

Honors College Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
graduation from the Honors College

“That Was Long Ago; Tell It Again, Though”:
Adapting Myth to a Modern Context in a Non-Linguistic Form

Sarah Baileigh Gaetano
Orion Duckstein
Margaret Lally
Craig Carson
May 20, 2025

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Introduction:.....	4
Researching Adaptations.....	7
Choosing a Myth & Modern Context.....	10
The Myths of Atalanta.....	12
Discovering Atalanta.....	16
Connecting to a Modern Context.....	17
Audition & Casting.....	18
The Rehearsal Process.....	21
Design Elements.....	37
Reflection & Conclusion.....	43
Works Cited.....	47

Abstract

Ancient Greek mythology and literature are some of the oldest pieces of Western culture that we have, and they are simultaneously some of the most well-known and utilized references in the modern era. It seems there is always more meaning to excavate, more lessons to be learned, more connections to the current state of the world to be made within these long-enduring narratives. With this project, I've sought to explore this practice myself, developing an understanding of the process of adapting an ancient story to respond to and interact with a modern context. Given that these stories were borne of an oral tradition, I have chosen to apply the adaptation process to a non-linguistic art form to discover how the themes persist or fall away from perception when oral storytelling is removed. I worked with two alumni of the Adelphi Dance Department to stage, compose, choreograph, and design a dance piece that tells the story of an ancient mythological figure, Atalanta, within a modern context, the ways in which the patriarchy affects society as a whole and how toxic masculinity is detrimental to men. I have concluded that it is not crucial for the audience to understand every detail of what they are seeing, especially when working sans words; humans are meaning-making machines, and they will interpret and project and assume to a degree that is outside of the control of the creator, but as long as they receive implications of the story, the artist has done their job. It is increasingly clearer that Greek mythology's timeless encapsulation of the human experience — the values, emotions, flaws, passions, natural phenomena, etcetera— and its potential to incite progress in current and future generations through the development of contemporary adaptation, is what has kept this ancient tradition alive through the entire lifespan of Western world. This work was performed as a part of the Adelphi Dance Department's Spring Dance Showcase in May 2025.

Introduction:

I often think about the purpose of theatre and dance, not just in our current society— although there's plenty to be said for how desperately our world needs the arts at this moment in history— but in a broader sense. We have a deep-rooted instinct to tell stories, partly for survival, partly for social connection, for the health of the community, to see the impact it has on our surroundings, for the catharsis, to find answers, for the feeling it gives us, for the feeling it gives others. Human beings have been telling stories since language was invented; that's *why* language was invented: for the exchange of information. Renowned acting coach Stella Adler expressed the purpose beautifully: “The word theatre comes from the Greeks. It means the seeing place. It is the place people come to see the truth about life and the social situation. The theatre is a spiritual and social X-ray of its time. The theatre was created to tell people the truth about life and the social situation.”

Ancient Greece is the original birthplace of Western culture. Any stories we have from that time are, therefore, the oldest existing pieces of Western civilization, and yet its influences are *everywhere*, more universally widespread than most other cultural threads. Our society is constantly making references to Greek myth or concepts related to Greek myth, even when we are completely unaware of it. This is mostly due to how extensive their purpose was: establishing morals and duties, explaining origins, exploring community dynamics, contemplating the meaning of life and the ultimate reality, and so much more. They taught us how to personify challenging concepts in order to understand them more easily. They provided us with the “blueprint” of human nature, and despite its age, we are still learning more, making new connections, discovering new ways to relate their ancient concepts to our modern world.

I am fascinated by this. I have been since I was a young child. To share thoughts with other human beings so distant in history, to feel close to a society so ancient, to make a living emulating ritual practices they developed potentially more than four millennia ago, and to participate in the further development of those traditions is difficult to fully comprehend. I feel that it is immensely powerful/meaningful that these stories and traditions exist with such prominence. In my life as a performing artist, I always find myself holding on to the way theatre was utilized in Ancient Greece as a means of grounding myself in my own artistic endeavors: for them, it was an outlet for catharsis and a source for entertainment, yes, but more importantly, it served as a means for publicly calling attention to issues within their society, a secure setting for being open about the societal flaws that needed addressing. This still stands today, because those are necessary features of a healthy civilization.

One type of creative media that I'm most interested in working on professionally is adaptation, reference, and response work. I particularly enjoy when a new, modern piece of media is adapted from something classical, like the musical *Hadestown*, a retelling of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice that warns about the dangers of capitalism and celebrates art as a tool of hope and humanity, or when a piece of media is inspired by preexisting work, like Kimberly Belflower's *John Proctor is the Villain*, which, instead of being an adaptation of *The Crucible*, is a contemporary critique of Arthur Miller's play through the lens of feminine rage and pride. I'm excited by the dialogue that is created between artists when one work is created in response to another work, a discourse that transcends life and death and then invites the audience in to participate and experience and be transformed.

