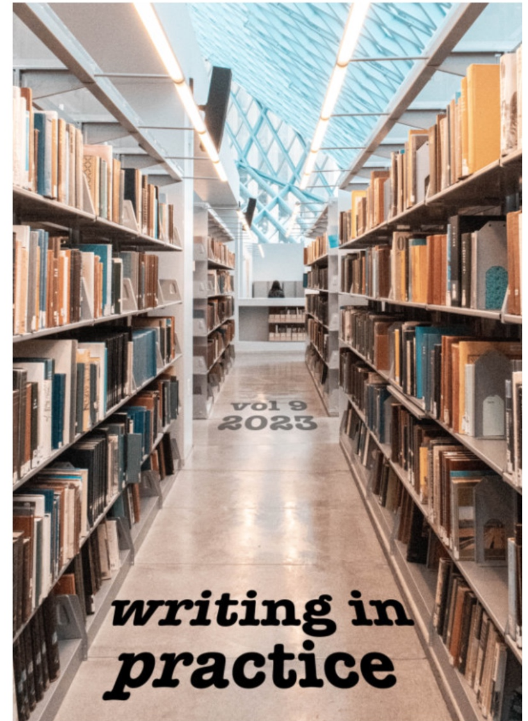

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“The nymph is all into a lawrel gone”: Creative Writing, Consent or Coercion, in Ovid’s Metamorphoses

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The many depictions of Daphne and Apollo

"The nymph is all into a lawrel gone": Creative Writing, Consent or Coercion, in Ovid's Metamorphoses

Dr Alison Habens

ABSTRACT:
This article considers how a familiar story from literary history, with its effective demonstration of the art of transformation, can not be used unquestioningly as a teaching text in the era and awareness of #MeToo. Though referred to for thirty years in my pedagogical practice, I could no longer excuse its glorification of sexual abuse without including a 'trigger warning' about the famous myth of Laurel and Apollo, alerting students to potentially sensitive material in the creative writing classroom. The discussion covers several translations into English from Ovid's original *Metamorphoses*, digging deeper than written traditions to find the roots of this glamourized rape scenario. Can the woman's desperate withholding of consent really have been retold as a triumph of man's genius, rewarding his brutality with the conscription of her leafy protest? Crucial concerns around that coercion, raised by Ovid in the year 0, are checked against the legacy of its content now. Canonical representations of male privilege and fragility are queried, and comparative myths considered, to update a syllabus of appropriate stories for an undergraduate context. The essay is accompanied by performance poems in the voice of Daphne, from the POV of Laurel, reformulating the critical issues as creative practice.

Keywords: Creative Writing Pedagogy, Classical Mythology, Decolonising Curriculum, #MeToo, Apollo and Daphne, Transformation, Laurel Tree, Feminist Literary Theory

Is the story of Daphne and Apollo, beloved by artists, sculptors and storytellers for two millennia, romance or horror? Or, as “a large part of Greek mythology is politico-religious history” (Graves, 2017), is the famous scene where a woman begs to be turned into a tree to escape the unwanted attentions of a male admirer, an analogy for the violation of land and legacy, as well as lady.

The romantic picture, seen in Veronese’ 1560s portrayal or Bernini’s marble sculpture, shows Laurel only in the leaf-tipped fingers and foliate hairstyle, with dirty roots merely hinted at by the toes. In between are bare breasts, naked waists, detailed down to the pelvic bone. Waterhouse, painting Daphne in 1908, also takes the chance to show nudity not usually permitted. Here, she blends with the undergrowth, bound for Apollo’s approaches; with the look on the face of this pre-Raphaelite sun god suggesting it’s a plot of unrequited love.

In these well-known visual representations of Daphne’s metamorphosis into a tree, her trunk remains that of a woman and she’s posed to emphasise its curves. Only in the painting by Piero del Pollaiuolo dating around 1480 is the female figure fully dressed, though in a sexualised posture and just arboreal at the extremities.

I’ve used these images to illustrate lectures for a generation of undergraduates in creative writing, explicating Ovid’s technique of transformation so readers can literally see one thing turn into another, flesh to wood. To read that aloud was almost to wink with him, though, at Phoebus’ pressing need, the passionate drive of the sun’s charioteer. Still it was a useful tip for students, a good literary trick; until that particular year, when women, on UK commons or in woods, had died again at the hands of spoilt gods.[9]

Retelling it (online) in 2021, teaching about Daphne’s plight for the twenty first time, explaining again the gripping etymology of the laurel tree according to the very textbook of authority, I read it differently. In these words as well as the pictures, her physical beauty is used against her personal will as pen-men and painters appoint the female form for their practice and pleasure.

