

51 Heroines: Contemporary Anglophone Versions of Ovid's *Heroides*

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Sorrow comes in so many ways. ... I had no notion of ... the unexpected way in which trouble comes, and ties our hands, and makes us silent when we long to speak.

Middlemarch (1871), George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)

... I'll scribble these words on scrolls,

In notebooks,

My hands will be mine and hers,

My pen will be mine and hers,

...

I mean every woman who has ever lived,

I mean every woman whose heart has ever been broken,

I will write the words spoken by many women who have cried into their hands ...

The Cost of Red Wine (2020), Lettie Precious

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Abstract

This project is a comparative study of translations and adaptations of Ovid's *Heroides*. Specifically, it demonstrates the key role of creative and innovative English translations and adaptations in transforming understanding of the poems. As some of the only poems outside Greek and Roman drama imagining the unmediated first-person perspectives of mythical women, they have inspired a wealth of creative responses throughout the history of their reception. However, *Heroides* scholarship is only beginning to recognise the breadth and significance of these receptions. Since scholarship on the *Heroides* and on Ovid, especially his gender politics, has in recent years undergone significant development and reconsideration, new studies of the reception of the *Heroides* are especially urgent and timely.

The thesis compares several recent English versions that reimagine the texts for their own times and audiences, and examines how these reimaginings reflect their respective sociopolitical contexts. These versions are explored against the changing background of *Heroides* scholarship, which has burgeoned particularly since the turn of the millennium. It particularly highlights women and non-binary writers' translations and adaptations, which have tended to be produced and distributed in more marginalised, independent environments, and to be informed by contemporary progressive responses to sociopolitical issues faced by women. It also assesses how these both supplement and challenge more traditional and more widely available versions such as the Penguin Classics edition and the Loeb. Guided by the responses of Josephine Balmer, Emily Wilson, Shelley P. Haley, Stephanie McCarter and others to the particular problems of developing productive translation practices for ancient texts, the thesis assesses and compares each reception in terms of how it breaks open the emotional complexities and shifting characterisations of the Ovidian heroines. It gives particular attention to instances where different translation decisions noticeably affect the sense or tone of whole poems. The receptions explored include close translations, more thoroughly recontextualised creative

versions or 'transcreations', and intersemiotic adaptations for the stage. It demonstrates that innovative translations and radical adaptations make the once marginalised voices of ancient heroines newly compelling and relevant, and are thus instrumental in renewing the *Heroides* for a modern readership as a perennially resisting text. Conversely, it finds that versions informed by patriarchal preconceptions tend to foreclose any such possibilities.

Introduction

Ovid's *Heroides*, the series of fictional verse letters written from the perspectives of mythical women to the lovers who have abandoned them, are unparalleled among the surviving literature of ancient Greece and Rome. Women do speak at length in other genres of Greek and Roman literature, especially drama and epic, both to other characters and to themselves. They declare love, protest at ill-treatment and injustice, defend what they love and plot revenge. They can speak uninterrupted and with both emotional authenticity and sophistication, irrespective of the level of freedom real women had in Greek and Roman society to express themselves in these ways outside the home. Verse epistles also exist elsewhere in Latin literature (for instance those of Horace, and Ovid's own *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*). What distinguishes the single *Heroides*, however, is the combination of the mythological woman writer, the epistolary format and the resulting lack of any mediating influence from the addressee. The external reader gains a unique experience from this combination: the sense of reading sentiments expressed privately and unilaterally for the eyes of someone other than themselves, alongside the illusion of having direct, unmediated access to the previously unknown thoughts of a mythological character.¹

It is therefore unsurprising that readers throughout the history of the poems' transmission should have found them compelling enough to respond to. In Ovid's own time, replies by the *Heroides'* addressees were composed by the poet Sabinus (lost, but described in *Amores* 2.18.27–34), and Ovid himself later returned to the concept to write exchanges of correspondence in the double *Heroides*. Further responses were composed in Latin by Italian Renaissance scholars such as Angelus Sabinus, and were printed in Renaissance texts as the actual compositions of the ancient Sabinus.² This demonstrates that even very early scholars 'employed imitation as a means of working towards interpretation', 're-imagining' and 'interpret[ing] Ovid by reconfiguring his

¹ The seminal work on the double readership of the *Heroides* (absent lover and external reader) is Kennedy (1984). For the single epistles' representation of addressees' earlier words: Michalopoulos (2022).

² On Angelus Sabinus' authorship of the three *Sabini epistulae*: Sommariva (2022).

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work', serving as one of countless examples of 'efforts to flesh out and make sense of the narratives of classical literature'.³

Once translated into modern languages, the influence of the poems can be traced throughout the development of fictional writing in many European literary cultures. Besides inspiring the above-mentioned responses of Italian scholars, the collection was also hugely influential in other parts of medieval Europe: for example in Spain, influencing the *novela sentimental*; and in France, prompting countless creative responses once translated, in addition to their role in Héloïse's letters to Abelard.⁴ Fulkerson also lists Pope, Marlowe, Chaucer, Donne, Tennyson, Petrarch, and the *Lettres Portugaises* as further examples of authors and works influenced by the *Heroides*.⁵

Additionally, in their early history in English, the poems had considerable cultural significance in their own right. This is most strikingly seen in the status of *Ovid's Epistles* (1680), a miscellany of translations by several hands, spearheaded by John Dryden and the publisher Jacob Tonson. Reprinted dozens of times, incorporating new versions along the way, it became a cultural touchstone in both sincere and parodic forms, and integral to the rise of the English epistolary novel throughout the eighteenth century (see Chapter 1 for some factors underlying its creative appeal). In contrast, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Ovid was mainly an author read and translated in schools, and it was not until late in the twentieth-century revival of interest in Ovid that the attention of literary translators returned to the *Heroides*.

The waxing and waning popularity of the *Heroides* in translation correlates to scholarship's uneasy relationship with the poems. Even during the 'Ovidian boom' in scholarship from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, the *Heroides* remained understudied, at odds with the fact that 'the

³ Knox (2009a), 215–16. See also Lyne (2004) on the broader Elizabethan tradition of 'replying to Ovid'. Page (1981), 127–8, describes a Hellenistic vogue for composing epigrams under the names of earlier famous authors.

⁴ Brownlee (1990); LeBlanc (1996).

⁵ Fulkerson (2009), 88. For an exhaustive survey of *Heroides* reception across Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries: Dörrie (1968).

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Heroides have been Ovid's most influential work from antiquity until very recent times'.⁶ More even than the rest of the Ovidian corpus, the *Heroides* have been subject to the pattern of 'generalisations' in scholarship identified by Hinds that Ovid as a poet is both 'shallow and over-explicit' and 'excessively literary' (see Chapter 2: 'Context').⁷ More general criticism has also been made of the collection as a whole for its apparent repetitiveness and monotony. This orthodoxy of inferiority has hampered the poems' reappraisal until far more recent times.

Besides reproducing these generalisations, *Heroides* scholarship is especially preoccupied with the particular inappropriateness of wit and over-literariness to the depiction of tragic or epic heroines in elegy.⁸ Criticisms of excessive rhetoric undermining emotional authenticity and of the inappropriate use of wit are repeated in the middle of the century by Wilkinson ('the *Heroides* were probably not intended to move; they are a display of virtuosity designed to entertain'), and of their apparent monotony by Fränkel and many others (although Fränkel argues this is simply because elegy should not be read in bulk).⁹ Where critics such as Fränkel and Rand do speak favourably of the poems' emotional insights, they are often inappropriately sentimentalised, trivialised or generalised: for instance, a heroine's letter is deemed to constitute 'sentiments that flow through her tender soul', or 'studies of woman's moods'.¹⁰ It is unavoidable to conclude from the remarks of these critics that their assessments were unduly influenced by prevailing preconceptions regarding literature about women.¹¹

More recent years have seen a scholarly reappraisal of Ovid, especially the *Metamorphoses*, which has tended to recast the poet's incongruous wit as 'a more adequate attempt to see life steadily

⁶ Knox (2002), 118.

⁷ Hinds (1987), 4; 11.

⁸ Rand (1925), 19, 20. For Dryden (1956), 112, Ovid 'often writ too pointedly for his Subject, and made his persons speak more Eloquently than the violence of their Passion would admit: so that he is frequently witty out of season'. However, for Dryden's enthusiastic approach to this in translation: Hopkins (1988).

⁹ Wilkinson (1955), 93, 97; Fränkel (1945), 41.

¹⁰ Fränkel (1945), 45, 37; Rand (1925), 22–6.

¹¹ An exception is Anderson (1973), exploring some misconceptions of canonical criticism; see Chapter 2: 'Context'.

and whole, for *all* that it contains, than many apparently more “serious” literary endeavours’.¹² The *Heroides* themselves have also been considerably re-evaluated (see further below). However, anglophone scholarship containing detailed philological analysis of the poems still mostly predates this reappraisal.¹³ To date, since Palmer and Purser’s 1898 critical edition, the only anglophone monograph treating each of *Her.* 1–15 in turn is Howard Jacobson’s *Ovid’s Heroides* (1974). The shortcomings of Jacobson’s readings are discussed in some detail in Chapter 2, but the work’s most significant drawback is that it is one of the clearest examples of critical indifference to emotionally intense accounts of women’s experiences. Although his analysis of specific details is often insightful, there is a strong sense that the whole commentary is informed by the sentiments expressed on *Heroides* 11 that Canace’s uncomplaining acceptance of repeated brutal violence makes a refreshing change from ‘grating and carping women’.¹⁴

One of the most significant difficulties in studying the collection is the text itself: owing at least in part to its particularly complex manuscript tradition, there is still no stable high-quality text such as an Oxford Classical Text or a Teubner for the whole collection, despite the aspirations of various scholars to produce one.¹⁵ Information from Oxford University Press indicates that Sergio Casali intends to do so, but this project will take some years. Commentaries on selections and on individual poems have their own texts, and individual problematic passages have been tackled in short articles by textual critics ranging from Housman to Heyworth. However, for a full text more recent than Palmer (1898), one must use Showerman (1977) or Dörrie (1971), both of which are still problematic.¹⁶ This presents difficulties for the reader who wishes to view the Latin text in its entirety without having to flick between different editions. It is also indicative of the fact that the *Heroides* as a whole collection have received less recent attention from textual

¹² Hopkins (1988), 190.

¹³ For a comprehensive critical survey: Spentzou (2003), 13–21.

¹⁴ Jacobson (1974), 175.

¹⁵ For the *Heroides*’ manuscript tradition: Reynolds (1983), 268–72; a full study is Dörrie (1960).

¹⁶ See Hall (1990), 262 on the textual limitations of the Loeb format; Reeve (1974) outlines Dörrie’s shortcomings.

critics than might be expected for a work of Ovid. Other notoriously problematic texts such as the corpus of Propertius now have respected critical editions that comprehensively cover the difficult textual issues, but the *Heroides* have yet to benefit from this.

Lematic anglophone commentaries more recent than Palmer do exist, but are selective (due in part to the abundance of textual problems). The most recent is Reeson (2001) on *Her.* 11, 13 and 14.¹⁷ The commentary covering the largest number of single epistles is Knox (1995), which selects and excludes on the basis of disputed authenticity, justified with examples of lexical or metrical anomalies (a school of thought more prevalent in the preceding decades). Despite acknowledging the limitations of taking as genuine only those epistles listed in *Amores* 2.18, Knox nonetheless proceeds from this as the ‘safest assumption’ and comments only on a selection of those poems: 1, 2, 5–7 (4 omitted), 10, and 11; and also 15, which he takes as spurious.¹⁸ He does adopt the by then accepted observation that the poems are effectively an ancient work of reception, in that the heroines ‘reassemble the components of the original narratives in new and sometimes arresting combinations’, and that each act of reception ‘causes the reader to separate his reactions from the original model and to question the values represented there’. However, Knox remains committed to earlier conceits regarding their literary value, reiterating intentionalist ideas that ‘the novelty of the *Heroides* consists in their concentration on works of literature’, and that the poems’ wit limits their emotional impact: ‘the response elicited ... is intellectual rather than emotional’.¹⁹

European scholarship on the poems has been considerably more prolific in producing commentaries, especially in Italian. The 1990s saw the publication of a series of commentaries in

¹⁷ Several recent PhD and Master’s theses also comprise selective commentaries: e.g. Bebergal (2014) on 5, 16 and 17; Michalopoulos (2006) on 4 and 8; Fear (1993) on 1, 2 and 7. Reeson is a published doctoral thesis too.

¹⁸ Casali (1997), 305–6, evaluates Knox’s inconsistent criteria for inclusion. Farrell (1998) outlines the principal issues surrounding authenticity (307–8 and n. 2), and suggests reading strategies for when authenticity is in question. Hinds (1993) counters Knox’s (1986) discussion of supposedly spurious passages in *Her.* 12, with a methodology also applicable to other disputed poems.

¹⁹ Knox (1995), 20; 24; 30.

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Italian on individual poems and selections by the former pupils and associates of Gian Biagio Conte (whose foundational work on intertextuality is especially critical to scholarship on the *Heroides*), with further entries in the series in the early 2000s.²⁰ Additionally, a full commentary on *Her.* 1–15, complete with translation, was published in Greek in 2021. However, a review noted that due to copyright restrictions imposed by Greek publishers, the text used was a lightly edited version of the one available online from *The Latin Library*, with no critical apparatus or notes based on other critical editions.²¹

These contributions are significant and have undoubtedly helped to transform the discipline in more recent years, serving as part of the explosion in scholarship on the poems throughout the 1990s and the twenty-first century to date. This thesis cites many of the commentaries throughout discussions of the text, but analysis of their scholarly impact is outside its scope. It focuses instead on how anglophone scholarship in particular has been inhibited by the preconceptions of individual critics, and has in turn influenced subsequent receptions of the poems. Those who have translated and adapted the poems into English who are not themselves multilingual academic classicists (for example Harold Isbell and Clare Pollard) cite exclusively anglophone scholarship in their references, and the impact of this can be traced through their translations. Furthermore, non-academic readers encountering the poems for the first time in English translation who seek further reading (for instance in Isbell and Pollard's bibliographies) are directed primarily to this anglophone scholarship. From a pedagogical perspective, anglophone undergraduate courses in Classics and related disciplines do not generally require students to read modern languages other than English (even if it is encouraged). As a result, university reading lists such as for the University of Oxford's *Literae Humaniores* module on

²⁰ Barchiesi (1992) on 1–3; Casali (1995a) on 9; Rosati (1996a) on 18–19; Bessone (1997) on 12; and more recently Piazzi (2007) on 7, Pestelli (2007) on 8, and Battistella (2010, not for Le Monnier) on 10.

²¹ Vaiopoulos, Michalopoulos and Michalopoulos (2021), reviewed by Antoniadis (2023). The *Latin Library* text is an original edition by David J. Califf: 'Credits', *The Latin Library*, <<https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cred.html>> [accessed 27 March 2023].

Ovid list mainly anglophone scholarship, and early problematic scholarship such as Jacobson's is still included.²²

In tandem with their representation in commentaries, there is a decisive change in the level of attention given to the *Heroides* in other scholarship from the late 1980s onwards. The number of articles on the *Heroides* in all languages listed by *L'Année Philologique* jumps from averaging no more than two in a year from 1950 to 1985, to five or six in a year from 1986 to 1990, to between six and as many as seventeen in a year by 2022. The poems have been the exclusive subject of special editions of journals, including *Renaissance Studies* in 2008 and *Illinois Classical Studies* in 2021. Introducing the latter, Battistella outlines non-anglophone scholarship from the last five years and further forthcoming scholarship.²³ In English, besides entries in larger monographs and edited volumes on Ovid, the *Heroides* have been the exclusive subject of landmark feminist studies, with reference to various critical theories, by Lindheim (2003), Spentzou (2003) and Fulkerson (2005).²⁴ They have also featured in feminist-oriented studies of individual mythological women, including Armstrong (2006) and Rimell (2006). Wiseman notes that these groundbreaking studies have enabled further work focusing on 'the dramas of gender and sexuality and the doubleness of the role of heroine and "Ovidian" presence'.²⁵ French scholarship on the *Heroides* has also studied Ovid's epistolarity (Roussel 2008), as well as the poems' broader innovations of genre and insights into mythical relationships, including Jolivet (2001), Casanova-Robin (2007) – the first French edited volume exclusively on the *Heroides* – and sections on the *Heroides* in Jouteur (2009). In German, interest in the *Heroides*' relationship with

²² Jacobson also still features on the more generalised Oxford Bibliography on Ovid: see K. Sara Mack, 'Ovid', *Oxford Bibliographies*, <<https://www-oxfordbibliographies-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/document/obo-9780195389661/obo-9780195389661-0039.xml>> [accessed 15 September 2023].

²³ Battistella (2021), nn. 4–6.

²⁴ Comparable feminist studies of Ovid's other works came much earlier: e.g. Myerowitz (1985) on the *Ars Amatoria* and Richlin (1992) on sexual violence in the *Metamorphoses*. Second-wave feminism provided a new framework for reading sexual violence in Ovid; third-wave feminism (and its interactions with poststructuralism) explored issues of more literary violence against the heroines.

²⁵ Wiseman (2008b), 299. 296–300 surveys theoretical questions in contemporary *Heroides* scholarship, and how these change according to 'the values ... at stake at the moment of reception'.

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Latin genre conventions is also found in the seminal Spoth (1992). Most recently the poems have begun to be studied through the lens of queer theory, in the work of scholars such as Erin Lam.²⁶

The increase in interest through this time can clearly be linked to the gradual percolation of feminist thought into mainstream classical study throughout the 1980s and 90s, increasing the perceived legitimacy and therefore prominence of explicitly gender-based research in all areas of Classics and related disciplines.²⁷ New studies have continued to burgeon in connection with the development of third- and fourth-wave feminism and ‘post-feminism’, and its intersections with queer studies, particularly prolifically at PhD level.²⁸ Yet all this comes far later in the history of scholarship on the *Heroides* than it does, for instance, on the *Metamorphoses*. Because scholarship on the *Heroides* was dominated by negativity for so long, it still remains on the back foot.

Another far-reaching consequence of the belatedness of attention to the poems in scholarship is that there has historically been no interest among scholars in producing an academically-informed but accessible translation for the mass market. To translate the works of Hesiod, Virgil and Sophocles for the prestigious modern mass market editions of Penguin Classics and Oxford World’s Classics, it was possible to find scholars specialising in those authors who were also sensitive to the requirements of writing engaging English, such as Martin L. West, David West and Oliver Taplin. For the *Heroides*, on the other hand, this appears to have proved a challenge, and the Penguin Classics edition has considerable limitations (see Chapter 4). While work continues on new editions of particularly outdated translations in the Loeb Classical Library series, this has not yet reached Showerman’s heavily archaising 1914 *Heroides* (textually revised by

²⁶ See Lam (forthcoming); Bryn Mawr College (2023).

²⁷ For the state of the discipline by the 1990s: Rabinowitz and Richlin (1993). Compare now e.g. the existence of *Eugesta*, an interdisciplinary journal dedicated to approaches to antiquity informed by gender studies: <<https://eugesta-revue.univ-lille.fr/en/this-journal/>> [accessed 27 September 2023].

²⁸ See e.g. Connelly (2000); Westerhold (2011); Martorana (2021). Importantly, the monographs by Jacobson, Verducci, Greenhut, Spentzou, Lindheim and Fulkerson all started as doctoral theses too.

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Goold in 1977, but with only the necessary corresponding changes to the translation). As a result, prospective retranslators still have limited material from which to work.

The combined absence of a stable text, detailed scholarship and good-quality full commentaries in English cannot historically have made for an attractive project for a prospective translator, whatever their level of expertise. Furthermore, the persistent and pervasive negativity in the existing seminal scholarship paints a still discouraging picture for any would-be retranslator. Even those who have published translations confess to having had early doubts for this reason: Clare Pollard relates that ‘on the dispiriting days I spent in the British Library trawling essays about the *Heroides*, it seemed like I’d made a mistake and was wasting my time on a minor text. Mean-spirited critics repeatedly talked of Ovid’s failure.’²⁹ It is therefore unsurprising that so few recent retranslations have been produced or remain in print.

In comparison, Penguin alone has four English translations of the *Metamorphoses* currently in print: three from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Stephanie McCarter, 2023; David Raeburn, 2004; and Mary M. Innes, 1955), and another historic one (Arthur Golding, first published 1567). That of Innes, the first English *Metamorphoses* translation to be commissioned by Penguin, pre-dated Isbell’s *Heroides* by thirty-five years (although they had rejected a pitch of the latter as early as 1968; see Chapter 4). Furthermore, the late twentieth century was characterised by a new ‘Ovidian boom’ in more creative translations and literary receptions of the *Metamorphoses*, most famously Ted Hughes’ *Tales from Ovid* (1997), but also including the anthology *After Ovid* (Hofmann and Lasdun, 1994) and David R. Slavitt’s verse translation (1994), all published in the space of three years. Thus it is not a simple lack of popular interest in Ovid generally that explains the under-representation of the *Heroides* in translation. On the

²⁹ Pollard (2013), 11.

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contrary, the wealth of versions of the *Metamorphoses* demonstrates how successive artistic movements and generations of readers have continued to find inspiration in Ovid's verse.

Related to the lack of widely available translations is the rarity of receptions of the *Heroides* in other forms. Whereas the *Metamorphoses* dominate surveys of popular twentieth-century Ovidian receptions, there are far fewer engagements with the *Heroides*.³⁰ Undoubtedly the lack of readily available translations must feed into this, in that creative engagement by artists without Latin is predicated on existing versions such as translations having their own canonical status in the receiving culture. Modern responses to the *Metamorphoses*, for instance, are possible because of the pervasive cultural presence of not just the text in translation but of all its well-known existing receptions: from paintings by Titian and episodes in Chaucer and Shakespeare to modern adaptations by Nina MacLaughlin and Kae Tempest and perennially popular productions such as the musical *My Fair Lady* (a reception of the myth of Pygmalion at *Met.* 10.243–97).³¹ By contrast, a work without such lasting cultural currency like the *Heroides* is less able to prompt new responses by the simple fact of being less visible. This can be seen from the contrasting wealth of creative responses to the poems at times when culturally resonant translations have been available. In a time of renewed interest in radical retellings of the *Heroides*, there is consequently a need for studies exploring the reasons for the popularity of these new receptions.

Classical reception studies is regularly concerned with radical – that is, unconventional, innovative or disruptive – receptions of ancient Greek and Roman literature, including and indeed especially by those historically or systemically excluded from traditional paths for studying this literature.³² It is particularly important to explore such receptions' two-directional impact on a text: their ability to break open complex and under-studied ideas expressed in the source texts and to supplement or challenge earlier interpretations, as well as their use of the ancient texts as

³⁰ See e.g. Ziolkowski (2005); Martindale (1988).

³¹ On twenty-first century poets' renewed ability to assume readers' familiarity with Ovid: Annes Brown (2014), 436.

³² See e.g. Cook and Tatum (2010); Hall and Stead (2020).

new ways of interrogating contemporary concerns.³³ Broder writes, ‘a classical reception approach allows us to shift our narrative of classical antiquity from one of eternal verities continually reproduced, to one of enduring objects that continue to speak to different readers in successive generations and centuries in new and newly valuable ways.’³⁴ Translation studies too has generated important work on modern retranslations of ‘classic’ texts, including from Latin and Greek. A considerable range of studies have been undertaken on Ovid’s reception in general with sections on the *Heroides*, although such broad-brush approaches have been problematised by Hexter, who notes the risk of ‘cacophony’ in studies that indiscriminately attempt to trace the entire history of receptions of a single author.³⁵ One strategy he suggests is a focus on the reception history of a particular work, or of an author in particular eras of literary history, and many surveys of this kind also exist on the *Heroides*, especially relating to the Elizabethan and Early Modern periods.³⁶ Particularly rich work with more precise historical focuses has also been done at PhD and Master’s level.³⁷

Nonetheless, there remains a lack of comparative work on contemporary versions that fully incorporates Hexter’s other suggested focus on ‘the horizon(s) of expectations along which [they] emerged’. The translations and receptions of the *Heroides* that are the most radical, in terms of their ability to disrupt ancient or modern assumptions about ideas and identities expressed in the poems, have typically come from writers with non-traditional classical backgrounds.

³³ On classical reception as dialogue: Hardwick (2003), 3–4; Hopkins (2010), 1–36.

³⁴ Broder (2013), 510.

³⁵ Hexter (2006), 27–30. See also Gillespie (2023), theorising a more targeted diachronic approach.

³⁶ See particularly the special issue of *Renaissance Studies* (Wiseman and Thorne 2008) on the *Heroides* in the Renaissance and Restoration. On the *Heroides* in Chaucer: most recently Camargo (2013), although scholarship dates as far back as Winsor (1963). For the *Heroides* in Shakespeare: e.g. Bate (1993), 1–47. For reception of the *Heroides* by the English Augustans: Trickett (1988). Besides Dörrie’s exhaustive study, the most significant general survey of Ovid’s reception is Miller and Newlands (2014). There are several surveys of Ovid in translation: Lyne (2002) (with further bibliography), Gillespie and Cummings (2004), Harrison (2004), and for the mass market Martin (1998).

³⁷ As a sample of the breadth: Brenner (2019) on Middle English collections of ‘good women’; Smith (2016) on receptions by Early Modern English women; Volkhonovych (2014) on Russian translations; Levenson (2012) comparing seventeenth-century English translations; White (2005) on sixteenth-century French responses; and Slater (2008), the most translologically focused of this selection, on ‘voice’ in Showerman, Isbell, Hine (1991), and two online translations. See also Šolcová (2018), a dramaturgical study with a new translation into Czech, and Larres (2021), an intersemiotic translation into music.

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However, no book-length study yet exists on twentieth- and twenty-first-century receptions of the *Heroides* by these writers, or on the circumstances giving rise to these receptions. The work that comes the closest is Fiona Cox's study of contemporary women writers' receptions of Ovid, which includes a section on the *Heroides*.³⁸ Cox demonstrates that exploring how Ovid's works particularly resonate with women writers' concerns is a fruitful line of enquiry. For the *Heroides* in particular, there remains a need for studies that invert this enquiry, investigating how creative contemporary treatments can and do enhance and destabilise readings of Ovid, and how such treatments bring his works to new readerships and audiences. In particular, there has been insufficient attention given to actively tracing specific receptions of the poems against the sociopolitical and scholarly contexts in which they were produced, and how they reflect these contexts. This is important in moving towards an understanding of why the popularity of the poems has waxed and waned so dramatically, in contrast with the more perennial and widespread appeal of works like the *Metamorphoses*.

Hexter describes the need for a complementary body of different approaches to the reception of the Ovidian corpus, each of which should serve as a 'partial evasion' of the risks of an overgeneralised approach that arbitrarily groups unrelated receptions together. This study's own 'partial evasion' responds to his call for historically delimited surveys that link receptions to the contexts in which they emerged, and that seek to identify meaningful points of contact between individual receptions. As Martindale notes, reception histories for individual texts are important to identify 'the factors that may have contributed to our responses to the texts of the past, factors of which we may well be "ignorant"'.³⁹ Thomas also calls for historical surveys of translations in particular, because 'translation ... requires the reader/translator to put into words the actual process of reading', and a survey of how those readings have changed and multiplied

³⁸ Cox (2018), 201–18.

³⁹ Martindale (2006), 5.

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‘in turn brings out complexities both in the text and in its tradition’.⁴⁰ Hall advocates surveys of widely available translations for the more specifically remedial purpose of highlighting where ‘translators have obscured the detailed linguistic construction of gender in ancient texts by insensitive – or downright sexist – translation practice’.⁴¹

Since scholarship on Ovid and particularly his gender politics has in recent years undergone significant revision, and because in recent years there has been increased popular cultural interest in the collection, new studies of contemporary receptions of the *Heroides* are essential. This project therefore investigates the role played by creative English translations and adaptations, especially those of women and non-binary writers, in transforming, renewing and expanding understanding of the *Heroides*, in both scholarship and popular literary culture. It traces translations and adaptations of the poems against the changing background of *Heroides* scholarship. It compares neglected translations and independently produced, rarely studied transcreations and adaptations by women and non-binary writers against older and more mainstream translations to assess how they both supplement and challenge these earlier versions, and how the sense of whole poems can be transformed by such readings. The study also exposes the limitations of scholarship and translations that still have undue influence, and identifies more productive ways of engaging with the texts, and the disruptive, resisting aims that this can serve.

It achieves this through a sustained comparison between four translations and adaptations from the last forty years. First is Florence Verducci, whose verse translations of six of the epistles, complete with facing Latin text, form part of her 1985 monograph *Ovid’s Toyshop of the Heart*, thus making it the first parallel-text edition, albeit a partial one, since Showerman’s 1977 Loeb (with translation dating from 1914). Second is Harold Isbell’s Penguin Classics edition (1990, revised 2004), the most widely commercially available version in the UK. Third is Clare Pollard’s free

⁴⁰ Thomas (2006), 154. For other studies of individual modern translations’ interactions with their literary tradition: Parker and Mathews (2011).

⁴¹ Hall (2008), 330–1.

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verse version, *Ovid's Heroines* (2013), adapted from previous translations and set in a modern, colloquial idiom. Finally, the stage adaptations of *15 Heroines* by fifteen playwrights (2020) are explored as the latest modernisation of the heroines' voices in fierce dialogue with contemporary sociopolitical issues, becoming both retelling and resistance. These total fifty-one versions of the individual heroines, coincidentally inverting the digits of the stage version; hence the *51 Heroines* of the title.

In each case, close readings of the translator's rendering of particular facets of the source text are used to compare what a reader might gain from that version with previous versions. The aim is to gauge how much each retranslation supplements or challenges the versions preceding it, including the source text. A more consciously progressively situated analysis also explores the context in which each translation was produced, and assesses how much the conscious or unconscious biases of a translator in that context impact a reading of the translation in the present day. It is shown that retranslations are not automatically or unequivocally improvements, especially if particular unconscious biases go unchecked. Conversely, it is also clear that new versions that interrogate the text, its translation tradition and their own context in new ways can multiply the possibilities for further transformative readings.

Hall notes the importance of knowing the 'history of the important role played by modern-language translations in the study of the ancient world', and how this can help understanding of a 'time-honoured ... tradition that nonetheless needs to be handled with care'.⁴² A recent survey by Bastin-Hammou and others (2023) has also demonstrated the richness of synchronic surveys of translations of ancient texts from a translation studies viewpoint. The study's comparative approach to versions that sequentially supplement and challenge each other merits a scope confined to these particular versions. A handful of other partial or full translations were published in the same period, but are now out of print, including Miller (1925), Cannon (1972),

⁴² Ibid., 316.

and Hine (1991). Slavitt (2011) remains in print but is not widely commercially available, although Slavitt's interest – as a translator with strong links to academia – is notable as a mark of the reintegration of the *Heroides* into the mainstream canon in the wake of increased scholarly interest. Murgatroyd, Reeves, and Parker (2017) is an educational edition aimed below undergraduate level rather than at mainstream readers. A full translation by A. S. Kline remains available online as part of the extensive open-access Poetry in Translation project (see Chapter 5), and is an important resource in the digital age for non-academic readers seeking quick access to good quality translations.⁴³ However, it neither explicitly challenges earlier versions, nor carries the same implied prestige (whether justified or otherwise) of a print edition.

To date, Isbell and Pollard, together with Showerman's Loeb, are the three English translations remaining in print that are most readily accessible to non-academic readers. However, this study takes Verducci's versions as its starting point because her work provided a fundamental reappraisal of the *Heroides* in both scholarship and translation, challenging prevailing orthodoxies (including the prejudices of the Loeb) and helping to increase the poems' interest to other English retranslators. In comparison with Verducci, the shortcomings of Isbell's Penguin Classic, itself an explicit response to the need for the *Heroides* to be retranslated, demonstrate the importance of continually challenging translations from bygone academic and sociopolitical contexts. Pollard, responding to the versions of Showerman, Cannon and Isbell, openly challenges a tradition of retranslation dominated by men. Finally, the multivocality of *15 Heroines*, in which each epistle was adapted by a different playwright, escapes the limitations of any unifying perspective on the poems.⁴⁴ These particular receptions can all be assessed in light of

⁴³ Kline (2001).

⁴⁴ A recent Italian fiction project that similarly responds to contemporary concerns is Bernardini, and others (2019). Although similar projects also exist for other ancient authors such as Horace (e.g. McClatchy 2002), anthologies of adaptations seem to particularly suit Ovid's style and variety: besides the century-long success of *Ovid's Epistles*, see Hofmann and Lasdun (1994), collecting responses to the *Metamorphoses*, and Terry (2000), to the whole corpus.

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how they supplement and challenge previous readings, and how they aid or hinder understanding of the poems for new times.

Hardwick has outlined the ‘democratic turn’ in translation theory and practice: in studying receptions in poetry and drama, it has become essential to consider ‘the construction of meaning added by the reader and/or spectator, partly in response to signals in the translation itself, partly brought by the reader/spectator as creative subject’.⁴⁵ In other words, the role of the reader is as important in constructing meaning as that of the translator. The readers whose responses this study primarily explores are those without an academic background in ancient Greek and Latin literature, who are coming to the texts in English for the first time. Such putative readers can be receptive to themes in the source texts that resonate with their own contexts. These might include their own experience, awareness of the lived experience of others, and contemporary sociopolitical issues and events.

It is a central tenet of this study that new translations and adaptations renew texts like the *Heroides* for new audiences over time, as Broder described.⁴⁶ More specifically, it is argued that creative, innovative receptions invite readers both to reconsider their relationship with the ancient text or texts, and also to view contemporary issues through an ancient lens. To this end, the thesis responds to issues raised in translation studies regarding the relationship between source texts, translators and (re)translations. It is especially concerned with how the situatedness of a translator affects how they translate, and how different translation strategies influence readers’ engagements with the text.

In any process of translation, as Venuti outlines, neither source text nor receiving culture emerges unchanged: the translated source text ‘comes to support a range of meanings and values

⁴⁵ Hardwick (2008), 342–3. On non-specialist responses to classical texts: e.g. Hardwick and Harrison (2013); Richardson (2019); Hall and Stead (2020) on working-class classicists; McElduff (2006) on Irish receptions.

⁴⁶ See n. 34 above.

that may have little or nothing to do with those it supported in the foreign culture’, and the decisions of the translator ‘may reinforce or revise the understanding and evaluation of the foreign text that currently prevail in the receiving situation, consolidating readerships or forming new ones in the process’.⁴⁷ As a result, for readers without access to the source language, ‘the translation enacts an interpretation that does not simply stand for the foreign text, but comes to be indistinguishable from it and in fact replaces it.’⁴⁸ As is demonstrated with reference to the *Heroides* in this study, these omissions and additions are never simply neutral aesthetic decisions but are informed by each translator’s own situatedness: aspects of their identity, such as education, gender identity, race, social class, political outlook, and so on. The assumptions, biases and prejudices that these aspects can entail all influence their interpretations of texts. The questions raised by the Postclassicisms Collective – ‘how does who you are make visible what you see in antiquity? ... How does what you see make you the scholar who you are?’ apply as much to translation as it does to the study of classical texts themselves.⁴⁹ For readerships without access to the source text, it is as difficult to identify what the translator may have elided or omitted from the source as it is to distinguish whether something has been added.

Venuti and others have advocated a ‘foreignising’ approach to translation, where differences between source and receiving culture are highlighted, rather than ‘domesticated’ in acts of cultural imperialism that reduce or suppress the cultural identity of the source text in favour of fluency in translation.⁵⁰ This domestication is not limited to aesthetic decisions, but can be violently ideological: in nineteenth-century translations of Horace, for instance, the male poet–narrator’s male lover Ligurinus was regendered as a woman, in an ‘act of distortion and misrepresentation’.⁵¹ Conservative biases enacting violence on the text can be seen in far more

⁴⁷ Venuti (2008), 30. For the influence of translated Latin and Greek texts on the English canon: Gillespie (2011).

⁴⁸ Venuti (2008), 49–50.

⁴⁹ On the general significance of situatedness in classical study: Postclassicisms Collective (2020), 144–60.

⁵⁰ Venuti (2017), 13–20.

⁵¹ Thomas (2006), 165.

recent translations and commentaries on the *Heroides* too, especially the Penguin Classic (see Chapter 4). Commentaries and translations such as Isbell's can become complicit in the overdomestication of the *Heroides* to fit conservative male values and a voyeuristic male gaze, rather than sentiments actually expressed in the Latin. Receptions that are not committed to close translation have the potential to render these more directly by exegetically unpicking and highlighting cultural biases.

Yet it is possible to modernise too far: Spivak describes a different form of overdomestication to 'a sort of with-it translatese', without attention to the rhetorical characteristics of individual authors and texts.⁵² Even so, as Balmer notes, a foreignising approach is often particularly challenging in translating ancient texts, where the cultural gulf is incomprehensibly large. Furthermore, there are often political or personal reasons for recasting an ancient text into an explicitly modern context, as Pollard and the writers of *15 Heroines* do. Hardwick describes examples of 'interventionist' receptions of drama where changing the context was essential to a production's underlying cultural or political standpoint.⁵³ In particular, Wilson outlines the difficulties for women translators in translating ideologically unpalatable texts without challenging them.⁵⁴

From an aesthetic point of view, too, foreignised translations of classical texts can be challenging: Thomas describes them as 'often neither possible nor desirable if our eye is on poetry and poetic meanings'.⁵⁵ In negotiating this balance, Lianeri notes that the particularly large cultural and temporal distance 'calls for a less coercive and more ambiguous mode of appropriation' than either nostalgic historicising or a 'pragmatic appropriation' that 'seeks to subsume both the past and the present's relation to it into a fixed horizon of contemporary

⁵² Spivak (1993), 181–3.

⁵³ Hardwick (2000), 63–78.

⁵⁴ Wilson (2019), 281–5.

⁵⁵ Thomas (2006), 156.

meaning'. A translator cannot pretend that 'aspects of antiquity can be merely *used* to advance present aims'. Furthermore, it is actually far more productive to bear in mind that the meaning of a text does not remain fixed through time, but comes to represent different things for different receiving cultures. This allows the reader to remain open to 'the experience of the absence of meaning that characterizes a radical alienation from the past and the process of questioning whether there is something in our heritage that is still meaningful for us.'⁵⁶ Translation Studies has long recognised that retranslations and new adaptations of the same text over time serve to open up new facets of texts for new and existing readerships, but Lianeri emphasises that it is also essential to recognise when a particular interpretation of a text has ceased to be meaningful. A comparative study of successive retranslations of the *Heroides* thus affords understanding of the process of changing meanings and how these issues have been navigated.

However, there are several recent examples of comparative studies of retranslations (of texts in modern languages) that implicitly or explicitly subscribe to the 'retranslation hypothesis', which uncritically assumes a cumulative process of representing the source text increasingly accurately: 'later translations tend to be closer to the source text'.⁵⁷ Outlining the limitations of this approach, Deane-Cox notes that it tends to assume that retranslation occurs simply as a mechanical process of updating linguistically outdated versions, and does not accommodate 'the socio-cultural factors as the driving force behind the shape and substance of retranslation'.⁵⁸

Retranslation is not simply a linear progression of new translations supplanting old to update and elucidate a single original 'meaning'. As with other forms of reception, it is rather a complex process of creating new threads in a web of possible responses to a text in light of changing social contexts, new approaches to social, political and religious issues, and unique personal experiences.

⁵⁶ Lianeri (2006), 152; 143–4.

⁵⁷ Chesterman (2004), 8.

⁵⁸ Deane-Cox (2014), 7.

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There are further complexities regarding texts with a long tradition of retranslation, such as ancient Greek and Latin texts. The process of producing new versions tends to involve a translator consulting previous versions (especially in cases where they themselves do not have the source language). Retranslations of texts often seek to either challenge or supplement previous versions, as well as simply updating their language for new times. Armstrong notes that the reshaping of an often-translated ancient text to new literary norms often explicitly constitutes ‘a literary gauntlet thrown down in public – an open challenge to all comers and a pointed criticism of all goners’. However, they cannot avoid being influenced by the previous translations they consult, even as they seek to depart from them.⁵⁹ Therefore, as Venuti outlines, ‘the values [retranslations] create are ... determined not only by the receptor values which the translator inscribes in the source text, but also by the values inscribed in a previous version.’⁶⁰ For readers who encounter texts only in translation, the translator serves as an authority on the source text that it is difficult to question without access to multiple versions.

This is true even and especially in the case of translations that have become canonical works of literature in their own right. Bassnett identifies the particular difficulties associated with (re)translating texts like the *Odyssey*, where the history of earlier translations, commentaries and editions, as well as how the text has come to be perceived, all have influence: ‘translating an ancient text means therefore being alive to the history of that text in its multiple manifestations through time, whilst seeking to bring out that which is eternally present.’⁶¹

A retranslation of a canonical text, Venuti writes, is ‘premised on an interpretation that differs from that inscribed in a previous version, which is shown to be no longer acceptable because it has come to be judged as insufficient in some sense’, by a standard that is itself the subjective

⁵⁹ Armstrong (2008), 172; 190–7.

⁶⁰ Venuti (2013), 96.

⁶¹ Bassnett (2018), 335–6.

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judgement of the retranslator, relating to their own values.⁶² As Wilson demonstrated in analysing previous translations of the *Odyssey* by Robert Fagles, Richmond Lattimore and Robert Graves, flawed and partial renderings – especially of passages about women – made for distorting readings of the source text that went unchallenged for many decades.⁶³ Haley and McCarter have undertaken similar studies of translations of texts about women of colour and about sexual assault respectively.⁶⁴ Part of producing new versions for new times, it has emerged, can involve stripping out alienating and troubling language that was not simply a now unpalatable aspect of ancient culture (as a reader might assume) but an imposition of more recent prejudices that were not in the source text at all. This makes it particularly important for both readers and scholarship to be aware of retranslations that do expose and challenge the underlying values of earlier versions.

The *Heroides* therefore sit at a curious place within this network of difficulties. As far as both reception and translation studies are concerned, there is in general a necessary emphasis on the importance of moving away from privileging translations that are close renderings of the source text over more creative versions, in light of the issues discussed above regarding a text's meaning changing over time. However, unlike contemporary texts that are translated within the author's own lifetime, ancient texts have been retranslated many times over many centuries, and have accumulated new meanings according to the cultural biases of each translator's time. As a result, particularly in the case of texts concerning systemically oppressed demographic groups, there is a sense in which producing a translation that reclaims and emphasises what is actually in the source text remains a progressive act. McCarter writes that a feminist translator of Greco-Roman works can 'ensure that the translation *accurately* and *clearly* reflects its cultural politics in order to enable critical reading of it', using terms that at first glance seem not to advocate progressive

⁶² Venuti (2013), 97.

⁶³ Wilson (2019), 286–95; see further Chapter 5, 'Updating conventions'.

⁶⁴ Haley (2009), 41–9; McCarter (2019).

translation strategies at all.⁶⁵ In translations of the *Heroides*, producing new translations and adaptations has involved a similar process of challenging not only the source text but the biases of previous English versions. In this, new translations by members of those demographic groups – for instance, women translators reclaiming a male-authored text from a male-dominated translation tradition – join a long history of translation by and for the marginalised, as an act of resistance against that marginalisation.⁶⁶

A comparative study of the most recent retranslations and adaptations is therefore an important strategy for understanding which interpretations of the *Heroides* have historically been overlooked, and can be accessed by differently situated translators. As Deane-Cox notes, one shortcoming of comparative studies of retranslations that assume a process of cumulative improvement is that they preclude any analysis of such a ‘move backwards’.⁶⁷ The present study constitutes one strategy of avoiding this assumption, by situating each reception within its sociopolitical context, in order to identify the likely unconscious biases of each translator that subsequent retranslations and adaptations sought to challenge.

This is not to advocate discarding earlier translations simply because they contain tendentious readings. As translation studies scholars have emphasised, the sense of a source text transforms organically over time as the meanings of words and ideas evolve, and earlier translations can serve as important artefacts attesting to this evolution. Nor is it to recommend an essentialist approach – that only people whose identities align with those in the texts make appropriate translators. Rather, it should be emphasised that translations produced by one small, very privileged demographic group cannot hope to give a survey of many possible interpretations of a very multivalent text in a very multivalent language. If that demographic group, with the cultural assumptions and preconceptions it overlays on a text, is the only arbiter of meaning, then a

⁶⁵ McCarter (2022), 138; emphases in original.

⁶⁶ Chamberlain (1988), 470–2. See also Tymoczko (2014) on the broader potential of translation as activism.

⁶⁷ Deane-Cox (2014), 5.

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reader without the source language cannot recognise how partial and reductive an approach to the text this is. Without access to other versions that reframe the text in different ways, all sorts of engagement with the ancient text become more difficult: giving readers new to these texts reasons to find them compelling; challenging the assumptions of readers who are familiar with them; the academic ability to assess why these texts still have such cultural weight; the simple emotive experience of seeing a relatable feeling or idea expressed by a fictional or mythological character. This study's analysis of the close translations of Verducci and Isbell, comparing them with both previous translations and each other, investigates to what extent this plurality of ideas is achieved. It also explores both translators' observations as paratextual commentaries on their translations.

There are further issues involved when this reframing involves more creative strategies such as modernisation, condensing or exegesis, and changing of cultural references. In recent decades translation studies has also moved decisively away from any notion of translated text as subordinate to source text, and towards recognising that translated texts are creative artefacts in their own right, and this too applies to the retranslation of ancient texts as much as contemporary ones.⁶⁸ Even when producing relatively straightforward, faithful versions of well-known ancient authors' works, Balmer observes, 'classical translation blurs into creative writing as a matter of course.'⁶⁹ This, for her, is an intrinsic part of the process of seeking to renew an ancient text.

One approach to studying creative translations of ancient texts is to borrow from modern translation studies the concept of transcreation. This term is defined by Díaz-Millón and Olvera-Lobo as 'characterized by the intra-/interlingual adaptation or re-interpretation of a message intended to suit a target audience, while conveying the same message, style, tone, images and

⁶⁸ See e.g. Lefevere (2017), 75–83.

⁶⁹ Balmer (2008), 190.

emotions from the source language to the target language, paying special attention to the cultural characteristics of the target audience'. It 'may imply adaptations that move away from the original text to a greater or lesser extent to ... overcome cultural barriers'.⁷⁰ While aspects of this approach do risk the 'domestication' that Venuti has long cautioned against, recent developments in translation studies have urged translators to embrace rather than distance themselves from their role as transcreators, in order to 'authorise' the interventions they have always made and to account for their cultural distance from the source text.⁷¹ Close readings of Pollard's versions are compared with earlier translations in light of the aims of transcreation, to assess how her modern adaptation allows readers to access aspects of the text that closer translations do not.

Another layer of complexity is added when a translation is intersemiotic, adapting a source text in one form (such as written poetry) into another medium (such as a performance of a staged dramatic monologue). Hardwick has written extensively on intersemiotic adaptations of ancient non-dramatic texts for the stage, while Fischer-Lichte has called for studies of these to include the conditions under which such adaptations are produced.⁷² On this basis, passages and aspects of the staging of the adaptations of *15 Heroines* are compared with earlier versions, to explore the resulting dialogue between ancient and modern texts, and to consider why it was at this moment that the *Heroides* regained enough cultural resonance to become a performed text again.⁷³

Yet all this is of no use if readers and audiences are not reminded of what is gained by comparing multiple versions and adaptations, and by thus becoming aware of the gaps between each, and between them and the source text. This is a particular challenge in a cultural context where copyright laws restrict the retranslation of contemporary texts, creating a greater illusion of the

⁷⁰ Díaz-Millón and Olvera-Lobo (2023), 358.

⁷¹ Katan (2016), 375–8.

⁷² Hardwick (2010); Fischer-Lichte (2010).

⁷³ On their possible performance in antiquity, see Chapter 1, n. 1.

possibility of one-to-one correspondences between text and translation. However, Martin notes that a proliferation in available translations of Latin and Greek texts is starting to actively invite readers to compare versions, including less close translations, stemming from an awareness that ‘if a reader enjoys the poetry, the distance from the original can be as provocatively stimulating as engagement with the standard itself.’⁷⁴ In particular he cites Slavitt, who encourages the reader to be aware that ‘a translation is ... an account of a reading’, with pointedly indefinite articles.⁷⁵

In this proliferating marketplace of available translations, including – gradually – of the *Heroides*, there can perhaps be seen a return of sorts to the miscellany translations that proved so popular in seventeenth-century England, where individual editions could contain multiple translations of the same text.⁷⁶ *15 Heroines* itself was consciously designed as a return to the multivocal translations that characterised the Early Modern reception of the *Heroides* (see Chapter 6). An understanding of what different translations have brought to or detracted from the poems will demonstrate that this is far more desirable than declaring any individual translation ‘definitive’.

The thesis finds that creative translations and radical adaptations remain essential in renewing the *Heroides* for successive new readerships as a resisting text, by making the marginalised voices of ancient heroines newly compelling and urgent. Conversely, it finds that mistranslations informed by patriarchal prejudices tend to foreclose these possibilities. It does not aim to suggest that translations and adaptations by women and non-binary writers are inherently different from or better than those by men, but that it is these that have tended to expose, interrogate and undermine the patriarchal discourses dominant in translations by men.

This thesis works towards an understanding of feminist and antiracist readings of the *Heroides*.

The studies by Lindheim, Spentzou and Fulkerson have shown some groundbreaking readings

⁷⁴ Martin (2009), 483.

⁷⁵ Slavitt (1990), xii.

⁷⁶ Particularly successful modern examples include Hofmann and Lasdun (1994) and McClatchy (2002).

made possible when an explicitly feminist scholarly stance is taken. This thesis applies the same approach of foregrounding its own situatedness to a study of the poems' receptions. It regularly uses terms such as 'progressive', 'feminist' and 'antiracist', in reference to adaptations of the *Heroides* and to scholarship, including its own. It is a study of receptions that highlight, develop, problematise and celebrate aspects of the ancient texts to comment critically on contemporary sociopolitical issues. As such, it cannot itself pretend to neutrality or objectivity.⁷⁷ Chapter 2 demonstrates how earlier works on the *Heroides* that presumed their own objectivity merely projected their own biases onto the texts and presented them as fact. Instead, I regard my own situatedness, as a progressive feminist, as integral to the aims of this study. Studies of progressive receptions must acknowledge their own progressiveness, because an unjustifiable assumption of objectivity would limit the study's ability to stress the real-life urgency of progressive interventions in a work's reception.

This applies most obviously in Chapters 5 and 6, concerning the most explicitly feminist and progressive receptions of the *Heroides*, but also in the earlier chapters, which problematise some of the early anglophone scholarship on the texts at the same time as exploring the ways in which these scholars' conflicted attitudes towards the poems opened new pathways for more progressive work. Throughout Chapters 2 and 3, the study contrasts the apparent attitude of the scholar with the response of a 'modern progressive reader'. This too is a subjective term that this study chooses to utilise rather than disregard in favour of the imagined neutrality of a hypothetical or 'ideal' reader.⁷⁸

Zajko problematizes the idea of a monolithic 'feminist approach', asking whether 'a discourse that prioritizes and theorizes gender difference over and above any other persists in having the capacity to generate debate and provide intellectual sustenance' when other axes of difference

⁷⁷ On the inseparability of ideological criticism from aesthetic considerations in reception studies: Goldhill (2010).

⁷⁸ On the problematic assumptions about homogenous 'interpretive communities' in the scholarship of e.g. Stanley Fish: Hopkins (2010), 6.

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demonstrably have equal impact on an individual's intellectual outlook.⁷⁹ This thesis demonstrates that one of the disparities affecting scholarship and translation of the *Heroides* has been gender-based, and identifies instances of it that still have cultural and academic currency and influence. However, as Harloe notes, it is important in such a survey not to merely note the conscious and unconscious biases and exclusivities of past receptions, while taking a self-congratulatory view of contemporary ones and of one's own.⁸⁰ In demonstrating how adaptations such as *15 Heroines* use the source text to interrogate intersecting experiences of oppression, especially those of Black women, it also paves the way for further feminist work on the *Heroides* grounded on a more inclusive theoretical basis than white liberal feminism.⁸¹

The thesis develops the tradition of the three dedicated feminist studies of the *Heroides* by Lindheim, Spentzou and Fulkerson. Fulkerson and Spentzou move away from author-oriented criticism to produce studies of what agency the heroines can reclaim from the author, while Lindheim proposes that Ovid is an anti-feminist poet who collapses individual women into an undifferentiated Woman. All three thus pointedly distance themselves from the tendencies of earlier *Heroides* scholarship to assess the poems only in terms of whether Ovid was successful in his 'aims'. However, they are each limited by their own aim to recover a single voice for each heroine, rather than exploring how different approaches can produce a multiplicity of complementary readings. Harloe cautions that the questioning of stories that still shape contemporary culture should be underpinned by a commitment to 'complicate those stories, widen their cast of characters, and open up debates over their meaning, rather than to close them down'.⁸² Taking the cue from Harloe, this thesis moves beyond these foundational feminist

⁷⁹ Zajko (2008), 202.

⁸⁰ Harloe (2013), 13.

⁸¹ Examples of such approaches are outlined by Haley (1993), 31.

⁸² Harloe (2013), 12.

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studies by exploring how the heroines' voices are complicated and complemented, rather than supplanted, by successive new translations and adaptations.

Relatedly, the thesis serves the feminist objective of re-evaluating the work of neglected women scholars whose output and careers were affected by gender-based prejudice, as exemplified in works such as the historical survey of Wyles and Hall (2016). The exploration of Verducci's scholarship and creative work builds on the early studies of Rabinowitz and Richlin (1993) and of McManus (1997) on women classicists and on feminist classical scholarship in the twentieth century. Collating, rehabilitating and promoting the work of women classicists past and present is the focus of initiatives such as the UK Women's Classical Committee (WCC) and the Diotima project.⁸³ The WCC also spearheads campaigns such as Wikipedia editing slams, inviting members to create pages on Wikipedia featuring women and non-binary scholars in Classics and related disciplines, to help redress the gender imbalance in their online representation.⁸⁴ Further recent pedagogical initiatives are summarised by Leonard and Bond (2019). Studies of individual scholars thus also continue to be critical to furthering this goal.

Finally, this thesis also contributes towards the aim of countering misappropriations of ancient literature for regressive sociopolitical purposes by politicians, public figures and far-right online communities. A mainstream example is the rhetoric of former UK prime minister Boris Johnson, whose rhetorical classical allusions are one example of the tendency de Pourcq identifies particularly among conservative populist politicians to use such allusions to legitimise their own popular image and their agenda.⁸⁵ More marginal but increasingly prevalent are full pseudo-academic far-right movements citing Greek and Roman authors including Ovid as evidence in

⁸³ *Women's Classical Committee*, <<https://wcc-uk.blogs.sas.ac.uk>>; *Diotima*, <<https://diotima-doctafemina.org>> [accessed 12 October 2022].

⁸⁴ 'Women's Classical Committee', *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Women%27s_Classical_Committee> [accessed 12 October 2022].

⁸⁵ de Pourcq (2019), especially 173–8.

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favour of discriminatory ideologies such as the social inferiority of women.⁸⁶ Projects such as Zuckerberg (2018), the *Eidolon* online journal formerly edited by her, and the Pharos project publish rebuttals of these narratives alongside constructive pieces on how scholarship on Greek and Latin literature can achieve more socially progressive ends.⁸⁷ Complementing this defensive work against contentious conservative appropriations of the Ovidian corpus, this thesis aims more constructively to demonstrate how radically progressive creative works have received the *Heroides*. It explores explicitly feminist and antiracist readings and stagings to demonstrate the breadth and depth of progressive and disruptive responses to Ovid. These are embedded in a cultural landscape of resistance and protest, against both systemic oppression and increasingly emboldened hate groups.

Chapter 1 contextualises the project with a historical survey of English translations of the *Heroides*, from the first print translation in 1567 to the present day. It outlines the explosion of creative responses to the poems in Early Modern England, establishing that it is when compelling translations coincide with contemporary cultural concerns that there is most creative interest.

Chapters 2 and 3 chart the reappraisal of the *Heroides* in scholarship in the late twentieth century, and the contributions to this by Florence Verducci's *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart* (1985). Chapter 2 outlines the scholarship to which Verducci responded, and demonstrates that Verducci's translations were creative resisting receptions of the *Heroides* that demonstrated her scholarly viewpoint. Chapter 3 critically considers aspects of Verducci's work that are more challenging for a modern reader, and demonstrates that although some of her readings now read as regressive, her disruption of previous criticism was an essential turning-point, and her translations themselves still offer modern readers new ways to interrogate depictions of the heroines.

⁸⁶ Zuckerberg (2018), 90–5.

⁸⁷ *Eidolon*, <<https://eidolon.pub>>; *Pharos*, <<https://pharos.vassarspaces.net>> [accessed 12 October 2022].

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Chapter 4 assesses the Penguin Classics edition, Harold Isbell's *Heroides* (1990, revised 2004). It especially demonstrates how the translator's unexamined prejudices surrounding gender and morality contribute to oversimplification and misrepresentation of both heroines and text. While it may have fulfilled the aims of Penguin Classics as conceived at the time, it is no longer fit for purpose as the means of most non-specialist readers' access to a text that should challenge and resist, not reinforce regressive readings.

Chapter 5 focuses on the poet Clare Pollard's modernised verse versions of the single *Heroides* (*Ovid's Heroines*, 2013) as a creative adaptation or 'transcreation' rather than a conventional translation. It examines Pollard's reclamation of the heroines from a still predominantly masculine tradition of translation, in particular comparing the interpretative possibilities opened up by her versions against the limitations of Isbell's. It also shows the significance of Pollard adapting her text into a performed piece, restoring her heroines to the status of performers of their own stories.

Chapter 6 explores the 2020 Jermyn Street Theatre production *15 Heroines*, and the consequences for heroines who have been visually depicted so often being made newly visible onstage in ways that spoke to contemporary sociopolitical concerns. The chapter demonstrates that inviting writers to recover the heroines' voices in whatever ways were compelling to them generated groundbreaking intersemiotic transcreations that consciously disrupted viewers' preconceptions about well-known mythological figures, about contemporary issues, and about the fundamental reconsiderations of our modern relationship with ancient literature.

The thesis concludes overall that contemporary translations and adaptations have contributed to the *Heroides* once again becoming a text that is performed as well as read, in ways that both make them urgently culturally relevant and also demonstrate that audiences turn to these stories at culturally relevant moments. They serve as receptions in the strongest sense, enabling a fully two-directional dialogue between ancient and modern, and between different versions. Giving them

new voices invites audiences to reassess their views of the ancient heroines, and at the same time the heroines' voices add new facets to ongoing conversations about contemporary concerns. As a further demonstration of what reappraisals of the poems are made possible by different translation decisions, I offer my own versions of two of the epistles, with commentary.

Notes on methodology

This thesis discusses the single *Heroides* only, because three of the four versions examined adapt only those poems. Aside from Isbell's translation, there have been very few anglophone receptions of the double *Heroides*, and the scholarship on these poems is more limited.

It assumes Ovidian authorship for all single and double epistles. Their authenticity was assumed by Verducci; Jacobson writes on all of the single *Heroides* and considers the double epistles genuine too. Pollard and *15 Heroines* also offer versions of all fifteen single epistles. This study is concerned primarily with their translation decisions, not with their positions on textual criticism.

In quoting from different *Heroides* translations and commentaries, it is not possible to refer to a single Latin text. Unless otherwise specified, in quoting Latin passages when discussing a translator's choices, I refer to the Latin text used by that translator. Verducci's was the unrevised text of Showerman (1914), while Isbell used both Dörrie (1971) and Showerman's revised text (1977). Pollard, not having Latin, referred to the translations of Showerman, Isbell and Cannon (1971), but also checked the dictionary definitions of Latin words from Showerman's text. In quoting commentaries, for ease of reference, I refer to the text offered by that commentator.

Abbreviations follow the conventions of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edition.

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1. Heroines Through the Ages

This chapter summarises the history of the translation and performance of the *Heroides* in English. Several passages of Ovid have been taken to suggest that the collection was intended for, or at least suited to, performance in Ovid's own time.¹ The chapter demonstrates that its subsequent periods of popularity are also characterised by an awareness of its suitability for performance, and of the increased possibility of performance engendered by the availability of a range of translations. In particular, it highlights examples of historic translations that identify the work's particular interest to, and suitability for performance by, women. It also demonstrates that in periods when the work is popular, it has inspired considerable quantities of original creative work. As other scholars have noted, the *Heroides* in English had their peak of popularity in Early Modern England, and the chapter explores some factors influencing this. The contemporary resurgence of interest in the poems follows a long intervening period of critical and creative neglect (longer even than that experienced by Ovid's other works; see Introduction).

This preliminary study serves two purposes. Firstly, its outline of the widespread popularity of the *Heroides* serves as a contrast to the negative critical responses outlined in Chapter 2 that contributed to the dearth of new creative responses throughout the twentieth century. Secondly, it demonstrates a historical precedent for the kinds of transformative creative responses discussed in later chapters. The outpouring of creative activity in the Early Modern period that can be directly or indirectly linked to the *Heroides* is an example of the impact of the availability of engaging translations. As later chapters demonstrate, translations from a multitude of backgrounds can indicate the breadth of possible interpretations of a text. The evidence from this period for people from a wide range of backgrounds, including women, being inspired to

¹ The seminal argument for the *Heroides* as a new performance genre is Cunningham (1949), with a more circumspect discussion by Curley (2013), 59–94. See also Spoth (1992), 206–14.

translate or adapt the *Heroides*, as well as to read and perform the translations of others, serves as one example of this, in stark contrast with later times.

Chronology of translations

The need for diachronic surveys of translations of ancient texts was noted in the Introduction. In the case of the *Heroides*, this knowledge is particularly important for beginning to understand the factors influencing the poems' changing popularity in English over time. An anthology tracing the history of the English translation of Ovid in general has been curated by Martin (1998), but as he notes elsewhere, it is also instructive to explore the translators' individual aims and their conceptions of their role – even if, as Balmer observes, translators' statements of intent are themselves rarely to be taken at face value.² More purely factual chronologies of the translation of each of Ovid's works have been published by Gillespie and Cummings (2004) and by the contributors on Ovid to the *Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, to both of which this study is indebted.³ The intention of outlining another chronology here is to trace the changing attitudes to creative approaches to translation and to readerships that are noticeable in *Heroides* translations in particular, and to identify what made the *Heroides* especially popular in certain periods. Historical comparisons of these attitudes and trends between different Ovidian works, though essential, are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Horowitz notes that Ovid was among the poets most frequently translated into English in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This was not least due to the popularity of miscellany translations (collections of poems translated by several hands) published by the bookseller Jacob Tonson, whose contributors constitute 'a "Who's Who" of the period's best-

² Martin (2009), 470–1. On translator statements: Balmer (2013b), 3–56.

³ Scodel (2010), 220–5, on 1550–1660; Tissol (2005) on 1660–1790; Talbot (2006), 195, on 1790–1900.

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known authors'. Yet no one major author laid claim to Ovid by translating the whole corpus, and so he 'was seen as free game by translators of more modest talent' too.⁴

English translations of the *Heroides* are no exception to this trend. Their most prolific period by far was the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, and one of the most popular editions was a miscellany translation.⁵ The earliest known English *Heroides* translation of all is a manuscript of *Her.* 17 by Thomas Chaloner, dated to around 1560. According to Scodel's chronology, the first published translation of all the single and double epistles (together with translations of the medieval Sabinus's replies to *Her.* 1, 2 and 5) is George Turberville's *The Heroicall Epistles* in 1567, making it the first of Ovid's amatory works to be published in English translation, and 'the standard English edition for seventy years'.⁶ Stapleton argues that Turberville's attention to sound indicates an intention for his poems to be read aloud as performed soliloquies.⁷ This was the same year as Arthur Golding's more celebrated and influential translation of the *Metamorphoses*, which Martin identifies as initiating a widespread Ovidian influence on the work of the most prominent writers of the day, including John Dryden.⁸

It can be seen that published translations of the *Heroides* had a similar influence of their own. The trend of writers being inspired to produce their own English responses to the heroines, or original poems modelled on the collection, goes as far back as the period of the translations themselves. This itself continues a tradition that dates to Ovid's own time in the responses of Sabinus (see Introduction). One example is the Elizabethan poet Isabella Whitney, whose collection of verse letters (*The Copy of a Letter ... to her Unconstant Lover*), published in the same year as Turberville's translation, is evidently modelled on the *Heroides* and makes references to

⁴ Horowitz (2014), 355.

⁵ In Europe it is earlier still. For the Early Modern French reception of the *Heroides*: White (2004); and for medieval and Renaissance Spanish, French and Italian responses: Brownlee (1990) and Hagedorn (2004).

⁶ Scodel (2010), 221–2.

⁷ Stapleton (2008), 497.

⁸ Martin (2009), 474–7. See also Oakley-Brown (2006) on the social and political significance of Early Modern English translations and adaptations of the *Metamorphoses*.