This creative research project provided me with the opportunity to investigate the adaptation process myself, putting my performance experience and training to the test to explore

methods of contemporary staging in order to develop a dialogue between these ancient stories and a modern context relevant to our society. Given my background in dance and my adversity to creative writing, it felt most appropriate, and much more interesting, to approach this project from a non-linguistic standpoint, especially considering that these stories belonged solely to oral tradition for a very long time until they were written down and translated over and over; the words themselves are a tremendously significant feature of the Ancient Greek tradition, so to take them away and rely entirely on the movement of the body is intriguing. I aimed to observe and discover more about the perpetually lasting relevance of Ancient Greek myth while also strengthening my collaboration skills in a less academically-facilitated setting— as is standard, every process I've been a part of over the past four years with both the theatre and dance departments has been coordinated or directed by a professor or hired outside professional. This was necessary in a college setting, but I've realized that soon, *I* will be the hired outside professional, and no one will be facilitating the process the same way they do during undergraduate training. This is especially true at the very start of an artistic career: you must be extremely self-motivated, because most work will likely be self-driven. On this process, though I did have a mentor to meet with as needed, within the rehearsal space we were a group of young artists creating together, with no “adult authority” present like we were used to. I desired to prove to myself with this process that I am ready for that dynamic. Lastly, I was simply eager to contribute to the steadily-growing canon of modern, female-centered myth adaptations being created by women artists.

The finished piece can be found here:

 [ισο σε βάρος - Adelphi University Honors Thesis Performance Spring 2025](#)

Researching Adaptations

In order to prepare myself for the endeavor of creating my own adaptation, I studied a variety of different pieces of media based on or influenced by Greek myth. This involved seeking media I was previously unfamiliar with and re-consuming media I already knew from the perspective of one who is aspiring to accomplish a similar task. Nothing was off-limits: theatre, cinema, novels, song lyrics, short stories— if it referenced ancient Greek stories to teach a lesson or make social commentary, it was useful. I was interested in observing how the creators thread modern elements into these ancient stories, where they found the connections to our world and the ways in which they artistically convey those themes. I also wanted to assess which myths were most commonly adapted, because I was eager to give a spotlight to a lesser-known, but equally-deserving, myth.

When exploring existing linguistic adaptations, there were a few that stood out for particular reasons. *Medusa Undone*, a relatively new play by Bella Poynton, reexamines the myth of a character that is often portrayed as a monster (which is, after considering her story from the perspective Poynton presents, terribly problematic in of itself), and uses her story to highlight “our culture’s fascination with blaming the victim, and the great injustice suffered by female victims of abuse of all kinds”, and to demonstrate how trauma transforms the victim and *all* of their relationships in some capacity (Poynton, Synopsis section). I found this so powerful, using a physical transformation to represent a symbolic inner shift like this, and I took note of the way Poynton pulled from different versions of Medusa’s myth, blending the details from each in a unique way that suited her portrayal of the social issue she was commenting on.

Author Madeleine Miller takes a similar approach, but on a much larger scale for her novel *Circe*. As part of my Human Condition independent studies with Dean Carson in Spring

2024 and Fall 2025, I read and performed a deep analysis of the Fagle translation of the Iliad, then of Miller's novel. Starting with a direct translation of ancient source material and moving immediately to a contemporary, female-centered adaptation novel was a very enlightening experience. I was able to use what I'd learned and gathered from my deep analysis of both books to investigate the narrative similarities and differences between them and how Miller operated within ancient tradition to develop her contemporary interpretation. This allowed me to identify where Miller felt she could use creative license within the story and make allowances in order to guide the rhetoric, and the reader, in her chosen direction and effectively make her points about systems of power, female identity, and autonomy in a patriarchal society through Circe's myths. This empowered me to feel comfortable taking certain creative liberties in my own adaptation process if I felt that a certain detail would be more functional in expressing my social commentary if presented in a different way than what I'd seen in the source material.

I was heavily inspired by Martha Graham, one of the most significant dancers and choreographers in the twentieth century, who developed a number of dance pieces around Greek myth from the perspective of a female character. One example of this is *Errand into the Maze*, a consideration of the relationship between Ariadne and the Minotaur. In my opinion, the most remarkable feature of Graham's work is how much of the character's emotional state is openly revealed through the movement. Ariadne is visibly troubled, her contracting and repetitive movements painting a clear image of fear and uncertainty as she finds the courage to confront the creature she knows is lurking in the labyrinth with her. The Minotaur is physically burdened by a large pole that he holds behind his back above his shoulders for the entire piece, creating a very unconventional and extra-nuanced power dynamic between them during the duet sections of the piece. The string, a primary symbol of the original myth that represents her cleverness and

strategy, is heavily present throughout the design elements: there is a rope that twists around the floor of the space, and to make it even more personally connected to her, her dress features a spiraling black line that encompasses her body. One of my favorite details about this piece is that the Greek hero Ariadne is leading through the maze in the original myth, Theseus, is not included at all. Ariadne traverses alone, and it is she who defeats the Minotaur, a fascinating and powerful departure from the source material.

Graham's *Night Journey* is another work that employs the traditional narrative of a very famous Greek myth, reframed from a female perspective, as space for contemporary commentary. This piece resonated with me particularly because my study abroad experience in Greece was centered around a new translation of the exact same myth: Oedipus. Our linguistic production—told not only in one spoken language but in four—and Graham's nonlinguistic interpretation, told solely through the language of movement, are both conscious of the female experience in this story; our production incorporated it as a crucial part of the larger narrative, but Graham makes it her focus. The staging of this piece accesses this myth's long-established themes identity and fate and recenters them around Jocasta, Oedipus' mother and, controversially, his lover, instead of around Oedipus himself, and it weaves in a new emphasis around power and gender roles. "Although *Night Journey* recounts only part of the story, Graham transformed the traditional myth into powerful stage images that portrayed a woman's interior landscape" (Azzarone & Koyluoglu). This myth is tragic for every character involved, but viewing it from the perspective of Jocasta confronting her memories of both her relationship with Oedipus and the realization of who he really is extracts a new, visceral layer of personal tragedy and illustrates what it feels like to be in conflict with your own morals.

