TRANSFORMATIVE INTERSECTIONS: THEATRE AND ADAPTATION IN MARY ZIMMERMAN'S METAMORPHOSES

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ABSTRACT

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Adaptation studies has been traditionally characterized by an emphasis on literature and film. The institutional grounding of adaptation studies in university English departments continues to reinforce the framing of adaptation as a transformation of literary texts into films. Despite the fact that many theatrical works are adaptations, theatre remains notably absent in much of the discourse on adaptation. Works like Mary Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses*, a theatrical adaptation of Ovid’s retelling of Greek myths, bring tales of transformation to the stage. Myths are among the most adapted and retold stories, and Zimmerman’s play forms a generative intersection among theatre, myth, and adaptation.

This study begins with an overview of adaptation studies from which I distill four key elements of adaptation; these four elements provide a critical vocabulary through which to analyze theatrical adaptations. Then I focus on the work of adaptation scholar Linda Hutcheon and her modes of engagement, which serve to broaden adaptation studies beyond the dominance of literature-to-film adaptations. I apply four clichés created by Hutcheon from her modes of engagement to Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses* as a methodology for analyzing theatre’s potential contribution to adaptation studies. Finally, I return to my fourfold vocabulary to examine the transformation of theatre and adaptation studies which can emerge from their mutual exchange.
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INTRODUCTION

Adaptation in storytelling has a long and fruitful history. Storytellers for millennia have borrowed and changed tales to suit a particular time and place so that a story speaks anew with a fresh voice. Myths are among the most frequently adapted of stories; storytellers have often returned to myths in many times and places to connect their audiences with the profound depths of the human experience. However, while many theatrical productions are adaptations, theatre is notably absent within the field of adaptation studies. Theatrical adaptations have been investigated at length by performance studies scholars, but theatre remains marginal within adaptation studies. Literature and film represent the primary focus of adaptation studies, a focus supported by the institutional grounding of adaptation in university English departments. For this reason, an exploration into the ways in which adaptation theory, particularly the ideas of Linda Hutcheon, can be applied to theatre may prove useful and illuminating for theatrical adaptations. Mary Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses* will serve as a focal point for this exploration, providing a site at which to examine the ways adaptation studies can be applied to theatre.

While adaptation itself has existed as long as there have been stories to tell, adaptation studies as a field is still in its youth. Emerging in the late 1990s, adaptation studies examines the alterations in stories as a result of retelling. This often takes the form of examining changes in a story as it shifts from one medium to the next, most commonly from literature to film. While no specific genre or medium defines adaptation studies, literature-to-film adaptations constitute the majority of existing scholarship. As a theatrical practitioner, this bias within the field of adaptation studies does not speak to
my own experience. Therefore, this study will add theatre into the discussion of
adaptation, illuminating new applications to theatrical adaptations.

The work of one adaptation theorist in particular lends itself to expanding the
boundaries of adaptation studies beyond the scope of literature and film. Linda
Hutcheon’s theory of adaptation widely extends across genres and mediums. Film
adaptations represent the dominant focus in adaptation studies, and theorists like
Robert Stamm seek to theorize adaptations through the lens of film. Deborah Cartmell
and Imelda Whelehan also examine the movement from text to screen. The emphasis
on literature and film within adaptation studies leaves an opportunity for an investigation
into theatrical adaptations to nuance and variegate the field of adaptation studies.

Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation* expands the boundaries of adaptation
studies by formulating a new model for adaptation studies based on what she terms
“modes of engagement.” In Hutcheon’s framing of adaptation, there are three modes of
engagement: telling, showing, and interacting. Novel, radio, or recited poetry exemplify
the telling mode; dance, theatre, and film typify the showing mode. The third mode
utilizes technology and new media: video games, simulations, and theme park rides
represent the interactive mode. Hutcheon’s three modes encourage intersection, and
overlapping can occur. Theatre, for example, encompasses the showing and telling
modes, and owing to the presence of live audiences, the interactive mode as well.
Hutcheon’s modes of engagement flexibly traverse the boundaries of medium specificity
with increased inclusiveness, thereby supporting theatre’s increased presence within
adaptation studies.
The play *Metamorphoses* by Mary Zimmerman, a theatrical adaptation of Ovid’s epic poem about change and transformation, serves to anchor this exploration in the practical applications of adaptation theory to theatrical works. Zimmerman’s play offers rich material for the application of adaptation theory. First, it offers multiple applications for Hutcheon’s modes of engagement because it fluidly shifts between telling, showing, and, with the presence of a live audience, interactive modes. Zimmerman’s utilization of a Chamber Theatre format, which I will define shortly, features numerous moments where actors create an interactive relationship with the audience through direct address. Second, because it is an adaptation, the play offers opportunities to investigate the shifts Zimmerman made in bringing Ovid’s poem, itself an adaptation of Greek mythology, to the stage. Zimmerman’s adaptation of mythology provides an apt case study for adaptation, as myths are among the most adapted of stories. Third, Zimmerman’s adaptation of *Metamorphoses* is divided into discernible segments by myth. This division facilitates the application of Hutcheon’s modes of engagement by allowing a focus on particular episodes rather than on one continuous, extended narrative.

The performances upon which I draw for this study are three performances of *Metamorphoses* I have viewed. The first staging is the Broadway production at the Circle in the Square Theatre in August, 2002. The second performance I witnessed was Zimmerman’s Chicago revival of the play at the Lookingglass Theatre on October 6, 2012. Both the New York production and the Chicago production were directed by Mary Zimmerman. The third production of *Metamorphoses*, which I viewed on December 1, 2012, was produced by the University of Toledo and directed by Irene Alby. Specific
references to the Broadway production will be drawn from reviews, interviews, and my personal memory, while the Chicago and Toledo productions were viewed in the interest of investigating the specific ideas I investigate in this study. References to the latter two productions are drawn from notes I took during the performance and my own personal responses as an audience member.

Mary Zimmerman’s script for *Metamorphoses* provides another basis for my analysis. The script forms an important part of the final of product of Zimmerman’s adaptation process, a concrete textual document which can be compared to the sourcetext of Slavitt’s translation of Ovid. Importantly, Zimmerman’s script functions doubly: it speaks and yet remains silent. The text of the script communicates the dialogue of the play and provides the structure of the plot, but the embodiment of stage images and the distribution of roles among cast members is the responsibility of the director. In this investigation I will be comparing the finished adapted script for Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses* with her embodiment of it to investigate the staging process as a form of adaptation.

The adaptive potential of theatre is evident in the versatility of the play’s casting. The original casting of the play featured ten performers, five men and five women. Zimmerman states that the parts in *Metamorphoses* may be divided at the discretion of the director, but she provides the original divisions of characters (85). The play can support additional performers, however, as the script lists 27 characters with, in addition, “several important narrators, servants, sailors, other gods and goddesses, denizens of the Underworld, spirits, and so forth” (4). The flexibility of the script in terms of casting allows for a number of possible choices in the staging of the play. As such,
the script’s character breakdown functions as a possible site of adaptation. By examining the script as well as productions which utilize casting in different ways, we may see the ways in which directors can adapt the script across various productions through casting. For example, the Chicago production of *Metamorphoses* utilized ten actors, five men and five women, as indicated by Zimmerman’s notes in the script. However, the Toledo production increased that number to seventeen actors, featuring ten women and seven men. The Toledo production of *Metamorphoses* maintained the integrity of the script while providing opportunities for a number of young actors to participate in the production who would have missed the educational experience had Alby maintained the original casting breakdown.

In addition to the script, I will be focusing on reviews from the original Broadway production. These reviews bear importance to my study in that they highlight key elements of adaptation. Additionally, the reviews from the Broadway production will serve to illuminate specifically theatrical contributions to adaptation studies.

Finally, I will trace Zimmerman’s theatrical techniques for adapting Ovid’s work to the stage. To do so, I will draw on the work of Robert Breen, who pioneered a form of theatre called Chamber Theatre. Chamber Theatre may be understood as a method for adapting literary works to the stage. A greater understanding of Chamber Theatre practices as exemplified in Zimmerman’s work will serve to highlight the specifically theatrical techniques of adaptation and support my investigation into theatre’s contribution to adaptation studies.

This investigation into the intersection between theatre and adaptation begins with an overview of adaptation studies. The first chapter establishes a critical vocabulary of
four elements drawn from the wider field of adaptation studies: context, retelling, fidelity, and medium specificity. The second chapter centers exclusively on Linda Hutcheon’s theory of adaptation and her modes of engagement, focusing on four cliches she creates to typify limiting assumptions surrounding adaptations. Using Hutcheon’s cliches as a tool for analysis, the third chapter applies them as a methodology to Zimmerman’s adaptation in order to illuminate the adaptive qualities of theatre. My conclusion examines how Zimmerman’s theatrical adaptation has been illuminated through applying tenets of adaptation studies; additionally, I suggest ways in which both theatre and adaptation studies in a broader sense may be enriched by their mutual exchange.
CHAPTER ONE: MYTH AND ADAPTATION

Mary Zimmerman created a performance that exists as an intersection among theatre, myth, and adaptation. In doing so, she created a uniquely theatrical embodiment of the expanded perspective theatre can contribute to adaptation theorists. This chapter lays the foundation for a fresh understanding by creating a critical vocabulary for interpreting adaptations. Adaptation studies encompasses a wide range of topics, and a comprehensive survey is beyond the scope of this investigation. Therefore, in order to provide a structure for analysis, I have distilled four key elements from adaptation studies which are illuminated by my case study: context, retelling, medium shifts, and fidelity.

Zimmerman is situated in a long line of adapters of mythology. When the adapter-director embodied Ovid’s mythic tale of change and transformation on the stage, she engaged with a particular kind of story that is unique in its adaptive possibilities and limitations. The ahistorical essence of mythology invites adapters to continually tell mythic stories in new fresh contexts. Myths never literally happened but they are always happening, and it is this eternal quality that allows myth to perpetually flow into new times and places with relevance. Adapters inspired by mythic stories find themselves fitting the eternal, timeless quality of myth to specific historical moments. Because myth has no context per se, the adapter of myth must give these mythic stories contemporary, relevant contexts that speak to audiences in meaningful and imaginative ways.
Adapters focus on context to render a story articulate and intelligible. Defining the context of a story requires identifying the circumstances of its setting: the characteristics of time and place. When confronted with the challenge of shifting context in adaptation, adapters meet two aspects of contextualization that formally shape new works: 1) Context refers to both the setting of a *story* as well as the setting of its *telling*, and 2) adapters are limited in their ability to alter context; they are free to shift the setting of a story but not the setting of its telling.

For example, Marcel Camus’ 1959 film *Black Orpheus* tells the myth of Orpheus through the context of the Rio de Janeiro carnival (Sanders, 70). The realm of the underworld becomes an urban parade of flashing color and passion; each character has analogous representation through contemporary figures. The internal context of the film mirrors the myth using Brazilian iconography so that each element of the story finds representation. Camus shaped the film in accordance with the myth, exemplifying the contextual setting of the story, while the context of the film’s 1950s reception remained beyond the control of the filmmaker.

When meeting the first aspect of context, adapters find themselves at the intersection between a story’s setting and the context of its telling. The job of the adapter becomes fitting one to the other. This process invites the metaphor of the carpenter, an image rooted in the etymology of the word adaptation itself. Adaptation comes from the Latin word *adaptare*, meaning “to fit, to join.” One who adapts is one
who fits pieces together. In the contextual sense of adaptation, it is one who joins the context of a story to that of its telling.

Myth blends the contexts of telling and story seamlessly. When an adapter retells a myth, she conjoins a temporal context to an eternal one. When Mary Zimmerman recreated Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in a contemporary setting, she opened a third space in the theater wherein the eternal realm of myth mingled with the temporal world of the audience.

Though the adapter stands in between two contexts, the sphere of agency in this overlapping space is limited. The context of a story’s *telling* lies outside the means of the adapter. Richard Schechner addresses the flowing context of storytelling by citing the Greek philosopher Heraclitus: “No one can step twice into the same river, nor touch mortal substance twice in the same condition” (28). Activities like performing and oral storytelling occur in the present, moment to moment, necessitating continual re-contextualization as time passes.

Changes in context alter the shape of a story through familiarization so that the audience may “enter” and access it. Not every element in a story requires familiarizing and re-contextualizing. Take William Shakespeare adaptations for example. While the language of Shakespeare’s stories may not change, the setting is frequently altered through updating. Contemporary settings of Shakespeare provide an accessibility that allows the audience to devote its attention to language comprehension. Myths are also adapted to contemporary settings, providing the audience with a familiar avenue into the vast and impersonal territory of timeless stories. The impersonal nature of myth challenges adapters to continuously fit universal themes to individual situations. Myths
resonate in relevance as they are joined to personal stories that move the heart. Without the adapter’s hand to fit a mythic story to a familiar context, however, the impersonal nature of myth can seem too general. The double-edged universality of myth makes the adapter a crucial figure in mythic storytelling.

Wendy Doniger, an eminent scholar of mythology at the University of Chicago, offers adapters a tool for negotiating the balance of personal and universal elements within mythic storytelling. She defines myth by contextualizing it on a visual spectrum. At one end lies the telescope, and on the other end, the microscope. Doniger describes the microscopic end of the continuum as entirely solipsistic or personal. Microscopic narratives include realistic novels, diaries, dreams, or entirely subjective retellings of experience. These stories emphasize individual character, asserting that the events could or did happen to only one person. On a cultural level, the “individual” can be substituted with a specific community of individuals while maintaining the particular quality of the microscope.

Telescopic stories, on the other hand, are vast, broad, and formal. At the extreme end could be a theoretical treatise or even a mathematical formula. Abstract and unimaginably great, telescopic stories apply to entire nations or even the entire human race. It is this end of the spectrum where we might imagine pure objectivity, an experience beyond any human subjectivity. The narratives at this end of the continuum broadly capture experiences such as birth, death, beauty, or change within their vision.

Doniger situates myth in the middle of the spectrum, a fluid space in constant interaction between the two ends of the spectrum. Doniger says that, “Myths range from the most highly detailed (closest to the personal end of the continuum) to the most
stripped down (closest to the artificial construct at the abstract end of the continuum):
and each myth may be rendered by the scholar in its micro- or macro- form” (6). If
Doniger’s “scholar” is replaced with an adapter of myths, then the decision to render a
myth in micro- or macro- form can be seen as an act of adaptation. Myths challenge
adapters to keep scope and context in mind. Adapting a myth calls for balance and
requires practical adjustment of telescopic and microscopic perspectives in any
rendering. Because myths traffic in universal themes, adaptations of myths can take the
form of augmenting familiar aspects, weighting the microscopic end of the spectrum.
The telling and retelling of a myth moves the story along Doniger’s spectrum, with the
adapter shaping the journey of that movement to suit a new context.

