

SHE STILL SEES HERSELF IN ARTEMIS:  
THE CHAOS MAGIC OF FEMINIST MYTHOLOGICAL  
RETELLINGS

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Creative Writing  
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Minor in Creative Writing

May 2023

## **An Abstract of the Thesis of**

Amelia Hamerlynck for the Minor  
in the Department of Creative Writing to be taken June 2023

Title: She Still Sees Herself in Artemis: The Chaos Magic of Feminist Mythological Retellings

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This thesis is a creative writing portfolio entitled “She still sees herself in Artemis” that retells, mostly in verse, stories from classical civilizations with emphasis on feminist themes. My collection engages with a body of retellings as old as the source material itself, but especially converses with contemporary poets, influenced as they are by the feminist writers of the twentieth century who have greatly shaped my creative and political sensibilities.

Part one is a critical introduction that posits rewriting and autotheory as integral to feminist literature. Rewriting enables us to reclaim a canon that has historically marginalized female and queer voices; to critique the supposed ‘foundations’ of a ‘Western inheritance,’ thus allowing us to rebel against the violence therein; and to imagine a past wherein the oppressed were always conscious of and combating their oppression, thus allowing us to imagine a future that carries this legacy.

Part two is a chapbook consisting of thirteen poems and one piece of flash fiction. I wrote ten pieces specifically for this thesis and include four pieces from past classes that are thematically relevant, two of which have minor revisions. In keeping with the fluid, cyclical nature of mythological retellings, each of my pieces is intentionally derivative and referential. Footnotes and epitaphs in the chapbook identify some references. Most pieces are written “after” a specific artist, which in poetry indicates both response and mimicry.

Finally, part three is an autotheoretical piece entitled “Artemis: a Gloss.” Autotheory is a feminist genre dedicated to turning one’s own life experiences into theory; as well as understanding one’s personal experiences through the lens of theory as though they were works of art. This title is lifted from “Nightingale: a Gloss” by Paisley Rekdal, in which she braids the lineage of the Philomela myth in Western literature with her own experiences as a sexual violence survivor. In a similar vein, my gloss braids a discussion of dilemmas in rewriting mythology; analyses of the artists and scholars who have directly influenced my work; and other insights into my creative process. The Gloss is itself divided into three sections, each addressing aesthetic and political questions at the heart of mythological retelling:

- I. What do we owe ancient historical women in our discussions of mythological gender violence?
- II. What is the power of reimagining mythological gender violence as healthy, romantic, and consensual?
- III. How do we center intersectional feminism while perpetuating story cycles that have historically been used to justify white supremacy and colonialism?

After completing a broad review of literature that engages with these questions implicitly and explicitly, I was able to address them in my own poems. The writing process was a transformative hands-on experiment in both craft (how to write a poem) and positionality (how to be aware of where the poem comes from and what work it does).

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to my thesis committee: Professor Anna Carroll, Professor tia north, and Professor Casey Shoop. Special thanks to Anna for her constant faith in my abilities and to tia for their crucial feedback on my poems, no matter how rough the draft.

This thesis truly constellates disparate pieces of my college education into a whole. Portions of the essay started their life in my Line of Inquiry for the Kidd Creative Writing Workshops in the 2020-2021 school year. Thank you to Lou Terlikowski, Dr. Brian Trapp, and my entire Kidd cohort for bolstering confidence in my writing skills and inspiring me to pursue poetry more seriously.

Other pieces started in HC221 Feminist Epic, HC421 Creative Nonfiction, CRWR330 Intermediate Poetry Workshop, and CRWR435 Advanced Poetry Workshop. Thank you to any classmate who has provided me with workshop feedback or intellectual stimulation throughout my undergraduate experience. Even when they did not realize it, they were helping.

Finally, thank you to my best friends and principal deities Melina and Sofia for everything.

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## Introduction

When I was 16 years old, my sister Roxi painted me a watercolor nude portrait of Artemis. The goddess is illuminated by yellow light. She's standing on a small pool of water while a stag runs sidelong in the middle distance. A crescent moon shines down. Rather than modeling the goddess after any historical depiction, Roxi modeled her after me. Her hair is in an anachronistic messy bun to match how I wore mine almost every day in high school. Her arms are long, her breasts are small, and her eyebrows are thick and harsh. The painting was meant to depict a myth in which a suitor spies on Artemis bathing. To protect her virgin status, she turns him into a stag. The painting settled deeply in my head as a representation of retaliation against sexual violence.

During my sophomore year of college, three years after receiving the painting, I realized that one of my previous sexual experiences had been nonconsensual, although I had accepted it as normal at the time. The day after this difficult revelation, I took a walk to the Eugene Masonic Cemetery. Sitting among the weathered mossy headstones, under the protective cover of the pine canopy, "Elegy for my seventeen-year-old self" visited me. It is the first poem in this thesis and the origin of its title. I say "visited" because it was the most effortless writing process I have ever experienced. It felt less like writing a poem and more like I was a conduit through which the poem passed. When the time came to revise it, I could only manage small line edits. In its current form, it has done everything I need it to. Looking at the painting, now hanging above crystals, candles, and my poetry collection, I think about the old gods, the old stories, and the incalculable weight of all the survivors that have suffered between the ancients and me. Could it be that a force of divine feminine protective energy sent me a message?

As much as I like imagining Artemis herself pouring a prophecy into my sister's palette and later out the tip of my pen, my real answer to this is no. Both poets and scientists have examined the semi-voluntary, mysterious quality of the writing process. Audre Lorde says in "Poetry is not a Luxury," an essay encouraging Black women to write, "it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless-about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding" (Lorde 36). Similarly, Adrienne Rich shares the sentiment that "poems are like dreams: in them you put what you don't know you know" (21). I, too, have sensed a truth in my body, but needed to render it in language before it could become conscious knowledge, a process creative arts therapists refer to as "the dance between the conscious and the unconscious" that takes place in the "imaginal realm," enabling a "transformation toward wholeness" (Lewis 5). While the experience might feel mystical, it is consistent with the neurological processes which evidence that "healing through language has evolved from the ability of the brain to modify thoughts, feelings, and behavior" (Brand 217).

Of course, human brains also form in specific cultural contexts. That Artemis came to me during this process was not providence, but a result of which myths my culture values such that they stick in my brain as powerful and important. The worlds we inherit cast "the quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives" (Lorde 36). For this reason, a recurring element of my creative writing education has been positionality, described by Professor tia north in my Intermediate Poetry workshop as a triangulated relationship between poet, reader, and subject matter. Awareness of positionality is especially important while creating socially conscious art because "creativity and invention do not happen in a vacuum. They cannot transcend culture or the

realities of hierarchical systems” (Heffers). It is vital, then, for writers to raise their “critical consciousness so that they can recognize their own constructed nature” and “resist the hegemonic ideological forces that drive that construction” (Anderson and MacCurdy 11). My poetry is no exception. A goddess did not write “Elegy” for me, but I also did not write it alone.

I am one of literally countless artists to use myths politically. As the video essayist Princess Weekes says, even the so-called ‘source material’ were formed as political creations in which “myths were taken from other cultures and smaller cults in the area and reappropriated into stories that fit into the Greek cultural identity that they were forming for themselves...what we have left is really the cultural propaganda version” (2:56-3:28). Each subsequent retelling has further warped and reframed source concepts; “myths are inherently open to interpretation and are subject to change and manipulation in each retelling,” making retellings and framings just as reflective of our cultural identity as those of the distant past (Richards 132). As such, myths are often mobilized for political purposes, both oppressive and liberatory.

Throughout my education, I experienced the interaction between Classical mythology and my settler-colonialist, white supremacist, and patriarchal state. Like many Gen Z kids, I read at a young age in Rick Riordan’s *The Lightning Thief* that the gods travel through time and space to instill the values of Western Civilization in special, blessed (i.e.: white/European/colonizer) countries. In high school freshman English class when we watched a film version of the *Odyssey* on VHS, my male classmates called Circe a ‘whore’ for her cartoonishly seductive line delivery and plunging neckline. I got angry at them but couldn’t articulate why. Perhaps that powerful image excused Odysseus’s constant infidelity, making his reunion with Penelope read as deeply romantic rather than disturbing. We didn’t even unpack how he brutally murders his slave girls in retaliation for having been raped by the suitors. By contrast, in my senior year, my high school

English teacher told us Antigone was the strongest female character in literary history besides maybe Linda from *Death of a Salesman*. Excited to find a literary woman who was wildly headstrong without being evil, I read Antigone as a feminist character while knowing Sophocles absolutely did not intend her as such. What to make of my education?

I am, of course, not the first to ask such a question. In 1972, Adrienne Rich wrote “When We Dead Re-Awaken: Writing as Re-vision” which argues for re-writing as an act of feminist resistance. Rich’s rallying cry “to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us” is a foundational tenant of feminist rewriting (19). Rich continues, “if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives...to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name. For writing is re-naming” (23). The impulse to re-name is synergistic with the healing power of releasing traumatic experiences from the body and “onto the more permanent surface of the page, where they can be considered, reconsidered, left, and taken up again. Through the dual possibilities of permanence and revision, the chief healing effect of writing is thus to recover and to exert a measure of control over that which we can never control—the past” (Anderson and MacCurdy 7). So, by intertwining these methods, we exert control over many pasts, both the deep past and our own.

In addition to unbridled creativity, Rich’s treatise centralizes the importance of reaction.

