes he is bringing civilization to the colonies and who never doubts that to learn Latin would be a good thing for Tristia to do.¹⁸³ Over the course of the play, however, Ovid begins to understand the relationship between power

¹⁷⁹ Stănescu (2011a, pp. 3-4, 20). On Latin as a postclassical marker of power, see Waquet (2001); also Hardwick and Gillespie (2007), and Greenwood (2011). On English as a 'civilizing' tool in colonies of the British Empire see, e.g., wa Thiong'o (1986).

¹⁸⁰ Ovid says of the poem he writes for the barbarian woman in Getic: 'I don't master this Barbarian language well... it's not my strongest poem, but... there are many silences in it. She was good at listening to my silence...' (Stănescu, 2011a, p. 64).

¹⁸¹ Stănescu (2011a, p. 24).

¹⁸² Stănescu (2011a, p. 14).

¹⁸³ On teaching classics in colonial contexts see Goff (2005).

and language; in a later scene, Ovid relates a nightmare to Tristia, in which he was tasked by Augustus with ‘civilizing’ the ‘Barbarians’ by teaching them Latin:

I dreamt I was back in Rome... We need to make our empire grow. We need to have everyone speak Latin. The language of culture and civilisation... But Caesar, I whispered, I am not a soldier, I’m a poet. Nonsense... The Barbarians must learn Latin. You are the only one who can teach them. We’ll help you. The soldiers will be there with you to fight, to kill, to conquer, to extract the gold from those Barbarian lands, to get their riches as you will enrich their spirit. It’s just a fair trade.¹⁸⁴

Language is shown clearly here as one of many weapons used in colonization, and the supposed superiority of the Latin language is used to justify Rome’s expansion. The reference by Caesar to ‘the wit and beauty of the Latin language’ directly and darkly mirrors Ovid’s first scene in the play, in which he wishes that Tristia could understand ‘the wit’ and ‘the beauty’ of Latin.¹⁸⁵ The dream shows Ovid’s development as a character and his growing recognition of the ‘other’ in his horrified protestations to Caesar.¹⁸⁶ It also forces Ovid to reassess an earlier conversation with Tristia in which he ‘explained’ the categories of slave and master to her:

OVID: I don’t think you really understand the words master-slave. (*pointing at him*) Master. (*pointing at her*) Slave. MASTER tells SLAVE what to do. Not vice versa.

TRISTIA: We borrowed these words from Latin. We didn’t have them twenty years ago. Slave. Master. Funny words.¹⁸⁷

In a fresh feminist take on Ovid’s hoped-for eternal *fama* at the close of *Metamorphoses*, the Muses Ponta and Euxina bet on the likelihood of either Ovid or Tristia being ‘better known by posterity’. Verba offers a Foucauldian analysis of the power of Latin over the Getic dialect:

¹⁸⁴ Stănescu (2011a, p. 48).

¹⁸⁵ Stănescu (2011a, p. 14).

¹⁸⁶ Stănescu (2011a, p. 48).

¹⁸⁷ Stănescu (2011a, p. 24); ‘twenty years’ alluding to the twenty years of the postcommunist period 1989-2009 when the play was written (Mihăilă, 2010, p. 304).

‘That’s [a] stupid [bet]. We both know it’s gonna be Ovid. Roman civilization takes care of memory slash history’.¹⁸⁸ But she also concludes finally that she can ‘make the Barbarian woman famous’, which ‘should be enough given the circumstances. The differences in their birth and upbringing’.¹⁸⁹ In Stănescu’s reading, Ovid’s *fama* is conditional upon the enduring power of the Roman Empire and the Latin language (as it is for most careful readers of Ovid’s Augustanism), but the negative implications of this are here made explicit.¹⁹⁰ Stănescu deconstructs the notion of poetic art and political authority to show the dynamic interplay between the two; yet she also suggests that women’s revisionary mythmaking has the power to make the silent barbarian woman famous, a powerful feat, ‘given the circumstances’.