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several of the addressees.⁹ Another is Michael Drayton, whose original poems *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (also 1597) are self-professedly ‘written in imitation of the stile and manner of Ovid’s Epistles’, imagining letters between men and women from English history, and combining the Ovidian epistolary style with the Elizabethan interest in female complaint.¹⁰ Lyne explores more broadly the Elizabethan trend of creative responses inspired by the *Heroides*, and also analyses the translation of *Her. 7* by an anonymous woman (who may or may not have been Whitney) appended to a published translation of the *Remedia Amoris* in 1600, together with an original reply from Aeneas.¹¹ What can be noticed in this period is the way translations are regularly intertwined with more creative adaptations and original work.¹²

A wave of partial and complete translations followed in the early part of the seventeenth century. Thomas Heywood included a translation of *Her. 17* (Helen to Paris) in his *Troia Britanica* (1609), in another example of translation being included in an original work. Wye Saltonstall (1636) and John Sherburne (1639) both published complete *Heroides* translations entitled *Ovids Heroicall Epistles*, and Saltonstall’s was particularly successful, running to six editions to 1671.¹³ Robert Stapylton appended his version of *Her. 18* and *19* to his translation of Musaeus Grammaticus’ *Hero and Leander* (1647), in an early example of a translator inviting comparison between two different versions of the same tale. These translations explicitly target a female readership for the first time: Saltonstall and Stapylton indicate that they intend their work to be read by women, including aloud (see ‘Early Modern Ovid’ below). All of these have also been identified as having influenced Dryden’s own *Heroides* translations.¹⁴

⁹ See Clarke (2001), 194–5 on Whitney’s use of Turberville; Rigolot (2012) on the French parallel of Louise Labé.

¹⁰ On Drayton’s creative innovations of the genre: Barnes (2013), 59–84.

¹¹ Lyne (2004), especially 154–64; disputed by Scodel (2010), 221.

¹² On Restoration miscellanies as representative of this mixing of genres and registers: Benedict (1996), 70–108.

¹³ Andreadis (2008), 405.

¹⁴ Hopkins (1977).

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The most overwhelmingly successful *Heroides* translation of this period was *Ovid's Epistles*, a miscellany edition of translations 'by several hands', published in 1680 by Tonson with a preface by Dryden, in which he famously laid out his tripartite model of translation as 'metaphrase', 'paraphrase' or 'imitation',¹⁵ as well as emphasising the collection's suitability for women. As Gillespie's analysis of the Dryden–Tonson partnership shows, many of the contributors were also playwrights, including Nahum Tate, Thomas Otway and Aphra Behn, one of the first professional women playwrights (and also a prolific author of epistolary novels).¹⁶ Many of the translations, including Dryden's own, treat the text with considerable licence, embroidering with their own explications of aspects that the Latin had left implied. In these, Reynolds identifies links in creative practice between translation and adaptation for the stage: 'a trace of the same liberty, together with the need to create a hearable voice ... hermetic moments in the Latin needed to be made performable in the theatre of a reader's imagination'.¹⁷ There is also evidence for widespread recognition of the poems' suitability for performance (see 'Early Modern Ovid'). Behn's translation in particular was labelled an 'imitation only', as Behn supposedly 'understood not Latine' but worked from previous translations.¹⁸ In doing so, she incorporated politically-charged allusions to current events, and erotically-charged descriptions of the lovers' relationship, both of which reflected the interests of her plays and novels. Heavey notes that Behn's version is particularly significant for its 'recognition that Ovidian myth can be made to speak to contemporary politics'. In fact, in editions from 1681 onwards Behn's free adaptation is placed alongside a much closer but more pedestrian version by John Cooper. Whereas Wiseman suggests this addition may have been a response to negative criticism of Behn's version, Heavey proposes that it invited the reader to compare the relative merits of the two: 'even a reader who did not know their Ovid well would be able to compare the two translations, and appreciate the

¹⁵ For Dryden's influence on translation theories, see Macintosh (2012).

¹⁶ Gillespie (1988), 12.

¹⁷ Reynolds (2011), 96.

¹⁸ Dryden (1956), 119. On Behn's complex relationship with her own classical education: Klause (2019).

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extensive, and politically weighted, alterations that Behn had chosen to make.¹⁹ Thus even in the publication of a full translation, the period's relationship with the activity is such that more daringly creative approaches were included.

The collection ran to dozens of editions throughout the rest of the century and the next, with the introduction to an edition issued in 1795 (in Samuel Garth's name, although published after his death) remarking on 'the public having encouraged so many editions of Ovid's Epistles'.²⁰

Subsequent editions incorporated new versions of many epistles along the way, by leading writers including Alexander Pope (in the eighth edition published in 1712). The cultural significance of this collection, both as a translation in its own right and for its influence on the development of English literature, is explored further below.

The popularity of the collection is also evidenced by the immediate and numerous parodies it inspired. In an era where travestied translations of ancient texts were particularly popular, the *Heroides* had already come in for parody in *Ovidius exulans*, published under the pseudonym of Naso Scarronomimus (1673). However, two publications in 1680, by Alexander Radcliffe (*Ovid Travestie*) and Matthew Stevenson (*The Wits Paraphras'd*), specifically travestied the lofty style of the Dryden–Tonson edition with particularly earthy versions. These versions themselves sought to compete with one another and were popular in their own right.²¹ As Dentith emphasises in his exploration of the integral role of intertextuality in parody, 'one of the features of parody is that it depends for its effect upon recognition of the parodied original.'²² The parodies' popularity indicates their success in recalling a text that was itself culturally familiar.²³

¹⁹ Wiseman (2008a), 422; Heavey (2014), 304, 315, on Behn's translation as a commentary on the Exclusion Crisis.

²⁰ Garth (1795), sig. Aii^r. For a full chronology of editions: Andreadis (2008), 403–5 and Appendix.

²¹ Leavitt (1919), 115–16. Leavitt surveys Early Modern travesties of Roman and Greek texts. See also Dentith (2000), 96–109, on parodies by the eighteenth-century literary coterie known as the Scriblerians, including Pope.

²² Dentith (2000), 39. For his full approach: 1–38.

²³ On the particular popularity of classical theatrical burlesque, which peaked in Britain in the nineteenth century – long after the appeal of the *Heroides* had faded – see Hall and Macintosh (2005), 350–90.

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Wiseman proposes that an Early Modern idea linking the heroines' 'immodesty' to Ovid's own gave rise to responses to the Dryden–Tonson edition that explicitly exposed and caricatured what *Ovid's Epistles* had sought to suppress (see 'Early Modern Ovid' below).²⁴ Heavey develops the argument further: while the aims of parody-writers were not necessarily as lofty as Dryden's, 'they take Dryden's assertion, that there is more than one way to render the classics English, to its logical conclusion, making Ovid's heroes and heroines speak in a determinedly vernacular English'.²⁵ It can be seen that not only does the presence and frequency of these parodies indicate the popularity of the work parodied, but that they serve as another example of the *Heroides* inspiring daring and innovative original creative work. Where the Alexandrian aims of the Ovidian work were to dethrone idealised mythological heroines, Early Modern parodies achieved the same thing for a contemporary readership, turning figures of (re)romanticised chastity into street bawds.

Besides the continuing new contributions to *Ovid's Epistles* by well-known writers, a further wave of translations by mainly minor poets and writers followed throughout the rest of the century and into the next.²⁶ In particular, a handful of unpublished manuscript translations dating from around the first publication of *Ovid's Epistles* can be seen as responses to the published work. First, the otherwise unknown R. Herbert's dedication of his *Her.* 10 to Lady Deincourt (also in 1680) indicates that 'it was rendered ... some time before the other Poems were published', but he only decided to present it 'when ... I understood your Ladyship was much pleas'd with Ovid's Epistles, done into English, by the Ingenious of both Sexes'.²⁷ Herbert's is one of a number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscript *Heroides* translations anthologised by Gillespie that appear to respond to the Dryden–Tonson miscellany. As Gillespie notes, manuscript translations are often a more accurate indicator of readers' interests than published

²⁴ Wiseman (2008a), 423–7.

²⁵ Heavey (2009), para. 31.

²⁶ Gillespie and Cummings (2004), 210–13.

²⁷ Bod. MS Rawl. poet. 146, fols. 30^r–35^r.

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works of the time, particularly in the case of Ovid: ‘the breadth and diversity of his readership suggests that manuscript translations may be particularly revealing as to Ovid’s wider reception history’.²⁸ In the case of the *Heroides*, manuscript translations corroborate this suggestion.

One other manuscript translation is by a woman, the courtier, poet and painter Anne Killigrew. A translation of parts of *Her.* 1.1–80 (Penelope to Ulysses), it was one of a number of ‘Fragments ... found among her Papers’, included in a collection of her poems published posthumously by her father in 1685.²⁹ Although any inspiration is not noted, from her family’s close relationship with Dryden, it seems very likely that she would have been aware of *Ovid’s Epistles*. Her father was known as a classical translator, but although classical themes recur throughout her poetry, it is not known whether Killigrew herself learned Latin or adapted from versions such as *Ovid’s Epistles*. In any case, Ezell characterises Killigrew as a poet who sought to distance herself from the libertinism of the courts in which she served. That she was particularly drawn to produce a version of the opening of Penelope’s epistle is consistent with these values: ‘for Killigrew the classics were not only stories about lustful gods and their hapless females, but also ... about real wives and queens’.³⁰ Killigrew’s somewhat free translation serves as another example of how translations of Ovid such as *Ovid’s Epistles* not only interacted with original work, but resonated strongly enough with contemporary concerns to encourage further adaptations that used the ancient text to express new ideas.

Apart from the contributors to *Ovid’s Epistles*, the lack of major literary names translating the poems reflects the general decline in translations throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, as Ovid gradually fell out of favour in English poetry. No translations of the *Heroides* by women were published at all in the eighteenth century, although the work of other women who translated or adapted Ovid in this period, such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Phillis Wheatley,

²⁸ Gillespie (2018), 333–56, with introduction and notes; 329.

²⁹ Killigrew (2013), 93.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2–3; 36.

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demonstrates that this was not for want of women's interest in Ovid generally.³¹ Backscheider suggests that among women poets there was a conscious move away from 'the miserable, deserted women of Ovid's *Heroides*' towards the happier women of Tibullus.³² Lyne offers other reasons for Ovid's lack of appeal to literary tastes between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries: 'he becomes a writer still much read in schools, and one much recalled as a source of stories, but in comparison with Virgil he is judged lacking in moral or artistic seriousness'.³³ This is evident in the increasingly educational focus of translations that did appear, reflecting far greater rates of literacy, against Ovid's decline in status as a poet of literary interest. Writing in a preface to the second edition of his full translation in 1753 (first edition 1746), Joseph Davidson notes that 'I write chiefly for those who still stand in Need of Instruction'.³⁴ The title page designates it 'for the Use of Schools as well as of Private Gentlemen', and the preface genders the reader as 'he', where earlier translations had explicitly included women in their anticipated readership. Versions by Stephen Barrett in 1759 and Nathan Bailey in 1777 were also intended for use in schools.

No major nineteenth-century English author translated Ovid. This is despite the contemporaneous rise of the English dramatic monologue, typified by poets such as the Brownings and Tennyson, which could have found rich inspiration in translating the *Heroides*.³⁵ Hopkins suggests that in this period in particular it was the Victorian Romantic demands for sincerity and originality that 'caused [Ovid's] highly literary and self-conscious artistry to fall out of favour'.³⁶ As Chapter 2 demonstrates, academics of the period had similar objections (especially Palmer, the only critic to publish a commentary on the whole collection).

³¹ Barbauld's 'Ovid to his Wife' mixes lines translated from the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto* with 'a fantasia on themes from the *Tristia*': Barbauld (2020), 115. On Wheatley's imitation of Ovid: Cook and Tatum (2010), 35–47; contrasted with earlier men's translations: Walters (2007), 41–7.

³² Backscheider (2008), xxv.

³³ Lyne (2002), 258.

³⁴ Davidson (1753), vii–viii.

³⁵ Tennyson's dramatic monologue 'Oenone' (Tennyson (2014), 35–49) reworks *Her.* 5, but is not a translation.

³⁶ Hopkins (2000), 520.

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Nonetheless, it also reflects a general lack of interest in translating classical poetry among major English poets in this period. In the case of Ovid, Gillespie and Cummings's bibliography shows that it falls to amateurs, scholars and lesser-known poets to fill the gap, and Talbot notes that 'almost all the translators attracted to Ovid in the period are either very minor figures or otherwise unknown to literary history.'³⁷

Several translations of the *Heroides* were published during this period by minor poets (if manuscript translations from this period exist, they have not been discovered). Following two translations of selections before 1810, versions of the full collection began to resurrect the idea of female readership. The first, in 1842, was by Emma Garland, about whom almost nothing is known, despite the striking fact that she was the first woman to publish a complete English translation of both the single and double *Heroides*. Garland's collection also includes translations from other Latin poets, alongside her own poems, several of which are on classical themes. Thus Garland also resurrects the practice of combining translations of the *Heroides* with original creative work, although not in the earlier tradition of responses to the Latin poems. Besides anticipating that her translation will be read by women, Garland admits to 'paraphrasing', and justifies it as benefiting the reader because of 'the amazing difference between the genius of Ovid's tongue and her's [sic]; the hasty, startling transitions of his fancy; and, moreover, the essential alteration in the taste of his day and that of his translator'.³⁸

Martin, in one of the only academic treatments of Garland's work, identifies her as a bridge between the foundational work of early translators such as Aphra Behn and twentieth- and twenty-first-century women translators of Ovid.³⁹ Martin also includes John Jump's 1857 translation of the single and double *Heroides* in his analysis, noting that Jump's targeting of a readership that goes beyond 'the Cantab and the Oxonian' and also includes 'my fair

³⁷ Gillespie and Cummings (2004), 211–15; Talbot (2006), 195.

³⁸ Garland (1842), vi.

³⁹ Martin (2009), 479.

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countrywomen' reads as both quaint and patronising, centuries after the first translations that offered women (and Latinless readers collectively) access to the poems. However, it remains notable for two reasons. Firstly, after Garland, it was only the second English translation explicitly to do so since the miscellany translations of the Early Modern period. Secondly, Jump describes at considerable length his innovative creation of a metre that 'seems peculiarly adapted to epistolary poetry' because it 'reads more like measured prose ... than any measure of rhymes that you have met with' (alternating iambic pentameters and trimeters).⁴⁰ Whatever his success, both Jump and Garland represent a return to a more unapologetically creative approach to the translation of the *Heroides*.

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, translating Ovid into English has come gradually back into fashion again, especially following the renewal of interest in anglophone scholarship from the 1940s onwards. While the *Heroides* are far from regaining the supreme position they held from the late sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries, they have nonetheless experienced a resurgence. It came later than that of other Ovidian works at least partly because its reappraisal in scholarship came much later, in an example of the influence of feminist scholarship on the reassessment of historically neglected works (see Chapter 2). Translations of the *Heroides* in this period are marked both by a return to the interest of established literary figures, and by Classics scholars (both inside and outside academic institutions) incorporating their own creative translations into their academic work on the poems. Translations by women are also more common than at any other time.

The first, and most significant for access to the poems for students and Latinless readers in particular, came with the 1914 publication of Showerman's Loeb Classical Library edition, printed together with the *Amores*. Contrary to earlier *Heroides* translators, who readily admitted to having deviated somewhat (however wildly in practice) from the strict sense of the Latin in the

⁴⁰ Jump (1857), ii; x; iii–v.

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interests of producing elegant English verse, Showerman offers no translator statement of any kind, although offering opinions on the quality of the Latin poems in his introduction. This is perhaps because the professed aim of the Loeb Classical Library as a whole was ‘to make the beauty and learning, the philosophy and wit of the great writers of ancient Greece and Rome once more accessible by means of translations that are in themselves real pieces of literature’, in a time when knowledge of the source languages was on the decline.⁴¹ However, as Lawton demonstrates, this general aim concealed various ways in which deliberate mistranslation, excision, and non- and retranslation actually prevented access to the meaning of passages of different texts across the series.⁴² Specific examples of passages of Showerman’s translation where this becomes problematic are discussed in later chapters.

A translation of *Her.* 15 by Marion Mills Miller was then published in 1925. The undeniably melodramatic translation is nonetheless of interest because it forms part of a historical and literary study of Sappho, *The Songs of Sappho*. This makes it a further example of the developing trend of interlacing translations of the *Heroides* not with original responses or other creative writing, but with academic work on the poems. It is also the first of two examples of this being done in the twentieth century by a woman.

The second, much more substantial example of this was published in 1985: Florence Verducci’s *Ovid’s Toyshop of the Heart*, which includes translations of the six poems discussed. Verducci states that the translations ‘were not designed as closely literal versions of the *Heroides* and do not therefore pretend to strict accuracy in that respect’, rather seeking to reproduce ‘the fugitive, varying *tone* of Ovid’s epistles’.⁴³ What she also achieves is the first facing-text English translation of (some of) the poems written in immediate, contemporary language, updating the dense and often puritanical archaisms of Showerman. The result is an implicit reappraisal of both

⁴¹ Loeb Classical Library (2023).

⁴² Lawton (2012), including on Showerman’s omission of *Amores* 3.7: 183.

⁴³ Verducci (1985), x.

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Showerman's translation and earlier *Heroides* scholarship, and the underlying assumptions and prejudices that governed them. Furthermore, as a translation offered within an academic work used by undergraduates, this version bridges the gap between literary translations and those used for educational purposes, with far greater lexical and emotional directness than the purported accessibility of the Loeb series. It is also one example of a by then established tendency for academics, including women, to embed their own creative translations in their academic works, or to be respected published translators alongside their academic work.⁴⁴ Being both a creative translator and an academic, Verducci thus serves as another example of a writer whose work on the *Heroides* encourages them to experiment creatively with form and language. What further sets Verducci apart, however, is the challenge her scholarship and translations issue to academic orthodoxies about the poems and the heroines. As Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate, her work was a foundational step towards the feminist work on the *Heroides* in the early 2000s that has helped to rehabilitate the poems in scholarship, which in turn has contributed to their gaining a higher popular profile outside academia.

Verducci's monograph was bookended by the publication of two *Heroides* translations for the mass market, by Harold Cannon (1972) in Britain and Daryl Hine (1991) in the United States. While at the time both served as examples of new translations becoming available to the general public for the first time in over a century, neither is any longer in print or readily available. Both used heroic couplets (rhymed iambic pentameters), Hine with rather more success for a modern audience as he added 'the salt of neologism and the sauce of slang' and borrowed from popular culture to give the heroines realistic (and arguably more Ovidian) voices.⁴⁵ Yet heroic couplets written in modern English can too easily come across as artificially mannered or old-fashioned, and while rhyme does often work well for humour, it can be less effective for the heroines' more sincere emotions. Furthermore, adhering to a strict metrical scheme can often result in

⁴⁴ Other Ovidian examples include Myerowitz (1985) and Nagle (1995).

⁴⁵ Hine (1991), xiii.

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oversimplification to the point of facileness. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, Cannon and Hine's translations represent the *Heroides*' gradual return to popular cultural awareness.

A particularly significant example of this (and one still in circulation) is Harold Isbell's verse translation of all the single and double epistles. Published by Penguin (1990, revised 2004), this is one of the most readily available anglophone versions to modern non-classicist readers, and represents the significant milestone of the *Heroides*'s return to the mainstream anglophone literary canon for the first time in several centuries. Isbell writes that his aim was 'an English translation that captured at least some of the form as well as as much of the substance as possible', and expressed hopes that it would inspire further interest in and study of the poems.⁴⁶ However, in many places his readings of the 'substance' are affected by underlying prejudices (as discussed in Chapter 4). Furthermore, Isbell occasionally inserts lines completely of his own invention, in a manner more suited to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century translations than one informed by the modern commitment of Penguin Classics to democratise access to classical texts through reliable translations, as laid out by E. V. Rieu in founding the series (see Chapter 4). In a literary environment where other mass-market versions are no longer readily commercially available to compare it against, Isbell's version thus retains the potential to influence ideas about the text and the heroines in unhelpful ways. Paradoxically, Isbell's creative intervention made a significant contribution to the accessibility of the *Heroides* for new readers, and yet – by reading the poems through a conservative patriarchally-prejudiced lens – it also had the potential to be counterproductive for arousing new interest, whether creative or academic.

Nonetheless, several translations published in the twenty-first century have taken a far more radically creative approach. Firstly, David Slavitt's versions, published in 2011 alongside the *Amores* and *Remedia Amoris*, marked his return to Ovid after translating the exilic poetry in 1989 and the *Metamorphoses* in 1994. As with Slavitt's other translations of Ovid, no mass-market

⁴⁶ Isbell (2004), xix.

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edition exists; they are all published by university presses, with small and expensive print runs and little to no presence on shelves in commercial bookshops. However, Slavitt's modern and somewhat free translation is as significant a milestone in the translation of the *Heroides* as their induction into Penguin Classics, since he, unlike the comparatively obscure Isbell, is a distinguished and prolific author and poet as well as translator.⁴⁷ His translation marks a renewal of interest in the poems by professional creative practitioners after several centuries of neglect.

In 2013 Bloodaxe Books, the independent Newcastle-based poetry publisher, published Clare Pollard's verse translation of the *Heroides*, entitled *Ovid's Heroines*. This was the first woman's translation since the nineteenth century to be published as a literary work in its own right, rather than part of an academic work. Pollard, a professional poet who does not read Latin, consulted other translations in order to complete her versions (as Aphra Behn may have done three centuries earlier), including Isbell's. Like Verducci before her, Pollard goes to great lengths to capture the variety of the women's voices: they are described in the blurb as 'brave, bitchy, sexy, suicidal, horrifying, heartbreaking and surprisingly modern'.⁴⁸ Like the seventeenth-century readers of *Ovid's Epistles*, Pollard also perceived the poems' appropriateness for performance, and toured 'lightly rehearsed readings' of several of the poems around the UK. In Pollard's own analysis of her translations, and reviews of the collection and her performances, the poems' particular interest to women is re-emphasised for the first time in almost two centuries.

Most recently at the time of writing, the single *Heroides* were adapted for the stage in 2020 in the Jermyn Street Theatre production *15 Heroines*. Although, with the exception of Natalie Haynes' *Knew I Should Have* (Hypsipyle), the monologues were loose adaptations rather than translations, they can be seen as a culmination of increasing cultural awareness of the *Heroides* for several reasons. Firstly, they mark a more complete return to the poems' ancient and Early Modern

⁴⁷ 'David R. Slavitt', *Academy of American Poets*, <<https://poets.org/poet/david-r-slavitt>> [accessed 5 July 2023].

⁴⁸ Pollard (2013), back cover.

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performance context, after Pollard's foundational step. Secondly, like Behn's 1680 'imitation', the adaptations creatively reshape the work to express contemporary political concerns, in this case violence against women and people of colour. The idea of a committee of creatives each adapting a different epistle to create a collection without one single voice also consciously recalls the process of creating the Dryden–Tonson miscellany edition. The *15 Heroines* production thus represents the latest milestone in the history of the anglophone reception of the *Heroides*.

Early Modern Ovid

Considerable scholarly attention has been paid to the reception of the *Heroides* in Early Modern England. Introducing the special issue of *Renaissance Studies* on this topic, Wiseman notes that 'the reader encountering early modern versions of, and responses to, the poems needs to engage with the way the poems were understood at that time'.⁴⁹ The Dryden–Tonson *Ovid's Epistles* was published at a time when ancient Greek and Roman literature, and Ovid's works especially, were exerting enormous influence over English literature, including the rise of the novel. As noted above, they had been influential prior to this period too.⁵⁰ However, Horowitz describes a new sense of requirement in this period to create an English literary canon by translating classic works of European literature, including those from Greece and Rome.⁵¹ This literature was also being consumed by a widening readership, including growing numbers of women. This is demonstrated by the wide range of formats in which translations were published, ranging from magazines stocked in coffee houses to full library folios, both with and without facing texts, and therefore catering for all readers, whether or not they knew the languages concerned.⁵² More specifically, though, there was also 'a consistent demand across the [eighteenth] century for Ovidian writing, which was consumed with an avidity more often associated with distinctively

⁴⁹ Wiseman (2008b), 300.

⁵⁰ See Introduction, n. 36. For general accounts of Ovid's reception in early English literature: Hexter (2002), and chapters by James, Fyler, and Braden in Knox (2009b).

⁵¹ Horowitz (2014), 364–5.

⁵² Outlined in Gillespie and Wilson (2005).

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modern forms like the novel'.⁵³ There are possible practical reasons for the popularity of *Ovid's Epistles*, such as the miscellany format that enabled browsing, and the sense of realism from the fact that 'there were simply more women writing letters in England than ever before'.⁵⁴

Additionally, Benedict notes that by mixing high and low registers and 'bridging political and personal discourse', miscellanies enabled readers from different backgrounds to 'participate in a celebration of cultural plenty', and made familiarity with contemporary literature into a new means of participation in public life.⁵⁵ However, Martin suggests that Ovid's works particularly chimed with the Restoration reappraisal of values, and it is worth exploring these in more detail to understand the particular creative resonance of *Ovid's Epistles* in this period.

Under the reign of Charles II (1660–1685), popular culture underwent several significant changes that are relevant to the popularity of *Ovid's Epistles*. Following the reopening of theatres under the Restoration, the king's encouragement of liberated performance practices included a pronouncement that women characters should be played by women, and not by boys as previously. Thus this period saw England's first professional women actors.⁵⁶ This in turn contributed throughout the 1670s and 80s to a shift of interest from heroic drama to pathetic tragedy or 'she-tragedy', dramas depicting the sufferings of female main characters, who were either wronged innocents or had made sexual transgressions.⁵⁷ Hall and Macintosh note that there were particular overlaps in appeal between she-tragedy and themes from (considerably reworked) Greek tragedy, as 'a concatenation of pathetic "situations" exploiting maternal pain and persecuted loveliness'.⁵⁸ On the page, too, there was considerable appetite for literature of 'female complaint', including by women writers, and both the *Heroides* and *Ovid's Epistles* can be

⁵³ Horowitz (2014), 355.

⁵⁴ Tissol (2005), 205; Horowitz (2014), 363.

⁵⁵ Benedict (1996), 107–8.

⁵⁶ On the cultural shifts surrounding women actors: Howe (1992), 19–26.

⁵⁷ For a survey of pathetic tragedy: Hume (1990), 216–20.

⁵⁸ Hall and Macintosh (2005), 66; 64–98 is a survey of the genre.

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identified as a factor in the rise of the epistolary novel.⁵⁹ Audiences had clearly become interested in hearing women perform accounts of their own romantic sorrows, and *Ovid's Epistles* was ideally placed to appeal to this interest.

The links between Restoration drama and *Ovid's Epistles* can also be seen in the translators who contributed to the first edition. Many were playwrights, and Gillespie notes that Matthew Prior's lampooning of their 'atoning for bad Plays, with worse Translations' directly links the publication of *Ovid's Epistles* with declining public interest in heroic drama.⁶⁰ Hooker, Swedenberg and Dearing provide further possible reasons for Dryden's own interest in the project, and the role of Tonson, although Gillespie disputes some of their conclusions.⁶¹ In this context it becomes easy to see why *Ovid's Epistles* became such a cultural touchstone, referenced in passing in magazines, introductions to other translations, and literary fiction.

Besides the considerable success of parodies explored above, the miscellany also appears to have had considerable seductive potential, with Richard Steele writing satirically of the 'Woman's Man' in the *Spectator* magazine in 1711:

When a Gentleman with such Perfections adds to it suitable Learning, there should be publick Warning of his Residence in Town, that we may remove our Wives and Daughters. It happens sometimes that such a fine Man has read all the Miscellany Poems, a few of our Comedies, and has the Translation of *Ovid's Epistles* by Heart. Oh if it were possible that such a one could be as true as he is charming!⁶²

Such satire is testament to the breadth of circulation of translations of the poems, including in performance, and of who could be expected to be familiar with them. The translations' status is indicated by the throwaway mention of 'Ovid's Epistles' as carrying equal weight with 'a few of our Comedies', and the fact that a man's ability to recite them should be reason enough to lock

⁵⁹ For a survey of female complaint literature including Restoration *Heroides* translations: Kerrigan (1991). For the importance of the 'Ovidian wooing-story' to the development of English epistolary fiction Day (1966), 11–20; Kauffman (1986), 29–61, on their influence on a range of amatory fiction; Moore (2000) on Elizabethan fiction; and Ballaster (1992), 61, on the link with Early Modern women's amatory fiction in particular.

⁶⁰ Prior (1971), 19–24, 'A Satyr on the Modern Translators', l. 30; Gillespie (1988), 12.

⁶¹ Dryden (1956), 324.

⁶² *The Spectator*, no. 156 (29 August 1711), in Bond (2014), vol. 2, 113.

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up one's daughters. On the perhaps surprising seductive possibilities of the writing and performance by men of female complaint, especially when addressed to unfaithful lovers, Clarke writes that it may have been a 'titillating novelty ... given the kinds of proscriptions and constructions surrounding female speech'.⁶³ As *Ovid's Epistles* included translations of the double epistles, it is also possible that the male-voiced epistles were deployed by would-be seducers. Moreover, the *Spectator* article does not only provide a knowing joke for male readers. The paper was explicitly aimed at women: 'there are none to whom this Paper will be more useful, than to the female World'.⁶⁴ References to the poems, or at least to men who perform them, are expected to be recognised by women too.

Some evidence for men genuinely dedicating the miscellany as a way to flirt appears to exist in poems addressed to women prefacing particular copies. Matthew Prior's to Lady How refers to 'the destin'd heart | That feels the wound, yet dare not show the Dart', while Samuel Garth's to Lady Lenos predicts that 'All Eyes shall gaze, all Hearts shall Homage vow, | And not a Lover languish but for you'.⁶⁵ A similar practice is even attested in fiction: in William Makepeace Thackeray's historical novel *The History of Henry Esmond*, set in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Esmond, 'who had a knack of stringing verses, turned some of Ovid's Epistles into rhymes, and brought them to his lady for her delectation'.⁶⁶ He ultimately marries the woman in question. Thackeray's Esmond thus combines the poetic pretensions of an R. Herbert with the flirtatiousness of a 'Woman's Man'.

However, there is no way of knowing whether the copies given to women like Lady Lenos and Lady How were read. Lady Deincourt, recipient of Herbert's translation, however, made it known that she had read *Ovid's Epistles*. Martin notes that from a relatively early stage in England,

⁶³ Clarke (2001), 51.

⁶⁴ *The Spectator*, no. 10 (12 March 1711), in Bond (2014), vol. 1, 46.

⁶⁵ Prior (1971), 716, 'Verses in Lady How's *Ovid's Epistles*', l. 8; Earl of Roscommon, and others (1750), 357–8, 'To the Lady Louisa Lenos: With *Ovid's Epistles*'.

⁶⁶ Thackeray (1991), 94.

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‘women had become conventional targets of Ovid’s translators, particularly those presenting the *Heroides*.’⁶⁷ This can be seen in inscriptions, dedications and introductions by both men and women translators. However, the reasons for this apparent inclusivity are not always straightforward. Clarke explores how the construction of gendered voices varies between men’s and women’s writing in Early Modern translations and adaptations of the poems (although her analysis of this in the Ovidian text itself can appear reductive).⁶⁸ Further analysis of this kind is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is worth noting where readerships of women were anticipated, sincerely or otherwise, in order to recognise the poems’ relationship with performance, and how translations inspired further creative work, whether intentionally or not.

Wiseman notes a prevailing perception in this period that the availability of translations of the *Heroides* made them ‘dangerous, particularly to the susceptible female reader (for whom a translation is necessary) in representing unchaste heroines’.⁶⁹ Translators took great pains to emphasise that their versions negotiated these dangers appropriately, but closer inspection reveals that such declarations were rarely entirely sincere. Wye Saltonstall (1636), addressing the entire work to ‘the Vertuous Ladies and Gentlewomen of England’, states from the outset that he expects women to be interested in his translation because it is relevant to them: ‘these Epistles, in regard of their subject have just relation to you, Ladies and Gentlewomen, being the complaint of Ladies and Gentlewomen, for the absence of their Lovers’. Furthermore, he emphasises that it ‘is for your sakes come forth in English’, and he is so keen for them to perform it that he characterises the work as

a Suiter, to wooe your acceptance, that it may kisse your hands, and afterward have the lines thereof in reading sweetned by the odour of your breath, while the dead letters formd into words by your divided

⁶⁷ Martin (2009), 478.

⁶⁸ Clarke (2000). For the gendering of voices in Early Modern texts with reference to feminist theory: Harvey (1992). For how Turbervile (1567) alters the feminine voices: Greenhut (1988). On the particular suppression of Sappho’s sexuality in translations intended for women: Andreadis (2008). Sappho’s transformative receptions are explored more fully by DeJean (1989). While Rowland (2013), 4–6, outlines other examples of misogynist creative responses, Lyne (2008) highlights Early Modern receptions whose intertextuality enables female characters to reclaim agency.

⁶⁹ Wiseman (2008a), 426.

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lips, may receive new life by your passionate expression, and the words married in that Ruby coloured temple, may thus happily united, multiply your contentment.⁷⁰

Stapleton highlights the salacious characterisation of ‘a book that metamorphoses into a suitor whose body is enhanced by their breath and touch and somehow works his way into their mouths’.⁷¹ As Clarke notes, knowledge of Ovid’s more infamous subject matter exposes the subtext of the dedication: ‘his readers are to *think* that they are encountering exemplary models of virtue, whilst the male reader takes a voyeuristic delight in the sight of them repeating the words of an “obscene” and unsuitable poet’, and thus ‘Saltonstall slips in a school-boy joke for the entertainment of his male contemporaries.’⁷² The continuing eroticisation of women’s dramatic performances can be seen too in the sexualisation of the first professional women actors a few decades later. Howe argues that to a considerable degree, public interest in seeing women onstage was voyeuristic, especially when they took on ‘breech roles’ (playing women who disguise themselves as boys). Furthermore, the plots of she-tragedy were fully intended to be titillating, depicting the misfortunes of openly desirable women.⁷³ If female performance throughout this period was perceived as innately erotic, it can be understood as a factor in male translators finding women’s recitals of their verse desirable.

There does appear sometimes to be an intellectual intention at least alongside, if not instead of, an erotic one. The 1647 edition of Robert Stapylton’s translation of Musaeus’ *Hero and Leander*, to which his versions of *Her.* 18 and 19 (between Hero and Leander) are appended, addresses a preface ‘To the Ladies’. After a similarly suggestive opening purporting to assure readers that ‘the *pure and innocent Love* [Musaeus’] Poem treats of, is consistent both with *Yours* and the *Time’s Modesty*’, he invites them to compare the versions of Musaeus and Ovid: ‘*two, the greatest Masters*

⁷⁰ Saltonstall (1637), sig. A3^v–A4^r.

⁷¹ Stapleton (2008), 495.

⁷² Clarke (2000), 69–70.

⁷³ On female sexuality in she-tragedy: Marsden (2006), 60–99; on the eroticisation of sexual violence in she-tragedy and female eroticism in other theatrical genres: Howe (1992), 39–65.

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of *Greek and Latin Poesy*, using their *Art* upon one *Subject*, and *appealing to your judgement, in your own language*. He too claims that his translation is particularly suited for women's performance: 'How I have taught them to speak *English*, is likewise most proper for your Ladyships *Determination*; from whose lips *English* sounds sweeter then [sic] *both their learned languages*.'⁷⁴

By the time of *Ovid's Epistles*, the focus is less on performance, and apparently more straightforwardly on the work's suitability for women to read. The 1680 miscellany translation explicitly links itself with Ovid's own invitation to women to perform the poems. Dryden's preface declares that '[Ovid's] amorous expressions go no further than virtue may allow, and therefore may be read, *as he intended them*, by Matrons without a blush' (emphasis added), while the frontispiece quotes the *Ars Amatoria* passage expressing that intention (3.344–5), although untranslated.⁷⁵ However, the couplet originally occurs in a passage advising on how women might make themselves attractive to potential lovers, and Ovid is infamously coy on whether respectable women should read the *Ars Amatoria* itself.⁷⁶ Thus an untranslated reference to a work purporting to be a seduction manual also hints at an erotically-coloured in-joke. Clarke's analysis of Wye Saltonstall's dedication to women applies here too.

Nonetheless, as Herbert's note to Lady Deincourt shows, inscriptions encouraging women readers are more than just the suggestive fantasies of translators. Furthermore, Horowitz gives several examples of women writers whom *Ovid's Epistles* inspired to write their own verse, including Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's heroic epistles and Jane Barker's more ambivalent responses to Ovid, as well as many verse epistles by women that 'turn the tables' on their male predecessors by themselves taking on a male persona.⁷⁷ However sincere or otherwise

⁷⁴ Stapylton (1647), sig. A6^v; A7^v–8^r.

⁷⁵ Dryden (1956), 114. Frontispiece in Dryden (1680), sig. A1^v.

⁷⁶ *Ars am.* 1.31–2, *este procul, vittae tennes, insigne pudoris*, | *quaeque tegis medios instita longa pedes*: 'get far away, fine woollen bands, symbol of modest restraint, and the long skirts that hide the feet'; and his commentary at *Tr.* 2.251–2, *ecquid ab hac omnes rigide summovimus Arte*, | *quas stola contingi vittaque sumpta vetat?*: 'have I not strictly excluded from this 'Art' all those | whom the wifely dress and headband forbid from being touched?' On *matronae* reading the *Ars*: James (2008). Ingleheart (2010), 243–52n., calls the *Tristia* defence 'delightfully unconvincing'.

⁷⁷ Horowitz (2014), 365–7. On Wortley Montagu, see further Backscheider (2008), 84–91.

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translators' belief in the poems' interest to women may have been, it can thus be seen that there were women who were inspired by the poems to undertake original creative work. As Clarke observes, 'the intervention of an author whose sex is continuous with that of the constructed speaker serves to reconceptualize the trope which underwrites this form'; the form moves away from the ventriloquisation of the female voice by male writers. While for Clarke women writers who respond to the male-authored *Heroides* still cannot construct 'unproblematically "feminine"' voices, they are nonetheless writers who work 'within the gaps of inherited tradition to unsettle the normative construction of the female voice'.⁷⁸

As the chronology above established, only a handful of women translated rather than adapted the poems before the modern period. Heavey argues that Aphra Behn was inspirational to those who did either, and 'gave women a new power to intervene in, and contribute to, traditionally male-dominated forms: not only female complaint, but also classical translation, and politicized adaptation'.⁷⁹ Exploring another of Behn's classicising works, Klause argues further that the subversiveness of Behn's readings actively 'demonstrates to other women how they might freely read the Classics', 'how a reader denied a traditional classical education might creatively engage with the classical past', and 'how such a reader could reshape the reception of that past by others'.⁸⁰ Once again, the extent of this impact can be estimated by the ruthlessness with which Behn's version was parodied. The seventeen-line passage of Matthew Prior's verse attack on the miscellany translators that relates to her is particularly searing for her use of others' translations:

... our blind Translatress Behn.
The Female Wit, who next convicted stands,
Not for abusing Ovid's Verse but Sand's:
...
Thus let her write, but Paraphrase no more.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Clarke (2000), 77; 85. For the unique features of responses to the *Heroides* in Early Modern complaint poetry by women: Smith (2016).

⁷⁹ Heavey (2014), 320.

⁸⁰ Klause (2019), 34.

⁸¹ Prior (1971), 19–24, 'A Satyr on the Modern Translators', ll. 74–91.

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If, as Dentith suggests, eighteenth-century satirists wrote such works at least partly out of concern at the deterioration of literature indicated by emerging trends, Behn's version clearly had sufficient impact to give them cause for not just outrage but alarm. The inclusion of women translators in satires – which, again, is a form of acknowledgement – suggests something of a craze for women of many classes, including aristocrats, penning their own versions. For instance, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's adept and prolific imitations of Ovidian epistles were noted above. However, the impact of her translation work at the time can also be seen from the fact that she too appears in a satire. Alexander Pope's poem lambasting a new miscellany translation of the *Metamorphoses*, which included a version of his own, includes the following verse:

Ye *Ladies* too draw forth your Pen,
I pray where can the Hurt lie?
Since you have Brains as well as Men,
As witness Lady *W—l—y*.⁸²

Dentith notes the peculiar productiveness of parody in this period and later, itself contributing to the development of new literary forms rather than simply policing existing ones.⁸³ In any case, it is clear that Radcliffe, Stevenson and Prior did not manage to completely discourage women from producing classical translations and versions. If, as suggested above, Anne Killigrew did not have Latin herself, it may have been the adaptation of Aphra Behn in *Ovid's Epistles* that encouraged her to do the same in the version of *Her. 1* published in 1685. As Ezell notes, there is no evidence that Killigrew intended any of her poems for publication, but she is likely to have participated in what Ezell terms 'social authorship', the circulation of manuscript copies of poems among a select readership of friends and fellow writers.⁸⁴ It is not impossible, therefore, that Killigrew too would have intended her version to be read by women.

⁸² Pope (1964), 170–2, 'Sandys's Ghost: Or a proper New Ballad on the New Ovid's Metamorphosis', ll. 65–8.

⁸³ Dentith (2000), 102–17.

⁸⁴ On the moral and practical reasons for this practice among women translators: Annes Brown (2005), 112–13. For another unpublished example: Hall (2016), on the remarkable complete Lucretius of Lucy Hutchinson (1620–1681). On those who did publish and enjoy commercial and critical success: e.g. Annes Brown (2005), 116–18, on

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It is regrettable that so little is known about Emma Garland, the only woman before modern times to have translated, rather than adapted, all of the single and double epistles, in 1842. In a period still characterised by concerns about the immodesty of women who published their own work, and about what it was suitable for women to read, Garland addresses both issues head-on in the preface to her translation. After insisting she was persuaded to publish by a friend, Garland declares that (unlike previous translators) she has not altered the text for the sake of protecting her female readers' sensibilities:

though Ovid has here and there 'a few lines too luscious', or a passage which his Translator ... would have fain dashed through by the ready help of a handful of *asterisks*; yet, rather than offer, *knowingly*, an imperfect version to the Public, she e'en determined to hesitate at none, but rather endeavour to give the most pure and delicate English that strict fidelity to her Author would allow ... and yet hopes these productions of the 'tuneful Ovid' may have been so far modernized by her hand, as to be agreeable to many of her own sex.⁸⁵

She publishes, under her own name, with not merely the expectation but the intention that women will read her translation.⁸⁶

Early Modern translations of the *Heroides*, and especially *Ovid's Epistles*, can be seen to have had an extraordinary influence on the creative output of both men and women. The particular intersection of interests with the transformations taking place in Restoration drama evidently played an important role. Receptions of the poems in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries represent a new period of creative responses. Just as in the Early Modern period, the *Heroides* inspire responses across a range of creative media because they are perceived to speak to a particular cultural moment; and, conversely, they inspire new versions that speak to cultural moments in new ways precisely because of their popularity.

Elizabeth Carter's Epictetus and Sarah Fielding's translation of Xenophon's *Apology of Socrates*. For a survey of women's statements on why they translate: Balmer (2013b), 41–56.

⁸⁵ Garland (1842), vi.

⁸⁶ On women translating for women: Annes Brown (2005), 111.

Conclusion

This survey demonstrates that a diachronic analysis of engagements with the *Heroides* is a fruitful approach. Translations are creative activities that merit exploration alongside original creative works because they very often inspire both further retranslations and other creative responses. *Ovid's Epistles*, as a reception of the *Heroides*, clearly had a significant influence on the literary developments of its period.

Despite long periods of neglect, in periods when the *Heroides* have been popular in anglophone culture, they have been extremely popular. More strikingly, at times when women have been encouraged to read the *Heroides* by readily accessible translations, there is surviving evidence of the creative work they were inspired to produce in response. This is despite the fact that this was a text in a language that women in England were only occasionally permitted or encouraged to learn. During a period of new fascination with women performers, 'she-tragedy' and the intimacy of female complaint, the *Heroides* offered a well of creative inspiration.

New responses can change the terms of a discussion, about the poems and about what literature can do. The variety of responses and counter-responses to the poems in this period shows what creativity and intellectual pleasure can be inspired by a translation or translations that speak to a particular cultural moment. Conversely, it also demonstrates that translations can inspire new versions that encapsulate contemporary cultural concerns in a different, ancient framework.

2. From Fond Tenderness to Varying Vanities: Twentieth-Century Reappraisals

This chapter is the first of two to trace the reappraisal of the *Heroides* in scholarship and translation in the late twentieth century. It focuses particularly on the role of *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart*, the 1985 monograph on the *Heroides* by US Classics scholar and translator Florence Verducci (hereafter *Toyshop*). Firstly, the chapter situates Verducci's work in the context of previous scholarship, with reference to her own position and that of women generally in the US classical academy at the time. Though flawed and outdated, exhibiting a tension between formalism, intentionalism and reader-oriented criticism, *Toyshop* can still be read as a broadly feminist work of scholarship resisting the prejudiced canonical readings of previous (predominantly male) scholars, and especially of Howard Jacobson.

In particular, this study focuses on her translations, which have hitherto been largely neglected. This first chapter explores those poems that Verducci's work reclaims from widespread critical disfavour: *Her.* 6, 12 and 15 (Hypsipyle, Medea and Sappho). Her translations not only offered a significant alternative to the other available versions and thus constitute part of the translation history of the *Heroides*, but are also creative as well as academic artefacts that can be read and appreciated in their own right. Verducci's joint position in the departments of both Classics and Comparative Literature made her uniquely equipped to produce translations that appealed to a broader (and less specialist) readership than pure Classics scholars. In supplementing and challenging Showerman's Loeb, Verducci's translations and interpretations offer a different way for readers new to the poems to consider the *Heroides*, and serve as an example of how readings of entire poems can change when different translation decisions are taken.

Context

As outlined in the Introduction, the *Heroides* have been subject to an unprecedented level of academic study in the last two decades, particularly among women academics, with the

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publication of a number of monographs, articles and PhD theses that reassess neglected aspects of the corpus. However, at the time of Verducci's publication, Jacobson's *Ovid's Heroides* (1974) was the only anglophone academic monograph covering all of the single *Heroides*.

Jacobson's work represented a departure from the tendencies of earlier criticism on Ovid and on the *Heroides*. It followed major anglophone Ovidian monographs such as Rand's *Ovid and His Influence* (1925), Fränkel's *Ovid: A Poet Between Two Worlds* (1945), Wilkinson's *Ovid Recalled* (1955), and Otis's *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (1966). All of these re-evaluated Ovid as a poet worthy of serious study after his long period of disfavour through the nineteenth century, but generally agreed that the *Heroides* were an inferior exception. This was because, they argued, the *Heroides* were the most egregious example of the general commonplace that Ovid was too often carried away with his own cleverness – echoing, and legitimising itself with, ancient criticisms such as Quintilian's that Ovid was *nimum amator ingenii sui* (*Inst.* 10.1.88, 'too much in love with his own ingenuity'). In particular this criticism tended to centre on the poems' self-conscious intertextuality and the frequent undermining of emotional sincerity with wordplay and rhetoric. This led critics either to conclude that the *Heroides* were unsatisfactory because the tension between wit and sincerity precluded any unity or stability of tone, or to completely disregard the poems' wit and rhetoric in favour of reading them as serious and tragic psychological portraits.

Jacobson's departure was to read them similarly as 'seriously' intended, but as explorations of the heroines' limited individual perspective, in pursuit of a broader resistance against the Augustan world 'in which the individual is a mere sacrificial lamb on the altar of community and principle'. Thus his work represents a line of criticism that begins to read the *Heroides* as subversive, but one that still leaves no room for their unsettling wit, which he continued to deplore in the same

terms as earlier critics. It is the weaknesses of this approach, characterised by the positivism of a purely philological approach to Latin texts, that Verducci would come to react against.¹

As Spentzou notes, Jacobson is significant because he was the first to devote an entire monograph to the *Heroides*, not simply continuing the tendency to dismiss both poems and heroines as rhetorical exercises or the inappropriate trivialisation of lofty mythical topics. Notwithstanding her fundamental difference in approach, even Verducci acknowledges that Jacobson's work does contain much insightful and worthwhile analysis on the lexical level. Reviews were correct in predicting that Jacobson would prove essential in future studies of the *Heroides*. Despite more recent influential monographs by Spoth (1992), Spentzou (2003), Lindheim (2003), Fulkerson (2005), and Thorsen (2014), to date Jacobson remains 'the standard and most far-reaching book-length study of the *Heroides*'.² Most of these monographs reference Jacobson explicitly, and his work still features on university reading lists about Ovid.³ However, it is precisely because of its singular status that it is also important to be aware of its shortcomings, and especially the flawed basis for his assessment of the poems' failings.

Two of these weaknesses are methodological: a dependence on *Quellenforschung*, the identification of Ovid's sources for each poem, without ever satisfactorily exploring the impact on ancient or modern readers of recognising these sources; and a focus on intentionalism, professing to identify Ovid's intentions in each poem (and often how these failed). Both of these methods were outmoded in scholarship by the 1970s, having been challenged as early as the 1940s by the tenets of New Criticism, and it is on this basis that Verducci issues her riposte.⁴ Jacobson's continuing reliance on them, and his defence of them (8–11), mark his work out as particularly

¹ Jacobson (1974), 354. For Verducci's analysis of two prevailing tendencies in *Heroides* criticism, with Jacobson representing a third: Verducci (1985), 288–306. Jacobson (8, n. 13) rejected the argument of Winsor (1963) that the poems parodied declamatory rhetoric, an approach that Verducci contrastingly found helpful (61, n. 4). Further page references to Jacobson and Verducci given in text.

² Spentzou (2003), 14.

³ See Introduction, n. 22.

⁴ See e.g. Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946). New Criticism was itself developing into structuralist criticism by the 1970s.

conservative. A third weakness is that his assessment of the poems is also pervaded by the influence of his own prejudiced expectations regarding the literary depiction of women.

Jacobson's *Quellenforschung* guides his in-depth discussion of each epistle, but without attention to how recognition of the sources affects the reader, the discussion is limited to the merits of Ovid's innovation for its own sake. This gives rise to remarkable claims such as that there is no hint of Dionysus' imminent arrival in *Heroides* 10 because 'Ovid wants no irony' (227).⁵ On the contrary, as Kenney later identified with regard to the double *Heroides*, 'Ovid was entitled to assume that his readers were conversant' with other treatments of the myths, in order to 'give an original turn to [the heroines'] character' or 'at once imparting tragic irony to his story and at the same time inviting the alert reader to admire his deft manipulation of his material'.⁶ Instead, Jacobson often uses these sources to claim that 'we can gauge what Ovid was trying to do' (90), usually concluding with phrases such as 'failure' or 'doomed to defeat'. He is especially damning of clashes of genre and register, which more recent criticism now appreciates as the intertextuality central to Roman love elegy.⁷ Without this analysis, Jacobson is forced to fall back on the old culprit, Ovid's lack of self-control. His assumptions are most egregious in epistles with a predominant single source, such as *Her.* 7 (Dido) and 10 (Ariadne), because he reads them exclusively as attempts to compete with that source, in which Ovid 'shows himself inferior' (84), 'without consideration for the possible unhappy results' (218). He rarely entertains the idea that creative deviation, rather than repetition, might have been the point of recalling these models.⁸ Consequently, rather than accepting ironic interplay as the most straightforward interpretation of the evidence, he dismisses it summarily in a breezy footnote (on *Her.* 7):

⁵ For a general corrective to Jacobson's *Quellenforschung*-based analysis of Ovid's intentions: Smith (1994).

⁶ Kenney (1996), 4; 8; 14.

⁷ As outlined in Conte (1994); on intertextual foreshadowing, and the heroines' 'self-reflexive' intertextual allusions: Barchiesi (1993). For the productive impact of intertextual studies on *Heroides* scholarship: Spentzou (2003), 17–22.

⁸ See Hinds (1993), *contra* a similarly critical approach by Knox (1986).

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One could actually argue that this is precisely what Ovid is doing. Such a view would have the singular advantage of explaining away much of what appears ludicrous or humorous in the poem. I do not, however, think it would be right. (90, n. 25)

Thus Jacobson's narrow focus on *Quellenforschung*, and on Ovid's supposed intentions, seriously impairs his interpretation.

It is also impossible not to notice that perspectives on the poems by both Jacobson and his predecessors tend to align with the female behaviour depicted. The epistles of Hypsipyle, Medea and Phaedra are repeatedly censured, while those of Canace and Hypermestra are overwhelmingly and effusively praised. The assessment of Palmer and Purser that 'it may or may not be true that most women have no character at all; but certainly some of Ovid's heroines have very little character' is hardly surprising in the context of the prevailing values of 1898.⁹ It is altogether more disturbing that Jacobson should be reproducing such views in 1974 at the height of the second-wave feminist movement.¹⁰ Yet he does, continuing the inescapable tendency of those before him to conflate his own prejudices with his assessment of the poems' quality.

His view on the depiction of villainous women is exposed by strongly emotive language, and his evident revulsion clouds his judgement of those poems in which women express a desire for revenge. For example, the Medea of *Her.* 12 is 'a villainous creature, a fratricide, a corruptor of the innocent, about to become a child-murderer' (118), an assessment that conflates the canonical Medea of later depictions (such as Seneca's) with the strikingly different Ovidian version without exploring the interplay between the two as a more reader-oriented response might. Conversely, in cases where the heroines' behaviour appears meeker, Jacobson romanticises them in a way that leaves no room to consider their subversive elements. Canace (*Her.* 11), for instance, who in Jacobson's reading never protests at her treatment, is 'loving,

⁹ Palmer (2005), xvii.

¹⁰ While often traced back to the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Thompson (2002) offers a chronology of second-wave feminism that does not decentre the critical role of women of colour.

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gentle, delicate, pitiful, yet with a carriage of dignity, quiet resolve, and resignation' (164) and 'will not attempt extenuation of her actions, defense of herself' (175).¹¹ Equally problematically, he explicitly links his admiration for the subject with Ovid's skill in depicting it without 'nauseating mawkishness', but with 'tact, restraint, and self-control' (159). Jacobson's impatience with complaint of any kind is unfortunate given its fundamental function in elegy: the complaining heroines take on the role of the complaining male lovers of conventional elegy such as the *Amores*. Yet impatient he is: Hermione's rhetoric is 'rather boring, not to say sometimes silly and annoying' (55), and Dido's is 'tedious and shallow' (91), apparently simply because it is not contrasted with Aeneas' responses. Most tellingly of all, Canace's uncomplaining acceptance represents 'temporary relief from grating and carping women' (175). Questionable asides like these form an illuminating picture of the values underpinning his critical judgements, and it is essential to keep these in mind as having coloured the whole work.

Jacobson's monograph was undoubtedly important, often insightful and valuable, and instrumental in the process of reclaiming the *Heroides* from their critical disfavour. However, its outdated methodology and underlying prejudices should offset its authoritative status as the only monograph covering all the single epistles. More broadly, with both methods and prejudices being typical of conservative scholars of their era, it is easy to see how the negative assessments advanced by Jacobson, Palmer and others might become orthodoxy, and remain unchallenged until a different kind of academic turned their attention to the collection.

Born in 1940, Florence Verducci completed a PhD in Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley in 1975, supervised by William S. Anderson, Ralph Johnson and Phillip Damon. In the same year she became the first woman to attain a permanent position in the Berkeley Classics department, remaining the only woman until 1981.¹² Accounts by her former colleagues and friends (in

¹¹ For Verducci's analysis of the partiality of previous *Heroides* 11 scholarship, see Chapter 3: 'Canace'.

¹² Fontenrose (1982), 46. The department was renamed the Department of Ancient Greek and Roman Studies (DAGRS) in 2021.

personal communications with the author) suggest that she was not appropriately supported professionally or personally by the faculty, including while raising a child as a divorced single mother, and through a series of personal difficulties and crises that led ultimately to her early retirement in 1994. During her career she produced only a handful of publications: two papers published in the early 1980s, and her 1985 monograph, which was the published version of her PhD thesis. At her retirement she reportedly also had a monograph on the *Ars Amatoria* in manuscript. Despite her limited output, she is described by friends and in acknowledgements in former students' books as an insightful and supportive scholar and teacher. In subsequent years most of her former colleagues and friends lost touch with her. It proved impossible, and increasingly seemed unethical, to contact her for the purposes of this study.

In *Toysshop*, Verducci resoundingly rejects the dismissive *nimum amator ingenii sui* criticism common to previous scholarship. Rather than condemn the poems' apparently incongruous wit, she argues that this is the point. For her, Ovid's deliberate irreverence towards the tradition sets his versions apart from, and in opposition to, earlier canonical versions of both characters and stories, and exercises 'a calculated challenge, by way of parody, to an earlier literary prototype' (82).¹³ This synthesis of witty and sincere also allows for a fundamental reassessment of Ovid's characterisation of the heroines. While she was not the first to argue that the poems were psychologically realistic, Verducci's innovation was in centring their witty elements as markers of personality flaws that parody the heroines' loftier conventional depictions. (It should be noted that Jacobson also occasionally entertained this idea: 'One might even think of *Heroides* 1 as a conscious attempt to free the character of Penelope from the shackles which constrained it: to turn the paragon back into a person' (249). However, as explored above, he does not find such lines of thought convincing.)

¹³ On the playfulness and irreverence of Ovid's intertextuality: e.g. Casali (2009).

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In its exploration of Ovid's wit, Verducci's argument is self-professedly 'fundamentally at odds with that of Mr. Jacobson' (120, n. 19). She mentions other critics, especially Rand and Wilkinson, but it is Jacobson against whom she generally reacts. She does concede that Jacobson's work was 'the most ambitious and searching reappraisal of Ovid's *Heroides* to see the light in the last two centuries' (290). Nonetheless, she argues that his use of Ovid's generic innovations as evidence with which to ascribe a 'serious' intended meaning to the poems – while still deploring moments of irreverence – is simply a new version of the old and misguided 'recuperation' of Ovid. For her, the fundamental problem is the continuing reliance on the Horatian expectation that poetry should *either please or educate* (*aut prodesse ... aut delectare*, *Ars P.* 332). The argument that oscillation between parody and seriousness 'is only necessarily a violation of generic integrity when the notion of genre is too limiting' (83) is central to her work.

The work of William S. Anderson, Verducci's principal PhD adviser, was characterised by the pioneering way in which it 'came to ally the traditional resources of philology to the styles of criticism being practiced in the study of literatures in English and other modern languages'.¹⁴ Anderson was a contributor to Binns' *Ovid* (1973), which noted the particular transformative influence of English literature studies and of the cultural landscape of the 1970s on Ovidian scholarship.¹⁵ Through a study of Ovid's Dido, Anderson demonstrated that Ovid's transformation of epic and tragic heroines into elegiac ones humanised them, and that 'all the heroines suffer radically, not merely in a silly, juvenile way'. Suggesting that previous scholars were critical of the Dido epistle because 'some men object to an articulate woman, and many Ovidian critics – all men, obviously – object strenuously to a Dido who manipulates rhetoric so ably', he hoped that scholarship of his own time would take a more circumspect view, 'because of its complexities, its odd sense of humour, and its new, hard-won attitude towards women'.¹⁶

¹⁴ UC Berkeley Department of Ancient Greek and Roman Studies (2022).

¹⁵ Binns (1973), vii.

¹⁶ Anderson (1973), 67; 53; 56.

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The influence of this can be seen also in the work of Verducci, who like Anderson worked in both Comparative Literature and Classics; at that time it was standard for Comparative Literature faculty members to have joint appointments in another department, to ensure familiarity with more than one literature.¹⁷ In the course of her work, Verducci quotes from I. A. Richards, Robert Langbaum, T. S. Eliot, Erich Auerbach, and other figures associated with New Criticism and related approaches. A cornerstone of her criticism of earlier scholarship is the positivist determination to identify a poem's single 'meaning', which she rejects as a 'rather canine critical consciousness' that disregards a poem's 'full verbal context' (304). Instead she deploys Richards' concept of 'coenaesthesia', 'that superimposition and overlay of different emotional responses to a single stimulus which account for the treacherous incongruities both of literature and of the human emotional life' (84). In this way New Criticism's restoration of focus to the text itself is fundamental to her argument.

It is evident that she had also engaged with the more modern schools of critical theory to which New Criticism was giving way by the 1970s, but which were much slower to take hold in classical academic thought.¹⁸ As well as Richards and Eliot, she cites critics as diverse in approach as Dorothy van Ghent, Harold Bloom and Wolfgang Iser. In particular this would explain Verducci's particularly rich work on the *Heroides*' intertextuality and her attention to reader response, in contrast with Jacobson's positivist, *Quellenforschung*-influenced approach in the previous decade.¹⁹ Her Comparative Literature background is also evident throughout in other elements of her style, from the title (a quotation from Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*) to analogies with figures from English literature. It is this idiosyncratic, interdisciplinary approach that

¹⁷ UC Berkeley Department of Comparative Literature (2020a).

¹⁸ On the acceptance of critical theory methods in Classics following their success in English and Modern Languages departments: Sullivan (1994), 1–6.

¹⁹ The *Heroides*' intertextuality was soon to be explored in the early work of Hinds and of Kenney on the double epistles. Gian Biagio Conte had published his seminal *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario* on Latin intertextuality much earlier, in 1974, although it was not translated into English until 1987 (as *The Rhetoric of Imitation*).

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enabled Verducci's more sophisticated synthesis of the disparate elements of the *Heroides*'s style than the reductive positivism characterising the earlier approaches of more traditional classicists.

Verducci was also an example of the changing focus of interests in the study of the ancient world in the US, in many ways corresponding to the increasing presence of women in Classics faculties. McManus describes the 1970s as a period in which applications by women for academic jobs surged in America, as an entire generation of women had the opportunity to complete Classics-related PhDs for the first time.²⁰ Equally the study of women in antiquity and in ancient literature was growing, as demonstrated by a dedicated issue of *Arethusa* in 1973 and the publication of Sarah Pomeroy's groundbreaking *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* in 1975.²¹ As one of those women completing PhDs in the 1970s, Florence Verducci and her work were characteristic of this interest, forming part of what Ziolkowski describes as a 'new wave of Ovidianism' that was 'enhanced in the 1980s and 1990s' by movements including feminism.²² However, her work stops short of declaring itself feminist (see Chapter 3).

Thus her scholarship reads as strangely contradictory. In one respect it is solidly formalist, focused firmly on rehabilitating the literary value of the *Heroides*, although also analysing Ovid's humour in explicitly intentionalist terms, which was anathema to formalism. By another turn it is also strikingly progressive, pointing out flaws in earlier scholarship that (she implies) are rooted in prejudice – like the 'male scholars' reliance on feminine stereotypes' over evidence in ancient history²³ – rather than the contents of the poems. Despite its limited explicit engagement with reader response theory, it does regularly bring in 'the role of the reader' (first at 22), still relatively new in the classical scholarship of the time.²⁴ Its argument centres on how Ovid's wit relies on

²⁰ McManus (1997), 45–6.

²¹ On the impact of these publications: *ibid.*, 14–19. The *Arethusa* special issue (Sullivan, 1973) is problematised by Skinner (1987), 184–5, with further bibliography.

²² Ziolkowski (2005), 225.

²³ McManus (1997), 29.

²⁴ While reader response theory had been developing since the 1960s (see e.g. Suleiman and Crosman, 1980), Classics as a discipline did not engage substantively with it before the mid-1980s; see e.g. Pedrick and Rabinowitz (1986) introducing a dedicated issue of *Arethusa*. Note also the bibliography of de Jong and Sullivan (1994) on the

catching the reader out, and to talk about wit is unavoidably to talk about reader response. This is perhaps why previous critics had been so uncomfortable reconciling the apparent contradictions of Ovid's style: an academic approach that still attempted to isolate a text from its readers could not cope with a text to which the humorous thwarting of reader expectations is integral. Thus even as Verducci seeks to reclaim what Ovid 'intended', she speaks of the reader. While Leslie Cahoon's review regretted that the work lacked a firm grounding in reader response criticism, it is notable that Don Fowler, a pioneer in applying critical theory to Greek and Roman literature, reviewed the work favourably for its awareness of the applicability of theory to the poems (as also outlined by Kennedy, 1984), despite the other limitations of its approach.²⁵

Chapter 3 explores some reasons for this methodological unevenness in further detail. It is salient to note here, however, that although *Toyshop* was published in 1985, it originated from a thesis completed in 1975. Many of the seminal works of reader response criticism were published and translated into English between these dates: for instance Iser's *Der Akt des Lesens* (1976; translated 1978), and Jauss' *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (1977; translated 1982), following his earlier *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (1970; translated 1982). As noted, those applying it to ancient texts came some years later. The original thesis, completed shortly enough after Jacobson's publication that it is not mentioned, was a refutation of critics such as Wilkinson and Rand. It did this by means of close readings of 'those poems which, either alone or in relation to their literary models, have seemed most difficult, or at least rewarding, to modern readers': *Her.* 3 (Briseis), 15 (Sappho), 11 (Canace), and 10 (Ariadne).²⁶ The version revised for publication incorporated Verducci's response to Jacobson, and added a new chapter comparing *Her.* 6 and 12 (Hypsipyle and Medea) to outline more fully the applicability of New Critical ideas to the Latin poems. The monograph was also more informed by reader-oriented thought; for

'Classical Application' of intertextuality and reader response theory, in which many seminal works date from the years surrounding *Toyshop*'s publication.

²⁵ Cahoon (1988), 276; Parker, and others (1986), 209.

²⁶ Verducci Goldstine (1975), ii.

instance, her concluding remarks on reading the Briseis of *Her.* 3 back into the *Iliad* (120–1) are added to the published version of the chapter. One contributing factor to the work's theoretical shortcomings therefore may be simply that reverse-engineering newly emerging critical theories onto earlier scholarship could not be done in a satisfactorily comprehensive fashion.

Furthermore, in the peculiar case of the *Heroides*, it is arguably too reductive to dichotomise between a formalist *or* a reader response-oriented reading. As Verducci demonstrates, previous criticism on the *Heroides* had been so affected by scholars' underlying prejudices that the most basic interpretations of the poems had been distorted. It was thus an improbable case of it being both a formalist and a reader-focused project to restore the reading of a text from an accumulation of serial misreadings to what was actually on the page.²⁷

Translations

Perhaps the most striking of all the ways Verducci's thesis evolved into the published work was her addition of her own full English verse translations of the six epistles discussed, with facing Latin text. Other than to gloss Latin quotations, Verducci does not mention the translations in her main text. A prefatory note states that they are intended to 'complement rather than supplant' other versions, and that they favour 'the fugitive, varying *tone*' of the poems over strict literalness (x).