Choosing a Myth & Modern Context

The process of selecting my subject material took me down many different paths. I knew from the start of this process that I wanted to tell a woman's story, hence the emphasis on media that interprets the classics from a female perspective. As an avid Greek mythology enthusiast, I already had a rather extensive library of myths in mind. I started by simply listing all the female characters whose myths might be valuable to tell, taking into account what their stories might illuminate and provide commentary on in our current world. Unfortunately, it quickly became apparent that there were certain characters who were not central enough in any one myth to build a strong adaptation without having to come up with most of the foundation myself, which was not the intent of this project, as I was looking for a story with enough details that I could work with without having to invent entire plot points. The Pleiades were one such example— they're known as a collective, seven sisters who were transformed into a cluster of stars as protection from the huntsman Orion, who began to relentlessly pursue them as soon as their father, the famed Atlas, was forced to take the burden of holding up the sky. As individuals, their only defining characteristics are the men they married and the children they bore, disappointingly. Similarly, the Nine Muses, though constantly invoked throughout the *Iliad* & *Odyssey*, and despite their iconic musical presence in films like *Xanadu* and Disney's *Hercules*, are more so manifestations of artistic inspiration than actual women. While there certainly are pieces of performance art based on these beings, that isn't the type of content I was inclined to work with for this project; I was seeking a more traditional narrative structure.

There were other myths on my list that, while female-centered and solidly connected to a modern issue in some way, did not feel best suited for a non-linguistic adaptation. The nereid Thetis, for example, is primarily included in the mythological canon as renowned hero Achilles'

mother or as Peleus' wife, rarely as her own individual with narrative agency. In a modern context, this correlates to the well-intentioned but fundamentally problematic phrase "That's someone's daughter/mother/sister", which is used to convince misogynists to have more respect for women, but really just implies that a woman's value is defined by her external relationships, not her inherent personhood. Using contemporary adaptation to break the convention of Thetis' status as a mother first, foremost, and exclusively in these myths could also serve as a reference to the lasting struggle to end the perspective that woman's purpose is merely to bear children as a vessel for the next generation, which has unfortunately been renewed with the new wave of anti-abortion legislation. While I was, and still am, extremely eager to pursue this concept, I feel this is the type of story that would likely be more effectively expressed in words rather than movement, given its less-physical nature. I plan to hold onto it for a future creative endeavor, and I look forward to utilizing what I've learned about modern myth adaptation from this current process when I do.

There were also LGBTQ stories I discovered in my research that piqued my interest; I feel these are even more underrepresented than female-centered myths, and I've eagerly taken note of them for future adaptation projects. Artist Mari Phillips expressed it well: "I think it would really help this new generation to figure out who they are and to actually be inspired... they have that story from the past to keep on living, to hold to themselves and to be proud of" (Albert & Phillips 31:39). One such story is that of Iphis and Ianthe, the "sole [known] mythological account of [overt] female same-sex desire, not only in Ovid but in all of classical literature" (Kamen). It begins with a character named Iphis— which is, for starters, a gender-neutral name— whose mother hid their true biological sex (female) from their father, who declared he would put the baby to death if it was a daughter, and raised them as a boy. At 13

years old, Iphis was betrothed to their best friend, a little girl named Ianthe, and while they both had feelings for each other and were happy about the arrangement, Iphis secretly felt ashamed and “wrong” about loving another woman, and about deceiving her. On the day of the wedding, the goddess Isis granted Iphis a gift: she transformed their body to that of a young man’s to match the gender they’d been socialized as and render the marriage “acceptable”. An argument could be made that Iphis was a woman with same-sex feelings who could only marry her love in good faith if she became a man, or that Iphis is a transgender man whose biological sex did not match his personal or public gender identity until Isis’ gift, or that Iphis is a nonbinary individual who was coming to terms with their gender-fluidity. Many scholars and queer individuals interpret and identify with this story differently, and I believe there is so much value in a story that can be perceived in so many different ways and considered a form of media representation for several groups of marginalized people. This story thoroughly met my requirement of “lesser-known but equally-deserving”; and although this specific project and process did not feel like the right time to tackle this story, I feel very strongly that I would like to work with it eventually.

The Myths of Atalanta

The Ancient Greek heroine Atalanta is involved in several myths, starting on the day of her birth, when her father, King Iasus of Arcadia, committed infant exposure, the act of abandoning an unwanted newborn out in the wilderness, when Atalanta was not the son he’d been expecting. This was done often as a method of absolving the parents from guilt; they could tell themselves there was still a chance the infant would be discovered and saved by someone else. This is exactly what happened to Atalanta, except the creature who found her was a mother

bear, who nursed her and cared for her until eventually a group of hunters happened upon the baby and decided to raise her as their own child. As she grew into a young adult, she became a lightning-fast runner, a strong and powerful athlete, and an exceptionally skilled hunter. She became known for her independence, bravery, and ability to protect herself when two violent centaurs attempted to assault her, and she killed them both easily. She once again proved her physical superiority by besting the hero Peleus, husband of Thetis and father of Achilles, in a wrestling match. She was a devoted follower and favorite of the maiden goddess of the hunt, Artemis, and the only female member of the Argonauts.

