



‘Some Myths Need to be Ripped Apart’ (Iizuka): The Violence of Reception and Reception of Violence in Naomi Iizuka’s *Polaroid Stories: An Adaptation of Ovid’s Metamorphoses*

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Abstract

Naomi Iizuka’s *Polaroid Stories* (1997) combines a stage adaptation of selected tales from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* with the stories of homeless young people. Iizuka’s use of these two sources in her play provides a new insight into Ovid’s treatment of the theme of sexual violence in the *Metamorphoses* as well as exposing the dangers faced by young people on city streets today. In particular, looking at the two texts exposes the link between sexual violence and linguistic violence in the silencing of victims and the refusal of victims to be silenced. Alongside exploring Iizuka’s reception of the sexual violence portrayed in the *Metamorphoses*, this article uses a feminist reception theory to analyse Iizuka’s own literary act of violence in her reception of Ovid. Does Iizuka simply present Ovid’s tales and their concern with sexual violence in a more modern setting, or does she violently dismember Ovid’s text to produce a play that criticizes his portrayal of victims of sexual violence in the *Metamorphoses*? In some ways the techniques Iizuka uses to give the characters in her play a strong voice against the violence they face are similar to those that can be identified in Ovid. However, Iizuka can be seen to use those techniques against the author she emulates in order to give a voice to characters he had silenced.

Introduction

Alison Sharrock’s 2020 article on gender in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* identifies two categories of feminist readings of Classical texts: a ‘resisting’ reading, which ‘identifies the chauvinist, sexist, or other ideology of the text but refuses to play along with it’, and a ‘recuperative’ reading which ‘opens up possibilities for women’s voices which exist in the text, but which have traditionally been downplayed by the

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critical establishment'.¹ This reflects a conflict among feminist scholars over how to respond to portrayals of women in male-authored Classical texts. Endorsing the 'resisting' approach, Patricia Klindienst compares female writers using Classical myth to 'thieves of language',² while Fiona Cox describes the 'duet of male original and female transgressor'.³ Both scholars present an essential conflict between female writers and Classical authors, stealing from and trespassing on texts in order to make their mark on Classics. However, Lillian Doherty criticizes the view that 'a modern preoccupation with gender *conflict* [...] has distorted our view of the ancient myths', arguing that, instead, 'a hard honest look at the ancient texts reveals an equal preoccupation with gender conflict'.⁴ Doherty's view suggests that writers can harness and recuperate the emphasis on gender conflict already present in Classical texts, rather than resisting and distorting Classical authors' intentions by turning them forcefully to feminist ends. Genevieve Liveley suggests that both forms of reading may be important to feminist reception when she claims that 'it is those who resist the legendary charms of his song, like the women who tear the poet apart and scatter pieces of his corpus abroad, who keep the head and lyre of Orpheus singing still'.⁵ This image shows how feminist authors may recuperate the essence of Classical myths even as they violently resist elements of them.

Orpheus and the female reception of his myth will be important to my exploration of this debate as I focus on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and its adaptation in *Polaroid Stories* (1997), a play by Japanese-American playwright Naomi Iizuka.⁶ Iizuka is a little-known playwright who studied Classical literature at Yale and often writes plays which fuse Classical myth with stories of society's outsiders.⁷ Apart from *Polaroid Stories*, *Anon(ymous)* (2006) tells the story of a refugee mother and son through the *Odyssey*,⁸ and *Freak* (2008, with Ryan Pavelchik) fuses the myth of Pygmalion with the tale of a girl who is ostracized at school because she might be a

¹ A. Sharrock, 'Gender and Transformation: Reading, Women, and Gender in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in *Metamorphic Readings: Transformation, Language, and Gender in the Interpretation of Ovid's Metamorphoses*, ed. A. Sharrock, D. Möller, and M. Malm, Oxford, 2020, pp. 33–53 (35).

² P. Klindienst, 'The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours', in *Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World: Readings and Sources*, ed. L. K. McClure, Oxford, 2002 pp. 257–92 (259–60).

³ F. Cox, 'Generic "Transgressions" and the Personal Voice', in *Reading Poetry, Writing Genre: English Poetry and Literary Criticism in Dialogue with Classical Scholarship*, ed. S. Bär and E. Hauser, London, 2019, pp. 172–86 (173).

⁴ L. Doherty, *Gender and the Interpretation of Classical Myth*, New York, New York, 2003, p. 12 [Doherty's italics].

⁵ G. Liveley, 'Orpheus and Eurydice', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. V. Zajko and H. Hoyle, Hoboken, New Jersey, 2017, pp. 287–98 (287–8).

⁶ The play is N. Iizuka, *Polaroid Stories*, Woodstock, Illinois, 1997, referred to as *PS* in in-text citations. For the *Metamorphoses*, Latin quotations are from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. R. J. Tarrant, Oxford, 2004, referred to as *Met.* in in-text citations. Translations are my own.

⁷ M. Berson, 'Naomi Iizuka: Raising the Stakes', *American Theatre* 15, 1998, 7, pp. 56–7 (56); D. Amoto, "'This was like a thousand years ago...': Remembering the Plays of Naomi Iizuka', *Theatre Forum* 0, 2000, 17 pp. 12–16 (13).

⁸ Iizuka, *Anon(ymous)*, *American Theatre* 24, 2007, 2, pp. 61–77.

robot.⁹ Iizuka also often writes about violence against women and girls. *Good Kids* (2014) tells the story of a teenage victim of gang rape, and was inspired by a real incident in 2012–2013.¹⁰ A performance of *Good Kids* was criticized for encouraging ‘performative neutrality’ around rape by failing to unambiguously cast the teenage rapists as responsible.¹¹ Similarly, a reviewer in *Forty-Niner* criticizes *Polaroid Stories*’ ambiguity, arguing that the play is ‘unable to make up its mind on whether or not to criticise or simply show to audiences what is the reality for the homeless youth of America’.¹² Charles Segal makes similar comments about Ovid, saying that ‘it is hard to know whether Ovid is just opportunistically exploiting the tastes of his time [for violence] or whether he protests against them’.¹³ The similarity of response to the two texts makes *Polaroid Stories* an excellent source for exploring the benefits of a resisting or recuperating model for the reception of Ovid.

Ovid’s ambiguity has made him a focus for debates around the portrayal of gender in Classical writing. Jacqueline Fabre-Serris argues that ‘Ovid is the ancient author most interested in examining erotic feelings and sexual situations from a female perspective’.¹⁴ However, Ovid’s ‘interest’ in the ‘female perspective’ may or may not be benign. Sharrock points out that while ‘these representations could be taken as sympathetic exposure of the damage done to women [...] the problem is that they could equally well be enactment and even fetishization of it’.¹⁵ Elissa Marder suggests that in any case Ovid cannot sufficiently expose the difficult lives of women because ‘[t] here are no “real” women in Ovid’s text—only allegories of representations of gendered subject positions. A reading of Ovid can have no direct, mimetic applicability to the plight of particular oppressed “real women”’.¹⁶ In her view, Ovid’s work simply presents male-authored myths, or worse fetishes, about female subjectivity.

In *Polaroid Stories*, Iizuka attempts to apply Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to the plight of ‘real’ homeless women, whom she spoke with while developing her play.¹⁷ Each character is both a homeless young person and a character from the *Metamorphoses*: key figures include Orpheus, Eurydice, Echo, Narcissus, Philomela, and Pen-theus. In joining these myths with the lives of real homeless women, does Iizuka resist Ovid’s failure to present the reality of women’s lives in his epic, or does she

⁹ Iizuka and Pavelchik, *Freak*, New York, New York, 2008, <https://www.playscripts.com/sample/1463> [accessed 26 October 2022].

¹⁰ Iizuka, *Good Kids*, New York, 2015, <https://www.playscripts.com/sample/2822> [accessed 26 October 2022].

¹¹ L. G. Spencer, ‘Performative Neutrality and Rape Culture in Naomi Iizuka’s *Good Kids*’, *Text and Performance Quarterly* 3, 2020, pp. 211–30 (212).

