Marie Cosnay, email interview with Fiona Cox, translated by Fiona Cox

FC: You are a teacher of Classics – could you give us an overview of how Latin and Greek are doing in the education system in France today?

MC: Latin's doing fine, but Greek a little less well. In any case, that's how things are where I am, where there isn't a single school offering it an an option. On the other hand Latin's being taught almost everywhere. It's in a good position with the way that the baccaulauréat is organised. It's in a good position on the curriculum as it's weighted more heavily than other subjects such as Audio-Visual Studies, Arts and Crafts and Chinese etc. Both pupils and teachers think of it as an easy option. There are questions only on the texts that the students have seen and studied in class. That's why a good number of pupils choose it over the other options that I mentioned earlier. And teachers are very quick to point out how useful the subject is if you're looking to get a distinction in the bac.

Pupils aren't required to have any great grammatical understanding. It can be enough to look at the words, their roots and etymology to be able to learn something about ancient Rome. A good many pupils sit the 'bac' without knowing how to parse a sentence in Latin on their own. Having said that, Latin, more than other subjects, allows teachers the freedom to look at the ways in which words fit together (as one of our inspectors pointed out to me one day, though he was reproaching me a bit for it). There aren't very many Classics teachers. Quite often Modern Languages teachers are brought in to replace them….

FC: What can an author like Ovid or Virgil teach young people today, do you think?

MC: That's a question that I think holds many other questions. What do these authors offer today's young people, and in what ways do they do this? And you have to ask – why authors like Virgil or Ovid?

I begin by explaining to my pupils that Latin isn't a language that helps us to communicate or exchange information. Latin's no good to us for talking with close or distant neighbours. We've got English for that – a muted form of English, I grant you, but nevertheless it's English that we'd use rather than Latin. And so usually somebody calls out: 'So what's the point of Latin?' My answer is that we're not learning the Latin which, at one time (the time of the Roman Empire, round about the birth of Christ) enabled people to communicate and exchange information. We're not learning one kind of Latin. We're learning different Latins, distinctive languages that stem from an established grammar. And these languages are shuttled about by men constructing all kinds of new languages within their shared language. If my pupils don't learn to read Ovid, Virgil and Suetonius; if they (or others) don't learn to read Ovid, then the transformation of Caenis into Caeneus falls dead. They may still have access to the substance of the story (they already do have, through translations and editions abridged for children or university students), they will know that Phaethon plunged from the heavens after he went to look for his father, but they'll never

know that that fall, that that particular turn of phrase, really does transform the world, that it unravels the cosmogony that has been woven over the course of *Metamorphoses* 1, that that fall is a prototype, that after it you can't look at the sun in the same way, or fire in the same way, and that it teaches us something about the relationship between fathers and sons.

The way the story is written constructs a version of reality that we have to take on board. What these (and other) authors in fact offer young people is first and foremost a marvellous sense of what literature is. The distances that it forges, the freedom it offers, the pleasures of inventing verbal constructions, blocks of reality, blocks that mirror and transform reality.

Take the episode from Virgil's *Aeneid* VIII, where Venus offers Aeneas the shield. The description of it foretells the future. The description (of a static, fixed shield) maps out history through time, across layers of time. It blows your mind to see and read it at the same time. To see the poem (the image) and the path that is mapped out as they lead on and on, from the origins of Rome to the battle of Actium. And it's astounding to see how cinematic techniques are being foreshadowed here. On the one side there's the poetic voice, and on the other the image – and one reaches up to the skies, while the other burrows beneath the ground, or more simply beneath the smooth surface of a chased shield. And Virgil intuitively forged this disjunction, long before Duras, long before Straub. So how do we now make this real for the pupils?

We pull it apart. We look at every clause from the inside out – every case, every gender – it's painstaking work. Then we make the text our own. We work on distancing ourselves from it, and then on coming back to it. We lose our footing, and then regain it. We give ourselves over to a rational approach and then liberate ourselves from it. We translate. And that's when the pupils say: 'It belongs to us now.'