When the King Oeneus of Calydon forgot to include Artemis in his sacrificial honors, she sent a vicious wild boar to terrorize the city and make the land infertile as punishment. The king summoned the greatest warriors in the land to hunt the Calydonian Boar. Numerous Argonauts answered the call, Atalanta among them, along with King Oeneus' own son and brothers-in-law and many notable others from far and wide. A number of them, upon discovering that there would be a woman hunting alongside them, were skeptical, if not downright opposed, but Meleager, who was aware of her talents and knew she would be beneficial to the hunt, convinced them to let her join them.

A few men and dogs lost their lives in the hunt, either to the boar or to other hunters' poorly aimed weapons. Atalanta, using the precision and skill that comes with being trained by a bear, a group of hunters, and Artemis herself, drew back her bow and struck the boar with her arrow, drawing the first blood from the creature thus far. Now wounded by her shot, the boar became less coordinated and the other hunters began to find success. It was Meleager who made the final blow, killing the creature and ending the hunt. He was, however, aware of who had

made his feat possible, and the other hunters' accomplishments too: they could not have prevailed if Atalanta had not made the first wound.

When he received the hide and head of the animal, which are considered the trophies of the hunt, given to the hunter of honor who killed the target, he instead awarded them to Atalanta for her essential contribution. His maternal uncles, Toxeus and Plexippus, were appalled by this action and claimed that by right of bloodline, if he did not wish to claim his prize, it belonged to them. They took the spoils before he could hand them to her, which he took as an act of extreme disrespect. They exchanged blows, and the fight got increasingly more intense until Meleager, caught up in his rage, killed both men.

Upon learning what her son had done to her brothers, Queen Althaea of Calydon, Meleager's mother, fell into her own frenzy of rage and grief, retrieved a log of wood that she'd hidden away many years ago— when she'd given birth to Meleager, the Moirai (the Three Fates) had visited her and prophesied that her newborn child's life was directly linked to the log burning in her hearth, and when the wood was reduced to ash, so too would her child expire. As soon as they'd left her, she'd rushed to the hearth and put out the fire, then hid away the log, confident that her son's life would be protected for as long as it was hidden. But in her great despair, Althaea set fire to the log and watched as it was consumed by flames. At the very same time, Meleager was suddenly consumed by the sensation of fire, as if he were burning from inside out. As the log was reduced to ashes, the hero Meleager met his end.

Her role in the Calydonian Boar Hunt brought Atalanta a great deal of fame, and the word got back to her father, who recognized the opportunities his newly famous daughter could bring him if he reclaimed her and demanded that she marry. Atalanta reluctantly accepted, but devised a plan to outsmart her father and remain a maiden: each suitor would have to compete

against her in a footrace where the prize for winning was her hand in marriage, and the consequence for losing was execution. Knowing that she was undoubtedly the fastest in the region, she was confident that after the first few were defeated and sent to death, the rest would reconsider, and she would be left alone. While some were certainly dissuaded as she'd hoped, the majority of her suitors felt that the potential reward was worth the risk, so she was not able to be rid of them. Despite sometimes even giving her challengers a headstart to make the races less monotonous for herself, she defeated them all easily.

One of the suitors, Hippomenes, called to the goddess Aphrodite, praying for her help. Driven by her distaste for Atalanta's desire to remain a maiden, Aphrodite decided to help Hippomenes win. She gave him three golden apples from the legendary Garden of the Hesperides and instructed him to toss them in front of her during the race, which would distract her long enough for him to pull ahead. He obeyed, but even after she was delayed by the first two, he was still behind. He threw the final apple as far off the path as he could, and although she briefly hesitated, she could not resist the divine temptation of the fruit. Hippomenes crossed the finish line just before Atalanta, sealing her fate: she would be his wife, as promised.

They had not been married for long when Aphrodite became irritated, as Hippomenes had still neglected to properly honor her with sacrifices to thank her for what she'd given him. In retaliation, she flooded him with uncontrollable passion and compelled him to take Atalanta inside a sacred temple of Rhea. This thoroughly offended the titan, who punished his disrespect by transforming them both into lions to pull her chariot.

Discovering Atalanta

When I first came across the myths of Atalanta in my research, I couldn't believe that I'd never heard of her. Even for Rick Riordan, whose mythology-based fiction novels I'd consumed ravenously in my adolescents, and who is known for weaving every possible mythological figure into his plotlines, she was little more than a footnote, with a measly single page in his characterized Greek Hero encyclopedia. During a conversation with Dean Rudolph about my topic selection, she informed me that I'd reminded her of a children's educational entertainment project from the 1970's called *Free to Be... You and Me* that encouraged ideas like gender neutrality and equality, individuality, and acceptance. She was able to vividly recall an episode about Atalanta that was actually played in schools as an engaging method of instilling the value of autonomy and empowerment (especially for young girls) in young children. The story they tell certainly has some significant deviation from the classical myth— her competitor in the race is named “Young John” instead of Hippomenes, he does not cheat to win, they end the race tied, and she is not forced to marry him— it is still a very honorable use of her myth and a great example of how drastic creative liberties can be used very effectively without sacrificing the integrity of the story, depending on what themes one is trying to convey.

