

REPER
SEATTLE



META MORPH OSES

BY Sami Ibrahim, Laura Lomas, and Sabrina Mahfouz

DIRECTED BY Shana Cooper

PLAY GUIDE

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A NOTE FROM ARTS ENGAGEMENT

This Play Guide is unique because it gives you a peek into what goes on behind-the-scenes of the creation of an adaptation or classical play. This Play Guide is cut down from a 108-page Dramaturgy Packet researched and compiled by Seattle Rep's Literary Manager and Dramaturg Paul Adolphsen and Assistant Director Lucas Esperanza. They put all of this together before rehearsals for the play even started – that's a lot of work! I wanted to share a little bit about these two roles in the theater.

The Literary Manager reads and watches lots of plays to help pick which shows the theater will do. They maintain relationships with playwrights who are writing plays for the theater and find new playwrights to write new plays for the theater. They also serve as the Dramaturg on productions at the theater. The Dramaturg does research for the play (like making the Dramaturgy Packet) and advises the playwright on edits during the rehearsal process. Both are very important roles!

The Assistant Director supports the Director of the show in many ways. They take notes, advise the director, update paperwork, and serve as another set of eyes and ears to make sure the play looks and sounds great.

We are so lucky at Seattle Rep to have Paul and Lucas fulfilling these roles! And you will see a snapshot of their wonderful work for this show in this Play Guide. There is so much to learn about Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and the deeper you go the more you will get out of this dense play. Happy learning!



Nabra Nelson
Director of Arts Engagement

ABOUT OVID'S METAMORPHOSES



ABOUT OVID

Publius Ovidius Naso (also known as Ovid) was born in 43 B.C.E. in the Roman Empire and died in 17 C.E. in exile from Rome. Even in his time he was a deeply admired and famous poet in Rome. The *Metamorphoses* or *Transformations* of Ovid was completed in 8 C.E.

“Ovid had made his name by writing love poetry, beginning while he was still in his teens: a series of books of loosely linked poems that explored the various aspects of romantic and sexual passion, written in the first person.”

- W. W. Norton & Co. Charles Martin Translation.

OVID'S OTHER POETRY

- ***Tristia*** (aka *Book of Sorrows*)
- ***The Loves and the Heroines***
 - "Imaginary letters from fifteen famous women of legend to their lovers, sometimes even including their husbands" – Indiana University Press Rolfe Humphries Translation
 - Written in Latin elegiac couplets and presented as though from the perspective of heroines of Greek and Roman mythology; narrative addressed to their heroic lovers who have in some way mistreated, neglected, or abandoned them.
 - Aka *Heroides*
- ***The Art of Love***
- ***The Cure of Love***
- ***On Make-Up***
- ***Medea***
- ***Religious Holidays***
- ***Letters from the Black Sea***

ABOUT OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*

OVERVIEW OF OVID'S POEM *METAMORPHOSES*

The *Metamorphoses*, also known as *Stories of Changing Forms*, is a Latin narrative poem from 8 C.E. by the Roman poet Ovid. It is considered his magnum opus. The poem chronicles the history of the world from its creation to the deification of Julius Caesar in a mythico-historical framework comprising over 250 myths, 15 books, and 11,995 lines.

It is an epic-length poem with 250 variations on the theme of transformation that the poet speaks of in its opening lines. It is a collection of stories from mostly Greek myths and legends, in which transformation (metamorphosis) plays some kind of role. The stories are told in chronological order from the creation of the world to the death and deification of Julius Caesar. The stories are not otherwise directly related to each other.

Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Metamorphoses-poem-by-Ovid>



ABOUT OVID'S METAMORPHOSES

STORIES IN THIS PLAY

Not all the stories in Ovid's original *Metamorphoses* epic poem are in the play. Here is the list of the stories you will see onstage:

1. The Creation

2. Juno & Jupiter (called "Tiresias" in some versions of the poem)

3. Procne and Philomena

4. Pentheus and Bacchus

5. Arachne

6. Actaeon

7. Orpheus & the Ciconian Women (called "The Death of Orpheus" in some versions of the poem)

8. Myrrha

9. Medea (also called "Medea and Jason" in some versions of the poem)

10. Midas and the Judgment of Apollo

11. Philemon and Baucis

12. Achilles (also called "The Death of Achilles" in some versions of the poem)

13. Hecuba, Polyxena, and Polydorus

14. Caesar (also called "The Ascension of Caesar" in some versions of the poem)

15. Phaeton and Phoebus

INTERVIEW WITH DR. STEPHANIE MCCARTER

Dr. Stephanie McCarter is a professor of Classics at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee and the author of a recent English translation the *Metamorphoses*. The first female translator of Ovid's Roman epic in nearly 60 years, Dr. McCarter spoke with Seattle Rep Literary Manager and Dramaturg, Paul Adolphsen, about the context of these ancient stories, and why they have endured for millennia

Paul Adolphsen: From your perspective, what do you think is the most helpful thing to know about Rome, at this time, for someone who's reading the *Metamorphoses*, or is going to watch an adaptation of it?

Dr. Stephanie McCarter: I actually don't think you need to know the intricacies of political maneuverings of that day and age. But **I do think you need to know that Rome has just come out of a period of civil war, and is itself in a state of metamorphosis, from being a republic, to being an empire. That's really the most important thing. As Ovid is living, it's become increasingly obvious that something huge has changed. I think putting your finger on exactly what has changed might be less easy than we would think, in hindsight. So, much of the literature written at that period is a response to crisis and change. And this is one reason I think Ovid actually wants to pick up the idea of metamorphosis and transformation. Because that's something that happens not just to individual bodies, but also political bodies. [...]**

I was speaking about this with my students. They really respond viscerally to Ovid, and I think it's because we, too, are in a period of crisis and transformation. [...] And these are all the sorts of things that Ovid is doing is

response to his own political moment. Who gets to hold power? That question brings transformation, always.

PA: I had not thought about it in terms of transformations of power and an artist responding to a politically changing moment. And I guess for Ovid, too, having been exiled, he had a real personal experience of the transformation he's writing about. The personal stakes must have felt very high for him.

SM: When one or two or three powerful people can bring such transformations, I think that's really important to pay attention, because it's those who are in power who have the ability to transform others. Metamorphosis [in the poem] is almost like the prerogative of the gods. And it's the humans who take transformation into their own hands that often get taken down a peg or two through metamorphosis. And those who are at the bottom of the hierarchy are the ones who usually have to suffer from the transformation, in a lot of ways. Like Ovid, being exiled. It's artists, it's people who want to have a voice, right? Who gets to speak often butts up against who has power.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. STEPHANIE MCCARTER

SM: These are all questions that were being debated in Ovid's time. One of the fundamental questions during this moment was who has *libertas*, which is the Roman word for freedom. It's where we get word for "liberty." But that was not just political freedom, or the freedom to do what you want. It was also the ability to speak. Who gets to speak in society, who gets to speak in an autocracy becomes a really important question. *Libertas* was also bodily autonomy. So, when somebody transforms another, [they're] denying them not just control over their own bodies, but control over their voice. I think so much of what this epic is doing is wrestling with questions that were really of [Ovid's] political moment. But the interesting thing is that they're also of ours. I mean, we're asking ourselves all the time: who do we center in our stories? **Who gets to speak in our society? And how does that intersect with power? The connections are so clear between our time and then. Even if the specifics change, the big questions don't.**

PA: I just wrote down, "who gets to speak" and "bodily autonomy," because those are big themes we've been exploring in pre-production conversations, and I know the actors will have questions and impulses about these dynamics in the text. Two of the many elements that we use to tell stories in the theatre are bodies and voices, so it makes sense to me that these stories about which bodies get to speak have been adapted to performance throughout the centuries.

Your comments about the questions that Ovid is asking around who gets to speak and bodily autonomy, bring me to a question about violence in the *Metamorphoses*. Many of the stories that are contained within our adaptation include moments of intense violence, often directed at women, by the gods and humans. I'm wondering, from your perspective, how do you understand this gender-based violence in the context of Ovid's time and our own? And how did you approach it as a translator?

SM: The main way I approached this was: I considered it important. And that seems like a really simple approach, and an obvious approach in some ways. It's really only been in the past few decades that people have been reading Ovid with an eye to this question. **Why is there so much gender-based violence in the poem? One thing I never wanted to use to explain it was the very tired trope of, "well, that's just the way it was. He's just reflecting his own society, and we can't judge the poem because there's a lot of gender-based violence." I think Ovid's putting this in there because he finds it worth thinking about. Otherwise, what's the point? He could just write another epic that centers male experiences, and is about war and who gets to hold power and assemblies of men, right? He's not interested in doing that. [...]** It's about taking the traditional story and re-centering it on others to see how it changes. This is one reason I think rape is so important in the epic because in some ways, rape is to women what war is to men, in the world of the epic genre.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. STEPHANIE MCCARTER

SM: War brings violence to men through penetration with spears and arrows and things like that. What happens to women in the aftermath of war is that rape becomes the weapon that's used against them, which is a different kind of penetration. It's one way that Ovid can say: "so many of our stories have had a narrow focus." **And what is so brilliant about Ovid is that he knows how to shift the focus to tell a new story. Which is another reason I think we've been reading him for so long, because he teaches us that every story can be rethought. [...]**

But I also think: **if Ovid's thinking about power, who are the most disempowered people in society during his time? Who can't speak, who has no bodily autonomy?** It's women. And so, if these are his fundamental concerns, then he has to look at women, and the power that is used against them. I think that Ovid uses women to think with. What does it mean to live in a world where you don't have agency? Well, let's look at the lives of women. And let's examine this question through them, because they really don't have agency. I also think that, even though the enslaved are not focused on a lot in the *Metamorphoses*, I do think the figure of the slave looms large in Ovid's mind as well. Because, again, the enslaved person was someone who had been stripped of the ability to speak and the ability to have bodily autonomy. And so to a degree, what happens to all these transformed people is that they have the status of an enslaved person, because they've been stripped of their ability to speak and to control their own bodies. I think that if you're not thinking through power and agency and gender [in the *Metamorphoses*], you're

overlooking so many of the more interesting aspects of the text. **If you're going to think about power in the world, you cannot disentangle that question from gender.** Because for the Romans and the Greeks before them, to be in power was to be masculine. And to be disempowered was to be feminine. So they understood that gender and the body were not necessarily states that were equated with each other. They were states that had to do with a whole range of circumstances. And so, to play a feminine role in society really didn't have everything to do with the body. **This is one thing that was so interesting about Ovid is that he understood that the body and identity -- one didn't determine the other, that they could be separated from one another.** For Ovid to think about gender and power intersecting, it's about the way that power is gendered too. To be disempowered was simply to have a feminine role. If Ovid is going to write an epic about power, gender has to be a major part of it. **I think that Ovid would so understand that one's gender identity and one's body -- that the relationship between these is very complex.** So you do have transgender characters, for example, in the in the *Metamorphoses*, like Tiresias. And then you have a whole series of characters whose gender expression does not match what the Romans would have expected from their body. So, for example, you have you have Daphne, you have Callisto, you have Hermaphroditus, you have Narcissus, you have so many characters who do not behave and do the sorts of things that were expected of people of that particular sex in the ancient world.