6.8 Conclusion

For a Barbarian Woman presents a sophisticated exploration of the relationship between periphery and centre, constructing a dynamic and complex dialogue between two languages, cultures, and identities, and demonstrating the necessity of recognizing it as such. Stănescu has imaginatively posited the space of exile not as a simple ‘recentering’ of power to the margins, but as a new space, an ‘in between’, a ‘no man’s land’. As well as responding directly to Ovid’s exile poetry, in her characterization of Theo, who must also be reconciled to the colonizing power, Stănescu also ‘writes back’ to Romania, warning her audience not to sentimentalize Ovid’s (or her own) exile, and particularly not at the expense or the simplification of the inhabitants of those places. While Ovid’s self-definition against the ‘barbarian others’ he encounters in Tomis is crucial to an understanding of the exile poetry,

¹⁸⁸ Stănescu (2011a, p. 11).

¹⁸⁹ Stănescu (2011a, pp. 26-27).

¹⁹⁰ E.g., Galinsky (1996, pp. 261-266), Gibson (1999), and Hardie (2002c).

Stănescu demonstrates how, in a postcolonial world, the ideologically-loaded nature of the term *barbarus* must be recognized, and its use and replication in modern translations and receptions questioned. Whilst clearly inspired by the Roman poet, Stănescu's work offers an important critique of the colonial representations of the 'barbarians' within Ovid's exilic works, and exposes the power mechanisms of ancient and contemporary imperialism alike. The ambivalence of her Ovidian allusions allows Stănescu to dramatize a fond critique of Romania's national poet Ovid by using her characteristic humour, at the same time as she offers a sharp critique of the 'stupid translations' of the classical traditions of Western imperialist powers.

There has been a recent trend in scholarship documenting the 'democratic turn' in classics; but if scholars wish to claim that Latin and Greek are no longer elitist, or a privilege of the (male) elite alone, this cannot be done without problematizing their histories as tools of empire.¹⁹¹ Stănescu's work forms a vital part of this re-evaluation by challenging the encoded ideology within Ovid's exile poetry at the same as it reinvigorates the ancient text for new audiences and old readers alike, encouraging a return to the original Latin text as interrogative and active readers. Her own erudition and close reading of ancient texts sets an example of how scholarship should be actively political in order to facilitate social change.

Stănescu expands her feminist concerns from issues of gender and the representation of women alone, to global concerns with exile and migration without ever losing sight of the particularized experiences of women immigrants. Political impact and relevance are key to

¹⁹¹ The phrase 'democratic turn' is taken from the subtitle of Hardwick and Harrison's edited volume *Classics in the Modern World* (2013); see also the on-going research project 'Classics and Class', available at: <http://www.classicsandclass.info> (Accessed: 24 September 2014); and the Mayor of London's 'Love Latin' scheme (in association with the Iris Project), available at: <http://irisonline.org.uk/index.php/component/content/article/7-news/53-london-mayor-launches-love-latin-scheme> (Accessed: 24 September 2014).

Stănescu's works of classical reception, as they are key to her dramatic and poetic works more widely. Through her use of fragmented source texts and feminist theatrical forms, Stănescu's feminist reworkings of the tales of Jocasta and 'Tristia' are politicized explorations of the discourses of power, myth, and literary archetypes. Her works of reception are accentuated by her feminist concerns and play with language, and she uses Ovid's poetry to open discourse and to query the construction of both contemporary knowledge and ancient narratives. It is this playful incorporation of a critical perspective and effortless scholarliness within a fictional narrative that is the hallmark of Stănescu's work, and which characterizes her contribution to Ovidian reception.

CONCLUSION

In 1982, reviewing women's poetry published in the 1960s and 1970s, Ostriker posited four characteristics of women's revisionary myth-making: anti-authoritarianism; social re-evaluation; rejection of nostalgia; and formal experimentation.¹ In 1985, DuPlessis added the imperative for women's revisionary mythmaking to 'write beyond the ending', and to use strategies of narrative displacement, narrative de-legitimation, and narrative realignment to tell the 'other side' of a story.² From the perspective of 2016, reviewing women's Ovidian receptions written predominantly after the essays by Ostriker and DuPlessis, I propose: that the additional recurring thematic concerns and common revisionary strategies that have emerged through this thesis suggest a diverse, yet characteristically feminine tradition of Ovidian reception; and that the dissimilarities between the writers suggest the 'difference made' to women's Ovidian receptions by feminist scholarship in the late twentieth century.