One of the passages that has most impacted this project reads:

A lot is being said today about the influence that the myths and images of women have on all of us who are products of culture. I think it has been a peculiar confusion to the girl or woman who tries to write because she is peculiarly susceptible to language. She goes to poetry or fiction looking for her way of being

in the world, since she too has been putting words and images together; she is looking eagerly for guides, maps possibilities; and over and over in the “words’ masculine persuasive force” of literature she comes up against something that negates everything she is about: she meets the image of Woman in books written by men. She finds a terror and a dream, she finds a beautiful pale face, she finds La Belle Dame Sans Merci, she finds Juliet or Tess or Salome, but precisely what she does not find is that absorbed, drudging, puzzled, sometimes inspired creature, herself, who sits at a desk trying to put words together (Rich 21).

I was stunned when I first read this passage because of its resonance with the opening lines of “Elegy,” now the opening lines to my chapbook: “If you need her, she’ll be in the garden reading / the Norton Anthology of Classical Mythology.” By depicting a reaction rather than starting with a direct retelling, I acknowledge my positionality within the text. The image of a teenage girl absorbing and reacting to a literary inheritance illustrates the meta nature of retelling. Like Louisa May Alcott as described in the introduction to *Homer’s Daughters*, I was always “aware” on some level “of the ways in which the foundation texts of the Western tradition have conspired to silence women, and to marginalize them in books that nevertheless depict highly regrettable behaviour on the part of the male protagonists” (Cox 1). Early efforts to address this discrepancy include an angry poem written at 14 in which I employed biblical symbolism to describe sex and envisioned myself in a coven with Antigone and Maya Angelou. I am honoring that bygone version of myself. An ‘elegy’ celebrates her life while grieving her loss and moving on toward a more complex understanding of both myself and the tradition. But she remains at the heart of it.

I first saw my angst transformed and illuminated at age seventeen when I read *Hold Your Own* by Kae Tempest. Tempest is a profoundly liminal poet. Their art transcends the gender binary and floats between Classical and contemporary, between ‘highbrow’ art and the worlds of spoken word and hip hop in which they came up. *Hold Your Own* “divines inspiration from” the prophet Teresias, who, “though he was born and died a man...also spent years as a woman. Though he was blind, he saw what others couldn’t” (Tempest cover). By “weaving together

classical myth, lover's confession, and humanist sermon," (Tempest cover) they "shuttle easily back and forth between the mundane and the mythic, the banal and the philosophical" (Kakutani). When they shift from introspective to outward-facing, Tiresias provides a conduit for philosophical observations; but because Tempest sees poetry, like Teresias's prophecies, as a tool for relating ethereal concepts to everyday people, Tempest never loses their sense of humor, absurdity, and accessibility. One of the best examples of their tendency to juggle diverse forms and moods comes in the sharp shift from "Ballad of a hero" (88-91), an anti-war song that made me cry when I first read it, to a poem called "Sigh" which consists of one line: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by payment plans" (Tempest 92).

To me, *Hold Your Own* maximizes the potential for mythological retelling to be as defiantly multifaceted as we may feel while reclaiming a canon that has been historically weaponized against us. They boldly claim new space in the canon, queering Teresias with blunt, sometimes vulgar speech or slang in lines like, "She remembers ancient times / When she was young, a boy who climbed / On top of girls to feel them grind. / And how she fought so she could find / Herself top boy" (63). Their revision comes from both revery for the source material and resistance to it, as Tempest believes deeply that "the plight of a people who have forgotten their myths / and imagine that somehow now is all that there is / is a sorry plight" (Spiers 114). When we rewrite, we struggle between the opposing desires to dismantle the canon and to take up space within it. In this oft-contradictory process,

The old text, the source text, occupies a privileged place within the literary canon and critical rewriting chooses it to compromise the principles lying at its creation, replacing them with new, non-discriminatory, politically correct ones. The resemantization of the source text by deconstruction and reconstruction, although radical, does not succeed – or intend – to knock the canonical text off its pedestal; on the contrary, its consequence is most often the consolidation of the source text. To put it differently, this text is brought to the present, discussed, analysed and

given new meanings, while shaking the dust from its covers and placing it in the universe of contemporary readings (Haneş 10).

I embodied these contradictory impulses while writing the chapbook. To continue centering the vitality of reaction as outlined by Rich, I employ autotheory in “Artemis: a Gloss” to explore two such contradictory impulses in greater depth. The title “Artemis: a Gloss” comes from the autotheoretical piece “Nightingale: a Gloss” in Paisley Rekdal’s poetry collection *Nightingale*. Rekdal blends an etymological analysis of the Philomela myth with a harrowing account of her own sexual assault experience (38-54). Autotheory is a feminist genre characterized by “the integration of the auto or ‘self’ with philosophy or theory, often in ways that are direct, performative, or self-aware” (Fournier 6). I learned about this genre in HC421 Written on the Body, a creative nonfiction class with Dr. Brian Trapp in which we read *The Argonauts* by Maggie Nelson, one of the most popular books to employ a “self-conscious way of engaging with theory—as a discourse, frame, or mode of thinking and practice alongside lived experience and subjective embodiment, something very much in the Zeitgeist of cultural production today—especially in feminist, queer, and BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, and people of color—spaces that live on the edges of art and academia” (Fournier 7). This approach differs from and reacts to a “general inclination” in academia “to marginalize” deeply personal, “disturbing texts in favor of safer, more controlled discourses of the academy” (Anderson and MacCurdy 2). The poetry writing process begins in “the deep places” within “each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling” (Lorde). I can only logically explain why I wrote a poem with retrospect and meditation on positionality, and even then, only to an extent. Autotheory is therefore a fitting genre for a project about writing poetry. Both evidence and personal experience are integral.

Each of the three sections are headed by quotes from relevant retellings. The first two sections of the gloss are called “‘The ones you killed / The ones you left behind’: Revenge as Re-Vision” and “‘Being optimistic doesn’t make you naïve: Romancing Re-Vision.” These sections explore the impulse to rage at the gender violence committed against mythological women vs. the impulse to reimagine their sexual relationships as romantic and consensual. The third section, “‘How we plow and furrow the murky Styx’: Intersectionality as Re-Vision,” explores the impulse to perpetuate ancient story cycles that connect us to the deep past vs. the impulse to decolonize a canon which has historically been used to justify white supremacy. As I hope to express in this thesis, these impulses can exist simultaneously, by turns critiquing and supplementing one another.

## She Still Sees Herself in Artemis

### Elegy for my seventeen-year-old self

Previously published in the 2020-21 Kidd Anthology

If you need her, she'll be in the garden reading  
the Norton Anthology of Classical Mythology.  
Her Guardian Angel in the gardenias  
hesitates, considers emerging to reveal their nine  
eyes and unkempt concern. They finally retreat  
behind the ivy-encrusted brick wall and await a moment  
of greater duress. If you need her, she'll be

in the garden reading the Norton Anthology  
of Classical Mythology, the soup mug's steam  
fogging her goggles, dusk's knife-like  
bite coloring cheeks pink. She's heard that salt  
makes slugs shrivel but has no interest  
in such boyish pursuits. Instead, she watches them crawl  
across her picnic blanket and into her  
dish of coconut cake crumbs. If you need her, she'll be

in the garden laying the Norton Anthology  
of Classical Mythology over her eyes, begging  
the flowerbeds to swallow her whole, so she,  
too, may wilt come winter. She likes her buildings  
rotting and ravaged by mud  
and wildflowers. This is the last  
version of herself who  
hasn't been told  
*but I really want to,*  
*but you like it, don't you?*  
*just relax,*  
*we're not being that loud,*  
*no one can hear us,*  
*don't worry,*  
*it's okay*

it's okay

for now  
she still sees herself in Artemis, who  
fearlessly strikes Bouphagos from the mountain  
for all his ugly trespasses  
on page seventy-four.

## Cassandra: variations on a theme

### *i. Chorus*

after Margaret Atwood and Kae Tempest

We once were teenage girls  
obsessed with divination.  
Tarot cards spilled on rugs  
alongside sweet libation.  
Forest green tea leaves swirled  
and settled in our cups. We stole  
an heirloom watch to hold above our chests.  
Asked our queries. Let it swing  
east to west. Grasped at straws  
and shoehorned vivid omens into cloud shapes.  
Blamed our foul moods on fairies. Shit-talked  
Venus in Scorpio and New Moon in Aries.  
Spent our meager paychecks  
at boardwalks. Psychics tapped  
their red nails on plastic spheres.  
Delicately took our naked palms in theirs.

On bus rides home, we tangled up  
our limbs and clucked about *The Craft*.  
Grown men scoffed and mocked it.  
They drew the line between reality and myth.  
We popped our bubblegum  
and flipped them off  
and crossed it.

We saw Cassandra slit the goat belly  
from tail to chin. Innards sprayed  
across a marble wall. Blood crept  
like an elevator in a haunted hotel.

We longed to bow before wild minds  
with third eyes and beg in forked tongues  
for signs –

We, too, smelled smoke  
and screamed fire.  
No one brought the rains.  
Arsonists held up  
our charred flesh  
as proof we were

too sensitive  
to flames.

Our eyes sewn shut  
and tongues scraped  
clean of buds,  
we crawled back into seas.  
Cassandra fed us back  
our instincts –  
piece  
by  
bloody  
piece.

*ii. Dialogue from therapy*

There's one where he chases me  
on some Italian beach  
at golden hour.

Do you run?

I hold still.

Ah.  
The three responses:  
Flight.  
Fight.  
Freeze –

But I'm not frozen.

No?

I'm waiting.

And when  
he catches up?

I lift my linen skirt,  
kick clumps of sand  
with leather boots  
into his god-shaped face  
and scream.  
The waves roar  
a hoarse chorus with me.  
He cries and cries and tries  
to interrupt, but I...

But what?

I am the single loudest creature  
ever born.

That's no anxiety dream.

No?

That's a resolution.  
That's a prophecy.

