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Glossary

Characters

**The history of Greek (and Roman) mythology has a wide set of "correct" origins, stories, pronunciations, etc. - this is a fascinating result of a mix of written and oral storytelling over a long period of time. Mary Zimmerman's Metamorphoses is based on Ovid's epic poems, specifically David R. Slavitt's translation. Ovid was Roman, so you will find a mix of Greek and Roman names. The collection below is based on simplified information found from multiple sources. If you believe there is information here that is fundamentally incorrect or contradictory, please let me know! Otherwise it may just be that you have knowledge of one of the many versions of these stories, which can also inform your understanding.*

**In the context of myths, most characters are archetypes. They represent an aspect of the world, a concept, an emotion or trait of humanity, or a recognizable and simple type of person. While our characters are flawed and they change/learn throughout their stories, often their past and complexity of daily life is not relevant to the events of their story. What our characters represent and how they relate to the human experience is more important than the analysis of them as singular and unique beings.*

- **GODS**

- Aphrodite - **aff-roh-dietee**
 - Goddess of Love and Beauty
 - Punished those who neglected her worship, protected and favored those who honored her
- Apollo - uh-**paul**-oh
 - "Phoebus Apollo"
 - Olympian God of Music, Prophecy, Healing
 - In Zimmerman, represents Helios, father of Phaeton
- Bacchus - **bock**-us
 - God of Wine, Theatre, Debauchery
 - The Roman version of Dionysus
 - Known for drunkenness and debauchery in the hills
- Ceres - **seer**-ees
 - Goddess of Agriculture, Grain, Fertility
 - Roman version of Demeter
- Eros - **air**-ros
 - God of Love & Passion
 - Son of Aphrodite
- Hades - **hay**-deeze
 - God of the Underworld
- Hermes - **her**-meeze
 - Messenger of the Gods, Patron of Travel
 - Conductor of souls to the afterlife
 - Son of Zeus
- Hunger
 - Limos: Goddess of Starvation & Famine
 - Polar opposite of Demeter

- Persephone - per-**seff**-oh-nee
 - Goddess of Springtime
 - Wife to Hades, Queen of the Underworld
- Iris - **eye**-riss
 - Goddess of the Rainbow
 - Messenger and servant to the Olympians
- Morpheus - **more**-fee-us
 - God of Dreams, Son of Hypnos
 - Appears in dreams, taking form of any human
- Pomona - puh-**moh**-nuh
 - Goddess of flourishing, abundance
 - Appears as a wood nymph
- Poseidon - pohs-**eye**-done
 - God of the Sea & Storms
 - In this story, portrayed as an uncontrollable force of nature
- Sleep
 - Hypnos: God of Sleep
 - Fatherless son of The Night, twin brother of Death
 - Said to be calm and gentle, helps humans in need
- Vertumnus - ver-**tum**-niss
 - God of Fruit Season, Plant Growth, Fruit Trees, Gardens
 - Shape shifting seasons
- Zeus - **zoose**
 - God of the Sky, Thunder, Justice
 - Supreme Deity, defined earth and the heavens, creating humans
 - Merciful in overriding Aphrodite's spite, helps Eros & Psyche
 - Curious about the nature of people
- **OF THE GODS**
 - Alcyone - al-**sigh**-oh-nee
 - Daughter of Aeolus, God of Wind
 - Experiences powerless loss and grief
 - Denizens of Underworld
 - Sisyphus - **siss**-uh-fuss
 - Sly, deceitful, cunning - hubris (pride / over-confidence)
 - Angered the gods by betraying, evading, tricking
 - Ultimately punished by being forced to push a boulder up a hill endlessly
 - Tantalus - **tan**-tuh-luss
 - Murdered his son to serve him to the gods as a test - hubris (pride / over-confidence)
 - Punished by standing in a pool under low hanging fruit. Neither within reach (recede, blow in the wind). Never being satisfied