No scholarship has engaged meaningfully with the fact that Verducci's six full translations contributed to the reclamation of the heroines' voices in a way attempted by no other work of anglophone scholarship before or since.²⁸ The few reviewers who mention them at all confess themselves nonplussed. Fowler calls them 'vague and unhelpful', while Knox considers the sixty pages they add to the book to be 'an unnecessary extravagance', and in reference to Verducci's

²⁷ For another example of this practice: McCarter (2022).

²⁸ Notably the Le Monnier commentaries translate into Italian, though in prose. A closer anglophone parallel is Lee (1968), a free verse *Amores* translation with facing text by a Classics scholar (and well reviewed by classicists).

pursuit of the poems' 'fugitive tone', his view is that in places where she deviates from literal meaning, 'the fugitive has escaped, along with his accomplice, sense.'²⁹ It was not standard practice at the time to include even English glosses of Latin passages under discussion, still less translations of whole poems, although this has changed since. Understanding the reasons for their inclusion requires moving beyond the context of traditional classical scholarship.

Verducci's versions are in unrhymed and (for the most part) accentual rather than accentual-syllabic verse, with couplets of six followed by five stressed beats. It reproduces the indented elegiac couplet layout and offers a facing Latin text taken from the 1914 Showerman edition.³⁰ It is especially significant that she chose to translate in verse, reflecting a more literary aim than the functional prose of the Loeb. In this, she bridges the gap between academic prose cribs and more artistic verse versions such as those of the Early Modern period, anticipating the return to this more literary approach by poets such as Daryl Hine in the 1990s.

Knox (1987) points out that the revised Loeb, whose Latin text was 'altered in over three hundred places',³¹ was available from 1977, some years before *Toysshop's* publication. However, the latest in textual criticism is never Verducci's focus; for instance, she never discusses issues of authenticity. Rather, she offers *an* interpretation of *a* text, identifying her translations as a 'complement' to the Loeb and not claiming either text or translation as definitive. Furthermore, *Toysshop* is the published version of Verducci's PhD thesis, completed in 1975, before the revised text was issued. For a thesis not primarily concerned with textual criticism, revising the text used may have been less of a priority. In any case, for the purposes of examining her translation decisions, the question of why she should choose an earlier text over a later one is less relevant.

²⁹ Knox (1987), 274.

³⁰ Verducci (1985), 104, n. 12.

³¹ Showerman (1977), viii.

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It is also significant that Verducci reproduces the Loeb format of facing text and translation. This being by no means standard practice in academic Classics monographs, it makes more sense if one considers her intended readership to be students and scholars in Comparative Literature as much as in Classics. Verducci's PhD was in Comparative Literature, and throughout her career she taught students in both disciplines. While a classicist reader might be expected to have access to the Latin text already, this is not true of other readers. Thus, reflecting the aims of the Loeb Classical Library itself – to make classical texts accessible to readers without Greek or Latin – the text is provided in full for easy cross-reference. For Latinate readers, there is also a clear invitation to compare her translations against the text.

Although several other partial or complete English translations were published between 1914 and 1985, Verducci was effectively updating (parts of) the only previously available parallel-text edition. Reflecting the pre-war aesthetics of its time, Showerman's language is often overwrought and archaising: for *quamlibet adverso signatur epistula vento* (*Her.* 6.7) he gives 'but a letter is written, howe'er adverse the wind', and *non ego sum furto tibi cognita* (6.43) is 'I was not made acquaint with you in stealthy wise'. A reader seventy years later, especially one not familiar with the literary conventions of major nineteenth- and twentieth- century translations of Greek and Latin texts, would be unlikely to find any immediacy in these lines. Wilson notes that an archaising style 'may also silence critical impulses, and may confirm prejudices that many readers will already have: that ancient texts are boring, and that they express a predictable set of values'.³² Just as Ovid's Alexandrian practices brought mythical Greek heroines into a poetical world that was entirely Roman, so Verducci brought Showerman's heroines into her own time.

That full translations are included at all also indicates a creative, as well as academic, interest. Her aim to reproduce the 'fugitive, varying *tone*' similarly suggests a wish to provide something more

³² Wilson (2019), 284.

literary than inline cribs would allow. Verducci had a longstanding creative interest in poetry; according to Francine Masiello, a colleague in the Comparative Literature department:

... she knew the poetry world intimately, and was engaged in a number of poetry projects in [San Francisco]. On campus and as a professor, she was an amazing reader of poetry. Not only did she read her translations of Ovid, which left her audience in near tears owing to the beauty of the translations and Florence's passionate oral delivery of the texts, but she also taught generations of students how to read a poem – scansion, rhythm, emotion, and so forth. And she presented this as a work of love.³³

It is clear, therefore, that for Verducci, writing about poems in which she found such emotional immediacy, it was not possible to separate academic and creative aims. Whereas publishing a collection of translations as a purely literary work would not have accommodated academic (re)analysis of the poems, incorporating them in a monograph could lend her interpretative decisions more authority. While it would be some decades more before the merits of translation as scholarship were properly recognised, the predominant translation theory of Verducci's day was that of Steiner's *After Babel* (1975), which proposed the notion of translation as interpretation. Her translations in their own right serve as a comment on the Latin poems. Conversely, they also corroborate her academic analysis. Her account of each of the epistles generally focuses on particular issues in earlier criticism: limited understanding of the repetition of *Her.* 12 in *Her.* 6; sentimentally one-sided readings of *Her.* 11; misunderstandings of the caricatures in *Her.* 10 and 15. While her refutations of these issues can be seen to have informed her translations-as-interpretations where she quotes from them in the main text, providing a full translation also strikingly demonstrates the transformative implications of her readings at the level of whole poems. Furthermore, that her interest in the text as literary artefact should extend to producing whole poems on the basis of her readings is not out of keeping with the New Critical approach still central to scholarship of her generation.

³³ Francine Masiello, email to the author, 27 May 2023.

The combination of creative and academic interest in the poems is what underpins Verducci's translations. Therefore, despite the context of the academic monograph, her translations are a creative contribution to the overall understanding of the poems. In particular, they provide new access to the text for two kinds of reader. They give a dynamic new perspective on the poems to a reader who is already familiar with the Latin text, including through the more negative criticism of other scholars. They are also of interest to readers without Latin, such as those with a Comparative Literature background or (especially in more modern times) those studying Classics without having learnt ancient languages. Assessing her translations in this light, it is possible to recover a strikingly modern set of poems that have shed the overblown mannerisms of previous versions and provide new perspectives on the heroines' distinctive personalities.

Hypsipyle

Verducci's prefatory note stresses her focus on tone in her translations. In Hypsipyle's epistle, that tone is of self-righteous outrage, of 'bourgeois fervor', 'ferocious hauteur' and 'glacial sentimentality' (63). Yet rather than argue as Jacobson does that the epistle documents the heroine's steady decline from this into 'the depths of violence and hate' (104), Verducci argues that Hypsipyle's stiff propriety is a mask over the *Medeae Medea* (l. 151) who has always been beneath.³⁴ In making the poem an exploration of 'the darker, pathological recesses of near-insanity, the *caeca nox humanitatis*' (65), Verducci moves beyond the interpretations of earlier critics that Hypsipyle's epistle is of interest primarily as a fresh perspective on the story of Jason and Medea, and for its foreshadowing of Medea's fate.³⁵ For Jacobson, the specifics of Hypsipyle's curse are 'so strikingly accurate in their fulfillment that one scarcely restrains a smile; it is quite as if Hypsipyle had read Euripides' *Medea*' (103). While he observes that 'most of her arguments are self-unveiling', he concludes that *Medeae Medea forem* merely suggests a belief that acting more like Medea would have made her attempts to keep Jason more successful (104–6).

³⁴ Line references are to Verducci's facing text, which is from the 1914 edition of Showerman's Loeb.

³⁵ For more nuanced explorations of these aspects: Rosati (1988); Leigh (1997).

Verducci, in contrast, maintains that the pathologically violent Medea is who Hypsipyle really was all along. For a reader new to this perspective or one without access to the subliminal violence in the Latin, Verducci's translation heightens both Hypsipyle's stiff Augustan formality and her possessiveness, mercuriality and vengefulness.

Hypsipyle's primary concern throughout the letter is 'for her image, for public opinion, for her pride' (Jacobson, 98), and the privilege this affords her, as both queen of Lemnos and a seemingly exemplary wife. She names herself more frequently than any other heroine; besides four uses of *Hypsipyle* (8, 59, 132, 153), she is three times *Thoantias* (114, 135, 164), and there are no fewer than seven instances of the emphatic *ego* (15, 43, 75, 11, 148, 155, 163). This is the lens through which she views every aspect of her betrayal: she has not received the *officium* she is personally due from her legitimate husband, and that husband has been stolen by Medea.

Jacobson (107) and Knox note that Ovid departs from the tradition of Apollonius' *Argonautica* (1.609–909) in there being any expectation on Hypsipyle's part that Jason might return at all, let alone that they married.³⁶ This innovation allows the specific legal legitimacy of a marriage to be the focus, unlike most other epistles. Verducci notes the Augustan overtones of Hypsipyle's claim that she is *felix in numero* (121) and a *mater duorum* (155) in having given birth to twins, and likens her to a *matrona Romana* (p. 65), since she is most of the way towards the *ius trium liberorum*, setting up the conventional depiction of Hypsipyle as one of 'the most faithful and dutiful heroines of antiquity' (p. 62).³⁷ Knox similarly notes that Hypsipyle is fixated on her being 'Jason's only legitimate spouse' (132n.).³⁸ However, this is repeatedly undermined by moments of high passion that cause her mask of propriety to slip, revealing the violence beneath.

³⁶ Knox (1995), 171. Further references given in text.

³⁷ See *OCD*, s.v. '*ius liberorum*'.

³⁸ Knox, ad loc. also notes the marital usages of *conubialia iura* (41, 'marriage vows'), *pignora* (122, 130, 'pledges') and *taeda pudica* (134, 'wedding torch'). In an Augustan wife objecting to a *barbara paelex*, Hypsipyle's protests perhaps recall the struggle between Octavia and Cleopatra over Mark Antony: Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 53–7.

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Her glacial response to this gravest of violations is maintained in the sanctimonious, royal tone of Verducci's version of the salutation (3–4):

gratulator incolumi, quantum sinis; hoc tamen ipsum
debueram scripto certior esse tuo.

Permit me to compliment you on your safety, and on such success
as you had more properly divulged in writing to me.

In a similar connection the translation of *Hypsipyle ... digna* (8) as 'Hypsipyle was entitled to...' sets out the entire tone of the epistle. The *mibi promissi ... tori* (20) is 'reserved for me', conveying the sense of *promitto* as not simply 'promised' but specifically 'promised in marriage' (*OLD* 2b), underlining Hypsipyle's wish to stress the legitimacy of her claim. She is repeatedly concerned with what is proper, making frequent use of *dignus* (8, 42, 146, 148) and gerundives (*tuenda* 54, *persolvenda* 74, *conciliandus* 94, *ferendos* 125, *roganda* 144). Passages of the translation exegetically enhance this: 'you had more properly divulged in writing' (4), 'the courtesy of a personal note' (8) countered with 'vulgar rumor' for *fama* (9), 'fallen somewhat short of proper devotion' (17). Knox (17–18n.) notes the Augustan distinction between the legally-inflected *officium* and the elegiac *obsequium*; Verducci's blurring of the two into 'proper devotion' and the diluted 'regard' respectively hints at both her priorities and perhaps also a belief that Jason's attention has not been abject enough. Thus the first hints arise in the translation that Hypsipyle's concern with what is proper is also to do with what she can possess. As Verducci notes, 'Hypsipyle is not so much gradually revealed in the course of her letter as she is dramatically exposed by it' (63).

It would be difficult in a literal English translation to highlight the emphatic use of *ego* and *meus*, which Hypsipyle uses countless times, as they are not grammatically extraneous as in Latin. Instead, Verducci builds on the pervasive sense of possession (or lack of it) with additional phrases. For instance, *pacta tibi ... mea regna* (5) becomes 'those realms I have pledged to you *as your own*' (emphasis added), while the translation of *Aesonides ... meus* (25) as 'Aeson's prince, and mine' modifies the patronymic to reproduce the emphatic deferral of the Latin possessive. A

similar effect is achieved in Verducci's version of Jason's tearful departure scene. Jacobson reads this as 'prayers for return and assertions of enduring love' (107). But here too, love is what is not asserted. Jason says *vir tuus hinc abeo, vir tibi semper ero* (60): that he will be hers, and specifically her husband (Knox, ad loc.), and *that* is the promise that has not been fulfilled.³⁹ In this line Verducci stresses the possession, rather than the marriage, by repeating the possessive even more than the Latin does: 'I am yours, yours even as I leave you'.

More pointedly, *obsequium ... grande tui* (18) is greatly expanded to the sanctimonious 'I count myself ... in full possession of your regard', while *devoto nuptaque virque toro* (164) becomes 'that bed, your bed, possessed by my curse.' Here Verducci's choice of forms of 'possess' spells out what Hypsipyle truly desires from this lost relationship; her entire letter concerns what she is or is not 'in full possession of', and in particular the subtext of the final line is that if *she* cannot possess Jason in a marriage bed, he can do nothing to prevent her curse from doing so. The repetition of 'that bed, your bed' further explicates Hypsipyle's fixation on ownership; her concern with the fact that the *torus* is hers throughout the letter makes it particularly emphatic that this time she is addressing *nuptaque virque* (promoted in Verducci's translation to the start of the line), so even when *tuus* is not in the Latin, that is evidently what is on her mind.

Hypsipyle's description of Medea as *paelex* (81, 149) is carefully chosen. Knox (81n.) notes that in light of her legitimate marriage, she 'refers to Medea as a concubine'.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the term is also 'applied opprobriously to a second wife' (*OLD* a, b). Thus she not only denounces the inferior legal standing of Medea and Jason's liaison, but expresses both disapprobation and rivalry. This is further emphasised when she calls Medea *adultera virgo* (133), stressing the fact that as (in Hypsipyle's eyes) an adulteress, her union with Jason cannot be considered as legitimate as Hypsipyle's own *conubialia iura*. While 'mistress' would probably be the closest English translation

³⁹ In contrast, Jacobson previously noted that 'Hypsipyle's feelings are not typically those of the lover ... she is hurt, by and large, because Jason has had the nerve to treat her in an unbecoming and insulting manner' (98).

⁴⁰ For the legal status of *paelices* under Augustan law: *BNP*, s.v. '*paelex*'; '*concupinatus*'.

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of these nuances, emotionally it is inadequate. Verducci conveys some of the disgust with which Hypsipyle speaks in translating it as ‘whore’. Furthermore, as well as being evocative of an immorality specifically incompatible with legitimate marriage, the emotive, offensively strong language of the English word is incongruous with the chilly formality of the opening, demonstrating again Hypsipyle’s rage breaking through her façade of outraged propriety.

Hypsipyle is so concerned with Augustan propriety that it is incongruous that her epistle is an elegy, to the extent that when she does fall back on elegiac tropes, it seems out of place. One of her few moments of actual lament reproduces the elegiac trope that *faxque sub arsueros dignior ire rogos* (42, ‘the wedding torch, now more fit to ignite my pyre’; for parallels see Knox, ad loc.).

Whereas other heroines suffer such emotional turmoil that they move inexorably towards taking their own lives, Hypsipyle does not seem so inclined apart from in this line and *me quoque fata vocant?* (28, ‘does death ... cry out, in addition, for me?’; Knox notes that the tragic phrase ‘suits Hypsipyle’s sense for the melodramatic’). It is as though she is merely trying out conventional lament, and even this is a response to the violation of a legitimate marriage, not the illicit affair of conventional elegy or the transgression of tragedy. Similarly, one of only three explicit mentions of *amor* (94, the others at 21 and 76) is in the context of proper courtship conduct, as contrasted with Medea’s wiles. The mention of *moribus et forma* (‘virtue and beauty’) in this line, recalling the earlier *facie meritisque* (83, ‘her lovely face, her distinction’), appears to unite elegiac attraction with the Augustan propriety that she represents.

Verducci communicates this unsettling code-switching by adding incongruous elements of melodrama. Echoing the violent emotion of *exilui*, she translates *tunicisque a pectore ruptis* as the harshly alliterative ‘from my bosom [I] gashed my gown asunder’. At odds with the haughty formality of the opening, this passage reads more like sensational bodice-ripping. Just four lines later *animus rediit* (31) is rendered as the more collected ‘I recovered my composure’, an almost comically abrupt reversal – as if the civil mask has been put back in place. On the elegiac side,

‘give you my body in secret love’ is neatly and melodramatically evocative for the suggestive *cognita* (43, literally ‘known’: Knox, ad loc.), without implying ideas of ‘carnal knowledge’ which might introduce unwanted Biblical associations. For readers unfamiliar with the verb’s suggestiveness, Verducci’s translation is far more effective than Showerman’s ‘made acquaint with you in stealthy wise’, which is coy to the point of obscurity. As in the Latin, Verducci also reuses the phrase to translate *illa virum cognovit* (133) as ‘she gave her body ... to her husband’, linguistically highlighting the contrast Hypsipyle wishes to make between herself and Medea while at the same time hinting at the links Ovid makes between the two. Thus the translation heightens Hypsipyle’s apparent relish for relating the scandals of her own mistreatment.

More tellingly, she also uses unsettlingly violent vocabulary in passing, which Verducci maintains. While Knox reads *aurea Phrixiae terga revellit ovis* (104) as “‘tore down’’: from the tree in the precinct of Mars’, Verducci’s translation, moving away from the actual course of the myth, is violently literal: ‘tore the fleece of gold from Phrixus’ ram’. The tension between these two readings of *revellit* (OLD 1a, c) implies that Hypsipyle imagines Medea as involved in acts of violence that she cannot have committed – not merely taking the fleece from the tree, but actually flaying the ram – or perhaps as being given credit for Phrixus’ deeds as well as Jason’s. More violently still, once Hypsipyle has given up all pretence, Verducci takes *meos implexsem sanguine vultus* (149) graphically literally: ‘I would have smeared my own face with her life’s blood’. Knox takes the passage figuratively – “‘I should have glutted my eyes with the sight of her blood” ... but not without suggestions of the grotesque’, but Verducci’s reading is consistent with the underlying violence of the rest of the epistle. It also evokes ideas of ritual sacrifice: in considering the Thesmophoria as one possible ritual origin for the Lemnos myth, Burkert observes that participants ‘smeared their hands and faces with the blood of the victims’.⁴¹

⁴¹ Burkert (1970), 12. For a more recent ritualistic reading of *Her.* 6: Chadha (2023).

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Hypsipyle's vengeful fixation on Medea develops from the notion that she has stolen Jason, and to this end she repeatedly suggests that Jason no longer has any will of his own. Jacobson (100) notes the striking ways in which 'Jason's role is completely ignored' in the account of his own deeds: his name is repeatedly omitted, strange circumlocutions such as *inque necem dextra non eguisse tua* (12) abound, and even Jason refers to himself in the passive (*abstrahor*, 59). Verducci amplifies this lack of agency, stressing it from the outset by translating *tetigisse ... diceris* not as 'you are said to have...' but as 'Your ship, I am told, has returned you...' (emphasis added). Anticipating the deeds supposedly accomplished by Jason's hand (*dextra, manu* (12, 14)) that 'some hesitated to credit' (15), Verducci expands *missa* to 'a personal note from your hand' (8); Jason, she observes, is not even capable of writing a note, never mind accomplish heroic deeds.

While Jacobson (99) notes that in her early mentions Hypsipyle cannot bring herself to name Medea, instead using only *hanc*, this does not account for what happens subsequently as she becomes increasingly obsessed. After l. 75, she refers to Medea by name seven times and once by her patronymic: even more frequently than she names herself. Her sanctimonious disgust comes through again in the frequency of the emphatic demonstratives *illa* and *hanc* (85–88, 95, 131, 133, 135). While again it is more difficult to stress demonstratives in English, Verducci retains some of the emphasis by breaking the long succession of clauses into separate sentences, so that each *illa* becomes 'She...' at the start of its own sentence and line. It is here that the sanctimonious mask slips completely, and the vengeful Lemnian queen she has struggled to conceal comes through in earnest. The climax of the imagined activities of Medea is left implied, in both the Latin and Verducci's translation: *certainque de tepidis colligit ossa rogis* (90) has just enough semantic overlap for the reader to wonder if it is really the pyre or the body itself that is still alive (*OLD* s.v. *tepidus* 2), while Verducci's translation of the line, more explicitly, is 'gathering choice bones from pyres still alive with heat'. Hypsipyle's choking off of her increasingly frenzied accusations

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with *et quae nescierim melius* (93) ends up looking like a feeble attempt to re-establish the moralistic contrast between herself and Medea. Verducci's version of 91–3 is literally cut off midsentence:

Her curse vows destruction for distant victims: she fashions their likeness in wax
And into their wretched vitals her delicate needle probes, and she—
Whatever else she does, I should rather not know. ...

The brief attempt to collect herself is reflected in the brief return to the formal phrasing of 'I should rather'. This is almost instantly forgotten again in the rush towards the climactic *Medeae Medea forem* (151). After using it three times in two lines (127–8), this exclamation defers the verb so that for a moment Hypsipyle appears to have been reduced to simply chanting the name of her rival, an effect reflected in the spondaic phrase. Verducci's translation of *Medeae Medea forem* expands the phrase to occupy an entire line, completely monosyllabic apart from Medea's name: 'I would have been a Medea to your Medea!'

Finally, Verducci closely reproduces many of the alliterative and metrical effects of the Latin text. Her translation of *dentes in humum ... iactos* (33) as 'sown in the indented ground', while less than literal, echoes the sound of the Latin as well as expanding the imagery (and reproducing another passive). Various alliterative and assonant effects are reproduced: 'vagner than a vapor of Spring' (109) reflects *vernaque ... verba*, and the onomatopoeic sounds of *illa volat; ventus concava vela tenet* (66) are reflected in 'bellied its hollow sails'. Verducci is particularly adept at reproducing polyptoton, and one instance of her adding it where none exists in the Latin is 'I cried out, "cry out..." for *exclamo, "me quoque fata vocant?"* (28), a highly effective way of emphasising Hypsipyle's melodramatic response.

Verducci (65–6) comprehensively covers the way in which the two women merge so completely as to change places at the end of the epistle; Hypsipyle is far more the canonical Medea than is Ovid's Medea herself. Rather than read Hypsipyle's epistle as simply a new perspective on the story of Jason and Medea, Verducci's translation allows readers to see the heroine as a truly

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alarming character in her own right. Scholarship prior to Verducci had neglected the fact that Hypsipyle takes the *mores* of Augustan propriety to extremes of possessiveness, and that her vengeful obsession with Medea can be seen throughout the letter, not just at its conclusion. Her translation puts this exploration of Hypsipyle's '*caeca nox humanitatis*' into practice far more powerfully than could be experienced by a reader simply following along in the Loeb version.

Medea

The linguistic and thematic parallels between *Her.* 6 and 12 are well attested in scholarship, but without always giving due attention to how the precedent is altered.⁴² Verducci noted how like the canonical Medea Ovid makes his Hypsipyle. Meanwhile, of *Her.* 12 she says, ‘Had the Medea who emerges from Ovid’s *Heroides* 12 shown any of the fury, rancour, contempt, and above all fierce pride exhibited by Ovid’s Hypsipyle, she would have been the Medea we know and expect’ (73). Yet this is not the Medea who emerges, and in almost every particular she defies the expectations created by *Her.* 6.

For Jacobson, and also earlier commentators quoted by him such as Palmer, the opposite is true: Medea is, if anything, morally worse than her other depictions (see ‘Context’ above), and her manner of expressing her regrets indicate that ‘there is no hope for this dastardly villain’ (113). Furthermore, as often when an epistle has clear literary precedents, Jacobson concludes, ‘Though interesting in what it tries to achieve, this letter ... must in the end face relentless and odious comparison with ... Euripides’ play and Apollonius’ epic’, and that ‘what diminishes Ovid’s version in our eyes is its lack of excitement, its frigidity, the absence of spontaneity and passion’ (123). Verducci offers a reading in which the opposite is true.

Verducci first noted that Medea’s epistle is dominated by her self-destructive, obsessive passion for Jason, justifying everything she has done (alone and with Jason) in the name of love: they ‘became ... an exclusive society of two, estranged from the world by the criminal guilt they shared but together exempted from guilt by the one law they honored and the one language they spoke ... love’ (73). Her self-characterisation thus becomes a desperate attempt to continue to justify her crimes in the name of love, to both Jason and herself, after finding that Jason is no longer willing to be party to this idea, if he ever was. If Hypsipyle’s epistle belied its elegiac form

⁴² See e.g. Knox (1986), Hinds (1993), Bessone’s commentary (1997), Bloch (2000), Vaiopoulos (2013), and, comparing both with *Her.* 5, Fulkerson (2005), 40–66.

and departed from tradition by emphasising her legitimate marriage, Medea's does the opposite. Despite marriage being central to her story, she is here so much the elegiac lover as to be consumed by it. Where Hypsipyle's protests were not so much of love for Jason as of the impropriety and illegitimacy of his union with Medea, Medea barely focuses on their marriage at all but on Jason's ingratitude for all the sacrifices she has made. Hypsipyle's alleged address to Jason is in reality fixated on her violent revenge fantasy against Medea; Medea's own epistle is squarely addressed to Jason, and leaves her infamous revenge implied and not yet planned. Verducci's translation foregrounds these elements to demonstrate what manner of Medea emerges in a poem that visibly departs from tradition, rather than depending on it.

Verducci notes that *adusta* (180, literally 'set alight', of Creusa) is 'a metaphor for passion' twisted for the purposes of Medea's revenge into something far more extreme (for examples see Bessone, ad loc.), and translates it similarly suggestively as 'be consumed'. Bessone (15–16n.) notes the ominous prevalence of flames throughout the epistle: 'le fiamme vinte dai veleni [15, 42, 165], le fiamme d'amore [33, 166], le fiamme del Sole [190] anticipano le fiamme della vendetta, procurate coi veleni [181].'⁴³ Jacobson (117, n. 21) had also noted this, but he reads the possibilities as only '(a) Medea's relation to *Sol*, (b) fire as the weapon of Hecate ... and the ultimate burning deaths of Creusa and Creon'. While these do contribute to her characterisation (see below), she also uses fire imagery so regularly in clearly elegiac contexts that literal and figurative flames are everywhere blurred together: everything she says and does can be read in the context of an uncontrolled elegiac passion.

This blurring is central to Verducci's often striking translation of the flame imagery. The Latin *eminet indicio prodita flamma suo* (38) is translated graphically as 'The darting gash of flame | escapes, self-accusing, self-betrayed'. While 'darting gash' is nowhere suggested in the Latin, it is

⁴³ 'The flames overcome by potions, the flames of love, the flames of the Sun, anticipate the flames of the revenge, obtained with potions.'

evocative of any number of Medea's crimes, as well as suggesting a violence in the passion itself that is more than met by its depiction with the same vocabulary elsewhere. Besides being a metrically convenient monosyllable, 'gash' also recalls Hypsipyle's 'gashed my gown asunder' (*Hypsipyle to Jason*, 27), offering a further lexical link between the temperaments of the two women. Moreover, in the second of the poem's two associations between passion and actual flaming torches, this same image recurs in Verducci's translation: *accenso lampades igne micant* (138) becomes 'darting flames play about the kindled torches'. This reinforces the poem's broader chiasmic structure, and Verducci can treat the flickering of torches as a bookending device around Medea's marriage that also links her passion with her violence.

While *nec notis ignibus arsi* (33) plays on the trope of the *puella's* inexperience (as at *Her.* 11.25–32), Bessone (ad loc.) notes that it is ironic for 'una maga nipote del Sole ed esperta di fuoco' to call flames *nec notis*.⁴⁴ Playing into this latter aspect, Verducci translates the phrase as 'burning with a fire others do not know' (emphasis added). Expressed by a priestess of Hecate, this also evokes the idea of arcane fire rituals, especially in conjunction with Jason's allusion to *arcanaque sacra Dianae* (79, 'secret rites of Diana') and Medea's own despair of the *Hecates sacra potentis* (168, 'the rituals of powerful Hecate').⁴⁵ It is significant that the images Medea reaches for in her deepest despair are the most strongly suffused with the presence of the goddess she serves. Verducci also incorporates this arcane imagery into her translation at an unexpected point: she translates *inferias umbrae fratris habete mei* (160, literally 'shades of my brother, have of me your death-offerings') as the melodramatically macabre 'Brother, ghost, take me, a living sacrifice to your ceremony of death'. Verducci reconfigures the Latin to have Medea address her brother directly, rather than his *umbrae*, perhaps underlining her horror that she can no longer really do so. It is also an emotive exegetical rendering of the cultural significance of *inferiae* for readers unfamiliar with it.

⁴⁴ 'A witch, daughter-in-law of the Sun, and an expert in fire'.

⁴⁵ In Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.838–842, Jason and Medea's tryst takes place outside a shrine of Hecate.

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Other elegiac tropes abound in the poem too.⁴⁶ Medea repeatedly refers to Jason in terms of his body (30, 47, 93), once in conjunction with *premitis ... toro* (30). The well-documented sexual overtones of *premere* make this a suggestive phrase,⁴⁷ which Verducci translates with the similar innuendo of ‘our painted couches learn the pressure of your Greek bodies’, a phrase also evocative of Medea’s later imagery of virginal innocence. Medea’s remark that her love for Jason *me sequitur semper* (136, ‘pursues me always’) makes clear her actions are driven by a passion so ungovernable that it has its own will. Verducci’s use of ‘pursues’, rather than Showerman’s more abject ‘follows’, evokes hostile pursuit. Whether this is by the Love who provokes vengeance (Bessone, 136n.) or by the avenging Furies, Medea again ties her love to the vengeance to which it will drive her. Elegiac love is taken to extremes.

Yet it is not simply the opposite of *Her.* 6, where elegiac imagery is replaced by Augustan tropes of legitimate marriage; here the two run side by side. Unlike Hypsipyle, however, Medea never uses the lexis of marriage in reference to herself, except in quoting Jason’s vow (86–7). All other instances refer to Creusa, who is the *regia coniunx* (103) or *maritae* (175) to Jason’s *coniuge* (162). Only in the first throes of her passion (34) is a *pineae taeda* mentioned, and it refers not to the wedding (*OLD* 2b) but to Medea herself. Verducci reflects this strongly: where in *Her.* 6 *nuptaque virque* (164) was translated as ‘husband and wife’, she reduces Jason’s *nisi tu nupta ... ulla* at 12.86, addressed to Medea, to ‘any woman but you’. Similarly, where *taeda pudica* (6.134) was ‘the wedding torch’, Medea’s *pineae taeda*, despite similar matrimonial associations (Bessone, ad loc.), is simply ‘a torch of pine’. This imbalance suppresses references to her own marriage as lawful in favour of the elegiac depiction, emphasising that love, not matrimonial status, has always been her primary motivation. In contrast, Verducci stresses Creusa’s new majestic status by translating

⁴⁶ See Bessone on e.g. 11–12, 21, 22, 58 *quanta fuit*, 89, 92, 169–70. See also Hinds (1993), 23–4, on parallels between Jason and Amor in 31 and 33.

⁴⁷ *OLD* 2; Adams (1982), 182.

regia coniunx loftily and witheringly as ‘imperial consort’. Marriage, and the dowry of mere wealth that goes with it, pale in comparison to what Medea has done for love.

One parallel between the two poems not discussed in scholarship is Medea’s use of *paelex* (173). That she should use the same word of Creusa as Hypsipyle used of her further underlines Hinds’ damning assessment that ‘it is always the same story with Jason and his women. Only the names change, the situation remains the same. Hypsipyle is thrown over for Medea; Medea is thrown over for Creusa.’⁴⁸ Verducci reflects this repetition by translating with the same word, ‘whore’, as she does for Hypsipyle’s uses of *paelex*, where she did not for *nupta* or *taeda*. Whereas the sense of Showerman’s archaic ‘wanton’ has diluted over time (once meaning ‘prostitute’ or ‘mistress’, but now rarely used in that sense: *OED* 2), Verducci’s contemporary and blunt translation conveys unreserved disgust.

Like her Apollonian counterpart, Medea characterises herself in two different ways throughout the poem: an inexperienced elegiac *puella* deceived by Jason’s promises, yet also even then a royal figure for whose help Jason should have been grateful. From the very first line she is a *regina*, and refers to *nostras ... barenas* (13) in a possible majestic plural anticipating the later unambiguous use in *quod rogat illa, damus* (66), which suggests a royal favour being magnanimously bestowed.⁴⁹ This speaks of regal disinterestedness, as though even her own sister must approach her formally on behalf of a favourite who is in fact Medea’s own. Given that it was Medea, not her sister, who was in floods of tears two lines previously, this characterisation must ring hollow even to her own ears, but is essential to develop the theme of Jason’s ingratitude as something disrespectful to her status.⁵⁰ Verducci pushes this characterisation still further: *patriae regna beata meae* (24) is translated alliteratively as ‘the lavish kingdom of my lands’, a formulation which in English

⁴⁸ Hinds (1993), 28.

⁴⁹ On Medea’s aligning herself with other epic heroines: Bessone, 13–20n.

⁵⁰ Bessone (1997) notes the many linguistic parallels between *Her.* 12 and Verg. *Aen.* 1 and 4, first suggested by Medea’s resemblance to Dido in her elliptical retelling of the *Argonautica*. Not only does she thereby gain Dido’s outraged trusting beneficence, but Dido’s associations with Cleopatra retrospectively heighten the parallels between Hypsipyle and Octavia (see n. 38 above).

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suggests not merely Medea's home country but one that she rules. Even more grandiloquent is Verducci's translation of the already majestic plural at 66: 'I grant her petition to the Aesonian youth'. These exegeses translate the tone of the majestic plurals where a literal translation might seem archaic or simply misleading.

This is not to say that Medea considers herself innocent; quite the opposite, she is fixated throughout the poem on her own guilt. Davis notes the complex play with *relinquo* from 109–113,⁵¹ Medea is repeatedly concerned with her betrayal and abandonment of her own family (*proditus est genitor, regnum patriamque reliqui*, 109: 'My father was betrayed, I left both kingdom and country'). Moreover, Jacobson notes that 'three times in the letter she makes explicit and legalistic reference to her guilt' (113): she is *nocens* (OLD 2) at 106, 118 and 132, as well as making the Peliades *nocentes* at 129. As a result, her paraleiptic *quid referam* (129 'why should I tell') has a rhetorical feel, as if she were writing her own prosecution speech. Her fixation on her own guilt is conveyed by Verducci's rendering of *nocens* as the similarly legalistically coloured 'guilty' (rather than 'harmful' or 'dangerous'), and later *pietate nocentes* (129) as 'whose virtue spurred their crime'. Furthermore, her translation of *indicio prodita flamma suo* (38) as 'self-accusing, self-betrayed' develops the legalistic aspect of *indicium* (OLD 1b) to produce a phrase more applicable to Medea herself (who elsewhere uses *proditus* of victims of her own betrayal) than of signs of attraction.

Verducci develops this idea further by extending the legalistic vocabulary to Medea's denouncement of Jason's actions too; he is not simply a 'traitor'. Specifically, for *abstulerant oculi lumina nostra tui* (36), she translates 'your eyes, larceny, stole my sight from me'. Her parenthetical expansion of *abstulerant* into a legal term for theft anticipates Jason as a *latro* (111), but also develops Verducci's own interpretation of the 'society of two' who are equally guilty of a crime. Furthermore, far from it being Medea who bewitched Jason with her *carmina* as Hypsipyle claimed, Verducci translates the simple *haec* from *haec animum ... movere puellae | simplicis* (89–90)

⁵¹ Davis (2012), 36.

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as ‘Language such as this’, suggesting that the malevolent use of words in particular was the other way around (see Bessone, 36n.).

In contrast, Bessone identifies the point-by-point refutation of Hypsipyle’s accusations in 163–4. In particular, Verducci translates *ars mea* (2) as ‘my magic’, *medicamina* (97) as ‘magic charms’, and *medicato ... somno* (107) as ‘magic slumber’. As well as being an exegetical reading for the benefit of readers not familiar with the words’ magical connotations (see Bessone, ad loc.), this achieves a clearer distinction between the kind of benign magic she has performed for Jason’s benefit and the ‘curse’, ‘enchantment’, ‘spells’ and ‘poisons’ she is accused of using by Hypsipyle. Verducci’s Medea may be consumed by guilt for what she has done, but she will not be falsely accused.

Finally, as in *Her.* 6, Verducci regularly reproduces alliterative and metrical effects from the Latin. The hissing and clattering of *Insopor ecce vigil squamis crepitantibus horrens | sibilat* (101–2) becomes ‘suddenly, spiked, scales crashing, the sleepless guard | hisses’; even the enjambement is preserved. Similarly, and more exegetically, *mala multa* (20) is expanded to ‘many murderous sorrows’, and *perdere posse sat est, siquem iuvat ipsa potestas* (75) as ‘to be able to destroy at will is enough – enough if sheer power is pleasure’. The chiasmic structure emphasising the alternating emotions in *hinc amor, hinc timor est; ipsum timor auget amorem* (61) is further enhanced with both polyptoton and enjambement in ‘On the one side was love, on the other, fear: the fear | increased the love’.

The experience of reading *Her.* 6 and 12 one after the other, as Verducci’s reader is led to do, is one that produces insights that reflect both ways. Not only are the two expected personalities reversed, but Medea’s letter answers charges made by Hypsipyle, creating a tension that throws both accounts into doubt.

Sappho

Verducci's translation of *Heroides* 15, like the Latin poem itself, has a very different feel from the rest. Her scholarship also feels less of a combative corrective to previous criticism; perhaps because so much of what preceded her and Howard Jacobson's monographs (and indeed a considerable amount that followed) was centred around issues of authenticity.⁵² More recent scholarship has addressed in various ways the question of why Ovid's Sappho is not merely made into a heterosexual elegiac lover but assumes the male role.⁵³ Other scholarship has also rightly focused on the tension Ovid's Sappho recognises and develops between her life and her art: her newly-acquired status as both elegiac lover and elegiac poet, as her emotions prevent her from writing her usual lyric, and lyric is inadequate for expressing those emotions.⁵⁴ Verducci's own reading sits between this latter focus and what for her is a somewhat grotesque depiction of an older woman's very sensual and sexual desire for a much younger man. She summarises this depiction of Sappho as 'a portrait at times charitable, and at times cruel. Yet it is at all times, unerringly, at once an etiology of a fallen spirit and of a poet's fall' (179).

Where several others of the *Heroides* are notable for their lack of affection, or deal with the desire for revenge when love or lust has been betrayed, this epistle is striking for its almost singular focus on the physicality of love and sex. It may be true that Ovid's Sappho's love for a man is influenced by the caricatured, middle-aged, hyper- and heterosexual Sappho of Roman comedy.⁵⁵ Nonetheless it also recalls the real Sappho's attention to the overwhelming physical sensations of romantic and sexual attraction (see especially frs. 31, 47, 48, 130) by using far more vivid and persistent imagery in describing these sensations than do the rest of the *Heroides*. It has also

⁵² Since this study focuses on the poem's translations, it only notes that arguments in favour of Ovidian authorship by Rosati (1996b), Hallett (2005), Rimell (2006), 125–6, and Thorsen (2014), 117–22, convincingly refute those against it by chiefly Tarrant (1981) and Knox (1995), 12–14. Thorsen, 96–117, summarises the debate, with analysis of Tarrant. See also Thorsen and Harrison (2019), 6, on the debate's associations with arguments that Sappho's homoeroticism was a 'Roman "distortion"'.
⁵³ See e.g. Lindheim (2003), 136–76, Hallett (2005) building on Gordon (1997), and Martorana (2020).
⁵⁴ Besides Verducci, see Bessone (2003).
⁵⁵ For Sappho's male lovers in comedy: Knox (1995), 278.

recently been argued, along the lines of Fulkerson's 'releasing' reading, that the historical Sappho's identification with the natural world is another aspect emulated by Ovid in order to 'empower [his] Sappho to become a symbol of (her and his) poetic excellence.'⁵⁶

Verducci (137) describes the sexual frankness and unabashed lust of 45–50 and 123–34 as 'pathetic, if not grotesque, in her vaunted skill in sexual performance', as part of her overall argument that Sappho's loss of poetic talent and descent into frenzy is foolish: 'Her unconvincing excursus on the beauty of mind (her mind) is foolish and certainly self-deceived, especially when juxtaposed with her raptures on Phaon's beardless body'. Overall she argues that this is parody and travesty, though it 'becomes a passion seriously meant, and the stock equipment of elegy becomes living presence' (137–8) owing to the poem's focus on the tension between love and literature. In her distaste, she actually agrees with Jacobson, for whom 'the real Sappho ... has degenerated into a grotesque pursuer of material luxury and corporeal lust', and 'it is for this reason that Ovid's Sappho sounds so much like Ovid, for this is also self-parody' (297–8). Inevitably for Jason, this self-parody 'ultimately proves self-defeating' (299). While Verducci avoids Jacobson's assessment of the poem's failures, the reading of the lustful older woman as comedic figure is the same.

Contrary to Verducci's distaste, a twenty-first century feminist interpretation might celebrate a two-thousand-year-old depiction of an older woman unashamedly embracing her own sexuality – even if it might have been read as repellent or farcical by its earliest readers. Most particularly, Lindheim notes that *sicca non licet esse mihi* (134: 'I can't stay dry') 'causes translators to parade their best euphemisms and editors to excise lines as spurious'.⁵⁷ This includes Verducci, who renders it as 'I'm inundated with it', although this is at least coyly suggestive, and certainly an

⁵⁶ Martorana (2020), 138. Martorana explores the Ovidian Sappho's gender fluidity using more recent concepts and terminology than those in Hallett (2005) and Gordon (1997).

⁵⁷ Lindheim (2003), 169. Hodkinson (2014) notes that *Her.* 15's unconventional use of explicit sexuality over elegiac innuendo may be part of the characterisation of a historical rather than mythological figure. For this passage as exemplary of sexual suppression throughout the epistles: Smith (1994), 259–63.

improvement on Showerman's 'I cannot rule myself'. However, it is far from the only time Ovid alludes to women's sexual arousal and orgasm explicitly: Burkowski lists other examples, noting that although 'his references to taboo sexual subjects are coy and allusive ... the fact that he mentions them at all is striking enough'.⁵⁸ Feminist scholarship has yet to give full attention to this particular first-person woman narrator's description of her own orgasm, although when Verducci was writing the same focus was occurring elsewhere.⁵⁹ Nor has scholarship substantially explored this aspect of the poem in light of the complexities of its being written or 'ventriloquised' by a male poet, although Ovid's relationship with Sappho in general has been recently explored.⁶⁰ With this reclamation as a scholarly backdrop, Verducci's scornful reading now reads as rather regressive. Nonetheless, her translation achieves several striking effects that earlier translations did not in communicating the mutually destructive relationship between erotic love and poetic prowess that lies at the heart of the poem.

A particularly noteworthy feature of Verducci's translation of this poem, which has not been a focus so far in this study, is its poetic rhythm. In each epistle Verducci imitates the layout of the Latin elegiacs, with indented lines corresponding to the Latin pentameters. However, usually the lines themselves are accentual rather than accentual-syllabic, falling loosely into patterns of six followed by five beats, with various numbers of syllables in between. This results in poems that read more musically and rhythmically than prose, and reflect on the printed page their metrically strict origins, but are not themselves metrically strict, thus avoiding an effect that can often come across as more artificial and forced in English.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Burkowski (2021), 82.

⁵⁹ See Suleiman (1985)'s survey of studies of female eroticism following Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Luce Irigaray's reassessments of female sexuality in the 1970s.

⁶⁰ Chapters by Elisei and Thorsen in Thorsen and Harrison (2019) demonstrate the rich evocation of Sappho's poetry in *Her.* 15, and the poem's links with Ovid's other love poetry (also explored by Rimell (2006), 123–55). See also Rimell (2000) on the Heroidean Sappho basing her identity on precepts of the *Ars Amatoria*.

⁶¹ For the distinction between accentual and accentual-syllabic verse: Attridge (2013), 102–126.

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By contrast, in Verducci's translation of *Heroides* 15 many lines correspond far more closely to the Latin metre, creating a strong and self-conscious rhythm.⁶² In many cases her translation actually expands on the Latin to fill a metrical foot, or repeats whole phrases not repeated in the Latin to enforce a regular rhythm. An immediately noticeable result, even before the reader concentrates on the words, is that many of the English lines are shorter than in her other translations, corresponding more closely to the appearance of the Latin. This is appropriate to the translation of a poet writing in the voice of another poet who finds herself forced to write in a new, unaccustomed style due to the newness of the subject matter (love for a man rather than a woman, and the love being unrequited). Knox, who takes the poem as spurious, notes that 'None of O.'s *Her.* overtly acknowledge that they are in verse, but the author of this poem plays on Sappho's identity as a poet and represents her letter as another of her literary productions' (1–8n.). The interdependence of Latin metre and genre, and its exploitation for creative effect, are difficult to convey in translation to a target culture where these conventions are no longer familiar.⁶³ Verducci, as a creative poet, exploits the broader possibilities of English verse metre to introduce rhythmic changes that are immediately obvious in communicating Sappho's metrical struggles. Verducci's Sappho thus imprints her identity as a poet on everything she writes.

It is generally in passages where Sappho alludes to her lyrical talents that Verducci's rhythm becomes most strict and inhibited. Her translation of *carmina, cum lyricis sim magis apta modis* (6: 'when my sure gifts lie in the lyric mode') is pure iambic pentameter, while *non facit ad lacrimas barbitos ulla meas* (8: 'no lyre can fit its intervals to my grieving') is a pentameter with a mixture of iambs, trochees and dactyls, and the beats of the hexameters 5 and 7 are less blurred by unstressed or weakly stressed syllables than elsewhere. Likewise later, after two verses of longer, more flowing lines concerning Sappho's passion, *est mihi; mensuram nominis ipsa fero* (34) becomes the strictly iambic 'the measure of my stature is my fame'. As Clare Pollard would also do

⁶² Much earlier, Turbervile (1567) had also reflected the heroines' personalities in metre: Stapleton (2008), 496.

⁶³ On the *Ars Poetica's* allocation of different genres to different topics: Brink (1971), 160–3.

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subsequently (see Chapter 5: 'Form and style'), Verducci harnesses the more familiar associations of English iambic verse with love poetry to update Sappho's self-conscious use of subject-appropriate metres.

Verducci also expands single Latin words into whole phrases, exegetically or to fill a foot. She translates *studiosae* (1) as 'learned and passionate', accommodating the fact that no single English word encompasses both meanings, and playing on 'passionate' as a modifier of both learning and love.⁶⁴ In line 6, the poem's first strict pentameter, 'my sure gifts lie' expands the single word *sim*. Translating *non facit ... barbitos* (8) as 'no lyre can fit its intervals' achieves a similar purpose. By contrast, some hexameter lines are made defectively short. For instance, 'If stubborn nature has refused me beauty' (31: *si mihi difficilis formam natura negavit*) has only enough syllables for a pentameter, and 'O dismiss the truant from your land' (53: *o vos erronem tellure remittite vestra*) is a syllable short even for that. In a consistently unmetrical or blank verse poem these shorter lines might seem merely curt or emphatic, but here, where the rhythm continually alternates between free-flowing and strict, the effect is stumbling. Sappho's adeptness falters in this new genre immediately after she has professed her fame for her unrivalled artistry in her usual one.

The effect of the halting lines is to underline the shattering emotions that Sappho uses her new metre to express. Further on, 'A clear chill gripped my heart' (112: *adstrictum gelido frigore pectus erat*) should be a pentameter line, but is only six monosyllabic words and is end-stopped, reflecting the dumbfounding emotion of the moment. Similarly, 'in order to degrade its cause, says' (119: *utque pudenda mei videatur causa doloris*) should be a hexameter but has only nine syllables, in a passage stiffly describing Sappho's brother's mockery. Here the effect is of not amateurish metrical strictness but stunned simplicity.

⁶⁴ Knox, ad loc. notes that 'learned' is particularly suggested by the term's application to a poet's hand.

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As a result of this heightened metrical feel, it is more noticeable than usual when the stricter rhythm breaks down at moments of even higher emotion. At 83–4:

sive abeunt studia in mores, artisque magistra
ingenium nobis molle Thalia facit

becomes:

or because what you do love turns into who you *are* and becomes your *life* and Thalia,
who commands my art, has made my nature subtle, and matched me to my poems.

In translation, the uncontrolled run-on style of 83 – most of which corresponds to just five words in the Latin – depicts Sappho as so agitated that she forgets or neglects she should be writing in verse, and the couplet is so long that it barely fits on the page. The lack of natural breaks in the line leaves no room for breath, forcing the reader to pause in a place unnatural to the sense, after ‘Thalia,’ instead of after ‘becomes your *life*’, as if Sappho could only stop venting her distress when she ran out of breath. The stressed italics of ‘*are*’ and ‘*life*’ suggest that the pitch and volume of the speaker’s voice are also rising with her emotion. The pause at the end of the line then suggests a sudden check on her outburst, and a line with no breaks is followed by a line broken into three, creating a much quieter, more measured tone than the preceding outburst. The overall impression of this couplet is that, at least in this moment, Sappho is as distressed by the impact of her emotions on her poetry as by the loss of Phaon. It is notable that the first subtitle in Verducci’s chapter comes from this line. This for Verducci is the core of the poem: when painful love has a shattering impact on art.

In other areas of the translation where Sappho describes her passion, not only does the metre break down but the language becomes more melodramatic and departs further from the Latin than in other poems. For Jacobson (288) this tonal switching in the Latin was a marker of artificiality: ‘the sudden unexpected shift to elaborate emotionalism following the straightforward, almost clinical, diagnosis catches the reader in all its artificiality. ... Yes, I must

lament my love in appropriate elegiac strains; now let me show you how an expert does it'. His argument is based around the whole poem being artistic parody. For Verducci, in contrast, Sappho attempting to articulate her pain through her art is the only way she knows.

At 85–6, one of the passages in which Sappho (in)famously assigns herself the role of a male lover, *anni quos vir amare potest* (literally 'the years which a man can love') becomes 'that time of life | in which boys storm the captive heart of manhood'. Verducci's Sappho borrows from the earlier *abstulit* to melodramatically heighten the strength of her heart, making it a fortress that must be 'stormed'. Smaller phrases translated with similar melodrama are 'sail back into the havens of my embrace' (95: *inque sinus ... relabere nostros*) and 'green remembered bank' (148: *gramen*). In translation, 95 exegetically draws out the Ovidian play on *sinus* as both bosom and bay (Knox, ad loc.), as well as Sappho's sometimes (according to Verducci) over-romantic incorporation of her identity into the natural landscape around her. Verducci also applies her Comparative Literature credentials again: 148 evokes the sentimental wistfulness of Housman's 'blue remembered hills' (from *A Shropshire Lad*, XL), in an example of productive contamination, to convey that the joy, love and younger self associated with this place are entirely past.⁶⁵ Verducci's translation also enhances the ominous mournfulness of Sappho's *locus amoenus* by partially transferring the epithets of 153: *sola virum non ultra pie maestissima mater* becomes 'Only the nightingale, only Philomel, whose terrible grief took vengeance | most terrible against her husband'.⁶⁶ This completely reverses the litotes of *non ultra pie* and foregrounds the horrific revenge against a former lover at the beginning of 154. Whereas the 'host of scholars' including Hallett who identify the reworking of Catullus 65 in these lines focus on the differing treatments of grief, Verducci's Sappho sets herself pointedly apart from canonical vengeful lovers.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ On the potential effects of intertextual contamination in translation, see e.g. Annes Brown (2007), 2–3. A. E. Housman was himself a homosexual poet who produced significant textual criticism on the *Heroides*.

⁶⁶ Verducci mistakenly refers to Philomela, not Procne. For a summary of the referenced myth: Knox, 153–4n.

⁶⁷ Hallett (2005), 6.

Verducci's translation also achieves romantic emphasis in the more flowing passages, by expanding the Latin with emphatic repetition. She expands *uror* (9) to 'I burn, I burn', *nec me ... iuvant* (16) to 'none please me, none', *nec ... illa vel illa* (26) to 'neither of them, neither', and *carmina dictant* (27) to 'speak to me, speak songs'. There is one emphatic repetition in the Latin, *nulla futura tua est, nulla futura tua est* (40), but this is not translated word-for-word. Verducci appears to have taken this unusual feature and made it into a more general characteristic of Sappho's writing.

Yet in other places Verducci actually downplays sentiments in translation so that her Sappho is less forceful than Ovid's. *non mandata dedi, neque enim mandata dedissem | ulla, nisi ut nolles inmemor esse mei* (105–6) becomes 'I asked nothing of you, nor would I have asked for anything | except your consent simply to remember me'. *mandata* thus become requests, changing from a litotic order not to forget into merely a request to remember, which could have been refused. Verducci thus enhances Sappho's sentiment that she was too reasonable to plead, but even if she had, her pleas too would have been of no inconvenience. Sappho here goes from vaunting her sexual prowess to sounding more like Ovid's Briseis (for whom Verducci also expressed a lack of sympathy; see Chapter 3).

Overall the poetic style of Verducci's Sappho makes explicit the struggles that Ovid's Sappho described between her art and her emotions. This is conveyed through changes of metre, a technique not used in Verducci's translations of the other epistles, but one appropriate for drawing a distinction between Sappho's identity and those of the other heroines. The Ovidian Sappho's anguish is inextricably linked with her style of poetic expression, and Verducci's translation adapts this for the cultural frame of reference of a twentieth-century readership.

Conclusion

In exploring the beginnings of the poems' reclamation from contentious interpretations, this chapter has demonstrated Florence Verducci's position as a creative woman scholar–translator, whose work in Comparative Literature enabled her to formulate a new critical perspective. These joint perspectives helped her identify the unfounded assumptions of masculine scholarship and to argue that Ovid's depiction of women was not reducible to a single trait or technique, but complex and shifting. This is especially true in her handling of Sappho, where Verducci becomes a woman writing about and translating a woman who is herself writing about writing. Although a New Critic in scholarly practice, she generally avoids seeking any unity of theme and meaning in each poem or across the collection, which is one tendency that had hindered earlier scholarship on the poems. Instead she identifies that if anything it is variety, contradiction and disunity that most characterises the *Heroides*.

Subsequent works that allude to Verducci have generally been too ready to consign her to a bygone category of academic efforts to reclaim Ovid rather than the heroines. Lindheim summarises Verducci's reading as Ovid's 'masterly manipulation of irony and his brilliant strategies of wit' at the heroines' expense.⁶⁸ While it is not baseless to categorise Verducci in this way, it underplays her recognition of Ovid's keen interest in innovative methods of characterisation that do not simply reproduce canonical commonplaces.

Reviewing *Toysshop*, Cahoon predicted that 'no student of Ovid will be able to do without this book, by far the best book on Ovid since Otis [1960]'.⁶⁹ Articles on the *Heroides* suddenly burgeoned from the 1990s onwards, compared to their only sporadic appearance prior to the 1980s. This suggests that the monographs by Jacobson and Verducci, in combination with the filtering of feminist theory into classical studies in the 90s, had a significant role in reducing the

⁶⁸ Lindheim (2003), 7.

⁶⁹ Cahoon (1988), 276.

marginalisation of the *Heroides* in classical scholarship. Writing three years after *Toysshop*, and referencing it in her bibliography, Sara Mack offered far more sympathetic readings of the heroines, including of Briseis.⁷⁰ Lindheim explicitly notes that in places she is ‘greatly indebted to Verducci’s discussion’.⁷¹ Observations abound that despite flaws in its methodology, Verducci’s work was pivotal in reclaiming both Ovid and the *Heroides* from their disfavour.

As to her translations, it has been shown that they both reinforce her readings, in keeping with Steiner’s concept of translation as interpretation, and are creatively engaging poems in their own right. They continue the intertwining of creativity with translation and scholarship that had long characterised the poems’ reception. Furthermore, her translations continued to be quoted in more literary contexts even after the 1990 publication of the Penguin. Martin’s inclusion of her *Her. 15* translation in his anthology of Ovidian translations places her alongside Pope, Phillis Wheatley, H.D. and other major literary names. A reviewer noted that this strategy meant ‘the unknown (and heretofore unknowable) poets give this collection its worth, both as a treasury of Latin poetry in translation, and as a chronicle of English poetry’.⁷² Verducci’s translations thus have had their own literary afterlife, even, as demonstrated below, where the continuing usefulness of her scholarship has become more questionable.

⁷⁰ Mack (1988), 69–83.

⁷¹ Lindheim (2003), 116.

⁷² Martin (1998), 358–67; reviewed by Jenkins (1999), n.p.

3. Wit out of Season: Florence Verducci

This chapter continues exploring Florence Verducci's translations of the *Heroides* in *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart* (1985). Firstly it identifies Verducci's lack of involvement with the pioneering and explicitly feminist work in US Classics departments at that time, and explores some possible reasons for this. It then ties this to aspects of her scholarship that are less productive for a feminist reading of the *Heroides*, but still played a significant role in challenging the prejudiced criticism of the poems that had come before. Verducci re-evaluates *Her.* 3 (Briseis), 11 (Canace) and 10 (Ariadne) to argue that aspects of the poems' tone marking the heroines out as flawed and partial to the point of delusion serve as comedy at the heroines' expense. Since all three heroines display psychologically irrational behaviour after trauma, this argument is particularly difficult to accept in a contemporary context.

However, the chapter argues that where the continuing usefulness of her scholarship is questionable, her translations serve as a significant counterpoint. Chapter 2 argued that as well as updating the archaisms of the Loeb edition, Verducci's full translations served as living demonstrations of a reading that synthesised rather than suppressed the discordant elements of sincerity and wit, showing how a translation that takes new interpretative decisions can alter the sense of whole poems. This chapter develops this argument to suggest that while the conclusions Verducci draws from her assessment of the poems' tone read as unnecessarily cruel, the translations that display that tone do not. The personality traits that her translations highlight are undoubtedly informed by her derision for the heroines' susceptibility to delusion. However, her translations do not generally railroad the reader into this single reading, but rather are open to more empathetic readings than Verducci's own (although there are some exceptions). In poems such as these, where the difficult subject matter in Ovid makes it especially important to challenge the orthodoxy of traditional masculine scholarship, including the Loeb, Verducci's versions provide a point of departure for more progressive contemporary interpretations.

Context

Entering professional academia in 1975, Florence Verducci occupied roughly the same generation as pioneering feminist Classics and Comparative Literature scholars in America such as Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, Judith P. Hallett, Shelley P. Haley, Marilyn B. Skinner, and Amy Richlin, including several who were also at Berkeley, such as Page duBois and Mary-Kay Gamel. Yet despite forming part of the associated increased interest in women in Greek and Roman literature, her academic output does not occupy the same niche as theirs, which is explicitly informed by contemporary feminist critical theory. There is also no evidence that Verducci was ever involved in any capacity in the burgeoning Women's Classical Caucus (WCC), of which Hallett and Sarah B. Pomeroy were among the founder members in 1972.

Rather, Verducci's work makes no claim to be feminist, and often seems the opposite. Her argument that Ovid's wit comes at the heroines' expense is often driven home with criticisms of the heroines' naïveté, delusion, self-importance or (in the worst cases) simple unattractiveness. Hagedorn problematises this approach for its 'unfailing ironic view of any emotional involvement with Ovid's plaintive women as foolish sympathy with the histrionic inhabitants of "Ovid's toyshop of the heart"'.¹ Published in 1985, when the influence of feminism, if not of feminist critical theory, had long been felt in classical studies, this approach seems especially regressive. Furthermore, while Verducci's engagement with contemporary theory made her criticism more sophisticated than a purely philological approach, its methodological rigour fell short of the standards set by comparative literature. Reviewing the work, contemporary Ovidian and feminist scholar Leslie Cahoon outlined some examples of scholarship that would have given Verducci's work a more sound methodological basis, as well as enabled her to be less 'unjustifiably savage'.² Yet although Verducci never characterises her work as a feminist rebuttal of Jacobson, the shortcomings she identifies in his work are susceptible to feminist criticism,

¹ Hagedorn (2004), 25.

² Cahoon (1988), 276. For her feminist approach to Ovid: Cahoon (1990) in a special issue of *Helios* (see n. 6).

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most obviously on *Her.* 11 (Canace), where she quotes heavily from previous critics' effusive praise, including Jacobson's revealing assessment of the rest of the collection.

The context of Verducci's work offers some explanations for its unevenness. McManus describes a prevailing scepticism in classical academia throughout the 1970s about the value of studies of women in antiquity, leading to a general avoidance of feminist rhetoric in work on the topic.³ A concern in majority-male faculties that its comparatively early admission of women had trivialised US classical scholarship in the eyes of the rest of the academic world led to a pushback from male academics, who 'attempted to ignore, downplay, or even thwart women in the profession'.⁴ As a result, as late as 1987, Skinner was still describing classical academia as an environment in which 'androcentrism seems crystallized ... in its purest form', where, due to the complex gender dynamics affecting women's ability to gain respect as scholars, those working on women in antiquity often 'appropriated accepted methodologies and processes for validating knowledge' and 'implicitly assumed a male perspective upon antiquity as the correct one', rather than formulating new perspectives informed by feminist criticism.⁵ As to the topic in the study of ancient literature, Phyllis Culham's exploration of the limitations of reappropriating canonical male-authored texts about women for seemingly feminist ends, as represented by approaches such as Verducci's, was a response to a WCC panel about that approach in 1985.⁶

Operating within this academic ecosystem, Verducci's position within her own faculty was also difficult. Not only the first and for a long time only woman with tenure in the Berkeley Classics department, who was seen by some as having been hired due to the internal influence of William S. Anderson, her former PhD adviser, she was also one whose critical approach to Latin texts was (like his) subversive. In particular, anecdotes from other academics suggest that feminism

³ McManus (1997), 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵ Skinner (1987), 184–5.

⁶ Originally delivered at that conference as a paper entitled 'Decentering the Text: Praxis vs Logos', later published in *Helios* (Culham 1990) with further responses.

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and the rise of Women's Studies had a particularly strong influence on the work of the Comparative Literature department at that time. Verducci herself taught students about the 'subversive female voices' of Latin poetry.⁷ It is not improbable to assume that she would have had to work disproportionately hard to have her work locally respected. Isolated professionally on the Classics side, she may not have been able to benefit from the same collective solidarity as would have been possible with a greater presence of women, and thus to commit in her academic work to explicitly feminist perspectives. Cahoon characterised the limitations of Verducci's work as resulting from her being on the defensive against earlier scholarship, rather than taking a more celebratory approach to the poems. Her work thus appears caught between the different requirements for legitimacy between the two departments: the need to challenge earlier, positivist Classics scholarship on its own terms on the one hand, and the requirement for greater theoretical rigour than this approach allowed on the other. Furthermore, Chapter 2 noted that *Toysbop* was the publication of a PhD thesis completed ten years earlier. As with the greater profile gained by reader-oriented criticism during that time, it is possible that although feminist perspectives on Greek and Latin texts had become more mainstream through the 1980s, integrating those perspectives into a much earlier work would have involved more fundamental revisions than the scope allowed.

It is at least notable that some of Verducci's perspectives become more nuanced between the thesis and the published work. As Chapter 2 established, her thesis was primarily a refutation of the schools of criticism represented by earlier critics. Verducci's reading of merciless comedic parody in *Her.* 3, 10 and 11 highlights the omissions and distortions of those critics' romanticised interpretations. However, this chapter explores areas in the published *Toysbop* where she began to consider how the aspects she identified could also be disturbing. The differences between her thesis and her monograph are an example of scholarship on the *Heroides* being influenced, if

⁷ UC Berkeley Department of Comparative Literature (2020b).

inconsistently, by contemporary developments in criticism even as it was being written. If reading her scholarship now is frustrating, it is partly because areas such as these suggest how much richer it could have been if any of the circumstances of its creation had been different. Fundamentally, Verducci's challenge to the work of scholars such as Jacobson remains necessary for as long as Jacobson also remains in use as a major work on all of the poems.

Translations

As it stands, Verducci's addition of her own translations to the published version of her thesis fully lays bare the unsettling aspects of these poems, issuing a specific challenge to the patriarchal orthodoxy of earlier versions. In this, they transcend the limitations of her scholarship.

Chapter 2 noted that Verducci's translations put her readings into practice, giving as it were a live demonstration of the characters who emerge when the apparently contradictory mixture of wit and sincerity is centred rather than suppressed. In instances such as the poems below, where Verducci's criticism no longer holds up, her translations become even more important. Firstly, they still serve her purpose of highlighting aspects of the heroines' characterisation that were neglected or misinterpreted in earlier criticism, demonstrating how understanding of the poems can change if different interpretative decisions are made. Additionally it can be seen that, taken in isolation from her own analysis, her poems are more open to more constructive readings than her own, precisely because of her open-ended creative approach. It is true that, from a feminist theoretical perspective, the poststructuralist approach of completely isolating a text from contextual aspects such as the author's own ideological interpretation has its own drawbacks.⁸ It is important to keep in mind that her unsympathetic readings of the characters underlie her translation decisions. However, throughout the tangled history of interpretation of the *Heroides* and especially in Verducci's work, it is necessary to understand both her scholarship and her

⁸ On the (a)political drawbacks of poststructuralism in common practice, despite its applicability to women's movements: Eagleton (2008), 127–30.

translations as a springboard from which more constructive work became possible. In the case of her translations, this is because they are open to readings beyond her own as well.