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SM: I think Ovid would have been really sensitive to conversations we're having about gender today, probably more so than any other ancient writer. **But I also think, in general, that the Romans were attuned to the idea that gender was a spectrum, and that you could conform to certain gender norms in some ways, but not in others. I think that they would have been really alive to that to that idea.**

It's really nice for my students, for example, who have varying gender identities to look at ancient literature and say, "yeah, actually, this is something I can really see myself reflected in, and to think with about my own identity." And so it's really refreshing, I think, for modern audiences to see that in the poem.

PA: And unexpected, too, would be my guess.

SM: Absolutely. The people who try to keep a very rigid gender identity in Ovid, but I also think just in general in ancient literature, are usually the ones who experience downfall in a way. For example, Pentheus: he's someone who goes on a tirade about gender, and it doesn't end well for him. There's this idea [in Roman epics] that you have to be transformable, you have to be changeable, you have to be fluid. And the people who aren't, in Ovid's world, are the people who will experience often very violent transformations.

PA: Yes. It's an interesting lesson for us now, about embracing change or not. It can make you very brittle.

If you don't embrace change. I have a question for you about tone in the poem. There are parts of this adaptation that are actually pretty funny. Often, the humor--at least in the adaptation--is relying on a kind of irony. How do you see humor operating in these stories?

SM: Ovid is very funny at times. I don't think he's always "laugh out loud" funny, but he's the kind of funny that comes from irreverence and wit. There's a bit of bombast in the epic form, particularly with the gods. This intersects with Ovid's concerns with power. **To laugh at the gods is to bring them down a peg or two.** Ovid realizes that those in power are funny in ways that they cannot possibly realize because they're blinded by their own privilege. For example, Apollo comes out and he looks like an artist. It's all based on the fact that he just looks good, right? Whether the substance of his music is any good, we don't know. But he certainly looks the part. And I don't think Apollo could understand that he's an image without substance. That's what so many of the gods are [in *Metamorphoses*], image without substance. They know how to wield power, but they don't really understand that power doesn't substitute for personality, or cleverness, or resilience. It's the people who are disempowered who have all those things. It's the complete obliviousness of the gods that I think Ovid finds kind of funny. So in other words, I think he uses humor to empower those below, never to punch down.

PA: In a lot of the current conversation about representation and storytelling, there are people who take the side of, "Well, no, a story can be neutral," or, "you're just seeing something that's not there." But it has always been the case that storytelling is political.

INTERVIEW WITH DR. STEPHANIE MCCARTER

SM: Absolutely. And even the stories [in the *Metamorphoses*] where we are getting the narrator telling the story, Ovid makes it very clear that his isn't a neutral telling, either. For example, one of my favorite stories is when Ovid is retelling the story of the Sybil accompanying Aeneas into the underworld. Virgil had told us all about how she and Aeneas had descended, but nothing about how they came back up. Ovid is saying, "Now, wait a minute, that was a biased story he told, because [Virgil] didn't tell us everything. He was selective in what he told. So, I'm going to tell how she came back up. How the Sybil accompanied Aeneas back up, and I'm going to let her tell the story to Aeneas." **And so, Ovid, through his own narrative says, "previous people who told this story, they were not giving us a definitive version, they left things out, they made choices, and I can choose to make different choices, and somebody else can come along and make different choices."** It's not just with the internal narrators [of the *Metamorphoses*], it's also with his own narrative voice, where Ovid is clearly showing the ways that he's not telling an objective story either, by any means.

PA: I love what you just said about how there is no ending to the *Metamorphoses*. The adaptation we have starts with just the actors saying, "Hey, welcome! We're gonna tell you some stories." And then the play ends with an actor coming out, asking the audience, "Do you all want to hear one more story?" Hopefully the audience says "yes," and if they do, then the actor asks if they want to hear a happy story or a sad story. And either way, they actor tells a happy story, hopefully of some sort of transformation from their own life.

That's actually how the play ends. And I love that that is also kind of the feeling and experience of reading and being immersed in the flow of this epic. The story keeps going. Your own experience as a reader or listener is integrated into it and then it continues as you leave the theatre or close the book.

SM: The last word of the epic is *vivam* - which means, "I will live." Its Ovid saying, "my body might die, but my words will live." It invites us to think about the text as a living thing. I think Ovid would realize really quickly that [the *Metamorphoses*] needs to transform, it needs to be changed for different times, it needs to be kept alive, or else the text itself will just stagnate and die. The transformation of being brought into new times and places and made relevant in new ways is the only way that his text is going to survive and be vibrant. I think that it is really important to Ovid that [the epic] remains vibrant. So, I love the idea that you're bringing a completely different story of change into the context of the poem. I think Ovid would love that, too. It's almost as though his particular epic has to end, because he is mortal, and he can't tell this story forever. But, he ensures that it is still a living thing so that other people who read it will be able to shed new light on it and keep it alive and relate it to their own stories of transformation. I think he would love that. In fact, I think it is the most Ovidian thing you could do.

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

The following section includes contextual information about each of the stories from the *Metamorphoses* that appear in our adaptation. Under each story are a few questions to help guide your journey through this part of the packet.

INTRODUCTION

*“My mind leads me to speak now of forms changed
Into new bodies: O gods above, inspire
This undertaking (which you’ve changed as well)
And guide my poem in its epic sweep
From the world’s beginning to the present day.”*

“Ovid divided his *Metamorphoses* into fifteen books, and spoke of it as three times five volumes, suggesting that each five books constituted a kind of unity. The titles of books and the subtitles within books are the translator’s. In the opening lines of his poem, Ovid addresses its major theme of metamorphosis, and its chronological range from the creation to his own time.” - W. W. Norton & Co. Charles Martin Translation.

THE CREATION

What were the creation myths that Romans believed?

- **According to the beliefs of the ancient Romans, the world started out with only one primordial deity, which was Chaos. Chaos was a dark, silent, abyss that housed all creation.** The first thing to emerge from the abyss was the second deity, Gaia, the Earth. Gaia was said to be the mother of the universe, and from her came Uranus, or the sky. Many other primordial deities emerged from Chaos, notably including Cupid, the god of love.”

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

- “After this first generation of gods, there were the Titans. The Titans were the offspring of Gaia and Uranus. The first generation of Titans consisted of six sets of twins, each one a boy and girls. The twelve were: Saturn, Oceanus, Iapetus, Hyperion, Crius, Coeus, Ops, Tethys, Theia, Phoebe, Themis, and Mnemosyne.”
- “Saturn and Ops had six children: Jupiter, Neptune, Pluto, Hestia, Juno, and Ceres. The first five Saturn ate at birth due to a prophecy that said he would be overthrown by one of his children. The sixth, Jupiter, was stolen by Ops and taken to Earth to be raised by nymphs on the island of Crete.”
- “[Jupiter] and his siblings, known as the Olympic Gods, defeated the gods with the help of Prometheus. These gods then set up their rule and distributed the powers between them, along with gods that were children of other Titans, including Apollo and Diana.”



The Creation of the World (Orbis fabrica), from Ovid's 'Metamorphoses', Antonio Tempesta, cir. 1606
(SOURCE: <https://6thhourlaronroman.weebly.com/creation-myth.html>)

What were Ovid's sources for this section of the poem?

- “The subheading, ‘The Creation,’ like all the subheadings in the translation, are the work of [the translator] and are not present in the original. **Ovid’s cosmogony, or account of the creation of the world out of Chaos, combines early Greek mythology (codified especially by Hesiod in his Theogony), with philosophical (especially pre-Socratic) accounts, partly demythologizing the mythological material and putting the process under the guidance of a single divine mind.** Prominent philosophical aspects of his account are the separation of an undifferentiated mass into an order comprising four elements, the underlying principles of strife and attraction, and the roster of opposite qualities. Some of these philosophical themes will return at the end of the poem, in Pythagoras’ account of the world still in flux.”

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

JUNO AND JUPITER

Where do the Roman gods come from?



Juno Discovering Jupiter with Io, 1618 (Oil on oak)

“The Roman Empire was a primarily polytheistic civilization, which meant that people recognized and worshiped multiple gods and goddesses. Despite the presence of monotheistic religions within the empire, such as Judaism and early Christianity, Romans honored multiple deities. They believed that these deities served a role in founding the Roman civilization and that they helped shape the events of people’s lives on a daily basis. Romans paid allegiance to the gods both in public spaces and in private homes. While the Roman state recognized main gods and goddesses by decorating public buildings and fountains with their images, families worshipping at home also put special emphasis on the deities of their choosing.