Still, I feel this is not enough. For most male heroes in Greek mythology, their most notable features are related to their extraordinary physical abilities: their remarkable strength, their staggering speed, their masterful use of a weapon, etcetera. In almost every one of her myths, Atalanta is proven to surpass her male counterparts, most of whom are renowned heroes themselves, and yet she earns the name “*equal* in weight”, not “*superior* in weight”, and she has comparatively low notability in the classical Greek canon. Meleager is known as the main hero

in the Calydonian Boar Hunt, despite the fact that he himself was the first to acknowledge how none of it would have been possible without her exceptional hunting skills.

Connecting to a Modern Context

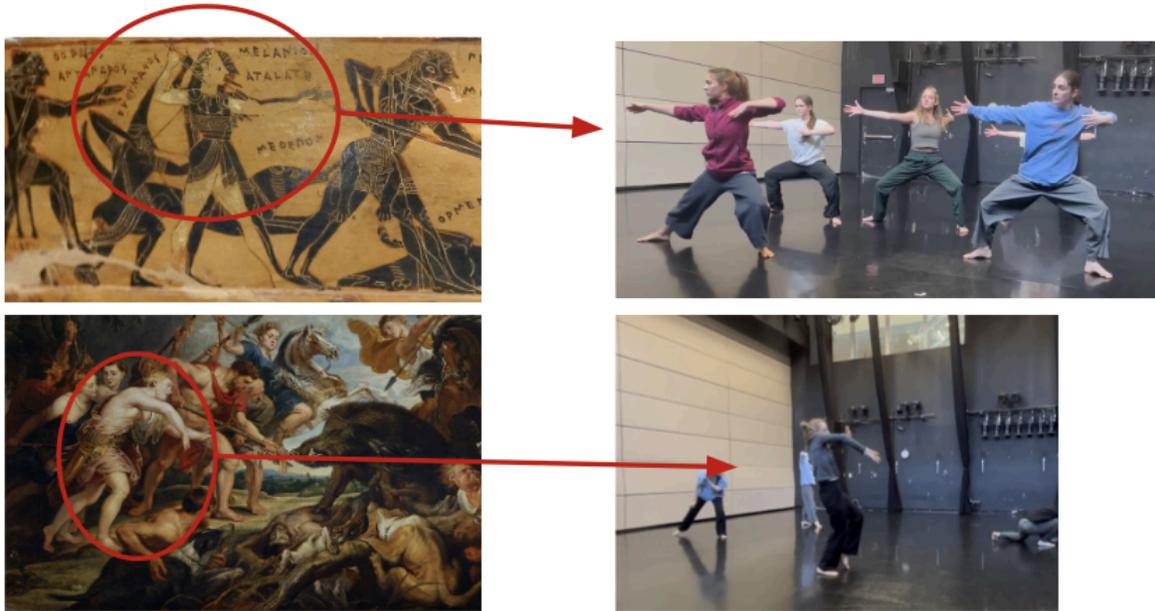
The Calydonian Boar Hunt tells the story of a group of men whose deep-seated patriarchal principals ultimately lead to their destruction. At first glance, it is clear that the hunters, with the exception of Meleager, are misogynistic towards Atalanta— refusing to hunt with her, diminishing her contribution, commandeering the prizes before she can be honored. Meleager’s uncles, who are so wrapped up in their chauvinist values that aggression seems like the best (manliest) solution— they *must* fight about the rightful recipient of the prizes— provoke Meleager, and he kills them both and is subsequently killed as well. Three men die in a fight over whether or not she deserves equal honor as a woman, because two of them were unable to overcome what they’d been raised to believe about women and look past the social constructs they’re accustomed to, and the other because he allowed himself to be overcome by the violent impulses driven into him by patriarchal expectations.

Presented in this way, this myth can demonstrate that when one leads with misogyny or acts based on toxic masculinity, the effects are harmful and often irreversible, even towards themselves. Feminism is not just a women’s issue; the gender hierarchy is detrimental to all, including those who benefit from the patriarchal systems in place, even if they don’t recognize it or choose to ignore it.

Audition & Casting

After some deep deliberation, my collaborators, Adelphi Dance Department alumni Hailey Cindric and Leah Schinsing, whom I asked to join me on the process due to their choreographical expertise, and I set up an arrangement for the casting. In the audition notice, requested that only female-identifying dancers attend; I was interested in taking the Ancient Greek theatrical standard of all-male casts with men playing women when necessary and inverting it, forming an all-female cast to play mostly male characters, which would be signified through costumes in correspondence with how the Ancient Greeks used masks as a visual indicator. The only exception to this was our Calydonian boar, as I'd already asked Aidan Acosta to play him. I was inspired by *The Moors* by Jen Silverman, a production I performed in with the Department of Theatre last year, because it centers around themes of identity, love, attention, and conquering traditional gender roles, and the cast is made up of five women and one man, and the man plays their family dog, which is strong social commentary in of itself and something I wanted to incorporate into this piece.

Our goal for the audition was to observe how each dancer moves as an individual, how their unique physical “voice” contributes to the choreography’s “dialogue”, and how they move as a collective. Since we were planning to have a very collaborative, research-based rehearsal process, it was important to experiment with some version of these exercises during the audition so we could get a feel for the dancers’ willingness and ability to engage in the material. I selected a few visual depictions of the hunt, and when we asked the dancers to add pieces of improvisation to the sections of choreography Cindric and Schinsing were teaching them, I showed them the artwork and asked them to choose the first element they were drawn to and incorporate it into their movement however they wished.