Briseis

To a twenty-first century reader, this epistle and Verducci's account of it are among the most troubling of the *Heroides*. In the context of contemporary reappraisals of depictions of violations such as enslavement and sexual abuse, it is difficult to read an enslaved and sexually abused woman begging to be reclaimed by a master and abuser whom she insists she loves. It is equally hard to defend Verducci's ambivalent response to the character, not least because, although such discourses only found their way into classical scholarship much later, she was active when American feminist and anti-racist movements were reaching unprecedented heights.⁹ While she does insightfully explore the poem as a disturbing depiction of the 'psychopathology of slavery', she also explores significant intertextual aspects purely through the lens of wit and bathos.

Ovid's Briseis is caught in a conflict between incompatible genres that reflects the literal liminality of her situation. Her uncertain status as an elegiac lover in an epic story who is also under a literal *servitium amoris* leads to a constant shifting of registers and to repeated mismatches between the typical expectations of erotic poetry and what is actually said. For Verducci, Briseis' incomprehension of the epic world, which is so much larger than her own elegiac problems, creates a kind of bathetic comedy that tips into the pathetic and pathological, and thus also into the disturbing. She claims that 'the result is a complicated and amusing poem, and a tone at once chill and fervid' (103).¹⁰ The New Critical prerogative to isolate a text from both its own context and that of the reader is particularly out of place regarding this epistle.

⁹ See Chapter 2: 'Context', n. 10. Verducci was an undergraduate in 1959–62 and a postgraduate from 1968–75. Throughout the 1960s, Berkeley campus and its surroundings were a renowned centre for new-left protest, including against McCarthyism and in support of the civil rights movement and unionisation: see Self (2003), 217–55 on the campus's links with the Black Panther Party, founded in Oakland in 1966; and Pierce (2022) on the links between women's liberation and unionisation on campus. Verducci participated in the Free Speech Movement, active in 1964: 'FSM Missing People', *Free Speech Movement Archives*, <<http://fsm-a.org/missing.html>> [accessed 5 June 2023].

¹⁰ For a more circumspect intertextual reading: Barchiesi (1992), 29. See also Fulkerson (2005), 87–106. For the specific 'mirror image' effect of the inversion of genres: Bolton (1997).

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However, even with these shortcomings in mind, Verducci does move criticism on the poem away from the problematic sentimentality of previous commentators' readings. Jacobson reads the epistle as a straightforward erotic elegy made sentimentally tragic by the fact that 'Briseis must find solace in the very man who caused all her sorrows' (30), Fränkel sees 'fond tenderness' in the new light cast on the relationship, and Wilkinson praises the 'affecting pathos' of Briseis' apparent incomprehension of the demands of epic.¹¹ Verducci instead notes the 'extremes of reproach and supplication' between which Briseis' paradoxical position forces her to oscillate, and how disturbing this is to read as a psychological response. Her analysis of Briseis' attempts to appeal to Achilles by at once commodifying herself and aligning herself with the major characters of Homeric epic is salient; what is difficult now is her argument that readers should find this amusing. Most strikingly, Verducci concludes the chapter with a central tenet of reader-oriented criticism: that the reader of *Her. 3* cannot avoid reading the Ovidian Briseis back onto the Homeric one. Her reading is thus complicated and not easily dismissed. In her translation of this epistle, it can be seen that her interpretative decisions reinforce her reading of Briseis as a melodramatic and uncomprehending character. However, Verducci's poem is not limited to the readings she herself outlines, and the very fact that she exposes the irrationality of Briseis' responses to trauma allows these same passages also to support a more empathetic reading.

Barchiesi notes the brutal literality of Briseis' adoption of the self-abasement of the conventional elegiac *servitium amoris*.¹² Verducci, whose chapter centres around the concept, heightens the well-analysed hesitancy of the opening in her translation. Offering 'not wrong' for *fas* (6) indicates her fear that it might be, while *de domino* (5) becomes 'respecting my lord and master': even a preposition becomes a wish not to overstep or offend.¹³ The translation also spells out the reality of *servitium* by rendering *serve nostram, tua munera, vitam* (149) as 'save my life, yours given as your

¹¹ Fränkel (1945), 43; Wilkinson (1955), 92.

¹² Barchiesi (1992), 27; 5n.

¹³ For these lines as consistent with Briseis' tentative style, and not textually suspect: Barchiesi, 5–6n.

gift to me'. This convoluted and chiasmic series of pronouns conveys the unfathomable contradiction of ownership over a human life and Briseis' unsettling psychological reaction to it. The Latin *nostra* here is ambiguous; Briseis, as a former princess, does use majestic plurals elsewhere (51; 75–6; 91; 107), but *nostram vitam* could also address Achilles and imply 'our life together' (recalling *noster ... amor*, 12: 'our love'). Verducci, however, eliminates this ambiguity and interprets the first-person plural to indicate Briseis correcting herself or elaborating ('my life – I mean, yours') to acknowledge that her life is not her own. Although Verducci argues that the incomprehensible scale of Briseis' self-annihilation is to be found excruciating yet amusing, her translation highlights how this is particularly tied to nuances of the vocabulary. Thus for a reader encountering or recognising these nuances for the first time, the translation enables more circumspect responses than Verducci's own.

In contrast, the emotional tone is strongest whenever Briseis contemplates being alone, and she shapes all her pleas around how much she would endure rather than be abandoned again. On several occasions the first hemiepes of a pentameter notes her misery at the prospect of being left behind: *ei mihi! discedens* (14); *infelix iterum sum* (16); *quis mihi desertae* (62). Finally, *hic mihi vae! miserae concutit ossa metus* (82) suggests a total loss of emotional control.¹⁴ Separated as it is from the rest of the line by the caesura, and made resonant by internal rhyme, *hic mihi vae! miserae* reads and sounds like an agonised wail of terror at the prospect of being left entirely alone. Verducci's italicised translation of 81 (*vel patiare licet, dum contempta relinqua*) as 'or let that happen, as long as I'm not left behind!' conveys the strength of the otherwise untranslated *vae*, although she reads this as Briseis consenting 'histrionically' (112) to endure any hardship rather than be alone.

Jacobson's reading of Briseis' combination of fear and pleading is that 'her largest feeling is ... fear that she will again be deserted' (28), as opposed to the 'jealousy or anger' (35) of other

¹⁴ Compare the expression's low register (Barchiesi, ad loc.) with the earlier elevated style of *ei mihi* (ibid., 14n.): here Briseis' distress is too raw for epic diction.

heroines. While this is not incorrect, neither Jacobson nor Verducci engaged meaningfully with the idea that this horror is perfectly realistic, rather than sentimentally attractive (Jacobson) or contemptibly histrionic (Verducci). Briseis faces the prospect of remaining unprotected and enslaved among enemies who will continue to sexually abuse her. Alternatively, she can be taken by Achilles to be either married and thus freed, or at least kept in the household of a man she has reason to believe will not brutalise her (and with the additional allyship of Patroclus). It is entirely reasonable to suppose that a victim of this kind of trauma might consider death preferable to being left behind. Although Verducci translates 81–2 in the way she does as evidence of Briseis’ histrionics, it is possible for a reader coming to it with this reality of enslavement in mind to read it more straightforwardly emotively.

If the literality of Briseis’ *servitium amoris* gives a jarring quality to her use of elegiac tropes in accusing Achilles of a life of *mollitia* (see Barchiesi, 113–20n.), her use of words connoting Roman marriage is even more so. She is regularly concerned with the risk that Achilles will marry someone other than her, using explicitly marital vocabulary for Achilles’ imagined wife: *coniuge* – *coniunx* (37), *uxor* (77); and for her inlaw status within Achilles’ family: *nurus socero*, *nepote*, *prosocer* (73–4, literally ‘daughter-in-law to a father-in-law’, ‘grandson’, ‘grandfather-in-law’).¹⁵ In contrast, Briseis can only address Achilles as her *viro* (5–6, literally ‘man’, although overlapping with ‘husband’) – the same word she later uses of her actual deceased husband (50, 103, 143) – and describe herself (paradoxically, as Barchiesi notes) as *dotata* with Agamemnon’s offering (55, ‘dowered’). Verducci’s translation reflects some of these ideas: she reproduces the polyptoton of *coniuge* – *coniunx* in ‘but you don’t need a wife – a wife’, manipulating the placing of the parenthesis to suggest that Briseis is merely repeating the word in horror that Achilles should take a wife other than her. The terms for inlaws are explicated for the non-specialist reader as ‘your father Peleus’ for *socero*, ‘his grandson’s bride’ for *cuique* ... *prosocer* and so on. Verducci

¹⁵ Jacobson reads this familial vocabulary as indicating that ‘the loss of her kin makes Briseis especially sensitive to familial relationships and their value’ (26), which is significant, but disregards the specifically marital dimension.

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manipulates the marital vocabulary, some of which is not otherwise found in poetry (Barchiesi, 74n.), to stress the specific fixation on lawful marriage that might not otherwise be obvious.

However, Verducci also portrays Briseis at her most histrionic when she contemplates the idea that Achilles has moved on to another lover (as borne out by *Il.* 9.663–5). Here, Verducci's impression of the comedy of Briseis' attempts to make herself relevant percolate most into her translation. Her translation of *i nunc et cupidi nomen amantis habe* (26) as 'Now try to keep your dignity, your lover's claim to fame' (emphasis Verducci's) ties Briseis' sense of Achilles' 'dignity' to his status as a lover. It also reproduces the spondaic *i nunc* (the only imperative in the poem before 80) and preserves the impotent sarcasm of the Latin (Barchiesi, ad loc.). Verducci also reflects Briseis' disgust: *quodque supervacuum est, forma praestante puellae ... corpora capta* (35–6) is a succession of sibilants, plosives and glottals that suggest spitting, and the translation offered is 'that useless addition, girls of surpassing beauty'. Besides the negative force of 'useless', it and 'surpassing' reproduce the sibilants and plosives and can be spoken aloud with explosive contempt. Here Briseis acts predominantly (and jarringly) as the jealous elegiac *puella* who accuses her lover of consorting elsewhere.

Verducci's use of italics throughout the poem, which is far more frequent than in her other translations, sharpens her focus on Briseis' supposed histrionics ('Now try to keep your dignity' (26), 'or *let* that happen' (81), 'If I lie, *then* you may wish to leave me abandoned here' (110), 'And if someone should ask *why* you refuse to fight?' (115), 'Or did you respect the savagery of battle only *before* you took me captive?' (123)). The italics reflect stresses in the Latin: 115 by the alliteration of *q* in words of questioning, and 123 by the double rhyme (jarring to Roman ears) of *an tantum dum*, underlining Briseis' distress that Achilles refuses to fight and thereby to accept her return. At 110, the opposition of *iuro* and *fallentem* in an entirely spondaic phrase in the first hemiepes of the pentameter stresses the sincerity of the vow. Verducci also goes beyond the Latin, adding typographically to her translation of *at Danai maerere putant* (113): 'Yes, the Greeks

think you are cast down!!' The double exclamation mark, especially incongruous embedded in an academic monograph, reminds the reader that they are supposedly reading a handwritten letter, in which such an informal written expression of extreme emotion might be expected. This cartoonish and juvenile display of anger is underpinned by Verducci's reading of comedy in Briseis' belief that she has a claim on Achilles' fidelity; the Latin phrase alone is not emphatic enough to warrant such explosive punctuation. Yet it is also useful to the reader as a corrective against any overly simplistic reading of Briseis as sentimentally pathetic; in her inability to succeed as an elegiac lover in an epic story, her anger is as strong as her desperation.

In a more sombre passage, Briseis' adoption of Andromache's speech to Hector (*Iliad* 6.429–30) at 51–2 has been well analysed as a prime example of the epistle's conflict between elegy and epic.¹⁶ Briseis, an enslaved former princess of Lyrnessus whose city was destroyed by Achilles, echoes the Iliadic lines in which Andromache, also a princess whose former city was destroyed by Achilles and who will soon also be enslaved, declares her total dependence on Hector.

Verducci interprets moments such as this as delusions of grandeur that make her ridiculous in her enslaved insignificance, and that leave the referenced passages 'blurred and sullied by Briseis' adoption of them' (111). Verducci opened the chapter by noting that this epistle is Ovid's opportunity 'to imagine a high-born slave's conception of her own servitude' (98). Yet when Briseis comes to quote Andromache, Verducci neglects Briseis' high birth and reads it only as a tawdry, naïve misappropriation demonstrating her 'tarnished shabbiness and mimic triviality' (110) rather than a neat and striking mirror image. In this, Verducci echoes Jacobson, who argued that the clash of genres 'invests the character of Briseis with an element of unconscious self-parody' by which Roman audiences were 'undoubtedly delighted and amused' (41). Although it does introduce Verducci's perceptive analysis of the speech as 'grimly slanted and disturbingly callous when addressed to the slayer of family and husband' (111), the suggestion that putting

¹⁶ For the parallels throughout the epistle: Barchiesi (1992), pp. 29–32, and 75–80n.

the words of one into the mouth of the other can only be travesty is difficult to accept.¹⁷

Perhaps, to a Roman audience, it would have been diverting to encounter an Aristotelian ‘living tool’ capable of such lofty pronouncements. However, it is more distasteful to suggest that modern readers are to find it merely a diverting literary exercise in putting unlikely literary allusions in the mouth of an enslaved woman.

Verducci’s translation, however, is open to less reductive readings. The unsettling cognitive dissonance of Briseis’ starkly uncomplicated pronouncement at 51–2 lies in its contrast with the immediately preceding couplet. Verducci dramatically heightens the horror of the sight: ‘I saw my husband lavish upon the bloody earth his magnificent ruin, | his chest heaving, livid with his life’s blood’. The use of ‘lavish’ grotesquely twists the earlier lavish bribery of Agamemnon (27–38), while ‘magnificent ruin’ is a visceral expansion of *quantus erat*. Both phrases also suggest the grandeur of epic cities reduced to rubble, hinting again at Briseis’ insistence on her place in an epic narrative (and Barchiesi, ad loc. notes the link between *quantus erat* and μέγας μεγαλωστί at *Il.* 16.776). The proximity of ‘livid’ and ‘life’ in ‘livid with his life’s blood’ give the sense of a false cognate, enhancing the sense of blood as what keeps a person alive contrasted with blood pouring from lethal wounds as in the earlier ‘bloody’. This brings out the distinction between *cruor* (in *cruenta*) and *sanguis* (in *sanguinolenta*), the former usually referring to spilt blood or ‘gore’ (*OLD* 1, 2), while the latter can refer to blood within the body (*OLD* 4). To use both in the same sentence stresses the horror of the one becoming the other, and Verducci’s English similarly connects Briseis’ husband’s death with his ‘life’s blood’ becoming visible on the ‘bloody earth’.¹⁸

That Briseis should immediately follow this gory scene with an unqualified pronouncement of dependence on the man responsible for the slaughter (51–2), translated similarly directly, is an apparent psychological disconnect highlighted by Verducci’s elaborate translation. The

¹⁷ In another parallel, Andromache too becomes disturbingly dependent on an enemy, not only married to Achilles’ son but taking refuge at the altar of his mother Thetis from Hermione and Menelaus’ threats (Eur. *Andr.* 42–4).

¹⁸ On the gratuitous bloodiness of the scene enhanced by Ovid’s use of unpoetic vocabulary: Barchiesi, ad loc.

translation thus highlights the clash between elegiac pronouncements of love and the horrors of epic battle and death, although it alone cannot convey the complex interplay with Andromache's speech unless the reader is already familiar with the *Iliad*.¹⁹ One could therefore identify a risk that without awareness of this interplay, the whole poem could be read too sincerely as a declaration of love. However, the unsettling emotional reality of making epic concerns into elegiac ones, and specifically of what Briseis has been forced to accept, is made plain by Verducci's gory version, without any need to superimpose a reading of comedy.

Verducci also reflects the clash of elegy and epic in her translation of the earlier *vince animos iramque tuam* (85) as 'conquer your *passion* and your anger' (emphasis added). Previously she had brought in Achilles' epic μῆνις (which Barchiesi, 85n. notes is played on by the pervasive use of *ira*) by translating *violente* (61) as 'in your violence of rage', thus connecting the elegiac addressee to his most infamous Iliadic attribute, which is precipitated by the loss of Briseis. Here, conversely, she collapses *animos iramque* into the erotically-coloured 'passion' (noting also of the elegiac *tristitiae* (90) that it is 'an unexampled permutation of the Homeric heroic depression' (113)). Again the uneasy tying of elegiac love to epic emotions is highlighted by the translation.

Throughout most of the poem, any requests pertaining to Briseis herself are expressed as hortative subjunctives or as indirect commands after verbs of begging or praying (especially 77–81). However, there are two sections where she uses long successions of imperatives: 85–91, ordering Achilles to go back to war, which is predicated on taking her back, and 145–54, ordering him to kill her if he cannot. She thus expresses these more forcefully than her actual pleas to be taken back, suggesting that while that is what she ideally wants, her wish to die rather than be abandoned is much more concrete.²⁰ Verducci's translation of *stricto pete corpora ferro* and

¹⁹ For a fuller discussion of Ovid's appropriation of epic heroes into elegy: Fulkerson (2005), 96–7.

²⁰ Ibid., 96, n. 5 highlights the poem's use of imperatives (14 in 154 lines), but does not note that almost all are in these two passages, and almost none concern Achilles reclaiming Briseis. Barchiesi (1987), 65 notes the tragic irony that Briseis' wish will be fulfilled, but only after the events of *Iliad* 16–19, when Achilles becomes so indifferent to her that he wishes for her death (*Il.* 19.59–60).

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fosso pectore (145–6) strengthens the cascade of imperatives by adding more, each in its own sentence: ‘Draw steel. Strike my body. | Stab my breast ...’ In 146, there is a particular sense of violent gouging in the use of *fodio*, also used of digging. Verducci translates the violence in the grammatical strength of the sentence, rendering *stricto* and *fosso* as additional imperatives where there is only one (*pete*) in the Latin. The violence is also drawn out in a jarringly sensual progression from Briseis’ body to her breast, outlining to the reader Briseis’ recognition that perhaps the only way she can reconcile her two genres is by submitting her body to epic death. This is also reflected in passages where Briseis refers to life and blood draining out of her own body, metaphorically or hypothetically: *sanguinis atque animi pectus inane fuit* (60) and *est mihi qui fossa pectore sanguis eat* (146).²¹ Verducci renders the former passage as ‘ashen, I lost all consciousness and colour’, in which the assonance in the pentameter is rendered more forcefully as a repeated *e*, perhaps reflecting the use of the vocabulary of violent epic death to describe her reaction. ‘Ashen’ expands the sense of the Latin to encompass the idea of the elegiac faint (seen in *Heroides* 2 and 13) and pallor (Barchiesi, 146n.), but also couples this with the idea of heroic death and cremation.²² Verducci translates 146 as ‘it has blood enough to flow’, which is a multifaceted reading: there is enough despite its earlier having figuratively drained away; in her enslavement Briseis is powerless to do anything, but still human enough to bleed; or an acknowledgement that for all her desires she is an epic character, and thus all she is able to do is die a violent death. Furthermore, while not herself driven (or able) to take her own life as other heroines are, 146 claims equality with them. In effect, she says, if you were to take a sword to me as Dido did to herself, for instance, I would be just as capable of dying for love as she was. Like Dido, too, she imagines using the sword of her lover to accomplish the act.

²¹ Hanson (2011) notes that the death she wishes for actually befalls Patroclus. Achilles will mourn him like a spouse; see Warwick (2019) on their quasi-conjugal relationship.

²² See further on *Her.* 11.76 below.

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Verducci's reading is thus complicated and hard to define. While many of her arguments for comedy are hard to accept, her analysis of Ovid's creation of a psychologically subjugated character is more perceptive and insightful than the uncomplicated romanticising that had come before. Her closing assessment that the reader's reaction to Briseis becomes 'a wince, a reflex at once of sympathy and of recoil' (121) is hard to contest. More striking is her assertion that Ovid's literary irreverence 'becomes an attack upon the arrogance of literature, its pretension to tell the whole story', with the result that 'no one, I think, after reading this epistle will read the *Iliad* again in quite the same way, with quite the same trust' (120–1). As Cahoon noted in her review, more extensive engagement with reader response theory might have enabled Verducci to develop these arguments further.²³ Yet as it stands, this observation alone indicates that her readings are not as simplistic as they sometimes appear. More importantly, her translation allows readers beyond her own time to consider Briseis anew, with greater nuance and empathy than her own academic analysis allowed.

²³ Cahoon (1988), 276.

Ariadne

Arguably Verducci's most spirited writing is her response to *Her.* 10. She argues that it is 'the funniest, most outrageous poem in the collection', 'Ovid's purest parody' (246). Far from being an inept imitation of Catullus 64, as previous critics including Jacobson believed, Verducci argues that the poem exposes a sentimentalised and hackneyed tradition that has reduced Ariadne to a laughable walking stereotype with no likeable qualities. As with *Her.* 3, this amused response to a poem depicting irrational behaviour can now appear unsympathetic. Her exposition can be challenging for a modern, progressive reader because of her reliance on the idea of Ovid laughing with the reader at the heroines, including where comedy now seems inappropriate.²⁴

However, as an early instance of reader-oriented criticism on the *Heroides*, her chapter is significant for highlighting how the poem exposes the artificiality of sentimental verse, and parodies not a character but a tradition. Her translation reinforces this idea, reframing the heroine's exaggerations and rhetorical excesses for an anglophone readership, rather than attempting to suppress them to create a less unsettling poem. In this, it is multivalent enough to lay the foundations for interpretations beyond her own, including newer, more progressive readings. Readers might note how wildly this Ariadne differs from a conventional understanding of the character, and thus also how they themselves might have sentimentalised the character's story.²⁵ Even though Verducci's reading of Ariadne as a melodramatic and rhetorically immoderate letter-writer noticeably informs her translation, aspects of this reading remain productive and can support a more nuanced reading of her poem.

Unlike *Her.* 11 below, *Her.* 10 has been the subject of more balanced scholarship in Verducci's wake, including direct responses to her readings. Far from Jacobson's incomprehension of the irreverent Ovidian use of sources, most scholarship now recognises the characterisation of a

²⁴ For a more sympathetic reading of *Her.* 10's humour as a 'humanising' strategy analogous with 'Camp' literature: Vessey (1976).

²⁵ On the enduring post-classical fascination with Ariadne, especially on Naxos: Ziolkowski (2005), 3–17.

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Heroidean Ariadne who is all too aware of how many times she has already been depicted.²⁶ Among those who challenge Verducci are Pavlock and Bolton, who both argue that she underplays the impact of Ariadne's extreme isolation.²⁷ More conciliatory is Armstrong's position that Verducci's reading is valid but 'this need not make [Ariadne] a wholly trivial creature' and 'can sometimes be an endearing picture of innocence as well as of clueless self-righteousness'.²⁸ Fulkerson also responds to Verducci, building on Smith (1994) to demonstrate 'Ariadne's increasing frustration: after each successive literary iteration of abandonment, she grows angrier and behaves more erratically', making the behaviour condemned by Verducci 'all too explicable'.²⁹ Notably, Battistella's commentary (2010) now echoes Verducci's view that the poem parodies a literary trope.³⁰ These more equivocal interpretations can also still be usefully applied to Verducci's translation of the epistle.

Verducci's main point of disagreement with earlier scholarship concerns Ariadne's histrionic and laboured rhetoric, as a reworking of her speech in Catullus 64 (something Ovid later does more explicitly in *Fasti* 3.471–506). Jacobson's reliance on *Quellenforschung* leads him to conclude that 'Ovid knew, used, and felt compelled to strive against Catullus, sometimes indiscriminately and without consideration for the possible unhappy results' (218).³¹ His aporetic remark that 'the only defense here is that this is an intentional joke, for which I see little motivation' (216–17) epitomises his sustained lack of interest in the effects of incongruous humour.

Verducci does not dispute that the Ovidian text echoes the Catullan one; however, for her the travesty is exactly the point: 'what is most disturbing, and most amusing ... is its distance from

²⁶ See similarly Conte (1986), 61–2 on *memini* (*Fast.* 3.473) and other 'linguistic signals' recalling earlier depictions. Mixing and reworking of genres and tropes was increasingly studied from the 1980s after Conte, including in the *Heroides*; e.g. Barchiesi (1987). For a similar study of Ovid's Medea's metaliterary self-awareness, see Hinds (1993).

²⁷ Pavlock (1990), 113–46; Bolton (1994). These arguments are consistent with this chapter's observations on Verducci's handling of psychologically irrational behaviour after trauma.

²⁸ Armstrong (2006), 232, 230.

²⁹ Fulkerson (2005), 138–9.

³⁰ Battistella (2010), 22–8.

³¹ For a general corrective to this approach to Ovid's reworking of the tradition, including *Her.* 10 as a demonstration of Ariadne's personal growth over time: Smith (1994).

Catullus' (274). She responds directly (273, and n. 24) to Jacobson, arguing that this is consistent with Ovid's 'comic hybridization of generic proprieties' (255). In her reading, the very point is 'to push Ariadne ... into selfish bathos – to expose the limitations, unreality, and latent sentimentality ... of what had become, in Ovid's own time, an outworn tradition, a narcotic' (285). However, her focus on the Ovidian Ariadne's laughable unattractiveness (254–5) limits her to a simplistic opposition between sincere grief in Catullus and comedy in Ovid. Klein's reading of Catullus 64, more informed by feminist criticism, identifies the poem's obvious appeal to a male gaze, both within and outside the poem; for instance, Ariadne is so fixated on Theseus' departure that she does not notice when all her clothes fall off (Catull. 64.63–70).³² The Ariadne of *Her.* 10 makes herself positively unappealing to that gaze. The ways she does this in Verducci's translation support more favourable interpretations than Verducci's own.

In these treatments, Jacobson and Verducci both focus on the poem's 'overblown rhetoric and obvious artifice' (Jacobson, 220). For Verducci, this is convincing evidence of Ariadne's overexaggeration of her plight for rhetorical effect, underpinning Ovid's parodying of a hackneyed tradition. Verducci thus augments these aspects in her translation for the benefit of readers without the requisite contextual knowledge. However, her translation is not limited to this interpretation. As also in *Her.* 11 (see below), an aspect of Ariadne's characterisation that Verducci does not consider in discussing the heroine's immaturity is her dramatic age. It is not improbable that a teenage princess in Ariadne's situation might over-react. Furthermore, having never previously had to write a persuasive letter to a lover, it would be all too easy to over-aestheticise her own appearance or to use rhetorical techniques awkwardly. A translation that emphasises these elements rather than attempting to suppress them can consequently provide a more sympathetic understanding of Ariadne than the translator saw.

³² Klein (2018), 122–3.

Verducci and Jacobson both analyse Ovid's Ariadne as a 'prima donna' (Verducci, 250; Jacobson, 224). Verducci develops this idea considerably (especially 259–61, 270–73), and augments it further in her translation. For instance, she uses Ariadne's evident attention to her ravaged hair and breasts (ll. 145–7) to colour her imagined enslavement. The Latin *neve trabam serva grandia pensa manu* (90) becomes 'I need not be ... made to spin enormous quotas of wool (such work ruins the hands)', in which the parenthesis is entirely Verducci's addition. The fear expressed in the Latin, already unfounded, is caricatured into something even more damning: her fear of enslavement really concerns its degradation of her appearance. In this, she tactlessly reworks the more justified fears of Briseis, which themselves echo those of Andromache and Hector in *Iliad* 6.390–465 (as noted by Battistella, 90n.). It is evidently distasteful for a princess to compare herself so melodramatically to an actual enslaved former princess, and she does it more than once (see further on 10.118 below, n. 36).³³ Verducci's addition, although characterising Ariadne as vapid, nonetheless imagines likely patterns of thought engendered by the princess's cosseted existence.

Ariadne's epistle is especially notable for trite consonance and alliteration. While Verducci finds only Ovidian wit, it is also especially productive here to consider Ariadne as characterised as a young, inexperienced writer. She knows the rhetorical impact of alliteration, but uses it excessively and inappropriately, sometimes almost at random.³⁴ For instance, while the repeated *m* in *in quo me somnusque meus male prodidit et tu* (5) recognisably mimics speaking through tears, and *v* and *m* in *verbera cum verbis mixta fuere meis* (38) combine this with wailing wind, the effect is laboured by further repetition in *velamina virgae* (41) and yet again in *vela videre* (46). Verducci's translation underlines that this is an intentional characterisation of Ariadne, by rendering a range of Latin aural effects as alliterative phrases. For instance, the alliterative wordplay of *verbera cum*

³³ For another Iliadic parallel: Barchiesi (1992), 3.69n. On Ariadne's rejection of the *servitium amoris* she desired in Catull. 64.161: Battistella (2010), 89–90n.

³⁴ For my analysis of the frequency of alliteration in *Her.* 10: Appendix 1.

Verducci also develops Ariadne's use of well-worn metaphors and other formulations. The familiar conceit of *auctores saxa fretumque tui* (132) becomes 'you were bred by granite cliffs and the waste of oceans', indicating Ariadne's attempt to convey her strength of feeling by making another stock phrase more melodramatic. In the same way, *scopulo, quem vaga pulsat aqua* (136) becomes 'a cliff lashed by the sporadic shock of the wave'. Verducci's onomatopoeic additions (of *sp* and *sb*) exegetically suggest the writer fumbling for dramatic imagery that ends up reading as contrived, if not strange. Similarly, *sepulta* (76) is expanded to 'buried alive'. Any one of these usages might only be considered an instance of unimaginative translation. However, in the English as in the Latin, the accumulation of trite images and phrases demonstrates this is deliberate. For Verducci, it is the 'convincing caricature of a whole and genuine sensibility' (281).³⁵ Even if the caricature is not at Ariadne's expense, the reader can recognise a deliberate characterisation of the letter-writer.

Ariadne's attempts at more sophisticated rhetorical devices achieve a similar effect. She writes that not Theseus, but *somnus ventusque fidesque* (117, 'sleep, and wind, and trust') have meant that *prodita sum causis una puella tribus* (118, literally 'one girl, I was betrayed by three causes').³⁶ The hexameter hints that there will be something peculiarly ineffectual about Ariadne's point, and the pentameter confirms it with the rhetorical (anti)climax to which she brings this 'prolix irrelevance' (Verducci, 281). Rather than attempt to downplay it, Verducci forces the rhetoric further: 'one fraction of a girl, I was betrayed by a faction of three'. Besides drawing on Ariadne's self-characterisation as hapless and helpless, the incongruously mathematical 'fraction' – rather than the more predictable 'slip' or 'chit' – emphasises the 'only superficial precision' of the

³⁵ Armstrong (2006), 233 suggests that Ariadne herself seeks to compete with Catullus: 'here we are presented with an Ariadne who makes slightly hackneyed comparisons, and is not able to describe herself as well as Catullus did'.

³⁶ Ariadne's use of *una puella tribus* in the second hemiepes of a pentameter recalls Briseis' description of Agamemnon's daughter offered to Achilles (*Her.* 3.38). This is not the only instance of her inappropriately echoing Briseis (see above on 10.90). Battistella, ad loc. argues that Ariadne also echoes the Virgilian Dido (*Aen.* 4.94–5).

construction. The over-obvious rhyme of ‘fraction’ with ‘faction’ to highlight the opposition further suggests Ariadne labouring the construction to try to make it work.

Both Jacobson and Verducci also comment on Ariadne’s oddly self-conscious narration of her own actions, as if Ariadne is ‘watching, indeed, directing herself’ (Jacobson, 224), in a manner that may recall the self-referential narrative style of tragic characters and choruses.³⁷ Both also agree that this deliberately counters Catullus’ version: ‘[Catullus] Ariadne *is* the abandoned heroine, Ovid’s Ariadne *plays* the abandoned heroine’ (Jacobson, 224); ‘one imagines [Ovid’s] Ariadne ingenuously *trying* to suffer’ (Verducci, 274). However, limited to the hypothesis of Ovid competing with Catullus, Jacobson can only call the effect ‘bizarre’ (217, n. 17). For Verducci, instead, the emotional remoteness of Ariadne’s narration perfectly fits the idea that each retelling in the tradition has diminished Ariadne’s agency and personality.³⁸ Her translation reflects this by not merely reproducing peculiarities in the Latin but also multiplying these apparent stage directions. If these usages come across as strange to the reader, it adds to the characterisation of Ariadne: a writer caught up in her own melodrama, but also one drawing attention to how much she has been aestheticised by successive retellings.

Her translation retains the clumsily tautological, almost dissociative style of phrases such as *membraque sunt viduo praecipitata toro* (14): ‘my body is hurled out of my widowed bed’, and *late | aequora prospectu metior alta meo* (27–8): ‘I scan | the deep waters far and wide with my glance’. Jacobson read this simply as a contrast of ‘the great panorama of water with the limited gaze of Ariadne’ (219), but it might seem to a modern reader that she moves her own gaze like a puppeteer. The translation then adds further suggestions that Ariadne is observing herself and inviting others to do so too. *Quid potius facerent, quam me mea lumina flerent* (45) is unexpected: until

³⁷ Armstrong (2006), 228: ‘Ariadne is so used to playing the part of the deserted woman that she now gets straight down to the business of mourning her plight’. For further developments in Ariadne’s metaliterary self-awareness, see Chapter 6: ‘Escaping the tradition’. On self-referentiality in tragedy more generally: Goldhill (1986), 244–64.

³⁸ Hinds (1993)

reaching *mea lumina*, a reader might expect the subject of the plural verb in this emotive rhetorical question to be people – in this case, outside observers.³⁹ Verducci enhances the strange impersonality by leaving *mea* untranslated, reproducing the lack of any possessive modifying *genae* (44): ‘What better could those eyes do than weep for me ... ?’ Thus her Ariadne appears to appeal as much to an imagined audience as to herself.

For Verducci, Ariadne’s self-observation, especially combined with her commentary on her appearance as she performs each action, ‘leaves her rhetorical stance vulnerable to the impression of self-love, or vanity’ (248). In translation, Verducci retains the self-consciously vulnerable connotations of *puellares* in ‘my girlish feet’ (20). First attested here, *puellaris* is subsequently used by Ovid in third-person narratives in the *Metamorphoses* to indicate youthful innocence or bloom (5.393; 10.594), and in the *Fasti*, including of feet specifically (4.433, 463; 5.611).⁴⁰ In later common usage it became a more neutral term for youth, but in the *PHI* concordance it is not otherwise attested for a young girl describing herself.⁴¹ The incongruously self-conscious first-person usage is unique. For Jacobson, this is merely emphatic: ‘the hostility of the sand is magnified by the pleading and pathetic *puellares*’ (220). This reading of *puellares*, with no attention to the self-regard elsewhere in the poem, seems to depend on the assumption that something *puellaris* is inherently pitiable. While Verducci’s reading, conversely, can appear gratuitously contemptuous, she at least interrogates the strangeness of the usage. She also retains it in her translation, rather than suppressing it: readers might pause over ‘my girlish feet’ in a way that they would not over phrases such as ‘her girlish enthusiasm’ (*puellari studio: Met.* 5.393). More forcefully, Verducci also implies self-pity in more neutral Latin phrases: *lugubria pectora* (145) is similarly personified as ‘my plaintive breast’, and *infelix* (146) becomes ‘pitifully’, as do many other words for sadness throughout. Verducci’s translation demonstrates that whereas such

³⁹ Battistella (2010), ad loc. notes Ariadne’s dissassociation from her own body parts throughout the poem.

⁴⁰ Knox (1995), ad loc. notes the strangeness, but does not read it as part of Ariadne’s self-characterisation. For Battistella (ad loc.) it highlights Ariadne’s being a parody of the elegiac *puella*.

⁴¹ The single exception is Seneca, *Medea* 908–9, but here Medea is disowning the description.

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terms might inspire pity in Catullus' third-person narrative, by using them of herself, Ovid's Ariadne comes across as histrionic and vain, whatever the underlying reasons for this might be.⁴²

Verducci pushes this idea further still in Ariadne's explicit appeals to the reader (both internal and external) to look at her. Amid so much self-conscious narration, her request that Theseus *adspice mente | haerentem ... adspice ... capillos | et tunicas* (135–8) seems equally addressed to the external reader. A more apposite verb might be one meaning 'imagine' or 'picture'; *adspice* underlines Ariadne's own attention to how she looks, in the eyes of more viewers than just Theseus. Anticipating her later translation of *ostendo maesta capillos* (147) as 'grieving, I exhibit my hair', Verducci here adds another verb of looking: 'Yet look at me now ... | Look at my hair ... | see my dress', (emphasis added). This stresses Ariadne's transparent desire to be looked at, in all her picturesque distress. The English phrase 'look at me now' also connotes pride or boastfulness, implying 'look how far I've come', as if Verducci's Ariadne is secretly pleased at what a convincing picture of sorrow she has become. When the reality is so overexaggerated, a reader's attention can be drawn to how heavily such aspects are emphasised in other tellings too. The translation even suggests its own metaliterary commentary on its picture of Ariadne. Verducci renders *movisset vultus maesta figura tuos* (134) as 'my pitiful form would have made you wince'. With *movisset* governing *vultus ... tuos* ('it would have moved your face', physically: OLD 1) rather than the more expected *te* ('it would have moved you', emotionally: OLD 15), its translation as 'made you wince' is undoubtedly pointed. Ovid's Ariadne seems convinced that she is such a complete picture of sorrow that Theseus (or other readers) could not fail to be moved. However, the slippage in Verducci's translation exposes the delusion. Her Ariadne, prone to inept lexical choices, has unwittingly alighted on one that is more appropriate than she

⁴² For another 'self-conscious echo of an appealing feminine pose' in *semisupina* (10): Armstrong (2006), 227.

realises. Theseus and the reader might well wince, not with pity, but with embarrassment at her exhibition – or at her distortion in the tradition.

Ariadne's performance to the reader is made clearest by two lines near the end of the epistle. Firstly, *non ego sum titulis subripienda tuis* (130), which Verducci translates as 'I must not be expunged from your index of honours'. The Latin verb *subripio* suggests surreptitious removal from a rightful place (*OLD* 1d), implying that Theseus would be deceitful if he omitted Ariadne from accounts of his exploits. However, Verducci's translation plays on the textual and inscriptional connotations of *titulis* to suggest something closer to altering a literary record.⁴³ A reader of the translation might therefore move beyond the text itself to consider that this Ariadne speaks as much of her literary distortion as of Theseus' boasts. There is consequently a postmodern irony in the fact that Ariadne – the most fearful of her own erasure out of all Ovid's heroines – would become one of the most frequently and widely depicted heroines of Greco-Roman mythology, even more in the present day than in Ovid's own time.

Secondly, the remark out of which Verducci makes so much comedy, *hos tibi – qui superant – ostendo maesta capillos* (147), translated as 'Grieving, I exhibit my hair to you (as much as is left of it)'. For Verducci this is a grotesque exaggeration contributing to the parody that 'ruins Ariadne' (246). However, if the poem parodies Ariadne's tradition, 'as much as is left of it' can imply 'after I have been depicted tearing it so many times'.⁴⁴ Verducci does not press the reading this far, but a reader of her translation, guided by Ariadne's own insistence on being looked at, can see in this a final critical comment on the 'outworn tradition': this ravaged caricature is all that is left of Ariadne now.

⁴³ Given the associations of *titulis* with military victories (Battistella, ad loc.), both the Latin and 'index of honours' may also suggest a list of (amorous) conquests, a witty over-formalisation of 'notch on the bedpost'.

⁴⁴ See n. 26 for Conte's study of the reworking of this idea in *Fast.* 3.471–506.

Canace

In common with those on *Her.* 3 and 10, Verducci's chapter on *Her.* 11 displays a lack of sympathy with psychologically irrational behaviour after trauma. Where for Briseis this trauma was enslavement and assault, and for Ariadne, less severely, betrayal and abandonment, for Canace it is the most violent and transgressive experiences of any in the *Heroides*. Impregnated (potentially through assault) by her brother, Canace undergoes unsuccessful abortion attempts, is compelled to give birth in silence, almost dies in childbirth, is condemned to death for unchastity by her father, has her newborn child taken from her to be exposed, and at the moment of writing is about to take her own life on her father's orders. However, whereas Briseis pleaded not to be abandoned by her own captor, Canace, having already accepted the inevitability of death, narrates increasingly traumatic events with almost total emotional detachment. Verducci regards both characters as disturbing, yet also contemptibly uncomprehending.

Jacobson's criticism of Palmer, later turned on Jacobson himself by Bloch,⁴⁵ applies here to Verducci: her argument 'manages to miss the point precisely as it hits it on the head' (113). She rightly identifies that Canace 'is unreflective ... neither rebellious, energetic, nor passionate' (205), as well as 'childish, naïve, prim, and ... even stolid', despite the poem's 'unrivaled' violence (210). Yet for Verducci this is comedy, 'Ovid's richest venture in the fascination of the banal' (207). A twenty-first-century reader is more likely to find Canace's detachment disturbingly indicative of her traumatised mental state.

However, Verducci's scholarship remains important in challenging the earlier 'almost universal critical approbation lavished upon [the poem]' (206–7), including by Jacobson, who lurches from critical detachment into outpourings of sentimentality (see above, Chapter 2: 'Context'). This was misplaced and problematic not least because it either 'ignored out of existence' or sought to explain away aspects incompatible with a reading of Canace as docile and accepting, such as the

⁴⁵ Bloch (2000), 199.

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abortion attempts (214). Verducci's reading is thus still valuable as a reading uncoloured by preconceptions about seemly feminine behaviour. More specifically, her translation, including its highlighting of Canace's strange, carefully factual narration, is open to more empathetic modern interpretations that consider Canace's trauma. However, here more than in other epistles, Verducci's translation is also affected by the limitations of her scholarship.

While victim-focused psychological investigations into trauma had begun by the mid-1970s when Verducci was completing her thesis, and had become more mainstream in the 1980s when the book was published, it was only in 1995 that a recognisable 'trauma theory' emerged as a concept usefully applicable to other disciplines.⁴⁶ Early applications in classical study focused particularly on post-traumatic stress disorder, especially in the warrior hero (and most notably Ajax).⁴⁷ It is only much more recently that trauma-based studies have been applied to Ovid's elegies: Wise has analysed *Amores* 1.7, 2.7 and 2.8 as attempts to think through experiences of violence from the perspective of the victim, with reference also to how the *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses* 'underscore the disparity in power between genders'.⁴⁸ Whether or not Verducci was aware of the state of the field prior to her publication, she does not consider Canace's detachment in this light. Her argument that 'she is *minime vivax*' (234) veers too far in the opposite direction to previous critics: it is not that Canace never feels, but that she no longer feels. She recalls confusion, pain and terror, but by the time of writing she has gone beyond this.

Amores 1.7 has previously been reappraised by feminist scholars such as Greene, who argues that the poem is 'a critique of both elegiac rhetoric and of conventional attitudes towards power relations between the sexes'.⁴⁹ Wise develops this argument, analysing Corinna's response to the poet-narrator's assault in *Amores* 1.7 by identifying symptoms of trauma: inability to move or call

⁴⁶ Caruth (1995).

⁴⁷ Karanika and Panoussi (2020), 2–3, citing previous studies.

⁴⁸ Wise (2020), 85.

⁴⁹ Greene (1999), 410.

out ('tonic immobility'), uncontrollable trembling, paleness, and weeping openly only once the danger has passed.⁵⁰ These can also be identified in Canace's account of her father's reaction to the discovery of her child (75–82 and 91–2 in Verducci's text). As well as shouting wildly, Aeolus clearly appears physically threatening: he *vix a misero continet ore manus* (80), corresponding to the *amator's* attack on Corinna's face and hair (*Am.* 1.7.49–50). Canace's resulting inability to speak (81–2: *ipsa nihil ... | torpuerat gelido lingua retenta metu*) corresponds closely to Corinna's (*Am.* 1.7.20: *ipsa nihil; pavido est lingua retenta metu*). Both weep silently while the threat is present (81: *nihil praeter lacrimas pudibunda profudi; Am.* 1.7.22: *lacrimis ore silente*), tremble violently in the terms of the same simile (75–7: *ut mare fit tremulum ... sic mea vibrari ... membra videres; Am.* 1.7.53–6: *membra trementia vidi ... cum tepido stringitur unda Noto*) and turn pale (77: *pallentia; Am.* 1.7.51 *albo et sine sanguine vultu*).⁵¹ Both also weep more openly once the immediate threat has passed (91–2: *tunc demum pectora plangi | contigit; Am.* 1.7.57: *suspensaeque diu lacrimae fluxere per ora*).

These parallels make Wise's analysis of the *Amores* passages applicable to Canace's experiences too. The pattern suggests firstly that Canace has the same traumatic response to her experiences, and secondly that she must distance herself emotionally from them in order to be able to describe them at all. Although it can be fruitful to apply concepts from psychology to literary characters, it is clearly anachronistic to suggest that Ovidian texts identify particular behaviours explicitly as psychological symptoms. Instead, Wise argues that Ovid recognised and described particular behaviours in women who would now be identified as survivors of trauma. This argument is key for understanding *Heroides* 11 and for separating it from unabashedly partial readings, both approving and critical.

⁵⁰ Wise (2020), 75–9. Wise notes that other violent parallels (e.g. Prop. 2.5.21–6; Tib. 1.6.69–76, 10.53–66) do not describe the impact on the *puella*. This is also true of other parallels identified by McKeown (1989), ad loc.

⁵¹ McKeown (1989), *Am.* 1.7.19–20n. and 53–6n. notes but does not analyse these parallels. Reeson develops the idea, but not fully; see below.

Critical opinions vary considerably over whether the Ovidian Canace, who appears to reciprocate her brother's incestuous attraction, departs fully from the model of Euripides' *Aeolus* (in which Macareus either seduced or raped her), or retains ambiguous hints of earlier versions of the myth.⁵² Verducci takes the former view, though noting that Canace's romantic feelings do not seem strong (205–6), as does Philippides, who notes that of all Ovid's depictions of incest, only here is the attraction mutual.⁵³ For Reeson, however, *quoque* (27) and *vitiati ... ventris* (39, his text) point to the Euripidean version.⁵⁴ There is noticeably no agent associated with *vitiati*, leaving it ambiguous whether Canace means the incest itself was a violation, or she was a victim of violence. Verducci's translation retains this ambiguity, giving simply 'my violated womb'. This literal version challenges Showerman, who translated unanatomically and moralistically as 'my wayward bosom' (37, his text). The distortion of *vitiati* to 'wayward', perhaps incorrectly deriving it from *vitium* ('vice'), implies a note of self-reproach that the Latin definitely does not warrant. This is therefore another example of where Verducci's translations are necessary to update and remedy the shortcomings of Showerman's antiquated version, to give a clearer sense of what the Latin actually does and does not say.

As well as *ventris*, Verducci also translates *uterus* (64) straightforwardly as 'womb', another improvement on Showerman who determinedly translated *gremio* (35) and even the more anatomical *venter* and *viscera* (42) as 'bosom' (although he managed 'womb' at 64). He does the same throughout *Amores* 2.13 and 14, even though there the focus is even more specifically anatomical. This kind of euphemistic translation is a striking reversal of the tendency of translators of Ovid to over-sexualise descriptions of women beyond or even at odds with what is

⁵² For the reader impact of Ovid's deviations from Euripides' *Aeolus*: Labate (1977). For an in-depth exploration of Canace's incest: Viarre (2007).

⁵³ Philippides (1996), 429. While generally an overly credulous romantic reading of the poem, Philippides' distinction between Canace and other incestuous Ovidian women is important for countering Verducci's criticism that Canace must be vacant because she is the only one not repulsed by her own actions.

⁵⁴ Reeson (2001), ad loc. See also Knox (1995), 37n. On her awareness of wrongdoing, see Reeson (2001), 40n., *furtivum*: by the passage's impersonality, 'Canace attempts to dissociate herself from the encounter with Macareus'.

in the Latin, as noted by Haley and McCarter.⁵⁵ Here Showerman used ‘bosom’ in preference for the actual body part referred to, in a prudish reworking of the circling of the elegiac gaze around women’s genitalia.⁵⁶ Verducci’s translation thus restores the text’s ‘arresting’ directness (Knox, 37n.) that was glossed over by earlier versions.

Verducci also retains the implied violence in Macareus’ behaviour. She interprets *scissa tunicaque comaque* (57) as his ‘tearing away *my* robe and hair’ (emphasis added; though, in an overlooked discontinuity, not on p. 217, where ‘Macareus tears his hair, tears open his robe’).⁵⁷ Whichever way round it is, the subsequent *pressa ... pectora nostra tuis* implies skin-to-skin contact of an forcefulness wholly inappropriate for a woman in difficult labour. Fredrick notes the apparently erotic associations of the (often explicitly violent) tearing or disordering of the elegiac *puella*’s clothes and hair, which often uses *scindere* or its compounds.⁵⁸ The later parallels with *Am.* 1.7 at 75–82 and 91–2, where Canace responds to Aeolus’ unequivocal violence – verbal, barely – also heighten the implications of violence at 57.

Furthermore, Verducci chooses the forceful ‘hurling yourself upon me’ for *super incumbens*, which at the very least hints at Macareus’ violent personality elsewhere in the tradition, and again would be entirely unwelcome in Canace’s situation. (The verb also foreshadows what Macareus will do when he finds Canace dead: not only will he doubtless throw himself on her lifeless body, perhaps using the same words as here, but he will then fall on her sword: a meaning also encompassed by *incumbo* (OLD 4b).) In this, the translation suggests possible violence and assault that Canace might not recognise or acknowledge, but that would nonetheless constitute further trauma. The tension between this implication and her expressions of affection thus becomes

⁵⁵ Haley (2009), 41–9; McCarter (2019).

⁵⁶ Richlin (1992), 47.

⁵⁷ Knox (1995), ad loc. supports the latter reading as a conventional ritual gesture, although at 5.141n. he reads Oenone as tearing Apollo’s hair; *contra* Casali (1997), 306–7.

⁵⁸ Fredrick (1997), 181–7. See e.g. Propertius 2.5.21, 2.15.18, Ovid *Amores* 1.5.13, 1.7.47, Tibullus 1.10.61–2.

disturbing. For a reader without Latin, or unfamiliar with the mythic tradition, the translation brings out connotations of violence that might otherwise be read merely as vehement passion.

In considering the possibility of Canace surviving assault, it is important to note that, as with *Her.* 10 above, one aspect of the poem that remains steadfastly disregarded in criticism is her dramatic age. For her to be unmarried, yet of marriageable age, as she must be for Macareus' petition to Aeolus to work, she can be no more than a teenager. Given the Romanisation of the other heroines (see especially Chapter 2: 'Hypsipyle'), a Roman readership may have readily considered her to be as young as twelve: a consideration that may not have arisen in the Euripidean tragedy.⁵⁹ In a modern reading, this would solidify the implication of assault, even if the reader is led to believe in Canace's apparent acquiescence; a child of that age cannot give consent. Furthermore, aside from the neglect of the impact of sex, pregnancy and childbirth on a person neither mentally nor physically ready for it, this has precluded interrogations of the simplicity of the style and the often childishly petulant tone of Canace's complaints against her father. Verducci refers to her as 'preadolescent' (208) and 'a child' (209), yet considers this a behaviour to be criticised, rather than potentially a concrete fact: 'Canace describes urgent emotion, an aberrant liaison, and violent action in the flat tones of an upper-class *puella* complaining that she must – it's unfair but she'll do it – card a little more than her usual quota of wool' (234). Arguably a certain lack of rhetorical sophistication is to be expected in the writing of a heroine characterised as a potentially barely pubescent Roman girl, who even as an 'upper-class *puella*' would probably have had only limited education.⁶⁰

A further possibility is that if Canace is so very young, she does not describe her feelings because she literally cannot comprehend their enormity, or does not possess the vocabulary to express them any more strongly than she does. A possible sign of this is her infamously ambivalent

⁵⁹ For the average age of Roman brides and their perinatal mortality: Pomeroy (1995), 164, 169; compare Athens and Sparta: 84–5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 170. More recently: Hemelrijk (2004), 20–30.

description of affection: *nescio quem ... deum* (26). In an inversion of the allusion to Virgil's *Eclogue* 8.41 (*nunc scio quid sit Amor*, 'now I know what Love is') identified by Hinds in *Her.* 12.33, Canace tells the reader plainly she does not know what sort of god Love is, despite what she has done apparently in his name.⁶¹ Similarly, her apparent 'disinclination for self-examination' over the transgression of her incest (212) might be more readily explained as a lack of the emotional maturity required to comprehend such things.⁶² A reading that recognises this incomprehension allows greater sympathy for and indeed horror on behalf of the speaker that she is dealing alone with experiences (including possible assault) that she does not fully understand.

Even if her reading of its causes is unsympathetic, Verducci's translation reflects the relatively unornamented Latin, and there are noticeably fewer passages that add English idioms or imagery not present in the source text. This aspect is particularly obscured by earlier translations, especially the archaisms of Showerman ('thy pinions' for *pinnis ... tuis* (14); 'sire', 'dame' and 'babe' throughout for *pater, anus* and *infans*). These give the letter a lofty tragic diction not suggested by the Latin. What is striking for Verducci is the epistle's (for her) vapid combination of simplicity and concrete precision. Her translation conveys this in the childishly methodical construction of linking each event in a shocking narrative sequence with 'and then' (37: *iamque*), 'and now' (45: *iam*), or 'and so' (49: *nec*). Showerman's style, combining archaism (37: 'presently') with a focus on tragic inexorability (45: 'already'; 49 with asyndeton), leaves no room for these elements. Thus the simple directness of Verducci's translation is key for recognising inappropriate readings of the poem.

Her recognition of Canace's teenage petulance is also conveyed in her translations: as in *Her.* 3, she sometimes typographically enhances moments of pique: *mandata persequar ipsa patris* (128) becomes 'I shall execute the will of my father *myself*, alone' (emphasis in original). The stress on

⁶¹ Hinds (1993), 23–4.

⁶² Labate (1977), 592 also notes that elegiac conventions preclude excessively dwelling on such emotions.

myself suggests a stropmy declaration of adolescent independence disturbingly inappropriate for the reality of the situation, reflecting Verducci's reading of the complaining 'upper-class *puella*' who confirmed her status as literal and metaphorical princess in the poem's early lines. More sombrely, however, Verducci immediately tempers this by adding 'alone', which both highlights Canace's literal isolation and stresses the traditional tragic irony of the fact that had Macareus returned to her earlier than he did, he would have been able to prevent her death.⁶³

Furthermore, as Reeson notes, there is not so much simplicity in the poem that there are no rhetorical effects at all;⁶⁴ Canace exhibits moments of grim humour, which Verducci reproduces. There is a dark reversal in the translation of *mandatum persequar* (128) as 'execute the will', which in English connotes carrying out someone's wishes after *their* death, whereas here the wish that Canace carries out is her father's for her own death. The association is especially strong following her own last request to Macareus in the previous line to *dilectae nimium mandata sororis | perfer* ('carry out the last desires of the sister you loved | too well'). Besides playing darkly on execution as killing, this further reproduces the earlier macabre twisting of legalistic and ritual vocabulary (99–100, of the sword as dowry, and 19, of the premature funeral offering as the cause of death).⁶⁵ The gallows humour of Canace's sign-off, present in the Latin in the repetition of *mandata* and verbs prefixed with *per-* for both sets of wishes, is brought out more strikingly in the translation as a moment of greater rhetorical flair than Canace is generally credited with. The fact that Verducci's translation highlights these elements enables a reader to see Canace's underlying vestiges of spirit, even where Verducci herself does not.

Canace's general disinclination to describe her own reactions, especially in anything other than concrete and literal terms, makes it more striking when she does do so in the poem's climactic moments. In these passages Verducci's translation correspondingly becomes more allusive.

⁶³ For the poem's tragic irony: Williams (1992) and Casali (1995b).

⁶⁴ e.g. 29–34n.: 'her professed amatory naïveté is in amusing tension with the highly rhetorical phrasing of her list'.

⁶⁵ Reeson (2001), 101n.; 21n. (Reeson's text).

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Where Canace likens herself to a *fraxina virga* and describes her limbs as *pallentia* (76–7), Verducci links the two and translates *fraxina* as ‘ashen’, so that the English semantic overlap picks up the simile with ‘ashen-white’ for *pallentia*. Besides strikingly emphasising that Canace is still recovering, alone, from a life-threatening labour, *membra* and *inposito corpore* (78) evoke a corpse laid out for burial, which she will shortly be. ‘Ashen’ rather than ‘like an ash’ thus plays on ‘ashes’ to heighten the funereal associations. This suggests Canace is projecting her impending death and cremation onto her account of the events that have caused it. It is striking that of all the experiences Canace relates, the one that evokes the most fear is her father’s howling rage, and the reason is suggested by the translation tying her reaction so clearly and macabrely to thoughts of the death he will order. Readers unfamiliar with the parallel with the *Amores* thus gain a stronger sense of the full, deadly scale of Aeolus’s violence.

Reeson notes that in the passage’s reworkings in *Her.* 14.39–40 and *Am.* 1.7.54, the simile uses the more obviously funereal poplar, but that the ash is suitable here as it is ‘particularly prone to trembling in the breeze’, creating a closer comparison with the anger of the ruler of the winds. For him, ‘the reader may play the “serious” cause of the trembling off against the more “trivial” context of the *Am.* passage’.⁶⁶ However, taking *Am.* 1.7 as a more serious poem, as Wise does, a reader familiar with both poems may more directly associate the threat Canace perceives with the actual violence against the *puella*. For a reader without this familiarity, the altered tone and allusiveness of Verducci’s version is much more disturbing in its rendering of Canace’s response than Showerman’s, which archaises still further (‘o’er’, ‘my blanching members’) to create an elevated style with no emotional immediacy.

Verducci’s oversimplification of Canace’s emotional response to her own incest becomes particularly challenging in passages concerning Canace’s child. She argues firstly that Canace’s description of herself as her child’s enemy in the attempted abortions, and the child’s own

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, ad loc.

personality (39–44), indicate Ovid’s ‘reservation of full sympathy’ for her (214) and provoke ‘sympathy for the infant’ (215).⁶⁷ Secondly, of Canace’s would-be funeral lament, she argues that ‘the foil for her protestations of grief is her attempt ... to abort her infant’ (223), and that such extravagant lamentation for an only minutes-old child is performative, ‘hyperdecorous decorum’ (226). Feminist objections to Verducci’s position are readily found. The failure of the abortion can itself elicit sympathy for Canace, due to the now more widely recognised trauma of being compelled to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term (especially if it resulted from assault).⁶⁸ Furthermore, had the abortion succeeded, the termination even of an undesired or unplanned pregnancy can be a source of trauma.⁶⁹

However, as before, it is also possible to find more sympathetic readings than Verducci’s own in her translations. Ovid would later regularly use the word *onus* for the unborn foetus: see *Am.* 2.13.1 and 20 (of Corinna’s abortion), *Her.* 6.120, *Fast.* 1.624 (of clandestine abortions) and 2.452 (a prayer for successful childbirth), *Met.* 10.481, 506 and 513 (of Myrrha’s pregnancy). Besides the connotations of a physically draining burden, all but two of these uses describe an either unwanted or transgressive pregnancy.⁷⁰ Furthermore, all but *Her.* 6 describe a difficult birth or other danger to the mother (and even Hypsipyle qualifies that the *onus* was only made *dulce* because of the father’s identity). Verducci translates both *onus* and *pondera* (37) using object nouns such as ‘freight’, ‘cargo’ and ‘burden’, which in this context give an even more striking sense of depersonification than the Latin. A feminist reading might find strong associations of unwanted pregnancy here, even before the attempted abortion.

⁶⁷ I follow James (2003), 173–83, that *Am.* 2.13 and 14 form part of Ovid’s exploration of realism in elegy, of the ‘actual risks and needs of the *docta puella* ... based in her profession’, and that the poet–narrator’s criticisms of abortion cannot be taken as the poet’s and should not be read into other episodes. Knox (1995), 39–44n. believes ‘this note of harsh realism is Ovid’s own and reflects his own sympathies for Canace’s predicament’.

⁶⁸ Logan Stotland (2019).

⁶⁹ Brooker (2017), 155–8, referencing clinical studies.

⁷⁰ For similar connotations of *pondus* (37): Oliensis (2019), 144, n. 127.

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Canace does, however, also refer to the child as *infans* four times in the epistle (43, 67, 73, 119), including before the birth. Verducci reflects the semantic change by translating all these instances as ‘baby’ or ‘child’. Similarly, she reflects the changing sense of *viscera* between 42 and 90 by translating the former as ‘deep inside me’ and the latter as the far more emotive ‘child of my body’. The abrupt change from the pregnancy as *onus* to the unborn child as *infans* symbolises Canace’s complicated emotional relationship with her child. This change, and her mourning of the child she earlier tried to abort, are contradictory responses, but not incomprehensibly so.⁷¹ Verducci’s direct translation, which does not attempt to resolve these apparent contradictions, thus describes responses with which readers can empathise, even if she herself appears not to.

Nonetheless, there are more cases in this epistle than in others where Verducci’s derisive reading of the poem does unhelpfully affect her translation. She particularly exaggerates Canace’s disengagement and inactivity, suggesting that Canace thinks and does nothing unless she is instructed to: the god *qualemque audire solebam* (25) becomes ‘one who was everything I *used to be told* he was’ (emphasis added). More striking still is her translation of 81–2. Although the strong emotion of ‘in my humiliation and shame’ for *prudibunda* counters the suggestion that Canace never feels anything, *nihil praeter lacrimas ... profudi* becomes ‘I ... did nothing but sob’. Aside from implying a more vocal expression of grief than the Latin, Verducci turns *nihil*’s implication of *saying* nothing into *doing* nothing. As well as suppressing the important interplay between inappropriate speech and inappropriate silence throughout the epistle,⁷² the whole phrase has a negative ring as a result. Used by someone else it would sound accusatory (‘She did nothing but cry!’), while in Canace’s own voice it sounds pitifully helpless.⁷³ Rather, as Knox (ad loc.) observes, the point is that ‘Canace wants to speak but cannot’. Similarly, while Verducci vividly

⁷¹ For the importance of considering the emotiveness of ancient attitudes to abortion: Escobar (2012), 119–22, and, though tending throughout to project modern concerns onto ancient sources, Kapparis (2002), 194–9. Kapparis cautions against uncritically equating a source’s use of *infans*, including here, with opposition to abortion (37).

⁷² On how this helps Canace’s positioning as a tragic heroine: Casanova-Robin (2009), 57–9.

⁷³ Showerman, Isbell and Pollard all translate *nihil profudi* this way too.

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retains the icy sense of *gelido* (82) in ‘speech froze upon my lips, checked by glazed terror’, the English usage of ‘glazed’ of someone’s face also suggests a distractedly vacant expression. Even as Verducci’s Canace claims to be terrified, she uses vocabulary that hints at her detachment. While at a stretch one can infer this from *torpnerat* (*OLD* 3), it is not strongly suggested. The reader might well wish Canace had attempted to speak, especially if they know of Aeolus’ susceptibility to persuasion by Macareus, but Verducci’s use of the passage makes Canace’s passivity far more irritating than the Latin suggests.

As with her reading of *Her.* 3, Verducci’s work on 11 comes across as gratuitously unsympathetic in light of more recent scholarship on the collection. However, it serves as an important step away from the more serious misreadings of earlier criticism that sought to romanticise and praise Canace’s behaviour rather than raise concerns about it. While Verducci’s own reading is itself now difficult to accept, it remains the only one (including subsequent feminist monographs that seek to re-empower Canace in other ways) to identify the disconnect between what the heroine says and what earlier scholars assumed she was saying.⁷⁴ Verducci’s unsentimental translation and her highlighting of the points where earlier criticism fell short create a much stronger position from which to move understanding of the Canace epistle forward. However, the passages where even her translation is unhelpful indicate the continuing importance of new translations, to supplement and challenge even those that themselves challenged previous versions. (For my own version of this epistle as one possible reinterpretation, see below, ‘Conclusions’.)

Furthermore, despite its representation in commentaries by both Reeson and Knox, scholarship on this poem has been slower to develop than that on other epistles. While French scholarship has made detailed intertextual explorations of her role as a tragic heroine in elegy, only a handful of articles from the 1990s concerning the poem’s dramatic irony make any movement towards reassessing Canace’s apparent naïveté. The epistle has seen nothing like the scale of

⁷⁴ For a reading of Canace as reclaiming her agency and control over events: Fulkerson (2005), 65–86.

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reinterpretations of *Her.* 10. It is particularly essential that *Her.* 11 be reassessed in interdisciplinary scholarship, as other episodes of assault and trauma in Ovid have begun to be.

Conclusion

In her scholarship on these three poems, Verducci regularly tends towards almost deliberately unsympathetic readings (which a Roman readership, and indeed perhaps some modern readerships, might have found more convincing), without balancing them against more circumspect alternatives. She is in many places limited in her readings by her New Critical lens, more than once cutting off her argument just when a conceptual leap to something more groundbreaking seemed imminent (such as on the effect of rereading the *Iliad* in light of *Her. 3*). Her approach may also be an example of the tendency Skinner identified for women Classics scholars to reproduce masculinist approaches, or to deliberately take an antifeminist stance to legitimise their work with more traditional scholars, but this is difficult to prove or disprove.

More modern feminist readings of the *Heroides* now rightly centre on the heroines themselves and how readers might respond to the connections between them. Methodologically, Verducci's work falls between two stools by comparison. Many recent responses react against her readings, some in detail on specific points to produce a more nuanced synthesis of ideas, others dismissing the general tendencies of the work out of hand. Effrossini Spentzou writes of Verducci that 'such an uncharitable perspective cannot be the only view on the *Heroides*, still less the only way to present the heroines to the world.'⁷⁵

Yet the importance of Verducci's work as a milestone in *Heroides* scholarship should not be underestimated: the second anglophone monograph concentrating purely on the *Heroides*, after Jacobson in 1974, and the first ever to depart from the conventional critical narrative about the poems. Her reappraisals provide more fertile ground for radical reinterpretations than the scholarly and creative landscape that existed before. The suggestion that they are intentionally disruptive and varied in tone, rather than being judged failures on the basis of unconscious bias,

⁷⁵ Spentzou (2003), 16.

leaves both scholarship and reception in a much stronger position, even when the poetic readings Verducci herself takes from that analysis are regressive.