Plath, Wertenbaker, Balmer, and Stănescu all employ heavy irony, ambiguity, and paradox as they negotiate an ambivalent invocation of authoritative Ovidian myth with subversive readings and rewritings.³ All four writers also give voice to women characters who remain silent in the original tales, drawing particularly upon the figures of Daphne, Philomela, and Pygmalion's statue; and they respond to Ovid's stories in particularly gendered ways, rewriting his texts to explore women's lives as lovers, wives, and mothers. Women's Ovidian receptions avoid the key critical impasse of feminist classical scholarship, that is, whether Ovid's women are 'real' or 'written', by highlighting their characters' knowledge of themselves

¹ Ostriker (1982; 1987).

² DuPlessis (1985b, pp. 108-109).

³ On classical texts as a means of conferring authority on the woman writer see Ostriker (1982, p. 72).

as constructed figures at the same time as the writer speaks through her character, avoiding the scholarly problem of the male ventriloquism of the female voice by voicing the character as women themselves. By fashioning themselves both as the magician and as Richlin's 'lady in the box', Plath, Wertenbaker, Balmer, and Stănescu parody discourses of power, femininity, and male creativity, and rewrite Ovid to construct a female poetic self. All four women writers also use Ovidian mythography to critique the traditional guardians of his texts, be they the 'sham' male poets in Plath, or imperialist powers wielding 'stupid translations' in Wertenbaker, Balmer, and Stănescu, thus figuring themselves as women writers both within and against the classical tradition.⁴

Strikingly, all four writers play with the deconstruction of patriarchal language and dictionary definitions; in the work of Plath, Balmer, and Stănescu, this is symbolized by the physical presence of their dictionaries. Against this utopian play with dictionary definitions, the writers' dismantling of the classical tradition and the literary canon is also signalled by the dystopic literary and physical landscapes their characters inhabit, from Plath's fragmented

⁴ The receptions of Plath, Wertenbaker, Balmer, and Stănescu are thus in the tradition of Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* (c. 1405, *The Book of the City of Ladies*), a work which draws heavily upon Ovidian mythography to question the representations of women in Ovid's texts, but most pertinently, to question the readings and use of these representations by subsequent authors; on de Pizan and Ovid see Kellogg (1998), and Desmond (2006; 2014, pp. 165-168). de Pizan wrote her book as a direct response to the antifeminist content of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* (c. 1230-1275), a work modelled on the *Ars Amatoria*, and which offered a contemporary guide to courtly love (on de Lorris and his classical sources see Liveley, 2006a, p. 59). As Marilyn Desmond argues: '[de Pizan] addresses the potential of the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Ars Amatoria* to foster misogynist reading practices that could possibly have a negative impact on the lived experiences of women: Christine... is responding to a fairly crude treatise on the manipulation of love and lovers rather than to the rich ironies of Ovid's Latin text' (2014, p. 167). de Pizan thus makes a distinction between Ovidian mythography and the classical tradition; a distinction that illustrates an approach to Ovid and his work that is central to the receptions I have discussed in this thesis. Despite the lack of critical attention paid to women's responses to classical texts, Ovid appears to have been inextricably linked with women's writing and feminine—feminist—revisionary mythmaking for over six hundred years.

statuary and headless caryatids, via Wertenbaker's ruined stage-sets and Balmer's collapsing trenches, to Stănescu's leaking tower-blocks.⁵

Alongside Ovid's usefulness as a rich source of female characters, his appeal also lies in the self-reflexive nature of his poetry; Ovid's style and stories lend themselves particularly to writers reflecting on themselves as women in an inherently masculine literary tradition, staking their claim to feminine artistic autonomy. Plath, Wertenbaker, Balmer, and Stănescu literalize Ovid's own 'feminine' self-fashioning, and use his ironic self-positioning against the masculine epic tradition as a source of authority to write back to their own times and *mores* in a specifically gendered way. Crucially, however, in their representations of desiring women, the women writers reawaken the sexual critique of Ovid's poems, a reading that has been elided in the scholarship through a focus on the receptions of male authors concerned with Ovid-the-man rather than his work. Furthermore, the later texts of Balmer and Stănescu, which challenge both prevalent patriarchal myths of female sexuality and the nature of 'translation' or poetry itself, reinvigorate both the political and aesthetic critique at the heart of Ovid's poetry.