The scenario that’s caught the eye and captured the imagination of authors, male artists and auters for millennia, is a rape; and only the magical function of myth, the marvellous features of fairy tale, make it seem not so. However, this article will examine the semiotic and psychoanalytic constructions of such trickery through the lens of *l’ecriture feminine* and the possibility of women’s writing. (Kristeva, 1994)

I first saw the scene that captivated me in the pen and ink illustrations of *Tales of Long Ago* (Blyton, 1965) where a few strokes show the girl’s grounding. But in the middle-class children’s nursery version, it’s all made out to be a misunderstanding. “[Y]ou should not have been so fearful of me. I would not have harmed you”: poor Apollo has been misunderstood.

This author bases her version closely on the Ovid though the god is not nearly so hot on the nymph’s heels. He “came rushing up, and flung his arms around her – then he drew back in surprise. It was no maiden he was embracing, it was a tree.” (Blyton, 1965) A sexual predator described for boarding schoolgirls, and boys who loved fairies and solving mysteries, he is innocent as they are.

From this formative exposure, I followed four key iterations of Daphne’s myth in English to track the degree of coercion, and any expression of concern, in a plot about sexual abuse perpetuated across the centuries. Golding’s version of 1567 was followed by Sandys’
in 1632. In 1717, Garth’s edition included sections translated by Dryden, Pope and Congreve. Then Brookes More’s 1922 version become the definitive account into the 21st Century.

The legend is older still but was first told in Latin at the beginning of the Common Era. In a backstory to the atrocity, man beats the beast, like light overcoming darkness. Robert Graves conveys the scenario as a key win for patriarchy over the sacred feminine, on a site dating back to matriarchal times. “Apollo’s destruction of the Python at Delphi seems to record the Achaeans’ capture of the Cretan Earth-goddess’s shrine; so does his attempted rape of Daphne, whom Hera thereupon metamorphosed into a laurel.” (Graves, 2017)

I trace the tree rings of its subsequent tellings, as a series of Oxbridge men account for the episode where a desperate nymph turns naiad to avoid a violent sexual attack, in metrical verse, over the course of 350 years[10]. This article will discuss the translations of *Metamorphoses* by four scholars on a literary timeline and disseminate new insight into their nuanced representations of its rape narrative. First, I’ll introduce them briefly in cultural context, before continuing to explore how the original text is inflected by their historical approaches to Ovid.

Cambridge alumni Arthur Golding was a Puritan, tutor to the nobility, an anti-Catholic reformer who also translated the sermons of Calvin and practiced his new religion. His approach to the ancient tales aligned their pagan content with a Christian message and a humanist stance. Oxford man George Sandys wrote in heroic couplets and Ovid’s Metamorphoses was the longest work of his life. Translating the books by candlelight at sea, he was a colonist to Virginia, producing the first English literature in the new world. (Davis, 1941)

Sir Samuel Garth, a Cambridge graduate, was physician to George I. An avid Whig, he was friends, despite political differences, with Dryden and Pope, who contributed sections of translation to his celebrity edition. (Booth, 1986) James Brookes More was neither an Oxford or Cambridge graduate; this American entrepreneur, who produced his own translation of Ovid on an early printing press, shares more common ground with Caxton. Self-educated, he published poetry during and after WWI, his interests being both scholarly and soldierly. (Hudgins, 1963) Python is a particular concern in either case, and for each of these literary laureates.

In celebration of Apollo’s defeat of Python, “to preserve the fame of such a deed” (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717), a kind of Olympic games were started. Winners of the “sacred sports”, the swiftest charioteers, best wrestlers were wreathed in any old leaves for the trophy, as a sign of their triumph, at first; with “the Oken Garland crown'd/ [As] The Laurel was not yet: all sorts of Boughs/*Phoebus* then bound about his radiant Browes.” (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632) The myth makes out there was no such thing as laurel till the next point on its own plotline. Its origin narrative tells how the tree gets its name, almost like an Aesop’s fable or ‘Just So Story’.

In his forward to the *Complete Greek Myths*, Robert Graves says this anomalous tale has been quoted by Freudian psychologists as symbolizing a girl’s instinctive horror of the sexual act; yet Daphne was anything but a frightened virgin. Her name is a contraction of Daphoene, ‘the bloody one’, the goddess in orgiastic mood, whose priestesses, the Maenads, chewed laurel-leaves as an intoxicant”. He

describes the frenzied rituals women carried out under the influence of "cyanide of potassium" from the plant, and the banning of its ingestion except by the Pythia herself. (Graves, 2017)

The bloody transformation from matriarchy to the phallocentric new order is signified, in Ovid's narrative, by the classic bow and arrow; and an aggressively-asked question of who is macho enough to use one. When Apollo sees Cupid, the god of love, also handling an archer's props he mocks the smaller, softer-seeming character: "'What, wanton boy, are mighty arms to thee/ great weapons suited to the needs of war?'" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922)

Sandys' translation fuels the assumption, his Cupid being "a lascivious boy", for whom Apollo's arms are too "manly". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632) Dryden excuses the bigger god's boast as, fresh from Python-slaying, and "swell'd with the pride, that new success attends/ He sees the stripling, while his bow he bends". His Apollo insists these are tools of war, not love, too. "Take up the torch (and lay my weapons by)", he tells Cupid, letting him have fire in exchange for sole entitlement to the penetrating barb.