¹² *Forty-Niner*, ‘Compelling, yet Shallow: CalRep Introduces “Polaroid Stories” at the University Theater’, *Forty-Niner*, 2017, <https://daily49er.com/artslife/2017/11/19/compelling-yet-shallow-calrep-introduces-polaroid-stories-at-the-university-theater/> [accessed 26 October 2022].

¹³ C. Segal, ‘Ovid’s Metamorphic Bodies: Art, Gender, and Violence in the *Metamorphoses*’, *Arion* 5, 1998, 3, pp. 9–41 (37).

¹⁴ J. Fabre-Serris, ‘Desire and Rape in the Feminine: The Tales of Echo and Salmacis: An Ovidian Answer to Propertius 1.20?’, *Helios* 45, 2018, pp. 127–44 (127).

¹⁵ Sharrock, ‘Gender and Transformation’ (n. 1 above), p. 45.

¹⁶ E. Marder, ‘Disarticulated Voices: Feminism and Philomela’, *Hypatia* 7, 1992, pp. 148–66 (155).

¹⁷ Berson, ‘Naomi Iizuka’ (n. 7 above), pp. 56–7.

recuperate aspects of the *Metamorphoses* that sympathetically present female experiences of life?

Sexual Violence

Genevieve Liveley, above, highlights the tale of Orpheus as a key battleground for feminist reception.¹⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly therefore, Orpheus and Eurydice are central characters in *Polaroid Stories*. Iizuka's Orpheus is a stalkerish lover who wants to control Eurydice's movements, speech, and thoughts. Eurydice introduces him as 'a man like a bad dream/follows me no matter where I go' and then describes how 'he's all/shut up, you ain't going nowhere, what are you thinking, girl, who are you kidding?' (*PS*: 12). In some productions, Orpheus' control over Eurydice has been additionally represented through elements like costume: in one production Eurydice wears a shirt 'strongly resembling a strait jacket which creates feelings of entrapment or entanglement, mirroring her controlling relationship with Orpheus'.¹⁹ For the majority of the play, Eurydice flees this damaging relationship, reflecting a common situation among homeless women. A 2011 Canadian study reported that 'it was more common for the women in the study to experience homelessness as the alternative to a "bad" relationship' since 'homelessness for the majority represented regaining control rather than losing control over their lives and relationships'. Meanwhile 'the male participants were more likely to frame their experiences in terms of continued personal agency and choice'.²⁰ Iizuka's Orpheus and Eurydice reflect this situation as Eurydice travels the streets to escape Orpheus and regain enough control to 'go someplace in this damn life' (*PS*: 12). Meanwhile Orpheus chooses to pursue Eurydice, telling her that 'i'm going to come bring you back [...] i'm going to rescue you' (*PS*: 42). He refuses to believe that she does not want to come back.

Women flee men like Iizuka's Orpheus throughout the *Metamorphoses*, from Daphne (*Met.* 1.490-565) to Scylla (*Met.* 13.917-14.24). Often these men seek to control the lives and especially the appearance of the women they chase. Apollo, in pursuit of Daphne, 'spectat inornatos collo pendere capillos/et "quid, si comantur?" ait' (sees that her hair hangs disordered on her neck and thinks 'What if it was styled?') (*Met.* 1.497-8). Like Iizuka's Orpheus, Apollo wants the woman he loves to sit still and keep her beautiful hair in order rather than roam the woods and 'go someplace in this damn life' (*PS*: 12). Additionally, these men refuse to believe the women they chase would reject them. Leo Curran calls Apollo 'a fatuous pest who will not take "no" for an answer' and who, although presented comically, is a 'formidable' threat to Daphne.²¹ Even when Daphne has managed to get herself turned

¹⁸ Liveley 'Orpheus and Eurydice' (n. 5 above), pp. 288–9.

¹⁹ A. L. Martin, 'Infusing High Fashion Streetwear with Personal History: Creating the Costume Design for *Polaroid Stories*', MA Thesis, California State University, 2018, p. 3.

²⁰ M. E. Jones, M. L. Shier, and J. R. Graham, 'Intimate Relationships as Routes into and out of Homelessness: Insights from a Canadian City', *Journal of Social Policy* 41, 2011, pp. 101–17 (108).

²¹ L. C. Curran, 'Rape and Rape Victims in the "Metamorphoses"', *Arethusa* 11, 1978, pp. 213–41 (221).

into a tree to escape Apollo, the god takes her leaves as his own,²² presenting this as a gift for Daphne, since ‘meum intonsis caput est iuuenale capillis, / tu quoque perpetuos semper gere frondis honores’ (my head is youthful with uncut hair; you also: wear your eternal honour always in your leaves) (*Met.* 1.564-5). Apollo offers Daphne eternal honour through association with him, as the laurel’s leaves are ever-green and remain alive in winter for men to constantly admire.²³ He is uncaring that she previously asked her father to ‘perde figuram’ (Destroy my body) (*Met.* 1.547) to escape him. Already determined to sacrifice her body, hair, and all that had made her beautiful to Apollo, she is unlikely to rejoice at receiving eternal renown through association with him. However, Apollo, gazing along with Ovid and the reader at the tree Daphne has become, observes how the ‘laurea ramis/adnuat utque caput visa est agitasse cacumen’ (the laurel branches nodded and the treetop, her head, seemed to move) (*Met.* 1.567-8). Ovid implies that Apollo interprets this nodding as Daphne’s approval of him claiming her leaves. However, Warren Ginsberg points out that while Ovid indicates that the tree that is Daphne *adnuat* (nodded), *visa est* (seemed) is inserted in the next line, making the nodding uncertain.²⁴ Ovid thus hints that the reader should not be convinced by the tree’s seeming nod. However, since laurel leaves are associated with Apollo the reader knows that Apollo ignores the uncertainty and unlikelihood of Daphne’s assent and claims her leaves anyway, determined to believe that she wants to be his. Similarly, Iizuka’s Orpheus continues to expect Eurydice to return to him, although she tells him she is ‘dead to you, freak’ (*PS*: 42). When she says directly ‘i don’t want to come back’, he insists ‘i know that ain’t true’ (*PS*: 42). Both Ovid’s and Iizuka’s women flee men who are determined to force themselves upon them, no matter how clearly their attentions are refused.

Although Iizuka’s Orpheus and Eurydice reflect Ovidian themes from tales like Apollo and Daphne, they contrast with Ovid’s own Orpheus and Eurydice, who are apparently deeply in love. Like Iizuka’s, Ovid’s Orpheus follows Eurydice to the underworld after her death (a less metaphorical death than that which Iizuka’s Eurydice claims) because he loves her (*Met.* 10. 25-6). However, unlike in *Polaroid Stories*, his love is returned, so much so that Eurydice cannot complain when he looks back and condemns her to Hades ‘quid enim nisi se querentur amatam?’ (for what complaint could she make except that she was loved) (*Met.* 10.61). I will interrogate this problematic silence shortly, but at face value it suggests mutual love between Ovid’s Orpheus and Eurydice. Iizuka transforms this relationship into one more reminiscent of Ovidian rape scenes where women flee men who will not be refused.

Iizuka is not the only female writer to transform Ovid’s Orpheus and Eurydice. Genevieve Lively highlights the ‘hostility surrounding Orpheus’ reception by women—in stark contrast to the positive response evinced by every other

²² W. Ginsberg, ‘Ovid’s “Metamorphoses” and the Politics of Interpretation’, *The Classical Journal* 84, 1989, pp. 222–31 (225–7); C. Lillie, *The Rape of Eve: The Transformation of Roman Ideology in Three Early Christian Retellings of Genesis*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2017, p. 138.

²³ See the translation of these lines in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, Oxford, 1986, p. 18.

²⁴ Ginsberg, ‘Politics of Interpretation’ (n. 22 above), p. 226.

audience'.²⁵ Examples of this include Carol Ann Duffy's 1999 'Eurydice', where Eurydice tricks Orpheus into looking back so that she can return to the peaceful underworld without him,²⁶ and Adrienne Rich's 1968 'I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus', which ambiguously but powerfully describes 'a woman feeling the fullness of her powers/at the precise moment when she must not use them', while she drives her 'dead poet' through the underworld.²⁷ Why should female writers choose a story about a devoted husband and wife to expose unequal relationships endured by women?