- Henchman of Poseidon
 - Elemental Spirit
- Oread (handmaid to Ceres) - **orr**-iad
 - A mountain nymph
- Silenus - sigh-**lee**-nus
 - Son of Hermes, raised Dionysus/Bacchus as a baby
 - Jovial, permanently intoxicated
 - Known as chief of the satyrs
- Spirit of the Tree
 - Hamadryad, female nymph spirits whose life is bound to the tree
- Phaeton - **fay**-ton
 - Son of Helios (Apollo) and the water nymph Clymene
 - Fueled by doubts of parentage
 - His story is often used to explain the extremes of hot deserts, frozen lands, and other environmental effects
- **MORTALS**
 - Baucis - **baw**-sis & Philemon - **fi**h-luh-mun
 - An honorable and hospitable couple of meager means
 - Ceyx - **say**-iks
 - A happily married king
 - Son of Eosphorus, the morning star
 - Driven to visit an oracle to seek answers about his brother
 - Cinyras - **sin**-uh-rus
 - A heroic king
 - Mentioned as the creator of art and musical instruments, and having significant beauty
 - Erysichthon - eri-**sick**-thon
 - An apathetic king
 - Represents greed and disregard for nature
 - Eurydice - yur-**rid**-ih-see
 - Has been known as a dryad (nymph) or possibly daughter of Apollo
 - Midas
 - A greedy king
 - His daughter, a playful young girl
 - Mother to Erysichthon - eri-**sick**-thon
 - Contrast to Erysichthon, an example of praising the gods and being rewarded for it
 - Myrrha - **meer**-uh
 - Daughter of King Cinyras
 - In some versions, cursed by Aphrodite due to her refusal of love, in others cursed because of her mother bragging about her beauty

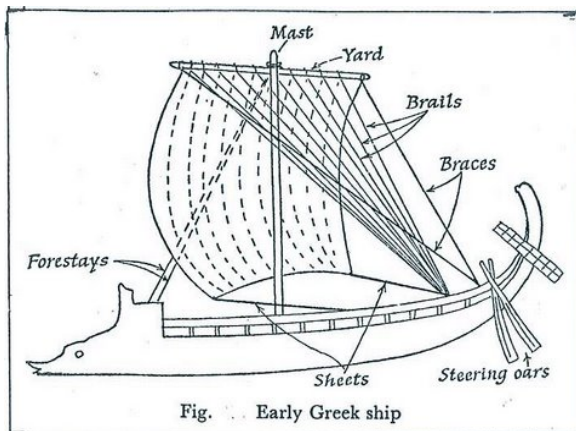
- Narcissus - nar-**sis**-us
 - Son of river god Cephissus and nymph Liriope
 - Distinguished for his beauty, but refused love of the nymph Echo and was cursed to fall in love with his own reflection, turning into a Narcissus plant
- Orpheus - **or**-fee-us
 - Poet & musician born with god-like gift for music
 - Son of muse Calliope
- Psyche - **sigh**-kee
 - Name means soul, known for her extraordinary beauty that drew jealousy from Aphrodite
 - Purified by trial and allowed immortality in love
- **STORYTELLERS / CHORUS**
 - Narrators
 - At times the characters in the story, others an outside observer. A fluid transition between indicates we are both living and telling the stories
 - Nursemaid to Myrrha
 - Plays a role in both saving Myrrha's life and aiding in her tragic decision
 - Launderesses (Fates)
 - A transitional character group but also a group potentially revisited
 - Three Fates: Moirai - Responsible for the destinies of mortals
 - Clotho (the Spinner), Lachesis (the Alloter) and Atropos (the Inflexible)
 - Lucina (handmaid to Alcyone)
 - Named for the Roman Goddess of childbirth and light
 - Scientist
 - An acknowledgement of modern science and the role that mythology played in our early understanding of the world
 - Singers
 - Highlighting the tragic beauty of Ceyx & Alcyone's miracle
 - Therapist to Phaeton
 - A complex modern analysis of Phaeton, highlighting the impact of our upbringing and role of our parents
 - Q & A
 - A pull back to the simplicity of curiosity
 - Woman at the water
 - Representing humanity, curiosity, setting the tone for fluid storytelling
- **ENSEMBLE**
 - The Buyer
 - Servant to Midas
 - Sailors of Ceyx
 - Wedding/Funeral Attendants

Locations

- Ends of the Earth, a pool that reflects the stars at night (p.19)
 - Midas is directed to travel here to save his daughter, not unlike the pool we find ourselves at for our storytelling
- Campania (p.26)
 - Beyond where Cimmerians live, the cave where Sleep lives
 - A region in southern Italy, including Naples and Pompeii
- Scythia, in the Caucasus (p.34)
 - Nothing grows there, bleak and nightmarish region
 - Mountainous area between Europe and Asia
- Underworld & The River Styx (p.41)
 - The river is the boundary between the world of the living and the dead
- Arab wilderness (p.60)
 - Place of escape, "remote and exotic lands"
- Across Ethiopia to the valley where Apollo works (helios)
 - Hot, dusty, the hill is steep
 - It might take at least two months to walk here from Greece

