

Kristina Silva's *Metamorphoses* Dramaturgy Note:

Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* is an adaptation of Ovid's first-century collection of Ancient Greek and Roman myths. Originally composed as a 15-book epic, Zimmerman brought these timeless tales to the stage in 1996, ultimately leading to the play's successful Broadway run in 2002 at Circle in the Square Theatre.

Many lovingly call this piece “the water play” due to its original staging in and around a pool of water, which underscores the importance of water to the myths. As Zimmerman explained in a 2012 interview with UC Berkeley: “I picked stories that hinge on water, that can use the water, or that water can work metaphorically in. At all times, water is working thematically because water is such a changeable, metamorphosing element.” Her staging featured the pool as more than a set piece, with it instead becoming an active participant alongside the performers. In her text, the water changes from scene to scene—becoming a treacherous ocean, transforming into a serene pond, and even metamorphosing into the subconscious of the tragically comedic Phaetön, who postures about the traumas he has endured.

It has been almost 30 years since Zimmerman's adaptation debuted. Since then, other directors have pursued many different interpretations using a 50-gallon pool, others a small pond, or even omitting actual water entirely. Regardless of these variations, the messages about transformation, fluidity, and how the human experience involves water as a vital resource remain clear.

As they explored the text, Professor Ellen Orenstein led the cast and production team through these conversations about the role of water. The actors explored how to literally portray shipwrecks and other aquatic scenes without water by relying solely on their bodies, while they also delved into the metaphorical meanings. As a result, some scenes evoke the tranquility of a pond while others are reminiscent of the arc of a tsunami.

The actors embody this ebb and flow, navigating our various human experiences of water. Gently or with force, the human spirit endures transformation, just as water shifts through different states of matter. While viewing this performance, the audience is invited to reflect on how we, like water, evolve, adapt, and transform with every new experience we endure.