Kathryn Hume suggests that Orpheus attracts writers of all genders because 'as a superb musician, he can stand for The Artist'.²⁸ Writers are drawn to the Orpheus myth because it encourages metapoetic, self-reflexive writing and allows the writer to subtly boast of their skill, placing their own art in competition with Orpheus'. William Anderson points out that even Ovid found this idea alluring, since '[w]hereas Vergil prudently avoided the challenge of reproducing the ineffable song by which Orpheus conquered death', Ovid places his own words in the great poet's mouth. Instead of the expected glorious poetry, Anderson considers that Ovid 'deliberately contrives a pompous, unconvincing speech'.²⁹ Russ VerSteege and Nina Barclay agree that the unpolished speech parodies first-century rhetoric.³⁰ However, their denial that Ovid's 'unconvincing' portrayal of Orpheus' speech could be described as a 'bold step' misses an important aspect of his endeavour.³¹ Ovid demonstrates that he is 'bold' compared with Virgil simply by attempting to represent Orpheus' song at all. Furthermore, in presenting Orpheus' poetry as only worthy of parody and therefore of a lower grade than his own, he contests Orpheus' status as the greatest of all poets. John Heath argues that Ovid thus presents Orpheus' 'inherently unheroic nature', perhaps even prefiguring unflattering feminist reception of Orpheus.³²

However, if Ovid does challenge Orpheus' heroism it is, as Segal suggests, an 'attack on heroic seriousness',³³ and a comic lampoon. For female writers this competition with the male poet of poets is not comic but a serious challenge to patriarchal conceptions of poetry. Although Genevieve Liveley claims that 'Both Virgil's and Ovid's "revisionist mythmaking" returned female voices and feminist

²⁵ Liveley 'Orpheus and Eurydice' (n. 5 above), pp. 288–9.

²⁶ Duffy, 'Eurydice', 1999, <https://genius.com/Carol-ann-duffy-eurydice-annotated> [accessed 26 October 2022].

²⁷ Rich, 'I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus', 1968, <https://poetryarchive.org/poem/i-dream-im-death-orpheus/>, [accessed 26 October 2022].

²⁸ K. Hume, *The Metamorphoses of Myth in Fiction since 1960*, London, 2020, p. 57.

²⁹ W. S. Anderson, 'Notes', in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Books 6–10, ed. W. S. Anderson, Norman, Oklahoma, 1972, p. 475.

³⁰ R. VerSteege and N. Barclay, 'Rhetoric and Law in Ovid's Orpheus', *Law and Literature* 15, 2003, pp. 395–420 (415).

³¹ Ibid.

³² J. Heath, 'The Stupor of Orpheus: Ovid's "Metamorphoses" 10.64–71', *The Classical Journal* 91, 1996, pp. 353–70 (354).

³³ C. Segal, 'Ovid's Orpheus and Augustan Ideology', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 103, 1972, pp. 473–94 (492).

perspectives to the core of the Orpheus myth',³⁴ a return to Eurydice's silence after Orpheus' fateful glance back shows that female silence is central to Ovid's presentation of this myth, at least where Eurydice is involved.³⁵ As Gregory Charles Lendvay points out, 'The image is decidedly one-sided. Orpheus' intentions, motives, drives are the issue. Eurydice accepts being an object of love and makes no complaint against Orpheus'.³⁶ Eurydice's silence, while it may indicate her love for Orpheus, also implies complicity in patriarchal concepts of the wife as an unspeaking object of love. The five lines of regret and anger that Virgil's Eurydice expresses at this juncture fade into passivity in Ovid, with Eurydice's capacity for anger denied by Orpheus' overwhelming love.³⁷ Richard Spencer, following Segal, argues that Ovid 'reverses the sympathies which Vergil strives to generate for Orpheus and Eurydice, shifting sympathetic identification away from Eurydice to Orpheus'.³⁸ Faced with Ovid's presentation of this story, it is even more imperative for feminist writers to strengthen Eurydice's voice.

In her telling of Orpheus' and Eurydice's story, Iizuka enters this feminist tradition of critical reception by highlighting Orpheus' prioritization of his voice over Eurydice's. When Eurydice introduces Orpheus, she says 'he's all/shut up, you ain't going nowhere, what are you thinking, girl, who are you kidding' (*PS*: 12). Orpheus' attempt to block her speech defines him for Eurydice, representing his control over her and her dreams. When Orpheus enters stage, his third line is 'shut up' and his refrain is 'i'm talking to you', with which he continuously interrupts Eurydice (*PS*: 13-15). She, as his love-object, must listen when he speaks without speaking herself.

However, Eurydice claims a powerful voice in the play, telling her story to 'anybody who's listening' as she flees Orpheus (*PS*: 11). She resists her passive Ovidian role and for the majority of the play, rather than Eurydice meekly and silently following Orpheus out of the underworld, Orpheus follows Eurydice, trying to entice her back. As Eurydice says, 'i got a man like a bad dream/follows me no matter where i go' (*PS*: 12). When Eurydice eventually does follow Orpheus, she holds a knife, and when Orpheus turns to look at her, he meets his death at her hands, rather than watching her fade back into death (*PS*: 82-4). Iizuka's Eurydice resists everything about Ovid's telling of her myth, to the extent of murdering Ovid's protagonist, Orpheus.

Iizuka's engagement with Orpheus and Eurydice places her among the writers that Patricia Klindienst describes as 'thieves of language staging a raid on the treasured icons of a tradition that has required women's silence for centuries'.³⁹

³⁴ Liveley 'Orpheus and Eurydice' (n. 5 above), p. 294.

³⁵ Liveley's article focusses more on Orpheus' death at the hands of the Bacchantes and in this her assessment may be justified.

³⁶ G. C. Lendvay, 'Love Earthbound and Love Evanescent: An Analysis of Love in Ovid's Characterizations of Alcyone, Orpheus, and the Songs of Orpheus', *Interdisciplinary Studies* 19, 2017, pp. 461-92 (473).

³⁷ Virgil, *Georgics* Books III-IV, ed. R. F. Thomas, Cambridge, 1988, 4.494-8.

³⁸ R. A. Spencer, 'Contrast in Ovid's "Metamorphoses"', PhD Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1996, pp. 114-5, following Segal, 'Ovid's Orpheus' (n. 33 above), p. 486.

³⁹ Klindienst, 'Voice of the Shuttle' (n. 2 above), pp. 259-60.

By presenting Orpheus as a stalker, Iizuka transforms and destroys this 'treasured icon' of the male poetic tradition. In Sharrock's binary, Iizuka's reception of Ovid's Orpheus and Eurydice is unquestionably 'resisting', since it identifies the chauvinist undercurrent of the myth and refuses to recreate it.

Violence and Speech

Iizuka's Orpheus obstructs Eurydice's voice in his controlling, abusive relationship with her, an important aspect of Iizuka's resistance of the *Metamorphoses'* patriarchal themes. However, Ovid also links sexual violence with voicelessness. Sharrock points out that many of the transformations which take place after rape or just before 'enact the loss of voice'.⁴⁰ Thus, when Callisto is transformed into a bear by Juno after being raped by Jupiter, 'posse loqui eripitur' (her power to speak was ripped away) (*Met.* 2.483). This silences her anger against Jupiter, leaving her able to witness (*testata*) the grief of her rape only with a bear's groan (*gemitu*) (*Met.* 2.486).⁴¹ Daphne's silence after her transformation into a tree allows her branches' seeming nodding to be interpreted as assent to Apollo's appropriation of her leaves (*Met.* 1.566-7), although, as discussed above, the narrator suggests this interpretation is questionable. Like Eurydice, whose silent return to the underworld is interpreted by Ovid as showing her love for Orpheus, Daphne's silence is interpreted as consent, while Callisto's inability to speak stops her condemning her rapist. Thus, the silence forced upon these women reinforces the sexual power that men hold over them. While Iizuka's Eurydice resists Ovid's more positive portrayal of her relationship with Orpheus, her concern with women's voicelessness in aggressive sexual relationships does not graft a new theme onto Ovid's *Metamorphoses* but expands one that is already key.

