

STUDY GUIDE

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THE PLAY

Midas desires the power to turn everything he touches into gold. The god Apollo leaves behind his half-mortal son. Orpheus, a great musician, follows the girl he loves all the way to the Underworld to bargain for her life.

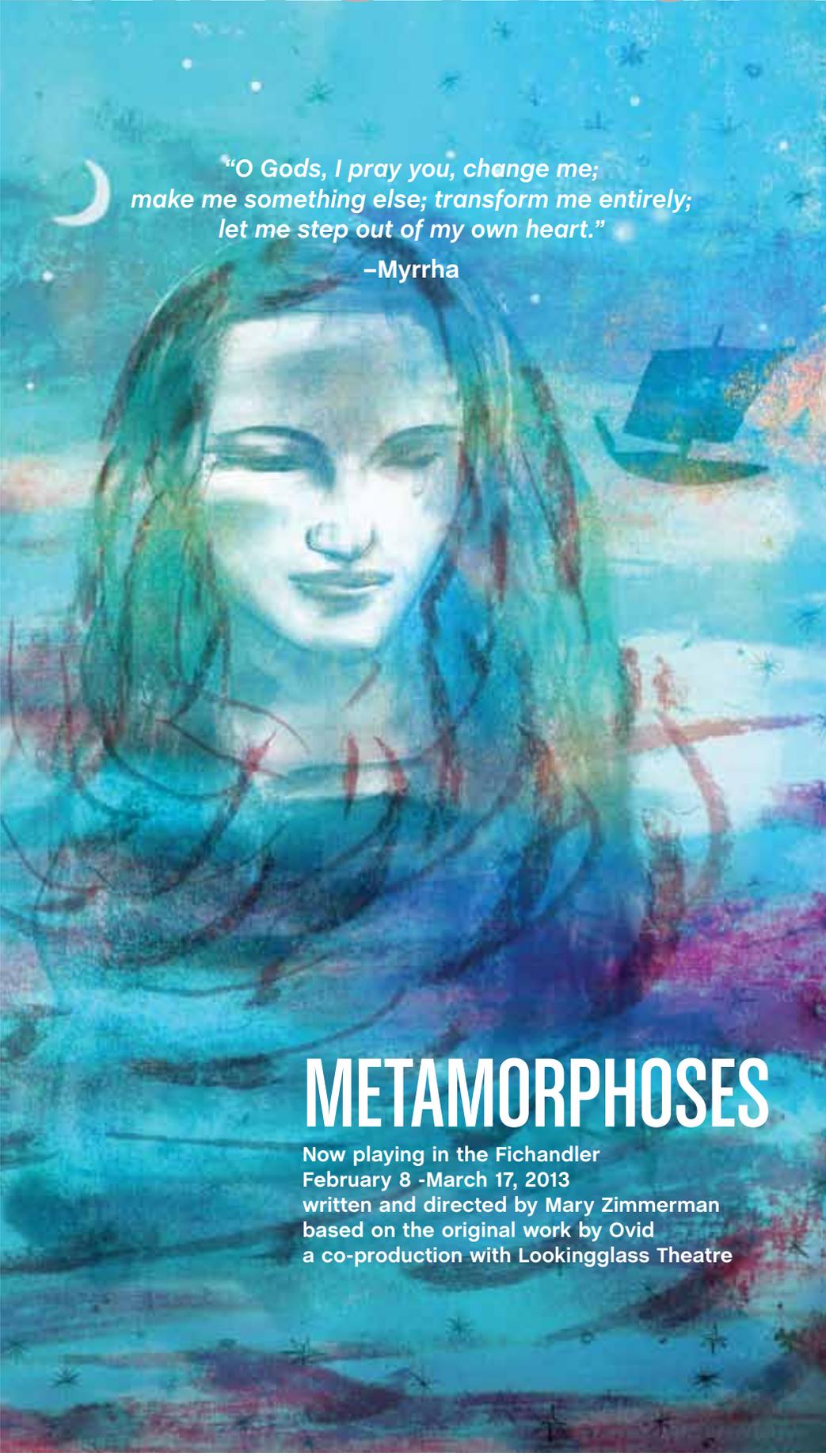
This is the stuff of myth. Such stories call listeners to sing, cry, pray, seek meaning, and change. "Metamorphoses" means changes or transformations. These stories of metamorphoses have existed in many forms for thousands of years.

In this theatrical adaptation, a simple pool of water is the set for the interplay between Greek gods and mortals. In these clashes, meetings and partings between the gods and humans, who changes? What compels us to change? What has the power to change us? What endures?



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*"O Gods, I pray you, change me;
make me something else; transform me entirely;
let me step out of my own heart."*

-Myrrha

METAMORPHOSES

Now playing in the Fichandler
February 8 - March 17, 2013
written and directed by Mary Zimmerman
based on the original work by Ovid
a co-production with Lookingglass Theatre

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT:



Mary Zimmerman

And I just have faith that if you allow yourself to be trusting, to sort of forget about your past hurts, your past wounds, that's the chance at which you will find love."