The gods and goddesses of Greek culture significantly influenced the development of Roman deities and mythology. Due to Rome’s geographic position, its citizens experienced frequent contact with the Greek peoples, who had expanded their territories into the Italian peninsula and Sicily. As the Roman Republic was rising to prominence, it acquired these Greek territories, bringing them under the administration of the Roman state. Romans adopted many aspects of Greek culture, adapting them slightly to suit their own needs. For example, many of the gods and goddesses of Greek and Roman culture share similar characteristics. However, these deities were renamed and effectively rebranded for a Roman context, possessing names that are different from their Greek counterparts.

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

The main god and goddesses in Roman culture were Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. Jupiter was a sky-god who Romans believed oversaw all aspects of life; he is thought to have originated from the Greek god Zeus. Jupiter also concentrated on protecting the Roman state. Military commanders would pay homage to Jupiter at his temple after winning in battle.

Juno was Jupiter's wife and sister. She resembled the Greek goddess Hera in that she kept a particularly watchful eye over women and all aspects of their lives. Minerva was the goddess of wisdom and craft. She watched over schoolchildren and craftspeople such as carpenters and stonemasons. Minerva is thought to be the equivalent of the goddess Athena, who was the Greek goddess of wisdom.”

(SOURCE: <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/gods-and-goddesses-ancient-rome>)

The King and Queen of the Gods: Who are Juno and Jupiter?



JUNO

“Juno, in Roman religion, chief goddess and female counterpart of Jupiter, closely resembling the Greek Hera, with whom she was identified...As Juno Lucina, goddess of childbirth, she had a temple on the Esquiline [one of Rome's seven hills] from the 4th century BC. In her role as female comforter, she assumed various descriptive names. Individualized, she became a female guardian angel; as every man had his genius, so every woman had her juno. Thus, she represented, in a sense, the female principle of life.

...As her cult expanded, she assumed wider functions and became, like Hera, the principal female divinity of the state. For example, as Sospita, portrayed as an armed deity, she was invoked...originally as a saviour of women but eventually as saviour of the state. As Juno Moneta (“the Warner”), she had a temple on the Arx (the northern summit of the Capitoline Hill [another of Rome's seven hills]) from 344 BC; it later housed the Roman mint, and the words “mint” and “money” derive from the name...Her significant festivals were the Matronalia on March 1 and the Nonae Caprotinae, which was celebrated under a wild fig tree in the Campus Martius on July 7.”

(SOURCE: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Juno-Roman-goddess>)

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation



JUPITER

“Jupiter, also called **Jove**...the chief ancient Roman and Italian god. Like Zeus, the Greek god with whom he is etymologically identical (root diu, “bright”), Jupiter was a sky god. One of his most ancient epithets is Lucetius (“Light-Bringer”) ...Throughout Italy he was worshiped on the summits of hills...At Rome itself on the Capitoline Hill was his oldest temple; here there was a tradition of his sacred tree, the oak, common to the worship both of Zeus and of Jupiter...

He is especially concerned with oaths, treaties, and leagues, and it was in the presence of his priest that the most ancient and sacred form of marriage (*confarreatio*) took place...This connection with the conscience, with the sense of obligation and right dealing, was never quite lost throughout Roman history. In Virgil’s Aeneid, though Jupiter is in many ways as much Greek as Roman, he is still the great protecting deity who keeps the hero in the path of duty (*pietas*) toward gods, state, and family.

But this aspect of Jupiter gained a new force and meaning at the close of the early Roman monarchy with the building of the famous temple on the Capitol, of which the foundations are still to be seen...Throughout the Roman Republic this remained the central Roman cult; and, although Augustus’ new foundations (Apollo Palatinus and Mars Ultor) were in some sense its rivals, that emperor was far too shrewd to attempt to oust Iuppiter Optimus Maximus from his paramount position; he became the protecting deity of the reigning emperor as representing the state, as he had been the protecting deity of the free republic. His worship spread over the whole empire.

(SOURCE: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jupiter-Roman-god>)

Where do the Roman gods come from?

- Summary from Encyclopedia Mythica: <https://pantheon.org/articles/t/tiresias.html>
- Summary from Encyclopedia Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tiresias>
- Professor Jennifer Finney Boylan on Tiresias in the New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/16/opinion/greek-prophet-sex-tiresias.html>

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

What were the prevailing beliefs about sex and gender in Rome?

From: Richlin, Amy. 1992: “Reading Ovid’s Rapes”

“Texts are inseparable from their cultures, and so, before looking at Ovid’s rapes, we need a context. We know that Ovid was a popular writer; law students emulated his rhetorical tricks, schoolboys read his stories (Bonner 1949; 1977: 217). How might Ovid’s rapes have fit in with the cultural experience of his audience? We know that great numbers of people attended theatrical shows and wild beast “games” that exhibit some of the same traits as Ovid’s writing: portrayal of sexual scenes from Greek myth, especially in the polymorphous theater of the pantomime (Beare 1955); savage and gruesome deaths (Hopkins 1983, Barton 1989). Wealthy people had representations of such scenes in their houses (see Myerowitz and Brown in this volume). The practice cases of the rhetorical schools where Ovid was trained often dealt with rape and violence (Bonner 1949).

Roman humor is full of rape; a series of first-century jokes focuses on the god Priapus, who graphically threatens male and female thieves with rape (Richlin 1983). And from Pompeii have been recovered phallic wind chimes, birdbaths, statues of Priapus, phallic paving stones (Grant 1975). Roman law on rape was ill defined, real cases rarely attested, and the victim was blamed (Dixon 1982; Gardner 1986; see Joshel, Chapter 6 above). All slaves

were, more or less, the sexual property of their owners; on the other hand, in Ovid’s Rome the new emperor Augustus was attempting to reform family life among the aristocracy (Richlin 1981).

Ovid’s rapes play a significant role in his work. He was the last great Augustan poet, having outlived his more conventional coevals, and he wrote prolifically; here I [161] will look at sections of only three of his works, though my analysis could well be extended. In the *Metamorphoses*, rape keeps company with twisted loves, macabre and bloody deaths, cruel gods, cataclysms of nature (the Flood, Phaethon’s fire), wars, and, of course, grotesque transformations. Rapes (some Ovid’s) fill Arachne’s tapestry in Book 6, and, like threads in a tapestry, the themes in the poem run in and out of sight; sometimes a horror in a half-line, sometimes half a book, sometimes gone.”

(SOURCE: <https://pressbooks.claremont.edu/clas112pomona-valentine/chapter/amy-richlin-reading-ovids-rapes/>)

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

PROCNE AND PHILOMELA



Philomela & Procne preparing to kill Itys, Attic Wine Cup, c.490 BCE

Who are all the characters mentioned in this story?

- **Tereus** – Thracian king; husband of Procne; father of Itys.
- **Philomela** – Daughter of Pandion; sister of Procne; raped by Tereus.
- **Procne** – Daughter of Pandion; sister of Pilomela; wife of Tereus; mother of Itys.
- **Itys** – Son of Tereus and Procne.
- **Hyman** – Also called Hymenaeus, in Greek mythology, the god of marriage, whose name derives from the refrain of an ancient marriage song.
- **The Graces** – Roman *Gratiae*; beautiful nymphs attendant on Venus.
- **The Furies** – Three sisters (Alecto, Tisiphone, and Magaera), originally Greek, but known to the Romans as the Furiæ; goddesses of vengeance, who torture the guilty in the underworld and sometimes drive the living to madness and frenzy.

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

WHERE WAS THRACE?



Thrace – ([located in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, of the Balkan Peninsula region](#))

How have critics understood the story of Procne and Philomela?

- “With Tereus, Procne, and Philomela (an old myth first encountered in Greek literature In a simile in *Odyssey*) we hear a story of savagery by humans against each other, vividly and gruesomely told. The Thracian Tereus is represented as a ‘savage,’ at least in his uncontrolled lust, in contrast to the Athenian civilization (the Athenian Procne, however, will respond to his crime with equal savagery). **The power play in the myth hinges ultimately on voice, and particularly on the ability to control narrative, produce knowledge. Philomela overcomes her voicelessness (often at issue in metamorphoses as well) to communicate with Procne; Procne acts as a loremaster of ritual, exploiting it for her purposes against her husband’s ignorance in the women’s Bacchic festival and in her wholly invented custom.**” - *Metamorphoses: The New, Annotated Edition*
- “So far, **the gods have been responsible for the pain inflicted on mortals; in this tale we discover that mortals can do it for themselves.**” - W. W. Norton & Co. Charles Martin Translation

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

What were the conceptions of sexual abuse in classical texts at the time?

- **“Translated versions of ancient texts are crucial for the ongoing inclusivity of Classics. But, as Stephanie McCarter has shown, translation is also crucial for hiding or revealing rape in ancient text, and irresponsible translators have turned sexual abuse into a consensual or even sensual union.** McCarter points out David Raeburn’s translation of *Metamorphoses* as one of those which take the most liberties — and yet it is an extremely popular edition. Raeburn’s translation of Persephone’s abduction makes no mention of her pain or fear of losing her virginity — elements in the original — and instead euphemizes her rape with her torn dress and dropped flowers.”

- “[It is not to be suggested] that knowing the classical languages automatically equates with a feminist reading — or else we wouldn’t have ended up with bad translations in the first place. Nor does not knowing them mean we don’t need to consider the issues. But knowledge of Ancient Greek and Latin does allow the reader to make decisions about meaning, decisions that have already been made for them when reading in translation. When non-specialist writers want to use these texts for reception, it’s unsurprising that even thoughtful feminists can create problematic work, if they are relying on translations that make misogynistic, racist, or even just euphemistic choices.”