After the audition, Cindric, Schinsing, and I deliberated on the cast list, and we unanimously agreed upon every role:

Mandy Ciraco, with her height, strength, and stunning extensions stood out to us as Atalanta, and moreover, Atalanta is typically depicted as blonde, like Ciraco.

Sarah Marino has remarkable power to her movement, and we felt that she could embody the nuance that Meleager's character requires.

Siobhan Feeney and **Anna Júlia Ortega Fernández** have the strong similarity in their movement dynamic that comes from being in the same graduating year and dancing in the same classes, making them a great fit for the two uncles.

Sarah DeLuco, as a freshman, is still coming into her own in the collegiate-level performing arts setting, so we hoped that playing multiple roles (a hunter, Meleager's mother Althaea, and potentially Hippomenes in the footrace) as our "ensemble" would give her a chance to try out a few different physicalities and continue to learn from and observe the process. As an Honors

College student, we also knew she may have ideas on the conceptual side and wanted to encourage her to share them with us.

A few rehearsals in, when we decided we wanted the footrace movement to be happening at the same time as Meleager's Death Solo, we realized that since DeLuco could not play both Hippomenes and Althaea simultaneously, and every other character besides Atalanta was either dead or actively dying, it would have to be someone else entirely. Cindric also pointed out that this would probably be a stronger choice anyways, because Althaea is completely disconnected from this entire hunt both physically and mentally. She is not with them and does not know what led to her son murdering her brothers. We agreed it may have been confusing for DeLuco to play her anyways, and that we'd prefer to see a new face who has not been involved in the piece up to that point. I offered to do it, both for ease— we wouldn't have to work around an additional person's schedule or acclimate someone new to the myth and our process— and for the selfish reason of wanting the opportunity to be physically part of the piece myself and have a small role in the actual performance of it.

The Rehearsal Process

From the very start, I was so happy that I'd elected to bring in two choreographers, especially two who graduated together and are great collaborators, and so fortunate that they both agreed to join the project, because it allowed us to work on multiple parts at once while keeping everything cohesive. Oftentimes during rehearsals, Schinsing would work on one phrase while Cindric worked on figuring out partnering movements or solo segments and vice versa, while I went back and forth between both, providing my thoughts and suggestions based on the story, giving the cast character development direction, or showing the dancers artwork I'd found, and the entire time I was able to write down and video record as much as possible.

The full video of the final product can be found here:

 [ίσο σε βάρος - Adelphi University Honors Thesis Performance Spring 2025](#)

March 30, 2025

We began our first official rehearsal with a quick group discussion where I gave the cast a more detailed narration of the myth, along with a brief explanation of Atalanta's other myths: her upbringing by a she-bear and hunters, the footrace, and her unjust transformative fate. To follow, Cindric began working some physicality with Acosta while Schinsing launched into the introductory section with the hunters. We agreed, perhaps because we traditionally visualize plot structure from left to right in Western culture— a characteristic we inherited from the Ancient Greek language!— that we should have the hunters move from stage right to stage left (which, for the audience, is left to right) in their search for the boar. I'd also drawn out in my storyboard that I envisioned the boar both beginning and ending in the downstage left corner, so having

them travel towards his “domain” felt symbolic of civilization encroaching on the natural world. To commit more fully to this, we decided to start the piece with Acosta, as the boar, moving freely around the space before bringing in the hunters with a traveling sequence.

While the Calydonian Boar was a violent creature specifically sent to ravage the countryside, there is no account in which he is actually actively destroying anything when they arrive to kill him. I was very moved and inspired by Madeleine Miller’s portrayal of the Minotaur myth in *Circe*, which simultaneously acknowledges his vicious ferocity and highlights the tragedy of his situation: he had no control over the circumstances of his unnatural conception or the consequences of his existence, and yet his entire life was one terrible punishment. In a way, he’s a victim of his own nature, which reminds me of wild animals who are caged or killed for attacking humans out of instinct.

A vast majority of the mythological monsters in Ancient Greek culture only existed, acted, and eventually died by human or demigod hands, on behalf of the gods as a tactic of getting what they wanted, and the Calydonian Boar is no exception. I did not wish to portray him as an exaggerated cliché of an evil, hostile beast, because the only reason he was devastating the land was divine order from a vengeful god. Additionally, I suspect that if we’d staged the piece beginning with the hunters establishing themselves in the space before the boar entered and the attack began, the audience would immediately categorize the dance as an adventure piece about fighting an evil creature. While hunting the boar is, of course, a major plot point, that’s not the point of the piece; I wanted to prevent the audience from making their minds up about the subject of the work based on an instantaneous surface-level assumption, therefore impeding their ability to perhaps perceive the bigger picture as the dance progresses.

For movement inspiration, Cindric and Acosta watched a video on wild boars (it can be found here: <https://youtu.be/eb6ja96y6Ps>), and then we asked Acosta to devise a 16-count traveling phrase and a 12-count gesture phrase based on the video. We found that he was naturally involving a lot of breath work, and I encouraged him to continue exploring that physical connection to breath. Once he was ready to show us the phrases he'd developed, Cindric began to transpose and refine the movements into a longer sequence spanning through the hunters' entrance up until he begins to interact with them in some capacity.