Retelling

The eternal nature of myths invites their continuous retelling, a facet of myth
which calls for the work of the adapter. The prefix “re-”, from the Latin for “back and
again,” occurs frequently in discourse on adaptations in many cogent “back and again”
words: re-tell, re-vision, re-interpret, and re-imagine, to name a few.

The “re-” prefix implies “looking back “ to what in adaptation terminology would
be described as a perceived original or source-text. Embedded in the process of
adaptation itself lies dualistic comparison. With the double consciousness established
through inherent “backward glances” to a source-text, adaptation practices can become
tied to an either/or mentality. This has been described by Robert Stamm, a film theorist
at New York University, as dichotomous thinking, and it inscribes unnecessary
limitations on adaptation studies in a number of ways. Of special importance to theatre
is the limitation of medium specificity. Dualistic thinking in contemporary adaptation studies tends to concretize into the dominance of literature and film. These two most prevalent media enjoy special focus almost to the exclusion of other media forms which may contribute equally to adaptation studies. However, a dichotomous mind frame cannot accommodate the nuance and complexity offered by multiple-media models, thereby leaving theatre out of the spotlight. While adaptation looks back and compares texts, the challenge of duality is ever present, necessitating models which open adaptation studies into greater multiplicity.

Critical theorists have approached the re-telling aspect of adaptation by pointing to its perennial newness. Adaptation scholars like Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins emphasize the generative aspect of retelling and encourage theorists to envision every telling of a story as a new story. “The story, so to speak, is never separate from the telling,” they say, adding that, “There is no such thing as an abstractable (or extractable) ‘essence’ in a novel or film that can be adapted to a new medium so that one may say, ‘It’s the same story, it’s just told in a different way’/ Any ‘retelling’ of a story is a new story because the text has been interpreted by the ‘reteller’” (18).

David Spencer challenges the assertion that no essential story exists. He describes the cardinal rule of adaptation as: “Never lose sight of the essential qualities that make your source material attractive to begin with. The only reason to adapt a work is to enhance and elevate the compelling things it already contains” (89). While the notion of essence sits uncomfortably with adaptation theorists on a philosophical basis, it nevertheless asserts itself in the discourse. Even Spencer agrees with Albrecht-Crane
and Cutchins on the primacy of the “teller” by adding this caveat: “The rule cannot be taken literally any more than it can be taken lightly. Because it exists side-by-side with this provocative truth: you (and your collaborators) are often the ones to decide what those ‘essential qualities’ and ‘compelling things’ are” (89, italics in original). In selecting specific episodes from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Zimmerman inscribes her own imprint on Ovid’s overarching mythic theme of change and transformation in her theatrical retelling.

A mythic story constellates around an inherently protean core which invites continuous retellings and permutations. The fluid and shifting nucleus within a myth is described as *poesis*, a Greek word meaning “to make, to create.” Myths owe their continuing adaptability to the quicksilver element of *poesis*, a quality that conjures the image of Heraclitus’ flowing river. Scholars of myth, such as Lawrence Coupe, describe the creative gliding of myth into new forms as mythopoeisis. Coupe builds a bridge between myth and adaptation when he defines mythopoeisis as a cycle of creation and re-creation, a link which echoes Roland Barthes’ comment that the fundamental nature of the mythological concept is to be appropriated (Sanders, 63).

Like a two-way street, the mythopoeic urge is Janus-faced: it looks back as it simultaneously moves away from a source-text. To envision a story as mythopoeic embraces both repetition and change, or as Linda Hutcheon states, “repetition without replication” (7). Like adaptation’s double vision, mythopoeic vision flourishes in paradox: the story is the same, yet it is different. Mythopoeisis can be seen as central to theatre in the respect that theatre is about re-creation; a live theatrical piece is re-created anew with each performance, making any theatrical performance a mythopoeic act. With each
performance, a play must be revitalized and re-invented, and the re-creation of a play through performance is subject to a number of influential factors. For example, the health of the actors, understudies taking over roles, new actors hired into a company that shift relationship dynamics, or new theatrical spaces for touring productions can all impact the performance of a play. Perhaps the most obvious factor shaping live performance is the behavior of the audience. The audience-performer relationship defines live theatre in contrast to film, where the size and behavior of the audience does not impact the finished cinematic product. On the other hand, in live theatre, actors must be aware of laughter, as audiences may laugh in different places than they had in previous performances. Stage actors must be ready to pause for varied amounts of time from night to night, but in film, the finished product continues regardless of audience response. Thus, the audience-actor dynamic in live theatre operates mythopoeically, rendering a completely new performance of the same play with each retelling every night.

Adaptations of mythology create a new perspective with each re-imagining of a story. As a myth is envisioned and retold from new thresholds, the richness and relevance of a story is deepened and revived. James Hillman points to one more “re-” of great benefit to adapters: respect. Using the metaphor of a walk through a garden, Hillman describes the ways in which we see the same landscape differently as we meander and wander. “These shifts of seeing again are precisely what the word ‘respect’ means. To look again is to ‘re-spect.’ Each time we look at the same thing again, we gain respect for it and add respect to it, curiously discovering the innate relation of ‘looks’ - or regarding and being regarded, words in English that refer to
dignity” (75). Hillman’s notion of respect stands out because much of the terminology surrounding adaptations is that of moral degradation, with words like betrayal, theft, and corruption appearing. Hillman’s apt framing of respect assuages the sting of debasement and supports retelling from the vantage point of honor and esteem which “looking again” bestows.

Furthermore, Hillman’s framing of respect foregrounds an important difference between theatrical and cinematic adaptations in terms of perspective. In the theatre, audiences are free to visually “wander about” the landscape of the stage without the controlled focus of the camera lens. In contrast, film audiences must follow the “eye” of the camera so that what is seen is dictated through camera angles, editing, and so forth. In the theatre, audience have greater freedom to “re-spect” a performance from different thresholds, marking a difference in the adaptive capabilities of theatre in comparison to film.

Phyllis Frus and Christy Williams add their voices in support of multiple perspectives in adaptation. They state, “Many of us have experienced pleasure in detecting a plurality of voices. We believe that the more echoes we can hear, the richer the text, and in the ways literary criticism has been practiced for nearly a century since modernism, richness is a sign of value” (13). Despite the rich chord sounded by multiple voices that adaptation can provide, the impetus towards unison in the form of fidelity arguments narrows adaptation. Instead of multiple perspectives, fidelity demands only one perspective so that the scope of possibility for re-telling stories from alternative viewpoints is truncated.
Fidelity

The discussion of fidelity in adaptation studies springs from the inherently comparative nature of adaptation itself. An adapter re-telling a story “looks back” to a perceived source-text that concretizes into a seminal original when he gazes with a “faithful” eye. Zimmerman’s choice of mythic material, however, challenges fidelity in specific ways. The theatrical medium combined with mythical subject matter provides an excellent example of a work that problematizes fidelity in adaptation.

Based on Lawrence Coupe’s definition of mythopoeisis as a continuous cycle of creation and re-creation, mythology calls into question the very notion of originality. Myth never “completes” itself, and in this way it does not look back to a starting point that it can emulate. Though myth is always in process, Coupe provides a viewpoint that opposes mythopoeisis, one which is analogous to fidelity arguments in adaptation. Demythologization is the process by which a myth is “perfected” or “completed” so that any further re-imagining is halted. In effect, the story stops and is “finished.” In terms of adaption, demythologization permits no further retellings by draining any further nuance or possibility from the story.

The plural origins of mythology destabilize fidelity arguments and propel adaptation studies into sophisticated analyses. Phyllis Frus and Christy Williams provide a bypass to fidelity arguments epitomized in mythic stories: “Because we rarely have one original tale, rather a host of stories with similar plots or details, there is no one story to be faithful to, and the issue of fidelity is avoided completely” (6). Compendia such as Grimm’s Fairy Tales or Hesiod’s comprehensive Theogony are other examples of compilations drawn from many oral sources. Though they are frequently viewed as
“original” versions, the plural origins of myths and fairy tales challenge fidelity by breaking open its tunnel vision.

Angela Carter’s writing provides insightful perspective on fidelity. Her grounding as an author retelling ancient and well-known stories in new ways situates her in the position of a bricoleur. She says, “The chances are, the story was put together in the form we have it, more or less out of all sorts of bits of other stories long ago and far away, and has been tinkered with, had bits added to it, lost other bits, got mixed up with other stories, until our informant herself has tailored the story personally to suit an audience...or, simply, to suit herself” (quoted in Sanders, 89). A collage is an apt metaphor for the work of an adapter, especially an adapter of mythology. A collage foregrounds the piecemeal construction of the work, highlighting constituent elements as specifically garnered from disparate sources. The result coheres into a new work that, like myth, combines the new and old. As a collaborative art form, theatre frequently offers new interpretations of “old” texts as plays and musicals are revived; theatrical ventures may also be viewed as collages which incorporate new and familiar elements with each retelling.

The musical form of jazz offers apt insight into the process of adaptation based on the expectation of reinterpretation built into the form. Jazz remains faithful to a basic structure, but the expected improvisation floating atop it allows adaptation and jazz to intersect with a shared double vision. Chord progressions in jazz remain stable as the expected improvisation over those chords unpredictably and delightfully tantalizes. Combining continuous variation with permanence, jazz is the mythical narrative of the musical canon. Actors may also be seen as jazz musicians. An actor in a play must
perform the same play from night to night, but he or she is free to “improvise” within the structure of the play to keep a performance fresh and vital.

Mary Zimmerman’s script for *Metamorphoses* functions like a jazz chart; it provides a basic framework around which to build, improvise, and reinterpret. The form of Zimmerman’s script, however, is influenced by the theatrical medium in which she operates. Each medium formally limits and shapes the body of a story. As stories are adapted into new media, they transform to meet the restrictions or possibilities of a particular medium. Therefore, adaptation theorists focus on a media’s formal elements and how those factors influence a story’s telling.

**Medium Shifts**

Consequential changes in a story occur as it is adapted from one medium to another. Changes determined by a medium’s capabilities or limitations inspire adaptation theorists to focus on the formal elements of media. While the illumination of definitive media elements necessarily provides ground for analysis, hyper-focusing on formal aspects can mire adaptation studies in a comparison of media. To remain flexible and combat hyper-focused perspectives, medium specificity in adaptation calls for a balance which establishes traversable boundaries among media.

As medium specificity is an important aspect of adaptation studies, it is useful to acknowledge the ways in which focusing on the capabilities or limitations of media can be both useful and restrictive. The usefulness of medium specificity emerges through in-depth and ongoing analysis of a medium’s capabilities, particularly as capabilities shift with advancement in technology. A solid foundation of formal medium elements allows
comparison to take place, opening up greater conversations of richness and nuance within adaptation studies.

Operating within a particular medium allows for shared vocabulary. Lateral movement among related media maintains a common language of intelligibility while retelling a story in a new medium requires new terminology. Put another way, the problem of translation rears its head when stories shift from one medium to another. Adapters seek to remedy the problem of medium specific language through translation; they seek equivalents across media like a traveler in Paris armed with a French-to-English dictionary. Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins advise caution as they point to the fundamental differences between media: “Phrases like ‘the movie was different than the book’ suggest a false assumption that films can indeed be the same as books, an idea to which adaptation studies can also succumb” (18). Staying within a medium allows adaptation theorists to avoid the traps of translation.

Formal elements of a medium provide stable aspects amenable to analysis and allow scholars to theorize adaptation. Media combine both fixed and mutable elements, however. The fixed elements of a medium support analysis by allowing greater control. Mutable elements, in contrast, present greater variance, making analysis more difficult. Take a novel for example. Upon publication, the text of the novel solidifies and therefore provides stable material for analysis. The complex and shifting reception of that novel, on the other hand, challenges analysis. The reader’s reception of the printed text includes many variables and lies beyond the agency of the author. She cannot control the setting in which the text is read nor the rate at which the reader engages the novel; one reader may speedily accomplish six chapters in a day while another may only read
one. To account for elements more readily analyzed, adaptation scholars focus on the formal, structural, and concrete elements within a specific media.

Focusing on stable elements proves advantageous for theorizing adaptation, but if these elements alone provide the basis of a theory of adaptation, then much is lost which can add complexity and versatility to the discussion of adaptations. Specifically, theatre’s contribution of liveness to adaptation studies provides further nuance to an investigation into adaptation. Though difficult to control, the variables of live performance add further dimension to adaptation, so not only does it include stable elements like printed text, but also spontaneous, improvisatory elements rendered through live embodiment as well.

The comparative double-vision of adaptation can concretize into dichotomous thinking. When this occurs, the source-text and its adaptation stand as two directly connected stories bound by their parent-child relationship. The bulk of adaptation studies has focused on literature-to-film adaptations, and concretized dichotomous thinking resulting in a skewed focus on literature and film at the expense of other media. The institutional setting of adaptation studies in university English departments has served to reinforce the perception of adaptation primarily as an activity devoted to shifting text from page to screen. The location of adaptation studies in English departments also emphasizes the adaptation of text rather than the adaptation of live performance. A similar situation occurs through viewing William Shakespeare’s plays as literature rather than performance. Regardless of whether Shakespeare’s works are viewed as literature, performance, or both, the specific foci of institutional structures necessarily biases and shapes discourse. Christi Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins
state that institutionally situating adaptation studies in English departments encourages adapters to “consider film adaptations vis-a-vis their literary source texts in a relationship of dependency that maintains a binary base positing literature against cinema” (20). The double vision of adaptation provides relevant and valuable information through comparison, opening a body of knowledge that would otherwise remain sealed.

The assumption that comparison equals the relationship between two texts, literary and cinematic, results from the combination of dichotomous thinking with the institutional grounding of adaptation studies. The inclusion of multifaceted theoretical models moves adaptation studies away from binaries, a transformation post-structural theorists have influenced. New theoretical models that challenge dichotomous thinking and binary comparison provide opportunities for both existing and emergent media to redefine the face of adaptation studies while recognizing the untapped potential of existing media.