I could put it differently - Latin is a good way of seeing that all pupils face the same difficulties, the same challenges of language. It's not an emotional language, but a language where you have to be utterly rigorous with regard to the syntax. You need to pull the sentence to pieces before putting it back together again, Obviously some handle the grammatical challenges better than others, but that doesn't matter. Latin is a language which doesn't belong to anyone. Which of course means that it belongs to everyone, and the efforts that we have to make to learn it, especially from the point of view of grammar, are ones that everyone shares. Suddenly we're somewhere else. And in this other place there are a whole host of stories to be told, and of which we've hear (such as Oedipus, such as the Minotaur) and it's in this other place that we discover that our relationship to a language is built on a sense of tension and foreignness – and this discovery is not made spontaneously, but by dint of hard work. Catullus writes *nihil vocis est in ore* – nothing of a voice is in my mouth – what do we do with this nothing, with this genitive? When talking of Ariadne Ovid writes *pectora sonuerunt palmis* - my chest rings our beneath my hands . . . Sometimes there are moments of grace. Sometimes the job of deciphering the Latin is so big

that you have to give them a couple of verses where they can go more quickly to encourage them. You have to tell them just to simplify the future participle, and have fun with it. After that, two kinds of exercise are possible. What I love doing after the literal analysis of a literary text (and what my pupils end up loving as well – Alexia said 'It's crazy how this makes our imaginations run wild') is to ask the pupils to make the text their own. I want them to take the text as their own, to rewrite it, translate it, to take all the liberties with it that they want to. When it's time to put their texts together in front of the class, everyone is very attentive. Some write a few comments on their laptops or on a scrap of paper. Julie, at the start of this year, commented on the solidarity of the atmosphere in the class . . .

When the pupils are in a position to understand the text literally, if I ask them to retranslate back from French into Latin, obviously we don't end up with the text as written by Catullus, Suetonius or Ovid. And there we can see clearly the symbolic distance, what makes a text work. We have in front of us literature uncovered.

I could add that the sense of effort before the consolation of translation (and I don't think that I'm wrong in saying that all the pupils I've known, even those who were initially hostile, have ended up enjoying this exercise) offers a fantastic education to pupils who are aged between 13-15. And not just for literary reasons. It's a question of the effort that you make where the meaning isn't given to you on a plate – you approach the challenge, ask yourself loads of questions about it, make things hard for yourself. And that's not bad training for approaching life as a responsible citizen.

FC: You seem to have a particular affection for the work of Ovid? Do you think that he continues to address us in a contemporary way?

MC: Yes – I've made Ovid my own a little bit. I say that with great affection. I don't know if he speaks to us more directly than others, if he shares something with contemporary writers. It's of course a matter of what I read in him, the way he changes the very form of epic. I find him quite puffed up. He only says what he wants to say. He doesn't describe things that he finds boring, and you get a clear sense of what he likes – the fantastic, the moments when things lengthen, when one shape turns into another, the way things switch. He's able to condense a lengthy action into two verses. He's able to write three pages about a storm. You can see how he rivals Virgil. At the end of the *Metamorphoses* when he goes back to the *Iliad* without any kind of song and dance and through that to Achilles and makes of him a real bloodthirsty monster, he's certainly not seeking to be 'the' Roman poet celebrating the marvellous new Roman legends (and after all he paid a heavy price for failing to celebrate Augustus), he's simply showing way, and the madness of war, displayed by Achilles, just like everyone else. In Virgil everything is very carefully worked over, is approached cautiously and he recognises that the Trojans (the enemies of the Greeks) were the ancestors of our Roman conquerors. Ovid seems not to care about that at all . . . he's full of fun. When he describes the marks left on the bodies he shows an excess that suggests that he's enjoying himself. He cuts the body into pieces. He cuts the verse into pieces as

well, and makes it twist around itself. I love the way he does that. The mangled, scarred, severed bodies become different bodies . . . He shows the transition and the movement. He flees and makes his own escape. But I lament the way things ended up for him . . .

FC: How do your pupils react to the works of Ovid or Catullus, for instance?