As a young girl in Nebraska, Mary Zimmerman loved to read. Among the many classics she read at a young age were *The Odyssey* and Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*.

These stories and mythology brought her to this conclusion: "what these myths are really about...is that life equals change, it equals loss. And you have to embrace it. You have to sort of go with it."

Zimmerman attended Northwestern University, studying theater and eventually earning her PhD. She is currently a professor, director and playwright in Chicago. She often adapts literary works for the stage. In addition to *Metamorphoses* (for which she won a Tony Award for directing in 2002), she has adapted Homer's *Odyssey*, Leonardo da Vinci's *Notebooks*, and the Chinese novel *Journey to the West*.

You may have seen her production of *The Arabian Nights* at Arena Stage in 2011.

MEET THE POET:



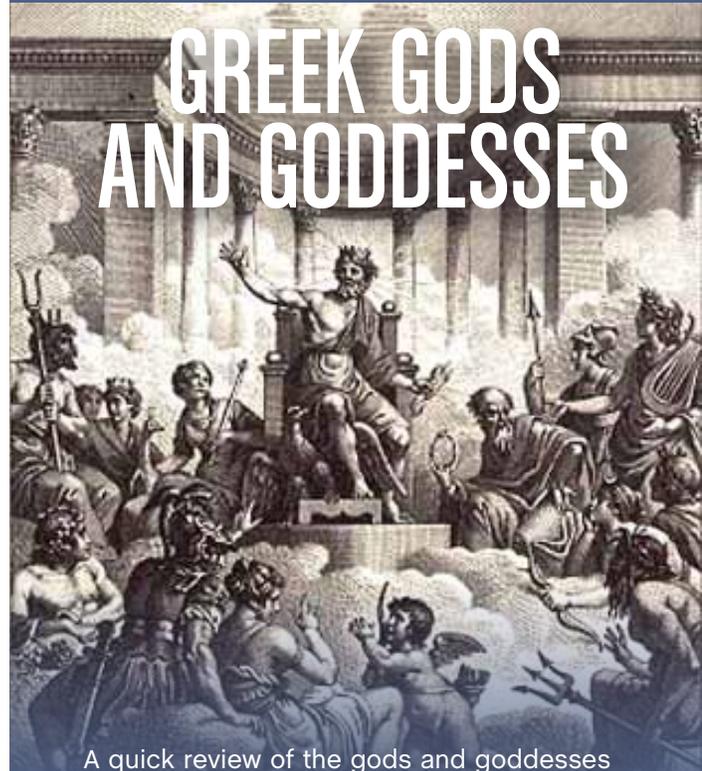
Ovid & His Masterpiece

Publius Ovidius Naso (Ovid) was one of Rome's most famous poets. His father brought him up to be a politician, but Ovid wanted to be a poet. He made a name for himself reciting his poetry aloud in public places. Completed in 8 AD, *Metamorphoses* is made up of 15 volumes of poems, and is a telling of how the universe came to be. Written in Latin, it combined myths and traditions of the Greeks and Romans. Most of its stories are about human and god interaction – how humans were rewarded for respecting the temperamental gods, and how they suffered when they didn't.

Although he wrote much about the gods, Ovid wasn't a conservative. His poetry was so erotic that most historians believe Caesar Augustus banished him from Rome because of it. Even his stories about the gods were often considered a touch too humorous and entertaining.

Ovid died 10 years after he was banished from Rome.

GREEK GODS AND GODDESSES



A quick review of the gods and goddesses will be helpful as you see well-known and lesser-known myths in the play.

Zeus – King of the gods and god of sky, order and fate, known for having many affairs with women (both mortal and immortal)

Apollo – God of prophecy, music and light, who drives the chariot of the sun across the sky

Aphrodite – Goddess of beauty and love

Poseidon – God of the sea and as temperamental as the waters he ruled

Hades – God of the Underworld, often pictured with his favorite pet, a three-headed dog

Hermes – Messenger of the gods, wears winged sandals

Dionysus – God of wine and fertility, known for his wild and destructive celebrations

Eros – Better known by his Roman name, "Cupid," god of love and sexual desire

Vertumnus – God of seasons and change



POOL ON STAGE!

Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* is famous its pool of water. The technicians at Arena Stage have been building this pool in our historic theater-in-the-round, the Fichandler Stage. According to Arena's technical director, Scott Schreck, this pool will be the largest in any of the productions of the play.