The elements of adaptation I have examined here serve as a vocabulary which can be applied to an analysis of Mary Zimmerman’s work. Through looking at the aspects of context, retelling, fidelity, and medium specificity, a framework emerges which can be utilized to examine the ways in which theatrical works can function adaptively. By highlighting these elements in a theatrical framework, theatre’s contribution to adaptation studies may manifest with greater clarity. As theatre announces itself as a site for adaptation, the work of Linda Hutcheon and her modes of engagement provide the tools for unlocking theatre’s potential contribution of embodiment, live performance and immediacy to adaptation studies.
CHAPTER TWO: MODES OF ENGAGEMENT

As adaptation scholars focus on retellings in different media, a dominance of literature and film is evident. This chapter will address limiting media biases by exploring Linda Hutcheon’s theory of adaptation. Her open structure of adaptation based on modes of engagement, which I will outline in this chapter, allows inclusive analysis of adaptation that can support theatre’s voice and presence within the discourse of adaptation studies.

Much in the way Mary Zimmerman thrives in the overlapping spaces between literature and theatre, Hutcheon’s background in comparative literature situates her at the intersections of stories. As a postmodern scholar engaged in rethinking narratives both literary and historical, Hutcheon brings a passion for intertextuality to the field of adaptation studies which deconstructs formal perspectives. Through emphasizing the experiential context of adaptations, Hutcheon expands adaptation studies to include what she terms modes of engagement. These modes of engagement are the telling mode, the showing mode, and the interactive mode.

Adaptations, as Hutcheon asserts, paradoxically encompass popularity and scorn so that they exist as a double entity. The practice of adaptation has gone on for centuries: the canonical works of Shakespeare, Racine, and Goethe attest to the popularity of adaptation as they are continually retold in new ways, supporting Walter Benjamin’s claim that “storytelling is always the art of repeating stories”, (quoted in Hutcheon, 2). Yet, adaptations are framed by literary critics as secondary or derivative. The twin reception of adaptation inspires Hutcheon to examine adaptations “as adaptations” rather than as autonomous works. She frames adaptations as “deliberate,
announced, and extended revisitations of prior works,” that refer to both a process of creation and a process of reception. Hutcheon’s theory therefore encompasses a perspective both formal and experiential. Through developing a perspective that doubly embraces the products and receptions of adaptation, Hutcheon expresses a desire to “challenge the explicitly and implicitly negative cultural evaluation of things like postmodernism, parody, and now, adaptation, which are seen as secondary and inferior” (xii).

Viewing adaptations as intertextual rather than autonomous foregrounds the comparative relations among adaptations. Hutcheon’s three modes of engagement provide a model which supports the conversational exchange among stories, foregrounding the vehicles through which a story is communicated and received as an important element in the discussion of adaptation. As theatre combines all three of these modes to some degree, Hutcheon’s modes provide a vocabulary which illuminates the adaptive processes and products of theatre. Modes of engagement also influence the shape of a story, affecting what gets adapted as a story shifts between telling, showing, and interacting.

The telling mode encompasses texts communicated through words. Telling does not fundamentally require the presence of a live speaker; literature read on the printed page as well as a radio plays also exemplify the telling mode. The showing mode incorporates embodied performance. Either live or mediated embodiment qualify as showing; film, television, and live theatre define the presentational mode of showing. Finally, the interactive mode includes media which physically involve audience members with the story. The direct engagement defined by the interactive mode sometimes even
challenges audiences to move beyond passive viewership and engage as co-creators. Examples of the interactive mode include video games, amusement park rides, and virtual media. Theatre, by virtue of its liveness, has its own unique relationship to the interactive mode by situating performers in direct interactive relationship to the audience. Even in the most realistic onstage portrayals, the liveness of theatre may impact onstage performances through audience response; sounds of laughter, tears, or even cell phone use represent ways in which audience members may interact with a live performance.

Through the wider lens of modes of engagement, focus on medium specificity and individual case study comparison broadens to encompass multiple connections across media. With the endeavor to widen beyond medium specificity, it is necessary to acknowledge, however, the degree to which some focus on formal limitations among media must exist within adaptation studies. Hutcheon recognizes the boundaries inherent in media, be they framed broadly or specifically; even within a single mode of engagement, major distinctions can be made (128). Importantly, Hutcheon asserts that “each mode, like each medium, has its own specificity, if not its own essence. In other words, no one mode is inherently good at doing one thing and not another; but each has at its disposal different means of expression - media and genres - and so can aim at and achieve certain things better than others” (24). Hutcheon’s words echo the balance required in expanding media specificity while embracing the depth and complexity of a single medium.

When texts remain within a single medium or one mode of engagement, the discussion over formal capabilities of media recedes. Alternatively, shifts in mode or
medium foreground the discussion over what media can and cannot do. For instance, a translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* from one language to another remains within the telling mode of engagement so that a discussion evaluating what literature can or cannot accomplish does not arise. Zimmerman’s theatrical adaptation of the literary work draws attention to the difference between page and stage. Not all adaptations need to shift mode or medium in order to quality as adaptations. Hutcheon points out that remakes, for example, are invariably adaptations because of changes in context. Theatre’s liveness involves a continuously shifting context: as every audience constitutes a new context, each new performance constitutes a new retelling of a story from night to night.

The appeal of adaptations hinges on the distinction between knowing and unknowing audiences; the pleasure which arises from the intertextual richness of adaptation is opened and activated only in knowing audiences. An unknowing audience encounters a story for the first time without a prior text for comparison. Unknowing audiences are denied the knowledge gained *through comparison*; the act of comparison yields pleasure as knowing audiences can receive the adaptation as an adaptation. Knowing audiences see an adaptation within a different context as compared to unknowing audiences; because they know that they are viewing an adaptation, the contextual framework inhabited by knowing audiences differs from that of unknowing audiences.

A myth is eminently familiar, an old story told over and over again, and as a narrative genre it excels at combining the familiar and new in creative, imaginative ways. The mythopoeic re-imagining nested at the core of Zimmerman’s stage
adaptation is an old story told in a new way. The delight kindled by the performance ignites the audience’s anticipation of the magical transformations they expect. Myths function as familiar adaptations; predictable themes, plots, and stories resonate archetypally so that most audience members will not need to focus on the plot structure. Instead, audiences may delight in the revivification and novelty of the adaptation.

Hutcheon reinforces the uniqueness of live theatre when she describes adaptation as, “not a copy in any mode of reproduction, mechanical, or otherwise” but rather as, “repetition but without replication, bringing together the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty” (173). The liveness of theatre guarantees the impossibility of reproduction; because a fresh audience witnesses each performance and therefore establishes a new context, live theatrical performance at its best prevents the possibility of mechanical copying. Zimmerman’s theatrical adaptation of mythology re-writes the same “old stories” anew both in her adapted script and in the performance of it. Just as Metamorphoses transforms a script into a fresh experience with each performance before a new audience, the play’s performance combines consistency and alteration, supporting Hutcheon’s framing of adaptation as both memory and change, persistence and variation.

As Hutcheon reconfigures adaptation studies from the threshold of her modes of engagement, restrictive viewpoints expand so that new possibilities for adaptation criticism arise. To describe traditionally limiting assumptions, Hutcheon created four “cliches”. Each cliche, framed in terms of her modes of engagement, describes limiting relationships which influence adaptation across media.
Hutcheon uses her cliches to explode open adaptation studies and allow a greater scope of comparison between media; she presents each cliche with a subsequent deconstruction of it. In doing so she provides an entryway for theatre to contribute its unique perspective on adaptation. While Hutcheon does not advocate her cliches as a rubric for analysis, they can serve as an aide to adapters. For the purpose of this investigation, I will utilize Hutcheon’s “cliches” as a methodological tool to focus on theatre and clarify how Hutcheon’s opening can serve to interface theatre with adaptation studies. Importantly, my usage of Hutcheon’s cliches is not intended to support them, but rather to reinforce Hutcheon’s interrogation of them.

Cliche #1: Only the Telling Mode (Especially Prose Fiction) Has the Flexibility to Render Both Intimacy and Distance in Point of View

The intersection of telling and showing challenges simple delineations; cinematic and novelistic storytelling, for instance, overlap so that boundaries between telling and showing blur. As an example, Hutcheon quotes novelist Joseph Conrad, who said, “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel - it is, before all, to make you see” (53). Describing the increase of film adaptations in the early twentieth century, theorists like Kamilla Elliott point to an increasing separation between the visual, external expression of film and the interiority of the novel. Hutcheon cites Robert McKee’s perspective, garnered from his influential text *Story*, which states that film should never borrow literary devices and stray from showing into telling. McKee’s stance maintains clear boundaries between showing and
telling, though perhaps unnecessarily. As theatrical practitioners like Zimmerman demonstrate, the merging of telling and showing can yield powerful, imaginative storytelling.

Performance media such as theatre challenge the strict divide between telling and showing, and Hutcheon asks, “Are performance media limited to third-person points of view? Or can the intimacy of the first-person narrator be achieved in performance? Do techniques like voice-over and soliloquy work?” (53) The spectrum of deep interiority and abstracted detachment applies to a range of works. Hutcheon points out that it would be faulty to unilaterally delimit the possibility of any media’s achievement of an element such as intimacy or distance: “No one mode is inherently good at doing one thing and not another; but each has at its disposal different means of expression - media and genres - and so can aim at and achieve certain things better than others” (24). Theatre can achieve a kind of intimacy or aim at it. Indeed, the identification of the audience with the protagonist of a play depends on the intimate connection between audience and actor in the theatre.

Seeing the transformations of Zimmerman’s play poetically rendered in live space invokes an imaginative response particular to theatre. Each mode, however, acts on the imagination differently. In the telling mode, “we imagine and visualize a world from black marks on white pages as we read,” whereas in showing, “our imaginations are preempted as we perceive and then give meaning to a world of images, sounds, and words seen and heard on the stage/screen” (Hutcheon, 130). Theatre’s claim on the imagination through live performance makes the transformations required for Zimmerman’s play more challenging; the story features physical transformations easily
rendered in telling but impossible to recreate realistically in live showing. Therefore Zimmerman draws on the imaginative tools unique to theatre, especially the simultaneous distancing and intimacy of the stage.

“Where film images engulf an audience in immediacy, the theatre audience is distanced from the action; it’s at a fixed distance physically, even if actors create intimacy through ‘presence’. The degree of involvement is always varying...this is why theatre permits one to experience something in an incredibly powerful way, and at the same time to retain a certain freedom. This double illusion is the very foundation of both the theatre experience and the dramatic form (Hutcheon, 131).

Here Hutcheon exemplifies the importance of the theatrical experience as distinct from the experience of film, a perspective often marginalized in scholarship on adaptations.

Zimmerman’s presentational style of drama typifies the double illusion of dramatic form. Direct narration to the audience foregrounds the awareness of storytelling so that the audience both directly perceives live actors and distances itself in imaginative reflection. Adapters shifting texts into theatre’s unique brand of showing have at their disposal the capacity to render a wide range of imaginative possibilities both intimate and distant, and Zimmerman’s adaptation demonstrates the knowing illusion of theatre.
Cliche #2: Interiority is the Terrain of the Telling Mode; Exteriority is Best Handled by Showing and Especially by Interactive Modes

Performance media in the showing mode feature embodied storytelling so that physicality and actions primarily convey plot and character. Though some media within the showing mode contain spoken dialogue, such as film and theatre, others like ballet most often do not; the showing mode encompasses a range of combinations of spoken word and action. Theatre’s combination of both speech and action allows for a range of interiority and exteriority, an intersection evident in Zimmerman’s adaptation. The adapter-director employs visual analogues for subjective experience as well as visual metaphors which creatively embody the magical transformations of her subject matter. For example, Zimmerman’s staging of the parting of Alcyone and Ceyx as well as the catastrophic storm which follows, which I will highlight in the next chapter, visually depict intense subjective experiences on the stage. In another scene, the transformation of Myrrha after her horrifying incestuous union with her father depicts a metaphoric transformation on the stage that simultaneously renders the subjective, gut-wrenching feelings which emerge from the young girl’s transgression: Myrrha simply wants to melt away in her shame, and so she does: in a eerily beautiful piece of stage magic, Myrrha becomes the water of the stage as she disappears under its surface, never to reappear.

Hutcheon also points to music as a means by which depth and interiority may be rendered in live performance. The physical response of the audience member’s body resonates with music and opens the possibility for interiority and depth, a tactic utilized by Zimmerman throughout her adaptation. At varying times in the play, music is “heard”
in different ways. Sometimes it is heard by the characters as they make it, rendering the
music more external, and at other times music exists only for the audience so that the
music serves as an entry into the interior experience of the character. The varied usage
of music in Zimmerman’s play will be expounded upon in the following chapter. In
particular, the episode of Alcyone and Ceyx features music used to heighten intensely
tragic moments as well underscore moments of great beauty.

Cliche #3: The Showing and Interacting Modes Have Only One Tense: The
Present; The Mode of Telling Alone can Show Relations among Past, Present, and
Future

Literature’s exemption from embodiment opens up greater possibilities in relation
to time. Within the showing mode alone differences in available “tools” for depicting time
are varied; cinema has flashback and flash-forward camera editing at its disposal.
Theatre, taking place in live physical space before an audience without the benefit of
editing, may also utilize flashback and flash-forward techniques through altering the
sequential presentation of scenes or stage pictures.

Zimmerman’s theatrical adaptation includes rapidly shifting time frames
throughout episodes of Metamorphoses, and passages of narration and dialogue jump
quickly from past to present. However, the mythic material Zimmerman adapted
challenges directly the notion of time. Mythology compresses time so that past, present,
and future exist concurrently. Theatrically adapted myths place the audience into
multiple time frames at once, giving primordial stories an immediate live presence.
The elemental set design of the original Broadway production, for example, was instrumental in creating a sense of the deep past even as audiences entered the theatre in the present. As I will relate in the next chapter, the set was a key factor in transporting the audience from the present to the past and establishing a sense of depth and reflection. Additionally, the opening of Zimmerman’s play features a scientist who addresses the audience and describes the creation of the cosmos. The scientist in the original Broadway production wore a white lab coat, a contextual element which was familiar and contemporary to audience members; the costuming choice served to compress the deep past with the present, thereby supporting Hutcheon’s dismantling of her third cliche. Other examples of Zimmerman’s staging, particularly the episode of Philemon and Baucis which I will illuminate in the next chapter, served to demonstrate the way in which theatre can fluidly move through past, present, and future.