MC: I'll answer that by giving two examples. I've not known of a child who doesn't enjoy, after a little while, going to his or her own translation of the text that we've been looking at in class. The only time that that happened is something that I remember clearly and there was a lovely ending. I'll tell you the story in a minute with the title 'Léo or the images of the fantastic.'

A few days before the October half-term this year while my fourteen year olds were busy translating Virgil's description of the eruption of Etna, young Alexia shouted out in enthusiasm 'It's amazing what this does for your imagination!'

Léo or the images of the fantastic

He's called Léo. He's thirteen. He's advanced for his age. He's a high achiever, and knows it. He's cracked the rules of spelling and grammar. He has a string of good marks. He talks quickly, a bit too quickly. He has an accent that reveals that he's from the country. His accent bears the marks of the *patois* that he talks at home and that he sneers at. He shrugs his shoulders. He can't understand why anyone minds that Latin is a dead language, or why you'd want to teach this ancient language to schoolchildren. As if it were simply there to convey things that we ought to know, as if it were simply something to know and tick off, as if it were worthy of learning. He finds it amusing: *It's taught in school now,* he says with a little, cynical smile hovering over his child's face. He affects bewilderment. He raises his eyebrows, and beneath them you can see dark eyes, very dark and I'd say very anxious. They express an anxiety that he's trying to his in a way that pulls my heartstrings, an anxiety that he doesn't express, ever. Or if it does express it it's through the way he has of piling his sentences very quickly one on top of the other, swallowing them up, rushing on and then denying what he's just said by borrowing an ancient turn of phrase from his grandfathers, an interjection – 'eh' He shakes his head from side to side. He purses his lips and puffs out his cheeks.

This year Léo translated some poems in Latin. These Romans are off their rockers. He said when he read Catullus' *nihil super vocis est in ore*, 'there's nothing of a voice in my throat'. He could just have said *nulla vox* 'no voice', said Léo with his complete mastery of Latin grammar, but this nothing, this pronoun, this nothing which is, which becomes something in the throat, which tickles the throat, which obstructs is annoying. He's irritated. He's just as irritated and paralysed as the poet is, thinking of the object of his love in the poem by Catullus which is an imitation of Sappho. *My tongue grows thick, there's a humming in my ears, a veil of night covers my eyes*, says the poet at the thought – just at the thought – of

facing the woman he loves. His beloved paralyses the poet who complains that others in his position manage perfectly well, and come up smiling, can bear it.

Then Léo translated Lucretius. He understood that simulacra were toppling to one side and falling from the sky, endlessly, on all sides, everywhere they were hanging on and clustering together to fashion complex forms, centaurs or minotaurs. They hampered us. Being so slight they couldn't break their way onto our eyeballs and so they passed *per rara corporis*, through the chain-mail of the body. The fantastical images that rose from the fragile skins that had come off things and were being recomposed by chance as they flew through the air, according to what they happened to meet, rained down on us. Unable to touch our eyes they passed into our bodies: that's how the imagination works. The tiny skins were like spider's gossamer or like a golden leaf – they were beautiful and subtle. Léo wriggled about on his chair, sighed heavily, and then began to huff and puff more and more loudly. After he'd huffed and puffed, he was a bit depressed. He said: 'I don't have any imagination, any at all. I can't see your films, your tiny skins. Lisa, Elise, Aurélia, Thomas, Yann, Coralie and Charlotte were all born with that, with these pictures that have nothing to do with each other. They can put them side by side, eh, and he began to speak quickly, to huff and puff, eh, to speak too fast and the words got mangled in his mouth.

He wrote a sort of poem in French: *What I'd like to be. I'd like to speak less quickly so that people don't ask me to say things again. I'd like not to be competitive. I'd like to let go of myself. I'd like to be less rational. I'd like to have an elder brother. I'd like not to feel any pressure.*

The images of the fantastic aren't my thing roughly speaking, thinks Léo, who's a high-flier at school. Léo is like the poet narrator who talks in secret to Lesbia, and whose tongue grows too thick in his mouth because he loves her.