(SOURCE: [Rape or Romance? Bad Feminism in Mythical Retellings](#) by Aimee Hinds)

- “Tereus locked Philomela away in a hut in the woods after raping her and cutting out her tongue so that she could not expose him. These stories of power abused, of victims brutalized and consequently left too afraid or even unable to speak, transcend temporal boundaries and resonate both in the context of Ovid’s Rome and today’s #MeToo movement, in which victims of sexual harassment and assault use social media to bring into general cultural discussion what had previously been taboo to discuss openly.”

“In this paper, I offer a reading of the Philomela episode of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* against the story of Matt Lauer’s profligacies and exposure, a comparison of microcosmic scope to highlight a common theme between at least some of the victims in Ovid’s poems and those in the #MeToo movement: the restoration of female agency in a male-dominated world that had stolen it away, whether through systemic privilege or deliberate targeting. I then consider the larger context of Ovid’s corpus and the value for students of the #MeToo era even in stories where the victim does not regain power. One aspect of Ovid’s stories of brutality that makes them important in the present-day context is the seemingly immanent nature of the power imbalances that he portrays, those generated by unfair criteria like gender or social power. Ovid’s poems offer us exercises in recognizing those structures of power and the ways in which they are constructed, an act of discernment necessary if we are to take steps towards dismantling those unjust structures, as the #MeToo movement is beginning to do.”

(SOURCE: [Ovid in the #MeToo Era](#) by Daniel Libatique)

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

- “Leucothoe is only one of the many raped women of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, though she is not as famous as Daphne, Io, Persephone, or Philomela. She is collateral damage in Venus’s revenge against the Sun, who exposed the goddess’s affair with the war-god Mars. To torment the Sun, Venus enflames him with desire for Leucothoe, a mere mortal, and each day he prolongs his light by watching her—until watching her is not enough. We’re told versions of this tale time and again in the epic: a beautiful girl, caught in the gaze of a powerful male, violated, and forever transformed. Translations of Ovid often pass lightly over these violations, describing women as being ‘ravished’ or ‘enjoyed.’ But in Leucothoe’s case in particular, translators have so obscured and mitigated Ovid’s language that it seems almost no rape at all but a consensual sexual liaison, a woman won over by the brilliant beauty of a god.

Since translation is an art centered upon small details, I must consider what may seem minutiae in order to glean exactly what happens to her. But, as any rape victim whose every action has been parsed knows, defining rape has far too often been a matter of minutiae. Translation all too often replicates contemporary social attitudes regarding what constitutes seduction, rape, and consent—and the often problematically hazy lines we have drawn between them.”

(SOURCE: [Rape, Lost in Translation: How translators of Ovid’s “Metamorphoses” turn an assault into a consensual encounter by Stephanie McCarter](#))

What does the crow represent in Greek and Roman myth?

- “Apollo, the son of the most powerful greek God Zeus, had an important, albeit tumultuous relationship with crows. **The greek word for crow, corone, comes from the name of Apollo’s mistress, Coronis. According to the version of this story told by Appolodorus, although Coronis and Apollo had been lovers, she left him to marry a mortal, Ischys. The crow, then white, brought news of the marriage to Apollo who became so incensed he burned the bird’s feathers and then burned Coronis to death.** In other versions Coronis is herself turned into the black crow and it’s possible the Greeks saw a mated pair of crows as a representation of the forbidden love between Coronis and Ischys. This may be one of the earliest stories of a woman marrying below her class for love.”

(SOURCE: [Why the crow is black and other mythology](#))

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

Why do Procne and Philomela become a swallow and a nightingale? What is the symbolism here?

- “...Ovid, in the *Metamorphoses*, seems to have been unusual in making Philomela the nightingale and Procne the swallow. Ovid, of course, was writing in the heyday of ancient Rome, but earlier sources from ancient Greece have the transformation or ‘metamorphosis’ the other way around, i.e. Philomela was turned into a swallow and it was her sister, Procne, who was transformed into a nightingale.

For instance, in his *Bibliotheca* (or *Library*), a compendium of ancient myths, Apollodorus (now sometimes known as ‘Pseudo-Apollodorus’ because we’re not entirely sure who wrote the *Library*) wrote about Procne becoming the nightingale and Philomela the swallow. (Incidentally, Apollodorus’ *Library* is available in a modern translation as *The Library of Greek Mythology* (Oxford World’s Classics).)

This makes more sense when we stop and think about it: it is perhaps odd that Philomela, having lost her tongue when a woman, should be transformed into a bird which is known for its beautiful singing voice. Either it’s a beautiful example of poetic justice and order being restored, or it’s a nonsensical transformation, given that she had lost all powers of speech.

But the alternative, that Procne was transformed into the nightingale, makes more sense, if we think about it: the woman who murdered her own son to wreak vengeance on her barbarous husband is doomed for eternity to sing a sad song, lamenting her own crime as well as her poor sister’s tragic fate. She is singing a sad song out of remorse rather than (or as well as) a more general grief or sadness.

Oddly perhaps, it is ornithology that helps to clear up this mess. There is a genus of martins (related to the swallow) named *Progne*. *Progne* is the Latinized form of ‘Procne’.”

(SOURCE: [A Summary and Analysis of the Myth of Tereus and Philomela](#))

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

PENTHEUS AND BACCHUS



Who is Pentheus?

The king of Thebes. He was grandson of the founder and first king of Thebes, Cadmus. Thebes was located near Athens and was the site of several Grecian myths and legends (including Hercules and Oedipus).

Who is Bacchus?

Also called Dionysus. “[I]n Greco-Roman religion, a nature god of fruitfulness and vegetation, especially known as a god of wine and ecstasy... Dionysus was the son of Zeus and Semele, a daughter of Cadmus (king of Thebes) [making him Pentheus’ cousin]...As Dionysus apparently represented the sap, juice, or lifeblood element in nature, lavish festal orgia (rites) in his honor were widely instituted.”

(SOURCE: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dionysus>)

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

ARACHNE



Minerva and Arachne, René-Antoine Houasse, 1706

Who are the characters mentioned in this story?

- **Arachne** – A girl turned into a spider by Minerva.
- **Minerva** – Goddess of wisdom, technical skill, and invention; patron goddess of Athens.

What is the story behind Arachne?

• “[Book VI] showcases three myths (of Arachne, Niobe, and Pilomela) that escalate in horror and violence. The first two continue the gods’ punishment of recalcitrant or overreaching humans, presented—in a narrative reflection of the gods’ viewpoint— as ‘justice,’ even of a kind tempered with mercy; compare the disguised Minerva’s advice on page [in the translation on page 130], (‘ask [Minerva’s] pardon...

She will be gracious, if you only ask it’) with the way the narrative represents her transformation of Arachne [on page 133] (‘Minerva / At last was moved to pity’). With the Niobe myth, the wrath of the gods at insolent humans and the consolidation of their sovereignty over mortal affairs seems to reach its conclusion—not that the poem will ever stop giving us examples of that.”

• “Arachne’s origins in the lower class and her achievement of renown through talent set the contest between her and [Lydia, the goddess] in sociopolitical terms and cast the punishment Minerva imposes as an assertion of class hierarchy.”

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

- Text Box “The non rectilinear, uncentered swirl of Arachne’s images contrasts with the Classicizing, even rigid orderliness of Minerva’s, a contrast paralleled in that between their themes. **Arachne’s tapestry comprises metamorphoses of Jupiter, Neptune, Apollo, Bacchus, and Saturn for the purpose of having sex with mortal women. The narrative leaves open whether her images disparage these male gods because they violated with women (notice the emphasis on deceit), or because the gods lost their dignity by falling prey to physical desire for lesser beings, or simply because they turned into animals and other demeaning shapes, or a combination**”
- “Of the other myths, most are known from sources outside the Metamorphoses, but all follow a pattern all too familiar from the gods’ activities within this poem, and one whose ethics are certainly contestable by a character—particularly a female character.
- Nevertheless—and despite the excellence of the weaving—**Minerva attacks Arachne (perhaps acknowledgement that the mortal won). Despite the narrative’s assurance that Arachne ‘still kept**

spinning’ in spider form, and despite the meaning of Arachne’s name (‘spider’ in Greek), it is important to note the indirect natures of the identity between the woman and the creature who continues her activity. There are stark discontinuities: it is not precisely Arachne who is metamorphosed but her dead body after she herself has committed suicide, so that the status of her mind is uncertain; Minerva (supposedly ‘moved to pity’) seems to revive her in parodistic form, reducing her to a crude approximation of her skill and embodying it in a tiny, grotesque, inhuman form. And present-day spiders are not exactly her, but her descendants. We cannot assume that the relationship between former and present beings is anything but metaphorical. IN pinpointing some continuing elements in its transformations (especially those that, like this one, promise an etiology of some phenomenon or a metapoetic commentary on some aspect of the narrative) while at the same time elaborating around that element a world of change, the Metamorphoses only mirrors back to us a desire for certainties.”

(SOURCE: Metamorphoses: The New, Annotated Edition - Indiana University Press (2018))

What is the context of Minerva and the tapestry?

- “**Minerva’s tapestry focuses on the dispute between herself and Neptune over who would have patronage over Athens (she won); each vied by producing a useful gift: Neptune the horse, Minerva the Olive Tree. This myth was depicted on the west pediment of the Parthenon in Athens. The ‘hill of Mars’ is the Areopagus, prominent in Athenian political geography as the site of certain government bodies and courts. Minerva depicts not only the gods, worthy of adoration in all their dignified majesty (augusta gravitate, with a reference to the qualities attributed to Augustus—a sharper political message for Ovid’s earliest readership), but also examples of their revenge on people who displeased or challenged them, including a miniature example of punitive metamorphosis in each corner.**”

(SOURCE: Metamorphoses: The New, Annotated Edition - Indiana University Press (2018))

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

ACTAEON

What is Actaeon's lineage?