Cliche #4: Only Telling (in Languages) Can Do Justice to Such Elements as Ambiguity, Irony, Symbols, Metaphors, Silences, and Absences; These Remain “Untranslatable” in the Showing or Interactive Modes.

The theatrical stage as a site for metaphor challenges adapters to embody traditionally literary devices. While theatre utilizes spoken text which allows actors to simply speak a metaphor in words, the showing elements of theatre provide additional opportunity for metaphor to move beyond words into physical images. Not all writers or adapters recognize the showing mode as an opportunity to extend metaphor beyond text, instead seeing the resources of the English language diminished to a series of
images. In contrast, Zimmerman often utilizes metaphor in her staging to figuratively depict transformations which cannot occur literally on the stage; sequences of elaborate choreography or sometimes simple gestures function as metaphors on the stage. In the next chapter, I will investigate in more detail Zimmerman’s figurative staging techniques which render metaphor in the showing mode.

Hutcheon points out musical modes of theatre which utilize music to symbolic ends. Musical motifs established for one character may transfer to another character, aurally depicting a symbolic shift in a character. Showing modes like film and theatre can juxtapose visual images to draw metaphoric connections. For example, a film version of *Romeo and Juliet* may present the image of Juliet on a balcony gazing at her Romeo, followed by the image of a budding rose covered in dew to depict the symbolic relationship of the young lovers: sensual, budding, yet thorny and complicated. Zimmerman’s theatrical adaptation directly addresses the showing mode’s capabilities regarding symbol and metaphor. The shape-shifting transformations of *Metamorphoses* cannot be physically rendered realistically in live space before the audience, necessitating a symbolic transformation rather than a literal one. In the next chapter, I will investigate more closely Zimmerman’s staging of various myths which incorporate symbolic transformations, including the stories of Alcyone and Ceyx and Narcissus. Furthermore, the set for the original Broadway production of *Metamorphoses* functions metaphorically, and in the next chapter I will highlight the ways in which the stage itself functions symbolically to represent Ovid’s overarching theme of transformation.

Linda Hutcheon establishes her cliches as a way of dismantling preexisting notions which she sees as unnecessarily limiting the discourse of adaptation studies.
The work of theatrical practitioners like Mary Zimmerman can support Hutcheon in her endeavor to broaden the scope of adaptation studies. In the next chapter I will utilize specific examples from Zimmerman’s adaptation of *Metamorphoses* to clarify and support Hutcheon’s cliches. Additionally, I apply them to Zimmerman’s adaptation to show how application of the cliches to a specific work of art reinforces Hutcheon’s revisioning of adaptation.
CHAPTER THREE: METAMORPHOSES AND THEATRICAL ADAPTATION

Up to now I have set up two frames of reference. First, I looked at adaptation studies writ large and examined four facets of adaptation: context, retelling, fidelity, and medium shifts. Linda Hutcheon’s modes of engagement provided another framework for analyzing adaptation. Here, I will borrow Hutcheon’s four clichés as a methodology for analyzing Mary Zimmerman’s stage adaptation in depth. As I investigate the theatrical nature of the adaptation I will utilize terminology drawn from my first chapter in order to illuminate Metamorphoses as an intersection among myth, adaptation, and theatre.

As I begin to look into Zimmerman’s transition from Ovid’s telling to a theatrical hybrid of telling and showing, I present David Batchelor’s words on color to frame the challenges of telling and showing. Referring to the inadequacy of words in the face of describing the experience of color, Batchelor turns to gesture and body:

“We point, sample, and show rather than say. And in our pointing, sampling, and showing we make comparisons. In doing this, we call for the help of something outside ourselves and outside of language, and in the process we expose the limits of our words...In a world dominated by the power of language, we often underestimate the significance of showing. And equally, we underestimate how often we resort to pointing. It has been argued that all attempts to explain something verbally will end up, at some point, with an index finger” (85).
As I investigate the cliches of Hutcheon through Zimmerman’s adaptation, I hope to broaden adaptation studies to include both the word on the page and the pointing finger.

Zimmerman is engaged in creating theatrical performances which merge the written word and theatrical “finger pointing”; the transformation of literary works into stage plays forms the backbone of her artistic practice. As such, Zimmerman is directly engaged in the adaptation of literary works into the medium of theatre. *Metamorphoses*, for which she won the 2002 Tony award for best direction, is one of a long line of theatrically adapted literary works; some of her previous successes include *The Arabian Nights* (1992), *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (1993), *Journey to the West* (1995), *The Odyssey* (1999), and *Eleven Rooms of Proust* (2000). The Tony award affirms Zimmerman’s increasing recognition in the New York theatre landscape, though the Chicago theatre scene in which Zimmerman has flourished has long recognized her innovative storytelling. “I’d have to say that it was clear to me she had exceptional gifts from the very beginning,” says Frank Galati, who taught Zimmerman at Northwestern. “She just happens to have made the acquaintance of the public very gradually” (Jones, 20).

A brief examination of Zimmerman’s background may provide some insight as to why her theatrical practice is so rooted in adaptation. Zimmerman’s career at Northwestern began with her enrollment as a comparative literature major and then later as an acting major. She stayed on to get her doctorate from the department of performance studies. “That department had been famous for its pioneering work in the adaptation of nondramatic sources for the stage,” relates critic Chris Jones. “Pioneered by Robert Breen and later continued by his student, Galati, story-theatre at
Northwestern had developed first as a pedagogical technique designed to aid with the teaching of literature” (22). Galati’s increasing renown and influence re-directed the program’s focus to looking beyond scripted plays for inspiration, a refocusing which carried Zimmerman along in its wake. Of her teacher, Zimmerman says, “We all came out of Frank Galati’s overcoat. He talked about how the standard impulse, when faced with a work of literature, is to hide the fact that it isn’t a play. He taught us how to keep the telling there as well as the showing” (Jones, 22).

Galati’s influence on Zimmerman derives from Robert Breen’s pioneering work in staging literary texts at Northwestern University. To actualize the performance of literary works on the stage, Breen inaugurated a kind of theatre called Chamber Theatre. The aim of Chamber Theatre was to theatrically present narrative fiction using all of the devices of the stage without sacrificing the literary elements of the text. Breen says that, “Like chamber music, which explores in intimate fashion the character and quality of a few instruments in harmonic relationships, Chamber Theatre explores the relationships among characters in a narrative context provided by the narrator’s intimate association with the audience” (4). The episodes Zimmerman staged in Metamorphoses exemplify the chamber music metaphor Breen employs in describing Chamber Theatre; each of Zimmerman’s episodes explores the relationship between a small number of characters through utilizing onstage narration. Breen continues, “Chamber Theatre is not interested in the problems of transforming fiction into drama; it resists the temptation to delete narrative descriptions and rewrite summaries as dialogue. No effort is made in Chamber Theatre to eliminate the narrative point of view which characterizes fiction; indeed, the storyteller’s angle of vision is emphasized through physical representation on the
stage” (4). Zimmerman employs onstage narrators in her adaptation of *Metamorphoses* in a move representative of Chamber Theatre. The actors in Zimmerman’s play serve simultaneously as narrators and characters, fluidly shifting from one to the other, as in this dialogue from the play’s Alcyone and Ceyx episode:

NARRATOR: She gazed still at the empty and desolate blue
and then went to her empty bedroom to lie on the huge and vacant bed
and give herself over to weeping.

CEYX: The vessel cleared the harbor and caught the freshening wind,
which set the rigging to singing and slapping against the spars.
I ordered the rowers to ship their oars and the sailors
to set the yards and make sail. Our ship ran before the wind. We made
satisfactory progress all that day and had reached
a point of no return, with as much blue water astern
as remained ahead.

NARRATOR: But as the sun was sinking in the West, the water,
everywhere blue until now, began to be flecked
with the whitecapped waves sailors dislike (22).

This passage retains the literary presence of a narrator who addresses the audience and describes the departure of Ceyx. Further, Ceyx, the subject of the narration, addresses the audience and takes over the narration of his own story, retaining the literary past tense and even using the genitive case in regard to his own story.
When adapting literature to the stage, it is important to identify the mode and genre of literature which one is adapting; the mode and genre of literature can suggest which vehicle may be most apt for adaptation. In order to clarify a work of literature’s mode and genre, one may return to Aristotle’s classical definitions. Aristotle suggested three modes of literature: the lyric, epic, and dramatic modes. In the lyric mode, the author stands in the most open relationship to the reader or audience, sharing personal feelings and thoughts directly. Next, the epic mode features an author speaking directly to the audience sometimes and at other times speaking through characters in dialogue. The author in the epic mode tells a story rather than sharing personal thoughts and feelings, even when speaking directly to the audience. Finally, the dramatic mode features an author who speaks through seemingly autonomous characters with thoughts and feelings entirely their own.

Performance studies scholars Marion Kleinau and Janet McHughes take Aristotle’s modal definitions and update them. Because in contemporary criticism the author can be separated from the literary or fictitious speaker and because, they suggest the following guidelines for the performance of literature: In the lyric mode a *speaker* stands in the more direct relationship to the audience or readers. In the epic mode, a *narrator* tells a story by sometimes speaking directly to the audience and sometimes through characters who speak for themselves. In the dramatic mode, *characters* speak to each other. The epic mode combines both the lyric and dramatic modes. Theatre utilizes an understanding of literary modes in order to shape a theatrical script and its staging (11).
Zimmerman’s work has been classified as Reader’s Theatre, though the distinction of literary modes places her work within the sphere of Chamber Theatre. While related, Readers Theatre and Chamber Theatre differ in that they operate through different modes of literature. Kleinau and McHughes define Chamber Theatre as the actualizing of presentational form in the epic mode, featuring a narrator who addresses the audience directly, often in past tense, with regard to the onstage action, whereas Reader’s Theatre does not utilize a narrator and actualizes presentational form in the lyric and dramatic modes (13). “Chamber Theatre is concerned primarily with the relationship between the narrator and the story she is telling. The narrator serves as liaison between the audience and the characters in the story, overtly controlling the flow of the action. The narrator presents the story through a combination of dramatic showing (when characters sometimes contact the audience through presentational gestures and sometimes use representational action on stage) and lyric telling (when the narrator is always in a presentational confrontation with the audience)” (Kleinau & McHughes, 13).

Leslie Coger and Melvin White affirm the epic mode as integral to the definition of Chamber Theatre: “It leaves in the narration, description, explanations, as well as dialogue, and it retains the past tense if that is how the original was written. It features the role of the narrator; thus those stories in which the narrator has a major role or is psychologically close to the protagonist are most often used” (50). Furthermore, characters in Chamber Theatre use onstage focus and speak directly to each other, where the narrator addresses the audience directly and uses onstage focus as needed when she participates in a scene. With the grounding of Zimmerman’s theatrical
practice in Chamber Theatre, we may now examine the ways in which her application of
Chamber Theatre techniques serves to explode open Hutcheon’s cliches.

Cliche #1: Only the Telling Mode (Especially Prose Fiction) Has the Flexibility to
Render Both Intimacy and Distance in Point of View

Theatre combines intimacy and distance, intersecting the fixed perspective of the
audience with the live presence of shared physical space. Where the telling mode can
allow a reader or listener to “get inside” the head of a character, the showing mode of
theatre prevents internal access to a character. An audience cannot typically see what a
character sees. This is not true of all showing modes; film can allow access into the
perspective of a character through the mediating eye of the camera. Theatrical
audiences remain distant in a way that film audiences do not. However, because live
theatre allows audiences to share space with the performers embodying a story,
intimacy is achieved at a visceral, bodily level.

Within the showing mode, audiences engage with storytelling in different ways;
theatrical showing offers multiple possibilities for reception. Realistic theatrical
productions, for example, do not explicitly acknowledge the presence of the audience,
while other theatrical performances allow for interaction between performer and
audience. Zimmerman’s adaptation of Metamorphoses utilizes a theatrical model that
both shows and tells in full recognition of the audience.

Mary Zimmerman’s work emerges from the performance genre of Chamber
Theatre, a model of theatre featuring performers directly addressing the audience. As
actors address the audience and break down the traditionally realistic “fourth wall”, they foreground the act of storytelling. Chamber Theatre also features a heightened level of embodiment, as evidenced by Zimmerman’s play. She combines Hutcheon’s telling and showing modes into a synthesized unit. Dialogue in the play may occur only between characters as in traditionally realistic theatre, eschewing the direct address to the audience. Additionally, episodes of the play feature physically sculpted images bordering on dance. Both the episodes of Alcyone and Ceyx as well as Myrrha incorporate the bodies of performers in storytelling: the transformation of lovers into birds and the incestuous coupling of father and daughter are communicated through stylized movement rather than literal showing or literal telling.

Zimmerman’s synthesis of telling and showing relies on both spoken word and embodied stage images. Her intentions for this relationship are revealed in the opening notes of her script where she states, “Although there is a great deal of narration in the play, it should not be taken as a substitute for action or superfluous description of action: The staging should rarely be a literal embodiment of the text; rather, it should provide images that amplify the text, lend it poetic resonance, or, even, sometimes contradict it” (3). Both telling and showing are honored in Zimmerman’s words; she encourages directors to utilize both to full potential. Telling and showing in harmony and counterpoint resonate poetically and spark fruitful dissonances.

An example from Zimmerman’s Metamorphoses encapsulates the potential of Chamber Theatre, illuminating the possibilities of intersected showing and telling. The episode of Phaeton is told through a therapy session. As the scene opens, we see a youth wearing a bathing suit and sunglasses bring a yellow raft into the pool and lie on
it. The therapist to whom he speaks enters with him and sits in a chair on the deck bordering the pool. Throughout this scene, Phaeton recounts his story to the therapist. The therapist never responds to Phaeton but instead speaks only to the audience, interpreting Phaeton’s story for us in contemporary psychological terminology and prompting us with reflective questions. In the stage directions for the episode, Zimmerman states that Phaeton “does not exactly hear the therapist when she speaks to the audience, or perhaps he just isn’t paying attention” (64).

As Phaeton tells his story, he recounts his discovery that Apollo is his father. At this point in the scene, Apollo enters and places a podium upstage. He exists only in Phaeton’s imagination. Underneath his son’s dialogue he sings “Un’ Aura Amorosa” from Cosi Fan Tutti in Italian. Occasionally, when Phaeton quotes him, Apollo momentarily sings an echo of the quote in English, never breaking the melodic line and returning quickly to his Italian aria to great comedic effect. Phaeton pauses only slightly in his text to allow this to happen; he neither sees his father nor acknowledges him. Phaeton’s therapy session concludes, and once he has exited, the therapist turns to the audience one last time and summarizes for us the importance of myth as a way to reflect upon and understand our own actions.