"Resistless are my shafts": his threat is made. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717) It's the attitude that has validated wolf whistles in the street, bum pinches at the bar, and unsolicited 'dick pics' since Ovid wrote this and well before.

He can do more damage with one little prick than all of Apollo's armoury, reveals the god of love, in the other translations. "O Phoebus, thou canst conquer all the world/with thy strong bow and arrows, but with this/ small arrow I shall pierce thy vaunting breast!" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922) Dryden's boasts "…mine the fame shall be/Of all thy conquests, when I conquer thee." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717) And Sandys' agrees, "all may thy Bowe transfixe, as mine shall thee." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632)

This one-upmanship between thinly veiled deities was edited out of Golding's 1567 version, with its monotheistic agenda. But the story's awful moral can still be heard; males may use love as a weapon, arousal as a reason to attack, and be violently passionate. Though it might seem the fight is between them, both gods mean war, and the heroine of the tale, about to enter, is the loser to each.

'Nymph Peneis' or 'Penean Daphne' is the child of the river god, Peneus. The original audience would know him from such stories as the Twelve Labours of Hercules where, in episode five, he was magically rerouted to flush out the stables of King Augeas whose thousand horses hadn't be mucked out for thirty years, beating an impossible test the semi-divine protagonist had been set.

The river god's daughter is described as wild: "In woods and forrests is hir joy." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567) And "emulating vn-wed Phoebe", she "ioyes in spoyles of salvage Beasts, and sylvan Lares" for Sandys, in his graphic portrayal of a young woman who "Frequents the pathlesse Woods; and hates to proue/ Nor cares to heare, what *Hymen* is, or Loue" in the pioneering seventeenth century. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632)

For Brookes More, she "rejoiced in the deep shadow of the woods/ and as the virgin Phoebe (who denies/ the joys of love and loves the joys of chase)/ … her pure mind denied the love of man."

Perhaps approaching emancipation, in this historical period, "[b]eloved and wooed she wandered silent paths/for never could her modesty endure/the glance of man or listen to his love." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922)

But was her personality, so vividly evoked in these tale-tellings, wholly derived from Eros clashing with Apollo? This Cupid tips one arrow with a shiny gold point, and another with blunt lead. The first he fires at Apollo who falls painfully in love. The second he fires at Daphne, who finds love a pain.

Plucked from his quiver, "arrows twain/ most curiously wrought of different art…" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922) "one to repel desire, and one to cause." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717) "What caus'd, was sharpe, and had a golden Head/ But what repulst, was blunt, and tipt with Lead." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632)

Daphne is vividly described as powerful, free, unmoved by romantic needs, already: "And as for Hymen, or for love, and wedlocke often sought/ She tooke no care, they were the furthest end of all hir thought" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567). It seems she was that way inclined before it was ordained by one Olympic dart, validated by divine authority. It's as much of an anomaly for Apollo; "Peneian Daphne was his first belou'd/ Not Chance, but Cupid's wrath, that fury mou'd." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632) If this romance can't be described without recourse to supernatural assistance, then it is surely in the realms of horror.

It gives the sun god an excuse for his abusive behaviour: he was compelled by a cherub's aim, enchanted by the golden dart, what he did was beyond his control. Or, would Daphne have loved him if it wasn't for Cupid's dull arrow? The myth's implication is she would have, and normally should have, been thrilled by the attentions of an alpha god who invented the alphabet, music and medicine. But Ovid has already shown us a wild card, a girl going against the hegemonic grain. Sandys' translation says she is sought by many men, but averse to all, before a single barb was fired.

Every poet on this timeline of transformation from the Latin points out Daphne's wildness by describing her hairstyle. "A maiden's fillet bound her flowing hair", explains Brookes More of this traditional sign of virginity earlier narrators may have taken as read. (Perhaps his 1920s heroine would have cut those locks into a modern 'bob'.) Dryden's "and with a fillet binds her flowing hair," is fairly neutral but the narrator's tone becomes more judgemental each step back through this literary history; "a fillet binding her neglected haires", for Sandys, while "Unordred doe hir tresses wave scarce in a fillet tide", as Golding first conveys the outrage in 17th C. English.