Actaeon's father was **Aristaeus**, “a minor god, protector and creator of various arts, such as cheese making and bee keeping. His parents were the god Apollo and the huntress Cyrene. He married Autonoe, daughter of King Cadmus of Thebes who was also the city's founder.”

(SOURCE: https://www.greekmythology.com/Other_Gods/Minor_Gods/Aristaeus/aristaeus.html)

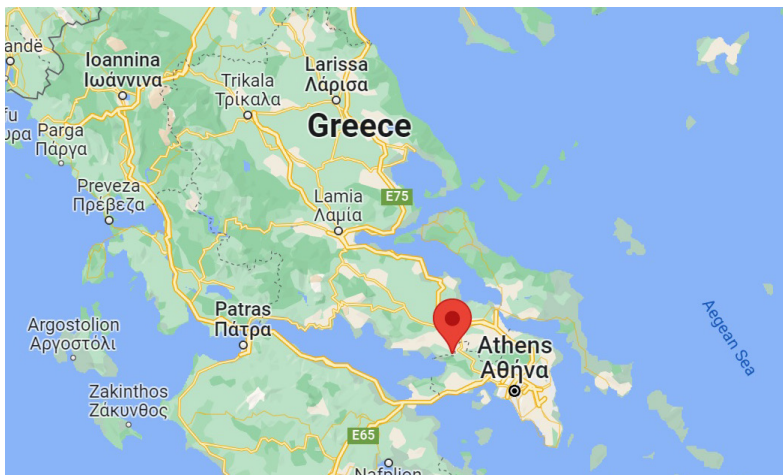
Actaeon's mother was **Autonoe** “the daughter of King Cadmus of Thebes and the goddess Harmonia, in Greek mythology. She was married to Aristaeus, and had two children, Actaeon and Macris. She was a follower of the god Dionysus, who was her nephew; when she and the other believers were banned from worshipping their god by King Pentheus, Dionysus drove them into a frenzy, during which they killed Pentheus.”

(SOURCE: <https://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Mortals/Autonoe/autonoe.html>)

Where is the valley of Gargaphia?

This valley was likely located near the town of Plataea in Boeotia (modern-day south-central Greece).

(SOURCE: <https://www.theoi.com/Nymphe/NymphePlataia.html>)



Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

What are nymphs in Roman mythology?

The Nymphs (nymphai) were minor nature goddesses which populated the earth. Although they were ranked below the gods, they were still summoned to attend the assemblies of the gods on Olympus.

The Nymphs presided over various natural phenomena--from springs, to clouds, trees, caverns, meadows, and beaches. They were responsible for the care of the plants and animals of their domain and as such were closely associated with the Olympian gods of nature such as Hermes, Dionysus, Artemis, Poseidon and Demeter.

The male counterparts of the nymphs were the Satyrs, Panes, Potamoi and Tritons.

(SOURCE :<https://www.theoi.com/greek-mythology/nymphs.html>)

Where is Mount Olympus?



“Olympos (Olympus) was the home of the gods who dwelt in fabulous palaces of marble and gold. Olympos is clearly described in Homer’s Iliad. It was essentially an ancient akropolis--a fortified hill-top and palace complex--located just below the peaks of Mount Olympos...The Olympian akropolis lay above the clouds and the paths of the stars, near the apex of the solid bronze-dome of the sky. It existed in the zone known as the aither--the bright upper-air of heaven or shining blue of the sky.

(SOURCE :<https://www.theoi.com/Kosmos/Olympos.html>)

The actual Mount Olympus is the highest mountain peak in Greece, at 9,570 feet (Mt. Rainer is 14,411 feet, for comparison). The mountain extends over the border between Macedonia and Thessaly. The name Olympus was used for other mountains and hills in Ancient Greece, though this is the particular mountain that was thought to be the home of the gods.

(SOURCE :<https://www.britannica.com/place/Mount-Olympus-mountain-Greece>)

ORPHEUS AND THE CICONIAN WOMEN (LUCAS)



Who are the characters in this story?

- **Orpheus** – Ancient Greek legendary hero endowed with superhuman musical skills. He became the patron of a religious movement based on sacred writings said to be his own. Traditionally, Orpheus was the son of a Muse and Oeagrus, a king of Thrace (other versions give Apollo).

(SOURCE: [Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Orpheus".](#).)

- **Ciconian Women** – The Cicones or Ciconians were a Thracian tribe, whose stronghold in the time of Odysseus was the city of Ismara (or Ismarus), located at the foot of mount Ismara, on the south coast of Thrace.

(SOURCE: <https://www.hellenicaworld.com/Greece/Mythology/en/Cicones.html>)

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

Where does “The Death of Orpheus” come from in the Metmorphoses?

- **“For the death of Orpheus, Ovid combines two traditions: that of the Hellenistic Poet Phanocles, in which Orpheus is killed for rejecting sex and love with women and promulgating that with males, and that he is torn apart by Maenads for dishonoring the god,** which originates in Aeschylus’ lost tragedy Bassarids; in Ovid’s version his killers are angry at his refusal to marry. The detail that his head and lyre float across the sea to the island of Lesbos was in Phanocles, where it accounts for that island’s fame for music; compare Virgil’s Georgics, where the floating head still sings out Eurydice’s name.”

(SOURCE: Metamorphoses: The New, Annotated Edition - Indiana University Press (2018))

- **Orpheus himself was later killed by the women of Thrace. The motive and manner of his death vary in different accounts, but the earliest known, that of Aeschylus, says that they were Maenads urged by Dionysus to tear him to pieces in a Bacchic orgy because he preferred the worship of the rival god Apollo. His head, still singing, with his lyre, floated to Lesbos, where an oracle of Orpheus was established.** The head prophesied until the oracle became more famous than that of Apollo at Delphi, at which time Apollo himself bade the Orphic oracle stop. The dismembered limbs of Orpheus were gathered up and buried by the Muses. His lyre they had placed in the heavens as a constellation.

(SOURCE: [Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. “Orpheus”.](#))

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

How is Orpheus portrayed in fine art?



The Death of Orpheus at the hands of the Ciconian women, c. 1879 (pencil and chalks on brown paper)



The Death of Orpheus, c.1870 (Oil on Canvas) by Henri Leopold Lévy

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

MYRRHA



What was the Festival of Ceres?

p.37: “She waits till the festival of Ceres, that time when women refuse the love of their men for 9 days and 9 nights.”

In Ancient Greece, the goddess CERES was known as Demeter. Ceres/Demeter was the goddess of agriculture and fertility:

“In Rome, the goddess Ceres became the divine embodiment of agriculture and the development of cereal crops, particularly spelt wheat. She oversaw ploughing into the earth (the province of the Roman Earth goddess Tellus) as well as sowing and the nurturing of seed. She released the creative and regenerative power of the earth. She was also guardian of marriage. As an earth goddess Ceres received a sacrifice to purify the house after a funeral and was also associated with the underworld and boundaries between the living and the dead.”

(SOURCE: <https://www.vindolanda.com/blog/ceres-and-the-festival-of-cerialia>)

The “feast of Ceres” mentioned in the play might be referring to the Greek festival of the Thesmophoria, which celebrated Demeter and, by extension, human and agricultural fertility. One of the most popular festivals of the Ancient Greek calendar, the Thesmophoria was only celebrated by adult women, and was generally held in the autumn when seeds were being sown (though some regions held the festival at harvest, instead). The festival rituals included blood sacrifice and all adult women leaving their homes to celebrate at a particular shrine. In our story, this is when Myrrha’s nurse arranges for her to visit her father’s bedroom.

(SOURCE: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thesmophoria>)

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

What did owls symbolize in Greek and Roman mythology?



“The Roman goddess of wisdom Minerva has the owl as her sacred creature, as does her ancient Greek counterpart Athena. Athena was often depicted with an owl, which was considered a symbol of wisdom in both cultures. The best-known image of Athena’s owl, the Little Owl, is seen on ancient Athenian coins dating from the fifth century BCE. To the Romans an owl feather placed near sleeping people would prompt them to speak in their sleep and reveal their secrets. However, in Rome the owl was considered a harbinger of death if it perched on a roof or on a public building and hooted. The deaths of several Roman emperors, including the assassination of Julius Caesar, were signaled by an owl landing on the roof and hooting.”

(SOURCE: Eason, Cassandra (2008). *Fabulous Creatures, Mythical Monsters, and Animal Power Symbols: A Handbook*. Westport, CT, USA: Greenwood Publishing Group. p. 71.)

Where is Sabaea?

“The Sabaeans were a people in Arabia. Their region was known in the Hebrew Bible as the land of Sheba”

(SOURCE: McCarter, Stephanie. *The Metamorphoses*. New York, NY, USA: Penguin Books. P. 545)

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

MEDEA



Medea on her golden chariot, by Germán Hernández Amores

Who are the characters in this story?

- **Medea** – Sorceress who helped Jason get the Golden Fleece. She was of divine descent and had the gift of prophecy. She married Jason and used her magic powers and advice to help him.
- **Jason** – Leader of the Argonauts, who with the help of Medea, got the Golden Fleece. His father's half-brother Pelias seized Iolcos, and thus for safety Jason was sent away to the Centaur Chiron. Returning as a young man, Jason was promised his inheritance if he fetched the Golden Fleece for Pelias, a seemingly impossible task. After many adventures Jason abstracted the fleece with the help of the enchantress Medea, whom he married. On their return Medea murdered Pelias, but she and Jason were driven out by Pelias' son and had to take refuge with King Creon of Corinth.

(SOURCE: [Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Medea".](#))

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

What is the Story of Jason and Medea?

- “The story of Jason and Medea is part of the larger myth of the Argonauts—heroes voyaging on the ship Argo in quest of the Golden Fleece—which Ovid here drastically abbreviates.