The Phaeton episode illuminates the multiple frames characteristic of Zimmerman’s employment of Chamber Theatre techniques. The therapist in the scene only addresses the audience, Phaeton speaks only to the therapist, and Apollo exists only in the mind of Phaeton. Three frames are nested within each other. The position of the audience is a privileged one in this episode because only the audience experiences
all three frames simultaneously; the figures on the stage are not always aware of each other. Some, like Apollo and the therapist, are never aware of each other.

The multiple frames achieved by Zimmerman in the Phaeton episode are made possible by its theatrical medium. The perspectives of the therapist, Phaeton, and Apollo can be shown simultaneously as a result of theatre’s intersected showing and telling modes of engagement. Phaeton’s episode in the telling mode alone could focus through only one perspective at a time; reading comprehension demands one viewpoint at a time. The showing mode of theatre, in contrast, lets the audience float freely among all three perspectives on the stage.

Traveling among the therapist, Phaeton, and Apollo on the stage requires a level of detachment from the audience. One may “zoom in” on Phaeton and imagine his story unfolding as he tells it to the therapist. Equally, one may “zoom out” and travel to Apollo to listen to his lofty melodic strains while his son buzzes on in the background. Zimmerman’s use of multiple images on the stage allows for dynamic movement among those images, and her model of Chamber Theatre allows intimacy and distance to be rendered simultaneously.

Cliche #2: Interiority is the Terrain of the Telling Mode; Exteriority is Best Handled by Showing and Especially by Interactive Modes

Theatre’s grounding in embodiment challenges adapters attempting to render the inner lives of characters on the stage; where novels can delve into the minds of characters and describe thoughts which remain unspoken, theatre expresses outwardly
through body, gesture, and voice. Zimmerman’s staging of the dramatic story of Alcyone and Ceyx illuminates the way in which intense feelings experienced subjectively and internally can find expression in a showing mode frequently associated with exteriority. The tragic love story exemplifies the showing mode’s capabilities for internal subjectivity with passages of intense emotional gravitas as well as high-soaring beauty written on the body.

Alcyone and Ceyx

The episode begins with the lovers arguing about Ceyx’s departure. His lover, Alcyone, begs him not to go, fearing that the sea is a dangerous and deadly place. She has good cause to fear, for her uncle is Aeolus, ruler of the winds. She has seen firsthand the devastation her uncle’s raging winds can cause, and a premonition has warned Alcyone that her lover will meet his doom on the stormy waters if he embarks on his journey. Not to be swayed, Ceyx sets forth.

Once Ceyx decides to embark, a group of actors dressed as sailors enter the stage carrying oars. A narrator relates to the audience the events surrounding Ceyx’s departure while the performers silently embody the action. The sailors take their place at the edge of the pool, placing their oars into the water and in unison, rowing in slow motion. As they do, in Zimmerman’s staging another actor enters and places a miniature Greek sailing ship on a string into the water at Alcyone’s feet. While the narrator tells the audience of the lovers’ parting, an actors slowly pulls the boat away from Alcyone. The usage of the miniature boat is not indicated in the script.
Ceyx addresses the audience, reporting the progress of his journey. As he finishes, another narrator takes over and heralds a change of fortune as Poseidon enters the stage and initiates a dreadful storm. The narrator describes the action of the storm while holding the miniature ship. As the narrator tells the audience of the storm’s progress, he/she mimes the ship’s rocking and rolling over huge waves. Simultaneously, the sailors on the edge of the stage move into slow motion and roll around the deck bordering the pool as if they were being tossed by the sea. Ceyx alone enters the pool and engages in a battle with Poseidon. The god wrestles with Ceyx as he continues to narrate his own story to the audience through the combat, occasionally joined in storytelling by one of his fellow sailors.

Finally, Poseidon conquers the ship and drowns the small band of sailors onboard. As a narrator announces the death of Ceyx, one by one the sailors rise and are lead out by Hermes for their passage into the underworld. Ceyx, the last, calls out a final plea to the gods that his beloved may find his body on the shore and prepare it for burial. With that, he sinks beneath the water.

Frequent use of slow motion in this episode renders gravity and intensity. The argument between the lovers at the opening of the scene announces foreboding and doom, shaping the rest of the scene to follow. Zimmerman’s staging renders the characters’ feelings of dread through changes in speed; as the action on the stage intensifies, the actors move in slow motion. For example, when Alcyone watches her lover sail off into the distance, despite her words of warning, we see her standing on the shore waving in slow motion as Ceyx’s ship disappears over the horizon.
Music in the Alcyone and Ceyx episode both underscores and provides a transition into the next episode. Music underscores the scene from the parting of the lovers on the shore until the death of Ceyx. It returns for a brief moment as the narrator describes Alcyone’s discovery of her dead lover’s body, ceasing dramatically at the moment of her realization that it is her lover she has found. As the episode ends, actors utilize music in a different way. Where music served to underscore the action of the episode in an emotionally heightened manner, the transitional music is sung by the actors prepping the space for the next episode. It is music heard by the bodies making it, whereas the underscored music is not “heard” by the performers. Presenting music both heard and unheard by the performers on the stage can move the audience between interiority and exteriority; music unheard by performers gives the audience a sense of the inner life of the characters, where music that the characters “hear” focuses on their external, shared experience. Zimmerman utilizes a variety of theatrical techniques to convey both interiority and exteriority on the stage, including narrators, changes in the style and rate of movement, and music.

Cliche #3: The Showing and Interacting Modes Have Only One Tense: The Present; The Mode of Telling Alone can Show Relations among Past, Present, and Future

Working around the temporal constraints of the theatrical medium, Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses* nests multiple time frames within the primordial container of myth. Zimmerman follows Ovid and begins her play with the creation of the cosmos. This
opening image, adapted in the play as a scientist narrating the creation, grounds the play in a cosmology of origins, situating the audience in the depths of the past. Beginning with the Creation frames the transformations occurring on the stage as intuitive explanations of the present.

The episode of Philemon and Baucis which closes the play encompasses a spectrum of time that extends across a lifetime in a matter of minutes. It transports the audience deep into the past, leads them through the lives of a devoted husband and wife, speaks to the present, and then transports the audience into the future.

**Philemon and Baucis**

The final episode of *Metamorphoses* is announced as a coda, a late tale of transformation born out of charity, goodness, and love. The gods Zeus and Hermes descend to earth to evaluate the goodness of mankind. They disguise themselves as paupers, but at every turn they are shunned and turned away when they ask for charity. When they encounter the couple Philemon and Baucis, the gods are finally offered charity and hospitality. The couple’s home is meager and they have little to share, but what they possess is offered to the gods willingly. As a reward, the gods decide to grant Philemon and Baucis any wish they choose. After deliberation, the couple decide that what they want most of all is to die at the same moment. Their love for each other is so great, they would not want to endure the pain of parting. The gods grant their wish, and at the moment of death, Philemon and Baucis become trees.

Though live theatre takes place in the present and can only do so, multiple time frames can occur simultaneously and quickly. The episode of Philemon and Baucis
shows the passage of a lifetime by a simple turn of the body. The slow turning and shaping of the bodies metaphorically reflects the slow turning of time: the couple slowly face each other and end their lives by “becoming” trees through a stylized posture. The representation of the passage through stylized movement is not indicated in the script, merely through narration:

Zeus: And Baucis noticed her husband was beginning to put forth leaves, and he saw that she, too, was producing leaves and bark. They were turning into trees. They stood there, held each other, and called, before the bark closed over their mouths,

PHILEMON AND BAUCIS: Farewell (82).

One of the narrators addresses the audience and tells how even today, the lovers can still be heard whispering to each other as the wind in the leaves. The connection of time passing with bodily movement is a figurative technique that not only addresses the third cliche but also leads directly to Hutcheon’s final cliche.

**Cliche #4: Only Telling (in Languages) Can Do Justice to Such Elements as Ambiguity, Irony, Symbols, Metaphors, Silences, and Absences; These Remain “Untranslatable” in the Showing or Interactive Modes.**

The many transformations in Zimmerman’s adaptation challenge the showing mode’s physical limitations. Ovid’s poem can easily describe transformations and allow
the reader’s imagination to envisage them. However, when Zimmerman adapted the story from a telling mode to a showing mode, theatrical tools were required. The showing mode of theatre calls upon the imagination differently than telling; showing curbs the imagination’s limitless capacity with the presence of live bodies.

The telling aspects of Zimmerman’s Chamber Theatre model facilitate the story’s transformations. Actors performing Alcyone and Ceyx could not literally become birds as they could in a film, so they had to figuratively become birds:

LUCINA: The gods are not altogether unkind. Some prayers are answered.

ALCYONE: Ceyx, is this how you return to me?

LUCINA: She began to run to him; but as she ran, crying, a strange thing happened.

[ALCYONE moves slowly toward CEYX, transforming. The sound of waves and seabirds crying comes up.]

By the time she reached him, she was a bird. She tried to kiss him with her bill, and by some trick of the ocean’s heaving, it seemed that his head reached up to hers in response. You ask, How could he have felt her kiss?

APHRODITE: But better ask, How could the gods not have felt it? Seen this, and not had compassion?

LUCINA: For the dead body was changing, restored to life, and renewed as another seabird (31).
The embodiment of the transformation onstage remains open to the discretion of the director. However, the transformation occurs through simultaneous showing and telling; audience members may imagine the transformation suggested by the performers’ movement on the stage.

Irene Alby’s 2012 production of *Metamorphoses* at the University of Toledo contrasts with Zimmerman’s stagings in New York and Chicago through the addition of bird puppets in this scene. The text remains intact, and the performers playing Alcyone and Ceyx accomplish the transformation through stylized, graceful arm movements, replicating the movement of birds’ wings. As music underscores the change and the actors move upstage through the pool, another small group of actors emerge with two bird puppets and traverse the downstage edge of the pool. Alby’s production both tells and shows the transformation, but then goes one step further to show the embodiment of birds with puppets. Alby provides not one but two imaginative methods for accomplishing the transformation indicated in the script.

This methodology for showing metaphor on stage and embodying it figuratively happens with the simultaneous showing and telling evidenced in the Alcyone and Ceyx episode. However, it can also happen in a showing-only mode as it does in Zimmerman’s staging of the Narcissus myth, where the metaphorical transformation of the beautiful young man into a flower occurs through embodiment alone.

**Narcissus Transition**

After the Orpheus and Eurydice episode, the following stage directions appear in the script:
[Music. Everyone leaves the stage. In the silence that follows, two
performers enter. One begins to mop the deck; the other (NARCISSUS)
moves to strike the music stand from the water. But as he starts to exit, he
catches sight of his reflection in the pool. It arrests him. He leans down to
it. He becomes still. The other performer finishes mopping and notices the
stillness of her companion. She tries to move him, but he is paralyzed.
She looks offstage impatiently. A third performer enters, carrying a potted
narcissus. He hands the plant to the first performer. In one motion, he lifts
the second performer, and the first performer fills the newly empty position
with the plant. Everyone leaves, the third performer carrying the second,

Narcissus has metaphorically “become” a flower through the presentation of sequential
stage images; the showing mode’s reliance on embodiment can yet offer the possibility
of performing metaphor in the absence of text.

The set design for the play can itself be seen as a giant metaphor. The
atmosphere of Metamorphoses conveys a timeless quality which extends back to its
origins in Greek myth and beyond. The elemental set design by Dan Ostling for the
original Broadway production as well as the Chicago revival features a 27-foot-wide
pool of water in which the actors transform; upstage right is a 1920s-style brownstone
doors and next to that a scrim with projections of shifting sky. New York Times critic Ben
Brantley described the set as having “the dislocating timelessness of a Magritte
painting” which recalls the “enchantment of Jean Cocteau’s fantasy films” (How Ovid
Miriam Chirico of Eastern Connecticut State University notes Brantley’s suggestion of early pioneers of the unconscious: “His nod to two key surrealist artists who dealt in Freudian allusions clearly indicates a set designed to tap into the audience’s primal selves” (157). Expanding on the set design’s elemental depth, Chirico goes on to state that “the properties upon the stage, though deliberately ambiguous in their denotations, work together to suggest the deep realms of the human psyche; the set design is allusive enough to be open to many interpretations and primes the audience to move away from the contingent and toward the sacred” (157). The many interpretations inspired by the set design evidence the power of metaphor on the stage, proving that metaphor is not a literary device which operates in the telling mode alone; onstage as well as on the page, metaphor opens to alternative possibilities rather than focusing on what is given. Ostling’s set design for the original Broadway production functions metaphorically to encourage imaginative reflection that leads audience members into deeper psychological waters.

Zimmerman’s script states that the stage is entirely occupied by a square or rectangular pool of water, bordered on all four sides by a wooden deck approximately three feet wide. Upstage is a large painting of the sky, above which the gods and goddesses “might” appear. Also upstage is a tall double door with steps leading to it from the deck. Zimmerman suggests six entrances to the playing space: one on each of the deck’s four corners, one through the doors, and one between the doors and sky. There is also a platform for the actors behind the sky, with its own entrance and exit. The set can function either in proscenium or in thrust theaters, but Zimmerman states
that it is essential that the audience look down at the playing space in such a way that
the entire surface of the water is visible.

The water in Zimmerman’s staging does a number of things. It serves as an all-
embracing metaphor for the theme of the play: transformation. As water takes the
shape of whatever container holds it, the water in Zimmerman’s play, becomes many
things as required: a laundresses’ stream, food, the sea, and more. Because water
functions as a metaphor for transformation, it becomes the site of the transformations of
the play. Characters undergoing metamorphoses do so in the pool. The gods, as the
causes of change, do not enter the water, save Poseidon who is himself the god of
water.

Zimmerman utilizes the levels on the stage figuratively as well. The gods alone
appear on the “sky level” of the set. Their immersion in sky and cloud plays on the
notion of divinity as high, lofty, and omnipotent. They do not descend into the water, for
they do not change; only mortal beings who are capable of change enter the pool. In
summary, the use of vertical levels on the stage combined with the pool of water as the
site of transformation serve to figuratively contrast the philosophical constants of Being,
represented by the unchanging deities who literally, save for Poseidon, remain “above it
all”, and Becoming, represented by the transformations of the humans, which take place
in the pool.