More radical feminist work interpreting the *Heroides* as attempts by the heroines to '(re)write their stories, against the will of the classical authorities'⁷⁶ was thus enabled, advancing from Kennedy (1984, writing contemporaneously with Verducci), for whom it was a struggle to imagine the heroines writing. Even if its most tangible legacy is to have inspired the next generation of feminist scholars (Spentzou, Lindheim and Fulkerson) to take a completely different approach, it nonetheless marks an important turning point in the fortunes of the *Heroides*, and constitutes part of the wider integration of the study of women into mainstream classical study.

Verducci's readings and the commentary justifying them cannot sit comfortably with a twenty-first-century feminist reader, but they served to bring the texts back to a place where further scholarship had a more stable foundation. Furthermore, her translations are often open to more progressive readings even when her scholarship is not. These too, in turn, offer a basis for further creative responses, because of their obvious departure from previous translations. Yet there are cases when even this can only take the reader so far, and in cases such as *Her.* 11, the unsympathetic reading underlying her translation is a marker of how even versions that are otherwise groundbreaking have limitations that can be challenged by further reinterpretations.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 29.

4. What Ovid Said? Harold Isbell

This chapter explores Harold Isbell's *Heroides* (1990, revised 2004), published by Penguin Classics and thus arguably the most readily accessible and mainstream English version of the *Heroides*.

The reputation of Penguin Random House and of the Penguin Classics imprint lends the translation some authority and prestige, and in many ways the translation does fulfil the aims of the series to offer an accessible version to non-academic readers seeking to explore the poems for the first time. However, the chapter demonstrates that Isbell's translation is also a partial and misleading rendition of the Latin poems for a readership that is significantly non-Latinate and therefore unable to compare the translations with the source texts. In particular, the analysis focuses on Isbell's translations of passages that oversimplify and misrepresent both the heroines and the poet, and also foreclose the possibility of varied reader responses.

Isbell thus stands at a complex divide. His translation represents a turning-point because it is indicative of the *Heroides* being brought into the mainstream of translation for the first time, reflecting their then recent reappraisal in scholarship. Thus, to readers browsing in bookshops, the *Heroides* are given equal status with the other translated works in the Penguin Classics series. Yet this turning-point is not necessarily an entirely positive one, because in many ways Isbell's readings do the poems a disservice.

Context

At the time of writing, conversations within and around mainstream commercial publishing have belatedly begun to demonstrate a growing awareness of the industry's problematic lack of inclusivity, in terms of both its own infrastructure and the authors and translators who have opportunities to be published.¹ Emily Wilson, whose English translation of the *Odyssey* was

¹ See e.g. Squires (2017), building on research conducted by Spread the Word (2015). On resistance to inclusivity in the anglophone translation industry specifically: Barokka (2018). For an example of translated literature as sociopolitical resistance: Davies (2020), 158–62, on Peirene Press.

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heavily marketed as that of the first woman to publish an English translation of the *Odyssey*, has expressed concerns about the fact that ‘the vast majority of English translators of ancient Greek are elderly white men’ and called for publishers to take steps to address this in commissioning translations in future.²

It is safe to say that this was not considered in mainstream commercial publishing in 1990, when Harold Isbell’s *Heroides* translation was published by Penguin. In appointing an appropriate translator for an ancient text, there are at least two considerations: expertise in the source language, and ability to convey ancient ideas and cultural concepts lucidly for modern readers. The specific aim of Penguin Classics – that of being accessible to non-academic readers – adds the further consideration that the translator should be able to produce engaging, readable English, rather than laboriously reproducing the structure and idiom of the source.³ In the terminology of translation studies, this is a domesticating approach. Hence translators in the series are as likely to be professional writers (of poetry or prose) as academics in Classics; the series at large includes names such as Dorothy L. Sayers, Robert Graves and A. E. Stallings, alongside Christopher Pelling, Cynthia Damon and Betty Radice. A special issue of *Arion* in 1968 had highlighted problems with this ‘tame, sedate and blandly readable’ approach, but Betty Radice, Editor of the series until her death in 1985, always persevered in aiming for ‘accessible, comprehensible, and fluent’ translations above all.⁴ This chapter demonstrates that Isbell’s translation is an example of the potentially detrimental effects of this domesticating approach.

More recent reflections on representation in publishing invite two further considerations which have historically tended to be neglected: whose expertise might be overlooked due to their being of a marginalised age, gender or race; and who might have a suitable register of experiences to be

² Wood (2019).

³ This stems from E. V. Rieu’s founding vision for the series, for which he approached professional writers rather than academics: Radice (1987), 21, note.

⁴ Fowler (2016), 350–1.

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able to bring out aspects of the text that a translator without those experiences, or at least a deep understanding of them, would not. Conversely, existing translations can be examined with an eye to the opposite: whether a translator whose age, gender or race was not marginalised was commissioned despite lacking expertise, and how their translation treats experiences to which they are unsympathetic. Haley and McCarter identify many examples of translators' unexamined biases influencing their translations of Latin texts in ways that readers without access to the source text have no way to recognise or interrogate.⁵ As demonstrated below, it is important to reassess Isbell's translation in light of his situatedness as a translator. While at the time of publication such questions may not have been cause for concern, it is timely to raise them now that it is almost the only anglophone close translation (as opposed to transcreation or adaptation) remaining in print and readily available.⁶

Isbell studied Latin in high school and college, but never majored in the subject. Educated at Loras College, Iowa, and later the University of Notre Dame – both private Catholic institutions – he went on to teach in Liberal Studies and became an associate professor of English at Notre Dame, but never taught Latin.⁷ The remainder of his career was spent outside academia, in banking and in various directorial roles.⁸ His additional publications include translations of two passages of Ausonius in *Arion* in 1965 and an original poem in *Prairie Schooner* in 1967, and by the time his *Heroides* was published he had also previously edited and translated *The Last Poets of Imperial Rome* (Penguin, 1971). In sum, he was neither an especially noted academic expert in Latin nor a prominent writer in English.

He does, however, appear eventually to have pitched the right translation at the right time. In the introduction to his translation, he acknowledges 'my former teacher ... who chanced the remark

⁵ Haley (2009), 41–9; McCarter (2019).

⁶ While following Isbell's publication it would have also been possible to consult Cannon (1972) or Hine (1991), both are now out of print.

⁷ Harold Isbell, email to Catherine Slater, 17 May 2006. I am grateful to Dr Slater for access to this correspondence.

⁸ Isbell (2004), frontispiece.

... that the *Heroides* needed another translation’,⁹ showing that he recognised the need for a more up-to-date version than the Loeb. Throughout the 1990s, classical translation in popular literature experienced what Ziolkowski describes as an ‘Ovidian boom’.¹⁰ Additionally, a review of Isbell’s translation notes that ‘it appears that Ovid is now top of the pops. His poetry, of course, is sexy and can be illustrated with attractive paintings of scenes from his poems showing broad expanses of naked flesh.’¹¹ The reviewer suggests that it is in response to such demand that Isbell’s translation was published.

Yet it should be stressed that Isbell had previously experienced considerable difficulty in having his translation published. He first submitted it to Betty Radice, then joint editor of the Penguin Classics series, in 1968. Radice’s pitch of it to the publishers was unsuccessful on the grounds of likely low sales, and she personally rejected the script due to ‘not the quality of your translation so much as the monotony of the original’, which she called ‘very uneven in quality’ and ‘overworked by Ovid, so that *for Latinless readers they can be very tedious*’ (emphasis added).¹² It is striking that Radice, who had read the *Heroides* in Latin, thought interest could only be found in appreciation of the Latin. In spite of her determination to serve the non-specialist reader both well and with respect – ‘there was nothing patronizing about her attitude to her non-classical reader. He [sic] must be served by the highest standards of scholarship’¹³ – she seems to have made an exception in her opinion on the appeal of the *Heroides*.

Radice also expressed doubt that likely sales would justify a print run of 25,000 copies. Besides her assessment that non-academic readers would not find the poems interesting, she also observed that the translation would not be widely used as an educational resource as other texts

⁹ Isbell (2004), xx. Further page references given in text. References to translated passages give page numbers, as line numbers are not printed.

¹⁰ See Introduction. For Ziolkowski’s full account of the renewed cultural fascination with Ovid and especially the *Metamorphoses* in the 1990s: Ziolkowski (2005), 185–207; on translation especially 195–207.

¹¹ Griffin (1991), 60.

¹² University of Bristol Library, Penguin Archive, DM1187/20. Letter from Radice to Isbell, 30 May 1968.

¹³ Wynn (1987), 41.

in the series were known to be. (She regularly dealt with correspondence from the Joint Association of Classical Teachers and other educational organisations asking if Penguin planned to commission translations of particular texts or authors that would be useful resources.) In light of the financial difficulties Penguin was experiencing at that time – ‘Betty Radice had to fight for every title and every reprint during those difficult years’¹⁴ – it is possible that this consideration may have weighed more heavily against accepting the translation than it might have otherwise. In any case, Radice instead proposed to Isbell the project that eventually became his *The Last Poets of Imperial Rome* (1971).

In response, Isbell explained what had interested him about the *Heroides*, citing its pervasive influence on Chaucer and subsequently on Early Modern English literature more broadly (see Chapter 1), and aligning his own views with those of Dryden on the compelling emotional register of the heroines. What is striking is that neither Isbell nor Radice explicitly refers to the actual content of the poems as worthy of interest. He went on to write in the same letter that because Showerman’s Loeb translation is ‘not very readable’, and students generally knew less and less Latin, ‘it is my opinion that a translation at this time would be valuable for those who are studying literature but lack the ability to read Ovid’s Latin with ease, comfort or enjoyment’.¹⁵ However, he evidently did not succeed in changing Radice’s mind at that time.

On the basis of the long transatlantic correspondence that the *Last Poets of Imperial Rome* project entailed, Isbell pitched the translation again several times in subsequent years. However, he was only finally commissioned in 1987, presumably at least partly due to the increased scholarly interest in the *Heroides* by that time, and he embarked on producing an entirely new translation. He notes that Radice’s increased interest in the project (prior to her death in 1985) may also have

¹⁴ Radice (1987), 28.

¹⁵ DM1187/20. Letter from Isbell to Radice, 6 June 1968.

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been due to the advent of desktop publishing, which meant that publishers no longer had to commit to such large print runs.¹⁶

However, Robin Waterfield, the editor who took over the project at Radice's death (and who is an academically trained classicist and was already a prolific translator in his own right), responded to Isbell's first draft noting countless instances where 'you ... over- or undertranslate', or where phrases are omitted altogether. Waterfield's intention was not that every instance should be changed, but that any instance might, in order to produce a less misleading translation: 'I do want the reader to be able to know better what Ovid actually said.'¹⁷ The concerns with over- and undertranslation are elaborated in a manuscript report on the first draft (unsigned and undated, but likely to refer to the 1987 manuscript, given its overlaps with Waterfield's letter), which notes that the Ovidian themes were 'invariably paraphrased, often compressed or expanded, and occasionally actually misleadingly presented'; 'whole lines of Ovid's may be omitted; extra lines may be inserted'.¹⁸ The Penguin Archive does not hold this first draft, and the letter refers only to line numbers, so it is largely impossible to identify changes in the published version (some exceptions are noted below). What is evident, however, is a tension between Isbell's attitude to translating the text and the editorial vision for Penguin Classics as Waterfield saw it. No further editorial correspondence concerning the text itself is held by the archive, and so it remains unclear how, or how far, this tension was resolved.

The other striking aspect of the Penguin *Heroides* is that Isbell was contracted to produce his own introduction and notes to the work (as he had previously done for *The Last Poets of Imperial Rome*). From August 1968, Betty Radice and Moses Finley had embarked on a project of reviewing the early Penguin Classics titles. Besides identifying those requiring new translations, the aim was to establish where there was a need for new, more academically sound introductions by recognised

¹⁶ Harold Isbell, email to Catherine Slater, 17 May 2006.

¹⁷ DM1852/D355. Letter from Waterfield to Isbell, 12 May 1987.

¹⁸ University of Bristol Library, Penguin Archive, DM1852/D355. Undated manuscript report.

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scholars to replace those written by the translators (who had been selected by the series' founding editor, E. V. Rieu, precisely because they were professional writers rather than academics). Furthermore, they declared that for future titles they would 'probably increasingly commission an academic to write the introduction from the start'.¹⁹

This reflected Radice's recognition of the changing purpose of the series. Moving away from Rieu's original conception that it should 'give pleasure even more than instruction', without the clutter of scholarly apparatus, the series was becoming so widely used as an educational resource, both in schools and by adults, that greater scholarly rigour was needed.²⁰ Consequently many early editions were revised to add 'line references, notes, indexes, bibliographies and fuller introductions' that would benefit a reader seeking to learn, with the intention that new translations would be commissioned this way in the first instance.²¹ Not all subsequent translations were published with introductions by someone else; some of the most recent publications still have introductions by the translator. However, it is striking that one translator who was left to write his own introduction was Isbell, even though his scholarly specialism was not in Classics at all.

In a letter to Robin Waterfield prior to commissioning Isbell, it was noted that Isbell had already written an introduction and would be revising it.²² Isbell's contract also states that he is responsible for producing the introduction and the notes. The introduction is essentially satisfactory, covering much of what is interesting and noteworthy about the collection, and introducing biographical and historical details to familiarise a non-specialist reader with the context. As such, it may have been decided that it was not necessary to seek an academic (such as Howard Jacobson or Florence Verducci, both of whom had published on the *Heroides* by

¹⁹ University of Bristol Library, Penguin Archive, DM1187/3, letter from Dieter Pevsner to Betty Radice and Moses Finley, 23 August 1968.

²⁰ Radice (1987), 10; 21.

²¹ Wynn (1987), 41.

²² University of Bristol Library, Penguin Archive, DM1852/D355, letter from Paul Keegan to Waterfield, 10 March 1987.

1987) to produce a new introduction, since it was known that Isbell had already written one. The scholarly landscape was far broader in 2004 when the edition was revised, but the original introduction was retained.

Griffin's review of Isbell's translation notes that 'I. has spent much of his career outside a university environment', but far from criticising, he suggests that 'this may have contributed to the freshness and directness of his translation'. It is not unreasonable to associate the experience of life outside a formal academic institution with the possibility of producing a livelier translation, as Rieu had previously found. However, Griffin's subsequent observation that 'Ovid's poetry seems to have particular fascination for active, successful and cultivated men of the world' is ominous, as is demonstrated below.²³

There also is also a likely connection between Isbell's lack of classical training and the significant number of errors and misreadings Griffin (who would later produce a commentary on *Met.* 11) finds in Isbell's notes. A mitigating factor here is the lack of any lemmatic commentaries on the *Heroides* that might have served as reference for Isbell's work at that time. Although commentaries on individual poems and selections were published in English and more especially in Italian throughout the 1990s, the only one available to Isbell would have been Palmer and Purser's 1898 edition. In the introduction Isbell acknowledges a number of bibliographical sources including both Jacobson and Verducci, though it is clear he has been more influenced by Jacobson and he does not mention Verducci's translations at all. The translations available to him were Showerman's Loeb and Turberville's 1567 version, and he also consulted Dörrie's text.²⁴ Besides his actual errors, the unavailability of any detailed textual scholarship may also have contributed to some of the shortcomings of Isbell's translation, discussed below.

²³ Griffin (1991), 60.

²⁴ Isbell (2004), xix; email to Catherine Slater, 17 May 2006.

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However good Penguin's intentions may have been to produce a *Heroides* translation that was more widely accessible and appreciable, this chapter demonstrates ways in which Isbell's translation perpetuates distorted and insensitive readings of certain characters and themes in the collection. Isbell demonstrates conservative attitudes typical of a middle-class American Catholic man born in the 1930s: a tendency to conflate moral purity with sexual innocence, and unchastity with shame. This results in a flattening and oversimplification of the nuances of these ideas in the Latin rather than an exploration of the underlying mentality of those experiencing them. Furthermore, his translations of passages describing assault introduce the idea of rape as a game in which the victim participates – a misogynist stereotype still current in, for instance, online 'manosphere' communities – in phrasing that elides the ambivalence of the Latin.²⁵ He also depicts the female body in stereotyped ways, distorts accounts of the experiences of enslaved women, and relies over-readily and indiscriminately on highly-charged slurs.

Additionally, in a tendency that may reflect his underlying reading that 'the one quality which runs through all [the poems] is the irony with which every situation, every expectation, every setting for action is viewed' (xix), his translations are tonally flat and do not distinguish between the distinctive voices of the heroines. There are passages where even Showerman's antiquated prose translation conveys stronger, more vivid emotion than Isbell's verse. As Waterfield's criticism noted, the restrictions of metre appear often to have led Isbell to oversimplify his translation into passages that read as more prosaic and dull than their prose counterpart. Comparisons with Verducci's verse translations will demonstrate that this was not inevitable.

In a time when scholars of Latin and Greek literature are rightly re-examining the ways in which ancient texts with difficult subject matter are understood, taught and written about, translations of Ovid – an author whose texts are so especially full of accounts of violence and assault – should be treated with particular care. McCarter has indicated examples of translators

²⁵ Zuckerberg (2018), 129–36.

introducing a more sexualised male gaze into translations of passages from the *Metamorphoses* than is in the Latin, while Haley has done the same with responses to depictions of women of colour in Pseudo-Virgil's *Moretum* and in Pompeian graffiti.²⁶ What is concerning in Isbell's translation is the extent to which he conflates the conservative values of his own time regarding women's behaviour with those of the ancient context. Passages of the resulting translation fetishise the female body, the enslaved experience, and narratives of assault. More concerning still is the way this creates a narrative voice that frequently distorts the sense of the heroines' attitudes towards their own experiences and towards others. Isbell's translation does a disservice to the poems, their heroines, and their readers.

This study applies a feminist critical lens to Isbell's text to expose both the patriarchal ideologies present in the Latin text that Isbell reinforces and enhances, and those additionally superimposed on the text that are informed by the more explicitly religious patriarchal ideologies of Isbell's own time. This analysis is not simply an attempt to expose the latent misogyny of past male writers for its own sake, since shutting down discussion of a text in this way is unproductive. Rather, it serves as an exploration of how alternative readings of such multivalent poems are made more difficult for readers who rely solely on Isbell's version. It is essential that translations of this sort can be supplemented and challenged by other versions.

Translations

First, it is important to acknowledge that in a straightforward sense Isbell's translation fulfils its brief: it is modern, readable and unthreatening, without obscure vocabulary or dated turns of phrase. As noted above, his introduction provides a clear explanation of the main issues of interest to a reader new to the work. In this sense, the work serves the intended purpose of Penguin Classics translations. It is not because these other aspects are unimportant that this

²⁶ See n. 5 above.

study focuses primarily on the translation's shortcomings, but because the cumulative effect of these shortcomings is both a misleading and reductive rendition of the Latin and a concomitant limiting of the range of possible reader responses.

Isbell's translation forms part of a landscape of work on the *Heroides* demonstrably influenced by prejudices that still have a contemporary sociopolitical impact: especially sexism, but also unexamined assumptions regarding the enslavement of people. A translation like Isbell's, which purports to preserve the 'substance' of the text, but then translates and embellishes with ideas informed by those prejudices, works to the detriment of the readers it sets out to serve.

Tone

Isbell translates into verse couplets of eleven followed by nine syllables, with a concluding couplet of twelve-syllable lines. He describes aiming to reproduce Ovid's couplet structure because 'the flow of Ovid's writing, the pattern of his expression, is so precisely fitted to the couplet form' (xix). However, an unfortunate result of Isbell's adherence to a syllabically rigid form (rather than an accentual one, like Verducci's) is that his lexical choices often become dull and uncreative. In many places his translation flattens out the emotional outbursts and shockingly vivid descriptions that distinguish the heroines from each other and indicate the progression of their emotional states. On the evidence of Isbell's letters to Betty Radice, it is apparent that he set out to offer an updated translation that would be more useful to general readers and to students than Showerman's outdated Loeb (see n. 15 above). However, in several significant cases Showerman's prose renderings capture far more of the emotional power of the Latin than Isbell's, and Verducci's accentual verse scheme utilises the strengths of both. A comparison of passages from all three translators shows the tonal shortcomings of Isbell's verse.

There are particularly striking examples in his translations of Briseis' moments of high emotion in *Her.* 3. For instance:

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vidi, quantus erat, fusum tellure cruenta
pectora iactantem sanguinolenta virum. (49–50)

Showerman translates vividly and readably as ‘I have seen my wedded lord stretched all his length upon the gory ground, heaving in agony his bloody breast’, and Verducci, even more strikingly, offers:

I saw my husband lavish upon the bloody earth his magnificent ruin,
his chest heaving, livid with his life’s blood.

Isbell renders the lines as:

my husband writhed in the bloody dirt,
his body heaving as he lay on the ground. (22)

This is one of many examples of Isbell inverting the couplet so that its brutal epigrammatic neatness is lost – despite his having noted the appropriateness of the couplet form. Furthermore, Isbell’s translation drastically reduces the sense of pouring blood, which is horrifyingly emphasised in the Latin by the resonating repeated endings of the near-synonymous *cruenta* and *sanguinolenta*, and completely omits the reverent Iliadic grieving of *quantus erat*. As a result, Briseis’ account seems detached, at odds with the scale of the horror and loss that she can only compensate with marriage to its perpetrator.

Chapter 3 explored the escalating emotional intensity of Briseis’ pleas to remain with Achilles at any cost, excepting – but then accepting – abuse from Achilles’ new wife. At 79–80 she begs:

neve meos coram scindi patiare capillos
et leviter dicas: “haec quoque nostra fuit.”

Showerman renders this straightforwardly as ‘And suffer her not to tear my hair before your eyes, while you lightly say of me: “She, too, once was mine.”’ Verducci reads in a little more of the context with a play on ‘had’:

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Only do not ...

...

... let her tear my hair in front of you,
or casually tell your wife "I had her, too."

Meanwhile, Isbell's translation runs:

do not let her tear at my hair while
you watch and remember that once I was yours. (23)

Superficially this seems similar, but there is a tonal shift in the rendering of *haec quoque nostra fuit* as indirect speech, and of *leviter dicas* as an act of recollecting. These change the manner of Achilles' utterance, making it no longer a callously offhand remark over Briseis' head to the wife (as Verducci reads it), perhaps even in the midst of the wife's violence. Instead it becomes a more contemplative, potentially non-verbal reflection, suggesting regret for not having married Briseis. While Briseis might wish this were what Achilles was thinking, *leviter* denies the possibility in the Latin. Even if it was simply a metrical decision or the translator reaching for a neutral-sounding verb, the resulting tonal flattening blunts the impact of the degradation that Briseis first begs to be spared, then even more shockingly accepts in the next couplet:

vel patiare licet, dum ne contempta relinquit;
hic mihi – vae miserae! – concutit ossa metus. (81–2)

As Chapter 3 explored, *vae miserae!* is a wail of terror showing that Briseis has lost all emotional control at the thought of being left behind. Showerman's translation of the couplet reflects this: 'Or, suffer it even so, if only I am not despised and left behind – this is the fear, ah woe is wretched me, that shakes my very bones!' Although the archaising 'woe is wretched me' distances a modern reader from the immediacy of the sentiment, 'fear ... that shakes my very bones' is suitably direct and emotive for a moment when Briseis admits her fundamental terror. Verducci's translation is similarly physical: 'At the very thought my body shakes with fear.'

By contrast, Isbell renders the couplet thus:

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I fear nothing so much as the fear
that I will be left here behind when you sail. (23)

Besides inverting the couplet yet again, this translation omits almost every detail of the Latin: *patiare licet*, *contempta* and *concutit ossa* are all untranslated, and what remains is a bland assertion that states fear but does not describe it at all, let alone as emotively as the Latin does. Isbell's Briseis could be accused of the unreactive placidity that Verducci ascribed to Canace; the fact that the Latin makes Briseis' terror vivid, immediate and all-consuming is lost to any reader who has access only to this translation.

One of the poignant features of Briseis' epistle is the contrast between her present abjection and her former status as princess of Lyrnessus. This is typified at 46, *et fueram patriae pars ego magna meae*. Showerman renders literally as 'I, who myself had been great part [sic] of my father's land', and Verducci's verse version runs 'my father's land, and I its ornament'. While Verducci's is looser, both she and Showerman reproduce the Latin's emphasis on Briseis' central and valued status within her city. Verducci even noted, critically, that the phrase is an interruption serving as 'Briseis' proud reminder of her own lost worth and revoked identity' (110; see Chapter 3). Isbell, however, omits *magna* and flattens the phrase to 'I who was part of my father's land' (22). This small change in the translation completely removes what was already a slightly ambivalent, impersonal expression of importance and suggests that Briseis considers herself *only* of worth as a component, no larger than any other, of her father's territory. While her epistle is notable elsewhere for her negation of her own personhood, it is not the sentiment here and the phrase as translated by Isbell almost makes a *non sequitur* of the rest of the sentence.

Highlighting these instances of tonally flat translation is not merely a case of aesthetic criticism, or of pedantically complaining that particular renderings are not precise enough. Isbell's introduction does move away from previous criticism in noting that the poems are 'as much united in their variety as in their sameness' (xviii). Yet the tonal uniformity of his translations

reinforces rather than challenges the earlier scholarly commonplace that the continual reworking of these themes makes the collection repetitive and dull. In several cases the dullness of tone is an actively misleading representation of sentiments in the Latin. It is therefore important to explore passages of the translation that lack sensitivity to tonal variation because they neglect one of the most distinctive features of each poem. Readers of Isbell's translation would have no way of recognising that Briseis' epistle, for instance, is any more emotionally explosive than Canace's, and thus their response to fundamental aspects of each heroine's personality is inhibited.

There are also significant shortcomings in the ways Isbell's translation handles particular themes, as follows.

Purity and shame

Isbell's translation repeatedly romanticises and valorises virginity as a gift to be given. While Roman society undeniably did prize the virginal status of unmarried women, Isbell adds references to it where none exists in the Latin and describes it in value-laden terms that the heroine does not. For instance, *cui dives egenti | munera multa dedi, multa datura fui* (*Her.* 2.109–10) becomes in Isbell's translation:

... She welcomed you and she gave
freely and without the least regret
the priceless gift a maiden gives only once. (15)

In adding 'without the least regret' and 'gives only once', Isbell seems to attach a sense of 'I would give it again if I could' to *multa datura fui*. While the heroine probably does include her virginity in what she means by *munera*, in light of the more explicit account that follows in 115–16, the lofty, romanticised terms Isbell uses are nowhere in the Latin and distort the sense of Phyllis' idea of value. 'Priceless', presumably coming from *dives*, applies the sense of value only to Phyllis' virginity, where in the Latin she used it to refer to her generosity in also giving him *hospitium* (108) and the *latissima regna Lycurgi* (111).

The translation elsewhere also conflates and collapses different terms for virginity into the oversimplified and fetishising idea of innocence. From the straightforward term *virginitas* (2.115 and 12.111), Isbell translates ‘my innocence’ (15) and ‘my girlish innocence’ (109) respectively, following Showerman’s Loeb.²⁷ The latter phrase plays into Medea’s characterisation of herself as a guileless girl deceived by Jason’s smooth talking, yet in the context in which it appears Medea is talking not of personal violation but of the valued ties she gave up for Jason’s sake (alongside her *genitor, regnum, cara matre, soror* and *germane*: 109–14).

Isbell also uses ‘remaining innocent’ (13) as a translation for *honesta* in *Her.* 2.60, where a closer translation would be ‘respectable’ or ‘honourable’; Knox, noting the conjunction with Phyllis’s name, translates the phrase as ‘my good name’ (59–60n.). The heavy emphasis Isbell’s translation places throughout on innocence causes a number of problems. The most straightforward of these is that it creates a sense that Phyllis did not understand the consequences of what she was doing when she took Demophoon to bed. While she does chastise herself throughout for her naïveté and guilelessness, it is nowhere suggested that she was ‘innocent’ in the sense of not recognising what she was doing. More troubling is the ready reliance on the religiously and morally coded association of sexual inexperience with innocence. The overlap with both lack of guilt and extreme youth is made more explicit in Isbell’s translations of other epistles. Here, on the contrary, regret is indicated by *turpiter* and *paenitet* (57–8; Knox: ‘I regret the disgrace’), and further undermines any impression that Phyllis did not understand what she was doing, or that what she feels is moral shame. The English semantic overlap of ‘innocent’ with lack of sexual knowledge significantly alters the sense of Phyllis’ response. Her reason for regretting her loss of honour is the impact on her public reputation as head of state (as indicated by 81–5), more than any sense of personal moral failing or cheapening.

²⁷ Isbell may also have made conservative decisions in light of Penguin’s growing educational presence. Although fears of litigation were long past by 1990, see Crowe (2012) on the evolution of Penguin’s cautious editorial approach to translating explicit material in Greek and Latin texts through the twentieth century.

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In *Her.* 4, Isbell, following Showerman, translates *servatae ... fama* (27) and *candor* (32) as ‘purity long preserved’ and ‘innocent purity’ (31). Although Phaedra has previously and incongruously characterised herself as a *puella* (2), the flattening of *fama* and *candor* into the same distorted idea of purity and innocence (when she is a married woman) makes her seem even more delusional than she is regarding her perceived appeal to Hippolytus. These cultural concepts centre far more around her public reputation than the personal ‘purity’ suggests, and ‘innocent purity’ once again overlaps troublingly in English with ideas of youth and inexperience. A particularly puritanical and Christian association of innocence is picked up more explicitly against *candor* in Isbell’s translation of *insolita labe* (4.32) as ‘unaccustomed sin’ (31). While *labes* (literally ‘stain’, *OLD* 4b) does have a sense of disgrace (*OLD* 5), ‘sin’ draws on a religious value system at odds with Phaedra’s concerns, which are with earthly, not divine consequences.

It is not simply because they can be unpalatable to a modern reader that it is important to reassess these translation decisions, since they do reflect sentiments which a Roman readership would have recognised. Rather, Isbell’s over-ready reliance on more simplistic concepts than the Latin passages express belies the complexity of the heroines’ responses to their own sacrifices.

Isbell’s translations are especially troubling for their flattening and oversimplification of the complex Roman concept of *pudor*, on which scholarship has developed considerably since his publication. Kaster explains some of the nuance of the term as follows:

All experiences of *pudor* depend upon notions of personal worthiness (*dignitas*) and value (*existimatio*), which in turn derive from seeing my self being seen in creditable terms. I experience *pudor* when I see my self being seen as *discredited*, when the value that I or others grant that self is not what I would have it be.²⁸

It can therefore be an emotion felt in response both to one’s own actions, of which one was in control, and to experiences over which one had no control. It can be felt by people suffering

²⁸ Kaster (2005), 29.

attacks of conscience, but also, for instance, by women whom men have raped: ‘the person experiencing *pudor* is not only aware of the view that devalues them, and even casts them in the wrong, but also in some way subscribes to that view, though the actions were in no way up to them’. Kaster notes that ‘the same behavior or state of affairs can be variously evaluated, according to its varying origins or motives, and cause *pudor* to be differently constituted’.²⁹

Even the *OLD* entry for *pudor* reveals the wealth of nuances demonstrated by its various usages: besides ‘shame’, it offers ‘consciousness of what is seemly’ (2a), ‘chastity’ (2b), ‘shyness’ (2c), ‘self-respect’ (3) and ‘humiliation’ (4). Yet Isbell translates almost every instance as ‘shame’. While this clearly is one aspect of *pudor*, there are many passages in which its connotations in English make it simplistic or actually inappropriate as a translation. Furthermore, he adds the idea of shame to his translation of other, more neutral words in similar contexts.

The translation of ideas of shame is particularly inappropriate and simplistic in Isbell’s version of *Her.* 11. As discussed in Chapter 3, the central theme of this poem is Canace’s incomprehension of the enormity of her experiences, whether that be through naïveté or traumatic dissociation. What is striking about Canace’s epistle is how little shame she exhibits; Verducci describes a tone of ‘outraged innocence and moral superiority’ in her railing against her father, and notes that ‘the usual *ratio-furor*, *pudor-amor*, *timor-audacia* antitheses are conspicuous only by their absence’ (209; 211). Even Isbell describes her as ‘perhaps ... too ingenuous, too innocent to be credible’ (96). Much of the sense of Canace experiencing shame at her actions, or consciousness of her incest being a ‘sin’, is thus imposed by commentators and translators who have not fully considered other possible reasons for Canace’s lack of emotional description.

One example is Isbell’s rendering of 35–6:

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37; 50.

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erubui, gremioque pudor deiecit ocellos;
haec satis in tacita signa fatentis erant.

I was a maiden and blushed; shame forced
my eyes down and I confessed without a word. (98)

Whereas Verducci translated 35 simply as ‘I blushed, and modestly looked down at my lap’, Isbell completely fabricates the phrase ‘I was a maiden’ to strengthen his reading of *pudor* as the kind of shame he expects her to be experiencing. The absence of description of strong emotions, including any kind of moral regret, suggests that she is experiencing less moral *pudor*, shame at her indiscretion, and more a simple fear of being found out, Kaster’s ‘seeing yourself being seen’.

Isbell also projects a sense of wrongdoing onto the text where it is absolutely inappropriate: in his translation of *vitiati ... ventris* (37). This phrase is serially euphemised: as noted above, Showerman translates it unanatomically as ‘my wayward bosom’, and Isbell too avoids the word ‘womb’ by using ‘erring body’ (98). Knox (37n.) notes that *vitiati* is ‘an explicit term with legal undertones’, and a specific usage is ‘to impair by violating the virginity of, deflower’.³⁰ However, both translators seem to treat the term as something unilaterally inflicted by Canace on herself; an admission that it was her own perverse desire that led her to willingly violate her own body by incest. Both thus sidestep the issue of any violation that Canace cannot be blamed for. Unlike Verducci’s ‘violated womb’, which retains the Latin’s ambiguity (see Chapter 3), Showerman and Isbell both read onto Canace a narrow moral perspective that is not suggested by the Latin.

The nurse too is made ‘shameless’ by Isbell’s translation, even though the hand with which she applies abortifacients is *audaci* (40), a word that has as much a connotation of simple rash boldness as a moral dimension. Again Isbell reads onto Canace’s narrative a moral judgement of events that is not quite, or not exclusively, the one the Latin offers.

³⁰ OLD 3; see Chapter 3 on Verducci’s translation of this poem for Reeson’s analysis of the usage (n. 54).

Isbell also repeatedly applies a different moral lens in translating *crimen*, an explicitly legalistically-inflected word (*OLD* 1) that for a Roman audience may recall the specific laws against incest.³¹ Instead, Isbell adds connotations of personal shame: the *crimina* the nurse warns against revealing in 49 become ‘your sin’ (99). As with the notions of ‘innocence’ above, this is an inappropriately and anachronistically Christian reading of a term referring to a moral failing, but not implying divine consequences (as *nefas* might). At 64, *crimen onusque* also becomes ‘my womb’s shame’ (99; a phrase Ovid reproduces from *Her.* 4.58, which Isbell also translates as ‘her burden of shame’, 32). Where in Latin a *crimen* is an act for which one can be reproached by others, and Knox (11.64n.) suggests ‘criminal burden’, Isbell turns it into a private feeling of transgression with much less attention to external reproach.

Shame is also applied inappropriately in Isbell’s translation of *Her.* 15.19: *non sine crimine amavi* becomes ‘I have loved in shame’ (134). The Ovidian Sappho implies reproach by others for a disgrace she does not necessarily feel herself (Knox: ‘not without incurring censure’). Isbell’s translation, however, changes her response into an acute internal awareness of moral disgrace that is felt whether or not the reactions of others are involved.

Interestingly, Isbell also flattens the idea of notoriety into ‘shame’ in his translation of 189–90:

an potes, o scopulis undaque ferocior omni,
si moriar, titulum mortis habere meae?

which becomes:

But if I die, you who are more dangerous
than cliffs or waves, can you bear the shame? (140)

Here, translating *titulus* as ‘shame’ is also a significant undertranslation, since a *titulus* is more literally an inscription, typically for military victories but also funereal (Knox, 190n.). The usage,

³¹ See also Reeson (2001), 11.51n. on Ovid’s frequent use of *crimina* for love-affairs. On legalistic vocabulary in Ovid’s love poetry as fundamental, not frivolous: Ziogas (2021), 1–20.

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ironic in an elegiac context, occurs elsewhere in the *Heroides* too, reproaching heroic addressees such as Theseus for their less than heroic behaviour: for example 2.68, 73; 7.76 (the same phrase as here); 10.130. Showerman and Verducci respectively translate *titulum mortis habere meae* as ‘endure the name of causing my death’ and ‘to be known as the one who caused my death’, emphasising that Sappho’s threat is not of personal guilt or shame but the pain of notoriety. Again, ‘shame’ in Isbell’s translation of this passage obscures the fact that it is the opinion of others that is at issue.

Isbell’s translation of a textually disputed passage in *Her.* 5 also includes an inappropriate use of the idea of shame, due to an apparent mistranslation. For 143–4:

Nec pretium stupri gemmas aurumque poposci;
turpiter ingenuum munera corpus emunt.

Isbell translates:

I did not want gems and gold for my disgrace,
my native gifts were used first in shame. (44)

By apparently reading the first syllable of *emunt* as long rather than short, as it must be in the second hemiepes of the pentameter, Isbell construes the verb as perfect rather than present, and also mistakenly parses *ingenuum* as governed by *munera* rather than *corpus*. The pentameter translates literally as ‘shamefully do gifts buy a freeborn body’: a moralising dismissal of any suggestion that Oenone might have prostituted herself.³² However, Isbell’s misreading suggests that the distinction she is making is that being assaulted by Apollo was something she felt the need to be ashamed of, rather than something that deserved rich reward.³³

³² Knox, 144n. notes the ‘legal flavour’ of *ingenuum ... corpus*.

³³ For further problems with Isbell’s translation of these lines, see below in this chapter: ‘Assault’, n. 43. Thorsen (2021), 13–19, *contra* Casali (1997), discusses the authenticity of 139–44 (condemned by nineteenth-century critics on a likely moralistic basis), and how their omission by Showerman limited subsequent scholarship. Knox, 139–46n., also defends the lines as they show Oenone ‘at pains to show that she rejected all advances’. Here Isbell restores the lines from Showerman’s apparatus, although he follows his omissions of 23–4, 44–5 and 151–2.

‘Shame’ thus is used as a catch-all for a complex array of emotions described in the Latin, and its moral overtones in English often colour readings of the heroines’ descriptions of their mental states in unhelpful ways.

Assault

Isbell’s readings are particularly problematic in passages describing assault. Implications of sexual violence are suppressed in his version of *Her.* 8, from Hermione to Orestes. Hermione, married to Pyrrhus at Menelaus’ behest despite having previously been promised to Orestes by her grandfather, writes that she consented to nothing and is a prisoner subject to nightly sexual assault by her husband.³⁴ In Latin the poem opens thus:

Pyrrhus Achillides, animosus imagine patris,
 inclusam contra iusque piumque tenet.
 quod potui, renui, ne non invita tenerer;
 cetera femineae non valere manus. (1–4)

Isbell renders these lines as:

Pyrrhus – a man as strong-willed as his father,
 Achilles – holds me here a captive.
 All laws of heaven and earth are on my side.
 I have done all that I can, I have
 Never been willing to be kept here by him;
 More than that a woman cannot do. (68–9)

Isbell’s version downplays both Hermione’s agency and the severity of her situation. The fact of simply having ‘never been willing’ is implied to be equivalent to having ‘done all that I can’, and ‘more than that a woman cannot do’. Despite the Latin explicitly mentioning Hermione’s hands resisting, Isbell’s translation takes the entire phrase as merely figurative, and *renui* (‘I said no’) is not explicitly translated at all.³⁵

³⁴ Thorsen (2021), 25–7, argues that *saepe* (111, 115) indicates assault on a regular basis.

³⁵ For Pestelli (2007), 5–6n, Neoptolemus’ violence corresponds to Hermione’s physical inability to oppose it, and *renuo* is a violently literal reworking of the conventional elegiac *puella’s renuere*. Pestelli, 5n., also develops Jacobson’s

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Isbell's introduction and notes on the poem interpret the issue of consent as pertaining to Hermione's lack of power over the legal marriage contract, and describe the irrelevance of her emotions to this legal inevitability. Arguing from the common critical position that the reader's experience of the poem is one of irony, he observes that 'while Hermione asserts that it is love which determines the viability of a marriage contract the reader must be aware of the fact that it is only by accident that she and Orestes have fallen in love after their betrothal' (67). Developing this position in the notes, he elaborates:

... her position is confirmed only to the extent that Orestes has the right to have the original contract come to fruition. While Hermione might insist that she has rights, only those of Orestes are directly at issue. By refusing to give her consent, Hermione ... has done all that a woman can do in such a matter. (73, n. 2)

For Isbell, therefore, Hermione expresses emotions that are irrational even if they invite sympathy. Furthermore, his reading is that her protests in this passage are only in regard to the marriage as a whole, and not to any experience of violence within it.

Nowhere in either introduction or notes is it mentioned that in several ancient sources Pyrrhus/Neoptolemus is notorious for violence and impiety. In particular, he is responsible for the brutal and sacrilegious murder of Priam at the altar of Zeus (Verg. *Aen.* 2.526–58), the throwing of baby Astyanax from the walls of Troy (*Little Iliad* fr. 29), and the sacrifice of Polyxena on the tomb of his father Achilles (Eur. *Hec.* 566–7). Furthermore, he took Andromache as concubine (*Aen.* 3.326–7) after his father killed her husband and he himself killed her son, thus between them destroying and dishonouring a family famed for its loving harmony. In other words, he is particularly dangerous to the helpless and blameless, and infamous for desecrating family ties.³⁶

suggestion (56, n. 22) that Hermione's phrasing fulfils a Roman legal requirement for a rape victim to prove she resisted. Both, unlike Isbell, take it as read that she experiences physical violence.

³⁶ On the central importance of Neoptolemus' impious violence to the epistle: *ibid.*, 22–3; 27–9. Ovid's Hermione differs from Euripides', who abuses Andromache worse than Pyrrhus (Eur. *Andr.* 26–39).

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Isbell's version offers no way for a reader unfamiliar with this tradition to know that marriage to such a man might reasonably be expected to be violent, or to involve rape (whether or not a Roman audience or poet accepted the concept of rape within marriage). By disregarding this aspect and foregrounding the legalistic aspect of Hermione's situation, Isbell's translation suppresses crucial aspects of her account of her experience.³⁷

Elsewhere, Isbell's translation inappropriately aestheticises and romanticises passages that explicitly recount assault. His reading of *Her.* 4.53–62 turns a series of assaults and punishments against Phaedra's female relatives into a sequence in which she appears to think she is the first to pay for the others' enjoyment. This appears to stem from Isbell's reading of 53–4:

Forsitan hunc generis fato reddamus amorem,
et Venus ex tota gente tributa petat.

Showerman translates, 'It may be this love is a debt I am paying, due to the destiny of my line, and that Venus is exacting tribute of me for all my race.' In other words, with a forbidden love of her own, Phaedra pays the penalty for the deviant passions and criminality of her mother and sister, and (perhaps) for Europa's being duped by a bull's beauty. Isbell, however, reads the passage differently:

Perhaps I am paying a debt to Venus
For the favours my family enjoyed ... (32)

By changing the loaded phrase *generis fato* to 'favours' that are 'enjoyed', Isbell turns the rape of Europa into a coy play on 'sexual favours' to indicate the god's regard. While this tension does exist in ancient mythology, it is certainly not a description applicable to the other experiences Phaedra lists. The progression becomes even more illogical in light of the lines that follow –

³⁷ For Clare Pollard's far more unequivocal version, see below, Chapter 5: 'Revoicing experience'.

Phaedra and Ariadne do not benefit from Jupiter's ancestry – and the translation of these lines has to be almost disregarded even for Isbell's own subsequent readings to make sense.

This is most obvious in Isbell's rendering of *Pasiphae mater, decepto subdita tauro* (57) as 'Pasiphae, my mother, was raped by a bull'. Admittedly Phaedra does appear to be subtly suggesting with *subdita* (literally 'subjected') that Pasiphae was a victim in order to align her experience more closely with that of Europa (described earlier at 55–6). However, she simultaneously draws attention to what actually occurred: having described Jupiter's disguise as *tauro dissimulante deum* in the previous line, she describes the *decepto ... tauro* to stress that this time it was the bull who was deceived, by Pasiphae's own disguise as a cow.³⁸ Furthermore, the translation of 'raped' only makes sense at all because Isbell omits *decepto* altogether to create a bizarre sense that the bull knew what he was doing.³⁹

This translation also entirely loses the additional and less violent connotations of *subdita* to mean both 'put under' and 'substituted spuriously', an obviously appropriate meaning for Pasiphae's strategy. There is undoubtedly an element of comedy in the Latin in Phaedra's blatant attempt to make Pasiphae more a victim of the bull than of her own bestial desires (and to limit the disgrace of the wooden cow to the single word *decepto*). However, Isbell's translation further limits the connotations of what she says, reducing the indignity of both Phaedra and Pasiphae and suggesting a prudish reluctance to print what is both expressed and implied in the Latin.

Where Isbell's interpretation of this passage becomes more worrying is Phaedra's later return to this idea at 165–6: *potuit corrumpere taurum | mater* becomes 'my mother made a bull | desire her' (35). The translation thus explicates the meaning that the Latin and Showerman's version ('my mother could pervert the bull') left implied, suggesting a somewhat voyeuristic interest in female

³⁸ On the wooden cow built by Daedalus for Pasiphae to mate with the bull: Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.1.4.

³⁹ Waterfield queries the omission in his response to Isbell's first draft (University of Bristol Library, Penguin Archive, DM1852/D355, letter dated 12 May 1987), but it was evidently allowed to stand.

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bestiality that belies the prudishness of the translation of the earlier passage.⁴⁰ As it follows a reframing of the original encounter as rape, this subsequent assertion of Pasiphae's agency and erotic motivations has troubling overtones of blaming the victim for their own rape that are at least more subtle in the Latin. There is undoubtedly something of a shift in Phaedra's own use of the two scenes, since she uses the first mention to lament the misfortunes of her line, and the second to appeal to (she hopes) Hippolytus' desire. In both cases, there is also a comedic omission of the fact that it was the wooden cow that the bull desired. However, the implication of assault in the first instance at 57 is much stronger in Isbell's translation than in the Latin, which makes the shift to talking of desire in the second instance more disturbing.

Most difficult of all to read is an example of the tendency identified by McCarter and Wilson for translators to turn accounts of rape into consensual encounters: Isbell's rendering of *Her.* 5.135–146.⁴¹ His reading of the passage in his introduction to the poem is troubling enough:

But the argument of Oenone that she was only a simple nymph who was in every way loyal to Paris is greatly undermined when she talks of her amorous adventures with various deities of whom Apollo himself was one. Though she insists that Paris should have remained faithful to her, she scarcely presents herself as a woman of unblemished and uncompromising virtue. (39)

The episodes Isbell is describing as 'amorous adventures' are having to hide from pursuit by Faunus and the satyrs, and being raped by Apollo. Being pursued and assaulted, for Isbell, cannot leave her loyalty to Paris and her virtue 'unblemished and uncompromised'. While this might correspond with a Roman attitude, Isbell considerably augments Oenone's words in his translation of 139–42:

⁴⁰ As an example of the burgeoning interest in female sexuality (including bestial fantasies) in the US prior to Isbell's translation, see the bestselling feminist work of Nancy Friday, *My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies* (1973).

⁴¹ McCarter (2018), on translations of the rape of Leucothoe, *Met.* 4.214–55. See also Wilson (2018) on translators' unexamined biases in translating rapes in Hesiod as consensual encounters.

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Me fide conspicuus Troiae munitor amavit;
ille meae spolium virginitatis habet.
Id quoque luctando; rupi tamen ungue capillos
oraque sunt digitis aspera facta meis

becomes:

Faithful Tros, Troy's builder,⁴² once loved me
...
We wrestled together for the prize
of my virginity; I pulled at his hair
and scratched his face with my fingernails. (44)

The transformation of *luctando* from something Apollo did to Oenone into 'we wrestled together' gives the passage a disturbingly erotic overtone, presenting rape as a game in which the victim participates. Oenone clearly considers it a violation, describing it as *stupri* in 143, despite the earlier use of *amavit*.⁴³ The physical violence Isbell imagines Oenone to suffer is also made clear by what is not so much a translation as a complete reframing of *ipse ratus dignam medicas mibi tradidit artes* (145), which becomes:

But he healed my torn body and injured pride;
he quickly turned my shame to honour. (44–5)

Nothing in the Latin approximates to these two lines of English.⁴⁴ The translation appears to read in subliminally expressed ideas from elsewhere in the Latin: the violence of 141–2, and *turpiter* from 144 – which itself Isbell misconstrued (see above, 'Purity and shame'). In any case, the translation attempts to reconcile an unambiguous depiction of physical and sexual violence with ideas of rape as an erotic game whose loss, despite involving a 'torn body', has a psychological impact no worse than 'injured pride'. This is the most egregious example of damaging ideas being introduced into the translation when they are simply not present in the

⁴² Incorrectly, for Apollo.

⁴³ Many editors argue that the conflict between *amavit* and the violence of the *stupri* is avoided if 140–5 are indeed spurious (see n. 33). However, since Isbell retained them, the issue is how problematically he reconciles this conflict in his lexical choices. For Brecke (2021), 96–8, the lines unambiguously describe rape.

⁴⁴ Waterfield's letter to Isbell does not query these lines despite highlighting similar examples elsewhere, suggesting the first draft may have been different.

Latin. As noted above (n. 33), many editors consider 140–5 spurious, with one scholar defending this view despite it being possible to think too well of Oenone; claiming, that is, that the argument has more to it than a simple desire to believe Oenone to be above the sentiments expressed in the disputed lines.⁴⁵ Isbell, conversely, apparently did find them consistent with his reading of Oenone's character. His inclusion of these lines, and his dubious translation of them, thus mutually reinforces misplaced ideas of promiscuity, shame and the supposed eroticism of unwanted pursuit and assault elsewhere in the poem.

Altogether, Isbell's translations of passages describing assault add disturbingly erotic and moralistic readings that are not present in the Latin, and affect the reader's ability to recognise and comprehend the heroines' accounts of their own experiences of rape and assault. This has far-reaching consequences, both within the context of the *Heroides* and in the study of ancient literature more generally. McCarter outlines the issue in relation to translators serially reframing the rape of Leucothoe as a consensual encounter in *Met.* 4.228–33:

We must think carefully about why translators have mitigated, even erased Leucothoe's rape. Their hedging in many ways reflects our own contemporary lack of adequate vocabulary for capturing sexual violence and our tendency to gloss over rape with language that mitigates and obscures it. ... These translations echo our failure to trust women who say they have been raped, and they reenact how we downplay female victimization while exonerating male perpetrators ...⁴⁶

The language of Isbell's translation is 'language that mitigates and obscures' Oenone's rape too. In a time when readers are increasingly aware of narratives of assault in ancient texts, it is incumbent upon them to be able to recognise and critically assess what is and is not said. Translations such as Isbell's are counterproductive in this respect. In McCarter's words, 'the translator does a disservice by eliding or diminishing the disturbing aspects of the original,

⁴⁵ Lehrs (1863), 60.

⁴⁶ McCarter (2018).

particularly when these involve sexual violence or abuse of power.’ This disservice affects both the voices of the heroines and the ability of the reader to listen.

The *puella*'s body

Isbell often fails to interrogate the reality that particular terms for women’s ageing entail. His literal rendering of *anus* (1.116), Penelope’s self-description as ‘old woman’ (6), is not strictly incorrect but can be challenged by more contemporary renderings (see Chapter 5: ‘Updating conventions’). In contrast, the translation also achieves a similar effect in another Latin passage that does not explicitly refer to ageing at all. Briseis observes that *abiit corpus colorque* (3.141), which Isbell translates as ‘my skin is old, my colour is gone’ (25). Ovid’s expression *abiit corpus* is unparalleled; his other similar usages refer to *sucus* or *sanguis* departing from the *corpus*, rather than the *corpus* itself (see for example *Her.* 14.37: *sanguis abit, mentemque calor corpusque relinquit*; *Metamorphoses* 3.397–8: *sucus | corporis omnis abiit*). Other translators have handled this in various ways: Showerman dramatically renders ‘gone is my flesh, and gone is my colour’, while Verducci more realistically offers ‘my body and color have wasted away’. What both these translations convey, which Isbell’s does not, is the sense of the loss of *corpus* as youthful plumpness (which might also be expected as the physiological impact of enslavement).

The connotation of disappearance by decay (*OLD* 12) is distinct from the idea of wasting through age. Although one can imagine Briseis describing herself as either pining until her flesh wastes away or prematurely ageing through her distress, in neither situation would one necessarily expect her to describe her skin as ‘old’. This translation suggests rather that she has been waiting for Achilles so long that she really has aged: an effect either inaccurate in terms of timescale or simply overly melodramatic. The function of the phrase is to stress that she has lost everything other than her hope in Achilles; to describe ageing skin as a loss would be incongruously self-centred in a sequence that should be anything but. One might expect a self-

regarding line in Ariadne's epistle, but not Briseis'. Isbell resorts over-readily to negative depictions of women's ageing at the expense of the emotion the heroine is actually describing.

In an almost amusing example of (usually male) translators' unusual ideas about women's breasts, identified by Haley and McCarter,⁴⁷ Isbell opts to translate the manuscript variant of *est aliquid ... | praesentisque oculos admonuisse sinu* (3.132–3), which is only printed in the first edition of Showerman's Loeb (the text also used by Verducci). *sinu* is emended to *sui* in Dörrie's text and Goold's 1977 revision of Showerman (both of which Isbell otherwise uses), as well as Barchiesi's 1992 text, so the passage would translate as 'it is something ... to have reminded a lover's eyes of oneself in person'. Isbell's translation is 'the sight of my breasts will stir your heart' (24). His choice of this version over more recent ones perhaps characterises Briseis as someone who knows that if anything, her body is what Achilles is (or was) primarily interested in, whereas the other reading would have appealed more to his appreciation of her as a whole person.

Slurs

Isbell's translations of passages where heroines refer abusively to each other rely over-readily and indiscriminately on the same highly-charged sexual slur. Whether the Latin term is *paelex* (used by Hypsipyle of Medea, and by Medea of Creusa) or *adultera* (used by Laodamia of Helen), Isbell always translates as 'slut'. *nocuit mihi barbara paelex* (6.81) becomes 'I never feared a barbarian slut' (51); *quos ego servavi, paelex amplectitur artus* (12.173) becomes 'That slut is caressing the body I saved' (111), and *quid petitur tanto nisi turpis adultera bello?* (13.133) is 'What do you seek but a common slut?' (121).

Hypsipyle and Medea are at least characterised as angry enough to use such a slur, although it is more an insult that a married woman might throw at a *paelex* than a translation of the word itself (*OLD*: 'a mistress installed as a rival or in addition to a wife'). But it is utterly out of character for

⁴⁷ Haley (2009), 43–5; McCarter (2019).

the peaceable Laodamia to use it, and moreover an oversimplification of the sentiment she is expressing. Laodamia, whose mutually faithful marriage has been disrupted by another woman's infidelity, is not attacking Helen's sexual licence but her specific disregard for her marriage. To translate *adultera* as 'slut' is therefore not only a loose, hasty way of creating a quick shock of strong language, but also blunts the particular impact of Laodamia's lexical choice.

Enslavement

Finally, Isbell's translation distorts Briseis' account of her experience of enslavement. While this is itself an imagined and ventriloquised account, the poem's undeniable attempts at empathy and psychological realism are significantly altered by the translation.

Firstly, Briseis' account of Achilles' reassurances that *utile ... fuisse capi* (54) becomes in Isbell's translation 'I was better a captive than free' (22). The translation changes the sentiment, from the possibility of there being some benefit in captivity by one person rather than another, to the suggestion that her enslavement in general is more beneficial to her than freedom. This is not only deeply unpalatable and difficult to read, but is profoundly at odds with the sentiments expressed in the rest of the poem.

Isbell's translation also makes several small changes to fundamentally alter the sentiment of the most infamously shocking lines of the epistle, where Briseis echoes the words of Andromache at *Il.* 6.429–30:

tot tamen amissis te compensavimus unum;
tu dominus, tu vir, tu mihi frater eras. (51–2)

Showerman translates: 'For so many lost to me I still had only you in recompense; you were my master, you my husband, you my brother.' Verducci's translation is similarly straightforward.

This effectively communicates the inadequacy of such recompense: 'still ... only you', rather than the more poignant 'you alone', which would be a more straightforward translation of

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Andromache's words to Hector in the *Iliad*. Furthermore, the retention of the Latin word order reproduces the jarring effect of adding *dominus* ahead of the Iliadic elements. Isbell, however, translates with:

my loss was eased by loving you as brother,
as my husband, and as my master. (22)

The ambivalence underlying the shocking contradiction of *te compensavimus* is completely lost in 'my loss was eased', and the translation consequently makes the passage into a straightforward tender expression of affection, when there is no mention of 'loving' in the Latin. The reversal of the order of *dominus*, *vir* and *frater* further reshapes the sentiment into a kind of affectionate crescendo with 'master' as its climax, suggesting that this is the way in which Briseis 'loves' Achilles most of all. One reading of this reversal might be that this is exactly how Briseis does think, and the external reader of the epistle should be shocked. However, this flattens the complexity of the Ovidian Briseis, who places *dominus* first as the most straightforward description of their relationship, and *frater* in the climactic position as the element it is most impossible to reconcile with the first. Thus the translation's sentimentalisation and oversimplification creates a misleading impression of Briseis' response to her own enslavement.

Later in the poem, Briseis makes this response more explicit, and Isbell's translation again misrepresents it. Briseis tells a fellow slave who accidentally addressed her as *domina* that '*servitio ... nominis addis onus*' (3.102), which Isbell translates as "'That name adds to the shame of slavery'" (23). While Isbell has translated *onus* in other contexts as 'shame' in conjunction with *crimen*, here there is no reason to suppose it is the kind of burden associated with shame. This lexical choice plays into harmful assumptions about circumstances such as enslavement or poverty being inherently a moral disgrace in its victims. Although that sentiment may have made sense to a Roman readership, it does not seem to be the sense here, and Isbell's translation overemphasises it. Rather, Briseis, as a former princess of Lyrnessus, is burdened by the painful

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recollection of her previous freedom and status, when other enslaved women would have addressed her as *domina*, compared to her own present enslavement, much as Andromache and Hector anticipate her future capture in *Iliad* 6.390–465.

Finally, in a choice that appears to romanticise the relationship between master and enslaved even more than Briseis wishes to, Isbell renders *domini iure venire iube* (154) as ‘be my lord, command that I go to you’ (25). Part of the deep discomfort the reader experiences on reading this poem is at how ready Briseis says she is to accept the brutality of enslavement as long as she is not left alone. By softening *dominus* to the far more conjugal and almost courtly ‘lord’ (compare Verducci’s sardonic ‘lord and master’ at 5), Isbell’s translation undermines this uncomfortable frankness. Although throughout the poem Briseis has indicated more affection than a reader might find comprehensible, this is not the note on which she ends, and the impact of her shocking self-abasement is reduced by Isbell’s lexical choice.

Conclusion

Chapters 2 and 3 established that Florence Verducci's translations and scholarship were an important milestone in rehabilitating the *Heroides* as a text with the potential to disrupt the assumptions of canonical depictions of mythical women. Harold Isbell's translation achieves the opposite effect. Verducci, despite her limitations, wrote as a resisting woman creative who broke open new possibilities for reinterpreting the text as an innovative and disruptive reading of the mythological canon. Isbell's translation, on the other hand, is informed by conservative values typical of a middle-class white Catholic American man born in the 1930s. It narrows the range of possible readings, enhancing only those that reinforce patriarchal Roman attitudes and imposing further aspects of patriarchal ideology from Isbell's own era that have no presence in the Latin.

The detrimental impact of this works both backwards and forwards. Backwards, in that the Penguin Classic is both the most readily commercially available and the one with the most widely recognisable editorial prestige. A non-Latinate reader encountering Isbell's translation will have no reason not to assume that this is a transparent rendering of ideals, prejudices and attitudes present in the Latin, rather than a reductive reading of a far more multivalent ancient text.

Forwards, because a reader who for the same reasons has only this translation to consider will find it far more difficult to recognise where the Latin text's heroines speak radically and disruptively. This also therefore affects a reader's capacity to develop their own ideas on new facets of these characters that they might not previously have considered; most especially regarding the well-known characters, but also the more minor ones who add their stories to the mix of myths represented for the first time.

Like the twentieth-century scholarship before Verducci, the effect of Isbell's translation, intentional or otherwise, is to suppress the Latin text's shifting perspectives and tones in favour of something more unified. An examination of the instabilities and contradictions of the Latin text can be fruitful and productive in inviting a reader to reassess their previous understandings

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of individual characters and the Greek and Roman mythological tradition as a whole. In contrast, attempting this reassessment based on Isbell's text alone is very difficult, because it imposes a more rigid and unified ideological project onto the text in its vocabulary and its occasional total deviation from the Latin, as well as narrowing the tonal variety of the poems into a style that varies only minimally from one poem to the next.

The aim of this chapter has not been to advocate the total rejection of translations such as Isbell's. To use David Slavitt's phrase, it remains 'an account of a reading', and an artefact of a particular time and set of values. Rather, the limitations of Isbell's translation demonstrate the importance of the availability of multiple translations, produced in different contexts by translators with different ideological standpoints and artistic priorities. Access to a broad range of versions enables readers to identify where they supplement or challenge each other, and to recognise the partiality and instability of any one interpretation. The next chapter explores a version that contributes towards this aim.

5. Living Poetry: Clare Pollard

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 explored translations that favoured line-for-line equivalence. This chapter explores how Clare Pollard's much freer translation, *Ovid's Heroines* (2013), not only supplements and challenges those versions but offers entirely new interpretations for a contemporary readership, by accessing ideas from contemporary culture that earlier, closer translations could not. The chapter first analyses passages from *Ovid's Heroines*, positioning the work as a creative translation, or transcreation, and exploring the heightened emotional authenticity and individuality of voice that this approach accesses. It situates the work in the context of other women's translations of Greek and Latin texts, as a consciously feminist project that widens the possibilities of what translation can do for modern readers of ancient texts.

Secondly, the chapter argues that the modernising approach of this translation, and the central focus it places on the heroines' distinct individual voices, brings the text back to life in a more literal way. Taking as an example Pollard's own performance of the poems as a one-woman stage show, it demonstrates that her creative modernisation of the heroines' epistles restores to them a sense of immediacy and directness that makes them compelling enough to be performed, as they may have been in antiquity. Pollard's *Ovid's Heroines* thus serve as an early instance of the *Heroides* moving back towards being a performed text in English, since it is the first version to restore their ability to speak to urgent contemporary cultural interests and concerns.

Context

The publication of Clare Pollard's *Ovid's Heroines* (2013) anticipated by some years the surge in popularity of fictional retellings of the stories of women marginalised in canonical narratives, including Greek and Roman myths (see Chapter 6: 'Context'). However, the poet, translator and scholar Josephine Balmer identifies a smaller and earlier trend of twenty-first-century women poets returning to translating Greek and Roman poetry after a period of decline throughout the twentieth. In particular, she notes their interest in producing consciously 'cross-gendered

translations' of men's poetry that 'act both to reinterpret and to subvert the original', in the same way that feminist classical scholarship had explored it.¹ Published the same year as Pollard's collection, Balmer's book was too early to comment on it (although she did review it).

Nonetheless it can be seen that *Ovid's Heroines* is another strong example of women's creative reappraisal of Latin poetry for new readerships.

Wilson has observed that since the millennium many Latin and Greek texts have been published in English translations by women for the first time, ranging from epic and tragedy to history and philosophy. She notes especially that while many of these are not conceived explicitly as projects of feminist resistance, there is nonetheless a noticeable tendency among these women translators to be more cautious of imposing themselves on the text than renowned male translators such as Fagles have previously been.² Wilson herself subsequently became representative of an increased popular interest in new translations by women, *qua* 'women translators', of ancient texts, after the publication of her *Odyssey* (2018). One reason for this was the attention Wilson drew to unexamined gender biases in previous translations, and her decisionmaking processes in translating as a woman: a topic also discussed by Balmer regarding her own Catullus translation.³ Like Wilson and Balmer, Pollard's versions write back to the source text, offering readings from a new perspective that challenged the assumptions of earlier translators.

Ovid's Heroines has particularly close parallels with Balmer's Catullus. Both were published by Bloodaxe Books, an independent British poetry publisher known for publishing 'a bold and diverse range of new and established writers ... including poetry in translation and proportionally more collections by women poets than any other British imprint'.⁴ This included many women's translations and adaptations of Greek and Latin poetry: Balmer's other works

¹ Balmer (2013b), 48–51.

² Wilson (2017).

³ For Wilson's analysis, see 'Updating conventions' and n. 31 below. Balmer (2013b), 153–64, on her *Catullus: Poems of Love and Hate* (2004).

⁴ 'About', *Bloodaxe Books*, <<https://www.bloodaxebooks.com/about>> [accessed 19 October 2022].