A major myth treated in early Greek poetry, it had its best-known exponent in Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* in the mid to later third century BCE; Varro of Atax translated this epic into a (now almost entirely lost) Latin poem a generation or two before Ovid. Under the leadership of Jason (who is under constraint by his uncle Pelias), an assemblage of heroes' voyages to retrieve the fleece of a golden ram held by King Aetes of the faraway land of

Colchis on the Black Sea. Ovid pares away the motivations, the adventures on the journey out and back, and most of the ordeal of getting the fleece, which was readily available to his readers in earlier treatments. Most remarkably, Ovid excludes specific mention of heroes besides Jason (and briefly Calais and Zetes, from whose story the poem transitions into this one at the end of Book 6). Traditionally this myth was about male cooperation under single leadership to explore the edges of the world from a Greek center; it carries meditations on political community and definition of an ethnic self. Its participants include such formidable figures as Hercules and Peleus, who will be introduced one by one in this poem and whose exploits will figure prominently but in piecemeal fashion; the present episode ultimately segues into a story of Theseus, another such hero of many adventures). None of them finds mention here.

- **Metamorphoses puts the emphasis rather on the menacing power of one woman and the power of love over her. Apollonius—working from Euripides' tragedy *Medea*—had made Medea the focus of the third book of his epic; Ovid follows him in showcasing her soliloquy over her love for Jason and her magical assistance in Jason's fight with monstrous adversaries.** Then we get more stories of Medea's deeds—although not the one, familiar from the tragedian Euripides, of her killing Jason's and her children. Ovid himself had written a (now lost) tragedy on those events, which perhaps partly accounts

for their inconspicuousness here. **The focus on a young woman desperately in love will henceforth be common in this poem. Medea's status as not only a distressed heroine but a foreigner, an 'other,' a with commanding uncanny powers, is a traditional part of her persona: in Greek literature she can represent something crossing lines between nationalities, the threat of the foreign ('barbarous') within the domestic.**

MIDAS AND THE JUDGEMENT OF APOLLO



Apollo and Daphne Apollo Chasing Daphne, by Gianbattista Tiepolo.

Who is Apollo?

“In Greek and Roman mythology, APOLLO was the god of light, truth, archery, music, medicine and healing but also the bringer of deathly plague. The mythological son of Zeus and Leto, he was the twin brother of Artemis (goddess of the moon).

As one of the most popular of the Olympian deities and the patron of the ancient Oracle at Delphi, Apollo was considered to have dominion over medicine (through his son Asclepius), over colonists, was the defender of herds and flocks and the patron of music and poetry. More importantly, he was eventually identified with the Sun god Helios usurping the latter god’s place in the Greek pantheon. However, Apollo and Helios remained separate beings in literary and mythological texts.

In literary contexts, Apollo represents harmony, order, and reason —characteristics contrasted with those of Dionysus, god of wine, who represents ecstasy and disorder. The contrast between the roles of these gods is reflected in the adjectives Apollonian and Dionysian. However, the Greeks thought of these two qualities as complementary...”

(SOURCE: <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Apollo>)

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS



Jacob van Oost Mercury and Jupiter in the House of Philemon and Baucis.

Who are the characters in this story?

- **Baucis** – Wife of Philemon; rewarded by Jove for hospitality to him.
- **Philemon** – Husband of Baucis; the couple were rewarded by Jove for their hospitality.
- **Jupiter** – (also known as Jove) Son of Saturn; chief of the gods, ruler of gods and men.
- **Mercury** – Messenger of the gods, agent of Jove.

What are the origins behind Philemon and Baucis?

- **Philemon and Baucis, in Greek mythology, a pious Phrygian couple who hospitably received Zeus and Hermes when their richer neighbours turned away the two gods, who were disguised as wayfarers. As a reward, they were saved from a flood that drowned the rest of the country; their cottage was turned into a temple, and at their own request they became priest and priestess of it. Long after, they were granted their wish to die at the same moment, being turned into trees.** Among literary sources the story is found only in Book VIII of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but it reflects folktale motifs found in many cultures.

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

- “The story of Baucis and Philemon, in which this older, childless, righteous couple receives as happy an ending as anyone gets in this poem, supports Lelex’s rebuke of Pirithous’ skepticism (note that in mythology, Pirithous was known for his defiance of the gods, as was his father, Ixion). This meditation on credibility in narrative mirrors back our own readership of the *Metamorphoses*. The story, itself a kind of *mise en abyme* within Achelous’ act of hospitality, focuses on the reception given by simple, humble people to more exalted (but not obviously so) people—in this case, gods. A chief model was the swineherd Eumaeus’ reception of Odysseus in *Odyssey*, but Ovid’s loving description of the quotidian details of setting the table and serving the food goes back to Hellenistic examples, especially Callimachus’ now-fragmentary *Hecale* (which also involves Theseus) and the Molorcus story in his *Aetia*, Book 3. The myth itself is not found before Ovid. It is left unclear which of the two turns into an oak and which into a linden; neither of their names is that of a tree in Greek or Latin.”

(SOURCE: *Metamorphoses: The New, Annotated Edition* - Indiana University Press (2018))

Who is Mercury?



- **Mercury (Latin Mercurius) in Roman religion, god of shopkeepers and merchants, travelers and transporters of goods, and thieves and tricksters. He is commonly identified with the Greek Hermes, the fleet-footed messenger of the gods.**

The cult of Mercury is ancient, and tradition has it that his temple on the Aventine Hill in Rome was dedicated in 495 BCE. There Mercury was associated with Maia, who became identified as his mother through her association with the Greek Maia, one of the Pleiades, who was the mother of Hermes by Zeus; likewise, because of that Greek connection, Mercury was considered the son of Jupiter. Both Mercury and Maia were honored in the *Mercuralia* festival on May 15, the dedication day of Mercury’s temple on the Aventine.

“Mercurus” by Evelyn De Morgan.

Mercury is sometimes represented as holding a purse, symbolic of his business functions. Artists, like followers of Roman religion themselves, freely borrowed the attributes of Hermes and portrayed Mercury also wearing winged sandals or a winged cap and carrying a caduceus (staff).

(SOURCE: [Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. “Mercury”.](#))

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

ACHILLES



The Death of Achilles, Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), c.1630–35, (oil on canvas)

What happened during the Trojan War?

The Myth of the Trojan War
By Victoria Donnellan, Project Curator,
Greece and Rome, The British Museum

“The story of the ancient city of Troy, and of the great war that was fought over it, has been told for some 3,000 years. Spread by travelling storytellers, it was cast into powerful words by the Greek poet Homer as early as the eighth to seventh century BC – and into powerful images by ancient Greek and Roman artists. Just as it enraptured audiences in the past, it still speaks to us today and it’s easy to see why. It’s a story that has it all – love and loss, courage and passion, violence and vengeance, triumph and tragedy – on a truly epic scale.

Spanning several decades, the tale is set in Greece’s mythical past. At its heart is the powerful city of Troy on the western coast of Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), besieged for 10 years by the Greeks, who sailed across the Aegean Sea to take revenge for a grave insult – the abduction of a woman. This ancient world war features a stellar cast of characters. Even the gods are involved. But this isn’t a straightforward tale of right and wrong. Its heroes – and none more so than the great Achilles – are complex, with heroic strength but human weaknesses and in the end it is unclear who, if anyone, really wins.

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

Judgement of Paris

The story starts with a wedding. The sea-goddess Thetis is marrying a mortal man and all the gods and goddesses are invited except one – Eris, the goddess of discord. Angered, she throws a golden apple into the party, bearing the inscription ‘to the most beautiful’. Three goddesses all claim it for themselves, and the king of the gods, Zeus, not willing to get involved himself, picks the Trojan prince Paris as the judge. The goddess of love, Aphrodite, wins the competition as she has promised Paris possession of the most beautiful women on earth, Helen. There’s just one problem. Helen is already married to Menelaus, king of the Greek city of Sparta.

The Face that Launched a Thousand Ships

Paris, prince of Troy, comes to Sparta on a state visit but, outrageously, leaves with his host’s wife Helen, queen of Sparta. To bring Helen back and restore his honour, the deceived husband, King Menelaus, assembles a huge army of Greek heroes. Its leader is Menelaus’ brother Agamemnon, king of the powerful Greek city of Mycenae. The army sails to Troy, sets up camp and lays siege to the city. But Troy has strong walls and the Trojans defend the city bravely, throughout nine long years of fighting. The Greeks succeed, however, in raiding neighbouring Trojan cities, taking some inhabitants as prisoners. Among them is Briseis, a young woman who is given to Greek hero Achilles as a prize of honour.

The Rage of Achilles

In the 10th year of the Trojan War, dramatic events unfold, as told in Homer’s Iliad. King Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek forces, seizes Briseis for himself.

Furious, Achilles withdraws from battle, together with his troops. Achilles’ mother, the sea goddess Thetis, asks Zeus to favour the Trojans for a while, so that Agamemnon will regret dishonouring her son. In the fighting that follows, the Trojans gain ground and are able to set up camp on the plain, alarmingly close to the Greek ships. Desperate to drive them back, Achilles’ close friend and perhaps lover, Patroclus, disguises himself in the armour of Achilles and leads the Greeks into battle, hoping to raise Greek morale and intimidate the Trojans. At first the plan works, but Patroclus is killed by the Trojan prince Hector. In a state of grief-stricken rage, desperate for vengeance against Hector, Achilles sets aside his quarrel with Agamemnon.

The Death of Hector

Achilles returns to battle, wearing new armour brought by his mother. Victory once more favours the Greeks – and Achilles succeeds in killing Hector. Consumed by rage and grief, he does not allow Hector’s body to be reclaimed by the Trojans for the customary funeral. Instead he desecrates it by dragging it behind his chariot, as Hector’s horrified family watch from the walls of Troy.