The costuming choices for the deities, rendered by Mara Blumenfeld for both the
original Broadway production and the Chicago revival, function symbolically and
exemplify a traditionally literary convention embodied in the showing mode; each of the
gods wear a headpiece constructed of a symbolic representation of the deity. For
example, Ceres wears crown of wheat, Sleep wears a hat of bobbing “Z’s”, Dionysos wears golden grape leaves, and Aphrodite wears a wreath of red roses.

The costuming of Aphrodite in the play’s 2012 Chicago revival summons the element of context as her corset is anachronistic to the mythic figure’s Greek or Roman context. The corset is also anachronistic to the historical moment of the play’s production. The corset alone sets the audience adrift in a sea of historical contexts, highlighting the multi-contextual freedom of myth in its wanton borrowing and sampling. The symbols utilized for the deities can be seen as both ancient and modern, and important to the adaptation of myth is the *synthesis* of contextual elements that allows myth and audience to meet in a middle space of relevance and meaning. In Zimmerman’s adaptation, the theatre is that middle space.

While all of the metaphoric applications contained in Zimmerman’s adaptation are re-visioned for the stage, not all of them openly announce themselves as adaptations. Only one episode unlocks the hermetic back and forth conversation peculiar to adaptation. The story of Orpheus and Eurydice openly announces itself as an adaptation and therefore functions uniquely in Zimmerman’s play, even as it “shows” the power of silence and absence mentioned in Hutcheon’s fourth cliche.

**Orpheus and Eurydice**

A narrator addresses the audience and calls attention to the tragic tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. We see the couple enter the stage in wedding attire, but as they move toward each other, a hissing snake is heard and Eurydice stumbles, bitten. The wedding becomes a funeral, and another narrator enters the pool with a music stand
and announces “Orpheus and Eurydice: Number One: Ovid, A.D. 8.” As the narrator speaks, the Underworld materializes. Hades and Persephone, wearing red devil horns, take their place, along with Sisyphus, the Fates, and others. The sound of jackhammers and chisels is heard along with music as Orpheus enters the pool. As he stands before the rulers of the Underworld, a rain shower begins and falls only on Orpheus. The bereaved lover pleads his case and, as the shower ends, Hades grants his wish, provided Orpheus does not look back until he has left the Underworld. The journey out of the Underworld commences as Orpheus moves Eurydice around the pool; Eurydice, with Hermes in tow, follows so silently that Orpheus questions her presence:

NARRATOR ONE: A long way they traveled, almost all the way. But you know what happened: Concerned for her, or not quite believing that it wasn’t a cruel delusion, a dream, or a mirage, he turned.

[ORPHEUS turns around; as he does, HERMES lifts EURYDICE and pulls her away as she and ORPHEUS reach for each other.]

EURYDICE: Farewell.

NARRATOR ONE: That was his last sight of her. But he saw it again and again.

[ORPHEUS, EURYDICE, and HERMES reassemble in their original positions. They walk forward, ORPHEUS turns around; as he does, HERMES lifts EURYDICE and pulls her away as she and ORPHEUS reach for each other] (43).
The actors recreate the moment of Orpheus’ loss five times, and with each recreation of the moment, the narrator poses different questions as to the story’s meaning. Zimmerman’s staging of the Orpheus episode encapsulates the enigmatic quality of myths, leading Chirico to reflect that, “the question-and-response process used to dramatize this mythic tale underscores the hermeneutic nature of reading any myth. The question always persists: what truths does this myth reveal?” (174). Zimmerman provides no answers, prompting audience members to do so instead; because of the repeated questioning with each reiteration of the action, the tragic ending of the scene resonates with a deep ambiguity that supports Hutcheon’s deconstruction of her fourth cliche.

However, the tale is not over. At this time, another narrator enters with another music stand and places it in the pool. This version of the myth is announced as “Orpheus and Eurydice Number Two. Rainer Maria Rilke, A.D. 1908.” This telling of the story uses the same actors, but it is much different from the first. The “dialogue” is the poetry of Rilke, and the new narrator, Orpheus, Eurydice, and Hermes take turns speaking different segments of the poem. The stage action is simply a slow walk around the pool, almost slow-motion and trance-like to mirror the hypnotic and deeply reflective poetry. The action of the sequence is that of the first, ending with the fateful glance. Rilke’s rendering, however, is not the agonizing tale of loss; Eurydice has entered a new state of being and has forgotten her former life and loves.

EURYDICE: She was deep within herself, like a woman heavy with child, and did not see the man in front
or the path ascending steeply into life.

Deep within herself. Being dead
filled her beyond fulfillment.

. . .

HERMES: She had come into a new virginity
and was untouchable; her sex had closed
like a young flower at nightfall, and her hands
had grown so unused to things that the god’s
infinitely gentle touch of guidance
hurt her, like an undesired kiss.

. . .

[ORPHEUS *slowly turns to look at her.*]

NARRATOR TWO: And when, abruptly,
the god put out his hand to stop her, saying,
with sorrow in his voice:

HERMES: He has turned around -

NARRATOR TWO: she could not understand, and softly answered,


Instead of the repeated lift to symbolize endless grief, Eurydice simply turns away and
walks offstage, back to her Underworld shadow-life. The poem ends, and the scene is
over.
Zimmerman’s inclusion of both Ovid’s and Rilke’s interpretation of Orpheus and Eurydice foregrounds the adaptive process by providing two poetic interpretations of the same Greek myth. The mythic revision depicted in this scene situates Zimmerman in a long line of mythic adapters. “I openhandedly admit that we are doing a version steeped in our own culture. These are texts that have been done in so many different forms that it’s as though I’m joining a chorus [of interpreters],” states Zimmerman. “These are texts that belong to the world. I don’t own them. Apart from being intimidated by the baggage these texts carry, I feel the humility of just another person stepping into the giant stream of people telling these tales” (quoted in Chirico, 168).

While Rilke’s rendition draws on the source text of traditional Greek myth, it tells a new story by shifting the perspective to Eurydice’s experience in death. Adding to the textual aspects of adaptation, the two retellings depict adaptation in action; actors embody the story in two different ways, one “traditional,” one non-traditional. In the first rendition guided by Ovid’s familiar telling of the tale, the actors on stage follow a traditional embodiment of the myth. Even the balletic lift that represents Eurydice’s disappearance draws on traditional ballet choreography, drawing on the symbology of pas de deux dancing between romantic lovers. The embodiment of Rilke’s shadowy poem reflects the bloodlessness of shades in Hades: no passion, no Orpheus weeping in a rainstorm on stage, no romantic ballet lifts; only a simple walk around the stage. The audience sees the same story in markedly different ways; the story is the same, yet it is different. The episode of Orpheus and Eurydice embodies the elements of Hutcheon’s fourth cliche, poignantly embodying silence and absence, metaphor and
symbol as visual proof that it is not only the telling mode which can do justice to the elements voiced by Hutcheon.

Linda Hutcheon, formulates the appeal of adaptations, asserting that they are not copies in the sense of reproduction, mechanical or otherwise. Instead, an adaptation is “repetition but without replication, bringing together the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty. As an adaptation, it involves both memory and change, persistence and variation” (173). Important to the appeal of adaptations in Hutcheon’s theorizing is the recognition of adaptations as adaptations; announced adaptations open the doorway to the pleasure of experiencing the combination of continuity with surprise and novelty. Zimmerman’s episodes of Orpheus and Eurydice openly announce themselves as adaptations, with actors literally labeling the episodes “Orpheus and Eurydice Number One,” and “Orpheus and Eurydice Number Two”. By drawing the audience’s attention to the adaptation of myth, Zimmerman brings to life on the stage what Hutcheon frames as the appeal of adaptations: repetition without replication. Because Zimmerman includes both the authors and the dates of their works as well, she emphasizes the timelessness of the myth depicted on the stage.

Zimmerman foregrounds retelling in her adaptation by literally retelling the story on the stage. Through embodying the words of two poets on the stage, the director-adapter shows adaptation in action, highlighting the differences inherent in any retelling. Through telling and retelling a single myth on the stage, Zimmerman embraces both sameness and difference. Through her choices of text and staging, she invites the audience to embrace the variations on the Orpheus story as she urges us to question what the “true” story of Orpheus may be. Retelling the story prompts the audience to
notice differences, but more importantly it destabilizes the notion of fidelity by contrasting two retellings of the story in alternative contexts.

Through presenting a doubled story on the stage, Zimmerman immerses the audience in double vision and evokes the rich questions that emerge from comparison. The Orpheus episode in Zimmerman’s adaptation uniquely stands out most starkly as “adaptive.” Through presenting a doubled story, Zimmerman’s adaptation challenges fidelity by preventing the authority granted by singularity. The other mythic episodes gain a tacit authority through single-telling; when Orpheus is doubled, that power is divided so that not one but both are valid.

Through this investigation I have been examining Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses* as an intersection between theatre and adaptation. Nowhere in the play is this intersection more evident than in the Orpheus and Eurydice episode. Because it openly announces itself as an adaptation, the scene uniquely and most explicitly embodies the meeting place of theatre and adaptation. Through the vehicle of a myth, Zimmerman actualized the theatrical potentials of adaptation. Through showing adaptation on the stage, Zimmerman foregrounds the adaptive nature of myth and calls the audience’s attention to the act of adaptation.

Applying Linda Hutcheon’s modes of engagement as a methodology for illuminating the adaptive elements in Mary Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses* supports Hutcheon’s revisioning of adaptation. Additionally, Zimmerman’s theatrical example stands out as an instance of adaptation which assists in problematizing assumptions Hutcheon has framed in terms of her cliches. As Hutcheon explodes open adaptation studies with
modes of engagement, greater possibilities beyond my case study emerge which mutually redefine the practices and products of theatrical adaptations.
CONCLUSION: THEATRE AND ADAPTATION STUDIES

What I have been exploring through this investigation is the intersection of theatre and adaptation. Having started with a broad scope of adaptation studies in which I set up a vocabulary for adaptation, I moved then to Linda Hutcheon’s framework which allowed me to utilize her modes of engagement as a methodology for illuminating the theatrical adaptation of Mary Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses*. Through the lens of Hutcheon’s four cliches and the adaptive cornerstones of context, retelling, medium specificity, and fidelity, I created a framework for analyzing a theatrical adaptation. What emerges from the intersection of adaptation and *Metamorphoses*, and what does this mean for theatre and adaptation studies writ large?

Returning to the moment of the play’s 2001 premiere at the Second Stage Theater in New York City provides a place of beginning as it encompasses my vocabulary of context, retelling, fidelity, and medium specificity. To help illuminate Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses* as an intersection of these four facets, I draw on Miriam M. Chirico’s essay entitled, “Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses*: Mythic Revision as a Ritual for Grief.” The historical context of the play’s premier at the Second Stage Theater took on horrifying resonance as the destruction of the World Trade Center just a month earlier continued to reverberate through New York City. Audiences still stunned from the catastrophic acts of terrorism filled the seats of the theatre to watch an evening of mythic tales of death, loss, and transformation. The timing of the play’s opening had Zimmerman anxious and apprehensive: “When we had our first audience, I was
trembling - I mean shaking, really hard, because we were about to present these stories that had such resonance, that were full of sudden violence and transformation...I thought, ‘I don’t know who’s here or what their proximity to the [September 11] event is - and they don’t know what we’re about to drag them through’ (quoted in Chirico, 151).

Zimmerman was justified in her apprehension, for the audiences viewing those initial performances of *Metamorphoses* were indeed wracked with confusion and grief. Said Ben Brantley of *The New York Times*, “It was less than a month after the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the show’s ritualistic portrayal of love, death, and transformation somehow seemed to flow directly from the collective unconscious of a stunned city. *Metamorphoses* became a sold-out hit, and every night you could hear the sounds of men and women openly crying.” This passage from the story of Alcyone and Ceyx, for instance, takes on new meaning when viewed in the historical context of the New York premiere:

CEYX [*dropping his shroud*]: Do you not know me? Has death undone me so?

ALCYONE: No!

CEYX: Look at me, I charge you - look at me.

ALCYONE: No! I won’t. I won’t!

CEYX: Look at me, and know your husband’s ghost. Your prayers have done no good, for I am gone, beyond all help or hope forever.

ALCYONE: Go away!
CEYX: I am not some bearer of tales, but the man himself to whom it happened. Look at me, my little bird.

ALCYONE: I told you. I knew it would happen and I begged you not to go. I knew the day you sailed I had lost you forever. The ship, my hopes, and my life grew smaller all at the same time. You should have allowed me to come... (29).

The devastating emotive force of Ceyx’s spectral return to his beloved exemplifies just one of many such moments in the play which confront the death of a loved one. Watching this scene with fresh wounds in the heart still bleeding after a senseless tragedy causes the grim context of the play’s performance to stand out in terrifying synchronicity. When the Alcyone and Ceyx episode began, Zimmerman recalls, “I just started shaking really violently because it has such uncanny echoes. But then I had to admit to myself that that’s what catharsis is. These myths have a redemptive power in that they are so ancient. There’s comfort in the familiarity of the human condition” (quoted in Chirico, 165). The fact that we continue to retell myths in new contexts speaks to their potency; we may continue to adapt myths because we yearn for a connection to the wider human community in times of profound conflict, stress, and uncertainty. The adaptation of myths can allow these stories to speak to new audiences again and again in new ways as human beings are confronted with new experiences of trauma and turmoil; as new situations confront audiences with devastation and breakdown, mythic stories can offer the potential for healing through
connection to universal human experiences. Adaptation of myths, therefore, can offer the potential for healing as they are embodied on the stage.

*Metamorphoses* has been retold in new contexts and continues to be retold. The ancient, redemptive power of myths does not diminish because the moment of the September 11 attacks has passed. The myths contained in *Metamorphoses* continue to resonate because of their grounding in the human condition, as Zimmerman relates. Death and change are universal; the moment of Alcyone’s recognition will play over and over again in each human life, just as the image of Eurydice disappearing into death will haunt each human Orpheus.