We know of children who think that intellectual things, educational things aren't up their street. And we know of those whose academic performance isn't great. Less often we know kids who are aware that their academic performance is making them suffer. Kids who keep not an anxious, but a terrified eye on their relationship with the symbolic, with images of the fantastic, with what makes their tongues slip when the *nothing* becomes something, this little stone lodged in the throat.

Something which bowls them over.

There are about fifteen of them, no more. They're 12 and 13 year olds. We've decided to read together the beginning of the love letters of famous heroines to the men they love, the cowards who have abandoned them. *A feminist thing,* says Coline. Ovid is the one writing as the women. We looked on the map for the site of Ovid's exile, above the Black Sea. In that land where the barbarians didn't speak a word of Latin.

Then we chose our letter and heroines. We had the two sisters Ariadne and Phaedra. They're not writing to the same man, though he was the husband of each of them. Then we had Helen, Medea and Dido. In class we said that Phaedra's forbidden love for her stepson, the handsome Hippolytus is tabu. *There's a bit of incest,* confirms Léo. In any case at the end of the day Phaedra declared her love. Threw herself on Hippolytus. Snatched his sword. Denounced him when she found out that her husband Theseus was still alive. Hippolytus didn't accuse Phaedra in his turn, but died with dignity. *He ought to have told the whole story.* We took a look at Pasiphae, the mother of the two Cretan women. She desired a white bull so ardently that Daedalus constructed her a machine that made her look just like a cow: and it was wearing this construction that she coupled with it.

Then it was Medea's turn. The girls shrieked. Medea cut her little brother to pieces for holding up those who were pursuing her, her father et al, who had it in for the man who had just stolen the Golden Fleece and with whom she had fallen in love all of a sudden when he had scarcely had time to set foot on Colchis, where she lived. Later, much later, Medea kills her own children. 'Because,' said Quentin, 'they were herself, they were her blood, but they were also the blood of Jason, the man with whom she's madly in love and who betrays her at this point of the story. Whom she wants to hurt in the worst way possible. Whom she wants to kill, yet without killing him. Jason tried to settle down everywhere with her, the outsider, the barbarian, the magician, the gypsy from Colchis. And they were driven away everywhere they went. In the end Creon accepted them. On condition that he renounced the magic of the witch, the foreigner, the barbarian. He gave up on her – he was offered a young princess in exchange. *Bastard,* somebody said. *Honestly, madame, these stories.* Thomas said that lots of heroes were forgetful – they forgot this, they forgot that. It was a hero's thing, to forget. Theseus forgot about Ariadne and his old friend Ulysses on the island of the Cyclops. *That's not normal.*

And then Quentin threw out a question: *it makes no sense but what are they trying to tell us with that?* 'Who do you mean by they?' he was asked. *They, I mean the author, the people who wrote these legends. What are they saying to us. I think*, he continued, *that they're telling us that, even if you do your utmost to be like a hero, life is phenomenally sad and misses its mark. Life is ridiculous.*

And then you have those women who complain and complain (he's pretty cunning, Ovid, with his feminism): they're monsters. One who lies as she denounces another and brings about an innocent's crime. One who kills loads of innocents. One who sleeps with a bull. Another who throws herself on the flames. Gaetan, who was sleeping up until then, or at least resting (or playing on the computer) shouts: '*and what's more that one was adulterous!' 'No, she wasn't'* says Baptiste, patiently, '*Sychaeus was dead. It was Sychaeus, wasn't it, Madame?'*

Let Quentin speak.

Guillaume says: '*they fall in love at the drop of a hat.They're not actually in love, they just think they are. And they rush headlong into it.*

Very quietly, sitting very straight, in an almost inaudible voice as silence falls again, Quentin continues: 'these women were normal before. That's the thing – they were normal. Then something happened and afterwards they went to the bitter end. Something happened which turned their lives inside out. And afterwards there were no limits. There you have it. Something carried them away, and after that anything could happen. It was a whirlwind.