In *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers*, Marina Warner follows this strand of signification to show how "[b]londeness and beauty have provided a conceptual rhyme in visual and literary imagery ever since the goddess of Love's tresses were described as *xanthe*, golden, by Homer" (1994, p.363). But her account includes darker tales in which women turn into various animals, their hair becoming fur all over, in order to escape the sort of attention Apollo will soon give Daphne. "As an outcast, spurning the sexual demand made upon her, her disguises – donkey, cat, or bear – reproduce the traditional iconography of the very passion she is fleeing". (1994, p.35)

There is no escaping it. She does, in fact, owe him 'pretty', and complicit, and reproductive. River God Peneus insists that Daphne owes him a grandchild and, indeed, a son-in-law. "But she, who Marriage as a Crime eschew'd" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632), begs her father to allow her to stay single; "graunt me while I live my maidenhead for to have". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567)

She evokes the precedent of Artemis, the huntress, who was permitted by her father to remain a virgin. "… [R]emember Jove/ did grant it to Diana

at her birth," Brookes More gives the gentle reminder. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922) "Tis but a small request; I beg no more/Than what Diana's father gave before," Dryden adds, reasonably. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717)

A sense that her good looks override her personal preferences is conveyed by Sandys "thy owne beautie thy desire with-stands" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632); and in Dryden, too, we hear a young woman being told that she is fair game by her father:

> The good old sire was soften'd to consent;
> But said her wish wou'd prove her punishment:
> For so much youth, and so much beauty join'd,
> Oppos'd the state, which her desires design'd. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717)

And in Brookes More's scheme, "… though her father promised her desire/ her loveliness prevailed against their will". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922) If it is "their will", and not just her whim, then the old river god has no power either over the thrusting new sun.

Peneus' reply possibly pre-empts the thinking of a real-life stalker, bully or sexual predator to this day. Ovid has him say, you are too pretty to be single. You're too attractive to not have sex, too desirable to not be into men, is his message. Though agreeing to her petition in principle, Peneus protests: "thy beautie and thy forme impugne thy chaste desire:/ So that his will and my consent are nothing in this case/ By reason of the beautie bright that shineth in thy face". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567)

The entire case, and key question of consent rests upon this line. The original Latin is: "ille quidem obsequitur sed te decor iste quod optas esse vetat. votoque tuo tua forma repugnant". Its most literal translation is: "He indeed complies, but that beauty forbids you to be what you desire, and your beauty resists your prayer/fights back/recoils from your vow." (Lines 488-489 https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Metamorphoses/Daphne_and_Apollo)

But the heart of Ovid's god-like man, or even the sexual organ of his man-like god, doesn't feel like the main casualty of this spurning. Instead, the damage, the devastation is done to His ego. "Do you know who I am?" An ancient theme or modern meme, Apollo lists all the things he isn't, in this numbering of his fragilities:

> …it is no enemy that follows thee -
> why, so the lamb leaps from the raging wolf,
> and from the lion runs the timid faun,
> and from the eagle flies the trembling dove,
> all hasten from their natural enemy
> but I alone pursue for my dear love. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922)

Golding's sun god makes it clear again who is the most insulted here as he goes on, "I am not one that dwelles among the hilles and stonie rockes/ I am no sheepehearde with a Curre, attending on the flockes" and says to Daphne: "Thou doest not know, poore simple soule, God wote thou dost not knowe/ From whome thou fleest. For if thou knew, thou wouldste not flee me so". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567)

All four versions iterate the affront to Apollo's self-esteem in this way: "Yet know, who 'tis you please: No Mountainere/ No home-bred Clowne; nor keepe I Cattle here". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632) And, "Perhaps thou know'st not my superior state/ And from that ignorance proceeds thy hate./ Me *Claros, Delphi, Tenedos* obey;/ These hands the *Patareian* scepter sway". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717) It's poignant to note the emphasis Dryden places on earthly power, here; listing, lingering on Apollo's political conquests. Ironically, Dryden himself died in penury, and would have had an obscure burial until his commissioning editor, Sir Samuel Garth, arranged a celebratory internment at Westminster Abbey. (Booth, 1986))

"Swift as the wind, the damsel fled away/ Nor did for these alluring speeches stay!" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717) When Daphne tries to run, to leave his vicinity at top speed, Apollo gives chase. He says it's for love. Or is it the case that her resistance turns him on, her fear arouses him?

In Golding's version, "Hir running made hir seeme more fayre". The Puritan poet's description is unusually cheeky: "And as she ran the meeting windes hir garments backewarde blue/ So that hir naked skinne apearde behinde hir as she flue". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567) By contrast, Sandys skips over this bit, with "how graceful then; the Wind that obuious blew/Too much betray'd her to his amorous view". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632) (Between the scant lines of his biography, probably unmarried, possibly living with a sea captain, the reasons for scrimping on a fuller description may be read.)