*iii. Scrying bowl recipe to glimpse an alternate universe*

Previous version published in the 2020-2021 Kidd Anthology

Large bowl  
Boiling water  
Eucalyptus oil  
Wrap a towel around your head  
while leaning over the bowl, trapping  
steam and scents like a tiny makeshift sauna.  
Quite potent, this one. Start to sweat  
and snot profusely.

Here,  
you never saw the girls,  
emaciated and makeupless in imitation  
of your innocent age, contorted  
to accommodate the mass of male  
violence in their barely-legal bodies.

Here,  
American folklore never declared  
the width between your thighs  
a telltale mark of loose or tight,  
never scolded scarlet letters in the pizza joint,  
never embroidered neon 'fuck me'  
on your spandex for posterity.

Here,  
you never asked five times  
before he listened,  
never thanked him for stopping  
when you asked him to,  
doubly never thanked the ones who asked first –  
never praised a single man for scraps.

If your face stings  
minty wintry knives,  
you've done it right.  
Through searing pain,  
watch the fuchsia blots dance  
across the water.  
Focus. It grows clear.

Pastel pink mesh hanging storage nets  
stocked with stuffed animals  
stand sentinel as gargoyles.

Frosting peaks and soap roses swarm  
masculine threats like locusts.  
Conversation heart-scented  
sleepover sounds like *Sailor Moon*  
and never ends.

Descendant of Cassandra, vestige  
of Tiresias, votive  
of Laveau, breathe  
relief, deep  
earthy lungfuls, in  
through mouth, out  
through nose. Purge  
the gunk. Cough  
up dislodged grime. Spit  
into the swirling void.

Your body is unsexed.  
Knee socks  
pigtails  
teddy bears  
lipstick  
bubblegum  
bananas  
braces  
big eyes  
popsicles  
“daddy”  
spreadeagled knock-kneed legs  
halter tops  
nipples  
shyness  
submission  
unsexed.  
Eight-year-old shoulders  
unsexed  
by schoolyard Catholic scorn.

Eyes burn,  
tears arrive –  
skin  
lungs  
throat  
tonsils  
sinuses  
cleansed.

## Medusa tries Nair

After Margaret Atwood

At first, dating as a Gorgon wasn't as hard as I expected. I couldn't go around turning Tinder dates to stone, but men didn't mind the sunglasses. It gave them something to look at, like Narcissus with his reflective pool. The glasses obscured and mystified my character enough to let them project any enigma they wished to decode. For one, I was a frigid career girl who had to learn to love again; for another, a quirky weirdo destined to change his life with my wacky hijinks; for another, a burn victim who would eventually show my face and weep (if my scarred eyes were still capable) because he loved me despite my disfigurement. The head scarf and modest clothes may not have helped, but they hardly hindered. Getting attention as a woman, wanted or unwanted, is quite easy.

The problem was they found it strange that I insisted on leaving all my clothes including the glasses on during blowjobs, my only sexual act. Most grew frustrated at my secrecy then ghosted me. I would love to show my naked body, but each hair follicle on it contains a tiny snake egg. Legs and arms are one thing; the pubic area, however—well, it should come as no surprise what a Mediterranean woman has going on down there. I was hopeful when I realized I was expected to be hairless anyway, but taking a razor to the throats of a hundred thousand baby snakes isn't as pretty as a shaving cream advertisement. Enduring so much blood and dying screams and snakebites didn't seem sustainable. I kept up my strange dating routines while searching for another solution, figuring I could get really good at oral in the meantime.

All that changed when Perciville came along. He was deeply, almost cartoonishly nice and insisted he never wanted to make me feel uncomfortable, for which I thanked him. He liked my mind, he said, and sex wasn't the only way of expressing that; so if I wanted to give blowjobs I could, or I could not, it didn't matter, as long as I let him get to know the real me. I didn't reveal to him how impossible this would be, which I felt guilty about at the time.

We were together long enough to take a trip. When we checked into the hotel, the young receptionist complimented my Versace bag (a private joke with myself). It wasn't until the early hours of the morning that I woke with one hand pressed on my mouth and the other tugging at my pajama bottoms. "You've got to be fucking kidding me," I said, but the muffled expletive sounded like a cry of protest to his biased ears, gifting him a manic laugh and hardening his penis against my leg. My eyes watered under my sleeping mask as I struggled to breathe.

He finally tore off my underwear and understandably let out a bloodcurdling scream at the nest of hissing, spitting vipers, which I honestly thought would be the end of it—that he'd call me a freak and run away and never see me again. But it got worse. Incensed by my snakes, apparently taking the thing between my legs as a personal offense, he mounted me once more and put his hands around my neck. He howled in pain as my snakes attacked his thighs and calves. Despite this, continued choking me. It didn't overly matter, of course, because my hands were free to lift my sleeping mask. I thanked Palas Athena for this cursed defense mechanism in the moment before the stone statue nearly crushed me to death. He was a large man.

There was a knock at the hotel door. Panic-stricken, I hauled the statue off of me, tossed the covers over it, pulled up my pants, grabbed sunglasses from the bedside table, and opened just a crack. It was the receptionist.

"We got a call from your neighbors, ma'am. They said it sounded like a fight."

"No, nothing to worry about. It was just rough sex." Her eyes widened. I'm not entirely sure why I volunteered this information or why I opened the door a little more to vaguely gesture

at the bed and said, “See, I knocked him right out.” Her eyes widened more, then narrowed suspiciously. “We’re done now, though. Good night!” I slammed the door.

What I was expecting to be a lazy Sunday morning with a paramour turned out to be me hauling a bizarre, undesirable stone statue to any willing antique store. I was trying to be discreet, but the dealers marveled at incredible detail. They each enquired about the provenance. “It was a family heirloom,” I improvised.

“Is that Calvin Klein carved into the underwear? Surely it can’t be that old, then. You really don’t know the artist?”

I finally found one of those charmingly indiscriminate junk shops. I stood staring at his howling bloodthirsty eyes one last time, at the protruding veins in his forehead and throat, at the engorged bulge and the strange gesture of the outstretched chokehold.

“Is that—”

It was the hotel receptionist. She must have been an artsy type, adorned in cutting-edge fashion and hanging out in strange shops on her day off. Her eyes darted between me and the statue, narrowing and widening as they had at my hotel door the night before. Finally, she caught her own reflection in my sunglasses and her jaw dropped. I’m not sure what I expected to happen. Her face shifted into something like determination.

“Have you tried wigs?”

I smiled and nodded slowly. “I’ve dabbled. But that’s only half the battle, see.” I lifted my long skirt to show the baby snakes on my ankle.

“What about Nair?”

## The Ballad of Deidameia

Revised from HC221 Feminist Epic Fall 2019 / after Madeline Miller

I was in my night clothes  
when the knifelike nymph  
pulled me into her cavern of the Sea  
and married me in secret  
to her golden-haired son  
who was known as the best of the Greeks.  
There was no farewell to my innocence  
but a god's gift couldn't be refused—  
So – brown eyes wide – I thought:  
maybe this time,  
a man who won't  
look right through.

I took off my night clothes,  
pulled the gold boy close,  
pressed against him,  
and called him my flame.  
My ego was sure  
I was worth much more  
than a footnote in his fame.<sup>1</sup>

I was in my night clothes  
when the dawn's red rose  
looked down on the birth of our son.  
But my husband wasn't there  
to see his flame-red hair,  
for he'd fled with his *therapon*.<sup>2</sup>

My father used to tell me  
to cease when I'd shout;<sup>3</sup>  
when you're one of seven sisters,  
you learn to stand out.  
My bratty disposition,  
my temper too hot –  
I want more than I get.  
I deserved what I got.

My father pushed men

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<sup>1</sup> “You have ruined me, you and your son. I have lain with him, as you told me to, and my honor is gone” (Miller 133).

<sup>2</sup> “A brother-in-arms sworn to a prince by blood oaths and love” (Miller 37).

<sup>3</sup> “‘No!’ Deidameia said again. ‘Daughter!’ This was Lycomedes... ‘Stop this scene’” (Miller 131).

off cliffs in cold blood  
to protect our glory and gore.  
My husband and his lover  
died one after the other  
in a fruitless ten-year war.  
And my red-haired son?  
Stolen by the gods –  
never mine since the day he was born.<sup>4</sup>

It's always been that way with me:  
nothing to hold, nothing to keep.  
Nor man nor god could return to me  
the blood I've lost to the Aegean Sea.

The only bad thing  
about being a woman  
is everybody treats you like one –  
whether you're on your knees,  
being pious and sweet,  
or screaming  
and coming undone.  
The only bad thing  
about commanding attention  
is you fall apart when you get none.<sup>5</sup>

My gold crown proud,  
I'm going down –  
a slaughtered lamb,  
that's all I am –  
mother of Achilles's son:  
Deidameia, the queen of none.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “‘I have lived with the gods beneath the sea,’ he says. ‘I have drunk their nectar and feasted on ambrosia. I come now to win the war for you. The Fates have said that Troy will not fall without me’” (Miller 356).

<sup>5</sup> “‘You do not have to humiliate her so thoroughly, I thought. But it was not kindness he lacked; it was interest. His gaze passed over her as if she was not there’” (Miller 141).

<sup>6</sup> “‘You are a foolish girl,’ Thetis said... ‘Poor and ordinary, an expedient only’” (Miller 133).

## Paris's thoughts upon waking up next to Helen

after Aidoneus

“She must have been willing, though. Menelaus's palace is like a fortress. If she had struggled or cried out, someone would have heard. She knew he must come after her” (Miller 234).