Meanwhile, Schinsing taught the hunters an entrance phrase to take them from the upstage right wing diagonally to downstage center. The goal we set was to produce positions and movements that emulate action and pursuit; this resulted in a sequence of lunges, reaches, extensions, pushes, and weaponry symbolism. We instructed them to keep their movements low and close to the ground, reminding them that they're skilled warriors tracking their prey. In the spirit of upholding the cast collaboration principle we'd proposed during the audition, we asked the dancers to each generate a version of the travel phrase they'd just learned, this time moving backwards in the opposite direction, and we then chose elements of each one to combine into the subsequent phrase. The next step in developing this section was to put together what both sides of the room had been working on, and we were pleasantly surprised to find that whenever Acosta moved closer to the group, their movements happened to be taking them backwards, away from him. We were very satisfied with the opposition that we'd created in the staging for this section, and we elected to move on.

At this point, we released Fernández, Feeney, and DeLuco since we'd be spending the rest of our rehearsal time working on a few solo/duo moments involving Ciraco, Marino, and Acosta. We listened to the music again to determine exactly where we wanted to place Atalanta's

Focus Solo within the first song. The end of the solo, where the First Blood Duet would occur, was very clear: the loud, staticky, malfunction-like sound that led into silence had been inserted specifically for that moment. At approximately one minute and six seconds into the track, the vocal dynamics make a noticeable shift to a quieter sound that highlights the lead vocalist a bit more than before, which felt appropriate for a solo that's meant to depict the character drowning out the chaos of her colleagues and centering her attention on her target. We chose to split into two groups again to work on these moments, with Schinsing staying center to work with Ciraco and Acosta while Cindric and Marino moved to the upstage left corner, where I'd placed Meleager's Death Solo in my storyboard.

For the Focus Solo, Schinsing gave Ciraco a series of slow, fluid movements, each one strong and sustained into the next, emphasizing the strength and deliberation in her movements. I gave her the added task of building in a constant awareness of Acosta during this solo, finding as many moments as possible to track him with her eyes. Although we were calling it a solo in order to keep our vocabulary consistent— we'd been using "duet" to refer to the following event when she makes contact with him for the first time— we wanted her to be so intently concentrated on him that it felt more like a duet. At one point in this section, they do move in synchrony with each other, when Ciraco lowers herself to all fours and matches his boar-crawl forward ([01:44-1:53](#)), stalking her prey more similarly to a fellow animal than to a human. For us, this moment is a reference to her childhood: as a product of a she-bear's early nurturing, she has deep-rooted animalistic instincts, and her subsequent raising by a group of hunters taught her how to effectively enter the mindset of her target. Moreover, this demonstrates that she is superior to these men in regards to hunting strategy and skill, something further proven when she is the first to draw blood with her weapon. I expressed to Ciraco that when the boar flips into her

control in the handstand ([2:00](#)-2:06), it is not at all an occasion of Atalanta getting lucky; she intentionally and strategically positioned herself exactly where she knew he'd go so she could successfully make the hit.

Once I felt confident about the direction their group was headed in, I moved to Cindric and Marino, eager to review Meleager's situation more in depth to assist Marino in developing her character and coloring her movement and emotional performance more appropriately to the narrative. We discussed how, for the intents and purposes of our piece, we did not see Meleager as someone who intended to ruthlessly murder his relatives for disagreeing with him. Marino remarked that it felt like he was caught up in the moment, which I agreed was a reasonable view and added on that it wasn't just the moment he was caught up in, it was the patriarchal values instilled in him from birth. Just like how Atalanta's upbringing taught her how to successfully enter her target's mindset and operate accordingly, Meleager was conditioned by the society he grew up in to associate masculinity and getting one's way with violence— war is honorable, warriors are among most highly celebrated citizens, and society's most powerful male deities are constantly normalizing and glorifying the use of violence and physical coercion, to name a few examples. By the time this violent impulse has subsided it is too late to reverse what he's done.

In Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, once Althaea (Meleager's mother, sister of the two uncles he's just killed), caught up in her own dangerous blend of blind rage and grief, sets fire to the log bound to her son's life, "Far off, and unaware, Meleager is alight with that fire, and feels his inner organs invisibly seared" (Ovid Book VIII 222). Meleager's death is certainly horrifying: suddenly, with no warning, he feels his body light up in invisible, and therefore inextinguishable, flames, and he burns to death in pace with the log in his mother's hearth. Cindric and I worked with Marino to create a solo section ([4:11](#)-4:37) that illustrated this tragic end— distressed

lurching and twitching movements combined with isolations and unnatural positions at a pace that gets more and more frantic until it comes to stillness, which, after watching Marino's gut-wrenching writhing, feels like a relief. To aid Marino in feeling consumed by the flames as we worked out the movement, Cindric played fire sounds instead of the music this solo would actually be danced to, which effectively made Marino's performance much more visceral even once we switched back to the actual music.

At the very end of rehearsal, Cindric, Schinsing, and I had a quick conversation about the replacement song for the second section of the dance. Cindric had found two new songs that she thought might fit better, and we all agreed that the one with a strong, heavy drum beat felt best suited to the intense events—the hunters fighting the boar, the boar's death, and the fight between Meleager and his uncles—in the section. Additionally, we decided that the tinnitus-like noise Cindric edited into the end of section two for the boar's death can only play for so long until it becomes too uncomfortable for the audience, especially when played through a large theatrical sound system instead of a phone speaker, so Cindric agreed to shorten it so that it still has its intended effect but does not become unbearable.