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

Over the coming days he repeatedly drags the body in the dust. But the gods take pity on Hector and his family, preserving Hector's body from damage and decay. The messenger god, Hermes, helps Hector's distraught father, Trojan King Priam, to enter the Greek camp secretly. He begs Achilles for the ransom of his son's body. Achilles' pitiless need for vengeance subsides and he agrees to Priam's request. It is an extraordinary, moving encounter, which restores humanity to the hero and a sense of order to the world. The funeral of Hector can now take place. This point in the story is where the Iliad ends.

The Death of Achilles



Hector is dead, but the war goes on. Troy has not yet fallen and more allies come to the city's aid, some from far afield. With the help of Achilles, the Greeks defeat both the Amazons (female warriors led by their queen Penthesilea) and the Ethiopians under King Memnon. **But Achilles knows that he is fated to die young, for his divine mother once foretold that he would have a short life if he stayed to fight at Troy. It is Paris, the Trojan prince whose abduction of Helen started the**

war, who kills Achilles. According to one version of the story, Achilles' divine mother tried to make him invulnerable to injury as a baby, dipping him into the waters of the river Styx. But she held him by one heel – the famous Achilles' heel – and this is the weak point where Paris hits him with an arrow, finally felling the great warrior.

The Fall of Troy

The Greeks finally win the war by an ingenious piece of deception dreamed up by the hero and king of Ithaca, Odysseus – famous for his cunning. They build a huge wooden horse and leave it outside the gates of Troy, as an offering to the gods, while they pretend to give up battle and sail away. Secretly, though, they have assembled their best warriors inside. The Trojans fall for the trick, bring the horse into the city and celebrate their victory. But when night falls, the hidden Greeks creep out and open the gates to the rest of the army, which has sailed silently back to Troy. The city is sacked, the men and boys are brutally slain, including King Priam and Hector's little son Astyanax, and the women are taken captive. Troy has fallen. But there is still hope for the Trojans' survival – Aeneas, the son of King Priam's cousin, escapes the city with his old father, his young son and a band of Trojan refugees. Aeneas' story is told in Virgil's Aeneid.

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

Returning Home

After the fall of Troy, the surviving heroes and their troops have little chance to enjoy their victory. The gods are angry because many Greeks committed sacrilegious atrocities during the sacking of Troy. Few Greeks reach their homes easily, or live to enjoy their return. The most difficult, lengthy and action-packed journey is that of Odysseus as told in Homer's *Odyssey*. He is forced to travel to the furthest reaches of the Mediterranean Sea, tormented by the sea god Poseidon. He is waylaid by storms, shipwreck and a colourful crowd of strange beings and treacherous people, from the one-eyed giant Cyclops to the Sirens with their mesmerizing song. Odysseus finally reaches his homeland, only to find his house besieged by suitors for the hand of his wife who had thought he would not survive his voyage. Yet after 10 years at sea, Odysseus also overcomes this final challenge. He kills the suitors and is reunited with his faithful wife, Penelope.

With Odysseus home at last, the events of the Trojan War come to a close. Whether Greek or Trojan, victorious or defeated, the heroes and heroines of the story have enthralled audiences from antiquity to today.”

(SOURCE: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/myth-trojan-war>)

What is the River Styx:

“**STYX**, in Greek mythology, one of the rivers of the underworld. The word styx literally means “shuddering” and expresses loathing of death... The ancients believed that the river’s water was poisonous and would dissolve any vessel containing it except one made of the hoof of a horse or an ass. There is a legend that Alexander the Great was poisoned by Styx water. In another legend, mentioned by the Roman poet Statius (1st century AD), Thetis dipped her son Achilles into the Styx to render him invulnerable; because she held him by his heel, he remained vulnerable there.”

(SOURCE: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Styx-Greek-religion>)

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

HECUBA, POLYXENA AND POLYDOROUS



The sacrifice of Polyxena by the triumphant Greeks (Attic black-figure Tyrrenian amphora, ca. 570–550 BC)

Who are the characters in this story?

- **Hecuba** – Wife of Priam; queen of Troy; mother of Hector, Paris, Polyxena, Polydorous.
- **Priam** – Last King of Troy, who reigned during the Trojan War; father of Hector and Paris.
- **Polyxena** – Daughter of Priam who was betrothed to Achilles.
- **Polydorous** – Son of Priam, king of Troy; murdered by Polymestor.
- **Polymestor** – King of Thrace during the Trojan war.

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

How have critics analyzed *The Sacrifice of Polyxena*?

“The sacrifice of the Trojan princess Polyxena to the ghost of Achilles bookends that of Iphigenia at the outset of the war and on the opposite shore. Owing her tragedy, she makes it untragic: Iphigenia’s passivity and silence contrast with Polyxena’s fierce speech embracing her fate, which in its own over-the-top way recalls Stoicism, the Hellenistic philosophy—emphasizing self-control and uncomplaining endurance—that became popular in late Republican Rome in response to the uncertainties of civil war and growing autocracy. This masculinist ethos is unexpected in a woman; next to her triumphant abjection, the men who kill her are represented as weaker and more emotional.”

(SOURCE: *Metamorphoses: The New, Annotated Edition* - Indiana University Press (2018))

What were the associations with Polyxena and Troy?

Polyxena was a princess of Troy in Greek mythology, daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba. She was the Trojan equivalent of Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra who was sacrificed so that the Greek fleet would sail to Troy. **According to a prophecy, Troy would not fall if Prince Troilus, brother of Polyxena, would survive to the age of twenty. When Troilus and Polyxena were fetching water from a nearby spring, they were ambushed by the Greeks, and Troilus was killed by Achilles. Polyxena was taken as a hostage, and soon earned the trust of the great warrior, who was still recovering from his close friend Patroclus’ death. In fact, he told her his greatest secret, the vulnerability of his heel. When Polyxena told Achilles to meet her at the temple of Apollo, he trusted her, and there, he was ambushed by Paris and Deiphobus. They shot a poisoned arrow, which,**

guided by Apollo, found Achilles on his heel and resulted in his death.

According to some sources, Polyxena killed herself out of guilt for Achilles’ death. However, most agree that at the end of the Trojan War, Achilles’ ghost appeared before the Greeks, saying that to have favourable winds on their way back to Greece, they should sacrifice Polyxena at the foot of the hero’s grave. Hecuba pleaded not to lose another child, but a brave Polyxena said that she preferred to die as a sacrifice for Achilles than as a slave. Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, was the one who slit Polyxena’s throat.

(SOURCE: [Greek Mythology - Polyxena](#))

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

How have artists portrayed The Sacrifice of Polyxena



“According to Greek legend, Achilles fell in love with the Trojan princess Polyxena, the daughter of the king of Troy. He was offered her hand in marriage if he agreed to end the war between the Greeks and the Trojans. At Polyxena’s request, Achilles came to make a sacrifice to Apollo, but he was ambushed by Paris, Polyxena’s brother, as he knelt at the altar. Paris shot a fatal arrow into Achilles’ heel, his one vulnerable spot. Before he died, Achilles vengefully proclaimed that the treacherous Polyxena be sacrificed at his tomb.

Here Giovanni Battista Pittoni depicted the ghost of Achilles demanding that his bride be killed. Polyxena, wearing a white wedding gown, extends her arm toward the priest brandishing a knife and with great dignity steps forward toward the tomb.

Giovanni Battista Pittoni, *The Sacrifice of Polyxena*, cir. 1734 (Oil on canvas)

Around her, a throng of Greeks and Trojans watch with mixed emotions. Although a violent subject, Pittoni’s elegant, richly garbed figures and elaborate antique architecture make an appealing picture of mythological martyrdom.”

(SOURCE: [Getty Museum Collection - The Sacrifice of Polyxena](#))

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

How have artists portrayed The Sacrifice of Polyxena



Sebastiano Ricci, *The Sacrifice of Polyxena* c. 1726–30 (Oil on canvas)

“Polyxena, daughter of King Priam and Hecuba of Troy, is loved by the Greek hero Achilles. In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes how the shadow of Achilles appears after the fall of Troy and demands the sacrifice on his tomb of Polyxena. Faced by Achilles’s son Neoptolemus brandishing a sword, Polyxena courageously bares her breast to meet her fate, as shown here. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (xiii, 440-80), it is the priest who kills her, ‘weeping and remorseful’, represented here by the aged man holding her head to her right. On the left of Sebastiano’s painting is the equestrian statue of Achilles, his ghost seated on clouds above Polyxena. Various figures, including a soldier and a page, look on. The features of the stout man standing behind the priest, although only summarily indicated, resemble Ricci’s own.”

(SOURCE: [Royal Collection Trust - Sebastiano Ricci “The Sacrifice of Polyxena”](#).)

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

CAESAR



How did Rome transition from a Republic to an Empire?

“Two thousand years ago, the world was ruled by Rome, but Rome could not rule itself. It took two men to wrestle Rome back from chaos and turn a republic into an empire.

In the first century BC, Rome was a republic. Power lay in the hands of the Senate, elected by Roman citizens. But the senators were fighting for power between themselves. Order had given way to anarchy and only might was right.

Julius Caesar was convinced something had to change. Rising through the political ranks, he eventually became governor of Gaul. This gave him the chance to make lots of money, while his abilities as a general brought him power and respect.

By 50 BC, Caesar had made many powerful enemies. With his life under threat, he invaded Italy. Over the next few years, he defeated his enemies and seized power for himself.

But his rule would be brief. After just two years, he was murdered by senators who were fed up with his autocratic style. Rome was again threatened with chaos.

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

Enter Augustus, Caesar’s nephew and heir. An ambitious man from an average family, this was Augustus’ big chance. With his ally, Marc Antony, he fought and killed Caesar’s old enemies. Victorious, he divided the spoils: Augustus took Rome and Antony got Egypt.