Although this emphasis on women's experience of sexual violence is certainly present in the *Metamorphoses*, scholars are divided on its role. As mentioned in my introduction, Jacqueline Fabre-Serris implies that Ovid's poetry shows sympathy with women's experiences and gives voice to a 'female perspective'.⁴² However, Sharrock highlights that this apparent sympathy could comprise 'fetishization', to her the more convincing interpretation, since she concludes that 'If there is any way of telling such stories without disempowering and negatively feminizing the victims, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has not found it'.⁴³ The objectification of women like Daphne through transformation and silencing supports this view. Amy Richlin even condemns those who 'have set out to absolve the poet [Ovid] of his apparent sexism' as complicit in the 'voyeurism' of Ovid's presentation of violence against women.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Sharrock, 'Gender and Transformation' (n. 1 above), p. 44 [Sharrock's italics].

⁴¹ D. Pintabone, 'Women and the Unspeakable: Rape in Ovid's "Metamorphoses"', PhD thesis, University of Southern California, 1998, pp. 281-2.

⁴² Fabre-Serris, 'Desire' (n. 14 above), p. 127.

⁴³ Sharrock, 'Gender and Transformation' (n. 1 above), pp. 45, 47.

⁴⁴ A. Richlin, *Arguments with Silence: Writing the History of Roman Women*, Michigan, 2014, p. 135.

However, Stephanie McCarter, who is currently producing a feminist translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, argues that 'Ovid's point of view is difficult to pin down. It is not always clear if *his* gaze is as ruthlessly erotic as that of his characters or if he is writing primarily to titillate or horrify'.⁴⁵ We see this in the ambiguity of Daphne's 'seeming' nod: while Ovid calls the nodding into question, he does not clearly suggest that Apollo is wrong to attempt to rape her and then claim her leaves. Working with Ovid is therefore difficult for feminist writers—do their texts expose and criticize Ovid's 'fetishization' of rape and silencing of women, or do they highlight and extend his early attempt to give female victims of sexual violence a voice?

One example where Ovid walks the line between sympathetic portrayal of women and fetishization is the story of Philomela, who is raped and brutally silenced by her rapist, Tereus, who cuts her tongue out. Philip Peek claims that this story has provoked 'the most vehement disagreement' among scholars of the *Metamorphoses*, who see it as either a sadistic or poignant account of rape and its consequences.⁴⁶ Justin Barker compares it to the #MeToo movement, claiming that it is 'about women's voices and men's need to silence those voices'.⁴⁷ Like the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, it has been an important story for feminist writers to 'reclaim' since it deals with the violent silencing of a woman who has become a symbol of poetry.⁴⁸ The need to 'reclaim' the story implies Ovid's authorial complicity in Philomela's brutal silencing.

However, Barker goes on to suggest that Philomela is presented as a powerful woman, like the women who spoke out in the #MeToo movement, whose 'power is her voice—her refusal to be silenced'.⁴⁹ Tereus severs Philomela's tongue in response to her threat that she 'pudore/proiecto tua facta loquar' (will tell of your doings, having thrown away shame) (*Met.* 6.545). Philomela's speech is powerful enough to make Tereus fear her voice: 'talibus ira feri postquam commota tyranni/nec minor hac metus est' (the anger of the wild tyrant was rallied, and his fear no less) (*Met.* 6.549-50). However, since Tereus hides Philomela in the woods where she cannot speak to anyone, why is he afraid of her voice? Philomela tells him that 'si siluis clausa tenebor,/implebo siluas et conscia saxa movebo' (If I am held closed up in the woods, I will fill the woods and move the witnessing rocks) (*Met.* 6.546-7) with her voice and Tereus is apparently convinced by this claim. If the reader, like

⁴⁵ S. McCarter, 'How (Not) to Translate the Female Body', *Sewanee Review* 127, 2019, pp. 581–99 (598) [McCarter's italics].

⁴⁶ P. S. Peek, 'Procne, Philomela, Tereus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: A Narratological Approach', *Journal of the Australian Society for Classical Studies* 37, 2003, pp. 32–51 (32–3). See Richlin, *Arguments with Silence* (n. 44 above), pp. 140–42 for a strikingly critical view on the tale. D. Libatique, 'Tereus, Procne, and Philomela: Speech, Silence, and the Voice of Gender', PhD thesis, Boston University, 2018, p. 183, by contrast, argues that Ovid increases sympathy for Philomela compared to other versions. Curran, 'Rape' (n. 21 above), pp. 219, 222 considers the tale's sadism demonstrates Ovid's condemnation of rape.

⁴⁷ J. L. Barker, 'The #MeToo Movement and Ovid's Philomela', *Radical Teacher* 110, 2018, pp. 65–7 (65).

⁴⁸ Richlin, *Arguments with Silence* (n. 44 above), p. 137; one example is M. Nourbese Philip *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*. Middletown, Connecticut, 1989.

⁴⁹ Barker, '#MeToo' (n. 47 above), p. 65.

Tereus, takes Philomela's claim seriously, it may draw their thoughts to Orpheus. Virgil wrote that Orpheus' song moved oaks and poplars⁵⁰ and Ovid later opens book 11 with 'carmine dum tali siluas animosque ferarum/Threicius uates et saxa sequentia ducit' (While the Thracian bard [Orpheus] with such song led forth the woods and animals of the wild places and the rocks following) (*Met.* 11.1-2), echoing Philomela's claim that she can move rocks with her voice. Thus, Philomela's speech may present a moment where Ovid challenges Orpheus' preeminent voice through a woman, prefiguring feminist reception of Orpheus, and giving a female rape victim great linguistic power.

Tereus' mutilation of Philomela is the most horrific silencing of a raped woman in the *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 6.556-7), and perhaps this is because she challenges the traditional power of men's voices compared to women's, as epitomized in Orpheus and Eurydice. Segal argues that Philomela is 'the only woman in the poem to undergo anything approaching the extreme mangling suffered by Actaeon, Pentheus, and Marsyas', that is, the only female whose suffering is as horrific and memorable as that of male victims in the *Metamorphoses*.⁵¹ Since her voice approaches masculine power, her punishment approaches male severity. Despite this maiming, Philomela finds a way to speak of Tereus' crime and defeat him, underlining her power. She weaves a tapestry that tells her story without speech (*Met.* 6.574-80). Once her tale reaches her sister, Tereus' downfall swiftly and brutally follows (*Met.* 6.581-660).

Klindienst argues that through this tapestry, Philomela 'threatens to reveal all that her culture defined as outside the boundaries of allowable discourse',⁵² suggesting that Philomela's tapestry becomes a resistance not just of Tereus, but of patriarchal norms. Elissa Marder, who agrees that Philomela prefigures the later feminist struggle to 'find a discursive vocabulary for experiences both produced and silenced by patriarchy',⁵³ argues convincingly that 'It is significant that Procne rescues Philomela by taking advantage of a Bacchic festival' from which men were excluded (*Met.* 6.587-8).⁵⁴ This setting for the sisters' reunion does not appear in other accounts of the myth, suggesting that it is a significant Ovidian touch.⁵⁵ It echoes Pentheus' story, where women use Bacchic worship to subvert and destroy Pentheus' patriarchal rule (*Met.* 3.511-733).⁵⁶ Since Procne can only rescue Philomela through the Bacchic festival, the sisters' actions become a reflection on the spaces of

⁵⁰ Virgil, *Georgics* (n. 37 above) 4.510-11.

⁵¹ Segal, 'Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies' (n. 13 above), p. 26.

⁵² Klindienst, 'Voice of the Shuttle' (n. 2 above), p. 271.

⁵³ Marder, 'Disarticulated Voices' (n. 16 above), pp. 162-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Anderson, 'Notes' (n. 29 above), p. 228.

⁵⁶ A. N. Michalopoulos, 'Fighting Against an Intruder: A Comparative Reading of the Speeches of Pentheus (3.531-563) and Niobe (6.170-202) in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in *The Rhetoric of Unity and Division in Ancient Literature*, ed. A. N. Michalopoulos et al., Berlin, 2021, pp. 213-28 (216) notes that Pentheus addresses only the men when condemning the cult of Bacchus, showing the patriarchal basis of his rule.

resistance available to women in a male-dominated world. Women can speak powerfully through craft and religion,⁵⁷ even when denied speech through other channels.