Mary Zimmerman has been described as a director of images, a poetic visionary who sculps stories on the stage. Actor Doug Hara, who has performed regularly in Zimmerman’s productions, affirms her innovative staging by describing her as “a very image-based director...Her strength continues to be creating incredible stage pictures and directing the movement of those pictures” (Chirico, 157). The affective, resonant power of Zimmerman’s staging reverberates through the minds of critics, leaving lasting impressions, particularly in the wake of the play’s opening shortly after the September 11 terrorist attacks. Upon the play’s October 2001 opening at the Second Stage Theater in New York City, Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* describes how, “images of loss repeat, distort, freeze, and transform” (*How Ovid Helps*) as the episodes of *Metamorphoses* unfold through the night. Orpheus loses his bride over and over again, frozen in that fateful backward glance; Alcyone stands hopefully at the seashore, yearning for the return of a long-dead husband; Psyche stares up to the heavens in anguish, immersed in regret for her betrayal of her vanished love, Eros. The powerful
stories of death, loss, and transformation lead Brantley to describe Zimmerman’s stage adaptation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as a “fugue of sorrow” (*How Ovid Helps*). The tragedy surrounding the play’s New York City premier did not escape the notice of other critics; William Meyers says that New Yorkers, “were better able to hear this work that came to them from the core of a culture they now knew they needed. They took it as balm. Even today, nothing one sees happening on Zimmerman’s stage is any more unbelievable than that the World Trade Center should have been metamorphosed from twin towers of steel and glass to two insubstantial beams of light” (57).

The play’s production extended into the weeks and months which followed the September 11 attacks, with sold-out runs of the play requiring a change of venue to the Circle in the Square Theatre on March 4, 2002. The anxiety surrounding the shift was not unwarranted. “The lore of theatre, like that of Ovid,” said Brantley, “has its own cruel tales of transmutation: fashionable smashes that lost their sheen as the times around them changed, of little shows that got lost in big palaces” (*Dreams Echo*) The new venue, however, offered a felicitous stage configuration that foregrounded the storytelling aspect of Zimmerman’s adaptation and heightened the impact of the work. Where the Second Stage Theatre, though intimate, featured a proscenium frame, the stage at the Circle in the Square utilized a thrust configuration so that audience members could sit on three sides of the playing space in view of each other. Furthermore, the steep incline of the seating allowed audience members to look down onto the stage, granting a god’s-eye view of the action. The new theater was more akin to a traditional Greek amphitheater, a communal setting which added to the ancient tone of the mythic stories unfolding in the pool below. The configuration of the theatre also
allowed audience members to see each other, further heightening the shared experience of the performance and emphasizing healing as a community.

The healing experience so intrinsic to the performance of *Metamorphoses* draws its strength from the mythic and theatrical elements of Zimmerman’s adaptation. Mythic stories delve into the deepest, most collective strata of human experience. Chirico says that, “Mythic tales create an unworldly resonance for the spectator; the setting lifts the individual out of ordinary time and the present moment, and places him in ‘mythic time’ - an ambiguous term for the timeless quality myths manifest” (153). *Metamorphoses* recalls the origins of theatre in the City Dionysia festival in ancient Greece. Seated in those great stone amphitheaters, audiences witnessed myths adapted for theatrical performance and were prompted towards spiritual reflection as a community. Through retelling mythic stories, audiences could meditate on the relevance of the tales in a new context via the communal medium of theatre. Remaining faithful to a past context would have lessened the power of those myths, as they would no longer revitalize the community in its present incarnation.

Zimmerman includes a passage on the healing power of myth in the form of a modern therapy session. As the babbling character of Phaeton attempts to come to terms with his “father issues” his therapist interprets the boy’s woes and complaints in contemporary psychological jargon. This sequence, a humorous nod to Jungian and Freudian analysts who returned to myth as the native language of the psyche, closes out his session with this address to the audience:
THERAPIST: It has been said that the myth is a public dream, dreams are private myths. Unfortunately, we give our mythic side scant attention these days. As a result, a great deal escapes us and we no longer understand our own actions. so it remains important and salutary to speak not only of the rational and easily understood, but also of enigmatic things: the irrational and the ambiguous. To speak both privately and publicly (67).

Zimmerman’s adaptation speaks publicly; through the therapist’s words, Zimmerman urges the retelling of myths out of necessity for understanding ourselves as human beings. The passage underscores the necessity of telling ancient stories in new contexts in order to provide new understanding of ourselves; a return to myth through retelling in new contexts opens audiences to contemplation of themselves at the broadest level. Such a contemplation becomes possible through the act of adaptation.

Retelling myths holds a mirror up to humanity; as the contexts of our lives change around us, these eternal stories continually require adapting. The act of adaptation in mythic stories foregrounds the changing nature of our own lives; as we adapt myths to speak to contemporary audiences in new contexts, we may note the complex balance between continuity and change, or what Linda Hutcheon terms “repetition without replication” (7). In one sense, I may encounter the timeless myths of Metamorphoses at various points in my life to notice not how they have changed, but how I have changed. On the other hand, as a result of seeing through the lens of adaptation, I am also drawn to notice how the telling of mythic stories has indeed changed through retelling. Viewing theatrical performances with an adaptive eye, I
additionally see the ways in which a story changes with each performance. Whether from viewing a single production on separate occasions or from viewing different stagings of a single script, the aspects of a story which have shifted in the retelling stand out. Adaptation studies may then offer theatre a conscious awareness of the adaptive process at work in the theatre and allow theatrical practitioners greater agency as adapters.

Contextual elements speak volumes in Zimmerman’s adaptation; familiar and contemporary elements stand out in contrast to the “mythic time” setting. Frequently, familiar contextual elements dot the play’s gravitas with sparks of humor and laughter and serve as tools to draw audiences into the story. Sam Leith describes laughter as involuntary assent and therefore a powerful tool for persuasive speakers (65). While not operating as a calculating politician, Zimmerman’s use of humor and laughter can nevertheless function as an adaptive tool as the eruptive chuckle builds an immediate and joyful bridge into a story. This immediacy speaks to the potency of live theatre. Humor can serve to recontextualize a story and give it new life, offering a new perspective on a story that resonates with context of a story’s telling.

In Zimmerman’s production, a single cigarette sparks a rippling wildfire of laughter in the audience not once but twice. First, at the beginning of the play, a scientist wearing a lab coat enters, shaking a jar of water and sand. She describes the beginning of the cosmos:

    SCIENTIST: Before there was water and dry land, or even heaven and earth, nature was all the same: what we call “chaos,” with neither sun to
shed its light, nor moon to wax and wane, nor earth hung in its atmosphere of air. If there was land and sea, there was no discernible shoreline, no way to walk on the one, or swim or sail in the other. There was neither reason nor order, until at last, a god sparked, [ZEUS appears above the sky. He lights a cigarette.]
glowed, then shone like a beam of light to define earth and the heavens and separate water from hard ground (5).

In Zimmerman’s script, the most profound moment imaginable, the creation of all existence, is signified by the nonchalant lighting of a cigarette. Only moments into the production, the audience at the Chicago production was rippling with laughter, as Leith would say, voicing their involuntary assent and entering into the profound depths of the story on a stream of giggles. Later in the play, a cigarette makes another appearance as Vertumnus cautions Pomona with the dreadful tale of Myrrha:

VERTUMNUS: Listen, aren’t you afraid of offending Aphrodite? Don’t you know the story?
POMONA: What story?
VERTUMNUS: The story of Cinyras, his daughter Myrrha, and Aphrodite? [The characters enter as they are named. MYRRHA carries a bunch of red flowers and a fan that is red on one side, white on the other. APHRODITE is smoking a cigarette] (52).
In the Chicago staging, Cinyras entered out of the large double doors first, followed by his daughter, Myrrha. Finally, Aphrodite emerged from the doors smoking a cigarette. A knowing laughter burst forth from the audience as she leaned against the doorframe and gave Cinyras a smoldering, post-coitus gaze. Both cigarette anachronisms result in laughter; the familiar cigarette and its humorous uses function contextually and allow the play to speak to its audience in familiar terms. The utilization of humor can provide fresh perspectives on situations, functioning adaptively to offer unexpected moments of comedy that can jolt an audience out of complacency or familiarity. Humor may additionally function therapeutically, lightening the mood and offering a necessary relief for audiences flooded with heavy subject matter; for audiences witnessing the play in the days and weeks after the play’s New York City premiere, for example, contextual elements like the cigarette which capitalize on humor allowed a temporary respite from grief.

Anachronisms such as the use of a cigarette are built into Zimmerman’s script. However, other adaptive elements do not exist on the page and are contingent on the performance of the play. As Metamorphoses is retold through different performances, new actors embody the characters and bring with them their own distinct features of embodiment. In particular, actors bring differing vocal timbres and resonances to their performance, literally giving new voice to retellings. The Chicago production featured two actors of special vocal talent whose unique gifts of musicality and resonance drew attention and focus whenever they were onstage. Marilyn Dodds Frank played the role of the therapist and others; as the most mature member of the cast, her voice possessed a depth and richness which called to mind the reedy darkness of an English
horn or a bassoon. Naturally suited to mature characters and authority figures such as the therapist and Myrrha’s nursemaid, a great delight came when Frank entered the stage as Erysichthon’s mother. Through the course of the Erysichthon episode, she is transformed by Poseidon from an elderly woman into a young girl playing on the seashore. Frank did little to alter her voice; she simply spoke in the higher octave of her natural vocal range. To hear that beautifully aged and rich voice speak as a child was a unique and delightful adaptation made possible only in the embodiment of that role by that particular actor.

Chris Kipiniak played the roles of Erysichthon and others with equal vocal dynamics. He possessed a rich baritone voice which boomed off the walls of the theatre with a commanding authority, making him well-suited to his portrayals of Zeus and Poseidon. His voice echoed with depth, yet possessed a resonant, gilded brightness like shimmering gold leaf. Kipiniak’s sonorous voice, coupled with his large stature (he was the tallest of the ensemble), called attention to him, weighting the storytelling in his favor like the jovial king of the gods he portrayed. Like Frank, Kipiniak’s vocal timbre and musicality strongly influenced the retelling of *Metamorphoses* so that the aural landscape of the play was new and impacting. Through the voices of actors, speaking the text influences the storytelling and becomes a form of adaptation contingent on the inherent qualities of their instruments. Heretofore, adaptation studies has not included vocal expression as a form of adaptation studies. If adaptation theorists were to take into account the influential nature of voicing, then scholars could open their studies to include the ways in which new vocal expressions could function adaptively to create new stories simply by speaking the same text in a new way. Furthermore, theatrical
practitioners might examine the role of the performer in the adaptation of theatrical productions. A more in depth study into the effects of casting choices on audiences could open up a greater awareness of the adaptive potentials inherent in the physical attributes of actors, such as voice types, body types, age, and so forth.

Embodiment in Zimmerman’s production is crucial to the adaptation of Ovid’s work. The tales of transformation are shown as much through movement as they are told through text. The highly stylized movement Zimmerman employed in creating Metamorphoses on the stage led Sylviane Gold to review the play as a dance piece. Not only does Zimmerman’s adaptation operate as an intersection among myth, theatre, and adaptation, it also operates as an intersection between straight plays and choreographed dance works: “Over the last two decades, with choreographers inserting text into their works and theatre directors adding abstracted movement to their plays, dance and theatre have been moving closer together, and musicals no longer have a monopoly on choreographed movement. Exhibit A this season is Mary Zimmerman’s story theatre adaptation of some of the mythical Greek tales in Ovid’s Metamorphoses” (Gold, 40). The play exists as neither dance, musical, nor straight play, but some fusion of the three forms. Gold noted an audience response typical of dance productions when she viewed the play, particularly as audiences audibly responded to the reunion of Midas and his daughter (40).

Many of the episodes rely on “choreographed” or stylized movement to convey transformations, such as Alcyone and Ceyx’s changing into birds or Philemon and Baucis’ becoming trees. However, Myrrha’s incestuous coupling with her father, Cinyras, stands out as the most overtly “danced” episode in the play. The young girl,
Myrrha, offends Aphrodite by remaining stubbornly virginal and refusing the initiation into adult sexuality. In retribution, the goddess of love smites Myrrha with an unquenchable sexual passion for her own father. Night after night, Myrrha secretly meets her blindfolded father in darkness and the two unite in shameful intercourse. The transgressive act is accomplished through dance: rather than show the incestuous union, Zimmerman suggests it through a repeated dance sequence and lets audience members imagine the episode themselves at their own comfort level. The shape of the choreography is not indicated in the script, leaving the director and actors to organically produce it:

[CINYRAS wades slowly toward MYRRHA. He touches her, lifts her. They lie down, kiss, and are submerged in the water. MYRRHA pulls away and leaves him.]

APHRODITE: Full of her father, the girl slips out of the room; guilty but shameless.

MYRRHA: There’s nothing to fear or to hope for now.

APHRODITE: The next night she returns.

MYRRHA: Because twice is no worse than once.

[The father and daughter encounter each other again. MYRRHA departs.]

APHRODITE: And the third night she’s back again.

[They encounter each other again] (59).
Zimmerman’s Chicago production featured the same movement sequence for each incestuous union. The script does not indicate the repetition of the movement sequence, though the sequential repetition of the movement increased tension exponentially. Says Zimmerman of the movement in Metamorphoses, “Maybe I learned something from dance in terms of the idea that you’re choosing everything that’s seen. That form means something, that the shape of things communicates something” (Gold, 40). Zimmerman’s use of showing to communicate the story echoes throughout her adaptation of Metamorphoses, suggesting that adaptation studies may benefit from continued examination of staging, choreography, and embodiment as forms of adaptation.

As performers give new life to Metamorphoses and adapt the script through embodied performance, directors like Irene Alby imagine new retellings of Zimmerman’s play. In creating the University of Toledo’s production of Metamorphoses, Alby was moved by the theme of birth and chose to render the myths through the experience of a woman on the threshold of bringing new life into the world. In the director’s statement for her production, Alby says, “The journey of birth seems like a perfect metaphor. It is an emotional, mental, and physical transformation, and requires total trust, self-awareness and courage, as well as the complete balance between mind, body, heart, and spirit. The process of birth is a journey of spiritual awakening and a chance to transcend our world and make contact with something divine.” Through Alby’s re-imagined framework, the storytellers become wise midwives who therapeutically share Ovid’s tales to help usher new life into the world. The play begins with these words:
Bodies, I have in mind, and how they can change to assume new shapes - I ask the help of the gods, who know the trick: change me, and let me glimpse the secret and speak, better than I know how, of the world’s birthing, and the creation of all things, from the first to the very last (5).