The differences between the four women writers and their receptions, however, are both productive for the different readings of Ovid that they create or foreground, and point to the multiplicity of women's voices and their classical receptions. Throughout the thesis, it has been shown how the four writers respond variously to a specific episode in Ovid's narrative or to an episode's theme, or focus on particular details of language and metaphor; they choose to respond to Ovid's text variously 'in character' or use the character to meditate metapoetically on their own writing and reception practices; and they overlap or diverge in the extent to which

⁵ See also the dystopic Ovidian landscapes in Iizuka (1999), and Darrieussecq (2003). On feminist dictionaries as a utopian genre see Anderson (1991).

they draw upon women's lived experiences or use feminist theory to frame or inform their work. For example, while Plath's reception of Philomela emphasizes the contest between male and female narrators at the centre of Ovid's episode and foregrounds women's complicity in male violence, Wertebaker focuses instead on the figure of the silent Procne to explore women's desiring subjectivity, and she inserts into the myth a female chorus of attendants to explore feminine modes of communicating; and while it may be said that Plath's response to Ovid is personal, Wertebaker implicitly draws upon feminist theory to explore collective responses to trauma. Balmer, however, reads (and rewrites) Philomela differently again—as a metapoetic comment on the ethics of using private grief to create public art. Similarly, while Plath uses Ovid's story of Pygmalion to explore the contemporary 'man-made woman', Stănescu reverses the direction of the transformation to draw out the sinister implications of the woman transformed into art and to highlight the violent reality of everyday metaphors. Yet common readings and approaches to specific episodes also emerge: both Wertebaker and Stănescu, for example, use the hardened figure of Niobe to allegorize the dangers for women denied feminine sisterhood, sexual experience, and sexual knowledge.

The dissimilarities in focus and content, and the divergences in literary strategies between the receptions of Plath, Wertebaker, Balmer, and Stănescu also suggest the 'difference made' by feminist scholarship on women's Ovidian receptions. Writing before the advent of the second-wave feminist movement, Plath harnessed Ovid in a particularly individual way to discuss the taboo subject of female sexuality, to critique the inequalities and expectations within a 1950s marriage, and to explore the tension she felt between domesticity and art, attempting to create a space for herself in the literary canon. Plath's isolation from other women and her lack of explicitly feminist critical tools is palpable; and while Plath argued that

classical allusions should be ‘realised’ rather than ‘pointed at’ in a text, this tactic may also have worked to disguise a timidity with her classical knowledge, wary perhaps of the censure she would incur as a ‘poetess’ trespassing upon male vatic territory.⁶

What differentiates Wertebaker and Balmer from Plath is their increasingly explicit use of feminist critical scholarship within their work. While Wertebaker’s reception work shares a broad feminist concern with revoicing mythic women characters, the playwright was hesitant in the 1970s and 1980s about aligning herself overtly with a feminist movement still in the process of defining itself, and, as many feminists still are today, was concerned with the monolithic nature of any universalizing feminist sisterhood. Yet second-wave French feminist ideas implicitly inform Wertebaker’s approach to her Ovidian sources, particularly in her presentation of what she conceived as fragmentary and ‘irrational’, yet ‘essential’, feminine modes of speaking and knowing.⁷ Similarly, Wertebaker’s plays directly address issues highlighted by second-wave feminisms: female sexual desire, motherhood, sexual violence, marriage, pornography, and social and political disempowerment.

Balmer, however, writing in the 1990s and 2000s, positions herself more confidently as a feminist and explicitly incorporates feminist scholarship into her translations of Ovid; her work is characterized by her sophisticated use of feminist classical scholarship and feminist translation techniques. Balmer draws upon second-wave feminist concerns with recovering historical women’s lives and voices in her early translations of women poets, but also demonstrates a third-wave feminist concern with language and power in her later work on male poets. Balmer translates with a keen sensitivity to issues of gender and class, and she blends

⁶ Plath (1957); on the timidity of women writers before the advent of feminism see Ostriker (1983).