After the holidays we'll take a good look at the phrases which talk of how the women's lives are turned upside down (as Quentin says). We'll look at the whirlwinds of the soul. We'll look at the sophisticated ways that Ovid makes his own of talking about the madnesses that were spoken of up till his time and after his time.

FC: There are a lot of women today who've drawn inspiration from the works of Ovid and Virgil in particular –I'm thinking for instance of Marie Darrieusecq, Sylvie Germain and Hélène Cixous. Do you think that these authors have something in particular to offer to women?

MC: I don't know. It's surprising that I've never asked myself that question in those terms. Now that you say it, something has struck me. I was writing a story about men – it was all about men right down to the title of the novel, *André des Ombres.* It was a story that took place in the trenches of the Great War and then on a boat heading for Djibouti. It was a story that took place among men – it looked at the question of fathers, of sons and fathers . . . I set off to look for Virgil in hell. There was Dido weeping for all eternity. The whole of the end of *André des ombres* was shaped by my memory of a woman, an old woman, my grandmother Emma, and I was guided by *Aeneid* VI when I wrote it, so Dido was present.

There's something else, something which nags at me all the time and can be seen working its way through *Déplacements* and through other stories that are on their way, and that's the story of Phaethon. I spoke about it earlier because of the fall, but what's really important to me in Phaethon's story, is the question of the mother, not of the father. The mother who tells her son who his father is, but can't produce any proof. Phaethon, not in Ovid's version, but in Euripides, is feminised. He's really young, an adolescent and he's treated like a young woman. In the fragments of Euripides that we've found we realise that he was married to the goddess of love, and so he's swallowed up, possessed. Aphrodite eats young men for breakfast . . .

And beyond that there's another theme (I don't know if ancient authors handle it the best – later authors have dealt with it a great deal as well) and that's the theme of androgyny. It's a theme to which I'm very sensitive, because it casts a doubt over the gender of the person who is writing . . . Might we say that the person writing is always feminised . . . Bearer of a work – giving birth to a work. What's more this question (which has been theorised, for

example the sociologist Nathalie Heinich writes about it) links to a matter that is very personal and difficult to talk about, short of going in some depth into something like an extensive family history of ancestors, parent, brothers, sisters (which would be somewhat inappropriate) . . . Let's just say that I had an androgynous uncle whom I knew very well. And that I was born beside a dead brother.

Do women take something particular from ancient authors? I can only speak for myself.

FC: Are you aware of your position as a woman when you turn to these authors?

MC: No . . . Or rather yes, insofar as the matters I spoke of earlier . . . But I'm thinking of my young pupil, Coline, who's twelve and who, when reading Ovid's letters from women in love, exclaimed: 'He's a real feminist, this Ovid!'

FC: I'm very interested in the way in which you've drawn on classical literature in your support of immigrants and foreigners. Could you clarify what lessons ancient Greek authors can teach us with regard to contemporary forms of injustice? In your view what is the link between Sophocles and the political backlash against today's migrants?

MC: It seemed to me that the questions raised by contemporary human rights in the matters of asylum, especially, had already been posed on numerous occasions in the West and in the works to which we have access. It seemed to me that contemporary representations of the 'stranger', of 'natural' law and of 'man-made' law were not new, that they were inscribed within a tradition of representations going back to the birth of democracy (and theatre and political debate) in Athens round about the fifth century BCE right up to the philosophies that it inspired and which came to light after the enormous upheaval of the first half of the twentieth century – after which one had to ask oneself whether poetry, representation, the law itself hadn't all been blasted to smithereens along with the genocide that we know about.

It seemed to me that we couldn't act as if all these questions hadn't occurred to us. I chose from Sophocles the most appalling, most sullied example of the exile that there is: Oedipus. To whom Theseus, king of Athens, offers absolute protection. In return Oedipus reveals a secret to Theseus. Obviously I'm not trying to say that Greece, and what the Greeks are going through today, is the hapless legacy of Theseus and of the secret that was heard/ forgotten. History does not need legends. Above all it doesn't need myths. You'd be better off going to look at European politics if you wanted to make sense of it. Yet it's tempting. Asylum, the asylum granted to Oedipus, the most tainted of tainted men in exchange for a secret. In our day a sick Europe hardly ever grants asylum any more. But obviously it's not enough to say that . . . It's seen through a small lens, the one which I have at my disposal . . .