Your eyelids flutter open.  
Outside the palace walls,  
the city pulses  
with Mediterranean air  
and hatred  
for your people. A body  
politic whose eyes  
you never gaze into directly –  
your body is too dangerous  
to kiss the Trojan sunlight.  
Gingerly,  
kiss my eyelids instead.  
These eyes that almost witnessed

the Styx a dozen times  
before reaching a man's age.  
Of all the men who wanted you,  
only I understood  
the horror of prophecy: life,  
without the dark mother of the unknown.  
I dove with you  
into that wine-colored sea  
of corruption.  
And emerged on the shore,  
three Fates' threads interlaced by war

before we even knew the way of war.  
When the Goddesses  
offered me power, I took  
your love  
instead. I had heard of Helen,  
reflector of all men's unhinged desire  
as a clear pool to Narcissus.

I knew  
even then  
only I  
could reach into the vale of tears  
and touch the whispering Nymph herself.

And trace out  
on her wrist  
all the reasons  
she had been so lonely.  
I promise never

ever

to call you beautiful.  
Were Hera to ravage  
my eyes so I had only  
my stronger senses, my love  
for you would guide me on  
in vision's stead.

How useless we would be!  
A comedy. You, your veil opaque; I,  
my arms extended  
as a sleepwalker. Paradise,  
perhaps, for so queer a pair as us –

A world without sight:  
so men may never gaze at you again  
and erratically devour  
your sublimity  
as you mask fear with flirtation  
by gazing toward Hades –  
downward.

A world without the Sight:  
so the Oracles could never have foretold  
my path toward my country's destruction,  
sealing my til-death blood bond  
to those that would destroy me.

No wonder,  
when I came for you  
in the dead of night,  
and we barreled blindly  
away from Menelaus's surveillance  
into the dark –  
you laughed  
instead  
of screaming.

## Inheritance: variations on a theme

### *i. Heritage braid*

Previously published in *Verseweavers* #27

This is the story of my Sephardic  
great-great grandfather  
who gave me my Mediterranean tan  
and caterpillar eyebrows:  
He changed his name from Mois to Morris  
to sound more Gentile after leaving Tunisia.  
The family told my Mama he'd converted.  
His baby son's stillborn body  
in a Jewish cemetery suggests otherwise –  
his wife Mathilde traded in her crucifix  
for a star of David.  
At five, I begged Mama to let me wear  
the pewter Hamsa he made  
a hundred years ago,  
but no. If I lost it,  
she would never forgive me.

This is the story of taming wild things:  
Every time you look into a dog's toothy grin  
and feel something, it's 'cause their kind  
have walked beside us since the Last Glacial Maxim  
twenty thousand years ago,  
and lent a helping paw in every single  
domestication process since.

This is the story of cave paintings:  
if you squint, you can't always  
tell them apart from Cathedral frescoes.

This is the story of an epigenetic memory:  
When my doctor puts the IUD in,  
my cup overflows with joy. Heavy  
lies the weight of unburned witches  
in my bloodline – beauties married off to beasts.  
A vision visits of my Mami discreetly popping birth control pills,  
feeding Mama *soupe aux poireaux et aux pommes de terre*  
with a glass of Catholic silence.

This is the story of your gut bacteria:  
*You're not a you, but an ecosystem.*

A host.

Just like Mama metamorphosed  
into to throw solstice parties  
every year, although  
I always forget to ask her why.  
They're Pagan holidays  
out of vogue since Constantine ruled Rome.

So here's the story of Mama:  
In a 1970s cinema  
thick with secondhand smoke,  
she saw the Devil's face  
in the movie monster  
and went home to tell Mami  
she'd never attend Mass again.  
'Cause ain't the Church *française*  
just practical effects like that?  
The threat of Hell – smoke and mirrors.  
No more real than a giant gorilla climbing the Chrysler.

This is the story of buttercup remnants  
fossilized in mammoth stomachs: Imagine  
a Neanderthal making love to a Sapien  
in a yellow field.  
They're your thick-skulled ancestors.  
You may not remember them,  
but your bones do.  
Every time you learn about a bigfoot –  
Tallman, Song, Sasquatch, Yeti –  
remember that we used to have neighbors.  
What died in us with them?  
Is that why we're profoundly lonely?  
There's an ape-shaped hole in our hearts,

all of us.

*ii. Notes on a church*

It's lopsided. Locked. Flanked  
by weak scaffolds.  
Only the stained glass  
virgin over the altar is visible  
through the keyhole.

Back in the day, you could  
enter any given French church  
at any time. No one  
wants to look after them, now –

perhaps a good omen.  
A nation of nonbelievers  
being better than the alternative.

My parents are re-creating  
their wedding photo before the doors.  
They've taken this pilgrimage  
after every birth – the same priest  
dipped all our infant bodies in water  
under the eye of God. We wore  
the same gown

everyone in the family has since  
*grand-mère* sewed it in the sixties.  
I'm third-to-last in that long line.

The August air is desert-hot.  
The stone remains  
disarmingly cold. I try to comprehend  
the arc: from fall of Rome  
to autumn of the Anthropocene.  
But the sun is blinding.  
I break away and suck at a slit

in my nail bed. Blood blooms  
on my tongue.

*iii. Heritage weave*

after Paisley Rekdal

Nor am I  
my grandmother,  
who bought the starched white cotton  
for cheap in the sixties,  
tore a pattern from a packet,  
and sewed the christening gown  
at her machine,  
the pedal rising and falling  
like a Mediterranean wave,

Nor Habetrot  
with her flat foot,  
fat lip, and flared thumbs,

Nor one of three German sisters  
spinning flax under the shroud of night,

Nor a clever silkworm  
smuggled out of China  
by a single soul,

Nor Anansi weaving trickster webs  
fragile-strong and ghost-white  
as hand-tatted lace,

Nor Spider Grandmother  
weaving a realm for the Hopi,

Nor Yue Lao unspooling  
bloodred thread, attaching  
two Chinese souls at the ankle,

Nor my friend Sofia, catch-and-releasing  
each spider she sees in the house  
and sewing red curtains with paisleys –

We watched videos of a Chinese woman  
harvesting, cleaning, and spinning raw cotton  
into starched white bed sheets,  
of Cambodian men dipping hand-woven baskets  
into water bodies.  
We yearned.

My fiery mother tried  
to teach me to knit.  
My head hurt  
at the hidden math,  
the universe in my small hands –

Nor can I be a ratio,  
peppering Mother Earth  
with plants and shells that feast  
on air and light,

Nor wily Penelope weaving  
Laertes's funeral shroud,

Nor a clever fate  
spinning Odysseus off-course again,

Nor his trickster slave girls  
unweaving under the shroud  
of night.<sup>7</sup>

My flesh peeks through lace flowers  
delicately bonded to my dress.  
My mother hand-tatted the lace  
at age fifteen –  
her clever fingers danced  
like spider legs.  
She rediscovered it  
last summer in her mother's house  
down the road from  
the thousand-year-old church  
where I was christened –  
the third-to-last in three generations  
christened in the gown  
my grandmother sewed  
at her machine  
in the sixties.  
Sixty years on,

I am only a girl  
in thrifted Wranglers

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<sup>7</sup> “The domestic space, the ‘οἶκος,’ is connected to the female, and there is great creative and economic value in the art of household weaving. But its most important function is that it allowed women to bring to life something outside the rules of patriarchy, their very own text of alterity made with their own ‘language’” (Massoura 398).

woven by absolute strangers.<sup>8</sup>  
Father Time gnawed  
my jeans down to the bone  
last summer.  
I sewed the last  
denim scraps together. No pattern –  
just the reckless abandon  
of the freshly heartbroken.

They're still buried under my bed.  
Stale,  
frail,  
unfinished, prey  
to predatory moths.

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<sup>8</sup> "...when the food does not come from a flock in the sky...that food may not satisfy. It may leave the spirit hungry while the belly is full. Something is broken when the food comes in in a Styrofoam tray wrapped in slippery plastic" (Kimmerer 30-31).

## Desert Icarus

after Paisley Rekdal

*i. wings*

Before the world was wide, you  
still seemed worthy of my love.  
I let your catcalls slide. I asked  
our best friend Tommy, who's that boy  
in the white trash jag and leather jacket?  
He said your daddy tinkered day  
and night with ancient engines. You liked to drive  
a hundred twenty 'round the bend  
where the Preacher's daughter crashed last year.  
"His ego is Mount Everest. His self  
esteem is the Mariana Trench. I hope  
he never trips and falls." Tommy told  
us God was fake and he should know, he dropped  
a lot of acid, but you found  
truth of the divine in Elon Musk.  
I hadn't drowned my stupid heart  
in Marxist cynicism yet—  
your colonizer hubris still  
resembled faith. My mama  
called your house a run-down shack. I  
screamed until my throat bled. Your  
poverty burrowed deep into my teenage dreams:  
the bad boy from the wrong side of the tracks  
who I'd jerk off to learn about myself.  
You drove us to the abandoned radar base  
and dislodged Draco from the Milky Way,  
your shoulder blades so sharp  
they split the world  
and broke my heart.

*ii. fall*

No one craves a rush  
like small-town teenage boys. At first,  
you picked your poisons wisely –  
stopped drinking 'cause  
it made you try to die. But some  
would say fifteen's too young for LSD,  
and weed is evil when psychosis chokes  
your DNA. By senior year,  
you're puking at my feet from six  
Sativa brownies in one evening.  
Digging rabbit holes.  
Your precious wings, rain-soaked with delusion,  
disintegrated between my fingers.  
"The Oracle of Delphi's downright clear-eyed  
next to Rus's hundred-meter gaze.  
The difference bein' that a stoner ain't  
know nothing that you can't—but thinks he does."  
You asked to date me  
for a motive to stay clean.  
"I'm not your fucking muse," I screamed,  
and ran the whole way home, then all the way  
out West were we regulate our drugs  
and talk about the soul outside  
of church. You'd love it here. It costs  
too much. I hate myself. I could've caught you  
on the long way down.