However, Philomela's power is ultimately lost since she is turned into a bird and becomes a victim again, fleeing Tereus' 'immodicum praelonga cuspidē rostrum' (huge beak with its very long point) (*Met.* 6.674), with obvious phallic connotations. As Klindienst argues 'Metamorphosis preserves the distance necessary to the structure of dominance and submission: in the final tableau all movement is frozen. Tereus will never catch the sisters, but neither will the women ever cease their flight'.⁵⁸ Through metamorphosis, Ovid finally silences Philomela's powerful voice, justifying Sharrock's claim that Ovid's transformations 'enact loss of voice'.⁵⁹ Although Segal argues that Philomela's 'mangling' aligns her with the *Metamorphoses'* male victims, she ultimately undergoes a transformation which Sharrock and Segal agree is a predominantly female fate in the *Metamorphoses*.⁶⁰ Despite his hints at Philomela's linguistic power, Ovid ultimately transforms her back into a female victim silently fleeing her male aggressor.

For most of *Polaroid Stories* Iizuka's Eurydice, too, flees Orpheus, which could suggest that Iizuka's telling of these stories, like Ovid's, does not challenge the continuing victimization of women, despite their occasional victories. Iizuka's Philomel, especially, appears to be a highly disempowered character. She has no lines to speak, although she sings. By making her non-speaking Iizuka denies her the powerful speech Ovid gives her before her tongue is severed, and does not make clear the rape that preceded her silencing. Iizuka's *Good Kids* was criticized for not directly portraying the sexual assault at the centre of the play,⁶¹ and Philomel's role in *Polaroid Stories* might merit similar criticism. In addition, Procne does not appear and Philomel makes little attempt to communicate with other characters. In fact, she is so isolated from the rest of the play that her part can easily be cut, as in UD Drama's 2014 production.⁶²

However, when viewing *Polaroid Stories* as a written text, Philomel's role is clarified through Iizuka's extensive stage directions. When Orpheus follows Philomel, in her only interaction with another character, Iizuka describes:

a sudden explosion of techno music – a bass line, a woman singing, looping back on itself like a record stuck in a groove. Bursts of light like shooting stars.

⁵⁷ See J. Heath, 'Women's Work: Female Transmission of Mythical Narrative', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 141, 2011, pp. 69–104 (71–2) on weaving and female storytellers, including Philomela; and B. MacLachlan, 'Ritual and the Performance of Identity: Women and Gender in the Ancient World', *Journal of Women's History* 23, 2011, pp. 176–86 (176–7) on the agency, especially sexual agency, Roman women enjoyed in religion. Richlin, *Arguments with Silence* (n. 44 above), p. 202 supports this with some caveats.

⁵⁸ Klindienst, 'Voice of the Shuttle' (n. 2 above), p. 272; see also Curran, 'Rape' (n. 21 above), p. 235.

⁵⁹ Sharrock, 'Gender and Transformation' (n. 1 above), p. 47.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*; Segal, 'Ovid's Metamorphic Bodies' (n. 13 above), p. 38.

⁶¹ Spencer, L. G., 'Performative Neutrality' (n. 11 above), p. 220.

⁶² UD Drama, *Polaroid Stories*, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z22ZnY2eolA> [accessed 26 October 2022].

Bodies moving in the darkness. They are like shadows underwater, caught for a second in slivers of light, body parts, then swallowed by the dark (*PS*: 33-4).

It is unclear what these explosions and unidentified 'body parts' represent. They could feasibly represent Philomel's rape, with Orpheus becoming Tereus. The music becomes 'stuck in a groove', which linguistically raises the image of Philomela trapped in a woodland grove to readers familiar with Tereus raping Philomela in a woodland hut (*Met.* 6.521). Alternatively, this could represent Procne's rescue of Philomela from the woodland grove during the Bacchic festival. The 'body parts' in the darkness could belong to men torn apart by Bacchants, as in the tale of Pentheus. The image of these body parts 'caught for a second in slivers of light' is echoed a few scenes later in a scene entitled 'The Story of Pentheus', where 'the light cuts up [Skinheadboy's] body. Chest, arm, neck, mouth. Pieces of skin' (*PS*: 49). Again, light picks out body parts as Skinheadboy (Pentheus) is dismembered. The similarities between these stage directions suggest the link between Philomel's and Pentheus' story, which, in Ovid, is the Bacchic festival.

In Philomel's next scene she paints the walls with blood that pours from her mouth (*PS*: 44-5). Again, this points simultaneously to two elements of Ovid's tale: firstly, Tereus' severing of Philomela's tongue, highlighted by the 'blood instead of sound' coming from Philomel's mouth, and secondly, Philomela and Procne killing Procne's son Itys, after which Philomela rushes upon Tereus 'sparsis furiali caede capillis' (her hair spattered by the raging slaughter) (*Met.* 6.657). Philomel's actions as she 'stains the world red' (*PS*: 45) do not seem those of a trapped victim, suggesting that she is enacting her revenge. In Ovid, her revenge comes long after her mutilation. Iizuka, however, demonstrates Philomel's rape and revenge in one scene, rather than dwelling on Tereus' horrific actions. Philomel is both victor and victim, spreading the blood of herself and her rapist's son around the stage as a testimony of the violence done against her and her violent resistance. In Philomel's last scene she sings a song without a tongue, reclaiming her voice despite Tereus' efforts to silence her (*PS*: 51).

Through the stage directions, Philomel, although a silenced, non-speaking character, becomes a powerful sung and embodied voice, who tells of her violation, covers the stage with the evidence of Tereus' crimes and the blood of her revenge, and overcomes her mutilation to go on singing. However, this relies on an actor's interpretation and performance of the stage directions. An audience may not even know that this singer who appears occasionally is named Philomel, let alone the complex story of her rape and revenge; they will rely heavily on her actor to gain insight into her character. Danielle Amoto argues that 'fundamental to the construction of Iizuka's texts is the fact that these works not only *invite* but also *authorize* an independent element of performance'.⁶³ This independent performance adds to the play's reception of Ovid's text. Grace Gerish highlights that an important part of her experience producing *Polaroid Stories* was that 'even mostly silent characters found a way to speak, even if it was

⁶³ Amoto, 'This was like' (n. 7 above), p. 12 [Amoto's italics].

not always apparent to the entire audience'.⁶⁴ Although a live audience loses the 'verbal power' of her stage directions and the subtleties of Iizuka's relationship with Ovid,⁶⁵ the reader who does not watch an actor's interpretation misses the creative embodiment of her characters. Marie-Louise Crawley, a dancer who produced and danced a choreography based on some of Ovid's heroines, including Philomela, highlights the powerful place performance has in reception, claiming that 'it is the dancing body that can [...] claim a new space for the live, female body in the performance of epic'.⁶⁶ The actor's or dancer's presence in *Polaroid Stories* creates a space for Philomela's female body to speak independently and wordlessly.

In essence, Iizuka writes the possibility of reception into Philomel's character, since in every performance Philomel will appear as a slightly, or drastically, different character. This returns me to Sharrock's idea of 'resisting' or 'recuperative' reception. This section has mostly suggested that Iizuka follows a recuperative model of reception, expanding Ovid's exploration of female vocal power in Philomela's story without challenging the limits placed on her voice. However, we have also seen that Iizuka reimagines and reorganizes Ovid's account of Philomela's myth, tying her rape and revenge inextricably together. Iizuka's reliance on the actor's embodiment of her characters is another challenge to Ovid's written epic. When Crawley describes dancing as Ovid's heroines, she asks 'Am I in fact remembering, or dismembering, an ancient form?/If I am dismembering an ancient form, I am quite literally tearing it apart, breaking it down and fragmenting it in order to reassemble it in another way'.⁶⁷ Her performative reception, conceived like this, may constitute violence against the source text, and so may an actor's performance of Philomel. Crawley's question about remembering or dis-membering asks again Sharrock's question about resisting or recuperative reception, suggesting that reception may enact violence against a text.