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(*Sappho: Poems and Fragments*, 1992; *Classical Women Poets*, 1996; *Chasing Catullus*, 2004), and Tiffany Atkinson's adaptation of Catullus, *Catulla et al* (2011). Publishing for a mainstream poetry market, Bloodaxe translations do not print a parallel text, and both Pollard and Balmer modernise their diction, cultural references and humour for their contemporary readership. Balmer argues that the lack of parallel text should allow translations to stand more fully as 'versions in their own right without necessarily requiring an "easy comparison" with the source text that a bilingual edition implies'.⁵ Lefevere notes that translations whose readers cannot check them against the original 'project images of the original work, author, literature, or culture that often impact many more readers than the original does'.⁶ While the striking modernity of a text with no Latin in sight might highlight its own distance from the source text, it also encourages readers to approach the text on its own terms, without the capacity to construct any kind of hierarchy between source and translation.

However, one significant difference between Balmer and Pollard is that while both are professional poets, Balmer has a Classics degree and translated directly from Catullus' Latin, whereas Pollard does not read Latin. Instead, she consulted the Showerman Loeb as a literal 'crib', the verse translations of Harold Cannon and Harold Isbell, and Isbell's explanatory notes, as well as using a Latin dictionary (a process she had used before to produce English versions of Hungarian and Somali poetry).⁷ She then wrote her own verse versions in response to these. It is demonstrated below that this proved important for identifying where previous translators' biases had influenced their texts in unhelpful ways for a modern readership (as discussed extensively on Isbell in Chapter 4).

Taplin's survey of mid-twentieth-century poets' reception of Greek and Roman texts describes as a 'liberation of inspiration' the opening up of classical translation from being the preserve of elite

⁵ Balmer (2013b), 165.

⁶ Lefevere (2017), 83; as a counter to the idea of 'loss' in translation, 75–6.

⁷ Griffin (2013).

academics to a wide range of creative artists (although, due perhaps in part to the dearth of women translators identified by Balmer in this period, all the poets in his short survey are men). He especially notes the capacity for poets without the source languages (especially Christopher Logue), and those who are classically educated but not academics (Michael Longley, Tony Harrison, Louis MacNeice) to interrogate more fundamentally the values in the source text unquestioned by closer translators and academics.⁸ The contributors to Hardwick and Harrison's collection on the 'democratic turn' also explore how different receptions provide access to classical culture for new audiences. In particular, Cox and Theodorakopoulos explore how women's classical engagement 'focuses not just on appropriating the classics for those who had previously been excluded from them, but on examining the other issues that form the fabric of women's lived experience'. They emphasise the importance of 'plurality, variety and openness' and of avoiding the 'new form of tyranny' risked by second-wave feminist approaches that, in seeking merely to 'reclaim' existing female voices, end up simply creating a new, equally exclusionary canon.⁹

The analysis below demonstrates Pollard's contribution to this democratic turn. By (re)ascribing to each heroine a strong individual voice, and linking her suffering to a range of situations experienced by contemporary women, Pollard invites a new plurality of readers and readings of the *Heroides* from a wider variety of backgrounds than has been enabled by previous translations. Pollard's was also not the only readily available version: A. S. Kline's translation had been available online as part of the Poetry in Translation project since 2001, kept free with the express intention of preventing any barriers to access for interested readers with no Latin and for students in the early stages of learning the language.¹⁰ In other words, Pollard's version forms part of a landscape of democratisation of access to the *Heroides*, and to responses to them.

⁸ Taplin (2002).

⁹ Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013), 289–90. For a theoretical approach to the issue: Liveley (2006).

¹⁰ Slater (2008), 24, discussing Kline (2001).

5. LIVING POETRY: CLARE POLLARD

From the publication of her first poetry collection (*The Heavy-Petting Zoo*, 1998), Pollard's interests as a poet have concerned the lived experience of women, including herself, and their interactions with men both individually and within patriarchally prejudiced societies. She also has a particular interest in folklore and myth, with a focus on 'monstered' women and how their stories are told (*Changeling*, 2011; *Incarnation*, 2017). In 2019 she published a single long-form poem entitled *The Lives of the Female Poets*, excavating the biographies and work of forgotten female poets and casting herself as the last of the line, inheriting their legacy.

Many of her poems have a confessional style. Writing in 2001, Pollard noted that many contemporary women poets tended to avoid confessionalism because of its perception as 'a particularly female mode of writing in its concern for the intimately emotional and physical'. However, she countered that it could be embraced for its 'more instant and violent appeal' that 'explores our darkest emotional instincts', making it 'the mode in which poetry ... can proclaim its relevancy'.¹¹ Christopher Grobe notes that confessional poetry has always been intertwined with oral performance, linking the confessional poets of the 1950s and 60s directly to the development of theatrical confessional monologues and the 'one-person show'.¹² Pollard also regularly performs her work, and writes with an awareness that 'my poetry is primarily written to be spoken'.¹³ Most notably, she performed several poems from *Ovid's Heroines* as a one-woman theatrical show that toured the UK from 2015 to 2017 (see 'Performance' below).

It can therefore be seen that Pollard's creative approach to *Ovid's Heroines*, like Florence Verducci's before her, was one that was aware of and able to draw on an established tradition of poetry and performance, as well as her own artistic need to speak to contemporary issues.

Balmer writes of using classical material as a frame through which to handle deeply painful

¹¹ Pollard (2001); later proposed as a new 'critical grammar' by Dowson (2011). In more recent years confessional poetry has rebounded: Crown (2019).

¹² Grobe (2017), 45–80.

¹³ Pollard (2016). For one of her performances: Bad Betty Press (2020).

personal material without resorting to the confessional mode.¹⁴ Pollard does the opposite: encountering the *Heroides* as a kind of ancient precursor to complaint poetry, her application of her own quasi-confessional style, giving the heroines stronger individual voices, enables ancient myths of painful experiences to read like personal poetry. The sense of emotional immediacy created by this approach gives the poems a new contemporary appeal, including in performance. Pollard's versions are thus a new instance of a translator tying an ancient text to a literary form or style that resonates with a contemporary cultural moment, as Aphra Behn did in the Dryden–Tonson *Ovid's Epistles* three centuries earlier. In adapting classical poems into new, feminist-edged versions for performance, she can also be likened to the spoken-word performer Kae Tempest, or to Alice Oswald, whose recitals of *Memorial*, her adaptation of the *Iliad*, 'from memory without reference to the text ... have become legendary to those who have witnessed them'.¹⁵ Pollard's work thus forms part of the twenty-first-century renewal of interest in oral performance of ancient Latin and Greek texts, as identified by Macintosh and McConnell with relation to epic.¹⁶

Ovid's Heroines consists of blank verse versions of each of the fifteen single epistles. Each poem follows the ancient text closely, but uses a modernised diction complete with contemporary cultural references, catchphrases and slang. Furthermore, rather than translating word for word and line for line, Pollard abbreviates the Latin text into something more succinct, with fewer and shorter lines, which for modern audiences carries a greater sense of emotional immediacy than the longer-form, metrically regular monologues that Roman readers would have found more standard. She noted that 'Ovid (and Latin itself) are quite condensed, and ... translations of him ... generally have a lot more words than the original. So I ... tried to pare it back again to

¹⁴ Balmer (2013b), 184.

¹⁵ Paul (2018), 137. Like the performing poets described by Grobe, Oswald's own reading of the poem was made available as an audio recording. For *Memorial* as a feminist intervention in the *Iliad*: Hahnemann (2019).

¹⁶ Macintosh and McConnell (2020), 11–15.

something more intense.¹⁷ It is demonstrated below that this practice is instrumental in the directness of voice that distinguishes Pollard's versions from closer translations.

In this sense, Pollard's version is therefore not, or not always, a one-to-one translation of the source text, perhaps coming closer to the sense-for-sense translation practices prevalent in the seventeenth century.¹⁸ However, it does engage in significant ways with issues of translation, and in many places serves consciously as a corrective to the choices of previous versions that were governed by prejudiced preconceptions.

In pursuit of a standardised definition of the term 'transcreation', Diaz-Millón and Olvera-Lobo outline a number of uses in various fields of modern language translation. They define transcreation as 'the creative inter-/intra-lingual re-interpretation of texts in order to suit the characteristics of an intended audience'.¹⁹ Katan, discussing the long-running difficulties translators face in negotiating their role as 'intercultural mediators', notes aspects of transcreation that are usefully applicable to the translation of ancient languages. He notes the acceptance in scholarship that Venuti's calls for uncompromisingly 'foreignising' translation (see Introduction) preclude intercultural mediation. It can instead be productive to move away from attempts at 'faithfulness' to the source text, towards an awareness of 'accountability and responsibility' for 'the relationship between texts, contexts, and their readers' and for 'accommodating the text into its new context'. Such an approach, its proponents argue, fosters greater possibilities for intercultural understanding on both sides. While in practice many professional translators remain averse to calling their work 'transcreation', Katan argues that the term is worth embracing on the basis that, regardless of how 'exact' their work appears, 'translators have always intervened on the text, and ... translation is, in fact, intercultural communication'.²⁰ In light of Balmer's

¹⁷ Clare Pollard, email to the author, 11 October 2022.

¹⁸ On Dryden's navigation of his own rules regarding sense-for-sense translation: Reynolds (2011), 88–100.

¹⁹ Díaz-Millón and Olvera-Lobo (2023), 347.

²⁰ Katan (2016), 368; 377.

5. LIVING POETRY: CLARE POLLARD

observation that Venuti's stance is particularly challenging to apply to the vast cultural distances involved in translating ancient texts, a practice that allows two-directional accountability and responsibility has clear and useful applications.²¹ By Katan's definition, any translation – Verducci's, Showerman's or Isbell's – cannot be anything but a transcreation. However, this study proposes that Pollard's *Ovid's Heroines* can particularly be considered a transcreation in its intentional recasting of the ancient text into a modern cultural context, which invites readers to reflect consciously on their preconceptions about the ancient and modern world.

Pollard's own motivation to make the *Heroides* accessible to new audiences is apparent from her accounts of the beginnings of the project. Announcing on her blog in 2011 that Bloodaxe had acquired her translation, Pollard described her excitement at the prospect of new readers discovering a neglected text: 'I'm very much hoping I can contribute in a small way to people rediscovering it...'²² In particular, she recognised that the neglect of the text in mainstream literature was due to there being 'a real gap for a readable contemporary translation', as 'the prose [Loeb] translation had dated' and its archaisms concealed 'something astonishing'.²³ Most importantly, her priorities were not primarily academic, but artistic: 'I'm interested in poems that have technically been translated, but not translated into living poetry that sings.'²⁴

Part of what enables Pollard's versions to be more easily marketable as exciting reimaginings for new audiences is the fact that her publisher is the independent Bloodaxe Books, rather than a mainstream publisher with an academically rigorous reputation like Penguin. The collection's blurb stresses that the Latin text too is 'a radical text in its literary transvestism' and that Pollard's version 'rediscovers Ovid's *Heroines* for the 21st century, with a cast of women who are brave, bitchy, sexy, suicidal, horrifying, heartbreaking and surprisingly modern'. This focus on how

²¹ Balmer (2008), 190.

²² Pollard (2011).

²³ Griffin (2013); Pollard (2013), 10. Further page references given in text. References to translated passages also give page numbers, as line numbers are not printed.

²⁴ Clare Pollard, email to the author, 11 October 2022.

straightforwardly exciting the reader should find the collection would not have been achievable by a publisher expected to maintain a sense of studied neutrality in its blurbs. Conversely, a reader's belief in the innovation and progressiveness of the collection is likely reinforced by the rest of Bloodaxe's list, which includes Tony Harrison's *v.* (1985), a translation of the late works of Mahmoud Darwish (2007), the complete works of Imtiaz Dharker, and the recent works of Grace Nichols and John Agard.

It is striking that reviewers have not been unanimously comfortable with this modernisation, and that those who are tend to be practitioners of creative receptions themselves. The poet and translator J. Kates described Pollard's pared-back, 'sketchy' approach as 'not mistranslations' but 'simply inadequate' (while also claiming that *Heroides* translates as 'women of the heroes').²⁵ Conversely, Balmer described Pollard's translations as 'lively versions, seasoned with both agony and irony, reanimating Ovid's originals'.²⁶ Similarly, Natalie Haynes wrote that 'Ovid ... understood the plight of the person left behind, waiting for news ... and this breezy, witty translation should give new readers the chance to share this understanding'.²⁷ Haynes, known for her long-running Radio 4 series *Natalie Haynes Stands Up for the Classics* as well as her novels about mythical women, is demonstrably committed to making Greek and Roman culture and history accessible to new audiences.²⁸ Thus reviewers interested in revitalising ancient texts find Pollard's version a valuable contribution. It is also notable that this is the first English *Heroides* translation reviewed in national newspapers like the *Guardian* and *Times*, rather than only in academic and library journals, as those of Isbell, Cannon and Hine were. There is also the fact that Pollard was already an established figure on the English literary scene, which Cannon and Isbell were not

²⁵ Kates (2018).

²⁶ Balmer (2013a).

²⁷ Haynes (2013).

²⁸ 'About', *Natalie Haynes*, <<https://nataliehaynes.com/about>> [accessed 6 September 2023].

(and although Hine was, his work was rarely reviewed in the UK press). This indicates something of a cultural shift in editors' perception of the mainstream appeal of such titles.

Setting Pollard within the context of third-wave feminist receptions of Ovid that respond to a vast range of contemporary issues, Cox notes that Pollard's frustration with the emotional distance of previous male-authored translations and her own 'enraged empathy' with the heroines is central to what makes her versions a success: 'Where she might have been ... anxiously repeating the words of others, the role she plays is ... delighting in answering back, and modifying the forms in which she retorts.'²⁹ Cox's work is currently the only scholarship on Pollard's reception of the *Heroides*. In her study of how Ovid has resonated with the concerns of contemporary women writers, what is striking for Cox is how, through Pollard, Ovid both 'displays his earlier receptions' and 'also astonishes us anew by his ability to comment on contemporary society through his appearances in the most contemporary of guises'. This chapter develops Cox's inquiry by exploring in more detail how Pollard's versions 'modify' and 'retort' to the translations she used, supplementing and challenging the collection's outdated translation tradition to invite readers to reconsider the ancient myths.

Translations

What follows is an exploration of four ways in which Pollard's modernisation of vocabulary and form allow her to revoice the ancient heroines in ways that recreate their distinctive individual personalities, and surprise the reader into reconsidering their perceptions of ancient stories.

Updating conventions

In an email interview, Pollard made it clear that she intended her versions to be a much-needed update to the 'old-fashioned' and 'dated' translation choices of Isbell and Showerman, in the

²⁹ Cox (2018), 206.

sense both of electing not to produce a word-for-word version, and also of challenging individual lexical decisions.

Isbell’s letter from Penelope begins: ‘Penelope to the tardy Ulysses’... No one speaks like that now, it just immediately sounds old-fashioned. As soon as I began with ‘Dear Ulysses, you’re late’ I knew I was onto something, and that just by modernising alone my version would be very different.

Rather than think of her collection as an overly simplistic project of feminist reclamation, Pollard was ‘interested in the decision Ovid made to write in women’s voices’ and in her own ‘being a woman translating a man writing as a woman’. However, on a close lexical level, one reason she used a Latin dictionary while writing was to identify phrases in previous translations that seemed to stem from translators’ biases rather than from the Latin text: ‘A phrase would often set off an alarm bell and you’d check, you know, “crone”, and it could just mean “older woman”’.³⁰

Pollard’s process has parallels with Emily Wilson’s experiences of consulting previous translations while producing her translation of the *Odyssey*. In a Twitter thread about earlier versions of ‘Telemachus’ hanging of the twelve enslaved women, Wilson observed: ‘Many translations import misogynistic language when it isn’t there in the Greek. In Fagles’ best-selling version, “You sluts – the suitors’ whores!” Lombardo: “Sluts”. Lattimore: “Creatures”. Fitzgerald: “Sluts”. Pope’s is the best: “nightly prostitutes to shame”.’ These translators all imposed terms of moralistic abuse to translate the strikingly neutral αἱ ... παρά τε μνηστῆρσιν ἴανον (‘the women who lay beside the suitors’, *Od.* 22.464). Wilson argues that what is more at issue in the Greek text is that Telemachus is ‘ashamed and disgusted by the existence of women whose bodies have been claimed by other men’, and this is the reason for his actions, not a desire to punish the women’s moral disgrace. Wilson noted that this proliferation of slurs in translation happened partly because of ‘entropy: once one version has “sluts”, others follow.’³¹

³⁰ Clare Pollard, email to the author, 11 October 2022.

³¹ Emily Wilson, X (formerly Twitter) thread, @EmilyRCWilson, 8 March 2018 [accessed 24 November 2022]. For more detailed analysis of this and similar passages: Wilson (2019), 286–95.

While, as is explored below, it is not automatically problematic to use slurs like this in translation, Chapter 4: ‘Slurs’ demonstrated the importance of being alert to the possibility that negatively charged phrases describing women in *Heroides* translations might not be so in the Latin.

Furthermore, even translations of phrases that do not introduce value judgements benefit from being reassessed from a modern perspective.

For example, translating *Her.* 1, Pollard renders *anus* (1.116) as not ‘old woman’ but ‘fully grown woman’ (18). Cox notes the ‘shift in cultural attitudes’ that this reveals: ‘Not only does the term “fully-grown woman” possess an allure that is utterly absent from “old woman”, but it also points to changes in what each generation thinks of as “old”.’³² Furthermore, ‘fully grown’ suggests self-actualisation: rather than having been simply helpless and bereft in her husband’s absence, Penelope has of necessity grown into herself more, and become more self-sufficient, than would otherwise have been possible. Against the straightforward ‘old’ of Isbell and Cannon, and Showerman’s positively Carolingian ‘aged dame’, Pollard’s version does not rely on easy commonplaces about women’s regret at ageing (or on sexist and ageist ideas about what age makes a woman ‘old’).³³ Instead, it invites consideration of what else a woman in Penelope’s situation might be thinking, besides what other versions have always assumed.

Revoicing experience

A highly noticeable feature of Pollard’s versions is their strong emotional authenticity, as the modernised lexis allows for the use of terms that are culturally familiar from everyday sociopolitical discourse. Issues such as sexual consent and reckoning with the legacies of colonialism, including the enslavement of people, have become central to many contemporary

³² Cox (2018), 209.

³³ Barchiesi (1993), 336, notes that in reality the partner who will appear old is Ulysses himself, even being likened to a γράυς (*Il.* 18.27).

cultural discussions. The unflinching frankness with which Pollard foregrounds these themes invites a reader to reconsider what they know about familiar stories.

Issues of consent and of feared and actual violence against women by men are particularly apparent in Pollard's versions of *Her.* 3 and 8. Her strategy of paring previous verbose translations back to 'something more intense' enables her to render these issues with particular forthrightness and occasionally unrepentant bluntness. Her Briseis especially stands in stark contrast to previous versions, as she highlights the reality of the experience of an enslaved woman with frank vocabulary that closer translations have not accessed, or have decided against. Where previous translations and analyses dwell on Briseis' apparent self-deception regarding any affection Achilles might have for her, Pollard's version makes it clear she is only too aware of the reality, casting her as 'a fiercely proud slave who knows her only hope is [to] plead' (25). As Pollard's version is aimed towards readers without any formal education in classics (hence her short introductions to each poem), it might be expected that if the reader knows anything at all about Briseis, it is more likely to be from popular depictions. While some such depictions in recent years have been explicitly feminist projects confronting the reality of her situation (such as Barker, 2018 and Haynes, 2019), earlier and more sensational projects, with perhaps wider cultural impact, created a romanticised and reductive version.³⁴ Pollard's transcreation thus provides an invitation to readers to reflect on their acceptance of this story.

Pollard's Briseis particularly highlights the enslaved woman's experience of being considered less than human, with no agency. For instance, Pollard renders 21–2, *tot noctibus absum | nec repeto*, as 'all these nights without my body' (p. 26). In *repeto* (used of debt or wrongfully acquired property: *OLD* 8–10) Briseis reduces herself to the commodity she has become, but at least she makes herself the subject of first-person verbs. The English worsens the commodification by reducing her to 'my body'. Later in the poem, *saepius in domini serva vocata torum* (100) is translated

³⁴ e.g. in *Troy* (2004), dir. Wolfgang Petersen, Achilles (Brad Pitt) and Briseis (Rose Byrne) began a relationship.

as ‘I’ve worked your bed’ (28), in terms a sex worker might use. Here she indicates both the unromantic reality of her experience and her awareness of it, even though elsewhere she seems to protest her love. In the same line, *domini serva* is turned into a direct address: ‘I know that, master’, starkly reiterating her understanding of the real nature of her relationship with Achilles (whereas earlier Pollard had followed Showerman in translating *viro* in 5–6 as ‘my beloved’).

Pollard renders *est mihi, quae lanas molliat, apta manus* (70) coyly as ‘I’m useful with my hands’ (28) immediately prior to the mention of Achilles’ marriage bed, with all mention of spinning deferred to the translation of 75–6 (*nos humiles famulaeque tuae data pensa trabemus, | et minuent plenas stamina nostra colos*): ‘I, your slave, will spin and the full distaff | grow slender, when I draw the threads’. Both Latin passages are strongly suggestive: pointed household objects such as distaffs frequently served as innuendos for the penis,³⁵ and *molliat*, punning on *mollis* as used of wool on the distaff,³⁶ creates an obvious double entendre in the threads of white wool being drawn off a phallic object to make it softer and smaller. The adjective is also identified by Ingleheart and Rimell as used suggestively of the penis after sex in *Ars Am.* 2.712, specifically in reference to sexual activity between Achilles and Briseis, as well as evoking the broader *mollitia* of erotic poetry.³⁷ The presence of wool in elegiac poetry has other erotic associations too. The demure female domain of spinning wool is frequently set in direct opposition to the elegiac lifestyle. Examples include especially the innuendo-laden Propertius 3.6, contrasting the lover who is *laetitia tumefactum inani* (3: ‘swollen with empty joy’) with the *puella* who *nebat ... umidaque impressa siccabat lumina lana* (16–7: ‘she was spinning ... and pressed the wool to dry her eyes’), and Terence, *Andria*, in which the title character used to *pudice vitam ... agebat, lana et tela victum*

³⁵ Barchiesi (1992), ad loc. notes but does not explain the ‘inquieta atmosfera erotica’ of the ‘autoumiliazione’ in Briseis’ reworking of Andromache’s fate. See Adams (1982), 22–3 on household objects, though Ingleheart (2021), 296 notes Adams’ limitations for identifying Ovid’s ‘broad range of sexualized metaphors’: his survey ‘pointedly eschews “fanciful speculations” about “obscene double entendres,”’ and disregards “ad hoc” sexual coinages.’

³⁶ Haupt, and others (1966), *Met.* 6.19–23n. See also e.g. Catullus 64.312, *laeva colum molli lana retinabat amictum*.

³⁷ Building on Rimell (2006), 91–2 on the suggestive way ‘Achilles collapses onto a “soft” couch (*mollis* 712)’, Ingleheart (2021) notes that ‘Ovid hints that it was not only the *torus* that was soft in such encounters between Achilles and Briseis’ (318), identifies a double entendre in *torus*, and notes other similar uses of *mollis* (nn. 97 and 98).

quaeritans before taking up prostitution (74–9: ‘she lived ... a modest life, earning her living with wool and the loom’), and also later Ovid, *Ars Am.* 2.686 of the insufficiently aroused *puella* who *siccaque de lana cogitat ipsa sua* (‘dry, thinks of her yarn’). The use of unspun *lana* after masturbation is also later attested in Martial 11.58.11.³⁸ Here, therefore, there is a darkly comedic subversiveness in making the spinning itself such an overt sexual metaphor.

In this context, the passage is suggestive of further sexual services Briseis foresees herself providing to Achilles in his married household. Verducci retains this implication in translating 75–6 as ‘the swollen distaff will diminish at my hands’ touch.’ Following the Loeb, Isbell determinedly retains the literal meaning, drawing out the couplet to more than three lines, which are admittedly informative for readers who have no knowledge of ancient spinning:

... I will be a slave
 spinning out my day’s work until the distaff
 once full of new wool grows thin as threads
 are drawn out from it. (23)

Effectively, Pollard presses the text for meaning to update the suggestiveness of the imagery for a readership without the cultural knowledge required to recognise the innuendo. At the same time, the translation retains the literal context of Briseis accepting the prospect of spinning wool while enslaved in Achilles’ household. Thus Pollard highlights the image of an enslaved woman, in the interests of self-preservation, having to resort to erotic punning in a pretence at flirting to try to keep her master’s interest: an image that was lost in the Penguin edition. This disturbingly layered passage is an example of where Pollard’s version, far from being a loose ‘adaptation’, offers the reader a close encounter with the Latin text.

Briseis’ awareness of the status of enslaved women only as a sexual commodity is further emphasised by the rendition of *forma praestante puellae* | *Lesbides, eversa corpora capta domo* (35–6), as

³⁸ The use of *lana suida* to soak up liquid including bodily fluids is attested in later antiquity, especially in medical texts, but it is unclear whether Martial alludes to a use that would have been culturally familiar.

‘lovely Lesbian girls caught fresh from Lesbos’ (27). Verducci’s translation recognised the significance of the Latin vocabulary in its literal ‘their bodies taken when their home was ruined’, far stronger than Isbell’s ‘taken | when Lesbos fell’ (22), which glosses over the particular focus on bodies. However, Pollard’s ‘lovely ... caught fresh’, implying the hawking of meat or fish in a market as particularly pleasurable to consume, reproduces an ancient convention in reducing the girls to literal flesh, and suggests the salacious appraisals to which they are subjected by their captors.³⁹ This idea is also revisited towards the end of the poem, in which Pollard’s Briseis says ‘I lose meat and colour’ (29) for *abiit corpus colorque* (141), suggesting the deterioration of her own value in terms of livestock raised for meat. Pollard also heightens the sense of sexual violence inherent in the taking of a town by translating *diruta Marte tuo Lyrnesia moenia vidi* (45) as ‘I watched your army rape | Lyrnessus, my father’s town’ (27). While not a literal translation of *diruo*, which refers to the physical destruction of buildings (*OLD* a), Pollard exploits the semantic overlap of ‘rape’ with this meaning in English to highlight what this meant for the city’s women who were captured and enslaved.

As noted in Chapter 4: ‘The *puella*’s body’, Pollard also follows Isbell (not Cannon or Showerman) in translating a manuscript variant for 131–2 (*est aliquid collum solitis tetigisse lacertis, | praesentisque oculos admonuisse sui*) that has *sinu* for *sui*. Thus her translation reads, ‘It would be something though: to hold your neck, to see you, | to stir memories with my breasts’ (29). While it is an example of an unsound textual decision leading to the perpetuation of variant translations, in the broader context of Pollard’s version it does also reinforce the depiction of Briseis as aware that her body is the only thing of value to Achilles, not her personhood (*sui*).⁴⁰

Briseis’ awareness of her chattel status is also indicated by her vocabulary in non-sexual contexts. Where both Verducci and Isbell (23) translated the *captiva* of *victorem captiva sequar, non nupta*

³⁹ For the food-like commodification of women, especially *hetairai*: Harrison (2017), 110–11, introducing *Odes* 2.8 addressed to Barine (possibly ‘carp’).

⁴⁰ Balmer (2013b), 141–7, discusses the difficulties of translating a complete but unstable text.

maritum (69) literally as ‘captive’, Pollard renders the phrase as ‘I’d come as a possession, not a wife’ (28). While ‘captive’ does imply possession to a reader who keeps in mind what capture in war meant in the ancient world, ‘a possession’ leaves nothing implied in its emphasis on enslavement, and explicates the full appalling reality of what Briseis claims to prefer to being left abandoned among enemies. (For detailed discussion of her sentiments in this passage see Chapter 3: ‘Briseis’.)

Pollard also echoes Cannon in rendering *neve meos coram scindi patiare capillos* (79) as ‘don’t let her shave my head’ (28), drawing on both the general ancient practice of shaving the heads of enslaved people (though more usually men) and the specific use of enslaved women’s hair for wigs by upper-class women. In contrast, Isbell (23) and Verducci translate *scindi* as ‘tear my hair’, in which they draw instead on elegiac allusions to the *puella* abusing her *ornatrix*.⁴¹ Pollard’s version exposes particularly dehumanising and humiliating aspects of being a woman enslaved to another woman, of which readers without knowledge of Roman culture might not be aware. It also evokes more general associations of the shaving of women’s heads as punishment in many cultures throughout history, especially for adultery and sexual transgression. Notably for this context, it has served more than once in modern times as a way to publicly shame ‘horizontal collaborators’, women who have had sexual relationships with enemy soldiers, whether voluntarily or otherwise. For example, it was practised in France after the Second World War, and in Northern Ireland during the Troubles along with tarring and feathering.⁴²

Pollard’s translation of *Her.* 3 thus refuses to allow the reader to forget at any point that Briseis is first and foremost negotiating enslavement: a situation with no defence against sexual violence, forced labour and dehumanising treatment. Where previous translations have prioritised expressions of romantic, even courtly love (Isbell) or made Briseis’ love pathological and

⁴¹ For wigs, see e.g. *Am.* 1.14.48; for tearing, e.g. *Am.* 1.14.16, *Ars Am.* 3.239. Barchiesi, ad loc. lists further precedents for both interpretations.

⁴² Stiles (2007), 525–8; McDonald (2009).

incomprehensible (Verducci), the unflinching frankness of Pollard's version invites the reader to reflect on the nature of Briseis' relationship with Achilles in unprecedented ways.

As explored in previous chapters, veiled references to experiences of sexual violence in the Latin have often been made still more veiled or ambiguous by the translations of Showerman and Isbell. Pollard, however, puts the reality of such experiences in straightforward, even blunt terms to shock the reader out of any romantic reading of the heroines' plight. As well as Briseis' epistle, this is particularly apparent in Pollard's version of *Her.* 8, from Hermione to Orestes. Chapter 4: 'Assault' demonstrated how Isbell's translation suppressed implications of Pyrrhus/Neoptolemus' sexual violence in the opening lines:

Pyrrhus Achillides, animosus imagine patris,
 inclusam contra iusque piūque tenet.
 quod potui, renui, ne non invita tenerer;
 cetera femineae non valere manus. (1–4)

Pollard, challenging Isbell's reading of the entire passage as figurative, offers the following:

Pyrrhus is stubborn like his father –
 mocks every natural law to keep me here.
 I don't consent in bed
 but my girlish hands can't keep him off. (57)

Pollard's version describes the reality of Hermione's situation in culturally meaningful modern terms. For twenty-first-century readers, in a cultural context where sexual consent is a prominent social concern, 'I don't consent in bed' for *quod potui, renui* recognisably describes marital rape. Pollard also turns *cetera femineae non valere manus* into 'my girlish hands can't keep him off', a disturbingly vivid description of frantic but futile resistance against unambiguous male violence. While the Latin passage does not explicitly describe this, the strongly emphatic accumulation of negatives *renui, ne non invita* (3) suggests repeated refusals, and the theme of Pyrrhus' violence is later sufficiently developed to read it back into the opening lines.⁴³ More straightforwardly, it is

⁴³ See Chapter 4, n. 35, on the violence implied in the Latin.

not unreasonable to suppose that a marriage that was not consented to cannot at the same time have been consummated consensually. Thus where Isbell omitted the context of Pyrrhus' notorious violence and elided Latin phrases that imply it, Pollard's transcreation fills in the cultural gaps and explicates aspects that modern readers cannot be expected to infer.

Furthermore, Hermione later unambiguously names herself as the latest in a long family line of women whom men raped, the *Tantalides matres apta rapina* (66: 'descendants of Tantalus, women who are suitable plunder'); confirming her inclusion among them (*ne non Pelopeia credar*, 81: 'lest I not be believed a descendant of Pelops'), she is *Neoptolemo praeda* (82 'prey for Neoptolemus'). Even Isbell translates 66 as 'easy prey for any rapist' (71), and retains the link between *rapina* and *praeda* by translating *praeda* as 'prey' too. However, there is no pervasive sense in Isbell's translation that Hermione is also literally experiencing sexual violence. Instead, Isbell's notes take this self-characterisation as simply a histrionic reaction to 'the fact that her desires [i.e. for marriage to Orestes] have not been met' (74, n. 8). Pollard, meanwhile, translates 65–6 bluntly:

Is the family curse still with us
that all women must be raped? (59)

This is the only instance of the actual word 'rape' in the poem, but retaining the plural *sumus* in 'us' reproduces Hermione's suggestion that her experience is identical, literally and not figuratively, to that of her foremothers.⁴⁴

The implications of actual physical and sexual violence are repeated far more strongly in both the Latin and Pollard's English at 107–8:

nox ubi me thalamis ululantem et acerba gementem
condidit in maesto procubuique toro

⁴⁴ For a still more forthright reading of Neoptolemus' abuse, see Chapter 6 on Sabrina Mahfouz's *Will You?*.

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Although the Latin again does not explicitly describe sexual assault, violence is strongly implied in the strength of the reaction described by *ululantem ... gementem*, and by the well attested double-edged nature of *condidit*. Where Isbell translates literally ('when night ... consigns me to my bed | with cries and wailing', 72), Pollard retains the power of implication, but makes the violent personification of *nox* more obviously euphemistic: 'night drags me, squirming, | to the bed' (60). The depiction of physical struggle through the alteration of *condidit* to 'drags', and of verbs of screaming and lamenting to 'squirming', gives a stronger sense of Hermione once again doing everything she can to resist, as she described doing at the start, as well as giving a more visceral sense of Pyrrhus' violence.

It might be argued that Pollard deliberately overemphasises implications of sexual violence in this poem to favour one particular interpretation of events that are barely implied in the Latin, as part of her practice of intensification and modernisation of the poems. However, in the context of transcreation, it can be seen that through this practice, those implications which are present retain or regain their power for a modern audience lacking knowledge of the source text's cultural context. That Hermione can only describe her experiences by means of implication indicates the horror she feels that prevents her from speaking more directly. It is also plausibly in character for her to react with a shock that she cannot fully articulate to the experience of marriage to a man who takes what he wants at all times. Hermione describes at length the personal impact of having no mother figure, from whom, among other things, she might have received emotional preparation for marriage (95–6), even if nothing could have prepared her for this particular brutality. In other words, much of what Pollard's Hermione tells the reader can be found in the source text too, but even those aspects that cannot be found in the Latin are plausible explications of those that can. Pollard's version simply offers one clearer way for a modern reader to consider what they are reading than Isbell's does.

Lexical idiosyncrasies

As noted by Cox, an effect of Pollard's use of modern vernacular is that 'the women of the letters become more distinct, one from another, than they are when they all speak in the same tones through a more mannered, old-fashioned translation'.⁴⁵ As a transcreation, this modernised lexis is another aspect of Pollard's creation of characters whose description of their own emotions is more immediate and compelling than a translation that deliberately archaises or sticks closely to the terms of the source text. Some of this modernity is undoubtedly Pollard's own drily witty voice that runs as a linking thread through all the poems, as so many critics argued Ovid's did through the Latin. However, by comparing the expressive styles of both those heroines whose situations are the most different and those who are the most similar, it can be seen that individuality of voice is an important part of Pollard's distinctive characterisations.

Pollard notes an important aspect of Ovid's apparent repetitiveness:

As an illustration of the sheer frustration of gender roles, the accumulative effect of the *Heroides* is to fill you with rage and heartbreak. Yet there is still huge variety in [the heroines'] stories. And in the letters they exercise the power they do have: the power of words. (12)

The power of words is what Pollard's transcreation, with its modernised lexis, deploys particularly successfully in recreating the poems' dramatic personas. They are not merely distinguishable from one another but vibrant individual personalities, whose wide variety of responses to a similar fundamental situation forms an essential part of the artistic and human appeal of the poems.

Briseis, for instance, is probably the heroine whose situation and emotional state are the furthest outside most readers' frame of reference. The stark frankness with which she describes her situation in Pollard's version of *Her.* 3 also characterises her description of her emotions.

Pollard's translation of *me qui timidam prenderet, hostis erat* (18) is startlingly litotic. Isbell is literal

⁴⁵ Cox (2018), 209.

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again ('but someone would catch this timid girl', 21), and Verducci is uncharacteristically abstruse ('but the enemy was stationed for a raid upon my fears').⁴⁶ Pollard, on the other hand, offers 'but they know how to hurt a girl' (26), implying Greeks, not Trojans. While less direct as a translation, this achieves a number of effects that literal translations cannot. Although violence is not mentioned in the Latin, it is a likely consequence for a recaptured slave, and the reference to gendered violence is loaded with the particular consequences for an enslaved woman. Briseis appears to speak from experience in her assertion that 'they know'. She speaks plainly and yet euphemistically, thus characterising herself as too fearful to describe the violence openly, and yet realistic about what would happen if she tried something so sensationally romantic as to attempt an escape back to her lover.

Later in the poem, rather than name her feelings, Briseis asks quietly despairing questions with startling simplicity, such as at 43–4:

An miseros tristis fortuna tenaciter urget,
nec venit inceptis mollior hora malis?

Where Verducci and Isbell's respective literal translations are:

Or can it be that grim fate still presses upon wretched men
and that once our misfortunes begin no gentler hour comes?

and:

Perhaps a dismal lot still crushes the sad
and I will not find a sweeter time (22)

Pollard renders this as:

Does bad luck like to brutalise its victims?
Will it never stop? (27)

⁴⁶ Verducci's discussion (106–7) of Briseis' strange use of *hostis* for the Trojans somewhat justifies her version.

Pollard's version offers an intentionally reductive translation of *tristis fortuna* as 'bad luck' to suggest that Briseis' emotional numbness and shock has reduced her to a juvenile lexis.

Additionally, the unornamented 'Will it never stop?' has nothing of the romantic or poetic about it. Contrary to Wilkinson's infamous criticism that the heroines are 'not too miserable to make puns',⁴⁷ Pollard makes it plain that Briseis has no emotional resources left for artistry.

Verducci noted that Briseis' self-annihilation through her awareness of her own chattel status makes her 'at once so colorlessly material and so tentative, even cringing' (119). She expresses her feelings not through sentimentally naming them but by blandly describing their tumultuous physical effects. Pollard's version enhances this by making the text less melodramatic and yet more absolute. Reacting with horror to the prospect of isolation, Briseis' *sanguinis atque animi pectus inane fuit* (60) becomes in Pollard's version simply 'blood drained from me' (27), giving the sense of a body completely emptied of blood, particularly after the graphic description of her husband's death. Similarly, the wailing *hic mihi vae! miserae concutit ossa metus* (82) becomes the unadorned 'the thought shakes my bones' (28). There is a difference between this style of understatement and the more severe muting of strong emotions in Isbell's version (see Chapter 4: 'Tone'). Pollard retains Briseis' description of their physical impact, but mutes its delivery with end-stopped and monosyllabic phrases, to indicate numbness even to this strength of emotion.

The modernised lexis and greater departures from the Latin text enabled by Pollard's transcreation thus allow her to convey the depth of trauma created by Briseis' situation much more clearly than earlier, closer translations. This serves as another way to foreground Briseis' enslavement rather than presenting the relationship as a romantic love story.

At the opposite end of the scale of emotional restraint, Pollard's Oenone in her version of *Heroides* 5 is bawdy, earthy and unrestrained in her emotional expression and her abuse of Paris.

⁴⁷ Wilkinson (1955), 98.

She relates her own ‘bawling’ (40, for *ululatus*, 73) and foretells that Paris will ‘holler with pain’ (41, for *clamabis*, 103), where Showerman translated ‘wailing cries of lamentation’ and ‘cry’, and Isbell ‘lament’ and ‘suffer’ respectively. Against these literal translations, Pollard’s version gives a much stronger sense of Oenone’s unfettered style of emotional expression (noted by Knox, 73–4n.). In a striking echo of the colloquialisations and vulgarisations of seventeenth-century parodies, the incongruously colloquial lexical register has the power to shock with its irreverence. This has effects at several levels. Most straightforwardly, it distinguishes Oenone’s unabashedly strong language as an aspect of her character much more strongly than a literal translation might for a modern non-specialist audience; it is clear that Briseis, for instance, would never speak this way. At a higher level, the lexical irreverence exposes and modernises a generic conceit in the Latin that readers unfamiliar with the Latin literary canon might not detect. Oenone’s incongruously rustic style of expression indicates her struggles with being a bucolic character, writing elegy, whose lover has departed into an epic story.⁴⁸ Language that challenges what a reader might expect to find in a translation of a classical text is an effective way of transposing that struggle into a less self-consciously intertextual literary culture.

Broader impositions of modernity in Pollard’s version also make Oenone’s grief deliberately incongruous. For 71–2:

tunc vero rupique sinus et pectora planxi
et secui madidas ungue rigente genas

Pollard characteristically abbreviates and modernises to offer:

I scratched off my make-up;
tore my dress. (40)

⁴⁸ See Knox, 13–32n. on her mixing of pastoral and elegiac themes. For another example in Ovid: Farrell (1992), arguing that the mixing of elegy, pastoral and epic in Polyphemus’ song (*Met.* 719–897) reflects the mixed narrative context, and that their incongruity achieves ‘effects that range from humorous to disturbing’ (267).

This contrasts with Isbell, who translates literally:

I tore the clothes away from my breasts
And beat my hands against my flesh; my long nails
tore at my tear-stained cheeks ... (42)

Oenone describes an ancient gesture of ritual grief, which would be culturally unfamiliar to a modern anglophone audience. Pollard turns this into a phrase that is at once a more emotionally comprehensible response (though far more connotative of shockingly raw grief in a modern context) and a completely unexpected phrase for an ancient character to use.⁴⁹ The incongruity of the phrase thus both characterises Oenone as particularly tempestuous and confounds any expectations of an ancient mythological character being by default elevated and remote.

This characterisation feeds into Oenone's invective too. In her anger her contempt for others is unrestrained: Menelaus, *credulus ille* (106) becomes 'that lonely ass' (41), where in both Isbell (43) and Showerman he was a 'trusting fool'. Although Pollard's words are not in the Latin, Oenone's rustic insult forms part of a vocabulary of animal-related insults that develops her characterisation as a country nymph. At 129, *a iuvene et cupido credatur reddita virgo?* becomes in Pollard's version 'And nothing happened with that young, eager stud?' (42) where again the earthy animal slang characterises Oenone as both rustic and unabashed in her anger. 'A Greek cow is coming!' (41), while a straight translation of *Graia iuvenca venit* (117), gains additional vulgar slang power in English. It also signposts that the translation of *possidet, en, saltus illa iuvenca meos* (124) as 'lo, the cow grazes my pasture', which retains the otherwise tonally incongruous 'lo' from the Loeb, is a bleakly witty pun on a cow's 'low'. The elevated register of 'lo' also indicates the tension in Oenone's identity between rustic nature-spirit and semi-divine entity who is loftier than a mere mortal. Not only are her claims to be worthy to hold a sceptre delusions of

⁴⁹ On the wildness of Oenone's grief: Knox, 71–2n.

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grandeur; she also does not use elevated language adeptly. Once again she is caught between registers and genres.

Less animal-related, but a similarly literal translation that gains bleak humour in English, is Pollard's rendering of *non ego cum Danais arma cruenta fero* (156) as 'I bring no bloody Greeks for company' (42). In her slang-laden register, 'bloody' reads as an intensive. Thus even as she denies that she is any less worthy of Paris the prince, Oenone cannot avoid, and perhaps embraces, expressing herself in ways that distinguish her from what she imagines is the refined exoticism of Helen. A fundamental aspect of that incompatibility is expressed for modern readers by her apparent relish for very English slang.

Oenone's vocabulary becomes particularly crass when referring to Helen. In the Latin *adultera certe est* (125); translated by Isbell, 'she lives in adultery' (44). Knox notes that here as elsewhere in her (and Ovid's) unapologetic frankness, 'Oenone does not mince words', and Pollard renders this as 'Helen's just | a slag' (41). The offensive slang, besides having shock value in itself, serves as a wryly outrageous adjective to apply to Helen because it is so wildly outside the register of conventionally appropriate words for her, both as a queen and as a character associated with the loftiness of epic. Pollard also develops this elsewhere by adding slurs where they are not present in the Latin. Oenone says:

Nunc tibi conveniunt, quae te per aperta sequantur
aequora legitimos destituantque viro (77–8)

Ovid's Oenone refuses to dignify Helen even with a noun, alluding to her only as the unmentioned subject of *conveniunt, quae ...* By contrast, Showerman adds in the noun 'jades', which Pollard updates to the contemptuous 'sluts':

You pleasure, now, in sluts
who abandon their husbands (40)

Chapter 4: ‘Slurs’ explored ways in which the indiscriminate use of the word ‘slut’ to translate any term of abuse made inappropriate use of shock to mask important aspects of the tone or character. Here, however, it is clearly a part of Oenone’s characterisation that her extreme hatred of Helen is very much tied into her condemnation of Helen’s promiscuity, as well as being consistent with her general tone. ‘Slut’ and ‘slag’ thus have a place in this version, despite not being immediately suggested by the phrasing of the Latin. The translation of *praebuit ipsa rapi* (132) as the well known and much-condemned English colloquialism ‘asking for it’ (42) is similarly effective here precisely because its victim-blaming is shocking, particularly for a woman to use of another woman.⁵⁰

Relatedly, Oenone is more openly sexually suggestive, making use of innuendo and describing entire scenes in ways that make them sexually charged (and that are perhaps particularly effective following immediately on from Phaedra’s more veiled epistle). Pollard’s Oenone refers to ‘sexy Satyrs’ (42) for *Satyri celeres ... turba proterva* (135–6), updating Showerman’s ‘wanton’ and more lascivious than Isbell’s ‘a nimble and carefree crowd’ (44). Later in the same passage, Pollard’s version also plays on the already suggestive *immensis, qua tumet Ida, iugis* (138). However, where the Latin is more suggestive of the aroused male genitalia, or perhaps of both male and female during penetration, Pollard’s version gives ‘Ida’s swollen ridge’ in a double entendre more exclusively applicable to the female genitalia. This version implies Oenone too found the pursuit arousing, where Isbell (ironically avoiding one element of eroticism that was actually in the Latin) translated simply as ‘in the rocky cliffs of Ida’. This version of Oenone appears to be much more the sexually liberated character boasting of the ‘amorous adventures’ she could have had that Isbell describes in his notes. Her one exception is translated as ‘Tros ... loved me truly’.⁵¹ One reason for this is that, working from Showerman’s Loeb, Pollard omits the particularly violent lines 140–5 that are included by Isbell, who supplements Showerman’s text with Dörrie’s (see

⁵⁰ Oenone’s unreasonableness is contextualised by Knox, 129n., noting ancient controversies over the story.

⁵¹ Pollard reproduces Isbell’s error in identifying *Troiae munitor* (139) as Tros rather than Apollo.

Chapter 4: ‘Assault’, n. 33). As a result, the whole passage is more suggestive and less focused on assault than a translation of the fuller text would likely be.

Modern slang and innuendo are not generally features that a reader used to reading more ‘highbrow’ translations of classical texts might expect to encounter; they might seem on first reading to be both vulgar and irreverent. Yet in translating a poet for whom irreverence was so often the point, unexpected translation choices that bring the reader up short are eminently appropriate.⁵² In particular, they invite the reader to reconsider what preconceptions they might have about what they are expecting to read that have nothing to do with the text in front of them. Pollard’s apparent deviation from the Latin thus achieves a similar effect to Ovid’s transposition of characters out of their ‘own’ genres, including Oenone. The subversion of generic tropes, and the characters’ (in)ability to cope with it, is part of the fabric of the poem. In translating Oenone, whose rusticity itself seems to be what bars her from the prestige of epic, Pollard’s lexis provides a vividly comprehensible modernised version of that struggle.

The strength of characterisation of these heroines provides a contrasting foil for other heroines too, and it is here that it becomes apparent that the modernity is not simply the effect of Pollard’s own voice. Against Oenone’s ‘slut’ and ‘slag’, Pollard’s Hypsipyle refers to Medea as ‘barbarian mistress’ (46, for *barbara paelex*, *Her.* 6.81) and ‘shameless strumpet’ (47, for *adultera virgo*, 133). These much more old-fashioned terms, associated with strongly patriarchal ideas of marriage and sexual morality, contribute to Hypsipyle’s characterisation as a stiffly proud wife whose outdated values strongly underpin her belief in the respect she is owed. In the Latin, Hypsipyle’s fixation on legitimate marriage was incongruous for being a concern of a character writing elegy, and, perhaps, a parody of Augustan propriety. In Pollard’s translation, her mannered archaisms highlight this moralising obsession for an audience in whose social context

⁵² See Balmer (2013b), 153–64, on her use of unexpected mixed registers and cultural references to translate Catullus, whose poems are also receiving renewed attention for their irreverence.

it is no longer a central concern. Additionally, this renews the dark comedy of the contrast between Hypsipyle's mannered mask and the violence exposed beneath when it slips. In place of 'mistress' and 'strumpet', the nounless *banc* (95; simply 'woman' in both Showerman and Isbell, 51) becomes 'hag' (46) after the heroine's outburst about Medea's dark arts.⁵³ In Isbell's translation, *dona feram templis* and *hostia ... concidit icta* (77–8) were rendered as 'shall I bring sacrifice | to the holy places' and 'must some | victim die ...?' (50). Pollard, however, gives the much more colloquially graphic 'Why slit guts on the altar?' (46). Most comedically shocking of all, Pollard's translation of *paelicis ipsa meos inplessem sanguine vultus* (149) graphically heightens the contrast with Hypsipyle's supposed mercy:

Still, I'd protect you –
I'm merciful –
only dash her brains out, so blood sprayed
my face, your face. (48)

The phrase's suddenness, heightened by the preceding parenthesis, highlights the undercurrent of violence beneath the veneer of outraged respectability that Verducci identified was only a mask. Once again, it is the shocking immediacy and casual graphicness of the modern lexis used by Pollard that distinguishes the *caeca nox humanitatis* of Hypsipyle's voice.

A particularly strong distinction which earlier translations have tended not to foreground is the young age of several of the heroines: Ariadne, Phyllis and especially Canace (as noted in Chapter 3: 'Canace') are all likely teenaged at most, a fact that carries ideas of emotional (im)maturity now that might not have been expected by readers of the Latin text. In Pollard's translation, it is Phyllis who is most consistently characterised as a tremulous, even stropky teenager. Her mannerisms are established right from the opening couplet, which Pollard renders with youthful colloquialism as 'You know the mountain we visited? I'm stood there, crying' (20). In the following lines she sounds almost juvenile, in a phrase that updates Showerman's 'ah, base, base

⁵³ The guttural 'hag' also translates *banc* phonetically, similarly to Louis and Celia Zukofsky's *Catullus* (1969).

man!’ (*scelerate*, 17) to ‘oh | you bad, bad man’. Her juvenile stropiness breaks through at 103, where *quid precor infelix?* becomes ‘Why do I bother?’ (22). This stropiness is made unsettling by the sense of transformation that Phyllis undergoes in the course of 63–5 (21) from ‘gullible girl’ (*credentem puellam*) to ‘smitten woman’ (*et amans et femina*). After the clear indications of inexperience in the fumbling feel of ‘pushed my body to yours’ for *lateri conservuisse latus* (58), the reader develops a sense that Phyllis has had to grow up faster than she should as a teenage queen who has taken a guest to her bed. Pollard’s translation does also reproduce the notion of ‘innocence’ (23) from previous translations of *virginitas* (115). However, in conjunction with ‘secret parts’ for *castaque ... zona* (116) and her broader youthful characterisation, this achieves a more nuanced effect than Isbell’s blanket use of the term (see Chapter 4: ‘Purity’).

As a result of this characterisation, lines strongly evocative of contemporary concerns regarding teenage depression gain particularly disturbing power. Fiona Cox notes that Pollard’s versions are powerful because ‘they accommodate so cogently the conditions of our modern world ... using terms that are freighted for us’.⁵⁴ This is particularly apparent in her translations of the youngest heroines: she translates *patior telis vulnera facta meis* (48) as ‘I self-harm’ (21), turning a metaphor of self-sabotage into one much more loaded with literal overtones. Phyllis’ suicidal ideation in the final lines of the poem also become yet more disturbing as the culmination of a poem that pervasively characterises the heroine as a teenager dealing with tumultuous emotions she has not previously experienced. A similar effect is achieved in Pollard’s translation of Canace, for whom ritual grief is once again updated. At *Her.* 11.91–2:

exierat thalamo; tunc demum pectora plangi
contigit inque meas unguibus ire genas.

Pollard’s version runs:

⁵⁴ Cox (2018), 216.

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Only when our father left my bedroom
did I try to hurt myself. (76)

Whereas a literal translation would have rendered the phrase in similar terms to the reaction of Oenone at *Her.* 5.71–2 (and Isbell’s translation does do this: 100), Pollard’s version is able to stress the particularly distressing fact of Canace’s immaturity by using language that a modern reader might expect a younger character to use. Earlier it was demonstrated that the unapologetically frank language of enslavement and sex work in Pollard’s version of Briseis confronted the reader with the reality of those experiences. Here, the use of loaded phrases relating to adolescent psychology, and of language that teenagers might use, foregrounds the characters’ age in a way that earlier, more literal translations have not. (In the case of Canace, Pollard could have gone much further in maintaining mannerisms that stress this aspect throughout the epistle, but she foregrounds other elements of Canace’s voice instead.) Whether or not this would have been a concern to ancient audiences, it is arguably inappropriate for modern readerships to continue to read those characters’ accounts of their stories without awareness of their age, which must make those stories especially shocking and harrowing.

Form and style

A distinctive aspect of Pollard’s versions compared to previous ones is her use of, and play with, free verse. Pollard’s introduction notes that in translating the *Heroides*, the use of metrical forms ‘often seems to mean a loss of concision and suppleness of tone’. Instead, she chose free verse in order to explore ‘the pacing, the hypnotic repetitions, the tragi-comic shifts, the immediacy of the voices’, as part of her aim to demonstrate that ‘this text is startlingly modern’ (13).

Pollard is far from alone in this practice. She referenced Hughes’ *Tales from Ovid* as one of her stylistic inspirations, but Hughes too was continuing a practice begun by the early twentieth-century modernist translators of Latin and Greek texts. The modernist injunction to ‘make it new’ included, as a principle of Imagism, the need for a musical rather than metronomic rhythm,

as a means of bringing classical texts more vividly and humanly to life than metrical translations allowed. Yopie Prins observes that H.D.'s translations of Euripides are particularly notable for her use of free verse as a means of conveying the unsettling, irregular-seeming cadences of Greek choruses, and her paring down of the ornamented Greek text to a 'spare English idiom' that looked 'less familiar, more strange to modern readers'. Her versions were celebrated as examples of how modernising translations could reclaim Greek texts from the fustiness of pedantically metrical versions.⁵⁵

Prins' analysis identifies many aspects of H.D.'s artistic vision that can also be found in Pollard's foreword on the capabilities of free verse to explore the Ovidian text. However, they do differ, in that H.D.'s free verse aimed more consciously to foreignise the text for anglophone readers by reproducing aspects of the Greek metre and (her perception of) the rhythmic unfamiliarity of individual words. This was a conscious reaction against strictly regular verse versions, which imposed what modernists saw as pedestrian rhythms that distanced readers further from the Greek text. Pollard, on the other hand, seeks to leave the metre of the ancient text behind altogether in favour of an aesthetic of modern immediacy. As Chapter 4 demonstrated, metrically regular verse translations of the *Heroides* have performed similar acts of domesticating violence on the voices of the poems (see Spivak, 1993, quoted in Introduction), where metrical constraints have led to a diminished emotional immediacy and altered sense that are often more egregious than in Showerman's prose version. Pollard's free verse reduces this violence by framing the heroines' voices in a form that makes their diction sound less mannered, artificial and archaic, just as her paring back of the idiom creates something more taut and 'intense'. Yet as is demonstrated below, Pollard also consciously plays with the interaction between this form and other regular forms to distinguish particular voices.

⁵⁵ Prins (2017), 182. On H.D.'s versions' mutually reviving relationship with the Greek text: 184–201.

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In many places this form allows Pollard to exploit the effects of unexpected line breaks for emotive effect, such as her rendering of *Her.* 4.125–6:

o utinam nocitura tibi, pulcherrime rerum,
in medio nisu viscera rupta forent!

Isbell's translation is not merely limited in its impact by the restrictions of its regular metrical form, but it is also an example of his tendency, identified in Chapter 4: 'Tone', to invert couplets so that the epigrammatic neatness of the Latin couplets is lost.

I wish my breast which has injured you
so greatly, fairest man, had been torn open. (34)

By contrast, Pollard's free verse version runs:

Oh I wish that this body, that did you such wrong,
had split – (35)

What follows is not merely a new line but a new stanza. The text is thus brutally interrupted by blank space on the page, and the next stanza does not pick up from the parenthesis but begins a new sentence; Phaedra's sentence itself splits with the strength of her expression. Elsewhere Pollard leaves stanzas without end-stops for emotional effect, either for a hesitation (*Hermione*, p. 60; *Medea*, p. 82) or for uncontrolled outpourings (*Sappho*, throughout), but this is the only instance in which the original sentence does not continue. The change of subject suggests that Phaedra has regained control of herself after her emotional outburst and seeks to continue her persuasive rhetoric.

What makes this effect particularly striking in this epistle is the fact that elsewhere it is more than usually metrical. In his introduction to the poem Isbell (29) notes that in the early parts of the poem Phaedra describes her passion in terms that outline the future literary trope of courtly love: clandestine, between equals, and adulterous. For Phaedra's faux-innocent exposition on the

nature of Love as a commanding deity (*Her.* 4.7–16), Pollard, free to use a mixture of metres, noticeably uses iambic tetrameters and pentameters.⁵⁶

Three times I've tried to speak to you,
 three times my tongue has stopped, sound's failed.
 Love should be modest, but though modesty
 forbids, it's Love commands me: write.
 Love's orders can't be nothing when
 it's Love that rules the Gods who rule –
 I tried to stop, but Love spoke out:
 'Write: his iron heart might yield.'
 Well let Love help me then, and heat your marrow
 as my marrow, your heart as my heart. (32)

After this opening section, the verse becomes more free, but it is interspersed with further lines concerning Love in iambic pentameters: 'but Love has come, come deep for coming late' (32, translating 19), 'I'd rather Love's forbidden than is mean' (33, translating 34), and 'Sometimes I think this Love's a debt I pay' (translating 53). This is particularly striking for readers familiar with the sonnet form and its associations with courtly love through Petrarch, and with the wider explorations of love in Shakespearean sonnets. As a result, readers with this familiarity might perceive Phaedra as having adopted a courtly, mannered persona in the opening of the poem which increasingly conflicts with the wilder nature of her passion as the poem progresses.⁵⁷

Even for readers without this intertextual familiarity, however, this quasi-courtly aspect is made more visually striking by the interchanging typography of 'Love/love'. Isbell (29) notes that 'Ovid – in the character of Phaedra – introduces the idea of love as a deified personification ... to heighten the purported helplessness of Phaedra before the harsh demands of her passion'. In keeping with this, his translation maintains a distinction between capitalised and uncapitalised love in particular passages according to the sense, largely capitalising Love in translating 1–16,

⁵⁶ On Phaedra's emulating the poet-lover's disingenuous claims of being overruled by Love on what to write in *Amores* 1.2: Armstrong (2006), 261–4.

⁵⁷ For another use of heightened metrical regularity to suggest studied artificiality and mannered love poetry, see Chapter 2: 'Sappho'. Verducci taught Comparative Literature and, like Pollard, would have been familiar with the historic conventions of English verse.

and consistently keeping it lower-case thereafter. There is some interplay of these two styles in ‘If Love is joined with modesty then | love should never be deprived of modesty’ (30), translating *qua licet et sequitur, pudor est miscendus amori* (9). The effect of this stylising is to demonstrate the distinction between the personified figure and the emotion that will follow.

Pollard, by contrast, blurs the boundaries between the two. After emulating Isbell’s capitalisation in her version of 1–16, Pollard also intermittently capitalises ‘Love’ in the iambic pentameter lines that intersperse the later free verse sections. This highlights for the reader the conflict between Phaedra’s sense of her love on the one hand as Love, a ‘worthy flame’ (*digno ... igni*, 33) and a conscious force that ‘rules the Gods’ (32, translating *in dominos ius habet ille deos*, 12), and on the other as love, something much more base and wild. This is typified most strikingly in the translation of *nostra invat lumina, quidquid agis* (84) as ‘my eyes Love all of you’ (34). Pollard’s Phaedra professes herself so dominated by passion that commanding deity and simple verb have merged and are for her the same. Coming as it does in the midst of a passage full of double entendres regarding Hippolytus’ ‘hardness’ and his use of lances and spears, this is an especially obvious indication of Phaedra’s attempts to frame her frenzied attraction in the context of something dignified and pure.⁵⁸ This is particularly important as a culturally meaningful modern reframing of what for a Roman readership would be a striking conflict between the Dionysian and the Artemisian, or between the contradictory aspects of Artemis.⁵⁹ In this context, Pollard’s version of Phaedra’s innuendo thus has a different effect again from the lewdness of Oenone and the self-degradation of Briseis. Fundamentally, here too it is Pollard’s departure from close, literal translation towards a more creative approach to and play with the text that revives the unique characteristics of Phaedra’s voice and makes her distinguishable from the other heroines.

⁵⁸ Similar vocabulary in the Latin helps apply the conventional *duritia* of the elegiac *puella* to Hippolytus, while also exploiting familiar innuendoes of sharp weapons (Adams, 1982: 19–22) and anything *durus* or *rigidus* (*passim*).

⁵⁹ On Phaedra’s conflict between quasi-virginal chastity and orgiastic wildness: Armstrong (2006), 99–104.

This analysis has shown the various ways in which it is the distinctiveness of the heroines' voices that is most strikingly emphasised by Pollard's adaptation of the poems into colloquial contemporary English. The heightened idiosyncrasies of lexis and tone give a far stronger sense of emotional authenticity and unstudied directness, imbuing them with the feel of dramatic monologues. This strong sense of personality and spontaneity in turn invites the reader to imagine that the poems really are being spoken by the heroines rather than written. As a result, the poems move towards being a text that invites performance, rather than silent reading, as they were in the time of the Dryden–Tonson miscellany *Ovid's Epistles*.

Performance

It was argued in Chapter 1 that one important indicator of the *Heroides*' cultural relevance was their popularity as performance pieces. That this might have been true in Ovid's own time too was suggested by the use of the verb *cantetur* in *Ars Amatoria* 3.344, where Ovid suggests women might make themselves attractive by performing poems.⁶⁰ It is further argued in Chapter 6 below that the renewal of interest in the *Heroides* in the twenty-first century lies behind their reimaginings as performance pieces, and conversely that there is greater interest in seeing them performed at times when they are most culturally relevant. A spinoff project of Pollard's own work served as another outstanding example of the reinstatement of the poems as dramatic monologues to be performed, rather than simply confined to the page.

This was Pollard's own UK tour of her translation as a one-woman performance from 2015 to 2017. The show was created with Jaybird Literature Live, described on its website as a production company specialising in the 'poetry show', working together with poets to create 'subtly theatricalised poetry performances which tour to theatres and arts centres'. Pollard had clearly long been aware of the dramatic potential of the monologues, remarking that 'you can

⁶⁰ See Chapter 1, n. 1.

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almost see the line from them to Shakespeare's soliloquys [sic], the way you see the women thinking aloud and making decisions.⁶¹ She regularly performs other pieces of her work at poetry readings, writing with oral performance in mind (see above, 'Context'). In fact, Jay Bird director Julia Bird had proposed the show to Pollard after seeing her perform one of the poems by heart.⁶² It toured to sixteen cities over two years, including a spot on the poetry stage at the 2015 Latitude Festival.

The show was never recorded, but the promotional material for the show describes it thus: 'Clare reads, recites and performs her astonishing poems against a backdrop of Mediterranean light and sound. Love letters fly back and forth between the ancient world and modern Britain – the messages of longing, suffering and beauty they bear are universal and timeless.'⁶³ The performance, consisting of eight of the fifteen poems, began with Pollard seated at a desk as though in the act of writing the letters, before she got to her feet and began to perform the monologue to the audience more directly. The monologues were interspersed with cues from contemporary musical artists including Lana del Rey and Amy Winehouse, who are well known for songs about unrequited love and dysfunctional relationships. Pollard also provided explanations of the poems' context for the benefit of viewers unfamiliar with the mythology.⁶⁴

Asked about the challenge of playing so many contrasting characters one after another, Pollard explained that 'accents, posture, the speed of delivery' were key to making them distinct: 'Hypsipyle had a deep stately voice for example, where as [sic] I rattled through Medea very fast with a kind of mania'.⁶⁵ Pollard also noted that towards the end of the run in 2017, when she was seven months pregnant, it felt particularly subversive to perform the Medea monologue with her

⁶¹ Clare Pollard, email to the author, 11 October 2022.

⁶² Patterson (2015).

⁶³ Jaybird Literature Live (2014).

⁶⁴ McHugh (2015).

⁶⁵ Clare Pollard, email to the author, 11 October 2022.

pregnancy visible.⁶⁶ It is notable that Pollard refers in particular to distinguishing the voices of the heroines, as an especially important aspect of every character being played by the same actor. After her tour had concluded, Pollard reflected that ‘the whole thing has confirmed my sense that my poetry is primarily written to be spoken’.⁶⁷

The performance was well received by audiences: reviewers unanimously praised the way Pollard’s modernisations brought the ancient voices to life and ‘made something from 2,000 years ago relatable’.⁶⁸ One reviewer noted how the audience was invited to become complicit in the exploration of what it meant for a woman to retell the stories and to ‘think critically about the politics and power-imbalances that condition, and are conditioned by, any narrative act’. However, even this review, which was otherwise appreciative, noted that the repeating of similar sentiments could become overwhelming, despite each epistle’s individuality: ‘there is a risk towards the end of the show that the individual literary interests of each tale, told in quick succession, begin to drown under a sea of overwhelming emotional excess.’ However, the reviewer also noted that Pollard’s production balanced this out by placing the ‘sage, loving but resigned’ epistle from Penelope at the end.⁶⁹

Pollard’s versions have themselves been adapted for other performances, including the 30-minute MIDI opera *Medea*, composed by Serafina Steer in 2016 as a commission for Manchester International Women’s Festival (also never recorded). Pollard described this ‘soap opera noise poem’ as ‘extremely, enjoyably avant-garde’.⁷⁰ Thus the success of performances including Pollard’s own demonstrates that her versions move the *Heroides* back towards being a

⁶⁶ In conversation with Helen Eastman (on YouTube), Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (2022), 38:21–39:16. Another coincidental pregnancy added a different facet to Briseis in *15 Heroines*: Littler (2021), [11]. (Pagination refers to article PDF from PVCRS website.)