*iii. funeral*

From last I saw, you're quite alive. I don't  
feel sorry for you. I just feel like  
the Elvis to your Chuck. We're haunted  
by the highs we chased in childhood,  
but I get scholarships for making  
art about them. For what it's worth,  
I hope you did peyote in the desert  
with your mom just like you planned  
and on the other hand I hope you threw  
your pipes down Donner Gorge.  
The glass shattered on the glacial rocks.  
You kissed a boy and found it fun.  
Your class frustration goes to use—you raged  
against the wrong machines and slaughtered lambs  
for false gods—your labor  
union's racially diverse. You're never  
shipped to Troy to die for oil. I hope  
my fucked-up condescending hopes and spend  
my parents' money on the party favors  
I once shamed you for,  
feeling like a fraud for wanting pain relief  
while boys like you grow up in towns like ours.  
I spark this blunt on Pisces season eve  
for spacey desert punks who dream  
of Futureland, Andromeda. Impossibility  
be damned. May their wax wings never melt.

## Ecological grief memoir

“And then they met—the offspring of Skywoman and the children of Eve—and the land around us bears the scars of that meeting, the echoes of our stories. They say that hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, and I can only imagine the conversations between Eve and Skywoman: ‘Sister, you got the short end of the stick...’” (Kimmerer 7).

### *i. Desert Persephone*

*September 2008; Tohono O’odham & Pima Land AKA Tucson, Arizona*

It’s monsoon season,

the pocket  
between the dog days  
and the school year where the desert  
splits open like a pomegranate.

I meet Persephone on my pool deck.  
She is a hive of queen ants  
who hatch and dance and fuck and fall  
to their death  
within five minutes – but not before  
she globs  
into a woman-shape –  
spins across the chlorination –  
kisses my forehead – and whispers  
in a language I didn’t know I spoke:

*You are a guest here, not a god.*<sup>9</sup>

Afterward, my dad  
sweeps up her innards  
with a sieve and dumps  
them into the ditch.  
At night, the lightning comes.

On the porch,  
we count the seconds between  
kabooms and vein-shaped strikes.  
Our Punjabi neighbor

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<sup>9</sup> “The storytellers begin by calling upon those who came before who passed the stories down to us, for we are only messengers” (Kimmerer 3).

waxes nostalgic about mangoes.

I understand, then,  
why a lust for fructose  
drove a harbinger of life  
to live amongst the dead.

Soon, my teachers will tell us  
how Tucson will run out of water  
in twenty years  
if we keep up all the drilling.

Today,  
I pour dry moong lentils  
in a cardboard tube,  
seal the sides with duct tape,  
and dance in the gravel pit  
to bring on the rain.

*ii. Desert Demeter*

*December 2016; Burns Paiute Land AKA Harney County, OR*

The sun set hours ago.  
The sky is apocalypse-yellow.  
White ice above,  
black ice below.  
On the four-hour drive  
from the sticks to the airport,  
I count each car on the roadside.  
I who have never known God  
secretly pray in the face of

flashing hazards.  
Flanked by cops and rescue crews  
like all the rest to come.  
The blizzard blinds my dad.  
His steady hand. A snail's pace.  
The radio and my mother  
murmur deep and low, chant oracular.

I who have never known ice  
was born of the Sonoran's symmetry.  
Raised on the back  
of a slumbering killer.  
Hot enough to fry an egg.  
Sharp enough to crucify  
an unsuspecting sinner.

At six, I bruised my thigh  
while sledding on Mount Lemmon.  
There's still a dent in my flesh.  
I rub it and remember  
spinning out,  
losing so much fucking blood.  
Holy fuck,

this one's flipped.  
Best not think.  
Tomorrow, we will drink  
of the Southwest's warm storms.  
Tonight, I see a thick flurry  
twist between headlights  
and the din.

How could I mistake her  
from the likeness to her daughter?  
Demeter,  
hunting the hills  
for the mouth of Hades,  
raging and sobbing.

*iii. Sea otter dirge*

*June 2021; Southern Kalapuya Land AKA Eugene, OR*

Persephone watched from her throne  
of rotten pomegranates and brittle bones  
as white folks mass-murdered the sea otters  
two hundred years ago.  
I reap the Pacific we sowed:  
glutted with urchins,  
guttled of kelp  
who drink of Carbon  
like mother's milk.  
Democrat millionaires  
pay me meagerly  
to accost rich white hippies  
and beg them for charity.  
Please, I need money  
to bring sea otters back.  
To save the world from  
her desert-like wrath.  
Her forest fire ash  
coats my hoarse throat.  
For just ten bucks a month,  
I croak through thick smoke,  
you, too, can bring sea otters  
back to the coast.  
She drips down my forehead.  
Paints the sun red.  
Two heatwaves down,  
dozens more dead.  
King of Shades, have mercy.  
They're down there, I know it.  
Gracile fuzzy saltwater fairies  
charting warm currents  
in Acharon and Lethe.  
Cracking ghost-shells  
with rocks to feast  
on ghost-clams.  
Taking naps while holding ghost-hands.  
Come up early, Hades. Drag down  
Spring's dread daughter.  
I'd trade her soul for those  
of the mass-murdered otters.

## ARTEMIS: A GLOSS

### I. “the ones you killed / the ones you failed”: Revenge through Re-vision<sup>10</sup>

In Fall 2019, I took my first Honors literature class, Feminist Epic with Dr. Anna Carroll. We read retellings of the Homeric texts written by woman authors. Most of my classmates were women; as such, our seminars often towed the line beautifully between literary analysis and therapeutic commiseration about misogyny. It was here that I first read *The Song of Achilles*. Written by Classics scholar Madeline Miller, the novel reimagines *The Iliad* from Patroclus’s perspective. Miller scrubs away the patina of historical ambiguity and makes Patroclus and Achilles explicitly queer lovers in a way immediately comprehensible to a contemporary audience. Their relationship is deeply romantic and emotional, challenging typical expectations of Achilles as a symbol of pure masculine violence.

Everyone in the class valued the groundbreaking softness in Miller’s queering. But during one seminar, we struggled with her interpretation of Briseis, a woman who Achilles enslaves after the Greeks raid her village. While Briseis plays a critical role in the epic’s plot, the true tragedy of her condition is its banality. As a character, she “forces us to acknowledge the horror of sexual violence as a weapon,” not just of the mythological Trojan War but of most real wars in human history (Cox 4). But Miller, while far from justifying or defending Briseis’s enslavement, paints a kinder picture of her relationship to Patroclus and Achilles than one might expect from a feminist writer. After Patroclus asks Achilles to claim her so he may protect her from rape (Miller 226), he reassures the horrified Briseis of her safety in their hands by

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<sup>10</sup> Atwood 5.

demonstrating both his dedication to Achilles and his queerness (i.e. his lack of interest in the sexual conquest of women):

I turned to Achilles and seized the front of his tunic. I kissed him. When I let go again, she was staring at us. Staring and staring. I gestured to her bonds and back to the knife. ‘All right?’ She hesitated a moment. Then slowly offered her hands (Miller 228).

What follows is a friendship of equals between Patroclus and Briseis; he goes so far as to describe his camp, enslaved and all, as “a sort of family” (Miller 251). Achilles never rapes Briseis. When he abstains from fighting to protest Agamemnon’s stealing Briseis, it is purely a decision based on pride rather than any regard for Briseis’s body (Miller 295). Alongside many of my classmates, I felt hesitant to accept this version of events, even as I was willing to accept the possibility of Achilles’s queerness. More than a lack of loyalty to the source material or a softening of Achilles’s character, it seemed a potentially dangerous oversimplification of an enslaved/enslaver dynamic. One classmate recommended *The Silence of the Girls* by Pat Barker to supplement our feminist readings of the *Iliad*.

Reading *The Silence of the Girls* did, indeed, feel to me like necessary vindication for the horrible injustices suffered by Briseis. By reimagining the *Iliad* chiefly from Briseis’s perspective, Barker “breaks the ‘silence of the girls’ to offer a distinctive and unbearably moving account of how war is experienced by women—by the mothers, and wives, and slaves of the warring men” (Cox 4). At the end of the novel, Briseis almost breaks the fourth wall and addresses the reader directly to demand her own centralization in the canon:

What will they make of us, the people of those unimaginably distant times? One thing I do know: they won’t want the brutal reality of conquest and slavery. They won’t want to be told about the massacres of men and boys, the enslavement of women and girls. They won’t want to know we were living in a rape camp. No, they’ll go for something altogether softer. A love story, perhaps? I just hope they

manage to work out who the lovers were. His story. *His*, not mine. It ends at his grave (Barker 461).

Whatever Barker's intention, it is difficult having read both novels not to perceive this passage as a direct critique of Miller's approach. Both novels dismantle the canon's misogyny but ultimately give mutually exclusive accounts of the same myth.

So, should we approach rewriting like Miller or like Barker? Does Briseis deserve to find protection from sexual violence and allyship with a queer man who is also directly harmed by his culture's toxic masculinity? Or does she deserve vengeance, a chance to character-assassinate the men who enslaved and raped her?

In my practice, I gravitate toward rewriting as a form of revenge. I put on the masks of mythological figures to speak in verse to the men who have wronged me. It is certainly easier as a goddess, gorgon, or seer than it would be in person, in regular speech, and only as myself. The best part is that my Bouphagos, my Appollo and my Neptune don't get to respond.