In Dryden's translation, edited by Garth in Georgian London, there is more elaboration of Apollo's credentials:

> The King of Gods begot me: what shall be,
> Or is, or ever was, in Fate, I see.
> Mine is th' invention of the charming lyre;
> Sweet notes, and heav'nly numbers, I inspire. […]
> Med'cine is mine; what herbs and simples grow
> In fields, and forrests, all their pow'rs I know;
> And am the great physician call'd, below.

Though urged to trust this doctor, Daphne still flees and, with a less fleeting glance in the translation of Dryden, "the wind… left her legs and thighs expos'd to view/ Which made the God more eager to pursue". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717) Brookes More's rendering gives a more predatory impression, though all four evoke tooth and claw in what is now certain to be a bloody catch. "She seemed/ most lovely to his fancy in her flight/ and mad with love he followed in her steps/ and silent hastened his increasing speed/ As when the greyhound sees the frightened hare…" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922)

Ovid's exquisite characterisation of the chase, a deadly race through the woods of Lazio, a montage of nature's cruelty, comes across in all the translations into English. Before the inevitable capture, he lingers on the hunting scene as a striptease, with this breeze revealing parts of the prey that make the whole look more tasty. It has become pornographic, like the fine artworks, the sculpted classics, because the point of view is the titillated observer's. Ticking off the bases, Golding:

> 'Hir lillie armes mid part and more above the elbow bare,
> Hir handes, hir fingers and hir wrystes, him thought of beautie rare.
> And sure he thought such other parts as garments then did hyde,
> Excelled greatly all the rest the which he had espyde.' (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567)

These long, courtly lines, 'fourteeners', iambic heptameter in rhyming couplets, became the font of mythical knowledge and chivalric ideas for the Elizabethans. The following translators evoke that same commonplace, of conceal over reveal, as he "Admires her fingers, hands, her armes halfe-bare;/ And Parts

vnseene conceiues to be more rare". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632) Next, Dryden reifies as he represents "Her taper fingers, and her panting Breast/ He praises all he sees, and for the rest/ Believes the beauties yet unseen are best." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717)

Brookes More's tone is the least sensational in this section, but the most spine-chilling, as he "permitted her no rest and gained on her/ until his warm breath mingled in her hair." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922) Golding twists the lines even more viscerally; "So that he would not let hir rest, but preased at hir heele/ So neere that through hir scattred haire she might his breathing feele". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567)

Previously each poet insisted, after Ovid, that "a maiden's fillet bound her flowing hair". Though he makes a memorable image of the simply-tied hair-style signifying modesty, in Daphne's first appearance, it seems to have disappeared just a few scenes later, when Apollo is stalking her through the wood.

The translations of Ovid's words, all aiming to tame the woman's wildness, show how beauty is culturally constructed as neat and tidy, trimmed and combed, under this male gaze. "Hir haire unkembd about hir necke downe flaring did he see/ O Lord and were they trimd (quoth he) how seemely would she bee?" says Golding (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567); compared with "He on her shoulders sees her haire vntrest/ O what, said he, if these were neatly drest!" by Sandys (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632). In Garth's edition, the point is given more emphasis:

> Her well-turn'd neck he view'd (her neck was bare)
> And on her shoulders her dishevel'd hair;
> Oh were it comb'd, said he, with what a grace
> Wou'd every waving curl become her face! (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717)

And this time, Brookes More's avoidance of rhyme does nothing to update the stereotype, or avert the powerful swipe of male hegemony, as it specifies a seemingly timeless ideal of femininity. "He saw her bright hair waving on her neck/ 'How beautiful if properly arranged!'" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922)

Though his thoughts and words hurt her in this scene, with the poets following Ovid all assuring the audience that she's frightened and desperate, panicking and exhausted, he also uses teeth. The climax comes with the greyhound fangs of Apollo parting the "scattred" hair of Daphne. It's clear the fillet has fallen.

So finally, she throws herself on the mercy of her father the river god or her mother earth with a dramatic plea for help: "Destroy the beauty that has injured me/ or change the body that destroys my life." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922) In Dryden, strong imagery is suggestive of her immolation: "Gape Earth, and this unhappy wretch entomb/ Or change my form, whence all my sorrows come." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717)

The poets all beat the same meter for her prayer but only Sandys calls the shots in explicit terminology: "Or, by transforming, O destroy this shape/ That thus betrayes me to vndoing rape." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632)

Though he is the only one to describe Apollo's deeds in these terms, it is evident that this mythical story, magical tale of transformation, is based upon an immoral act. Named or not, this is violent coercion, bullying or abuse, no matter the excuse. When her objections are not heard, Daphne becomes abject.