Terms / References

- Lachrymose (p.16)
 - given to tears or weeping : tearful
- Aeolus (p.20) - **ay**-oh-luss
 - (also Aiolos) God of the Wind
 - Keeper of the violent storm winds, releasing them at the command of the greatest gods
- Ship (p.23)



- - Spars - any long, steady beam such as the mast or sail rigging
 - Yards - horizontal beam holding up the sail
 - "Ship" the oars - pulling them in close / parallel to the boat
 - "Reef" the sails - reduce surface area to improve stability

- Langour (p.27)
 - A pleasant or heavy feeling of tiredness
- Profusion (p.27)
 - An abundance, great quantity, or large amount of something
- Somnolent (p.27)
 - Sleepy, drowsy, or causing sleep
- Kingfisher (Greek term: halcyon) (p.32)



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- Larder (p.37)
 - Cool room/cupboard used to store food and dry goods
- Denizen
 - An inhabitant of a specific place
- Versions of Orpheus & Eurydice
 - Ovid, A.D. 8 (p.41)
 - [Rainer Maria Rilke](#), A.D. 1908 (p.45)
- Lyre (p.45)
 - An instrument similar to a harp



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- "Wide couch's scent and island" (p.47)
 - A metaphor for Orpheus & Eurydice's shared bed and closeness
- Narcissus plant



- Helen (p.51)
 - Helen of Troy was said to be the most beautiful woman in the world, daughter of Zeus, and reason for the Trojan War
- Casement (p.53)
 - Type of window with hinges that swings open like a door
- Feast of Ceres - "Cerealia" (p.57)
 - 7-9 days of honoring and celebrating Ceres in April, the goddess of grain and harvest
 - *Cereal is her namesake
- Adonis (p.61)
 - After being birthed by Myrrha, he is raised in the underworld and adored by Persephone and Aphrodite
 - Mortal known for his extraordinary beauty
- Epaphus (p.63)
 - Son of Zeus
 - Raised doubts for Phaeton about his parentage, his true father
- Obviates (p.63)
 - Removes or makes unnecessary ahead of time
- Un' Aura Amorosa, *Così Fan Tutti* (p.64)
 - Expresses "a loving breath" or a "tender breeze of love", implying that the promise of love is enough without needing anything else. Contradicts Phaeton's need for his father to prove his love to him
- Exordium (p.65)
 - Statement of introduction to a topic or speech

Background - Mary Zimmerman

Mary Zimmerman's style is driven by collaboration, spectacle, poetic image, metaphor, and relationship to the audience in intimacy and connection. She believes that this connection defeats loneliness.

Her creation of *Metamorphoses* was built around "structuring an evening" - selecting and exploring stories that lean into the use of water.

[\(See her talk on "Metamorphosis of Poetry" for her perspective on storytelling\)](#)

From the author:

Metamorphoses is a play based on Ovid's first-century epic, a poetic collection of Greek myths. Each of the tales – beautiful, strange and often cautionary – comes to some form of radical, bodily transformation. Through trauma, love or an attempt to escape an unbearable moment, the characters end up changed into birds or trees, or melting into rivers. Throughout the centuries, these stories have been interpreted variously as reflections of psychological or spiritual journeys, or even as an early form of science – an encyclopedia of how nature got the way it is. They are always reminders that we, and everything we know, will change.

In the original Lookingglass Theater production, an ensemble of 10 actors embodied parts, or all, of a dozen or so of these myths. We performed the piece in a 24x24-foot pool of water surrounded by a planked deck. The presence of the water was not only beautiful, it was also profoundly connected to the idea of transformation. Water is itself a shifting and changeable element; it freezes and evaporates, it both corrupts and purifies. It is a cross-cultural symbol of transformation or passage to something new. Throughout the performance, the water itself is continually transformed by virtue of the way in which it is used. It is deployed variously as an emblem of language, drunkenness, sexuality, or the unconscious. Sometimes it simply plays itself, acting as a literal swimming pool, a river, or a fragment of the ocean.

As a reflection of my own belief in the constant relevance of these archetypal stories, the language of the play is often completely contemporary, but it is also mixed with the poetry of Ovid as translated by David Slavitt. There is humor in the stories as well as tragedy, but the ultimate expression of the piece is that of a faith in the ability of great love to cause great change.