My interest in this retelling philosophy was spurred by another book we read in Feminist Epic, *The Penelopiad*, Margaret Atwood's scathing, darkly humorous take on the *Odyssey* which features both "Atwood, Penelope, and the maids weaving, unraveling, and reweaving, offering to the reader multiple perspectives" on both *The Odyssey* and, by extension, male-centered literary traditions (Massoura 395). The portions told from Penelope's perspective are written in prose, but those narrated in verse by her enslaved handmaidens left the biggest impact on me as a poet. The first of the handmaiden's poems is "The Chorus Line: A Rope-Jumping Rhyme," consisting of ten tercets, most of which are only three to four syllables long and rendered in imperfect iambic pentameter (Atwood 5). There are no upper-case letters and no punctuation save a few clarifying commas. The poem addresses an ambiguous 'you.' The opening stanza "we are the maids / the ones you killed / the ones you failed" could be addressing Odysseus, who literally

kills the maids in the epic; or Penelope who is complicit in their murder; or even the reader who by engaging with the *Odyssey* reaffirms a literary tradition filled with misogynistic violence (Atwood 5).

The spare, simplistic juvenile form of a jump-roping chant evokes the subjugation by misogynistic violence of young girls, while also providing a vehicle for Atwood's trademark bluntness. Through this conduit, the maids make bold accusations that their counterparts in the original epic never got the chance to, providing "an alternative ethical background that is repressed in the original epic" (Massoura 395). For example, when they assert, "we did much less / than what you did / you judged us bad," they condemn the misogynistic double standard of being murdered as punishment for their affairs with the suitors while Odysseus went unpunished for his constant infidelity (Atwood 5). A similarly juvenile, simplistic phrase, "it was not fair," repeated for emphasis in lines 6 (Atwood 5) and 23 (Atwood 6), decries the injustice of their fate emphatically and unapologetically.

*The Penelopiad* thus gave me permission to talk back, to rage, even to blaspheme, despite and because of how foundational I have been told the myths are. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to write something narrated by a poetic "we" in conversation with Penelope's handmaidens, whose narration "functions as a pastiche of the ancient Greek Chorus...with a variety of poetic genres, such as nursery rhyme, sea shanty, ballad, and idyll" (Massoura 395). The narrative device of the Chorus is in itself gendered, as "the female choral voice, by contrast" to the male written voice "is consistently 'deauthorized': women in choral song speak as 'subjects [without] control over their bodies' (107) and 'stage their own subordinate status'...Only through writing do women gain access to a representation...detached from performance, and the textual 'I' assumes autonomy" (Katz 521). The device of the chorus,

therefore, reveals in both form and content how the handmaidens are rendered voiceless by their lack of individuality and therefore their disposability. On the other side of that same coin, the chorus format uses the poetic “we” to explore the potentiality of their solidarity.

I also wanted to write something oracular because of Kae Tempest. “Chorus,” the first poem in a trio called “Cassandra: variations on a theme,” combines the two concepts. My titular chorus is comprised of “teenage girls / obsessed with divination.” The poetic “we” speaks somewhere between a strict form-adhering, accessible style lifted from Atwood and a hypnotic slant rhyme lifted from Tempest, particularly those poems in *Hold Your Own* that directly depict Terisias. For instance, one stanza from “The woman the boy became” that has always stuck with me reads: “She has been touched without asking. / Punched by a madman. / Drunk in a bad town. / When she puts her hands down / And feels what’s beneath / She feels all the grief / Of the world” (Tempest 47). One can see their fingerprints on lines such as: “Spent our meager paychecks / at boardwalks. Psychics tapped / their red nails on plastic spheres. / Delicately took our naked palms in theirs.”

Nebulously, “Chorus” is about how a teenage girl might relate to Cassandra’s plight of not being believed. But I only allude to this, telling all the truth but telling it slant. The bulk of the poem is spent painting an image of a teen girl gang. This poetic subject in general and one line in particular takes after Olivia Gatwood’s “When I say that we are all teen girls.” My imagery in the lines, “On bus rides home, we tangled up / our limbs and clucked about *The Craft*. / Grown men scoffed and mocked it” blatantly mimics Gatwood’s imagery in the lines,

“and of course there are the teen girls, / the real teen girls, huddled on the subway / after school, limbs draped over each other’s shoulders / bones knocking, an awkward wind chime / and all of the commuters, who plug in their / headphones / to mute the giggle, silence the gaggle and squeak” (Gatwood 3:08-3:22).

In fact, the first four poems in the chapbook greatly concern the figure of the teen girl. In “Elegy,” I eulogize her. In “Chorus,” I cannot save her from sexual violence, but I can attempt to comfort her with a powerful seer who shares in her plight, connecting her to ancient women so she may feel seen. Clearly still impacted by her memories of teen-hood, she carries this power into adulthood as she interprets prophetic dreams in “Dialogue from therapy.” Finally, in “Scrying bowl recipe to glimpse an alternate universe,” I desperately try saving her once again by using my seer powers to deliver her to an “unsexed” state where signifiers of feminine innocence thrive.

Both the poems and the life experiences that birthed them are so thoroughly divorced from the mythological source material that any connection I claim can only ever be anachronistic, yet I crave it, nonetheless. The desire generates a belief in a legacy of violence (and healing from violence) with an almost mystical quality. Tempest argues it most beautifully in one of my all-time favorite poems, “Radical empathy”:

“Every time you sense a figure / Running for you, grabbing hold, / To beat you down and leave you dying, / Rob you blind and leave you cold — / It’s not the fear or the desire to fall. / It’s a memory. / Each wrong is repeated relentlessly. / All thought is eternal. / All life is empathy” (103).

Perhaps. It certainly feels that way. But the implications can be dark. *Memorial* by Alice Oswald is a book-length poem that strips the *Iliad* down to a minimalistic treatise on war and masculinity by transfiguring the glorious and macho to the tragic and absurd. A passage from Hahnemann’s essay on *Memorial* provides an elegant summary of what we risk by insisting on the connection:

“Often their families try to hold these young men back, but they don’t listen (20, 34, 37, 39). They hear ‘their own ghosts ... calling them’ (37), they are like ‘men on wire walking over the underworld’ (39), they ‘hurr[y] to darkness’ (9). Thus, *Memorial* forces us to look at the consequences of war while at the same time it raises the unsettling possibility that the urge to kill might be instinctive—an

integral part not only of nature in general but also of human nature, and of male nature in particular” (Hahnemann).

This is not a possibility I particularly want to contend with, especially as one might extend the explanation to many horrific types of conquest. “The swan upon Leda / Empire upon Jerusalem,” sings the Irish folk-rock singer Hozier in “Swan upon Leda,” drawing a direct analogy between an ancient Greek myth about rape and modern settler-colonialism in Palestine (1:08-1:19). Even in *The Penelopiad*, the deceased Odysseus, unable to face his guilt about the handmaidens, repeatedly drinks from “the River Lethe to be born again” as “a French general...a Mongolian invader...a tycoon in America,” and a “headhunter in Borneo” (Atwood 189). Mythological gender violence is denied its cultural specificity and made into a metonym for infinite types of human suffering. The explanation almost seems like an excuse.

Do we impart a sense of biological determinism by repeatedly comparing contemporary male violence to that of the deep past? Familiar myths provide vehicles for examining contemporary society, as well as cannon fodder for my coping mechanism: writing the same poem in different forms repeatedly about this thing that will simply never leave my body no matter how hard I try. I wrote the bulk of the chapbook during a summer of forest fires resulting from settler-colonialist land exploitation, of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, the Iranian protests against femicide, the largest cyberbullying campaign in history held in retaliation against a woman for alleging rape. Patriarchal violence continues to appear immortal. By the same token, within my own body, being a survivor means excruciating repetition almost daily (sometimes hourly) of the same invasive thoughts, obsessions, compulsions, flashbacks, physical pain. Even as I am happier than ever, I run in circles. And in seeing how my experiences connect me to the ancients, I am compelled to seek them out, to join hands, hold their pain, and run in circles with each of them.

## II. “To the world we dream about / And the one we live in now”: Romancing Revision<sup>11</sup>

Circles have a certain beauty. But how to exit them? Maybe not forever, but for a break? Perhaps with imagination.

I practice using my imagination in “Scrying bowl recipe,” but the approach proves more negative than additive. The line “Here, / you never asked five times before he listened” fumblingly attempts to imagine something new just as it draws the reader back into the circle with painful reminders of the world we live in now, rather than the one we dream about.

Turning to the overlapping worlds of poetry and academia, I read Anne Carson’s romantic prose-poem *Autobiography of Red* to look for answers. But as often happens, the inspiration came from somewhere unexpected: popular culture. More specifically, “in recent years, we have seen several mainstream stories focus on the complicated love story between Hades, god of wealth and King of the Underworld, and Persephone, the goddess of Spring and Queen of the Underworld, an examination and renaissance largely heralded by women and queer people” (Weekes 0:10-35). Rather than condemning Hades or mourning Persephone’s plight, these fem and queer artists and fans have often “taken this story with all its problematic layering and...tried to build a better narrative, not just in terms of the Hades-Persephone romance, but specifically with Persephone” herself (Weekes 7:19-7:31). The couples’ cultural revival first came to my attention with *Lore Olympus*, a romance Webtoon by Rachel Smythe that employs a soft art style and bright, saturated color palette to reimagine Hades and Persephone as a loving, supportive couple. Another recent popular retelling is Anaïse Mitchell’s workers’ rights- and

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<sup>11</sup> Mitchell “Livin’ it Up” 4:54-4:58.

ecological grief-themed musical *Hadestown*, which also eschews any depiction of gender violence in favor of a contemporary, matured interpretation of Persephone's character.

Such an approach presents a contrast to writers like Barker and Atwood who re-emphasize atrocities. Of course, a significant reason for this is how far one can or should stretch source material. In the *Iliad*, Odysseus commits unforgivable violence, such as unceremoniously slaughtering his slave girls to punish them for having been raped by Penelope's suitors, a moment central to the purpose of Atwood's retelling (Massoura 400). By contrast, "there is no evidence of sexual violence against Persephone" (Weekes 6:22-6:24) and the couple "are often depicted as equals in power and with very few exceptions are viewed as being faithful to each other" (Weekes 6:46-50). "One of the main reasons why 'victim Persephone' has fallen out of favor...isn't even because of...this desire for the romance...it's because people do not want her life to just be a constant state of misery...we see so few queens be given equal standing" in canonized stories, after all, that we may explore a new impulse to take the smallest seed of power and grow it into something new (Weekes 17:07-28).