⁶⁷ Pollard (2016).

⁶⁸ McHugh (2015).

⁶⁹ Richards (2015). On audience complicity, see Chapter 6, n. 51.

⁷⁰ Pollard (2016).

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performable text that is compelling and culturally relevant in ways that previous twentieth-century translations have not.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored ways in which Clare Pollard, like Aphra Behn more than three centuries earlier, turned her lack of formal classical education to advantage in her versions of the *Heroides*. Her use of earlier translations was not a means of uncritically reproducing, but of supplementing and challenging those versions. Pollard modernised and condensed the translated text, and checked the dictionary definitions of Latin words that seemed to invite reappraisal. Her versions, which have been shown to be a form of transcreation, could thus appeal to modern audiences, while presenting myths that they might already know in striking and surprising ways.

In particular, Pollard's being a professional poet with a specific interest in confessionalism meant she approached the texts with a different set of artistic priorities from those who have translated with primarily academic interests in mind. Chapter 4 demonstrated the tonal flattening of emotionally intense Latin passages that occurs in a version by a translator who did not prioritise emotional authenticity or directness for a modern readership. It also demonstrated the impact of a translator's unconscious biases on narratives of trauma and mistreatment. Pollard's versions confront both of these issues head-on, treating the poems as emotionally authentic accounts of women's experiences, which could tap into contemporary concerns surrounding men's mistreatment and abuse of women. In the process, they expose and challenge how these issues have been elided or romanticised in previous versions.

In its avoidance of romanticising archaisms and circumlocutions in favour of a more direct modern idiom, Pollard's version has more in common with Florence Verducci's. However, Verducci's line-for-line equivalence made the translated poems the same length as the Latin ones. In contrast, Pollard's paring back of the texts to something more 'intense' caters more for a contemporary readership, less accustomed to reading long-form poems. Like Verducci, Pollard reacted against previous criticisms of Ovid's poetic failures, but also against views to which Verducci did subscribe, regarding wit at the expense of the heroines. While Chapter 3

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demonstrated that, for the most part, Verducci's versions are multivalent enough for a contemporary reader to interpret them with more empathy than did Verducci herself, Pollard's versions invite what Cox termed 'enraged empathy' in the first instance. Pollard's interest in the poems as direct, unmediated accounts from the heroines themselves enabled her to prioritise creating strong, distinct individual voices. This challenged the long-held notion of the monotony of the poems' subject matter.

Pollard's versions therefore issued a new and essential challenge to the poems' translation tradition. Furthermore, her staged performances of her translations as dramatic monologues revealed the further creative possibilities that become available when the poems are taken as a means of revoicing women's experiences. From 2013 to 2020, Pollard's was the only commercially available anglophone version of the *Heroides* written by a woman. That interval was marked by an increasing popular interest in retellings of the stories of women marginalised in canonical narratives, including ancient myths. The almost two-year run of Pollard's stage show (from 2015 to 2017) is indicative of its continued success in appealing to this interest amongst audiences. As the popular appetite for own-voices stories and for stories of resistance and reclamation continued to grow in subsequent years, Pollard's *Ovid's Heroines* can be seen as an early demonstration of the renewed cultural relevance of the poems. This would be demonstrated on a far grander scale by the groundbreaking *15 Heroines* project in 2020.

6. Stoking the Canon: 15 Heroines and Beyond

This chapter explores the November 2020 Jermyn Street Theatre production *15 Heroines*. As a series of modern adaptations of the *Heroides* into dramatic monologues for the stage, they are transcreations with intersemiotic elements that revoice the source texts in new and dynamic ways. The conception of the project as explicitly feminist and antiracist enabled the playwrights to turn the heroines' complaints of their individual mistreatment outwards, transforming them into protests against systemic social and political injustices. It was a production that combined humorous use of tropes from popular culture, keywords from social justice campaigns, and conscious resistance of the conventional versions of myths about women. The result was a piece of theatre that looked both back and forward: interrogating the assumptions and omissions of the source texts and myths in the ways they depicted women, but also the assumptions relied on by readers and audiences who continue to engage uncritically with those depictions. By connecting the plight of the ancient heroines with the language and concerns of contemporary social justice movements, especially those of Black Lives Matter and Me Too, the production also serves as a timely and urgent artistic intervention, using the stories of ancient women to invite audiences to reflect on how they might be perpetuating injustices in their own lives.

15 Heroines is thus a prime example of the *Heroides*' resurrection as a performed text in English. Harnessing the momentum of the ongoing reappraisal of canonical works of literature linked to increased awareness of systemic injustices in wider society, it both modernises and challenges the Ovidian text. It was a production conceived in a time of resounding cultural relevance, and it demonstrated a way for readers and audiences to continue to find relevance in the *Heroides*.

Context

15 Heroines, a series of fifteen short plays adapted from the *Heroides* by a team of women and non-binary playwrights and actors, and streamed online in late 2020, was a culmination of several related developments in popular culture and in receptions of ancient literature. In the years

following the election of Donald Trump as US President in 2016, a new wave of feminist activism (sometimes described as a ‘fourth wave’) brought about a corresponding surge of interest in retellings of women’s stories from a range of cultures in anglophone literature. Important work has been done in classical reception studies on women’s fiction and poetry earlier than 2016 about Greek and Roman mythical women.¹ However, despite the authors’ often formidable reputations, these works have not had as high a profile as many published more recently. Following the bestselling success and prize shortlistings of established authors such as Natalie Haynes, Madeline Miller and Pat Barker, debut authors such as Jennifer Saint and Laura Shepperson also published successful works on this theme.² These works are often described as writing back to canonical versions: Miller, for instance, wanted her Circe ‘to be arguing with Homer’s version of her story’.³ Others seek to fill gaps in the canon: for Barker, ‘you need question marks, absences, silences that you have to fill’, while Haynes describes ‘this skeletal framework and all these people in the shadows that you get to fill in and bring forwards’.⁴ Women writers’ desire to ‘write back’ aligns with the concept of canonical counter-discourse, theorised by Tiffin with reference to postcolonial reimaginings of canonical texts, in which a writer ‘takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes’.⁵

At the same time, contemporary stagings of ancient drama have shown their ability to speak to modern issues as much as to the ancient text. Inua Ellams’ *Antigone* (2022) depicted a British Muslim family negotiating hostile government policy. Many stagings of Sophocles’ *Ajax* have

¹ Among others, Christa Wolf’s *Cassandra* (1984), Carol Ann Duffy’s *The World’s Wife* (1999), Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad* (2005), and Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Lavinia* (2008) have been explored by, among others, Braund and Annes Brown in a special issue of *Classical Receptions Journal* (Cox and Theodorakopoulos, 2012) and by Rabinowitz and Richards in Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2019). For a more general survey of classical reception in modern popular fiction: Maurice (2017).

² Haynes’ *A Thousand Ships* (2019) and Barker’s *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), both on the women of Troy, and Miller’s *Circe* (2018), were all shortlisted for the Women’s Prize for Fiction. Saint’s series of mythical retellings began with *Ariadne* (2021), and Shepperson revoiced Phaedra in *The Heroines* (2023); both were *Sunday Times* bestsellers.

³ Smith (2018).

⁴ Mesure (2021); O’Keeffe (2022).

⁵ Tiffin (1994), 97.

handled the experiences of PTSD among military veterans (set in the Middle East in Charles Connaghan's 2011 translation, and in other modern conflict zones in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Ajax*, 2013). The *Oresteias* of Tony Harrison (1981) and Anne Carson (2009) take subversive linguistic approaches to foreground the ancient plays' cultural incomprehensibility to modern audiences. Hardwick has theorised these modernising approaches as a type of 'interventionist' theatre, which can employ one of two strategies in its aim to transform audience perspectives. Either the handling of a contemporary issue is distanced with a remote mythological setting, or 'cultural shock' is induced by 'suggesting more overt correspondences and equivalences between ancient and modern crises and debates in a way which destabilises modern certainties'.⁶

15 Heroines also joined a tradition of stage performances of ancient texts other than drama. Hardwick explores a number of examples in which ancient poetry was adapted into drama, from Derek Walcott's *Odyssey* to the Royal Shakespeare Company production of Simon Reade and Tim Supple's 1999 adaptation of Ted Hughes' *Tales from Ovid*. In the terminology of translation studies, these adaptations are intersemiotic translations: 'translating' a text into another medium, such as a stage adaptation, which incorporates aesthetic elements such as body language and the visual imagery of a set.⁷ Performances of the *Metamorphoses* have remained popular in the twenty-first century. The Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD) lists four performances of Mary Zimmerman's Tony Award-winning adaptation (1996) and three of Peter Bramlin's (2010) in the UK, US and Canada since 2000, as well as two further performances of *Tales from Ovid*.⁸ More recent years have seen a new stage adaptation by Sami Ibrahim, Laura Lomas and Sabrina Mahfouz (2021), as well as Stephanie McCarter's translation (2023).

⁶ Hardwick (2000), 67–8.

⁷ Outlined in Giannakopoulou (2019). For a more recent theoretical approach to ancient epic on stage: Macintosh and McConnell (2020).

⁸ 'Metamorphoses', in *APGRD Productions Database*, <<http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/productions/scripts/8837>> [accessed 16 March 2023].

However, being less dramatic in scope, the other works of Ovid including the *Heroides* have tended to receive less attention in intersemiotic adaptations. Nonetheless, many of the heroines of the *Heroides* also have long performance traditions in their own right, whether through the performance of their eponymous Greek tragedies or through other adaptations like opera: Phaedra, Medea, Ariadne and Dido have all featured regularly on stage.⁹ However, although the *Heroides* themselves have formed part of the inspiration for some of these productions, the complete collection of single epistles (totalling around three thousand lines, the combined length of two Greek tragedies) had never previously been adapted for the stage.¹⁰

In 2020, however, the *Heroides* became relevant as never before.¹¹ In the summer of 2020, in need of escapism during the UK COVID-19 lockdowns, the broadcaster and writer (and Classics graduate) Natalie Haynes posted a series of short videos on social media, under the hashtag #OvidNotCovid, in which she summarised each of the single and double *Heroides*. Haynes' written work in recent years in both fiction and non-fiction has focused on 'the narratives of the women excluded from or demonised by centuries of classical reception', by means of 'a return to the texts themselves, which are far more comfortable with complex female characters than we give them credit for'. She 'has made it her mission to introduce the British public to the ancient world in a way that combines academic analysis with humour', and each video garnered between one and six thousand views from followers who are largely classics enthusiasts without formal classical education.¹²

⁹ For a study of classical opera heroines including Penelope, Medea and Dido: McDonald (2001), of which almost one-third is a 'partial' list of operas on classical themes dating from the 1600s to the present. For Medea in particular: Hall, Macintosh and Taplin (2000); Albrektson and Macintosh (2023).

¹⁰ 'Heroides', in *APGRD Productions Database*, <<http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/productions/scripts/8840>> [accessed 16 March 2023]. Larres (2021) also reimagines *Her.* 1, 10 and 11 in music.

¹¹ For a similar discussion of contemporary events giving ancient epic new appeal in performance: Macintosh and McConnell (2020), 15–18.

¹² Cunliffe (2021). Haynes's recent writing includes *Stone Blind* (2022), a fictional revoicing of Medusa, and *Pandora's Jar* (2020), a study of misrepresented mythical women.

At the same time, protests against racist police brutality were occurring in many countries in response to the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis by a serving police officer in May 2020. This served for many as a moment of reckoning, bringing into mainstream cultural discourse the longstanding campaign aims of antiracist social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter. Across many sectors of society, from business and industry to education and the arts, organisations and individuals were prompted to reflect on their unconscious biases, and on how they might be perpetuating and benefiting from systemic discrimination against people of colour. It was against this background of reinvigorated antiracist and feminist activism that *15 Heroines* was developed by Jermyn Street Theatre (JST), a fringe West End theatre known for nurturing new talent alongside well-known works and artists. Conceived as an ideal piece of theatre for streaming online and one whose subject matter would have particular resonance during a time of enforced isolation, it consisted of adaptations of each of *Her.* 1–15 by a different woman or non-binary playwright, each performed as a fifteen-minute dramatic monologue by a different actor, and divided into three individually-broadcast instalments (in a parallel to the possible division of the Latin poems into three books).¹³

Tom Littler, JST’s Artistic Director at the time and one of the production’s three co-directors (with Cat Robey and Adjoa Andoh), explained that, much like the Dryden–Tonson miscellany, the advantages of this approach were its ‘polyvocality and multitude of perspectives; the ways it frees these myths from a single guiding hand, of whatever gender, ethnicity, or background’ – whether that of Ovid or a single translator.¹⁴ Thus the historic criticism of the *Heroides* that their unity of subject matter makes them monotonous was well and truly avoided (see Chapter 2: ‘Context’). Furthermore, this enabled the inclusion of many playwrights who had had no educational exposure to the literature of ancient Greece or Rome, and the adaptations were

¹³ On the *Heroides*’ possible tripartite division: Holzberg (2002), 77.

¹⁴ Littler (2021), [13]; on its links with the Dryden–Tonson edition, [2]. Pagination refers to article PDF from *PVCRS* website. Further page references given in text.

consequently radically wide-ranging in the sociopolitical issues they explicitly or implicitly incorporated (particularly those of the Me Too and Black Lives Matter campaigns). This was thus a new example of the ‘deeply rooted “resistance postmodernism”’ that Macintosh and McConnell argue had long characterised reperformances of ancient epic.¹⁵ Their particular innovation was that from a text that explored the experience of a systemically oppressed gender, the adaptations incorporated the experiences of a wide range of intersecting axes of oppression, especially race, but also including class.

In order to familiarise themselves with the stories before choosing which one to adapt, the playwrights were directed to A. S. Kline’s free online translation (notably not to the Loeb), and to Haynes’ #OvidNotCovid videos, because these ‘would provide exactly the sort of brisk, engaging reading of the text that may lure in a wavering writer, unsure about the virtues of dusty Latin tomes’ (Littler, [4]). Thus the playwrights’ adaptations became receptions of previous receptions, and were filtered through Haynes’ already irreverent feminist readings. As a result, the only play that is a reasonably close translation is Haynes’ own version of *Her.* 6; even other writers who did have classical backgrounds, such as Sabrina Mahfouz, ‘firmly departed from the original’ ([11]). Littler also noted that the dramatic form enabled the monologues to be shorter than the poems by which they were inspired: ‘Letters summarise a writer’s condition ... at a fixed moment ... Drama is an aural and a visual artform, and it requires fewer words to make the same point’ ([6]). This, as well as their modernity, was an aspect that helped make them more appealing for a modern audience (see Chapter 5: ‘Context’ on the appeal of shorter-form works for a contemporary readership). The unmediated confessionalism of dramatic monologues also appealed to the renewed popularity of confessional poetry, especially by and for young women.¹⁶ This includes the revival of spoken word performance, including by artists who handle classical

¹⁵ Macintosh and McConnell (2020), 16, describe reperformances that address ‘contemporary concerns about how to live with anger’.

¹⁶ Crown (2019).

themes, such as *Kae Tempest*. The production is thus an example of the need Hardwick identifies to problematise traditional distinctions between ‘translation’ and ‘adaptation’ in analysing stage adaptations (in reference to ancient drama). She notes that creativity plays an essential role in the process of ‘innovative combination’ that allows for the use of ‘imitation, allusion, quotation, parody and pastiche’.¹⁷ The concept of transcreation, discussed in Chapter 5, is thus also essential here.

A particularly significant aspect of this production, as a reception of the poems, was that it restored the dramatic aspect of the subject matter. Any edition experienced purely on the page cannot foreground the oral performance of the poems, or the fact that many of the heroines themselves would have been more familiar to Roman audiences from the theatre. Both Pollard (see Chapter 5: ‘Performance’) and Littler have commented on the sense of the Latin poems being ‘dramatic monologues in which one can hear these women’s voices’.¹⁸ Many of the plays are primarily dramatic monologues rather than speeches directed at the epistles’ addressees, and many draw consciously on the interplay between different versions of the heroines’ stories through the classical tradition. Many also declared themselves explicit reclamations of their stories from that tradition, shaped by men who had told (and mistold) them, including Ovid himself; director Cat Robey remarked that the heroines ‘take back from Ovid ownership of their lives ... they demand to be heard’ and ‘hand this new canon over to us’.¹⁹

In analysing this, it is therefore especially important to note Fischer-Lichte’s injunction that ‘it is inadequate simply to examine the text version used and relate it to the performance’s social and political context’, and that the role and motivations of participants, including those who commissioned the production and the audience, must be taken into account.²⁰ It is important to

¹⁷ Hardwick (2010), 193–4.

¹⁸ De Angelis, and others (2020), Artistic Director’s Note (n.p.).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Directors’ Notes (n.p.).

²⁰ Fischer-Lichte (2010), 31.

pay attention not merely to how a production adapts a text, but how (and why) it is brought to life in a particular performance. Intersemiotic aspects of the production's relationship with the text must also be taken into account: how aspects of the written ancient text are translated into visual or aural elements onstage. As Hardwick demonstrates, the very concept of 'translating' for the stage must 'reflect the different kinds of activity that shape the move from the ancient text ... to a new work that ... is attuned to the semiotics and contexts of the receiving theatrical environment and its artistic and social traditions'.²¹

Rankine writes that, despite the various difficulties associated with 'the excavation of black authors for their display within classical reception studies', it is nonetheless the case that 'Black Atlantic' authors' reworkings of classical material can enact 'ethical, conceptual, and symbolic shifts that engage the state of play for Black Atlantic citizens and others'.²² It is to argue the latter, and not the reverse – that the *15 Heroines* playwrights benefited from a pristine Latin text and left it unchanged – that this study seeks to analyse the plays' specific interrogation of racist oppression as much as the experiences of women.

In exploring other intersemiotic stage adaptations of ancient texts, Hardwick notes that there are two possible levels of engagement for the audience: authorial, in which one can respond to metatheatrical or contemporary allusions and reflect on the relationship between the adaptation and its source text, and narrative, in which one temporarily consents to believe in the fictional world.²³ This is a key feature of *15 Heroines*, in which the texts' canonical counter-discourse continually invites the audience to reassess their own pre-existing relationship with the myths. However, Hutcheon suggests that, if the viewer is not familiar with the source work being adapted (as is especially likely with the *Heroides*, compared to, for example, the myths of the

²¹ Hardwick (2010), 192.

²² Rankine (2020), 273; 289. Rankine defines the 'Black Atlantic' as 'Africans in the Atlantic world, whether slave descendants brought to Europe or North and South America, or continental Africans in (post)colonial dialogue with Europe'. For further bibliography on classical receptions by Black authors confronting racist oppression: 274–5.

²³ Hardwick (2000), 118.

Metamorphoses), it is not possible to experience the ‘constant oscillation between it and the new adaptation we are experiencing’ that comes with viewing the adapted work *as an adaptation*.²⁴

However, this is not automatically a limitation, as the strength of an adaptation is that it can also stand alone as a new work. Furthermore, Rokison-Woodall counters that the necessary context for each play is provided with introductory captions and, in three cases, postscripts to those plays where tragic irony or other effects are achieved by learning the outcome of the myth.²⁵

Furthermore, there are other examples of plays in which it is critical that the audience does not know the context. Isley Lynn’s *Canace: A Good Story* relies on the viewer not knowing the identity of Canace’s lover, and the introductory caption reads simply: ‘Canace is daughter of Aeolus, god of the winds.’ Misdirection is also key in the caption introducing Lorna French’s *Sappho: I See You Now*. The text contextualises the life of the historical Sappho and explains that ‘she has given up everything for an affair’, but it leaves the object of her affections unidentified to preserve French’s twist. There are other cases where being too familiar with the original myth can make the audience less receptive to the changes of the adaptation. One reviewer described the end of Juliet Gilkes Romero’s *Medea: The Gift* as Medea’s ‘revenge, in the form of filicide’,²⁶ even though, as is explored below, Romero’s version actually suggests it was not an act of revenge at all. It is therefore important to analyse the production with reference to how it navigates different levels of audience knowledge: as Hardwick notes, ‘recognition that there are mixtures of knowledge (and expectations) brings the need to analyse the whole production concept for how it embeds information and metatheatrical commentary as well as narrative’.²⁷

As the plays were commissioned specifically for this production, Littler explicitly envisaged the texts having a legacy beyond the original performance, becoming a new point in a succession, in

²⁴ Hutcheon and O’Flynn (2013), xvii.

²⁵ Rokison-Woodall (2021), 25–8.

²⁶ Akbar (2020).

²⁷ Hardwick (2010), 203–4.

which Ovid himself had not been the first. In the published edition of the playscripts, he addresses readers directly: ‘If you find yourself working on one of these pieces ... you’re the next link in a chain of storytellers stretching back into the past, and on into the future.’²⁸ Furthermore, the playscripts, the filmed performances and a series of educational resources remain available through Digital Theatre Plus, enabling their use as an educational supplement to study of the poems.²⁹ It will be an important task for studies of any future performances to explore how the plays adapt to different sociopolitical contexts. It is demonstrated below that even the original performances gain new resonances over time.

Hardwick argues that in what are for her the most effective dramatic adaptations of ancient literature, the adaptation of the ancient text ‘has progressed beyond the point where simple contemporary allusions ... are any longer necessary in order for the audience to be convinced’. Instead, ‘equivalence grows from a web of translational practices, both verbal and visual, which gradually shift norms’, with the result that ‘ancient poetry mutates into an experience which is both devastatingly familiar and magically transformative’.³⁰ It has been noted throughout the study that translation strategies of modernisation and exegesis, including transcreation, translate aspects of the source text that more traditional strategies could not. This simultaneously draws a reader’s attention to the continuing and dynamic dialogue between ancient text and modern context, and how a response to each is affected by the other. This chapter demonstrates how the intersemiotic adaptations of *15 Heroines* achieve this on a new level. The aim of new versions to supplement or challenge previous ones becomes a broader canonical counter-discourse, issuing a more fundamental challenge both to the texts themselves and to previous readings of them.

²⁸ De Angelis, and others (2020), Artistic Director’s Note (n.p.).

²⁹ ‘15 Heroines’, *Digital Theatre Plus*, <<https://edu.digitaltheatreplus.com/series/15-heroines>> [accessed 13 September 2023].

³⁰ Hardwick (2000), 144.

Reimaginings

What follows is an exploration of three aspects that gave *15 Heroines* such great appeal to contemporary audiences as a reception of the *Heroides*: the modernity that enabled both humour and sincere emotional directness; its centring of antiracist and feminist concerns; and its challenging of a male-voiced tradition of women's stories. Since the project was conceived as one link in a continuing storytelling chain, there then follows a consideration of the additional resonances that subsequent events have lent to plays grounded in specific sociopolitical contexts.

The project's titles and creative team are laid out in Table 1 below.

6. STOKING THE CANON: 15 HEROINES AND BEYOND

Title	Poem	Playwright	Performer	Director
<i>The War:</i> women affected by the Trojan War				
<i>Our Own Private Love Island</i>	13: Laodamia	Charlotte Jones	Sophia Eleni	Tom Littler; Cat Robey
<i>The Cost of Red Wine</i>	5: Oenone	Lettie Precious	Ann Ogbomo	Adjoa Andoh
<i>Will You?</i>	8: Hermione	Sabrina Mahfouz	Rebekah Murrell	Adjoa Andoh
<i>Perfect Myth Allegory</i>	3: Briseis	Abi Zakarian	Jemima Rooper	Cat Robey
<i>Watching the Grass Grow</i>	1: Penelope	Hannah Khalil	Gemma Whelan	Tom Littler
<i>The Labyrinth:</i> women who encountered Theseus and Jason				
<i>String</i>	10: Ariadne	Bryony Lavery	Patsy Ferran	Tom Littler; Cat Robey
<i>Pity the Monster</i>	4: Phaedra	Timberlake Wertenbaker	Doña Croll	Adjoa Andoh
<i>I'm Still Burning</i>	2: Phyllis	Samantha Ellis	Nathalie Armin	Cat Robey
<i>Knew I Should Have</i>	6: Hypsipyle	Natalie Haynes	Olivia Williams	Tom Littler
<i>The Gift</i>	12: Medea	Juliet Gilkes Romero	Nadine Marshall	Adjoa Andoh
<i>The Desert:</i> women going their own way				
<i>The Striker</i>	9: Deianaria (Deianeira)	April De Angelis	Indra Ové	Adjoa Andoh
<i>The Choice</i>	7: Dido	Stella Duffy	Rosalind Eleazar	Cat Robey
<i>A Good Story</i>	11: Canace	Isley Lynn	Eleanor Tomlinson	Tom Littler; Cat Robey
<i>Girl on Fire</i>	14: Hypermetra	Chinonyerem Odimba	Nicholle Cherrie	Adjoa Andoh
<i>I See You Now</i>	15: Sappho	Lorna French	Martina Laird	Tom Littler

Table 1: Plays in 15 Heroines

Modernity

The most immediately striking aspect of the plays, as with Clare Pollard's free verse adaptations, is how their modernisation highlights and enhances the wit of the texts. Notably, humorous modernisations are not unique to the present day. Littler, distinguishing between the Early Modern satirical genres of travesty (relocating the ancient text into a modern setting, but without necessarily mocking it) and burlesque (undermining the text's prestige with a deliberately outrageous adaptation), notes that the 1680 *Ovid's Epistles* prompted a range of both kinds of reimagining almost immediately, despite Dryden's own concerns that Ovid's wit was inappropriate for the subject matter (see Chapter 1: 'Early Modern Ovid'). In *15 Heroines* too, the heroines' own wit, which has historically been criticised by different readerships and critics as inappropriate for the severity of their situations, is instead embraced as essential to their characters. The plays that undertake this kind of 'travesty' reading – Hannah Khalil's *Penelope*, April De Angelis' *Deianeira* (styled in the play as *Deianaria*), and Charlotte Jones' *Laodamia* – are in many ways the most overtly funny. The thorough modernisation turns the core of the ancient story into a kind of in-joke: what Littler describes as 'a "geddit? geddit?" humour reliant on some knowledge of the original' ([8]). This is combined with the humorously unexpected innovation of turning ancient heroines into lockdown dressmakers, footballers' wives, and stereotypes from reality television shows such as *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Love Island*.³¹ Audience members with no knowledge of the texts were informed by the production's introductory captions that the plays adapted ancient myths. Thus seeing them not merely modernised in diction but set vibrantly within tropes of mass media or current affairs can inspire a response of not merely amusement but delighted surprise. Those with knowledge of the ancient stories can be further surprised and delighted by just how well the modern settings seem to fit.

³¹ As Pollard also did; see Chapter 5: 'Lexical idiosyncrasies'.

However, the wit also serves another purpose, which is to provide a more emotive contrast when the heroines can no longer contain their underlying despair. Audiences may laugh at the outrageousness of bathetically sending up a Latin poem with mass media stereotypes (as much as vice versa) such as footballer's wife Deianaria and would-be *Love Island* contestant Laodamia. However, they may find empathy with them more difficult. Deianaria confesses that 'in my despair I almost gave up Hot Yoga' (64), while Laodamia 'takes a quick series of selfies', then deplores the fact that 'I look like shit. I haven't straightened my hair in days or done my brows or anything' (26). Yet this makes it all the more shocking or distressing when even these heroines suddenly become deadly serious. Deianaria's 'poison' for Hercules is the disclosure to the press that he was a 'paed' (66; see further 'Antiracism and feminism' below), while Laodamia 'speaks very quietly' and drops all the slang of her Multicultural London English when she asks, 'Is it wrong of me to say I don't think I can live without you?' (29). Here the transition from humour to unexpectedly serious subject matter makes the audience reconsider whether they should previously have been laughing, and serves as a deft modern example of the compatibility of wit and grief also exhibited by the Ovidian poems.

Littler's essay notes that the designation of 'travesty' most closely applies to Hannah Khalil's *Penelope: Watching the Grass Grow*. This play does not draw on media stereotypes, but reimagines 'Pen' as a dressmaker reduced to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic while Ulysses is late back from a work trip (making it the only play to reference the pandemic directly). Specifically, this approach 'demonstrates the dual potential of travesty: first, engendering a familiarity for the locked-down audience; second, creating a subcurrent of comparative entertainment for those familiar with the original' (Littler, [8]). Where making Penelope a military wife might be the obvious choice, Khalil opts for something more surprising, and surprisingly apposite.

The modernity of the diction gives this version of Penelope's epistle the most obvious parallels with Pollard's version: both modernise Isbell's address of 'Penelope to the tardy Ulysses'.

Whereas Pollard rephrased to the exasperated 'Dear Ulysses, | you're late', Khalil retained 'tardy' (*lento* in the Latin) but made the old-fashioned word sound intentionally incongruous, perhaps litotic, in its juxtaposition with forcefully expletive-laden language.

... So get the fuck home.
Now.
Where are you? Where are you? Where the fuck are you?
You tardy bastard.³²

As a playwright whose work often seeks to destabilise western stereotypes around the behaviour of Arab Muslim women as 'subservient and demure and at the will of men',³³ Khalil does the same here for hackneyed depictions of Penelope as the epitome of the uncomplaining faithful wife. The expletive-laden modern monologue, wavering between worry, frustration and suspicion, depicts a far more emotionally plausible response to a spouse's unexplained lateness.

This contrasts with the effect of unexpectedly modern expletives in Lettie Precious' *Oenone: The Cost of Red Wine*. Oenone, in all adaptations by far the most emotionally unrestrained heroine, swings violently between love and hate: 'God, I love you so much, | You piece of shit' (19); 'Goodbye then, Paris, | You beautiful bastard' (20–1). However, here expletives are not used for witty irreverence but to demonstrate Oenone's fearsomely uncontrolled anger. Precious' play, handling themes of colourism and racism, has little room for wit, turning the Latin Oenone's grandiose posturing into a metaphor of sincere rage against a prejudice that harms many more people than just the estranged couple (see further 'Antiracism and feminism' below). Yet here too it is the complete modernisation that enables such distinctive characterisation and gives Oenone's emotions shocking and uncomfortable immediacy.

³² De Angelis, and others (2020), 51. Further page references given in text.

³³ Hemming (2022).

In another act of modernisation that was a particularly specific in-joke, Khalil's Penelope refers to Ulysses' work colleagues by laddish nicknames that allude to their roles elsewhere in the epic cycle. It becomes clear from their activities that 'Heel' and 'Big Ant' are ciphers for Achilles and Diomedes, and Telemachus and Briseis become the humorously modern 'Mac' and 'Brie' (52).³⁴ (By coincidence, Abi Zakarian's Briseis also reflected on the shortening of her name to 'Brie' (41), in one of several examples of dialogue between the plays, even though the individual playwrights did not work together.) The use of modern names and nicknames forms part of the complete assimilation of the text into a modern and colloquial context. This technique sets it apart from other plays such as Natalie Haynes' *Hypsipyle: Knew I Should Have*, which modernises the diction but leaves in allusions to 'prayers, sacrifices' and '[taking] offerings to the temple' (139), creating a noticeable tension between the ancient source and modern setting. Littler notes that the clash between Haynes' 'breezy modernity' and the ancient material is appropriate for drawing audiences' attention to the 'modernity of Ovid, whose own project was one of linguistic and cultural rehabilitation, from Bronze Age mythology to Roman letter-writing' ([8]).

Another aspect of the poems' witty modernisation is the way modern lifestyles and technology change the stakes for both the heroines and their absent heroes. For Penelope, the timescale is altered: as Ulysses is on a work trip, not away at war, his absence has lasted days, not decades. The existence of 'the wives' WhatsApp' (52) and of payphones and email implies that it would be much harder for Penelope to go years on end without hearing anything. As a result, Penelope's repeated references to her own changing and ageing – 'this isn't me' and similar (54, 55, 56), 'I'm getting old waiting' (55) – become metaphorical expressions for impatience with the passage of time (reflected in the title of the piece, *Watching the Grass Grow*). This also obliquely addresses the fact that Penelope's description of herself as an *anus* in the Latin (116) would not tally with the modern perception of a woman in her forties (see above, Chapter 5: 'Updating conventions').

³⁴ 'Heel' for Achilles alludes to his mythical vulnerability; 'Big Ant' for Diomedes perhaps stems from his association with Achilles, commander of the Myrmidons, the 'ant-men' (for their aetiology see *Ov. Met.* 7.614–60).

Penelope's appearance is also addressed more directly later on when, in her concern that Ulysses may be unfaithful, she remarks that 'we're not unattractive – you and I. Not young but not unattractive either...' (55). The closest analogue to the final line of the Latin is her remark that 'I don't think you'll recognise me when you get home' (57), bringing the literal and metaphorical ageing together. The anxiety of a modern middle-aged wife left alone to negotiate a humdrum suburban existence makes Penelope a painfully relatable figure for contemporary audiences.

A more openly amusing facet of the transposition of Penelope and Ulysses to an ordinary suburban couple is that it completely undermines Ulysses' famous heroism. Rather than fighting a foreign war, he is on a 'work jolly in the middle of a pandemic' (51), organised by a domineering boss. As a result, his supposedly heroic exploits during teambuilding exercises ring hollow in the second-hand accounts gleaned by Penelope. This both amplifies the fears of the Ovidian Penelope that she cannot trust anything she hears about her husband, and also reflects the uncertainty over the truth of Odysseus' account of his own exploits to the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey*.³⁵ Khalil's Penelope sardonically acknowledges and undermines the tales' epic origins by calling Ulysses 'victorious' and 'proper heroic', and his colleagues 'warriors' whom she sees more as 'thugs'. The entire Doloneia is reduced to an episode of 'running amok in the dark, pilfering things from other tents' on a 'mission' from which they must bring back 'spoils – a packet of brioche and a camp stool' (53–4). In the presumably risk-controlled context of a teambuilding trip, such language suggests trivially playing at soldiers, rather than impressive achievements. Audience members familiar with the fuller story of Ulysses and his comrades may see in this a reflection of the modern incomprehensibility of the ancient desire for *kleos* above all else.

Yet the suburban ordinariness of their relationship is also made touching, in the detailing of Penelope's life under the COVID-19 lockdowns during which the plays were written and

³⁵ For analysis of the resolution of this question in the *Odyssey* itself: Segal (2018), 20–2.

broadcast. Penelope articulates the realisation of many couples that one positive effect of enforced working from home was that they spent more time together than before.

... being home with you all the time... *us*. I've gotten used to it. The constant togetherness. Sappy I know. But I miss you. Even started mentioning you on work calls – 'he'll be home Friday' – pathetic – though not as pathetic as *their* lies about their waist measurements, I'm telling you being a virtual dressmaker is IMPOSSIBLE – no one's honest about their lockdown lard-arses, but if the dress doesn't fit I get it in the neck. Trying to guesstimate saddle baggage on Zoom is an art in itself. (54)

Here the witty travesty of the famous weaving Penelope transformed into a 'virtual dressmaker' is effective for its irreverence and for just how well the analogy fits. Yet in combination with Penelope's sincere affection, and her acknowledgement that 'you see that's me – not this – this worrying' (55), it becomes touching as a drily exasperated work anecdote that a couple working from home might share at the end of the day. Similarly, in an update of stalling the suitors by weaving and unweaving the funeral shroud, her mischievous glee in vandalising her interfering neighbour's lawnmower ('oh but this is good', 57) gives another glimpse of the 'real' Pen. She seems to be used to swapping amusing stories of her everyday ingenuity with her equally ingenious husband, and would have told him this one in person too if he were still there.

The specific fears of the pandemic are mapped most closely onto the Ulysses myth in the closing section, in which Penelope imagines 'you – | coughing | And sweating | In a hotel room ... | Alone', fearing 'an absence that stretches beyond a week into – time' (56). In an adaptation that makes Ulysses' expedition a work trip, Penelope would normally have no reason to fear his death, or that her longing will be *dempto fine* (50: 'without end'). However, Khalil links this lament with the ubiquitous fear for loved ones' safety when COVID-19 vaccinations had not yet become available, and relatives were not permitted even to visit those dying of the disease.³⁶ Viewers who were themselves alone or unable to see loved ones, and subject to these same fears, thus could empathise with this Penelope far more vividly and painfully than they might

³⁶ 15 *Hermines* aired one month before the world's first vaccine dose was administered on 8 December 2020.

previously have done. Fischer-Lichte notes that the ‘co-presence’ of actors and spectators in the same space, and the responses of fellow spectators, are normally integral to the experience of any theatrical performance; moments such as this would emphasise the absence of that community especially strongly.³⁷

Another play that seeks to reclaim a well-known heroine from particularly hackneyed depictions of picturesque behaviour is Bryony Lavery’s *Ariadne: String*. It is one of a number of recent adaptations that characterise Ariadne as highly intelligent and, eventually, furious with herself.³⁸ Lavery, whose early work regularly featured ‘warm, witty feminist versions of well-known stories’, had, unusually, been familiar with the *Heroides* since school. She was also the only playwright to write with a specific actor, Patsy Ferran, in mind.³⁹ Her Ariadne is ‘not wonderfully good with her hands’, ‘more at home with books than real life’ and ‘an incredibly entitled snob about anything not royal and Minoan’ (107). Ferran performs the part with sardonic eloquence and a slight upper-class stammer, and her lines humorously mix ostentatiously erudite vocabulary, everyday expletives, and references to the classical tradition (see further below, ‘Escaping the tradition’). This gives the impression of keeping a steely control over her anger at Theseus’ abandonment with understatedly humorous stoicism.

... one never knows when someone you’ve trusted *utterly*...
And love more deeply than *the wine-dark sea*... is going to slither off like a *jackal*, leaving one ‘post-coital-sleeping’ while he boards his ship and fucking fucks off marooning you in utterly strange and unknown alien friendless territory!!! (108)

However, her emotions are not as under control as she pretends, and she is self-aware enough to acknowledge this:

I have to think about *this* to not think about the veritable *Hellespont* inside me.
It’s called ‘avoidance’ (110)

³⁷ Fischer-Lichte (2010), 29–31.

³⁸ See also Saint (2021), Ahearn (2020).

³⁹ Gardner (2006); Jermyn Street Theatre (2020). Tom Littler, interview with the author.

Her stoicism proves to be a mask that often slips, in her deadpan delivery of shockingly emotionally direct lines, such as ‘I wish I were home’ and ‘I’d like to be dead’ (110).

Lavery’s Ariadne thus contrasts strongly with the Catullan Ariadne left screaming helplessly on the shore with her clothes falling off. To some extent she also moves away from the Ovidian Ariadne, in that she is less comedically frantic, but as argued above in Chapter 3: ‘Ariadne’, this continues a new tradition of challenging previous depictions of Ariadne. Furthermore, like Ovid, Lavery is unafraid to make some comedy out of Ariadne the cosseted princess being completely out of her depth in the wild. However, Lavery’s adaptation makes Ariadne rather more self-aware in acknowledging this (‘got a touch of “separation anxiety”, 110), and the comedic effect tends towards the endearing, as Armstrong also argues of the Ovidian version.⁴⁰ The play retains the Ovidian Ariadne’s rather random knowledge of animals: in the opening lines she professes to have ‘*zero data* on its people and animalia’ (107) and describes her preparations:

If a... (Whatever terrifically new, unnamed and scary person or animal attacks her... lots of possibilities to an imaginative young woman.) whatever animal
Comes at me... (108)

The subsequent fearful litany of *lupos*, *leones* and *tigridas* (84–6: ‘wolves’, ‘lions’ and ‘tigers’) is represented by an uncertain challenge to a list of creatures as unlikely to attack her as the *phocas* (87: ‘seals’). The seals themselves are at least made to sound slightly more intimidating:

Come, Eagle!
Come, Sea Lion!
Leviathan? (114)

This humorous mix of precocious erudition and awareness of its uselessness out in the wild makes Lavery’s play a strikingly warmhearted updating of the Latin poem. However, as with Hannah Khalil’s Penelope, poignant references in the source text to events outside the poem are

⁴⁰ Armstrong (2006), 230.

made into a more central and sincere aspect of the heroine's emotional turmoil. Ovid's Ariadne suggests remorse when she voices with telling brutality her wish that

nec tua mactasset nodoso stipite, Theseu,
ardua parte virum dextera, parte bovem; (101–2)

Building on this by referring to him repeatedly as 'my brother' (*fratrem*, 77, 115), Lavery's Ariadne creates a surprisingly endearing picture of the Minotaur.⁴¹ She stresses that he was part-human ('my brother is only *half-bull*') and characterises him as a beloved family member with whom she enjoyed a playful relationship: 'my brother called me Ink Blot' (110); 'how could you not love a brother who was this silly | snorting stamping goofy hoofy parody' (112). This perspective of humanising canonical monsters is a strikingly modern one (and one picked up elsewhere in *15 Heroines* by Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Phaedra: Pity the Monster*).⁴² Pollard's version achieved a certain level of pity for the Minotaur's fate too, rendering *mactasset nodoso stipite* as 'clubbed to mush' (70), suggesting that Theseus used excessive force when, Ariadne goes on to claim, the creature could not possibly have wounded him. However, the playfully informal modern language of Lavery's 'goofy hoofy' achieves a more charming effect, calling to mind ancient and modern depictions of the Minotaur as a toddler.⁴³

As a result, it is when Ariadne dwells with apparent detachment on the graphic sight of the slaughtered Minotaur that she gradually acknowledges her sense of guilt, not only for devising a way for Theseus to kill him ('I wanted it to be my brother [who died]', 112), but for her complicity in his imprisonment:

⁴¹ Catullus' Ariadne also does this twice: *germanum* (64.150) and *fraterna caede* (181).

⁴² Another example is Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red* (1998), retelling the story of Geryon.

⁴³ e.g. a fourth-century BCE kylix depicting Pasiphae burping the infant Minotaur (*LIMC*, s.v. 'Pasiphae' 25), a rare depiction with no other figures expressing horror (ibid. 27–31). In modern times, e.g. Michael Ayrton, *Minotaur as Calf*, 1971, etching, <<https://providence.hope.edu/index.php/Detail/objects/40>> [accessed 1 August 2023], part of his *Minotaur Suite*. For a reimagining of the kylix scene: Frostious, *Just Look Over Your Shoulder*, 2021, digital artwork (DeviantArt), <<https://www.deviantart.com/frostious/art/Just-look-over-your-shoulder-869025978>> [accessed 1 March 2023]. See also Euripides' *Cretans*, F472b.29–39, in which Minos asks the nurse whether the newborn Minotaur walks on two or four legs and whether he is suckled by Phaedra or a cow.

6. STOKING THE CANON: 15 HEROINES AND BEYOND

His stomach was torn open
By Theseus
By the dagger I gave Theseus.
What was remarkable Was. His innards. His guts. Inside.
Looked like a labyrinth...
my brother had the labyrinth inside him as well as outside.
Was his inside always like that?
Or, did it become that because we made him live there? (114–15)

It is this that prompts her shift from a self-centred insistence that ‘none of this is my fault’ (111) to ‘this is all my fault’ (delivered in the filmed version after the section above but not in the published script). The amusingly modern language thus both enables a distinctive and layered characterisation of Ariadne and allows for considerable empathy when the wit is dropped.

A different change in tone is achieved by Ariadne shedding her affectations to deliver her curse on Theseus in the closing lines of the monologue, in which ‘she becomes taut as a wire... incredibly focused’ (115–16). In a similar manner to Olivia Williams’ performance of Hypsipyle, in which she drops her increasingly inebriated sardonic irreverence to curse Medea (141), the sudden seriousness of each heroine heralds to the audience that her words here have power and will come to pass, however vindictive they may be.

The use of modern wit and witty modernity in the *15 Heroines* plays, while in some ways moving considerably away from the Ovidian texts, nonetheless reproduces their effect. Far from being humour at the heroines’ expense, such moments demonstrate that they can be flawed, petty and even vindictive – and that this can amuse the audience – but their emotional responses to their situations are nonetheless genuine and justified, and can inspire considerable empathy.⁴⁴ The contrast between this humour and moments of more unsettling emotional frankness, both within and between the plays, underlines the layered, complex and sometimes contradictory nature of human emotions.

⁴⁴ Hall and Macintosh (2005), 404–15, identify similar effects in the serious undertones of nineteenth-century burlesques of Medea. On comedy’s capacity for sincere sociopolitical points and ‘an adequate explication of collective understandings and ... the limits of social order’: Smith (2018), 135–67.

Antiracism and feminism

It is easy to see why *15 Heroines* can be seen primarily as a feminist revoicing of forgotten women's anger: Oenone asks, 'Are all men like this?' (13) and Phyllis exalts in 'this strength, this power – from women!' (132). Reviews of the production celebrated its 'triumphant revoicing of famous tales' that constituted an 'exhilarating, howling testimony to female experience'.⁴⁵ However, to dwell solely on this aspect is to risk overgeneralising and universalising: many reviews did not also focus on the power of the plays that foregrounded the concerns of Black women. This is partly because, with the exception of Oenone, Medea and Sappho, the monologues do not explicitly centre around the character's racial identity. However, a more detailed exploration of the plays' undertones reveals the production's strong focus on antiracist concerns, with which its feminist ones almost always intersect.

Conceived and created during the summer and autumn of 2020, during the height of worldwide Black Lives Matter protests, antiracism was a prominent concern of the project. Littler explained that as a result of the protests, 'the wider conversation about race, racism and monoculturalism in the British arts scene made me and the team at Jermyn Street Theatre highly conscious that whatever projects we embarked on next must embed diversity among their core values' ([3]). Thus artists from a broad range of backgrounds were included in the project, and several plays explicitly explored anti-racist themes, adding a new axis of otherness and oppression to Ovid's exploration of an othered and oppressed gender. Furthermore, the introductory caption to each of the three instalments stated that the stories came from 'across the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Africa', to forestall any impressions that they belonged exclusively to a white European tradition.

Littler also noted that although 'there was never a political objective ... beyond the simple act of handing Ovid's letters to a diverse group of contemporary women, and then seeing what

⁴⁵ Clapp (2020); Marlowe (2020).

happened next', it 'was always a feminist project, insofar as it aimed to hand women's stories back to female writers' ([3]). Many of the playwrights use their modern lens to scrutinise stories where sexual assault and violence is a well-known feature, but some also highlight episodes that would be considered violent now but may have gone unremarked in Ovid's Rome. In both cases the audience is invited to question the acceptance and mitigation of sexual violence in previous tellings and retellings of ancient stories.

Many approaches to these themes, delivered by women of colour as accounts of their characters' experiences as women of colour, clearly demonstrated the particular intersections of sexist and racist discrimination experienced by those women. It highlighted issues raised routinely in Black feminist thought, that the objectives of a truly inclusive feminism cannot be separated from those of anti-racism and, conversely, 'racism is a gender-specific phenomenon, and Black antiracist politics that do not make gender central are doomed to fail'.⁴⁶ At their most powerful, the plays harmonised the ancient complaints with the language and aims of contemporary protest in a demonstration of the abilities of each to newly illuminate aspects of the other.

In exploring the issues surrounding the casting of actors of colour in Greek tragedy, Wetmore describes the practice of 'purposeful casting'. This combines categories developed by the Non-Traditional Casting Project (NTCP): conceptual casting ('an ethnic actor is cast in a role to give a play greater resonance') and cross-cultural casting ('the entire world of the play is translated to a different culture').⁴⁷ Wetmore explains that 'purposeful casting requires that the audience be aware of the ethnicity of the performers, as the Greek text is used as a frame to comment on the historical realities which are evoked by the races of the performers': for example casting African-American actors for productions of *Oedipus Rex* set in Africa that used the play's plague context

⁴⁶ Hill Collins (2005), 7. Building on seminal works by e.g. Davis (1981) and hooks (1981) chronicling racist exclusion in women's liberation movements, see more recently Kitossa (2002) on feminist scholarship's continuing universalisation of white women's experiences (89), and McCarthy (2013) on this tendency in mainstream feminism.

⁴⁷ NTCP categories quoted in Pao (2000), 2.

to interrogate the handling of the African AIDS crisis. Thus ‘purposeful casting uses ethnicity to transform classical text into contemporary comment,’ in a way that is more intentional than ‘colourblind casting’, which sometimes risks reinforcing existing stereotypes.⁴⁸

This also describes the practices at work in the adaptations of *15 Heroines*. Plays such as *Medea: The Gift* lent themselves particularly readily to purposeful casting, as the Euripidean Medea already finds herself treated as an immigrant from a country considered culturally inferior, and so translating her struggle into one against white supremacists seems a natural choice.⁴⁹ However, the approach taken by other playwrights meant that the casting of Black actors and the use of modernised settings was also a means of enhancing the plays’ comments on contemporary culture, drawing on more latent themes of identity and appearance in the Latin poems. Lettie Precious’ *Oenone: The Cost of Red Wine*, drawing on the Latin heroine’s insistence on her equality with Paris, showed Black British actor Ann Ogbomo railing against a Black Paris for his colourism in preferring a supposedly more sophisticated white lover, holding up magazines about natural Black haircare while offering to ‘iron my mane’ and lighten her ‘green-coloured blue-black skin’ (17) to better meet white beauty standards. The Jamaican-British actor Doña Croll’s performance of Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *Phaedra: Pity the Monster* transposed Phaedra’s regretful litany of the inheritance of her *tota gente* (*Her.* 4.54, ‘whole family’) into a meditation on the monsterring of age and race.

Most overtly of all, Lorna French’s *Sappho: I See You Now*, performed by Trinidadian actor Martina Laird, reimagined Sappho’s pride in her own success despite her not being *candida* (*Her.* 15.35: ‘light-skinned’), and her examples of the celebrated beauty of others who were *patriae fusca colore suae* (36: ‘of the dark colour of her homeland’). French’s Sappho is a famous Black British

⁴⁸ Wetmore (2012), 490.

⁴⁹ On Medea’s depiction as a barbarian being Euripides’ innovation: Hall (1991), 35. On Medea’s reception as a Black character by African-American authors, especially Toni Morrison: Walters (2007), 37; 106–12.

singer of Trinidadian heritage who has become a victim of the 2018 Windrush scandal.⁵⁰ At first seeming to write to a lover, for whose pleasure she too has lightened her skin, she eventually reveals her actual addressee: ‘But Britain, I now find that you’re faithless’ (99). In recounting her mistreatment, she recalls both historic race riots and the infamous inflammatory catchphrases of Home Office policy underpinning the Windrush scandal: ‘Brixton and Handsworth and Toxteth’ (99); ‘your go home, your hostile environment’ (100). Littler ([6]) highlights plays that use ‘you’ to make the viewer feel as if they ‘might be the feckless lover addressed’. In this case, the audience, addressed as ‘Britain’ as a whole, is forced to reckon with their own complicity (silent or otherwise) in the discrimination against people told to ‘go home’.⁵¹

In each of these cases, the play thus made the race of the performer a key element of its adaptation of the ancient poem into a comment on the contemporary realities of various forms of racial prejudice.

One adaptation written and performed by white women also interrogated latent prejudices in the source texts that came across far more obviously and distastefully in modern versions. The interactions between Hypsipyle and Medea’s letters to Jason are well acknowledged in scholarship (see Chapter 2: ‘Medea’), especially the contradictions between the two accounts of Medea’s dealings with Jason that destabilise both. Natalie Haynes’ modernised version, *Hypsipyle: Knew I Should Have*, translates that destabilisation into a modern context of racial prejudice. The production (like Verducci’s 1985 translation) pointedly places Juliet Gilkes Romero’s *Medea: The Gift*, performed by Black British actor Nadine Marshall, immediately after Hypsipyle. Once Medea’s racial identity is known, a different resonance is given to Hypsipyle’s having called Medea a ‘fucking barbarian whore’ (139, directly translating 6.81). Besides neatly capturing the

⁵⁰ In 2018, members and descendants of the Windrush generation – immigrants from Caribbean countries who arrived in Britain from 1948 to 1970, including on HMT *Empire Windrush* – were found to have been incorrectly categorised and wrongfully persecuted by the UK Home Office as living in the UK illegally.

⁵¹ The practice of making audiences feel complicit in onstage injustices ranges from Shakespeare to the present day: see e.g. Elam (2008), 7–10, on *Twelfth Night*, and Nielsen (2015) on contemporary works. The technique is used equally confrontationally in *Canace: A Good Story* and *Hermione: Will You?*: see below.

scornful register in which the Latin word *paelex* might have been used, the modern expletive uncomfortably highlights the racist overtones of *barbara paelex*. ‘Fucking barbarian’ suggests slurs shouted at anti-immigrant demonstrations, while ‘barbarian whore’ uncomfortably evokes tropes of Black women as hypersexualised, dangerously predatory ‘jezebels’.⁵² However, the words are uttered calmly by Hypsipyle, represented as a well-off white woman in a fashionably neutral-toned home. This signposts the uncomfortable reality that such views are not confined to anti-immigrant demonstrations or race riots, but have a long tradition also of being perpetuated by the affluent middle-class white women who could and should have been Black women’s allies.

In the course of Medea’s monologue, the existing destabilisation of Hypsipyle’s account is made even more disruptive by characterising Jason and his guards as ‘thugs’ who subscribe to racist stereotypes about Medea. She relates that she is explicitly thought of as the ‘Barbarian Princess’ (147), then defiantly insists that she was brought up to be compassionate, echoing her father’s reminder that ‘we are not barbarians’ (151) as (it is implied) she prepares to kill her children to protect them from being taken from her by white supremacists.⁵³ Medea also repeatedly addresses ‘sister’, expanding the single reference to *cara soror* in the Latin (62). While she clearly addresses her actual sister, referring to shared memories of their childhood, the context also suggests an appeal to ideas of a feminist and antiracist sisterhood.⁵⁴ Thus Littler notes that ‘Medea – written, directed, performed, and designed by Black British creatives – feels like a rebuttal of the prejudices exhibited in the preceding play’ ([11]). Furthermore, the exposure of Jason as the real enemy of both women retrospectively highlights Hypsipyle’s racist pettiness in attacking Medea when they could have united over their common experience. Medea, in contrast, insists of Jason’s new wife Creusa that ‘I bear the idiot no malice’ (150). Medea’s attention to how her struggles will be misrepresented by others (see further ‘Escaping the

⁵² Outlined in Hill Collins (2005), 27–30, and theorised with further bibliography in Hill Collins (2021), 81–4.

⁵³ In the playscript (but not the film), she explicitly challenges the use of ‘barbarian slut’ in many translations (148).

⁵⁴ See e.g. McCarthy (2013) proposing ‘sistership’ between Black and white feminists.

tradition' below) thus challenges the audience also to question what assumptions may underpin other versions.

Other more subtle correspondences include tensions between the plays of Oenone and Medea. Oenone asks Paris if she is not 'woman enough ... full-breasted, | thick-thighed and curved in the right places' (13),⁵⁵ characterising the Black female body as distinctively desirable. This contrasts with Medea's account of the crowds who 'gape' at her 'swollen, pregnant, black belly' (148), as nineteenth-century crowds did at the Khoikhoi woman exhibited as the 'Hottentot Venus' (whose birth name is unknown, but who is referred to as Sara Baartman).⁵⁶ This typifies the paradox experienced by Black women whose bodies are both eroticised and othered, especially through comparison with white women, both historically and in contemporary mass media.⁵⁷ Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Phaedra: Pity the Monster* interrogates this aspect more extensively, with Phaedra proclaiming, 'next stop: Africa ... this is my heritage' as she dons a cowrie-shell necklace. Doña Croll's hair is visibly greying and the warm lighting on her gold satin dress creates a dazzling glow that highlights the fullness of her figure ('this is my body: a woman | who has children | a little younger than you', 119). The seductive effect, which celebrates rather than disowns her middle age, underpins not only her entreaties to Hippolytus to resist the social othering of older women's desire, but also her allusions to 'darkness' and 'lands you do not wish to know' (119). Both these aspects seem to be included when she asks Hippolytus to 'pity the monsters'.

Unlike their Latin sources, these narratives do not end in despair, but in joyful, defiant liberation from their limitations. Both Oenone and Sappho abandon their attempts to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards, and triumphantly re-embrace their natural appearances as part of their own identities. Oenone reassures herself that 'I may not think it now, | but I am worthy ...

⁵⁵ On the social dynamics of Black men's rejection of Black women: Hill Collins (2021), 160–6.

⁵⁶ Qureshi (2004), 233.

⁵⁷ Summarised in Seck (2013), building on Hill Collins.

I am an artist's dream' (20). Sappho, having removed her pale make-up and her blonde wig to reveal her 'melanated skin and African hair' (99), remarks that her 'lightened skin ... will darken again in time'. In an ecstatic realisation likened to 'Cupid's arrow', she too declares that 'I'm not as White or blonde or thin as you demand, but ... I'm beautiful. I'm ideal' (101). Phaedra's proclamation that 'I will not shed my skin for you' (123) also resists the desire to conform, and her offer to 'save you from the human' (123) speaks not of monsters but of superhuman transcendence. In these plays, defiantly escaping a story that kept the heroines miserable becomes a radical act of resistance and self-actualisation. This empowerment is summarised by Hill Collins: 'When Black women learn to hold up new "mirrors" to one another that enable us to see and love one another for who we really are, new possibilities for empowerment via deep love can emerge.'⁵⁸

Purposeful casting and adaptation are used to more disturbing effect in Chinonyerem Odimba's *Hypermestra: Girl on Fire*. Odimba, whose work before and since *15 Heroines* has been characterised by an interest in putting a full spectrum of stories of Black lives on stage (most recently her play *Black Love*, 2021), interlaces *Hypermestra*'s speech with the lines of a chantress. The stage directions indicate that *Hypermestra*, performed by Black British actor Nicholle Cherrie, 'moves and morphs between herself and the chantress – sometimes not knowing which one is speaking' (87). *Hypermestra* refers to 'papyrus' (87), suggesting an ancient context. However, she and the chantress, singing in a 'jazz/soul style', describe her imprisonment in 'a dirty unworthy hole' (87), carrying a 'branding by [Lynceus'] name ... at my chest' (88), witnessing the rape of a 'young servant girl' (89), and being 'bundled' into 'wooden ships', 'exposed to open skies and curious cruelty ... fifty sister-bodies, curled up around each other' and subject to 'the thirst in the eyes of ship hands' (90–1). In combination, these elements serve to recall and interrogate the experience of the historical enslavement and transportation of Black

⁵⁸ Hill Collins (2021), 166.

peoples. This reverses the identities in the Latin text, where the Caucasian daughters of Danaus are married to the Egyptian sons of Aegyptus.

Although notably Hypermestra is one of the heroines who escapes and survives her plight after the end of the poem, this aspect is not referenced in the play. The closest it comes is a more desperate version of the transcendence of Oenone and Sappho: towards the end of the play, in the persona of the chantress, Hypermestra declares that she ‘cannot be bound by invisible fears no more. | She wakes up. | Is woke’ (93). The term ‘woke’, derived from African-American Vernacular English, was used throughout the twentieth century in Black activism, including in jazz and soul, to urge vigilance against racial discrimination. Since the Black Lives Matter movements from the 2010s onwards, its meaning has broadened to describe a socially conscious awareness of injustice.⁵⁹ Odimba’s adaptation looks both backwards and forwards: it links enslavement to present-day protests through a term and a musical genre used throughout twentieth-century anti-racist resistance. It is thereby able to both use an ancient story to shape a new retelling of the experiences of Black peoples, and also to use the history of racial discrimination to viscerally imagine a mythical woman’s experience of imprisonment.

Hypermestra also speaks more specifically of her gendered experiences. While proclaiming that she takes her stand because she knows that ‘the light in women’s eyes can be turned to dust | and that WE get burnt by the endless cruelty of it all’, she notes that ‘I am in my sixteenth year’ (93), and the chantress refers to her as ‘child, bride’ (91). She has repeatedly witnessed and experienced extreme gendered violence, and been made to marry at what was then the legal minimum age for marriage in the UK (it was subsequently raised to eighteen). A number of the plays tackle the emotional impact of the Roman commonplace that would now be condemned as child marriage. In Abi Zakarian’s *Briseis: Perfect Myth Allegory*, Briseis recalls ‘the sting, the bolt I

⁵⁹ Romano (2020).

did not want' after being married to an uncle at the age of twelve (43).⁶⁰ Medea also relates that Jason has taken a 'child bride' (150) as his new wife. More confrontationally, the 'poison' Deianaria sends to Hercules in the modern-day setting of *Deianaria: The Striker* is the ruinous public revelation that 'I was fifteen when you first fucked me' (66), exposing to the press that he is a 'paed' and a statutory rapist. Stella Duffy's *Dido: The Choice*, contrastingly, has no specific temporal setting; instead, Dido speaks from a present-day perspective about her ancient past:

Directed by others, I had barely known what I wanted.
I was married to my uncle at fourteen.
...
And yes, you might say it was common then, usual then, normal then.
All very wise,
But no one asked me if it was what I wanted.
It was not what I wanted.
I didn't know what I wanted, I was fourteen, what was to know? (69)

By inviting the audience to reconsider the agency and emotions of those who were affected, Duffy thus circumvents any criticism that it is anachronistic to condemn ancient cultural practices with reference to modern values.

The play with the most tangible connection to the protests of 2020 and earlier, against both racial and sexual violence, is Sabrina Mahfouz's *Hermione: Will You?*. Directed by Adjoa Andoh and performed by Black British actor Rebekah Murrell, the play depicts Hermione as a protester questioned by police, in a tense evocation of 2020's global demonstrations against racialised police brutality. While she is initially being questioned over Orestes' recent murder of Clytemnestra, Hermione swiftly moves away from this to beg the police to detain her abusive husband. The disturbing lines 5–6 and 105–14, translated unambiguously as assault by Pollard (see above Chapter 5: 'Revoicing experience'), are adapted by Mahfouz:

I can't repel my husband from my body.
That man who dotes on his mother as the sun beats down
and rapes his wife as the moon moves clouds.
I fight him with nails and hisses and every night I regret

⁶⁰ For Zakarian's handling of Briseis' experiences of sexual violence, see further 'Escaping the tradition' below.

6. STOKING THE CANON: 15 HEROINES AND BEYOND

not training with the women of my land
so I could break his hand with my finger.
I scream all the screams of Troy
and the next day his servants bring me eggs.
I know if you don't do what I say
he will be the death of me. (38)

Like Pollard's translation, the play thereby explores the emotional reality of an arranged marriage that explicitly disregards both the wishes of the bride and the likely behaviour of a man notorious elsewhere for violence.⁶¹ Furthermore, however, using the keywords of contemporary feminist discourse such as 'toxic masculinity', 'a consensual occasion' (33) and a wedding that is 'forced' (36), Mahfouz also sets Hermione's epistle in a wider contemporary social context. Hermione becomes an abuse survivor who seeks justice not just as an individual but on behalf of 'every other woman frightened of a partner | who does no partnering, only unstitching' (38). Her words are compelling for audiences aware of the statistics still regularly quoted by survivor charities such as Women's Aid and Refuge that in England and Wales two women every week are murdered by a current or former partner, and one in four women will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime.⁶²

Hermione's self-described 'revolutionary leanings' are underscored in this production by her makeup and costume: with an eyemask of black face paint, she wears an unmarked grey coat and black hoodie, like a protester avoiding police identification. Yet on her t-shirt, only half visible when she is seated, is Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. The (in)famously visceral depiction of the beheading of a Roman general by an Israelite and her maidservant has effects here on several levels. Most straightforwardly, any viewer who recognises the painting might gain the sense that Hermione's anger under the surface is far more violent than she puts into words.

⁶¹ On the centrality of Neoptolemus' violence to *Her*, 8, see Chapter 4: 'Assault', especially nn. 34–36.

⁶² 'The Facts', *Refuge*, <<https://refuge.org.uk/what-is-domestic-abuse/the-facts>> [accessed 23 January 2023].

Left implied by her closing question – ‘will you arrest my husband, Neoptolemus, the rapist?’ – is a further question that asks if she will instead have to take justice into her own hands.

The painting was also analysed in early feminist scholarship as an autobiographical work of visual revenge against Agostino Tassi, who raped Gentileschi in 1611, and was convicted and exiled in a trial during which Gentileschi was tortured to verify her testimony. The significance of Hermione wearing this shirt during her own testimony is apparent to any viewer familiar with the history of this work. Yet more recent scholarship on the painting has argued that this kind of criticism excessively centres the biographical aspect, to the detriment of comprehensive appraisals of Gentileschi as an artist interested in depicting women as dominant in traditionally patriarchal contexts.⁶³ Thus even if autobiographical elements are disregarded, Hermione wears a powerful and visceral symbol of female agency prevailing against the odds.

Audiences aware of the shortcomings in police investigations of crimes reported by women, both historically and to date, are likely to feel alarm on Hermione’s behalf as she describes her experiences to police officers. There continues to be media scrutiny of the handling by British police forces of women’s allegations of harassment and domestic violence, especially where it has emerged in coverage of high-profile cases that earlier incidents had often been repeatedly reported to the police and not acted upon or joined up prior to a more serious incident.⁶⁴

Hermione’s plea for help before a woman’s ‘blood spills a final time’ (38) therefore disturbingly recalls instances of women being murdered after previous reports to the police were ignored.