Some of the translations have her asking the earth to "devour me quicke" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567). It has formed her too beautifully, fashioned her so perfectly that she begs to be taken back under its cover. Whether the metamorphosis is something that she does or has done to her is key when considering the subjectivity or objectification of Daphne. To be entombed or devoured are passive fates, but actively chosen against the impaling force of rape; and in neither case can this story end prettily.

For two of the poets she is crying (Sandys and Dryden), for two she is praying to the pagan deities that are her parents (Golding and Brookes More). Then her plea is answered, her wish is granted, and her dreams come true: "…prayer scarsly sed: hir sinewes waxed starke/ And therewithall about hir breast did grow a tender barke", Golding announces. Dryden goes on, "Scarce had she finish'd, when her feet she found/ Benumb'd with cold, and fasten'd to the ground." Then, with Brookes More, whose translation was written over the course of two decades, endlessly finessed, and in virtual conference with Sandys and Dryden whose works he closely read:

> "Before her prayer was ended, torpor seized
> on all her body, and a thin bark closed
> around her gentle bosom, and her hair
> became as moving leaves; her arms were changed
> to waving branches, and her active feet
> as clinging roots were fastened to the ground—
> her face was hidden with encircling leaves" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922)

Though Daphne cannot take another step, the story continues, it is not over yet. The version by Sandys in 1632 implies a sleazy Apollo. The way he embraces the trunk feels sordid. The handling, the rhyming of plant and pant, continues to call out a rape that only this translator has so far named.

> Still Phoebus loues. He handles the new Plant;
> And feeles her Heart within the barks to pant.
> Imbrac't the bole, as he would her haue done;
> And kist the boughs: the boughs his kisses shun. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632)

Same in Brookes More: "with his right hand lingering on the trunk/ he felt her bosom throbbing in the bark…. and fondly kissed the wood/ that shrank from every kiss". (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922) This is definitely horror, not romance; modern tropes of terror bear traces of this nightmarish transformation.

Golding's god can feel the girl's heart pounding "within the barke newe overgrown" and her branches writhe. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567) With a grim aesthetic that's gone on gaining influence year by year like tree rings in the popular imagination "a filmy rind about her body grows" in Dryden. Having hair for leaves and arms for boughs, "the tree still panted in th' unfinish'd part." The Augustan idol in this description "fixt his lips upon the trembling rind/ It swerv'd aside, and his embrace declin'd." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717) If it wasn't clear to the sun god that she didn't fancy him as a woman, he must see her certain rejection as a tree?

Yet Ovid tells us he still gropes her; and, while carrying on the molestation regardless, glorifies and glamourizes her name. Daphne has turned into a laurel tree which the god now claims as the sign of his genius. Her leaves, wreathed around his musical instruments and weapons of war alike, will symbolise his greatness.

She is still his. In Sandys' translation

Apollo insists, "Although thou canst not bee/ The wife I wisht, yet shalt thou be my Tree" (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632) and Dryden's says: "Because thou canst not be/ My mistress, I espouse thee for my tree." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717) Golding elaborates with a politician's three-point repetition;

> Thou shalt adorne my golden lockes, and eke my pleasant Harpe,
> Thou shalt adorne my Quyver full of shaftes and arrowes sharpe.
> Thou shalt adorne the valiant knyghts and royall Emperours:
> When for their noble feates of armes like mightie conquerours
> (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567)

He brings her home to Rome, explicitly linking his leafy conquest to the emergence of a great city. "As long processions climb the Capitol/ and chanting throngs proclaim their victories", Dryden has them draped in the cuttings of her body. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717) "Thou shalt defend from Thunders blasting stroke/ *Augustus* doores, on either side the Oke", Daphne is told in Sandys' version, conscripting her instantly to Caesar's cause. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1632)

Also, indefinitely: "And as my youthful head is never shorn/ so, also, shalt thou ever bear thy leaves/ unchanging to thy glory." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922) "And as the locks of *Phœbus* are unshorn/ So shall perpetual green thy boughs adorn." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717) This is how Ovid explains the evergreen nature of laurel, and its association with passion and poetry.

The unruly locks of Daphne, earlier in the story, are tamed in this fable about women's consent; how it doesn't matter if she says no, he reads her actions as a yes. She is saying she'd rather be a tree than have sex with him. And his reply is: that won't stop me. Or perhaps, to be fair, her response is ambiguous because she has turned to wordless wood.

> Here the God,
> Phoebus Apollo, ended his lament,
> and unto him the Laurel bent her boughs,
> so lately fashioned; and it seemed to him
> her graceful nod gave answer to his love. (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1922)

"It seemed to him" that she was nodding, in the end: "The Lawrell to his just request did seeme to condescende/ By bowing of hir newe made boughs and tender braunches downe/ And wagging of hir seemely toppe, as if it were hir crowne." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1567) As if she's paid a fair price for this repackaging as royalty; her free body, her wild beauty, to stand forever as the phallus so as to mitigate her refusal of his.