When my friend first sent me the song "Persephone in the Garden" by Aidoneus, an independent transmasculine musician and digital artist with a moniker borrowed from one of Hades's names, I was excited to find another young LGBTQ+ person making mythological retellings. In this version, told from Hades's perspective, the couple are loving and consensual, aligning with the current retelling trend. Hades appears to capture Persephone accidentally, evidenced by the lyrics "Didn't mean to take you down" (Aidoneus 2:30-2:32) and "Didn't know my world was dark until you came / And you wilted with the lack of sun" (Aidoneus 2:47-3:57). Aidoneus emphasizes Persephone's agency with Hades's insistence that he "never could blame" her (4:11-4:15) for leaving him, even as he misses her so terribly that he feels as though she has

taken both her “spirit” and his “in tow” when she comes back to Earth to bring Spring every year (4:00-4:07). Although the abduction was a mistake, he still expresses regret.

The song’s structure flows and tumbles far more freely than the blunt, angry works of Atwood. He repeatedly contrasts short simplistic lines with run-on phrases such as: “How long / Did I stand in the garden with my breath against the leaves / as the trees bowed down and weeds would gather round my legs up to my knees?” (Aidoneus 0:50-1:10). The slant rhyme and assonance of flat ‘e’ vowel sound and ‘ow/u’ vowel sound creates lilting, rambling quality evoking the wildness, growth, and abundance associated with Persephone, the “goddess of light and Spring and all things good” as described by Hades/Aidoneus in the song’s climax (3:41-3:48). The repetition of the interrogative phrase “How long?” is possibly a reference to the song “How Long?” from *Hadestown*, in which the couple struggle to find understanding: “How long? / Just as long as I am your wife / It’s true the earth must die / But then the earth comes back to life / And the sun must go on rising” (Mitchell 2:54-3:15). The “How long?” motif also sets up a rhetorical switch to the declarative phrase “How wrong” near the ending (3:25-3:27). Aidoneus transfigures the motif to shift the song’s focus from Hades’s yearning to Persephone’s plight as she must “wil[t] with the lack of sun” to stay with her beloved half the year (2:52-56).

The song became a soundtrack to Summer 2022 while I consumed as much fem- and queer-centered mythological content as I could to induce poetic inspiration. I assigned myself a mission: to write a love poem giving the Aidoneus treatment to a female mythological figure who has been wronged. The result is one of the least personal, and therefore most prosaic and melodramatic poems in the chapbook, “Paris’s thoughts upon waking up next to Helen.”

Aidoneus, among the many other artists to reimagine Hades and Persephone, taught me to use alchemy, transmuting violence into romance to give a survivor a new chance at life. He

accomplishes this by turning the abduction into a mistake, lovesick and regrettable but well-intentioned, and evidencing Persephone's freedom of movement. As demonstrated by the Miller epitaph, I am far from the first to imagine that Helen ran away with Paris consensually rather than being abducted, so the alchemy was already halfway home. The extra twist I needed came to me while remembering a lecture in my middle school Latin class about the judgement of Paris: Paris accepts Aphrodite's offer of the most beautiful woman in the world over those of Athena and Hera. Rather than a shallow or selfish choice, I thought, what if Paris makes it very intentionally as he has somehow already "heard tell of Helen" and deeply understands her plight as a person non-consensually tied to a significant fate?

Evoking the concept of the male gaze, I play with a motif of sight and eyes in "Paris's thoughts." The poem specifically doesn't describe Helen's body; in one workshop, a professor recommended making the poem more sexually suggestive, which I think would have undermined the point. These are the only two body parts mentioned, both decidedly nonsexual. In the first stanza, there are eyelids: the rhetorical Paris wills Helen to "Gingerly, / kiss my eyelids," a gesture during which he would necessarily receive her love without seeing her. Next, in the fourth stanza, there are wrists. Paris performs a retelling within a retelling when he says, "only I / could reach into the vale of tears / and touch the whispering Nymph herself. / And trace out / on her wrist / all the reasons / she had been so lonely." In this metaphorical image, he, like Narcissus, sees only the water and his own reflection, not Helen's body. Tracing a message on her wrist using his fingers is a reference to Protactile and Sign, languages the couple might use in the alternate "world without sight" that he imagines in the eighth stanza. And, of course, he promises "never / ever / to call" Helen "beautiful," with the word "ever" isolated into its own stanza for maximum aesthetic emphasis.

It went against my initial retelling instincts to take Paris as a figure and “render / instinctual his greed, to make of him a man / barely culpable, so that we might command / a tale that only pleases us: there is no terror / in it” (Rekdal 69). But there is power here, soft and lovely as it may be. Rather than trapping survivors into perpetual suffering to condemn violent male characters, “we get to make it not about them anymore” [emphasis added] (Weekes 37:22-28). I like to imagine Menelaus’s insatiable need to convince both himself and the men around him that Helen’s honor was disgraced because he couldn’t bear the thought of her being smart enough as a woman to resent her gilded cage. I like to imagine, like Miller, that Patroclus and Achilles as queer people could see the liberation in her unconventional love. Like Marianne and Héloïse speculating in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* that Eurydice wanted Orpheus to turn around (Sciamma 1:15:03). The seeking of joy and recognition is influenced by and consistent with queering practices of “speculation, as a...powerful tool for recovering the lives of marginalized people” through the “imagining of queer legacies: the paying attention to a detail and seeing what the detail can do to you. When the detail is all we get sometimes. Elaborating, speculating, amplifying, imagining with that one detail” (Gonzalez).

### III. “How we plow and furrow the murky Styx”: Intersectionality in Re-Vision<sup>12</sup>

Every time I retell a classical myth, I reaffirm its importance. Even as I seek to right wrongs, the retelling is an admittance of the power that the myths hold over me. This is not only true while reckoning with gender, but also with other intersections. Greek and Roman civilizations have been “long revered as the foundation of ‘Western civilization’” (Poser), a concept which white supremacists invented within the last few centuries to justify colonialism (Appiah). In recent years, “Classics ha[s] been embraced by the far right, whose members held up the ancient Greeks and Romans as the originators of so-called white culture. Marchers in Charlottesville, Va., carried flags bearing a symbol of the Roman state; online reactionaries adopted classical pseudonyms; the white-supremacist website Stormfront displayed an image of the Parthenon alongside the tagline ‘Every month is white history month’” (Poser). That I am so familiar with so many Classical myths is not a coincidence, but an intentional result of “the production of whiteness” which “turns on closer examination to reside in the very marrows of classics” (Poser). I can never fully undo this connection, but it is vital to challenge it as often as I can while writing.

There is, for instance, great potential in exploring Ancient Greece as a pre-racial society, which Miller subtly nods to in *The Song of Achilles* when Patroclus describes the priest Calchas’s bright blue eyes as “freakish” and states that “he is lucky he was not killed at birth,” a stark contrast to the modern conceptualization of whiteness (200). Of course, some of the most important challengers to the dominance of so-called “Western” stories in the canon are the BIPOC poets who write about their own mythologies such as Natalie Diaz, who collates

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<sup>12</sup> Diaz “Other Small Thundering” p. 31 from *When My Brother Was an Aztec*

Classical, Indigenous, Latine, and modern American mythologies in her collection *When My Brother Was an Aztec*, where “a sister struggles with a brother’s addiction to meth, while everyone, from Antigone to Houdini to Huizilopochtli and Jesus, is invited to hash it out” (Diaz cover). By knocking Greek and Roman texts off their pedestal and into the collage of her identity, she robs them of their supposed grandeur while holding new reverie and power for historically colonized and marginalized mythology. I attempt something akin to this tactic in my comparative mythology poem “Heritage Weave.” It is also heavily influenced by Paisley Rekdal’s “Pear,” which charts the symbolism of fruits across various cultures (87-89).

But I cannot retell mythology from outside the White/Colonizer/“Western” canon with the same unbridled creativity as the members of their respective cultures because I generally subscribe to the #OwnVoices argument. Started by the Black YA novelist Corinne Duyvais in 2015, “the #ownvoices argument for authentic representation of lived experience is reserved primarily for the use of first-person narration; this is interpreted as the literary equivalence of “black-face” in the performing arts, one fraught with the risk of dangerous cultural stereotyping” (Rutherford 575). Despite originally being about children’s novels, #OwnVoices filtered into many conversations with my Kidd cohort about being intersectional in our poetry. Simply put, as a white writer, I obviously could not and should not write Diaz’s poems. How to center intersectionality without taking up the mantle of issues and identities that I do not have a right to, especially while engaging with a body that has such strong ties to white supremacy?

So, this is the story of how I wrote a poem only I could write, “Desert Icarus.” I will begin with a revelatory moment I experienced in college, which came from being very publicly wrong about something. In a class discussion, I claimed that a film was not about race because it focused so much on white people and rarely held explicit textual conversations about race in the

script. Professor Casey Shoop corrected me. In fact, the film was almost exclusively about race; I simply was not used to whiteness being the subject of art about race. To paraphrase Shoop, whiteness often gets to be invisible. The same sentiment rings true in Hahnemann's essay "Feminist at Second Glance? Alice Oswald's *Memorial* as a Response to Homer's *Iliad*," which contends that a text can be almost exclusively about men and very much about feminism at the same time. Through its careful examination of every named man killed in the Trojan War, *Memorial* obliterates "the male ethos that underlies the plot of the *Iliad*" (Hahnemann 93). Threading these notions, "Desert Icarus" takes white masculinity as a subject.