- The pool contains 3,584 gallons of water, weighing in at just under 30,000 lbs.
- It is held up by 65 steel columns and heavy wooden platforms and is lined with the same rubber used for outdoor ponds.
- The construction of the pool took three weeks plus overtime for eight people.
- The most expensive part is the drain matting (to keep people from slipping!), costing about \$7,000.
- The challenges of the project included building the components that could fit through the backstage door and then be assembled like a puzzle in the theater and then the challenge of controlling water. The production requires it be as still as possible.



ACTIVITY: What can be created on stage is limited only by your imagination and problem solving abilities. Imagine the most extravagant, impossible set for your favorite play or story. Then, in small groups, brainstorm a way to make it possible.

WATER OF LIFE

Water is central to life and, literally, at the center of this play. What is the importance of water historically, today and in the future? What stories of water do you find in different religions? Water is also closely linked to transformation. For example, it has multiple states: solid, liquid and gas. It is used in religious rites, like baptism, to purify or represent purification. In what other ways is water connected to change?

STORYTELLING AND THE UNIVERSAL

Metamorphoses has familiar characters. Over time, they stopped being individuals and became symbols or archetypes. An archetype is an original that has been imitated. Such characters, settings or stories are easily recognizable, because they appear again and again across many cultures. Archetypes are part of a human storytelling vocabulary.

Although Zimmerman makes her characters specific, she's also working broadly through archetype. This style of storytelling reinforces that myths can relate to any time or place. As you watch the play, note which myth most resonates with you.



ACTIVITY: As a class, make a list of archetypes that is as comprehensive as possible.

COMMON ARCHETYPES

The Great Flood
The Underworld
The Hero
The Trickster
The Scapegoat
The Quest
The Tree
The Mother
The Witch
What do these archetypes symbolize? Where do you find them in literature, film and modern stories?

ADAPTATION OF GREEK MYTHS

"Myth has two main functions, the first is to answer the sort of awkward questions that children ask, such as 'Who made the world? How will it end? Who was the first man? Where do souls go after death?' ...The second function of myth is to justify an existing social system and account of traditional rites and customs."

– Robert Graves, poet and scholar

Unlike the Torah, Bible, Koran or the Hindu Vedas, there is no answer-all text in relation to Greek mythology. The stories have undergone centuries of adaptation.

The earliest Greek myths began as an oral tradition. The Romans modeled many of their religious practices after the Greeks. Therefore, many writers and scholars from both civilizations wrote poems about the gods and goddesses. Each writer or artist was influ-

enced by the work that came before his or her own. Among the most influential texts, aside from *Metamorphoses*, are:

- Homer's *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, which tell the mythical story of the Trojan War and the gods' involvement.
- The poet Hesiod's *Theogony*, which is one of the first explanations of how the Greeks thought their world came to be.

- Plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, which feature many of the mythological figures.



ACTIVITY: Choose one of the lesser-known myths and write your own adaptation of it. It need not have a modern setting.

MARY ZIMMERMAN'S PROCESS

"The process goes like this: I fall in love, or have always been in love, with a particular text, or an episode that I happen to know from a particular text, or the back jacket cover description of a text in the hands of a friend I run into...or, in one case, the title of a text." – Mary Zimmerman

When most actors walk into a first rehearsal, they expect to receive a script. At a first rehearsal with Mary Zimmerman, however, the script is nowhere to be found. She says, "My imagination does not work that way."



"No script" does not mean "no plan." Zimmerman begins rehearsal having already researched the text and knowing which stories she'd like to tell. She has met with designers to develop

a concept or world for the piece. With this framework in place, she then works with the actors. This work in rehearsal provides further inspiration and images to help her shape the story into a final, but flexible, script.



Due to her collaborative style, Zimmerman chooses actors who work well together. She auditions actors in groups of 10 or 12 to observe how they improvise and cooperate. She also seeks actors

who move well. The actors often don't know what roles they will play. This emerges during the creative process.



This approach results in a style that is known for being open, fluid, lively and rich in imagery.



Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
Visit the restroom before the show starts.

Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.

Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.

Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!

Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.

Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.

Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.

Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.

Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.

Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.

Enjoy the show!

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

ONE How do stories change us or have the power to change us and the world?
TWO Why do we transform?
THREE How do stories reflect communities and cultures?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS & POETRY

Metamorphoses by Ovid
Mythology by Edith Hamilton
The Odyssey by Homer
The Lightning Thief by Rick Riordan
American Gods by Neil Gaiman
"Apollo" by Morris Bishop
"Leda and the Swan" by William Butler Yeats

ON THE WEB

Lookingglass Theatre Study Guide:
lookingglasstheatre.org/studyguide/MetamorphosesStudyGuide.pdf
Collection of Poetry based on Greek Mythology:
www.mythologyteacher.com/Myth%20Inspired%20Poems.pdf
Greek Mythology: www.theoi.com/greek-mythology/greek-gods.html
Mary Zimmerman on American Theatre Wing: "Playwright, Director, Choreographer" (video): americantheatre.org/wit/detail/playwright_and_director_04_02



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Production photos courtesy of
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