The peace did not last long. Antony was quickly seduced by Egypt’s queen, Cleopatra. Augustus suspected that the two wanted Rome for themselves. Before they could threaten him, Augustus attacked.

The Battle of Actium was a huge victory. Around three-quarters of the Egyptian fleet were destroyed and both Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide before they could be captured.

In Rome, Augustus was a hero. In 31 BC, he became Rome’s first emperor. The transformation from republic to empire was complete.”

(SOURCE: <https://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/republic.html>)

What was Rome like under Augustus’ rule?

“During his 40-years reign, Augustus nearly doubled the size of the empire, adding territories in Europe and Asia Minor and securing alliances that gave him effective rule from Britain to India. He spent much of his time outside of Rome, consolidating power in the provinces and instituting a system of censuses and taxation that integrated the empire’s furthest reaches. He expanded the Roman network of roads, founded the Praetorian Guard and the Roman postal service and remade Rome with both grand (a new forum) and practical gestures (police and fire departments).”

(SOURCE: <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/emperor-augustus>)

Did Augustus actually transform Caesar into a God?

“Having fought his way into power, Augustus used religion as a tool to protect his position and promote his political agenda.

Having gained power by force in a bitterly fought civil war, Augustus was aware that he could easily lose it again. He was prepared to use any tool at his disposal to strengthen his claim to the imperial throne and thereby make it harder for his enemies to overthrow him.

An important part of this strategy involved religion. **The Emperor of Rome was already the most powerful man on earth, but this wasn’t enough. Augustus wanted a piece of heaven too: he was determined that his people would see him as their supreme spiritual leader.**

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

Roman religion had many gods and spirits and Augustus was keen to join their number as a god himself. This was not unusual: turning political leaders into gods was an old tradition around the Mediterranean. There was also precedent in Roman history – Aeneas and Romulus, who had helped found Rome, were already worshipped as gods.

Aside from their many gods, Romans were deeply superstitious, so when Augustus was handed a huge piece of luck, he took full advantage of it.

Early in his reign, Halley’s Comet passed over Rome. Augustus claimed it was the spirit of Julius Caesar entering heaven. If Caesar was a god then, as his heir, Augustus was the son of a god and he made sure that everybody knew it.

Now regarded as part-god, Augustus encouraged stories of his frugal habits. He let people know that he lived in a modest house, slept on a low bed and, when he wasn’t fasting, ate only very plain food, like coarse bread and cheese. In a letter, he boasted to his stepson, Tiberius, of how he had not eaten all day.

Promoting himself as the man who would return Rome’s past glory, Augustus claimed that only by restoring the traditional values that had first made Rome great could he hope to make it great again. One writer commented: ‘He renewed many traditions which were fading in our age and restored 82 temples of the gods neglecting none that required repair at the time.’

As ruler of Rome, Augustus had to lead by example. He re-established traditional social rules and religious rituals, sacrificing animals to Rome’s gods. In 12 AD he made himself Pontifex Maximus, the chief priest of Rome and head of the Collegium Pontificum, the highest priests in the land.

These initiatives were very popular. To many Romans, the reign of Augustus marked the point at which Rome had rediscovered its true calling. They believed that, under his rule and with his dynasty, they had the leadership to get there. At his death, Augustus, the ‘son of a god’, was himself declared a god. His strategy had worked.”

(SOURCE: https://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/augustus_religion.html)

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

PHAETHON AND PHOEBUS

Who are the characters in this story?

- **Phaethon** – Son of Apollo.
- **Clymene** – Mother of Phaethon.
- **Apollo / Phoebus** – God of music, poetry, medicine, and prophecy; also god of the sun.

How have critics analyzed this story in the *Metamorphoses*?

The book opens with a double description of the Sun, first part an ecphrasis (literary description of a work of art) of the elaborately sculptured doors, and the second part an account of the palace interior and its inhabitants. The door carvings (recalling the ecphrasis of the doors of Apollo's temple in *Aeneid*, and in the further background, the image of the world on Achilles' shield in *Iliad*) represent the arrangement of the earth, bordered and contained by waters whose deities are at play; contrast the chaotic time before earth, sea, and sky were ordered. The sun god—a lofty, imperial figure, intimidating in the formality of his court, too dazzling to look at—has a retinue with an emphasis on cyclical subdivisions of time; “the Days, the Months, the Years” and so on are divine personifications of the

sort who typically attend major deities. **The passage as a whole suggests what the world is like now, its spatial, temporal, and hierarchical ordering post-Chaos and post Flood, and suggests it through images of serenity and stability, contrastively preparing us for the mayhem that the world will experience at Phaethon's hands, a fresh return toward Chaos (as the Earth says [in *The Story of Phaethon*]). In [The Story of Phaethon], the Sun already warns Phaethon that his daily journey is a constant struggle with the various elements—are they still potentially at war? The orderliness of the world is seen to depend on the continuing management by ruling gods, not just on the original establishment by the unnamed creator [in *The Creation*].”**

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation



What is the story of Phaethon and the Sun Chariot?

• Looking for his Father

“According to the Greek Mythology, **Phaethon**, whose name means ‘shining’, was the son of the **Sun-God Helios** and a mortal woman, **Clymene**. However, he was living only with his mother as his father had a difficult task to perform. He was responsible to drive the horse chariot with the Sun from the one side to the Earth to the other during the daytime.

One day, a school-mate of Phaethon laughed at his claim that he was the son of a god and said he didn’t believe him. In tears, Phaethon went to his mother and demanded proof of his paternity. **Clymene assured her son that he was indeed the son of the great god Helios and sent him on his way to the palace of his father to establish his legitimacy.**

A delighted and hopeful Phaethon travelled to India, as there was the palace of his father who was supposed to begin every day his course from the East. **When he reached the palace of Helios, he was astonished at its magnificence and luxury.** His eyes were almost blinded by the dazzle of the light all around him.

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

• The Palace of Helios



“Amazed with all the luxury he had faced, **Phaethon came into the august presence of his reputed father, Helios, sitting on a diamond-studded throne surrounded by the presences of the Day, the Month, the Year, and the Hour.** His other attendants included Spring, bedecked with flowers, Summer, with a garland of spear-like ripened grains, Autumn, with feet reddened with grape juice and Winter, with hoar-frost in his hair.

Phaethon told Helios about the humiliation he had to suffer because of the imputation of illegitimacy. **He pleaded Helios to recognize him as his son and establish beyond all doubt the legitimacy of**

his birth. Helios got deeply moved and firmly affirmed Phaethon’s paternity and legitimacy. In fact, he declared, in the presence of all his attendants, that he will gladly grant his son any favour that he would ask him.

Phaethon, happy because great Helios had recognized him as his son, decided to test the limits of his father’s love and benevolence. **The rash boy asked to be allowed to drive the awesome Chariot of the Sun for one day. Helios was fearful at his son’s irrational request.** He tried to explain to his son that even the mighty Zeus could not presume to drive the Chariot of the Sun, much less a mere mortal. That onerous task was reserved solely for him, god Helios.

Unfortunately, once the gods had promised a favour, they could not withdraw or deny it. Helios used all his persuasive skills to plead the rash Phaethon to withdraw his outrageous demand, but to no avail. The boy insisted that Helios kept his promise. The god of the Sun could do nothing else but to give in.”

• The Great Destruction

“A helpless Helios tried to warn his son for the dangers involved in driving the Chariot with its fiery horses which even the great god himself had found it difficult to control on many occasions. **He advised Phaethon to steer the Chariot through a middle course and not to go too high or too low.** Helios rubbed an expression of power and arrogance on his son’s face.

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation



As soon as he took off, Phaethon realized that he had taken on more than he could handle. He found himself utterly powerless to control the fiery horses. When the horses realized the weakness and inexperience of their young charioteer, they began to steer a wild and dangerous course. **The Chariot of the Sun was said to have blazed a gash in the skies which supposedly became the Milky Way, a spiral galaxy.**

The danger of a greater destruction infuriated the chief of the gods, Zeus, who struck the boy down with his thunderbolt.

The body of the dead Phaethon fell into the Eridanus River, which was later to be known as the river Po of Italy. The unfortunate Phaethon was deeply mourned by his sisters, the Heliades, who were transformed into poplar trees to stand by the river and protect their brother for always.”



(SOURCE: [Phaethon and the Sun Chariot](#); [Phaethon and Phoebus](#))

Contextual Information about Stories in this Adaptation

Who was Helios?



- **Helios (aka Helius) was the Titan god of the sun, a guardian of oaths, and the god of sight.** He dwelt in a golden palace in the River Okeanos (Oceanus) at the far ends of the earth from which he emerged each dawn, crowned with the aureole of the sun, driving a chariot drawn by four winged steeds.

Helios was depicted as a handsome, usually beardless, man clothed in purple robes and crowned with the shining aureole of the sun. His sun-chariot was drawn by four, sometimes winged, steeds.

Helios was identified with several other gods of fire and light such as Hephaistos (Hephaestus) and light-bringing Phoibos Apollon (Phoebus Apollo).

(SOURCE: [Helios, Titan god of the sun](#))

- **Helios, (Greek: “Sun”) in Greek religion, the sun god, sometimes called a Titan. He drove a chariot daily from east to west across the sky and sailed around the northerly stream of Ocean each night in a huge cup.**

In classical Greece, Helios was especially worshipped in Rhodes, where from at least the early 5th century BCE he was regarded as the chief god, to whom the island belonged. His worship spread as he became increasingly identified with other deities, often under Eastern influence. From the 5th century BCE, Apollo, originally a deity of radiant purity, was more and more interpreted as a sun god. Under the Roman Empire the sun itself came to be worshipped as the Unconquered Sun.

(SOURCE: [Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. “Helios”.](#))