⁷ See Wertebaker (2004).

Ovid with feminist scholarship to problematize both the tradition of male, elitist classical scholarship, and her own privilege as a contemporary translator and woman classicist trained in ancient Greek and Latin. Wertenbaker and Balmer both benefitted from women's increased access to a classical education in the latter half of the twentieth century, and they drew from the critical and literary tools generated by the growing feminist movement to engage more openly with their Ovidian source texts than Plath; yet they still felt the need to foreground their scholarliness and thus prove their 'authority' to translate ancient texts.

Finally, the contemporary writer Stănescu, writing from a position of post-communist postfeminism, both flaunts her scholarliness and openly rejects it, refusing to acknowledge any need to prove her authority to draw upon classical models. What differentiates Stănescu from Wertenbaker and Balmer is her confident intellectualism, which blends a sophisticated use of feminist and postcolonial theory with a playful rejection of the academy. Stănescu is also the most explicitly political writer I have discussed, 'confronting' her sources with feminist theatrical practice, and harnessing Ovid for her ongoing social activism. The 'difference made' to women's receptions may be that women writers have gained the tools and the confidence to reappropriate Ovid's male poetic voice for the feminine subject, refusing to be intimidated by a tradition of male scholars and writers. Moreover, the explicit use of feminist scholarship in the work of Balmer and Stănescu bridges the gap between feminist theory and feminist practice to enact classical reception as feminist praxis.

My account of a feminine tradition of Ovidian reception is necessarily incomplete; the four women writers I have discussed in this thesis are all white, heterosexual, and European or American, and I have discussed only poetic or dramatic texts. Avenues of future research are

thus suggested by recent Ovidian novels such as Ali Smith's *Girl meets boy* (2007) and Aoibheann Sweeney's *Among Other Things, I've Taken Up Smoking* (2008), which use stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to explore young women's experiences of puberty and to allegorize the sexual awakening of their queer protagonists.⁸ A yet more complex feminine Ovidianism emerges in Helen Oyeyemi's novel *The Icarus Girl* (2005), and Patience Agbabi's poetry collection *Transformatrix* (2000); both authors are British writers of Nigerian heritage and blend Ovidian imagery with European folktales and Yoruba mythology to explore the cultural hybridity of international identities. From South Korea, Ovid's Daphne is refigured in the classically-educated Han Kang's recently translated *The Vegetarian* (2015), a novel about meat and the male gaze, and which chronicles one woman's devastating slide into depression and her increasingly disturbing fantasy of escape by metamorphosing into a tree. Analyses of such a diverse range of texts would expand my conception of a feminine tradition of Ovidian reception.

To tell old stories in new ways and to 'break the hold' of tradition has the potential, as Ostriker suggested, to effect real social change.⁹ Yet the explicit combination of fiction and feminist critical theory in the receptions of Balmer and Stănescu provides a model for future feminist classical receptions, carrying critical feminist theory to a wider reading public in texts which blur the lines between translation, adaptation, and commentary. To conclude, I argue that the textual work and insights of this feminine tradition of Ovidian reception are essential to advance both Ovidian scholarship and feminist scholarship. Women's classical receptions can

⁸ On the 'democratic turn' in Smith's classical reception in her novels *Like* (1997) and *Girl meets Boy* see Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013b); on 'queer translation' in Smith's *Girl meets boy* see Ranger (forthcoming, a); on 'being both' as an Ovidian trope in Smith's *How to be Both* (2015), and on politicizing the postmodern in Smith's classical receptions, see Ranger (forthcoming, b).

⁹ Rich (1972, p. 19); Ostriker (1982, p. 72).

enact a feminist praxis that reawakens the political and aesthetic critique at the heart of Ovid's poetry; furthermore, women's receptions offer a critical tool to advance feminist classical scholars' attempts to 'reappropriate the text' by reclaiming female narrative authority from the male poet and by interpellating the 'resisting reader'. If the history of a text's reception reveals its hermeneutic possibilities, then the existence of a diverse yet characteristically feminine Ovidian reception tradition fundamentally challenges existing traditions and textual readings based upon male practitioners alone.¹⁰

¹⁰ Martindale (1992).

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