Reception and Violence

Dismembering has been important in theatrical reception since the 1960s production of *Dionysus in 69*, which Erika Fischer-Lichte argues was developed out of the 'dismemberment' of Euripides' *Bacchae*.⁶⁸ This dismemberment, in Fischer-Lichte's

⁶⁴ G. Gerrish, 'Ancient Stories Rise to New Life', *Skidmore Theater Living Newsletter*, 2013, <https://theater.skidmore.edu/2013/12/fall-black-box-2013-polaroid-stories/> [accessed 26 October 2022].

⁶⁵ Amoto, 'This was like' (n. 7 above), p. 12.

⁶⁶ M-L. Crawley, 'Epic bodies: Filtering the Past and Embodying the Present—A Performer's Perspective', in *Epic Performances from the Middle Ages into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. F. Macintosh et al., Oxford, 2018, p. 175; Crawley, 'Likely Terpsichore (Fragments)', 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kr7OpyXZWIU> [accessed 26 October 2022], Oxford.

⁶⁷ Crawley, 'Epic Bodies' (n. 66 above), p. 175.

⁶⁸ E. Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*, London, 2004, p. 222.

opinion, is essential 'to allow the ever-changing performance to emerge'.⁶⁹ A 1970 compilation of the script indicates this changing nature of the play immediately, stating that the first chorus 'is fragmented, organized randomly, and therefore is different at every performance'.⁷⁰ Iizuka, in 1997, might well have been influenced by *Dionysus in 69*.

Although Iizuka's play is not as randomly organized as *Dionysus in 69*, she does fragment Ovid's myths, which are divided into multiple scenes, scattered through the two acts. Some actors, like that of Persephone/Semele, transform from one character into another on stage (*PS*: 27, 31), while others yoke Ovid's protagonists together in unlikely combinations through their modern-day homeless character: Skinheadboy represents Theseus, Prometheus, and Pentheus at different points in his life story (*PS*: 25-6, 35-7, 45-9). Iizuka's retelling distorts and fragments Ovid's epic so that it is no longer recognizable to an audience without access to character names, scene titles, and stage directions.⁷¹ She transforms Ovid's *perpetuum [...]* *carmen* (continuous song) (*Met.* 1.4) into the 'sea of noise' mentioned in her first stage directions (*PS*: 7).

Iizuka portrays her relationship with myth through dismemberment imagery. In her essay about myth and theatre, written in 1999, two years after she published *Polaroid Stories*, she writes that 'Myth is the vital organs, the slick glistening arteries underneath the skin' and later that 'Some myths need to be ripped apart'.⁷² This image of myth invites and authorizes dismemberment as a metaphor for reception practice and Iizuka rips myths open to expose their gory viscera in her reception of the *Metamorphoses*.

Dismemberment is also an important theme within Ovid's poem. Iizuka's description, which flays myth to expose the 'glistening arteries underneath the skin', is reminiscent of Ovid's gory description of the flaying of Marsyas. Ovid describes how

clamanti cutis est summos derepta per artus,
nec quidquam nisi vulnus erat; cruor undique manat,
detectique patent nerui, trepidaeque sine ulla
pelle micant uenae

(As he was shouting his skin was torn away all over the tops of his limbs, and he was nothing but a wound; blood flows everywhere, and his uncovered sinews lie bare, and his quivering veins vibrate without any skin) (*Met.* 6.387-90).

Marsyas' story, of a musician who challenges the god of poetry, can be read as a metaphor for poetic competition and reception, showing its close links with violence.⁷³ Andrew Feldherr notes the 'semantic overlap between the description of

⁶⁹ Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre* (n. 68 above), p. 224.

⁷⁰ The Performance Group, *Dionysus in 69*. Toronto, 1970, p. 16.

⁷¹ R. Masih, 'A Life Worth Sharing', *The Medium* 43, 2016, 12, p. 6, https://issuu.com/mediumutm/docs/vol_43_issue_12 [accessed 26 October 2022].

⁷² N. Iizuka, 'What Myths May Come', *American Theatre* 16, 1999, 7, pp. 18-19 (18).

⁷³ T. K. Hubbard, 'Virgil, Longus and the Pipes of Pan' in *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Pastoral*, ed. M. Fantuzzi and T. D. Papanghelis, Leiden, 2006, pp. 499-513: (506) examines of pipes in

viscera throbbing under torture and the language of poetic performance',⁷⁴ where Marsyas' 'quivering' (*trepidiae*), 'veins' (*uenae*), and 'sinews' (*nerui*) recall the strings of Apollo's lyre,⁷⁵ the instrument that defeated Marsyas' pipes. Marsyas' physical dismemberment thus represents Apollo's poetic victory. Meanwhile, as Feldherr points out earlier in the same article, Ovid dismembers Marsyas' myth to present only the gaping wound of his punishment without the context that surrounds the tale in other tellings,⁷⁶ so that Marsyas' physical dismemberment becomes a symbol of Ovid's reception of myths through poetic dismemberment.

Orpheus also faces dismemberment in Ovid when Bacchantes tear him apart (*Met.* 11.23-44). For feminist critics, this dismemberment has become a symbol of female poetic victory over Orpheus.⁷⁷ Additionally, Genevieve Lively points out that Ovid himself 'performs his own form of textual *sparagmos* [dismemberment] in chopping up the Orpheus myth and physically separating its parts into different books'.⁷⁸ Thus, Orpheus loses Eurydice at the opening of book 10 but only dies in book 11, after a series of myths including Ganymede, Hyacinth, Pygmalion, and Myrrha (*Met.* 10.1-11.66). Similarly, Iizuka divides Orpheus' story into fragmented scenes across her play's two acts.

Ovid's modelling of dismemberment in his own reception of myth makes it difficult to define Iizuka's readings as either resisting or recuperative. Her division of Orpheus' tale could be seen as recuperative since it utilizes Ovid's own techniques of fragmentation and highlights the theme of dismemberment which runs through the *Metamorphoses*. However, the focus of feminist scholars, and Iizuka herself, on dismemberment in female resistance of male poetic prowess inclines the reader to view Iizuka's irreverent division of Orpheus' story (and others in *Polaroid Stories*) as a resisting transformation of Ovid. Does Iizuka follow Ovid's lead in her treatment of myth, or ironically use his own techniques against him?

The tale of Echo and Narcissus is good ground to explore this further. In the *Metamorphoses*, Echo's character can be seen to model reception through fragmentation. Cursed only to speak by repeating others' words, she cleverly reflects fragments of Narcissus' speech back at him, giving them new meaning. Narcissus, separated from his friends, calls 'ecquis adest' (Is anyone here?), to which Echo replies 'adest' (one is here) (*Met.* 3.380). Later, Narcissus cries 'huc coeamus' (let us meet here) and Echo responds 'coeamus' (let us have sex) (*Met.* 3.386-7), wilfully

Footnote 73 (continued)

Latin pastoral as a 'vehicle of literary imitation and tradition'; and A. Barchiesi, 'Music for Monsters: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Bucolic Evolution, and Bucolic Criticism, in *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Pastoral*, ed. M. Fantuzzi and T. D. Papanghelis, Leiden, 2006, pp. 403-25 (413-16) shows the significance of pipe and lyre competitions in the *Metamorphoses*.

⁷⁴ A. Feldherr, 'Flaying the other', in A. Feldherr and P. James, 'Making the Most of Marsyas', *Arethusa* 37, 2004, pp. 75-103 (83).

⁷⁵ W. Smith and J. Lockwood, *Chambers Murray Latin-English Dictionary*, Edinburgh, 1933, p. 461 gives the 'string of a musical instrument' as the second definition of *nervus*.

⁷⁶ Feldherr, 'Flaying' (n. 74 above), p. 78, Feldherr claims that the Marsyas episode is split between bucolic and hymnic genres meaning the poetic voice itself is dismembered.

⁷⁷ Liveley 'Orpheus and Eurydice' (n. 5 above), p. 289.