Contemporary events in both the UK and the US also inspire concern for Hermione as a Black woman reporting abuse to the police. Besides the overwhelming global outcry in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd by a serving police officer, subsequent crimes against Black people by

⁶³ Phillippy (2006), 75 summarises the two opposing perspectives.

⁶⁴ On police response to stalking: Taylor-Dunn, Bowen and Gilchrist (2021); to sexual violence: White and McMillan (2018). On domestic violence as a behaviour pattern escalating to femicide: Zara and Gino (2018); on previous offences being disregarded in the case of Wayne Couzens: Independent Office for Police Conduct (2023).

police officers further highlighted the scale of discrimination.⁶⁵ This added to the well-acknowledged fear that people of colour are not treated justly by police. A 2020 survey by the charity Hope Not Hate indicated that a majority of non-white adults in Britain believe police and the criminal justice system are biased against them.⁶⁶ The fact that Hermione is only speaking to police at all due to her brother's crime, not because her own complaint is being upheld, invites unease from the audience as to whether she will be treated justly in either case.

Furthermore, it is not merely complicity at the institutional level that the staging of this play calls into question. Adjoa Andoh, director of this play and five others, was noted for grouping three of her four cameras very closely around the actor, so that the viewer experienced a claustrophobic inability to look away (Littler, [6]). Furthermore, Mahfouz's is another play that retains the poems' second-person address and thus characterises viewers themselves as the intended addressee, thereby implicating them as the wrongdoer while keeping them powerless to reply. This is a particularly powerful effect of the lack of what Fischer-Lichte identifies as the conventional symbiotic relationship between actors and audience, and brings about in the audience the 'liminal state' of reflecting on their own experience.⁶⁷ These two aspects combine in Andoh's directing of Mahfouz's play: viewers are characterised as the police officers to whom Hermione is testifying, thus becoming the target of both her accusations and her closing question. Hermione asks the police if they will help her and prosecute her husband; she asks the audience if they will act on behalf of all abused women. The too-easy tendency to look away from mistreatment experienced by others is confronted head-on. In their inability to reply to Hermione, the audience are powerless to intervene, and thus helplessly reenact the unresponsiveness that women regularly encounter when they speak out against their abusers.

⁶⁵ An example in the UK was the case of the murder of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, in which police officers shared photographs of the bodies with colleagues on WhatsApp in June 2020, only weeks after Floyd's murder.

⁶⁶ Hope Not Hate (2020), 26. The survey used the term 'BAME', prior to recommendations by groups including the UK Government's Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities that disaggregated terminology is preferable.

⁶⁷ Fischer-Lichte (2010), 37–40.

The sense of complicity in silence is compounded by the audience's inescapable awareness of Murrell's ethnicity. It is regularly stated that to be an active antiracist, rather than merely a passive non-racist, it is imperative to risk discomfort by breaking silences and challenging racist behaviour.⁶⁸ In another instance of purposeful casting, the audience's inability to break their silence to help a Black woman in this situation, despite their sympathy for her, illustrates the ineffectiveness of allyship without action.⁶⁹

Thus many of the plays make antiracist and feminist concerns central to their retellings. This enables them both to interrogate neglected or mitigated instances of ancient physical and emotional violence, and to strike comparisons with other historical and contemporary examples of this violence. In several plays, the Ovidian heroines' anger at their own mistreatment is turned outwards, becoming a personal expression of rage against the systemic and societal abuses that enable their individual experiences.

Escaping the tradition

In not requiring the playwrights of *15 Heroines* to have background knowledge or education in Classics, Littler 'encouraged the playwrights to be irreverent, to "write back" to Ovid's originals, and to claim the pieces as plays of their own.' More forcefully, to writers wary of Ovid's notoriety, he added: 'now Ovid is in your sights, here is your chance to give him a good kicking' ([11]). The sections above have explored how audiences were invited to view contemporary concerns through a new lens provided by ancient characters, or used humorously irreverent modern approaches to re-examine well-known heroines. Another approach taken by some playwrights was to allow the heroines themselves to create a new canonical counter-discourse, explicitly reclaiming their identities from the limits imposed on them by their traditional stories.

⁶⁸ See e.g. Kendi (2019), 10–11.

⁶⁹ On audience complicity, see n. 51 above.

For instance, Stella Duffy's Dido outlines her momentous achievements in founding Carthage when 'there was nothing here' (75), and in solving 'the first isoperimetric problem, Dido's Theorem' (70) along the way.⁷⁰ This underpins her defiant reclamation of control over her story, asserting that 'I am not driven mad by love, insane with rejection' (75), as depictions after Virgil increasingly suggested. Instead, she hopes that 'when my story is told, I pray they tell of the choice': her own, determinedly controlled plan to 'unmake me'. This is intended not to spite Aeneas but to 'beat the gods', whose immortality means they can never know the strength of human love. In fact, far from being blamed for weakness, Aeneas is praised as an equal partner whose love enabled her own flourishing: 'I gave Dido and he gave Aeneas'. Thus Dido's revenge on the gods is as much for Aeneas' loss and powerlessness as for hers. Rosalind Eleazar's performance makes every movement seem carefully planned, and as the audience gradually realises that she is dressing herself for her own death, it seems that even her outfit is meticulously chosen: an elegant silk dress with a cut-out section over her heart for the knife to enter. Dido's monologue is one of only three to feature a postscript as well as a prologue, and it fulfils her wishes by noting the scale of her achievement: 'her city became one of the greatest in the world.'

Ariadne, too, draws attention to the controlling influence of the classical canon. In recalling Daedalus' influence over her early life and thought, she displays a humorous self-awareness engendered by her knowledge of mythology: 'Daedalus who made his son Icarus some wings so he could fly? ... Why by all the gods did I allow myself to be led by a man who couldn't see how *that* would end????' (111) Ariadne is unlikely to have learned this within the normal scope of her story, since Daedalus escaped Crete after she left (*Met.* 8.174–85). Rather, Ariadne's being 'famously bookish' (110) has made her an authority on myth not limited to her own timeline,

⁷⁰ The isoperimetric problem, more usually 'Dido's Problem', is: 'Find among all curves of given length the one which encloses maximal area'; see Bandle (2017). To build Carthage, Dido was offered as much land as an ox-hide would cover; she cut the hide into strips to encircle a large area (*Verg. Aen.* 1.365–8).

making her seem slightly outside time even though she does not yet know how her own story will end. More anachronistically still, Ariadne sarcastically describes Theseus in scholarly terms as controlled by his own story:

Theseus is a *classic hero*.
He *has* to run into things.
That's his appointed *fate*. (112)

It was seen earlier how Ariadne's metaliterary awareness enabled her to reflect on her own complicity in the life and death of the Minotaur. Here, her awareness of literary conventions enables her to lampoon the trope of the 'classic hero' and traditional masculinity as brutish and unimaginative, even as she admits she wanted Theseus to succeed in killing her brother.⁷¹

While Ariadne's awareness of her literary afterlife forces her to acknowledge her own culpability, many others take their plays as an opportunity to be heard where they were silenced before. Littler notes that 'this demand to be heard, read, and remembered is itself Ovidian' ([7]). This applies both within the *Heroides* and throughout the wider Ovidian corpus, as for instance in the closing assertions *legar* and *vivam* ('I shall be read'; 'I shall live') in *Met.* 15.878–9, and *cantabimur* ('we shall be sung') in *Am.* 1.3.25. Heroines such as Hermione and Oenone develop this assertion and speak on behalf of all women who share their experience. Whereas Hermione's words are a call to action, Oenone promises testimony:

I'll scribble these words on scrolls,
In notebooks,
My hands will be mine and hers,
My pen will be mine and hers,
...
I mean every woman who has ever lived,
I mean every woman whose heart has ever been broken,
I will write the words spoken by many women who have cried into their hands,
Felt unworthy when men like you left ... (20)

⁷¹ For examples of metaliterary awareness allowing another heroine to interrogate her own tradition: Hinds (1993), on Medea. Annes Brown (2007), 3–5, explores its particular effect in Seneca's *Medea*.

Being heard and remembered thus offers a way to ‘heal’ and to ‘hold men like you accountable’. Lettie Precious’ Oenone turns *perlegis?*, the first word of the Latin text, into an active insistence that the voices of these women will not remain unheard.

Others, however, are confronted with the impossibility of keeping control of their own stories once they tell them to others. Isley Lynn’s *Canace: A Good Story* deploys the cultural trope of an excruciatingly intrusive chat show interview to depict Canace’s struggle to master her story even as she tells it. As noted above, the introductory caption provides no context. Canace’s unnamed lover’s relationship to her is gradually revealed as, in a smiling, confessional tone, she answers the unheard questions of an interviewer who already knows it. Thus viewers realise that they have been cast in the role of a chat show audience hungry for salacious details. Lynn, whose work is ‘concerned with the marginalised and misrepresented’ and with ‘unearthing untold or mis-told stories’,⁷² characterises Canace as determined to demonstrate that she is not ‘confused. Or stupid. Or manipulated. Or taken advantage of’, and that ‘this was two individuals falling for each other’ and ‘it was all consensual’ (81). In Lynn’s version, it is Macareus who has taken his own life due to the scandal created by the birth of their child, who has also died. Canace insists that both would have survived if the stigma had not prevented them from seeking help. Like a more frantic version of Phaedra, Canace insists that she wanted to show that she is not an ‘abomination a disgrace or shameful, tragedy ... that’s not what this story has to be, automatically’ (83). Littler argues that Ovid displays ‘authorial cruelty in requiring his heroine to narrate a story doomed to corrosion when exposed to the oxygen of a moralising world’ ([10]). In Lynn’s version the cruel author becomes the unseen interviewer, who has lured Canace into giving away every detail with the promise of having her story heard. However, the audience is

⁷² Isley Lynn, ‘About’, <<http://www.isleylynn.com/about>> [accessed 14 March 2023].

left with the unpalatable sense that, by their participation in this kind of popular culture, they too are complicit in tricking her into this situation.⁷³

In *The Gift*, Medea also demonstrates her awareness of this lack of control as she experiences the misrepresentation of her actions in real time. Like Dido, she seeks to disown the narrative of ‘the wild actions of some weak, lovelorn, jealous woman’, and like Phyllis she is aware that it will be men’s retellings that distort her story. Before she starts, she warns her addressee (both her sister and the audience) that ‘you will read and hear terrible things spread about me in the press.

Believe nothing’, and that the ‘bare bones of my exile’ will be distorted by ‘the flesh with which generations of hate-filled men will choose to cover them’ (145). As Medea’s is last in the set of five plays, the audience may be prepared by now to have their preconceptions challenged.

However, her monologue is not merely an apologia for her actions. In countering the canonical depiction of Medea in popular culture, Juliet Gilkes Romero radically rewrites the story to insist that it is a scandal-hungry (and racist) press that has created the myths about her. She stands in her children’s bedroom, dressed in protective army surplus gear, yet surrounded by toys and books, with the children themselves asleep in bed behind her. This underscores her insistence that she is motivated primarily by the need to protect them, and amplifies the horror that their father’s violence endangers them. Although it is implied that she ultimately does kill them, it emerges that this was not a cold-hearted plan: Medea intimates that ‘I’ve made arrangements. Me and the boys will travel light and at night. We’ll be smuggled aboard a cattle truck as far as the coast’ (147). This continues a long tradition of depictions of Medea that recast her killing of her children as her only way to protect them.⁷⁴ Here, the infamous wedding present that kills Jason’s new wife is a booby-trap intended for Jason, but ‘his greedy wife ... snatches it, unwraps it, flings it open’ (150). It is this accident, and the resulting threat of arrest by Jason’s thugs, that drives

⁷³ On audience complicity, see n. 51 above.

⁷⁴ See e.g. Hall and Macintosh (2005), 401–4, for this as a feature of nineteenth-century British stage adaptations of Euripides’ tragedy that connected her with married women’s lack of legal protections. Compare 92–6 for the wholesale avoidance of the infanticides in earlier productions.

Medea to actions that she had earlier dismissed: ‘my stomach clenches with the dread of it’ (147). Recasting the final line of the Latin poem, she concludes that ‘I don’t know how this will end. But, it’s likely to end badly’ (151). The play’s canonical counter-discourse therefore continues the tradition, noted by Hinds, of Ovidian depictions of Medea that question each other.

The various distortions of Medea’s story are also highlighted by the ways Medea’s play immediately refutes Hypsipyle’s. In nods to their origins in verse epistles, many of the heroines are first shown writing, on paper, mobile phones or laptops. Hypsipyle’s play, though, explores its relationship with the written word and its unreliability in more depth: she reads sceptically from her own notes on accounts of Jason’s success, and searches the internet for rumours of Medea’s witchcraft. In a more hostile turn, she also types into her phone while saying, ‘someone could easily say that she was responsible for everything, with her poisons and potions. They’ll say that she seized the golden fleece, not you’ (140), suggesting that she herself is sowing such theories online to discredit Jason. As a result, when Medea seeks to reclaim her story from rumour-mongers, the audience may think of Hypsipyle’s malice too, especially as she echoes Hypsipyle’s use of ‘barbarian’: ‘I hear rumours that I, the Barbarian Princess, eat the eyeballs of my enemies’. However, she is at least happy to capitalise on the notoriety if it means she is left alone: ‘I am happy for them to believe this. I hope they run a fucking mile’ (147). Thus again Hypsipyle is characterised as one of the people who harm Medea, this time by compounding the falsehoods when Medea’s own account already stands little chance of being believed.

Phyllis too seeks redress for missing the opportunity to tell her story ‘before any men did’ (131). In Samantha Ellis’ *Phyllis: I’m Still Burning*, she, like Hermione, uses the language of contemporary feminist campaigns to connect her epistle with its broader social concerns. However, whereas Hermione’s costume and set evoke a specific sociopolitical context, Phyllis appears as a figure outside time. The play refers to the post-Ovidian version of the story, in which the grieving

Phyllis transformed into an almond tree.⁷⁵ She performs in her transformed state, classically costumed but rooted to the spot and with wood veining her hands. It is the most minimalistically staged of the three plays directed by Cat Robey: the empty set is filled with dry ice so that the edges of the space cannot be seen. Empowered by this atemporality, Phyllis explores her relationship with all the retellings of her story, addressing both Demophoon and the audience in turn. Her use of phrases evoking twenty-first century feminist activism – ‘we believe her’, ‘there will be hashtags’, ‘I’ve got no interest in being a good woman’ (131), ‘I took up so much space’ (132) – is another example of turning the heroine’s anger towards social issues. More radically, her atemporality also enables her to confront Ovid (and other male storytellers) directly:

He called me a heroine but he made me sound *miserable*. And everyone praised him. For writing the women’s point of view. Giving us a voice. Making our stories heard. Centring our pain. You do have to ask: why did he write so many women? Why were all his women abandoned or pining or wounded or raped? Why did he write so many rapes? (131)

As the only heroine to tackle the issue of Ovid’s many narratives of violence against women, Phyllis makes an important intervention in a production that might otherwise seem to celebrate Ovid unequivocally as a proto-feminist. Scholars such as Wise and McCarter have re-evaluated individual passages of Ovid to argue that his relationship with sexual violence is governed by greater empathy with the survivor than has hitherto been supposed.⁷⁶ However, as Zuckerberg has shown, Ovid also continues to be subject to tendentious readings by far-right misogynist communities. This includes pick-up artists who take texts such as the *Ars Amatoria*, which appear to justify rape, as an ancient precedent and validation for their own ideology. Furthermore, she notes that the *praeceptor* of the *Ars* invites the reader to consider him an authority on the basis of his earlier work, frequently including examples from the *Heroides* that demonstrate his insight into female psychology. Zuckerberg’s focus is on fringe communities that, she accepts, cannot be

⁷⁵ A common subject of nineteenth-century paintings, the almond tree myth is attested in Servius on Verg. *Ecl.* 5.10.

⁷⁶ Wise (2020) explores the Latin text of *Amores* 1.7 and 8; McCarter (2018; 2019) exposes voyeuristic overtranslations of rape episodes in the *Metamorphoses*.

stopped from ‘using and abusing the history and literature of the ancient world in service of a patriarchal, white nationalist agenda’. However, she also argues that the pernicious sociopolitical influence of their views is more widespread, and that understanding their relationship with authors including Ovid is key to countering this influence more meaningfully than simply identifying incorrect readings.⁷⁷ Phyllis’ overt counter-discourse demonstrates that adapting Ovidian works in pursuit of this aim can accommodate both celebratory and critical responses.

The heroine who departs most completely from her Ovidian depiction is Briseis, in Abi Zakarian’s *Briseis: Perfect Myth Allegory*. Rather than undertake the highly problematic task of modernising the words of an enslaved woman professing love for her master and abuser, Littler describes Zakarian’s reimagining as ‘a new figure whose response to early abuses was to work her way through classical mythology for her own advancement, and who was walking out to independence’ ([11]). Unexpectedly for readers of the ancient poem, the opening of the monologue indicates that Briseis’ wish for marriage to Achilles has in fact been achieved – but as a means to acquiring all his assets after murdering him. This, she tells the audience, is her reclamation of her story, which in the canon is ‘not even a footnote in a story full of swollen dicks’. Alluding to her own participation in ‘the greatest oral tradition’, she claims to both ‘leave a trace’ and ‘stoke the canon’. She thus both connects herself to her ancient story and fundamentally challenges it, not excavating an essential truth from mythological strata so much as severing herself from it in pursuit of ‘a history I alone will make’ (47). Her total dismantling of the persona imposed on her is represented by her gradual removal of her wedding dress and accoutrements, including a wig, so that her appearance at the end, like Sappho’s in *I See You Now*, is utterly transformed. The stage directions specify that this should be done ‘not in a nervy, uncertain or fidgety way – every action she makes is deliberate, thought through, by design’ (41). Unlike many other heroines, Briseis does not claim to speak for anyone except herself. Yet for

⁷⁷ Zuckerberg (2018), 89–142 (on the *Ars Amatoria*); 104 (on the *Heroides*); 10.

the heroine whose ancient text most literally represents the marginalisation of ancient women, a claim of personhood wholly and exclusively for herself can be the most radical of escapes from the limitations of her story.

Subsequent events

15 Heroines was conceived as an explicitly feminist and antiracist project in response to contemporary events, which Tom Littler described as ‘conscious of its own temporality’ ([13]). As a result of subsequent developments, some of the plays have gained further resonances since their original broadcast. This is particularly true of Sabrina Mahfouz’s adaptation of Hermione’s epistle, *Will You?*, in its imagining of Hermione as a modern-day royal asking police officers to arrest her abusive husband.

Since their inceptions in the mid-2010s, campaigns such as Black Lives Matter and Me Too had been highlighting, among other things, women and people of colour’s experiences of unjust treatment and actual criminality by the police. Between 2021 and 2023 in the UK (after the production’s original 2020 broadcast), several high-profile episodes served as further flashpoints in deteriorating levels of public trust in the police. From the mishandling of missing persons cases involving vulnerable Black Britons to continuing incidents in which Black people, especially minors, were groundlessly treated with suspicion by police, a special review by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) concluded in 2022 that people from minority ethnic backgrounds actually needed safeguarding from police bias.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the extent of what the Centre for Women’s Justice called a culture of ‘misogyny and serious criminality against women by police officers’ was made apparent by the conviction of two serving Metropolitan Police officers who had both used their police credentials to enable their crimes. In March 2021, Wayne Couzens abducted, raped and murdered Sarah Everard, and in December 2022 David Carrick confessed to a seventeen-year series of eighty-five serious crimes against women,

⁷⁸ Independent Office for Police Conduct (2022).

including forty-eight rapes. In both cases, the police handling of prior incidents that could have identified the risks was criticised.⁷⁹ A summary of recent YouGov polls in response to these events indicated that public trust in the police, both in the UK and more widely, had reached an all-time low.⁸⁰ These findings indicate that it is still to be feared not only that women and people of colour who report violence against them will not be taken seriously by the police, but also that they may not be safe from further violence at the hands of police officers themselves.

When *15 Heroines* was first broadcast in November 2020, antiracism and police violence were at the forefront of public consciousness. However, viewing at that time was not also affected by public revulsion at the crimes of Couzens and Carrick, or by the weight of increased general scrutiny of how police respond to allegations of sexual violence and of crimes against people of colour. Viewing Mahfouz's *Hermione: Will You?* in the wake of these cultural shifts, there is a far more ominous impact in Hermione's appeal to police officers for help. An audience watching in the wake of more recent events may wonder not only if Hermione's claims will be taken seriously, as a Black woman who is a survivor of sexual violence, but if the authorities to whom she speaks are themselves possible perpetrators. Writing in 2021, Littler had already noted that 'in a year featuring multiple police abuses, with more to come ... the piece had great resonance' ([11]). The audience unease and guilt prompted by Andoh's confrontational camerawork is also compounded when watching with this knowledge. More constructively, when contemporary events suggest that meaningful change has yet to occur, audiences watching Hermione's plea may be reminded of the continuing need for that change.

Another element that gained further resonance was Hermione's determination to '*get the first royal in prison for rape*' (emphasis in original), with the accused perpetrator himself being a member of the royal family. Viewers at the time would have seen echoes of the sexual violence allegations

⁷⁹ Centre for Women's Justice (2023).

⁸⁰ Kirk (2022).

against Prince Andrew, which Littler noted. However, in February 2022 the case ended with an out-of-court settlement, meaning the charges were never brought to trial.⁸¹ This adds a dark prescience to Hermione's observation that police inquiries into royal crimes

will lead nowhere because nobody in my family,
Including Orestes, will ever actually be arrested
And if they are they certainly won't be charged. (37)

Another reference to contemporary events that had a coda after the production was the recasting of Sappho as a victim of the Windrush scandal wrongly persecuted by the Home Office.⁸² After a government review, Wendy Williams, its Independent Adviser, had made thirty recommendations in 2020 for driving the necessary cultural change in the Home Office.

Williams' 2022 progress report on their implementation concluded that, while progress in some areas was good, in many others it had been 'disappointing'.⁸³ Most recently, following the Home Office's widely-condemned dropping of three of the commitments, victims described continuing to feel unwelcome in Britain as promised cultural changes continued to fail to materialise.⁸⁴ Thus, where viewers of the original production might have hoped that no one after Sappho would experience her pain, a viewer in 2023 faces the reality that many victims have yet to see meaningful improvements.

⁸¹ Coughlan (2022).

⁸² See n. 50 above.

⁸³ Williams (2022).

⁸⁴ Gentleman (2023).

Conclusion

Chapter 5 established Clare Pollard's *Ovid's Heroines* as a turning point in anglophone reception of the *Heroides*. Its often humorous modernisation of form and lexis delineated the distinct and vibrant personalities of each of the heroines, achieving far greater emotional immediacy for a contemporary audience than had been possible in previous, more conventional translations.

15 Heroines, with its polyvocality and its brief to adapt and retell rather than simply to translate, achieved a similar effect on a far more ambitious scale. Beyond simply reclaiming the identities and stories of forgotten and misrepresented women themselves, the heroines often explicitly spoke on behalf of others who shared their experiences. This ranged from the very general – identifying that re-empowering the marginalised women of Greek and Roman myth redresses just one example of a broader tendency in both literature and history – to the highly urgent and contemporary, in the plays' interaction with contemporary events and concerns. This collectivising approach is underscored by correspondences and patterns between the different heroines, which are noticeable even though there was no collaboration between the playwrights. Pollard's version can suggest an urgent and exasperated message that men who mistreat and abuse women are always the same. Contrastingly, *15 Heroines* turns this outwards, in a cry of protest that the mistreatment experienced by Ovid's heroines is symptomatic of systemic mistreatment and discrimination, against more than one oppressed identity. As a piece of art commenting on contemporary issues, the timeliness and urgency of the production could hardly have been more apparent.

As a reception of the *Heroides*, the effects of *15 Heroines* are two-directional. Playwrights used the experiences of Ovid's heroines to illuminate the emotional reality of historical and contemporary injustices. Conversely, their explorations of contemporary injustices, and their use of canonical counter-discourse, invited audiences to reflect on what assumptions were influencing both their own lives and their engagement with mythological characters.

6. STOKING THE CANON: 15 HEROINES AND BEYOND

The publication of the playscript, and of supplementary educational resources, forms part of the production's clear invitation for further engagement with the plays. Readers are explicitly encouraged to produce more new versions, to continue the chain of retellings onwards into the future. The strong temporal situatedness of many of the plays means that there will come a time when readers and audiences consider them outdated and their contemporary references unrelatable. However, what the production has demonstrated by linking itself so explicitly both to Ovid and to the present moment is that a text with the polyvocality and multivalency of the *Heroides* can continue to inspire new creative works with the ability to illuminate both ancient text and modern ideas.

Conclusions

This study has shown that twentieth- and twenty-first-century English receptions of the *Heroides* continue a tradition of creative responses to the poems that stretches as far back as their first published English translations. In particular, it has explored examples of the new readings that are made possible, and the urgent contemporary concerns that can be spoken to, when receptions are radical, subversive and modern. While there is no suggestion that women only should translate poems about women, it has historically been the translations and adaptations of women and non-binary people that have challenged dominant patriarchal discourses around the *Heroides*, and have used the poems to issue new challenges to contemporary sociopolitical issues.

Translations and receptions that come at moments of particular cultural relevance elicit high levels of engagement and inspire further receptions. The subject matter of the *Heroides* – the uninterrupted and (seemingly) unmediated accounts of women’s experiences – particularly chimes with moments of cultural shift towards centring women’s stories. This was seen in Chapter 1 in the popularity of the Dryden–Tonson *Ovid’s Epistles*, published amid an explosion of interest in ‘she-tragedy’ and the first appearance of professional women actors in England. It became a staple of poetic performance and inspired a wealth of original responses, both sincere and parodic, as well as playing a significant role in the development of English epistolary fiction. This cultural interest was also seen in Chapters 5 and 6, in the heroines’ return to the spoken word onstage in Clare Pollard’s *Ovid’s Heroines* tour and Jermyn Street Theatre’s *15 Heroines*. These versions harnessed a renewed interest in confessional poetry and in revoicing untold stories, and were underpinned by a fresh wave of global campaigns for sociopolitical change.

Recent translations of the *Heroides* have also commonly positioned themselves as explicit challenges to earlier responses. This was seen especially in Chapters 2 and 3 in the pioneering work of Florence Verducci, who was among the first anglophone scholars to challenge criticism of the poems’ poor quality and monotony, and proposed a new reading that centred rather than

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disowned their constantly shifting tone. It was also demonstrated that Verducci's full verse translations of six epistles, with facing Latin text, served as both supplement and challenge to the prose versions of Showerman's Loeb. Her unique approach, which combined an accentual metrical form with unrhymed couplets, retained the rhythm and structure of the Latin without suffering from the mannered, artificial feel that had hampered previous attempts in accentual-syllabic forms. Compared with Showerman's archaisms and elevated, tragic romanticism, Verducci's much more direct and modern versions served as this study's first demonstration of how fundamentally the sense of whole poems can change if different translation decisions are taken. The near-psychotic violence of Hypsipyle, the elegiac obsession of Medea, and the artistic despair of Sappho are all brought into sharper relief. Being both a scholar in Comparative Literature and a poet in her own right, Verducci was uniquely equipped to contribute creatively to the renewal of the *Heroides* for new readers, whether or not they had an educational background in Latin literature.

However, translations that purport to challenge the shortcomings of earlier versions are not free from problems themselves. Chapter 3 explored the limitations of Verducci's scholarship, which fell between the divergent aims of Comparative Literature and the more traditionally philological scholarship practised by Classics departments in the US at that time. This particularly applied to her unsympathetically amused response to the irrational and traumatised behaviour of Briseis, Ariadne and Canace. On the one hand, the chapter demonstrated that a present-day reader of Verducci's translations can still access more multivalent and empathetic readings than are offered by her scholarship alone. On the other, it also identified areas where Verducci's unsympathetic analysis did affect her entire characterisation of the heroine. These limitations reinforced the study's argument for the continuing need for new translations to supplement and challenge even those that were themselves intended as correctives to earlier versions.

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Nowhere is this more apparent than in Harold Isbell's 1990 version for Penguin Classics. As Chapter 4 demonstrated, Isbell too sought to redress the shortcomings of an earlier translation: the archaisms of the Loeb, which rendered the text particularly inaccessible to those who could not read the Latin. However, the chapter's close readings explored problematic aspects of Isbell's passages depicting assault, enslavement or ageing, or concerning notions of purity and shame or the use of slurs. It also offered examples where the syllabic metrical scheme flattened the poems' emotional intensity and altered their sense. In both of these aspects, there was an evident influence from Isbell's conservative, Christian, patriarchally traditional background on his interpretations, at the levels of both whole poems and individual lines and words.

Fundamentally, in producing a version out of primarily academic interest and for academic purposes, Isbell's artistic priorities centre around showcasing the intellectual interest of what Ovid supposedly said and how he said it. Often, this comes at the expense of the distinctive and emotive voices of the heroines themselves, and of the strength with which they destabilise the canonical narratives of their stories. Isbell's translation, showing little influence from the challenges issued by Verducci, succeeded Showerman's as a version that was more contemporary and readable, but with little difference in its underlying assumptions. Since for a long time it was the only commercially available version, non-Latinate readers could not compare it with any other version that might highlight the subjectivity of his decisions.

Isbell, as a translator with no academic specialism in Latin, demonstrates that it is not universally the case that a reception coming from outside academic circles can give new and subversive perspectives on a text. It is also an important demonstration of Deane-Cox's assertion that a new translation does not always improve on a previous one. However, those that have emerged in more recent years have unquestionably done so. Chapter 5 showed that Pollard's 2013 version in modernised free verse was explicitly conceived as a challenge to earlier versions and to the critical conventions of twentieth-century *Heroides* scholarship. In combination with her own

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artistic interests, Pollard's not having an educational background in Classics was fruitful for her work in two ways. Firstly, as Verducci had also demonstrated, the critical commonplace of Ovid's 'failures' was more easily challenged from outside the philological school of thought that engendered it. Secondly, Pollard's not having Latin entailed a reliance on dictionary definitions that enabled her to challenge conventional translations of individual words. Primarily, though, the difference between her approach and earlier translations was her interest in excavating the individual voices and personalities of the heroines; an interest in resurrecting the poems as 'living' poetry.

However distinct Pollard was able to make the heroines' voices, though, she remained a single poet enacting a unifying creative vision across all fifteen individuals' stories. As a result, she became only the latest in a succession of translations, each supplanting the previous one. While her translation and Isbell's are both commercially available, and can therefore be read alongside each other, for many years there was no version to supplement or challenge hers. Chapter 6 returned to an idea first expressed in Chapter 1, that multivocal approaches to a text can be more productive for showcasing the breadth of possible meanings of a single text. The success of the Dryden–Tonson *Ovid's Epistles* was not merely in the popularity of the original edition, but in the successive editions that added new poets' versions, sometimes printed alongside earlier responses rather than simply replacing them. This provided a sense of there being no overarching creative unity across a single edition, and of the interpretation of individual poems being something that could change over time.

This is a notion consciously returned to in the *15 Heroines* stage production in 2020. Most of the playwrights involved, like Pollard, had little or no educational exposure to Greek and Latin literature. Chapters 5 and 6 both demonstrated the central role of modernisation to the success of the versions of Pollard and the *15 Heroines* team, as it allowed them to form new points of dialogue between the ancient texts and contemporary sociopolitical issues. The key effect of this

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democratisation of creative access to the poems in both of these cases is the avoidance of any sense of the reception as in any way subordinate to the source. Viewers of *15 Heroines* were offered fifteen different people's responses to the poems, including – for the first time in the published anglophone tradition – people who were not white. The broader creative brief to adapt rather than translate also enabled a form of canonical counter-discourse, in versions that 'wrote back' to previous versions of the heroines' stories. From this it was apparent that any such response could be at the same time a groundbreaking new reading of an ancient text and also itself only ever a partial one that would be a mutual complement to other versions.

In the wake of *15 Heroines*, therefore, the reception tradition of the *Heroides* is moving back towards being an ecosystem in which multiple translations and versions coexist. As Hutcheon's work on adaptation demonstrates, new adaptations may invite interested readers to explore the source texts, and other versions, for the first time. Furthermore, as Chapter 1's historical survey of creative responses showed, a wide variety of available versions can itself inspire further responses from a wide range of backgrounds. To this supplementing and challenging end, in a context where for the first time in several decades it is possible to read several different versions alongside each other, it remains essential that new translations for new times and sociopolitical concerns continue to be produced.

Scope for further research

Many under-researched topics were beyond the scope of this thesis. Several of the single epistles still lack any coverage in published anglophone lemmatic commentaries more recent than Palmer's 1898 edition, although some of those covered in doctoral theses may see publication. There is a particular need for detailed studies of poems that have historically been neglected or otherwise underserved in scholarship. This applies especially to those whose authenticity was long disputed, but also those of the more minor heroines such as Canace, where the advancement of understanding of relevant sociopolitical issues has outpaced work on the Latin

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texts. Comparative historical surveys of the reception of the *Heroides* against that of Ovid's other works are also needed to improve understanding of the poems' varying popularity.

Until *15 Heroines*, there seemed little scope for work on the anglophone literary reception of the *Heroides* with reference to postcolonial or queer studies. (Indeed, prior to Clare Pollard, there was barely scope for work on feminist reception.) In the wake of the production, however, these are obvious directions for further research. Research on dramatic receptions of Ovidian heroines can also now include the *15 Heroines* production. There is also a particular need for work on the production with greater reference to theories of performance. Further to the pioneering feminist studies of Fulkerson, Lindheim and Spentzou, and the more recent work of Martorana and Lam, there is also scope for work on the poems themselves with reference to more recent developments in other critical disciplines.

The double *Heroides*, not covered in this thesis due to a lack of anglophone receptions, also have the potential for vast amounts of new work. Kenney's (1996) remains the only anglophone commentary, and even in Italian four of the six have not been covered. There is also creative scope for new responses; since Harold Isbell's, there have been no recent English versions whatsoever.

Most fundamental and constant, however, is the need for new translations adapting the poems for new times and sociopolitical concerns. As a further demonstration of this need, I offer my own translations of two of the poems that particularly merit reappraisal in light of their handling of violence against women: *Heroides* 5 and 11. These are followed by a commentary discussing some of the issues encountered when producing a feminist translation. The text used is Showerman's revised Loeb (1977). In that edition, lines omitted as spurious are included in footnotes, and in my translation these are marked by square brackets.

Translations

Oenone

Reading this, are you? Or has your latest wife banned it? Read it all – it isn't

Some scrawl from the Greek you cuckolded.

It's Oenone. From Pegasus. Quite the celebrity in Phrygian forests.

I, the injured party, bring a complaint against you, my own – if you'll permit me.

5 What god opposed their power to our vows?

What charge blocks me from being yours forever?

Put up with it quietly, if you've done something to deserve it;

A wrongful penalty should be protested.

You weren't so big then, when I was satisfied with you as a husband –

10 Me! A nymph born of a great river!

You're a son of Priam now, but – don't let's tiptoe round the truth –

You used to be enslaved. I, practically a goddess, could bear to wed someone not even free!

Often we rested among your flocks, shaded by a tree;

Grass jumbled with leaves served for our bed.

15 Often we'd lie on heaps of straw or hay,

A little shack our defence against the frost's white hair.

Who was it showed you the glades good for hunting,

And the crags where wild beasts hid their young?

I guided you. Many times it was me that stretched out the coarse hunting nets;

20 Me who drove the dogs fast across the long ridges.

CONCLUSIONS

Carved by you, beeches keep my name alive,
And I am read, *OENONE*, scratched in by your penknife.
[There's a poplar, I remember, growing in a rainwater stream.
The note inscribed on it is mindful of me.]

25 The bigger the trunks grow, the bigger my name.

Arise, grow up into my titles!

Live on, poplar, please, planted on the stream bank

With this verse in your wrinkly bark:

When Oenone's abandoned and Paris still breathes,

30 *The waters of Xanthus shall retreat to their source.*

Xanthus, back you go! Waters, turn round, run back!

He can bear it, Paris, to have deserted Oenone.

That was the day that sentenced me to be miserable. That was when

It began, a terrible winter of altered love,

35 When Venus came, Juno came, and her, better-looking with her kit off,

Minerva, naked, came for you to arbitrate. You!

Thunderstruck, my curves shook, and cold quaking

Ran through my tough bones as you told me.

I consulted elders – couldn't control my terror – both women

40 And men. Confirmed: ill-omened.

Fir felled, timbers cut, fleet prepared,

The deep blue swell took the waxed hulls.

You wept as you left. Spare me your denials, of this at least.

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[That other love is more to be embarrassed about. This one came first.

45 You wept, you saw my eyes streaming;]

Our tears mingled, both mourning;

Tighter than vines overwhelming an elm,

Your arms were twined round my neck.

Ha, you kept complaining the wind was holding you up.

50 Your comrades laughed; it wasn't.

You'd kissed me as you left me. You kept coming back for more.

Your tongue could hardly bear to say goodbye.

A light breeze breathes into the sails on the unbending mast,

And the water froths with the churning oars.

55 Luckless, I follow the receding sails with my eyes,

As far as I can. The sand's soaked with my tears.

I beg the sprightly green sea-spirits for you to come quickly –

For you to hasten to destroy me. Obvious now.

You were supposed to return by my prayers. Have you returned for someone else?

60 What a fool. I fawned for a doom-bringing whore!

There's a natural mound overlooking the immense deep –

A cliff, in fact; it stands firm against the waters of the sea.

From there I knew your ship from my first glimpse of the sails.

An urge took me to rush through the surge.

65 While I wavered, there was a flash of purple on the prow.

I froze; those weren't your clothes.

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It came nearer. A swift breeze touched the ship to shore.

My heart quavered. I saw a woman's face.

That wasn't enough – why did I stay? I must have been mad –

70 Your girlfriend was entwined in your lap. She's a disgrace!

Then I ripped my clothes, took fists to my chest,

And scratched my stiff nails down wet cheeks.

I filled holy Ida with moaning and wailing.

That's where I took my tears – to my own rocks.

75 I hope Helen grieves like that. I hope she howls when her husband deserts her.

I hope she suffers everything she inflicted on me first.

These days they suit you, women who follow you over the open waters

And desert their lawful husbands.

But when you had nothing, were nothing but a cowherd driving cattle,

80 Only Oenone was that poor man's wife.

I'm not dazzled by wealth. Your kingdom means nothing to me.

Nor would being called Priam's son's wife, one out of so many.

Not that Priam would refuse a nymph for an in-law, mind you.

Hecuba wouldn't have to disown me.

85 I'm worthy to be the respectable wife of a man of means.

I have the hands that sceptres are made for.

Just because I lay with you on beech sprays, don't

Turn up your nose at me. I'm better in a royal purple bed.

CONCLUSIONS

- Lastly, my love isn't dangerous. Wars aren't raised for it.
- 90 Avenging ships don't come in with the tide.
- Runaway Helen is demanded back with threatening weapons.
- That's the wedding gift she brings to your bed. The unrivalled arrogance!
- Should she be returned to the Greeks? Ask Hector, your brother!
- Ask Deiphobus or Polydamas!
- 95 Or serious Antenor? What would Priam himself suggest?
- Ask them! Long life has taught them!
- Putting a woman you grabbed before your country? Shocking way to start.
- Your cause is an embarrassment. Her husband's right to take up arms.
- If you've got any sense, don't bet on her being faithful,
- 100 When your touchy-feeliness turned her head so quickly.
- Look at Menelaus, shouting about the pledges of a bed defiled,
- Nursing the wounds of a foreign fling.
- You'll cry too. There's no fixing it,
- Propriety outraged. It dies all at once.
- 105 She's on fire with love for you? That's what she told Menelaus.
- Now he's languishing in bed like a widower. More fool him.
- Andromache was happy. She did well marrying Hector, a steady husband.
- You could have held me, as your wife, to your brother's example.
- You, you're lighter than leaves, dry ones, flying on changing winds
- 110 With no sap for balance.
- There's less in you than a corn husk,

CONCLUSIONS

Hollowed out, bone-stiff, torched by the sun.

I remember it now. Your sister once used to sing of this.

She predicted it to me, her hair streaming loose:

115 ‘What are you doing, Oenone? Why bother sowing seeds in sand?

Your bulls are ploughing a beach. Nothing will grow.

There’s a Greek cow coming, nubile and young. You, country, home,

She’s to destroy them all! Oh, don’t let her! The Greek cow is coming!

It’s obscene! Sink the hull in the sea while there’s still time!

120 Ah, she brings so much blood for your people!’

Her voice was on the run. Her attendants seized her as she raved.

But my fair hair stood on end.

Cassandra, you were a prophet too true for me.

Look. That cow has my turf.

125 Let her be ever such a famous face, she’s still a cheater.

She abandoned her marriage gods, caught up with her guest.

Theseus – if I’ve got the name right –

Some lad named Theseus stole her from her fatherland before.

And did he give her back unused, randy teen that he was?

130 Where do I know such things from, you ask? I love.

Call it force, cover the blame with the name,

But someone dragged off so often must have let herself be taken.

But Oenone stays, unspoiled for a cheating husband –

CONCLUSIONS

And you could have been cheated in your own way!

135 Quick Satyrs – while I was on my guard, hidden in the woods –

Tried to find me on tearing feet, rabid rabble,

So did Pan, horny head wreathed in pine needles,

On the vast ridges where the mountain swells.

Apollo, builder of Troy, famously devoted, was the one who took me.

140 [He stripped me of my virginity.

And not without a fight – I tore hair, used nails,

Scored cheeks raw with my fingers.

And I didn't demand gems and gold, a price tag for rape.

Disgraceful, for presents to buy my body. I'm not a slave.

145 He condescended to give me his healing arts,]

Granted my hands his gifts.

Any plant with power, any root that helps heal,

Growing anywhere in the world – it's mine.

Pity I can't treat love with herbs.

150 I know my art, but art isn't enough.

[Didn't Apollo herd cattle in Pherae? Him, the actual inventor of that healing art.

And all because he was smitten by the same fire as me.]

Earth rich for growing plants can't help me.

A god can't help me. You can.

CONCLUSIONS

155 You can, and I deserve it. Your girl deserves it! Have mercy!

I don't come with Greeks and their bloody weapons.

I'm yours. I was with you when you were still a boy.

Let me be yours again for what time you have left. Please.

Canace

If any writing has got lost in dark stains,
The book's just been blotted by its owner's bloodshed.

My right hand holds a pen, the other a drawn blade,
And in my lap there's some unrolled paper.

- 5 Picture this: I'm Aeolus' child, writing to my brother.
Apparently this is how I do as my dad desires. He's so mean.
I wish he were here – a spectator for my slaughter,
His work despatched before his eyes.
But he's inhuman. Far harsher than his own winds.
- 10 I bet he wouldn't bat an eye as I cut myself.

It can't be coincidence, when he lives with the wild winds.
That guy suits his subjects.
They're his, southerly, westerly, north winds from Thrace,
His to command, even the southeasterlies, in all their pushy plumage.

- 15 Argh. He governs the winds, but can't govern his bloated temper.
His – his whole *kingdom's* smaller than his own excesses.

What good is it to be practically celestial in descent,
To be able to say I'm related to Jupiter?
Doesn't make it less lethal – so macabre – the blade

- 20 In a girl's hand. It's a weapon. I don't know how to hold it.

Macareus – that time that made us into one –

CONCLUSIONS

I wish I'd died first.

Your feelings were more than fraternal.

For you I was what it isn't right for a sister to be. Why?

25 Myself, I felt a kind of hot flush too. I'd heard it was, you know, something like this.

It was some sort of god, I guess, though my heart wasn't in it.

It had fled from my face. The colour, I mean. Wasting drained my limbs.

My mouth ate as little as it could, if it was forced.

Sleep wasn't easy, and a night lasted a year to me.

30 Also, groaning. I kept groaning, even though nothing was hurting me.

Why I did it, I couldn't even explain to myself.

I didn't understand what it was to make love; but I'd done it.

My nanny was first, she intuited something was wrong, with her old lady mind.

My nanny was first: 'Canace,' she said, 'you *like* someone!'

35 I went red, and embarrassment turned my 'pretty little eyes' straight between my legs.

That, in my silence, was enough to look like owning up.

And now it was swelling up, the burden of my injured womb,

And smuggling the load was weighing on my sickened limbs.

What plants, what drugs did my nanny not

40 Use on me, force up me, like she knew what she was doing with her hands?

All so that from deep inside my – this is the only thing you haven't seen –

My guts, the growing mass might be kicked out!

I want to cry. It's too alive. It resisted everything thrown at it, the – baby –

CONCLUSIONS

All her guiles, it kept up its guard against her marauding.

45 Now she'd filled nine times, pretty, pretty moon,

Now a tenth time – there was moonlight – she was preparing her horses.

Clueless what was causing the sudden cramps,

I wasn't ready for childbirth. Too raw for a fight.

And I couldn't hold in the noises. 'Why,' she says, 'are you giving away what you've done?'

50 And the old woman clamps shut my snitching mouth as I scream.

What can I do? I feel awful. Ragged bawls, pain wrings them out of me,

But fright – her – fear of being found out – they won't let me cry.

I clench against the bawling, snatch after words that slipped out.

I have to gulp them down, my own tears and all.

55 There, death was there, right there. The birth goddess refused to help.

And it would be grave evidence too, dying, if I died.

But then you fell on me. Shirt torn, hair torn,

Crushing my chest under yours, you warmed it back up,

Your words a blur: 'Sister, sister, darling, stay alive,

60 Stay alive, don't destroy two in one body.

Take strength from a good prospect; you're to be your brother's bride.

You're a mother by me, and you will be my wife.'

Dead. Believe me, I was. But still I revived at your words,

And it's done. Delivered, the charge and burden of my uterus. Of me.

65 What is there for you to celebrate? Aeolus sits right in the centre of the palace.

Someone has to smuggle out the evidence right under Dad's nose.

CONCLUSIONS

In with some produce, she hides the baby, with white olive branches,
Ceremonial bands, the bustling old woman,
And does made-up rites and utters words like she's praying.
70 They all give way for her rituals, even my dad.
She was almost at the door – a wail comes to my father's ears.
One sound and the baby's given himself away.
He tears out the baby, lays bare the invented rites.
Aeolus, I mean. The halls roar with his raving.

75 Like a bristling sea, scraped by a shiver of a breeze –
Like a bendy twig, pummelled by unfeeling south winds –
That's how rattled I was – my arms and legs went white. You should have seen them.
My body laid out on it set the bed quaking.
He thunders in and broadcasts to the world with his yelling that I'm a disgrace,
80 And can hardly keep from my unhappy face with his hands.
Facing him alone, full of embarrassment, nothing came out except tears.
Tongue numb, paralysed with ice.

And now the puny thing was to be given to dogs and birds, his own grandson –
His orders – to be dumped in a godforsaken place.
85 Wailing, the wretched thing – he understood, you'd think –
With the one noise he could make, he pleaded with his grandfather.

What sense did I have left then, do you think, brother mine –
You might find it in yourself –

CONCLUSIONS

When my – before my eyes, into deep woods, an enemy took
90 My own guts for mountain wolves to eat?

He was gone. Then it hit me. I hit myself
And went at my face with my nails.

While this was still going on some minion of my father with regret in his face
Came and blurted out things he shouldn't say:
95 'Aeolus sends you this sword.' He handed it over.
'You're to understand, from what you deserve, what he means.'

I understand. I'll use his blade, no fear – it'll be quick.
I shall take my father's gift to heart.
What gifts to bless my union, sire!
100 Give me this kind of bridal shower, Dad, and I'll be rich.

Take them far away – you liar – the torches – marriage god – the wedding ones –
And get away from this unspeakable house! Pick up your feet!
Bring me the brands you bear, black Furies.
Let light glare from that fire. My pyre.
105 Marry happy, with a better Fate, sisters.
I'm lost – but remember me, keep me in mind nonetheless?

What. Did. He. Do? The boy was out in the world for so few hours.
Barely born. What harm did he do his grandfather?

CONCLUSIONS

- If he could deserve death, let them think he did –
- 110 Oh, he doesn't deserve this. It's my fault he suffers.
- Newborn – mother's grief – prey for ravening animals –
- I can't – torn apart on your birth day –
- Newborn – poor proof of cursed lust –
- Your first day was your last.
- 115 I wasn't allowed to drench you in the tears I was supposed to,
- For your – not to clip hair for your grave.
- I didn't fall on you, didn't take a keepsake of cold kisses.
- They're greedily tearing apart my guts, the animals.
- When I stab myself I'll follow the baby.
- 120 They can't call me mother or bereft for long.
- But you, intended for a sister you couldn't have – unlucky –
- The scattered bits – I hope you're listening – the newborn bits, pick them up – his limbs –
- your child –
- And bring them back to his mother. Put us in – in the same grave.
- One urn can hold the two of us. At least it'll be cosy.
- 125 Stay alive, remembering me. Drop tears on – on the cuts.
- Don't stay away from the body that made love with yours.
- You – please – the wishes of the sister you liked too much
- Are yours to carry out.
- I'm going to do as Dad says. By myself.

Commentary

It is incumbent upon a feminist translation of the *Heroides* to avoid the easy assumptions of previous translations and attend to what the heroines themselves actually say. Chapter 3 demonstrated that Canace's experiences (*Her.* 11) are among the most traumatic of all the heroines, and Chapter 4 argued that Oenone (*Her.* 5) unambiguously describes experiences of sexual assault. The impact of these experiences is demonstrated by the poems' subversion and distortion of the tropes of Latin elegy. However, as Chapter 4 particularly argued, these effects can be lost in translations that rely too heavily on the more sincerely romantic English equivalents of those tropes. Producing contemporary versions of these poems therefore involves stripping the texts back to something more concrete and providing exegetical readings, in order to interrogate what the heroines do and do not say. These translations do not aim to supersede other versions, but to demonstrate how strikingly the whole sense of the poems changes if different interpretative decisions are made.

Anticipating a non-specialist contemporary readership, modernisation of the language and the use of blank verse are key strategies. It is well acknowledged in the discussion of translations and adaptations in Chapters 5 and 6 that these techniques can enable greater emotional directness and stronger distinctions between the voices of the different heroines. However, in poems such as *Her.* 5 and 11, it also compels the audience to confront uncomfortable aspects of the ancient world. In *Her.* 5, that aspect is the prevalence of rape in aetiological myths, and in *Her.* 11, the extreme youth of Roman brides, which would now be recognised as abusive. Neither of these aspects has been highlighted by other translators.

Modernisation and colloquialisation give Oenone a blunt, irreverent voice, and Canace a distinctly adolescent one. Oenone's unabashed contempt for the behaviour of all who have harmed her, whether god or mortal, is exemplified by the phrase 'better-looking with her kit off' (35, *sumptisque decentior armis ... nuda*, of Minerva, punning on *arma* as military kit: *OLD* 2a), as

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well as colloquialisms such as ‘more fool him’ (106, *credulus ille*) and ‘randy teen’ (129, *iuvene et cupido*). In *Her.* 11, Canace is characterised as a formerly lively teenager who has suffered serial trauma and been failed by those who should have helped. Throughout, *pater* is translated not as ‘father’ but the more colloquial ‘dad’, underlining the shocking violence within what should have been a safe familial relationship. The culturally familiar railing of a teenager against an overly strict parent – ‘he’s so mean’ (6, *duro*), ‘I bet he wouldn’t bat an eye’ (10, *spectasset siccis ... genis*) – is macabre in its entirely literal context. Euphemisms such as ‘between my legs’ (35, *gremioque*) and ‘I’d done it’ (32, *illud eram*), and teasing infantilisations from others such as ‘You like someone!’ (34, *amas*), further heighten the sense of teenage immaturity, while *vulnera* (10, 125) become ‘cuts’, characterising her as at demonstrable risk of self-harm. Maintaining these mannerisms throughout prevents readers from forgetting that the speaker would now be considered underage and in need of safeguarding.

To avoid incongruous formality, exclamations of grief such as *heu, ei mihi* and *a* are rendered either as homophonic vocalisations such as ‘ha’ (5.49) or ‘argh’ (11.15), or to exegetical expressions such as ‘what a fool’ (5.60) or ‘I feel awful’ (11.51). Metrical effects that are not obvious when not read aloud, like the heavily spondaic *quid puer admisit tam paucis editus horis* (11.107), are highlighted with typographical quirks such as a full stop after every word, used on internet forums to sound angrily emphatic (‘What. Did. He. Do?’). *Her.* 11 also contains a striking number of elisions, rendered with hesitant parentheses and repetitions (implying a reluctance to speak clearly) or with additional phrases describing speech so quick it slurs (‘your words a blur’, 59). Canace often defers the nominative, suggesting an aversion to explicitness. In a synthetic target language where word order is less flexible, these phrases are augmented, such as at 27 (‘the colour, I mean’) and 74 (‘Aeolus, I mean’). The added ‘I mean’ suggests disorganised extemporisation, as if Canace periodically loses her thread and has to clarify.

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Translating without a regular metre also avoids the need to rearrange lines in which the word order completely breaks down, reflecting loss of emotional control (5.39; 11.101, 122).

In both poems, I continue previous translators' practice of translating culturally specific references exegetically for the benefit of non-specialist readers. Allusions to gods in religious contexts illustrate the significance of their invocations: *virides Nereidas* (5.57) are 'sprightly green sea-spirits', while Lucina and Hymen (11.55, 101) are 'birth goddess' and 'marriage god'. *Mycenaea* (2) becomes 'the Greek you cuckolded', to explain why Paris would be reluctant to read a note from him. For *iuvenca* (117), to underline the heifer's disruptive significance while still retaining the English slang of 'cow' (also accessed by Clare Pollard), the translation gives 'a Greek cow ... nubile and young'. In *Her.* 11, exegetical readings have the broader aim of combining Canace's youthful uncomplicatedness and direct diction with the horrors she describes. 'It's a weapon. I don't know how to hold it' (20) draws out the understated helplessness of *non mea tela*. The peculiar usage of *si tamen* (1), often left untranslated, is transposed to line 2 to become 'just'; Canace is disturbingly detached about her own bloodshed. Perhaps speculatively, *violento* (97) is taken as a transferred epithet for Aeolus as much as describing the *ensis*: an unpredictably violent figure whose capricious orders have instant and irrevocable consequences. The shockingly placid acceptance of Canace's 'it'll be quick' thus underlines both the cruelty of *violento* and the fact that, had she hesitated, she might have survived.

A recurring theme in this connection is that Canace is left alone when she should not have been, as a young girl of rank, let alone one in a vulnerable state. The emotional undertone of the closed condition 'I wish he were here' (7, *ipse ... adesse!*) underscores Canace's current isolation, and in the second half of the poem this particularly needs emphasising. The narrative moves in such rapid jumps, and is so dominated by what has already occurred, that it is easy to forget that Canace is writing a letter to her brother because he is not there, and the final tragedy can only occur because he does not return in time. The Latin contains only a few references to this fact,

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and so the translation expands them for a readership less familiar with the myth. Canace's repeated use of *ipsa* is expanded to 'by myself' and similar (81, 128). Macareus' absence is emphasised by making her addresses to him pointed: 'you should have seen them' (77, *videres*), implying 'if you were here, which you aren't'; 'I hope you're listening' (122, *precor*), because she cannot ask him in person; and 'don't stay away' (125, *neve reformida*), as he has until then.

Conversely, exegesis also highlights Canace's former spirit, as demonstrated by the witty wind imagery used in her adolescent railing against Aeolus (11–16) and her sardonic acceptance of the sword as a 'bridal shower' (100, *dos*) that she will 'take to heart' (98, *pectoribus condam*). Previous translations of *hoc te celavimus unum* (41) have tended to assume that the thing concealed from Macareus was the pregnancy. However, the parenthesis occurs not in conjunction with the *onus* in 42 but halfway through *mea ... viscera*. Thus the translation suggests a bleakly humorous allusion to 'the only bit of me you haven't seen': her insides.

Both heroines subvert the usual tropes of Latin elegy to recount experiences of sexual assault. A combination of exegetical readings and concrete, literal translations of conventionally metaphorical phrases deliberately resists previous translations' assumptions that the heroines find either romance or immorality in their own stories. To this end, *amo* and its compounds are translated with particular care. Oenone first uses *amavit* (139) before going on to describe an unambiguously violent assault. The translation thus starts from the purely physical definition of 'make love to' (*OLD* 4) and plays sardonically on the English slang usage of 'take' to create a phrase that gains a more violent edge through the subsequent lines. Oenone is characterised throughout as an unabashed yet jaded narrator who would use this kind of barbed wordplay to defy any pre-existing belief that the encounter was consensual. This is also translated in Oenone's contemptuous view of Paris' treatment of Helen. His sexual entitlement is foregrounded by translating *raptam* (97) as 'a girl you grabbed' and *amplexus* (100) as 'touchy-feeliness' rather than simply 'embraces' or 'caresses'.

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Conversely, since Canace is read as a girl of perhaps fourteen or fifteen, her apparent belief that her experiences constitute those of an *amans* should be alarming for the reader. Her strikingly ambivalent description of her feelings at 21–6 is heightened to suggest that things happened too quickly for her to take in, and that her feelings were not what she had heard they were supposed to be. In agreement with the argument of Casali (1998) that 27–30 describe the physical symptoms of morning sickness, ‘hot flush’ (25, *incalui*) ambiguously retains a physical quality rather than becoming a purely elegiac love metaphor. ‘I guess’ (26, *nescio quem*) has a non-committal colloquiality that stresses her reluctance to call it love even when directly addressing her brother. Most importantly, ‘my heart wasn’t in it’ (26, *corde tepente*) resists the reading of *tepeo* as a warm cosy affection (*OLD 2*) favoured by other translations, instead suggesting that her feelings were lukewarm at best (*OLD 3*). Particles such as ‘kind of’ and ‘you know’, although not present in the Latin, develop the sense of an embarrassed teenager hoping the listener will fill in the gaps so she does not have to finish the sentence.

Given this ambivalence, it would be odd to read *amans* (32) straightforwardly as ‘lover’. Instead, Canace, maintaining her concrete style of narration, does not use *amans* emotionally to mean ‘someone in love’, but physically to mean ‘someone who is a lover’, and does what (she has heard) a lover does, that is, be a sexual partner (*OLD 2* again). The translation ‘I didn’t understand what it was to make love’ is far harder to romanticise as the endearing innocence of first love, and instead disturbingly re-emphasises Canace’s youth. This also amplifies the striking use of the neuter *illud* of herself in the same line. For the same reason, although the polyptoton suggests reciprocity, *corpus amantis amans* (126) becomes ‘the body that made love with yours’. Even if Canace, being a young teenager who has been seduced, has decided this must be love and professes it, a reader who knows this context should not simply accept this and read the poem as a poignant love letter (see further the translation of *sperate* (121) as ‘intended’, not ‘longed for’). This is also important in 57–8, where the translation does not romanticise

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Macareus' inappropriate vehemence, which borders on violence and perhaps hints at his earlier behaviour. It also retains the ambiguity of whose shirt and hair are torn. In the more unambiguously violent context of *Her.* 5, *rupi tamen ungue capillos, | oraque sunt digitis aspera facta meis* (141–2) is translated similarly without possessives (as critics have disagreed; see Chapter 3, n. 57).

Another highly loaded word is *pudor* and its compounds, often translated in both poems – apparently straightforwardly – as ‘shame’ (see Chapter 4: ‘Purity and shame’). Oenone, herself always unabashed, uses *pudendus* twice of Paris (5.44, 98), while Canace uses *pudor* of herself throughout (first at 11.35). In both cases, it is translated as ‘embarrassment’. For Oenone, this conveys more contempt and accusation: Paris’ actions disgrace those around him as well as himself, and are thus ‘an embarrassment’ or ‘to be embarrassed about’. Meanwhile, Canace’s lack of any moral comprehension, let alone regret, makes it difficult to justify using ‘shame’.

‘Embarrassment’ has less moral weight, suggesting that Canace cannot grasp the enormity of her situation and is more embarrassed by talking about what has been done to her. Translations of more legalistic terms for wrongdoing, especially *crimen* (49, 64), avoid inappropriate connotations of religious sin with phrases such as the tersely disapproving ‘what you’ve done’.

In translating the abortion attempt of 11.39–44, it is crucial for a feminist reading to avoid English terms that project moral judgements onto a text where they are not present. Canace’s account is striking for withholding any opinion on the episode, positive or negative. Thus *audaci ... manu* (40) is rendered (with a strongly implied negation) as ‘like she knew what she was doing with her hands’. This does not assume a moral judgement of the nurse’s actions, favourable or otherwise, as respectively ‘fearless’ or ‘shameless’ would. Rather, it recalls backstreet abortionists with no medical training, who have often caused serious or fatal complications even where their intentions were benign. Building on a morally neutral but reproachful reading of *audaci* as ‘presumptuous’, this translation suggests that the nurse sought to help, but claimed expertise

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where she had none, and proceeded without consulting Canace. The strengthening of *supposuit* to ‘force up me’ also emphasises *audaci* as a heedless violation of intimate boundaries.

Similar sensitivity is required in translating *tecto tutus ab hoste fuit* (44). Translating the phrase as ‘it was safe from its hidden enemy’ would remove the sense of reciprocal enmity implied by the military term *hoste* (not the personal *inimicus*), and could imply that Canace feels moral guilt for becoming inimical to her own child. Such phrasing in a modern context is redolent of anti-abortion rhetoric and is not the sense of the Latin, which earlier related that the pregnancy was making her ill (37–8). Translating *tutus* as ‘kept up its guard’ rather than ‘safe’ thus retains the sense that the foetus and Canace were mutually inimical.

As demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, Oenone and Canace’s accounts of their experiences have been particularly susceptible to debatable readings in translations influenced by unexamined biases. The passages of my own translations explored here represent my aim to recast those accounts in a progressive twenty-first-century light. The poems are strikingly altered when translated with these different preconceptions. This demonstrates how critical it is, in order for new readerships to continue to find meaning in the poems, that new versions continue to supplement and challenge versions translated from other ideological standpoints.

Appendix 1: alliteration analyser

To assess the frequency of alliteration across the epistles translated by Verducci, I wrote a Python script to count repeated initial letters in each line of a poem. The script works as follows:

1. Accesses a text file containing the full poem.
2. Uses the `readlines()` and `split()` functions to split each line into its component words, then iterates over each word to create a list of initial letters. This list is passed to a dictionary of the form `line number: [initial letters]`.
3. Uses the `count()` function to count the instances of each letter in that dictionary and passes any repeated letter to a second dictionary of the form `letter: [number of uses]`.
4. For each letter used more than once, prints the line in which it occurs and prompts the user to accept whether or not to count it.
5. Creates a text file containing each accepted instance in the following format:

```
Line number of a line containing repeated letters
[x] uses of [letter]
Full text of line containing repeated letters.
Total number of accepted instances of alliteration found.
```

The user can use the program's output to estimate the frequency of alliteration, dividing the total accepted instances by the number of lines in the poem.

The program has some limitations and is not designed to output empirical data, but to draw the user's attention to lines for investigation. The user must examine flagged lines and assess which ones contain noteworthy alliteration. In general, the more instances in a single line, the more noteworthy a line will be. For instance, in *Her.* 10.40 the program detects 2 uses of 'v' and 2 of 'm', in a line that turns out to read *verbera cum verbis mixta fuere meis*. The program also helps survey

the density of alliteration across a longer passage, based on how many consecutive or nearby lines are flagged.

In many cases two uses of a single letter in a line will turn out not to be significant. For example, it detects repeated particles, such as *sive ... sive*, and entire repeated words or phrases (an intentional effect, but not primarily an alliterative one). However, it is still worth the program being sensitive to these, because there may be other consonant effects in the line complementing those that are flagged. For instance, in *Her.* 15.128 the program flags two uses of ‘s’. Further investigation shows that the line also contains the word *supposuisse*, creating an effect of more substantial sibilance than is suggested by the data alone.

There follows a sample of the output from *Her.* 10.1–30 without filtering, but with those that would be accepted in bold. Table 2 below displays the data obtained from analysis of all six poems translated by Verducci, with irrelevant instances rejected by the user. No significant differences were found in frequency of alliteration between the 1914 Loeb text she used and Dörrie’s edition.

Alliteration in each poem

Poem	Number of lines	Instances of alliteration	Average per line
3	154	60	0.4
6	164	56	0.3
10	150	84	0.6
11	128	44	0.3
12	212	83	0.4
15	220	79	0.4

Table 2: user-filtered analysis of output of poemAnalyser.py on Verducci's Heroides text

Heroides 10.1-30 analysis**Line 3**

2 uses of l

2 uses of t

quae legis, ex illo, Theseu, tibi litore mitto

Line 4

2 uses of t

unde tuam sine me vela tulere ratem,

Line 5

3 uses of m

in quo me somnusque meus male prodidit et tu,

Line 7

2 uses of t

2 uses of p

Tempus erat, vitrea quo primum terra pruina

Line 11

2 uses of r

nullus erat! referoque manus iterumque retempto,

Line 13

2 uses of s

excussere metus somnum; conterrita surgo,

Line 15

3 uses of p

protinus adductis sonuerunt pectora palmis,

Line 16

3 uses of e

utque erat e somno turbida, rapta coma est.

Line 17

2 uses of l

2 uses of s

Luna fuit; specto, siquid nisi litora cernam.

Line 18

2 uses of n

quod videant oculi, nil nisi litus habent.

Line 19

2 uses of n

nunc huc, nunc illuc, et utroque sine ordine, curro;

Line 20

2 uses of p

alta puellares tardat harena pedes.

Line 21

2 uses of t

interea toto clamanti litore Theseu!

Line 23

2 uses of e

2 uses of t

et quotiens ego te, totiens locus ipse vocabat.

Line 25

2 uses of f

Mons fuit - apparent frutices in vertice rari;

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