Does she consent? This is 'pathetic fallacy' now, the literary trick of investing objects with human feelings, but is the tree nodding or screaming? Having met the character as a flesh and blood girl first, the latter seems more likely. Dryden's translation suggests that she's won over by the prospect of wreathing all the best artists and athletes at Apollo's bequest, though. "The grateful tree was pleas'd with what he said/ And shook the shady honours of her head." (Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1717) She might have been shaking it in horror.

In another tale from Ovid, translated by Ted Hughes (Hughes, 1997), other naiads turn to Poplar trees; daughters of the sun god, the "Heliades", in grief for their lost brother, Phaeton, when he dies flying too close to the fiery rays. Here Ovid can dramatize the same gruesome metamorphosis with a greater cast:

> *"They wore out four full moons with their wailings/ Until at last Phaethusa / As she flung herself to the ground/ Cried out that her feet were fixed of a sudden/And Lampetie, as she stepped to help her/ Found her own feet rooted, immovable/ A third, tearing her hair/ Brought away handfuls of leaves/ One screamed that a tree bole/ Had imprisoned her calves and thighs/ Another was whimpering with horror/ To find her arms crooking into stiff branches/ And as they all struggled in vain/ To escape or understand, tree bark/ Rough and furrowed, crept on upwards/ Over their bodies, throats, faces/ Till it left only their lips, human enough/ To call for their mother."* (Hughes, 1997)

In the Hughes Heliades episode, their mouths are slowly sealed by the bark, but lymph tears ooze through, solidifying like amber in the sunlight, before being swept away by the river "to adorn, some day far in the future/ Roman brides." (Hughes, 1997)

So, in this case it's not aversion to the male that causes the metamorphosis but devotion; to a son, brother, husband. He is not all bad, and some later translators of Ovid's original character make Apollo more relatable. In the most recent edition he's kind to Daphne when he tells her to: "Run a little slower, And I will run, I promise, a little slower." (Humphries, 2018)

Another version of this unsettling bedtime story can also be uncovered in the works of Pausanias, a second century CE travel writer. There's another young man who loves the beautiful but chaste Daphne and contrives to become her confidante and hunting companion by dressing as a woman. In this classic telling, Apollo is jealous of their closeness and causes the group of girlfriends to go swimming; at the woodland pool, Daphne's boy admirer is stripped of his disguise, and beaten by the angry women. (Pausanias, 1918) The mytheme evokes Achilles, and Diana, as ancient bards could easily have mixed and matched the nymph from one plotline with another, especially when the focus was mainly on the male characters (their identity crises, their unmet needs).

That perspective, from beneath the wreath of laurel worn by a tipsy after-dinner singer in the *triclinium*, a similar setting to where Ovid immortalised the myth of Daphne, gives a panoramic view of a woodland full of petrified survivors of abuse. For it was written by him first, but no doubt sung by somebody before that, whispered after dining in rooms where the scene was painted on the walls. Though the story is even older than the book, new provisos are needed, to share both the words and pictures in Creative Writing lectures now.

In a palliative version of the story[11] conveyed by Robert Graves in his 1950s introduction to the Greek Myths, "when he overtook her, she cried out to Mother Earth who, in the nick of time, spirited her away to Crete, where she became known as Pasiphae. Mother Earth left a laurel-tree in her place, and from its leaves Apollo made a wreath to console himself". (Graves, 2017)

But in the most recent translation of Metamorphoses, new emphasis is placed on the unreliability of Apollo; it gently suggests he's deluded. "He hopes for what he wants - all wishful thinking! - Is fooled by his own oracles". (Humphries, 2018) The cultural commentary of #MeToo, with its deconstruction of sexist thinking, wishes and hopes, the calling out of bullies and abusers embedded in creative industries; these widespread contemporary practices ensure that man as sun god can't be fooled by his own oracles any more.

Its range of modern feminist positions, and responses offered in such situations, includes embracing the change into a tree, engaging with dialogue in the

transformation: "Daphne invites us to become treelike ourselves, to feel our own roots stretching deep into the dark earth, the unknown terrain of the unconscious beneath the Dayworld. We can imagine how Daphne felt to have layers of bark protecting her most vulnerable self". (Gabrielli, 2015) An extreme separatism, it ensures against any further penetration by Eros' lead or golden tips.