I first got the idea to put the character Icarus in a small American desert town after reading the Paisley Rekdal's *Nightingale*, a collection which radically reimagines the stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Most of the poems in *Nightingale* tell stories of contemporary fictional or semi-fictional characters undergoing major life changes and traumas only vaguely connected to *Metamorphoses* through the clue in their title; for instance, a poem called "Teresias" describes a transmasculine person transitioning (Rekdal 23). Structurally, my poem "Desert Icarus" is inspired by "Gokstadt/Ganymede," Rekdal's take on the eponymous adolescent boy who was a victim of Zeus's pederasty. "Gokstadt/Ganymede" eulogizes an ex-lover who had experienced incestuous abuse. Reading this poem is excruciating. It unfolds slowly over fifteen dense, prosaic, sometimes cryptic stanzas, each isolated onto their own page. Like many of her pieces, it is wildly honest, almost as though it should not be read by a stranger. Rekdal problematizes her cultural and personal relationship to male survivors in the confessional line, "I find myself / nursing the belief that your wounds kept you from hurting me. What you sensed, what I hated: / some part of me loved you, not in spite of, / but because you had been raped" (70). I audibly gasped when I first read this. I bore them in mind while writing my own

awful confession to Icarus: “Your / poverty burrowed deep into my teenage dreams: / the bad boy from the wrong side of the tracks / who I’d jerk off to learn about myself.”

I see myself in Rekdal’s content, but even more so in her form. She gave me permission to be overly analytical of my own feelings, heady and self-aware almost to a fault. Mimicking “*Gokstadt/Ganymede*,” I unfold “Desert Icarus” across several pages. In a way, “Desert Icarus” is also an elegy, for a friendship or for a past version of someone. More than an ode to another person, though, it is basically a portrait of me working through the complexity of intersectionality as a topic. The rhetorical Icarus hurts the poetic “I” with misogynistic catcalls and entitlement. But can Icarus really be said to be more privileged than the “I,” considering their massive income disparity? White and male privilege, in this case, cannot seem to supersede the limitations of poverty, at least not in all areas of life—the “I” goes to a richer town and to school while Icarus does not have this opportunity; the guilt eats her. She sublimates it into anger, but she cannot maintain this for long before collapsing under the truth. In the last section of the poem subtitled “funeral,” she lists a tirade of “fucked-up condescending hopes,” one of them being, “your labor union’s racially diverse.” This is, of course, a critique of the racism and lack of class-consciousness in low-income American whites. Like many, Icarus is placated by “celebrity,” which is “a way of distracting the powerless and nurturing ruling class values through notions of exceptionalism and vanity” (Mistry).

The scope of my intersectional writing practice grew wider while writing the three Hades/Persephone retellings in the “Ecological grief memoir.” I have joked to my friends that climate change is just a sign of Hades and Persephone’s relationship going through a rough patch. Weekes also jokes in her Hades/Persephone video that “with climate change happening, I am assuming there is some kind of strife in this whole situation, and I think we should get people

into counseling” (11:50-12:02). Mitchell portrays this same concept not as a joke, but deeply sincerely and emotionally in *Hadestown*, wherein Hades himself causes an ecological crisis by obsessively hoarding his wealth and expanding his empire. While writing about my own experiences with ecological grief, I wanted to explore Persephone’s “dual identity...as the goddess of Spring and the Queen of the Underworld...Kore the maiden and the Dread Persephone” (Weekes 5:00-5:08). But when this concept fails, the implications can be harmful. For instance, in the 2021 album *Miss Anthropocene*, the alt-pop singer Grimes personifies “climate change through a fictional cosmology of demons and villainesses giddily celebrating global warming as a force of good” (Mistry). Not only is “rendering climate crisis as dystopian aesthetic...privileged and indulgent,” it is also, in this artist’s opinion, lazy (Mistry). There is not enough space in this conceptualization for all the intersections of ecological grief.

I wrote like Grimes initially, imagining Persephone as vengeful. I simply could not get angry at a goddess when I could have been raging at Exxon Mobile. I tried remedying the problem by writing a dialogue between Indigenous gods and Persephone. I cut this idea quickly because it might have turned out more appropriative than comparative. The poem came off more like an essay than an art piece, too stilted and formal, because the Indigenous gods were not embedded in my subconscious like the Greek ones. I needed to tap into feelings circling endlessly around my head.

The otters were the key. I spent the summer after my sophomore year repeating the same monologue about saving sea otters hundreds of times. The speech wrote itself onto the sides of my insides. And it provides a very clear example of what Kimmerer says in *Braiding Sweetgrass*: that settler-colonialism is an ecological catastrophe. Kimmerer recognizes mythologies as “a source of identity and orientation to the world” (7). In her delicate, powerful

comparison between Indigenous and colonialist origin myths, she writes that the biblical Eve “was instructed to subdue the wilderness into which she was cast” rather than meeting the wilderness as a teacher (Kimmerer 7). She emphasizes how in the colonialist “tradition there is a recognized hierarchy of beings with, of course, the human being on top...and the plants at the bottom” (9), a mythology that severely limits our ability to imagine a healthy relationship to the earth (6). The logic of domination and extraction thusly underpins both settler-colonialism and the climate emergency. It also reflects the Greek origin myth of the seasons being one of abduction and violence against a female figure, to which I applied Kimmerer’s lens on the Eve narrative. The introduction of the mythology onto the land is intertwined with colonization, whiteness, and environmental destruction.

It is unsurprising that the ecological grief memoir was the last poem I wrote for the project; it took time and energy to position myself into the poem. “Elegy” was an initial gateway into the trauma in my body. Over the course of the rest of the process, I wrote iterations of the same preoccupation as I grew to understand how history imprints on my body and my body’s position in history. “Heritage Braid” was a first step, expanding the scope to my family history. The rest of the poems took the preoccupation into a wider world.

## Conclusion

I offer nothing new. That's kind of the point. The muse doesn't exist. We're all of us walking graveyards of our past selves. Mosaics of what we perceive. But I want you to do what I have: be aware of what you create and where it comes from and who it's talking to. Not just aware. Vigilant. Stand sentinel. Question, maybe not everything, but a lot, about how your brain was made. "The plight of a people who have forgotten their myths / and imagine that somehow now is all that there is / is a sorry plight" (Spiers 114). Not because the myths are perfect, but because they are not. "'Cause here's the thing / To know how it ends / And still begin to sing it again / As if it might turn out this time" (Mitchell, "Road to Hell Reprise" 2:09-2:31). It's faulty and strange and problematic of me to assume any connection to the ancient Greeks. But don't we need some type of arm reaching across the eras? As long as it does not form a fist and punch down.

To replicate my research, take some advice from Professor Garret Hongo in my Advanced Poetry Workshop. First, find your ancients. They don't have to be old, but you need to have them. Next, "move to the left / move to the right / sit down / stand up / fight, fight, fight."

When I wrote "Elegy," I mimicked the feminists. But I also upheld a canon that has been pedestaled for the worst imaginable reasons. Forcing ancient and foreign ideas about gender into a contemporary feminist paradigm clouds our judgement of the past. One wonders whether the Trojan War soldiers and enslaved handmaidens subtly resisted their gendered subjugation; whether Penelope grew frustrated at the double standards of her marriage; or whether Tiresias felt trapped by the gender binary. One tries and fails to imagine having a human brain unmarked by the thoroughly modern concept of 'race,' not to mention a one forged by utterly alien

religious beliefs. It is anyone's guess. The utility of rewriting, then, lies in its ability to empower. Exclusion of voices is an insidious force. The utter domination of "white" male voices in the canon psychologically and materially damages the marginalized. But it also provides gaps in the narrative that one may fill as creatively as they wish. We have license to imagine that people have always done what we do today: questioned, resisted, rewrote, re-named. "I want to believe that I inherited too ways of feeling joy, ways of finding pleasure" (Gonzalez).

Tratteggio is a "retouch invention...that enables the avoidance of hypothesis to replace the missing parts of the original" (Conservation Wiki). The retouch portion of art restoration is arguably the most difficult and dangerous of the whole process, because unlike just cleaning or lining the physical canvas, retouching moves the restorer into the metaphysical realm. The appropriate colors and even figures to insert are up to their discretion. Sometimes they must entirely paint big missing chunks, such as body parts or landscape features, and while context clues are very helpful as well as a strong ability to copy style, there is always a risk that they are clouding our perception of the artist's intentions. So rather than painting with normal brushstrokes that seamlessly blend the revision with the original, to trick the viewer's eye into thinking it is just one painting, the artist paints in lines. From afar, the painting appears perfect, but step closer and find that there are two distinct artists contributing to the piece. The old one is rendered realistically and the new one is rendered distinctly. I wonder if a rewriter should employ a literary *tratteggio*: self-aware and humble.

Paint with *tratteggio*. Rewrite. Rename. Fail miserably and repeatedly to coordinate the nervous system with the rest of your body. I needed this room to run in circles. To try the same project repeatedly and fail, mostly, but sometimes make something that could be mistaken for a poem if you squint. But if I am luckier than most, I will walk

into the sea of time and meet her.  
She will have run in these circles  
a million times, and in brand-new shapes  
as well, and she'll know how.  
She will have kissed people  
who I haven't met yet  
but who she loves desperately.  
She will be fluent  
in a brand-new language. She will  
have dog-eared and annotated  
brand-new favorites. Danced in sunlit pools  
and moshed with shades in rock-bottom.  
She will belong  
to the land of the living.  
Pour one out  
for twenty-two-year-old me.  
Write me an elegy.  
And she will still see herself in Artemis  
stubbornly  
delusionally  
achingly.

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