⁷⁸ Liveley 'Orpheus and Eurydice' (n. 5 above), p. 293.

misinterpreting his words. Garth Tissol argues that Echo 'succeeds at making word-play an aggressive act'.⁷⁹ She violently transforms fragments of Narcissus' speech in an attempt to coerce him sexually. Narcissus' cry that 'ante [...] emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri' (I'll die before my body becomes yours) (*Met.* 3.391), shows his fear of sexual assault from Echo. Unlike other sexual predators in the *Metamorphoses*, Echo accepts Narcissus' rejection and satisfies herself with transforming his words of resistance into words of love by repeating 'sit tibi copia nostri' (let my body be yours) before hiding in shame (*Met.* 3.391-4). Nevertheless, Ovid's Echo shows how a retelling can be a site of violence against a previous speaker.

Narcissus and Echo appear in three scenes in *Polaroid Stories*. In the first, Echo's repetitions of Narcissus' words reinforce key points as he describes his success in obtaining a 'sugardaddy'. Echo repeats 'it's phat it's plush', 'glass and chrome', 'surround sound' (*PS*: 16-17), reinforcing Narcissus' luxurious description of the older man's flat. She acts as a female backing singer to Narcissus' lead, making his words more powerful with her repetition. However, by the end of the scene her repetition casts a negative light on Narcissus' story. Narcissus attempts to present the sexual abuse he suffers from his 'sugardaddy' positively by focussing on the rich environment he enjoys, while presenting the older man as a fool or 'chump', but Echo's repetitions of 'whatever' and 'chump' could be understood as being addressed to Narcissus, showing that she views Narcissus as the 'chump' in the story (*PS*: 18), an interpretation supported when Narcissus is later abandoned by his 'sugardaddy' (*PS*: 40). Echo repurposes Narcissus' words aggressively to criticize him.

In the second Narcissus and Echo scene, Echo tells her own story through repetition, like Ovid's Echo, repeating Narcissus' description of his 'sugardaddy', so that it becomes her own description of Narcissus. She repeats 'looking good' and 'i get right up next to him', 'i can smell his skin', 'i can smell the gel', 'in his hair' (*PS*: 39). Whether an audience would interpret these lines as Echo's view of Narcissus would depend on the actors' physical closeness, but with the precedent of Ovid's Echo repeating *coeamus* to mean 'Let's have sex', it seems likely that Echo's repetition of this sexual description should be tied to physical affection. In Narcissus' final speech of this scene, Echo does not have to repeat much of his monologue for a reader or audience to understand that his description of being ignored by his 'sugardaddy' could apply to his treatment of Echo. Echo simply repeats 'talking and talking' and as Narcissus goes on talking the audience perceive that he is ignoring Echo just as he himself has been ignored (*PS*: 40). Iizuka takes Ovid's use of Echo further to show how repurposing some of Narcissus' phrases encourages an audience to understand his whole speech ironically. Similarly, Iizuka's repurposing of a few scenes from the *Metamorphoses* allows us to understand the rest of Ovid's epic in a different light. Fiona Cox supports this idea by arguing that 'as source texts enter both the fabric and the narrative of these changed lives, they themselves become radically altered'.⁸⁰ Iizuka's text, for example, emphasizes the fact that Narcissus is

⁷⁹ G. Tissol, *The Face of Nature: Wit, Narrative, and Cosmic Origins in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses'*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1997, pp. 15-16.

⁸⁰ Cox 'Generic "Transgressions"' (n. 3 above), p. 175.

a victim of sexual aggression, reminding us that in Ovid his infatuation with himself results from a rejected lover's curse (*Met.* 3.405). Meanwhile, Iizuka highlights the power of Echo's speech which can be missed when we focus on her repetition of others' words.

In Iizuka's final Echo and Narcissus scene, Echo breaks her curse and speaks with her own words. When Echo sums up her and Narcissus' experience with the proverb 'there ain't no point in wantin shit you ain't never gonna get' (*PS*: 69), the implications hit Narcissus so hard that he fragments: his 'reflection explodes as though a rock had been thrown into a pool, distorts, breaks up' (*PS*: 70). Iizuka uses Echo, a character through whom Ovid models the power of reception through fragmentation, and gives her a powerful voice that causes the dismemberment of the hero of Ovid's tale. Like Iizuka's Eurydice, her Echo becomes a powerful woman who finds her own voice and tears apart the male ego that had bound her to his myth.

This use of Echo aligns Iizuka with feminist reception. For many feminist scholars Echo represents women's silencing.⁸¹ However, Rosemary Barrow concludes that 'most scholars convincingly agree that Echo is a symbol of female resistance rather than oppression. Ingeniously she transcends her vocal limitations to reclaim an independent voice'.⁸² She can be a model for female writers who have, until recently, suffered the 'vocal limitations' that have forced them to write with men's voices and through men's words. As Adrienne Rich says, with some exaggeration, 'No male writer has ever written primarily or even largely for women, or with the sense of women's criticism as a consideration when he chooses his materials, his theme, his language. But to a greater or lesser extent, every woman writer has written for men'.⁸³ Female literary patrons have not been so uncommon that we can seriously conclude that no male writer has ever considered women's criticism.⁸⁴ However, the pressure of a largely male literary world on female writers has had a stronger, more omnipresent effect on women's writing. Not only have female writers written for men, they have been forced to write using men's words while engaging with the male-authored canon. As Amy Richlin points out, for 'our prefeminist sisters' the 'only option other than silence' was 'the appropriation of male-based texts',⁸⁵ especially for female writers engaged in Classical reception, since female sources for reception are limited to a few fragments of Sappho and a couple of other possibly female poets. Writers like Iizuka, therefore, follow Echo's lead in turning the words of male Classical writers to their own ends.

⁸¹ Curran, 'Rape' (n. 21 above), p. 213; C. Nouvet, 'An Impossible Response: The Disaster of Narcissus', *Yale French Studies* 79, 1991, pp. 103–34 (109); A. Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classic Hollywood Cinema*, Berkeley, California, 1991, p. 2.

⁸² R. Barrow, 'Narcissus and Echo', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. V. Zajko and H. Hoyle, Hoboken, New Jersey, 2017, p. 305. Scholars supporting this view include Tissol, *Face of Nature* (n. 79 above), pp. 15–17; V. Rimell, *Ovid's Lovers: Desire, Difference and the Poetic Imagination*, Cambridge, 2006, p. 1; and Fabre-Serris, 'Desire' (n. 14 above), p. 128.

⁸³ A. Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', 1971, in *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)*, ed. J. Ritchie and K. Ronald, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 2001, p. 272.

⁸⁴ This is particularly studied in medieval and early modern literature. See J. Crawford, *Mediatrix: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England*, Oxford, 2014.

⁸⁵ Richlin, *Arguments with Silence* (n. 44 above), p. 137.

Iizuka's violent transformation of myth is driven by her awareness of female exclusion from male-authored myth. In her 1999 essay, discussed above, Iizuka uses a powerful metaphor to describe her discomfort in working with myth, saying:

[m]yth is a swim in a giant ocean. [...] You bring your oxygen, a camera, a spear. In the murk you glimpse an alien universe – translucent fish, electric eels, whole cities made of coral. And then your lungs begin to ache, and you swim back towards the light.⁸⁶

The myths that Iizuka deals with feel 'alien' to her, and she compares myth to an ocean which makes the swimmer's lungs ache and attempts to drown her. Iizuka also imagines carrying 'a spear', showing that she feels she might need to defend herself violently against some aspects of myth. This metaphor closely resembles the feminist poet Adrienne Rich's 1973 poem 'Diving into the Wreck', which opens

First having read the book of myths,
and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body-armor of black rubber⁸⁷

and ends

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.⁸⁸

For both Iizuka and Rich, the journey into myth requires a camera and a weapon, though Rich's knife has grown into a spear for Iizuka. Both recognize the power and danger of the myth ocean and the need to defend themselves while recording what they see.

Rich suggests why myth is unwelcoming to these writers by finishing her poem with the 'book of myths/in which/our names do not appear'.⁸⁹ Rich feels that she and writers like her are unrepresented in myth. She can become 'the mermaid whose dark hair/streams black, the merman in his armored body' for a while, but ultimately acknowledges that these characters are not representative of her.⁹⁰ However, her

⁸⁶ Iizuka, 'What Myths' (n. 72 above), p. 18.