FC: Do your pupils enjoy seeing the resonances with today's world?

They find it more difficult than appreciating the grammar or the poetry of whatever passage we're looking at – it's funny isn't it? Why should that be? It's something to think about . .. Maybe school has become a place where nobody dares to talk about political or indeed ethical matters anymore . . . There'd be an awful lot to say about that.

FC: In *La Ville parjure* Hélène Cixous has also invoked Greek tragedy in order to address contemporary horrors, such as the contaminated blood scandal. Do you have the sense of sharing the same literary tradition as her?

MC: I'm an avid reader of Hélène Cixous. We have the same points of reference, which belong to us. There are others. There may be others. It's quite something to be sharing the same literary tradition as Hélène Cixous! But I'm also dependent on Hélène Cixous. What she has written has shaped what I've tried to write.

FC: The French writer Marie Darrieusecq, the Australian Jane Alison, and the English Josephine Balmer have all responded to Ovid's *Tristia* rather than the *Metamorphoses.* In *Comment on expulse – responsabilités en miettes* you detail the modern experience of exile by invoking Antigone, among others. In your view are we living through a time of exile? And if so, do women respond to this in a particular way?

MC: I've never had any experience of exile. It's easy to talk about it. If I have an insight into it it's through the fact that we meet (and will continue to meet) more and more people who are dealing with exile. Moreover it's interesting to take a stance that is slightly different to the issue of rights (the increasingly diminished rights of the stranger), to look at things from a different viewpoint to that of our horrifyingly perverse immigration policies. It's interesting to view the matter from the point of view of hurt. To look at the person who has had to leave his country (or his native tongue), and to think about how he gets by with this hurt, who he is in this hurt etc. I say this thinking of Ovid who, from the other side of the Black Sea, poured out his sorrow at no longer hearing his mother tongue. I say this thinking of a very beautiful book by John Berger called *The Seventh Man.* In this book Berger vividly depicts the reality of everyday life for those men who leave and who will no longer be anything or anyone except on their brief trips home – and what's more they'll always be caught between two places. Nicole Lapierre, a sociologist, explains that it's in the gap between the two places that we are able to think. It's this gap which offers exiled men and women the possibility of contemplating new things. There's a romanticising of exile and wandering (Lapierre refers to Hannah Arendt and Edward Saïd) that suggests that it lends more intelligence than 'eternal immobility.' That's undoubtedly true. But you can see, and this takes us back to Ovid, that you need to have the language to articulate it. And in order to articulate it this language crosses rivers and frontiers.

That's why I haven't translated the *Tristia*. What sort of hurt was Ovid experiencing? What had he done to end up in exile (no-one really knows). I don't want to 'romanticise' that. I couldn't treat these letters like a literary work (and nothing more). Nor could I read them as

a cry for help, pure and simple, because I didn't have the context for that. The *Tristia* are a lament turned into poetry. Some years ago Claude Mouchard wrote a beautiful book about writers and the world that had capsized (and is capsizing). Its title is *If I cried out, who* . . . There's no main clause. And I don't know who heard Ovid. I don't know enough about it.

FC: Are you responding in some way to these questions in your novel *Des Métamorphoses* when you say: 'Man is the only being to be able to change his nature. He is defined by this ability to metamorphose. He goes by land, by air and sea. He goes everywhere and nothing stops him. Nothing except sometimes, on the edges of cities the hybrid population which is itself a personification of the 'no man's land'.

MC: Yes – absolutely. That's a very free translation of a passage from Sophocles' *Antigone* where the chorus is meditating on the nature of man, with regard to Antigone's stubbornness and the fatal choice that she is getting ready to make. The chorus begins by saying that man is he who:

1. Goes from place to place, crossing frontiers.

2. Changes his nature.

3. Knows how to flee from death itself (and the way in which man can escape death is by seeking it out, that it to say anticipating it.)