The script indicates only that “a woman” says these words as she kneels by the side of the pool, gazing at her reflection. In Alby’s production, it is Europa, heavy with child, who enters the pool instead of merely looking into it, invokes the help of the gods, and sets the stories of the *Metamorphoses* in motion. Alby’s production dramatically shifts the context of the play from the historical moment of its post-September 11 premier in New York City; instead of transformations draped in the black of death and loss, Alby re-imagines the play with shades of new life wrapped in white. Alby’s new take on the play speaks to the tradition of adaptation welcomed and expected in the theatre, as directors are encouraged to provide a fresh viewpoint on a production through revivals, re-stagings, and re-conceptualizations. Directors viewing their work as adaptations may feel a greater sense of freedom to move away from a definitive Broadway production and create theatrical productions which respond to the special needs of their audiences.

The theatrical examples of adaptation cited here emphasize the unique contribution of theatre to adaptation studies through retellings in new contexts, new performers who bring unique voices to storytelling, and new imaginings which envision the “same old story” from a fresh perspective. One further facet of theatrical adaptation remains, an element which sets theatre apart in its adaptive capabilities: liveness.
Theatre’s live performance presents an immediacy lacking from other media; liveness is a definitive element of theatre and exists as the crossroads at which theater and film diverge. To use Linda Hutcheon’s terminology, both theater and film adapt stories from a telling mode of engagement to a showing mode, but only theatre does so with the immediacy of live performance.

The grounding of adaptation studies in university English departments has reinforced the perspective of adaptation as textual so that alterations of a story’s text define the adaptive process. Adaptation from a literary, textual perspective can still participate in the type of adaptation outlined here: changes in context shape literature in terms of its content and reception; novels may be retold from a different character’s perspective and become new tales; retellings and changes in context challenge fidelity. Gregory Maguire’s novel *Wicked*, for example, re-imagines Frank Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz* from the perspective of Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West. Retelling Baum’s story through Elphaba’s eyes represents a textual adaptation which creates a wholly new tale. Yet, the framing of adaptation studies as textually based omits the performance of those texts. Theatre lifts the text off of the page through embodied performance; tracking the movement of a text from page to stage through performance opens a realm of possibilities for adaptation studies. *Wicked*’s 2003 stage adaptation represents a level of adaptation which moves from page to stage through performance. A broader scope of adaptation studies which can speak to the performance of texts on the stage may open up an analysis of *Wicked* in its many iterations, not merely the textual.
Take for example the Chicago performance of *Metamorphoses* which featured arresting vocal talents. The text of the play took on new life and resonance as it was delivered through the voices of the actors in live space. The sound of their voices reverberating off the walls of the theatre and through the bodies of the audience members bestowed a sense of immediacy which was completely visceral on the part of both actor and audience. Recorded sound does not carry the same effect; audience members in live theatre perceive the voice of the actor emerging from the body of another human being sharing the same space. The immediacy of sound produced from one body and reverberating through another body grants a level of intimacy denied to a solitary reader of text. Theatrical adaptations turn literary adaptations into embodied, vital entities. The usage of amplification in the theatre situates the sound engineer as a figure instrumental to theatrical storytelling; further analysis of sound design in theatrical adaptations could reveal other aspects of the adaptation process.

The intimacy created through sharing live space with performers served to heighten the impact of *Metamorphoses* as it was performed for New York audiences in the throes of grief after the World Trade Center attacks. The ritual, communal nature Chirico points to as instrumental in the healing of grieving New York audiences emerges through the immediacy of live theatre. Audiences could have easily watched a film adaptation of Ovid’s tales or read David Slavitt’s translation of *Metamorphoses* from which Zimmerman created her adaptation. In either case, the audience would not have had a living, vital connection to the story in the same way. The words on the page could not hear the weeping of a reader; a film version could not have paused to let the audience member laugh and enjoy a small moment of joy before continuing on with the
story. This is not to say that the information literature and film provide to adaptation is less valuable; these examples merely serve to point out that theatrical adaptations differ from film and literature adaptations. Adaptation studies can offer a method of discourse which speaks to the differences exhibited through these examples, thereby allowing for a more versatile and comprehensive critical framework for the investigation of theatrical works as adaptations.

In Matthew Gurewitsch’s 2001 review of *Metamorphoses*, entitled, “Theatre’s Quicksilver Truth: All is Change,” he aptly comments upon the relationship between theatre and film. With the fantastical transformations inherent in Zimmerman’s play, Gurewitsch muses, “Anyone who has been to the movies in the last few years can easily imagine such sequences as rendered by the seamless enchantments of animatronics”. Zimmerman achieves transformations on the stage transparently, using words and gestures to suggest changes, and “the spectator’s wish to believe does the rest. We see what is and we see what is not.” Gurewitsch has put his finger on an important aspect of theatre which Zimmerman describes as “the slippage of difference between what you’re seeing and what you know you’re seeing...In movies it’s a special effect. Here, it’s achieved by an act of faith” (quoted in Chirico, 176.) Theatre and film both show, yet their means of doing so are very different. Theatre’s live performance begs the fantasy of the audience, who must both see and not see.

The difference between theatrical and cinematic showing hinges on presence and absence. Theatre occurs in live presence, affecting the audience with immediate, visceral response. Film shows, but its storytellers are absent. Audiences and actors on the stage combine in the theatre to create transformation and magic; actors and
audience meet in a middle ground which is located neither in the audience member or actor alone, but somewhere in between. Cinematic illusions, on the other hand, are more unidirectional; special effects in film show the audience everything, making audiences increasingly passive. McKellen muses,

> The particularly thrilling thing in the theatre is that the audience colludes. They allow magic to happen, know it can’t have happened, and are full of wonder that it did happen. If they thought about it for a second, they’d know it never happened at all. That’s the thrill, the impertinence of a transformation in the theatre (Gurewitsch).

The collusion of the audience, as McKellen says, helps to create the transformative magic of theatre. With the audience being so instrumental to theatrical performance, each new audience holds the power to transform a theatrical adaptation. In terms of adaptation, each new audience provides a fresh context, making each theatrical performance an adaptation. The amplification of context to include audiences represents a contribution which theatre can uniquely lend to adaptation studies. Lively audiences invigorate and energize actors and seem to hungrily propel the story forward; non-receptive and bland audiences give nothing back and can make the actor’s job feel like an exercise in heavy lifting. The show drags. In both cases, the collusion between performers and audience dynamically reshapes the story’s telling. This perspective could open new territory for both theatre and adaptation scholars as well.
Theatre’s immediacy problematizes fidelity in that a performance cannot be recreated from night to night. A new audience and a new context makes such an achievement impossible. An awareness of this dynamic could help breakdown the “myth” that a theatrical production operates like a well-oiled machine. All too frequently actors can be treated like robots who must sing, dance, emote, or perform at the drop of a hat. A greater awareness of the fluid dynamics of live performance could help to safeguard the health of actors so that they are not treated like disposable commodities. If actors are expected to create captivating, invigorating performances each night, then the notion of mechanical reproduction of performances must be abandoned. To return to the ancient Heraclitus: “No one can step twice into the same river, nor touch mortal substance twice in the same condition” (Schechner, 28). Live theatre exemplifies the changing fluid nature of Heraclitus’ metaphorical river, negating the possibility of faithful reproduction. Though Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses* can be performed nightly for an extended run, no single performance can be “faithfully” repeated.

Theatrical productions may extend into long runs, particularly in large-scale Broadway productions where long runs are necessary to recoup monetary investments. Productions of *Metamorphoses* have extended over many years in various incarnations from 1998 onwards through the Broadway premier in 2002. Actor Anjali Bhimani, who originated the role of Myrrha, has been involved in the production since its inception, and she additionally reprised the role in the 2012 Chicago revival. Application of the tenets of adaptation studies could potentially help to revitalize long runs and keep performers fresh, present, and engaged. Each performance of a long run becomes a new adaptation as a new audience assembles for the first time and creates a fresh
context. With a newly assembled audience, any retelling of a story through performance becomes a new telling, a new story, a new adaptation. Actors may relieve themselves of the burden of “faithfully” recreating old performances in a stale routine of stagnant repetition with adaptation’s fluid emphasis on revision and re-imagination.

While actors engaged in long runs of theatrical productions face the challenges of keeping performances fresh and energized, actors joining already existing productions face another challenge in terms of adaptation. Performers joining productions already in progress must find a way to quickly adapt themselves to the existing context of a production. This may mean learning to rapidly recreate a number of roles to the specification of the director or stage manager; an actor may want to put his or her “spin” on a role, only to find that they are asked to replicate the performance of the previous actor. Actors joining productions in long runs may benefit from an awareness of adaptive elements such as context or fidelity, so that as they step into a production, they are able to bring fresh perspectives and vitality to a performance while meeting the demands of the production team. Studies which investigate actors joining productions in progress may find a wealth of information on adaptation that a specifically theatrical setting can reveal.

The two-way street opened by an intersection of adaptation and theatre assists both theatrical practitioners and adaptation theorists. Given that many theatrical works are adaptations, a greater incorporation of key elements of adaptation into the theatrical world could serve directors, designers, dramaturges and performers. Applying a critical vocabulary of adaptation can increase awareness of the adaptation process and its outcomes in the theatre. Critical vocabularies such as those which I have outlined in this
study serve to illuminate the changes inherent in retelling while supporting the essential
dynamic liveness that defines the medium of theatre. For instance, one may see how a
new audience assembling with each performance creates a new context, a possibility
uniquely characteristic of live theatre as compared to film. The audience-performer
relationship in live theatre amplifies the context of a story’s telling beyond the historical
moment of a play’s performance to include the audience’s reactions to a performance.
Or, one may assert that faithfully creating a performance from the night before is an
impossibility, based on the influence of new audiences, rendering a new story with each
performance. Bringing theatre into contact with the realm of adaptation studies allows
scholars to redefine frames of reference which structure critical discourse on adaptation,
thereby enriching adaptation studies with multiple perspectives.

Applying Linda Hutcheon’s comparative perspective to theatre illuminates the
medium’s highly intertextual elements. Theatre as a site for adaptation incorporates
numerous texts in layered and intersecting relationships. The physicality of theatre
forms one language; musical elements include the vocabulary of vocal and instrumental
music with the body; speech and song intersect in Broadway musicals so that texts both
sung and spoken flow into and out of each other; design elements form yet another
vocabulary of visual elements. A theory of adaptation focusing broadly on wide cultural
intertextual practices ideally suits theatre, already a site of multiple intersections of
texts. Because it functions so intertextually, approaches like Hutcheon’s, which lift
adaptation out of medium specificity and formal aspects, readily incorporate the rich and
complex site of theatre as a ground for adaptation.
The highly collaborative medium of theatre can contribute an interdisciplinary perspective to adaptation studies. Zimmerman’s creation of *Metamorphoses* occurred through the agency of many individuals, not the adapter-director alone. The performers in Zimmerman’s company played an instrumental role in the adaptive process, both onstage in performance and through rehearsals. Zimmerman’s collaborative style of directing allowed actors to organically and improvisationally develop their own staging in rehearsals which would then be incorporated into the performance. As director, Zimmerman had the final say, but her collaborative stance allowed her actors greater agency as adapters in bringing Ovid’s text to life on the stage. Not only do the actors performing *Metamorphoses* function as adapters by retelling the story anew with each performance; they also function as adapters by creating the embodiment through which the story will be communicated. Further research into collaborative adaptation of texts through improvised rehearsal and performance practices may open new possibilities for adaptation studies as well as theatrical scholarship.

Developing an adaption through performance can make performance integral to the final adaptation. In some cases, the dialogue which forms the adapted playscript emerges out of improvisational rehearsals, reversing the usual trajectory of the rehearsal process. Most often, rehearsals begin with an existing script from which the director and actors work. However, parts of the script may emerge organically through the rehearsal process. Directors creating original work where no script exists may develop a text in this way. However, adapter-directors working collaboratively like Zimmerman may develop an adaptation of an existing text through improvisation and collaboration.
Zimmerman’s adaptation relies heavily on performance. Zimmerman’s genius lies in creating beautiful stage images, as actor Doug Hara has related (Chirico, 157). In Zimmerman’s playscript, she outlines the importance of stage images; the embodiment of the text can support or contradict the words on the page, but the stage images are an integral part of the storytelling. The importance of embodiment in Zimmerman’s work is reflected in the script, which can appear bare or even dull; the adapted script requires embodied performance to be fully actualized. The open, deliberately sparse nature of Zimmerman’s script indicates the importance of staging in adaptation. The dynamics of moving from a skeletal script to beautifully vital stage images are as yet untapped by adaptation studies. Incorporating staging into the discourse of adaptation studies may open new possibilities for redefining adaptation to include embodiment. An adapted theatrical script may be embodied in a number of ways; each new staging can qualify as a retelling in a new context as a director creates new stage pictures from the same adapted script. Adaptation theorists may not only turn to adapted scripts to investigate the process and products of adaptation in the theatre; they may also turn to the numerous stagings of a script as data which can inform and amplify the study of adaptation.

Mary Zimmerman’s theatrical adaptation of *Metamorphoses* opens up a conversation between adaptation studies and theatre, but that discussion is yet in its infancy. The dynamics of theatrical storytelling are only just beginning to be incorporated into the discourse of adaptation, and more can yet follow. Adaptation studies has yet to define theatrical terms like “staging”, “embodiment”, or “performance” as adaptation, though as work like Zimmerman’s has evidenced, they are vital and important elements
of storytelling. Similarly, many theatrical practitioners and scholars have not viewed their work through the lens of adaptation; seeing theatrical practice as adaptive could open up new pathways of study which could reframe theatrical scholarship and praxis. Linda Hutcheon’s theorization of adaptation through her intertextual and interdisciplinary perspective can help theatre gain a foothold in adaptation studies, especially given that theatre as an art form is interdisciplinary. If intertextuality and interdisciplinary perspectives are beginning to redefine adaptation studies, then theatre stands ready and poised to contribute to the re-visioning.

Greater investigation into the adaptive processes at work within the theatre can serve to broaden adaptation studies. Similarly, theatre can benefit from the application of the vocabulary of adaptation studies in order to identify adaptive processes at work. Conscious application of vocabularies like those which I have created in this study can serve to clarify the adaptive qualities of theatrical storytelling. As theatrical practitioners become more aware of the dynamics of adaptation, they may utilize elements like context or fidelity to enhance and articulate their own methods for creating evocative, resonant stories on the stage. For the greatest exchange to occur, adaptation studies and theatre may yet have to determine a common language of intelligibility. Mary Zimmerman’s work in adapting literary texts for the stage can work toward a lingua franca, and further investigation into the methodologies utilized by the adapter-director may serve to mutually benefit adaptation studies and theatre.
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