⁸⁷ A. Rich, 'Diving into the Wreck', 1973, in *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. M. Strand and E. Boland, London, 2000, ll. 1–5.

⁸⁸ Rich, 'Diving' (n. 87 above), ll. 87–94.

⁸⁹ Rich, 'Diving' (n. 87 above), l. 94.

⁹⁰ Rich, 'Diving' (n. 87 above), ll. 72–3.

poem is her knife that carves her name into myth, an act of violent vandalism that endures through her poetry.

Rich, described as a ‘major voice in American feminism during the latter half of the twentieth century’ with a focus on the ‘silencing of women’s voices’,⁹¹ also wrote an essay about her reception of older writing in 1971, two years before ‘Diving into the Wreck’ and three years after ‘I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus’. She writes that ‘Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival’.⁹² This suggests that writers like Rich and Iizuka are compelled to fight with myth to survive. Rich clarifies that the reason this ‘Re-vision’ or reception is essential is ‘not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us’.⁹³ Women’s reception of men’s writing allows them to violently ‘break’ the stories that have controlled them, like that of Orpheus and his silently loving wife Eurydice, or Echo who can only repeat the words of the male Narcissus.

Alicia Ostriker argues that ‘revisionist’ use of myth is important in ‘ultimately making cultural change possible’,⁹⁴ and Iizuka’s revisionist engagement with Ovid seeks cultural change for women and specifically homeless women suffering sexual violence. She aims to break the hold of ‘not just Ovid and Sophocles and Euripides’ but societal myths ‘about what’s normal and what’s freakish, what’s appropriate and what’s obscene’.⁹⁵ Iizuka’s engagement with Orpheus’ and Eurydice’s myth not only combats the stereotypical image of awesome male poet braving death to rescue his loving wife, ripping it apart to reveal the lack of female voice and agency in the idyllic relationship portrayed in the *Metamorphoses*, but also points to the precarious lives of homeless women in Eurydice’s situation, and their heightened risk of sexual violence. As the play closes, the possibility of violent reception producing positive change is subtly explored. Eurydice finally breaks Orpheus’ hold over her when she threatens to ‘tear you [Orpheus] apart’ and ‘blow your soul to pieces’ (*PS*: 83). She stabs Orpheus and he ‘is illuminated’ and dismembered by being ‘shot through with light’ (*PS*: 84), like Pentheus earlier. Eurydice dismembers her myth by destroying the man for whom she is remembered and after she has committed this violence, G, a predatory male character who sometimes represents Zeus and sometimes Hades, tells how Eurydice’s ‘old scars [...] grew new smooth skin -’ (*PS*: 85). Read metaphorically, this suggests the cathartic impact of violent reception: how one can tear apart old myths and characters to grow a new story.

In Ovid’s version, Orpheus is still dismembered: not by his wife, but by female Bacchants, who object to his anti-female stance after Eurydice’s death (*Met* 11.3–43). These women create music, which, although it is described negatively by Ovid as ‘ingens/clamour’ (a huge uproar), successfully drowns out Orpheus’ lyre,

⁹¹ *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. V. B. Leitch et al., 2nd edn, London, 2010, p. 1588.

⁹² Rich, ‘Dead Awaken’ (n. 83 above), p. 270.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ A. Ostriker, ‘The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking’, *Signs* 8, 1982, pp. 68–90 (72).

⁹⁵ Iizuka, ‘What Myths’ (n. 72 above), p. 18.

enabling them to kill him (*Met.* 11.15-18). The Bacchantes dismember Orpheus and destroy his song to make way for their own voices. Sharrock points out that Orpheus' spirit is then separated from his lyre and his head, his two musical instruments, and that the fact that he is now 'silenced and lyricless' enables his reunification with Eurydice in the underworld.⁹⁶ However, this interpretation of their reunification extends Eurydice's condemnation to eternal loving silence, which now encompasses Orpheus too in a not quite satisfying twist of poetic justice. For Genevieve Liveley, however, the important thing is that 'the women who tear the poet apart and scatter pieces of his corpus abroad [...] keep the head and lyre of Orpheus singing still'.⁹⁷ In this interpretation, feminist reception, taking on the role of the Bacchantes, continues the beauty of Orpheus' song even as it destroys his myth. Thus, Iizuka's Eurydice becomes the force to regenerate her own myth through the total destruction of Orpheus, while Iizuka reclaims and continues Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, ripping it out of context and recreating it through the marginalized voices of homeless women.

Conclusion

Naomi Iizuka conceives reception as a violent process in which myths must be 'ripped apart'. Her *Polaroid Stories* follows that idea, tearing up the myths of the *Metamorphoses* and depositing them in chronologically unrelated scenes so that the *Forty-Niner* reviewer complains that the play 'makes little sense from a narrative perspective'.⁹⁸ Characters like Orpheus and Narcissus are dismembered through detachment from their Ovidian roles, and then more literally dismembered through creative use of lighting, emphasizing the possibility of female power over sexual aggressors. In these respects, Iizuka fits Sharrock's model of 'resisting' reception and Crawley's idea of 'dis-membering' ancient myth.⁹⁹

However, this resistance may itself be a backhanded homage to Ovid since many of the techniques that Iizuka uses in her violent reception are modelled in the *Metamorphoses*, including dismemberment of characters and stories, as well as Echo's violent repurposing of language to coerce and criticize Narcissus. Thus, Iizuka does use elements of a 'recuperative' style of reception, investing in techniques Ovid may have used to problematize the stories he told and open them to future interpretation.

In addition, Iizuka's portrayal of female characters, while she does show them resisting the traditional male protagonists of their myths, is not simply vengeful or destructive, since she joins Genevieve Liveley's feminist rewriters of Orpheus who 'keep the head and lyre of Orpheus singing still'.¹⁰⁰ Iizuka and her female characters

⁹⁶ A. Sharrock, 'Till Death do us Part...or Join: Love Beyond Death in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in *Life, Love and Death in Early Latin Poetry*, ed. S. Frangoulidis and S. Harrison, Berlin, 2018, pp. 125–36 (131).

⁹⁷ Liveley 'Orpheus and Eurydice' (n. 5 above), pp. 287–8.

⁹⁸ *Forty-Niner*, 'Compelling yet Shallow' (n. 12 above).

⁹⁹ Sharrock, 'Gender and Transformation' (n. 1 above), p. 35; Crawley, 'Epic Bodies' (n. 66 above), p. 175.

¹⁰⁰ Liveley 'Orpheus and Eurydice' (n. 5 above), pp. 287–8.

enter into poetic competition with Ovid and characters like Orpheus to demonstrate the strong voice of women who refuse to be controlled by men. In this way, Iizuka's play creates a new, beautiful artwork from her destructive engagement with Ovid's poetry.

Nevertheless, *Polaroid Stories* is not a clear or smooth retelling of the *Metamorphoses* and is likely to send audiences away wondering what they have missed. In fact, we could say that Iizuka's criticism both of Ovid and of sexual violence in the homeless community is only accessible by ripping the myth that *Polaroid Stories* creates on stage apart, just as Iizuka rips Ovid apart. When studied as a literary text in relation to the *Metamorphoses* it is difficult to agree with the reviewer in *Forty-Niner* that the play is 'unable to make its mind up on whether it wants to criticize or simply show to audiences what is the reality for the homeless youth of America'.¹⁰¹ Had Iizuka aimed simply to show the experiences of homeless youth, she would not have needed to link the play's characters, however, ambiguously, to the *Metamorphoses*. Doing so gave Iizuka the opportunity to tear into the myths of the *Metamorphoses*, alongside the myths of the 'freakish', unpalatable homeless youth. *Polaroid Stories* reflects the preoccupations of the *Metamorphoses*, but engages with them in a destructive, critical way, in order to produce something new, that will raise consciousness of the prevalence of sexual assault and damaging relationships, both in the ancient world and on the streets and in the lives of the voiceless people we walk past every day.

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¹⁰¹ *Forty-Niner*, 'Compelling yet Shallow' (n. 12 above).