Once a strange hybrid creature (the Sphinx – half lion half bird) quizzed this man who changed location and nature. That's another story. And it wasn't Sophocles who told that story, it was a poet philosopher working much earlier than him. Who is this man? He's defined by his eternal movement, his passage from place to place, but also from state to state (don't forget the answer to the riddle of the Sphinx – he who walks on four feet, on two, on three . . .). The danger comes when he believes that he's been defined once and for all . . . That he's been assigned somewhere . . . The hybridity at the borders of the city that he's going to found (or save) reminds him that:

1. He needs constantly to be questioning himself (and living in the gap, as Nicole Lapierre says)

2. That no sooner has he founded (or saved or closed a circle), he must start all over again (and open the circle up)

FC: Is Kemal a personification of migrants in *Des Métamorphoses*?

I've never thought of it like that. Kemal is there at the start of the story to represent the possibility of a double-natured character. He's all the characters. He becomes a woman, or rather the perspective of the narrator turns him into a woman. When he's no longer there, the narrator sleeps. When she wakes up a young woman, Lise, is there. Lise is also my way of personifying migrants. She has a sea-crossing behind her (as well as a mother who bade

her farewell from her deathbed). Lise is Kemal to some extent. So Lise and Kemal are the two sides of the migrant (that the narrator will lose **bit by bit).** Rosa, who lives the life of a little princess in a funny hurdy-gurdy in the heart of the desert also has a link to migration. She is a stranger to her body. She's seen her brothers leave. Many remain travelling. And it's when she's with Kemal that the narrator is able to travel. He's the one that she followed.

FC: Phil Star has an identity that's divided between man and woman. Were you thinking of myths such as Iphis and Ianthe when you were creating her?

MC: Yes – and of Caenis and Caena as well. I've translated that myth . . . As well as being man and woman Phil Star is also fat and thin, or rather fat then thin then fat again. She doesn't have a fixed identity with regard to name, body or gender. She has an shortened name. Nothing goes right for this character. She falls in love with a story, she tortures a woman, she's made a mistake about her gender right from the start but she denies it. Behind her somebody else is hiding. That's how it is all the time. Behind a character or a name somebody or something else is hidden.

FC: You've recently translated Books X-XII of the *Metamorphoses*. Do you have the sense that you're bringing a feminine perspective to Ovid?

MC: I know that there's been work done on Ovid's feminine perspectives. Sylvie Laigneau has talked about it with regard to *The Art of Making Love.* But I haven't read what she said. No – I don't think that I bring a particularly feminine perspective to Ovid because the question of gender is one that is always on my mind. And I don't know what my version of bringing a feminine perspective would be. But I'm happy not so much to bring my words to his work (as if he needed me to!), but rather to overlay his language with my own language, to see the harmony of the two languages, And there we have the question of hybridity again!

FC: How do you see the future of the Classics?

MC: To tell you the truth it would be fantastic if we approached Korean poetry, Chinese or Basque poetry in the way that I described earlier, with this process of distancing and drawing closer to the text. Classical literature isn't the only literature worth studying, and I say that fully recognising the enormous importance that it has for me. But there is something magical about teaching Latin to young children. To eleven year olds, for example. When they're ten they've all read the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. And no matter how academic they are, they've all heard of the Greeks who left a horse within Troy as a cowardly means of killing the Trojans. That know that these Greeks are heroes. They know the names of Ulysses and Achilles. And then they're in the year above. They read bits from the *Aeneid*, which was written seven hundred years after the *Odyssey.* They get to book III. They see Aeneas landing at the island of the Cyclops. They see the Cyclops and his eye dripping blood. They

see a dirty, bearded wretch, a kind of Robinson Crusoe type, on the island. They all shout out - ‘He’s one of Ulysses’ friends.’ He’s not far away. He’s just gouged out the Cyclops’ eye!

So I think that Classics has a fabulous future.