The Chilean group Lastesis, who translate feminist critical theory into public performances, give the best example of contemporary activism on this issue, with their 'Un Violodor en tu camino', or 'A Rapist in Your Path' in 2019 and 20. Inspired by the writings of Rita Segato, this popular protest was seen and heard around the world; and made strong statements on victim-blaming and police violence against women, using poetry and dance techniques to dramatic effect. (Lastesis, 2023)

In an underpinning essay on female empowerment, The Laugh of the Medusa, the French feminist critic Helene Cixous urges woman to keep signifying, her priority in any activism being:

> *"To write; […] it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; […] tear her away by means of this research, this job of analysis and illumination, this emancipation of the marvellous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak. A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter."* (Cixous, 1976)

Laurel, following her transformation, will probably lose the fight; she is disembodied, a dumb wreath, blind branches to adorn any man's self-serving story. But if Daphne is always to be associated with literary genius, with creative and critical thinking, with this job of analysis and illumination, let each turn of her research, every leaf of her writing be an oracle for Apollo to check the golden arrow.

And the archetypal Pythia, seer priestess, entranced by fumes said to come from the decomposing body of Python (but which may have been mephitic vapours from cracks in the limestone terrain of the ancient mythology); she might also resist preservation into wood, at the end of matriarchy. Let each breath of her protest inspire, each sigh of her prophesy embody the movement. #TreeToo

I encourage my writing students of any gender to wield a laurel-wood pencil in this lesson and make original literary responses to the issues raised. Alongside this academic article, my own reply to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* comes in the form of performance poetry, set to music and danced, in a firm refusal to be rooted at the foot:

'Rappermorphosis' *(A classical nightmare to the tune of Rapper's Delight 1979)*

So, in the first scene, a lady named Daphne
Felt the lead-tipped arrow, the dull prick of Eros,
Made her mean and moody but Cupid's still shooty
With his hot dart, with his bright golden barb
The sun god takes it on the chest
He's rapidly disarmed
By the legs, the arse, and the hourglass
And best: her yet-to-come charms
See, he is Apollo, and - 'Don't you know who I am?' -
The actual male who invented the alphabet, music and medicine
But she just wants to stalk prey, to beat it and to eat it
Make mincemeat of the big beast, hunt game and defeat it…
'Hi Dad, don't be mad
(Daphne's daddy is a rising river god)
I'm not really into men
Okay if I move along?
Will you please give me leave to sling before
I get slung with this schlong'
Peneus spits, 'you're too pretty for virginity
You look too good for maidenhood
Shouldn't be a stranger to the marital arrangements
Pull Apollo…you know you want to… it's rude to say no'
So I start to run, but he can see my bum
And the 'dum-di-di' bounce of my breast
It wouldn't matter what clothes were on my body
His sunbeam eyes would undress me
Could be *crepe de chine*, *broderie anglaise*
Clad in satin, garbed in lace
Could be fashioned as maid or matron or
In fucking camouflage
The chase is a thrill, for him, a 'dip in the pool', a win
This race ends in a kill
It's fixed so the more I hide, the more he seeks
My first time as the hunt
I don't want to be horny, curvy, beautiful
In the view of a dim sun god
So I'm praying to my father, as I'm prey to this Alpha
Male with his tiny red-hot man-rod

Daphne's Less Attractive Sister *(She picks up where Laurel leaves off)*

So, she finally gets an answer from our father
With a river-slow solution to their quarrel
A cellular transformation is the cure-all
By his tides he turns the poor girl to a laurel
Well, the name was chosen by know-all Apollo
Hell, it's not a love story, this tale's immoral
She said no way but he didn't do that oral
Heard it before, saw it coming: 'Hashtag TreeToo'
For a start, her pretty (smelly) feet stopped moving
From the little toe tips up we watched them rooting
From her fingernails we spotted leaf tips shooting
Forest green polish instead of previous blood red
A crown of uncombed foliage sprouting from her head
'Dad,' she said, 'I told you I would rather be dead'
As daughter of the water her fate was fluid
She never wanted to, now can't, go with the flow
Her final curse was groaned from bosom low as earth
'I said destroy the beauty that's destroyed my life'
Her last words, or the last ones we could contemplate
Before the bark completely closed across her face
A bole for the mouth hole, and still the sun god kissed
(I think he used his tongue), and ripped the glossy leaves
Of hair, yanked laurel branches from her as she writhed
He wreathed the tendrils round his own head, the wanker
Posing with an arm around her trunk, slap bang where
This transformation at the hands of patriarchy
Into a tree still emphasized the hourglass waist
If he'd thought to place his godlike ear against it
He would have heard the beating heart, still hunted, I
Believe. His other hand placed where the natural V-shape
Modesty, moss-covered, could yet be molested
'I know you can't be my wife, now, Daphne' he winked
'But, Laurel, you will definitely be my tree.'

Phoebus was on fire, like ‘this’ll be the sign of
my genius forever’. She shuddered in the breeze
and, the bitch, she just looked more attractive than ever
Hand me down your unwanted beauty, sister tree
So I can catch the eye of the sun god next time…

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