April 6, 2025

Cindric began today's rehearsal by reviewing her audition phrase with the cast while Schinsing and I solidified the plan for both the staging of this section and where it should go chronologically based on how it would best connect. We recognized that if we manipulated the phrase a bit and weaved partnering "fight" moments between the hunters and the boar into it, it would serve us well in the second section with the new drum-driven music track. I pulled up an image of the François Vase, an Ancient Greek black-figure painted vase that depicts numerous

myths, including the Calydonian boar hunt, to serve as a reference image as we created this section. Once they were finished reviewing the choreography, we tasked them with creating their own individually manipulated versions of that phrase in 5-10 minutes while we explored partnering possibilities with Acosta. We played the new track Cindric re-edited so they could feel the energy of the section, and I showed them the image of the hunt on the François Vase for them to bear in mind as they devised their interpretation of the choreography.

When they presented what they'd created, we watched it a few times with various



alterations: having one of them face a different direction, having them split into pairs, and having them each start eight counts after the person to their right. We discovered that when they did their phrases facing different directions, sometimes they became synchronized with each other but moving opposite ways, or a ripple effect begins with everyone doing the movement in an accidental canon with one person facing upstage while everyone else is facing downstage, etcetera. Cindric gave them two notes: increase the energy and connection in the arms, and saturate the whole phrase in aggression and vigor. I was delighted by the chaos escalated by these notes; it was almost hard to discern whether they were doing the same base choreography at all. This scattered movement told the story of a group of people with similar training and processes that aren't working together to employ them effectively.

Section 2 Manipulated Phrase Chaos.MOV

At this point, we dismissed everyone except Marino and Acosta so we could focus on the Boar Death Duet at the end of this section, when Meleager kills the boar. Our objective was to create a short partnering segment that, ideally, had some subtle element of relation to the First Blood Duet. After some creative experimentation, we arrived at a sequence we were all satisfied with: Marino lifting Acosta backwards over her shoulder into a handstand (which alludes to the handstand Acosta cartwheels into with Ciraco in the First Blood Duet), followed by Acosta boosting Marino up onto his shoulder and lowering to the ground (this movement incorporated the other two staging elements we wanted to include somehow— abstract weapon symbolism, like Meleager stepping on the boar, and something that sends Meleager upwards above the boar, like Acosta lifting Marino up to defeat him). After running this sequence a few times with one of us spotting Marino to make sure she was safe, she was able to do it successfully with just Acosta's support (3:10-3:21). 📺 Boar Death Partnering.MOV

As rehearsal finished up, Acosta, Marino, and I chatted about a few concepts, and I answered their questions about some of the details of Atalanta's myths while Cindric and Schinsing brainstormed in a rather unserious way about how to potentially incorporate the lion transformation myth at the end of the piece. They spun around each other in an intertwined column shape and lowered into a Sphinx-like, child's-pose-adjacent position. I'm still unsure of the degree to which I want to include the footrace and lion myths, but I plan to keep both in mind as we continue developing the piece.

April 13, 2025

Before rehearsal began, Cindric and Schinsing showed me a partial version of the Meleager/Uncles fight that they'd developed together earlier that day. It was very cyclical and

combative, and they were staged in opposition almost the entire time, which fulfilled all the qualities I'd envisioned and communicated with them. When rehearsal started, Cindric taught Marino and Ciraco a repeating phrase to represent Meleager opting to confer the honor of the hunt onto Atalanta ([3:23](#)-3:38), which immediately follows Boar Death Duet between Marino and Acosta. It begins with Marino completing one cycle of the movement on her own, which includes a reach to the ground towards the boar that could be interpreted (or even turned into; we're still uncertain at this point whether we would like Acosta to have a mask or "pelt") as Meleager taking the object of honor from the boar to present to Atalanta, along with an arm position that we've associated with Atalanta throughout this process for its adjacency to the physicality of drawing back the string of a bow, as if referencing her. In the next step of the sequence, Marino turns to face Ciraco as they complete the second cycle of the same movement together, as if Atalanta is replying in kind. They complete another two and a half cycles of this sequence in unison before the uncles interrupt to confront Meleager for offending them. While Marino and Ciraco learned this segment, Schinsing taught Feeney, Fernández, and DeLuco their simultaneous choreography, which would lead into the uncles getting between Meleager and Atalanta with a sharp, definitive slashing motion.

Something about the original myth that has always bothered Schinsing and I is that, no matter how many details are slightly askew or entirely conflicting between all the different versions and translations, one consistent element in every version is that Meleager, despite being married, is immediately attracted to Atalanta. Every classical writer of this story attributes his willingness to hunt with her, his success in convincing the reluctant men to join her, his acknowledgement of her abilities, and his decision to bestow the honor of the hunt upon her on the fact that he was in love with her. As a woman, this is an incredibly frustrating, disrespectful,

and damaging concept that is consistently perpetuated: that a man can only respect a woman if he desires her. We agreed without a moment of hesitation from the very early stages of this collaboration that we would not be subscribing to that narrative. In our story, Meleager does not hold any sexual or emotional passion for Atalanta; he respects her because he is capable of and comfortable acknowledging that she is superior to him and to the rest of the hunters, which is indicative of healthy masculinity. Back at the beginning of the rehearsal process, we'd told Marino and the rest of the cast that we were taking that creative liberty, but since we'd finally reached the part of the story where his love is most often mentioned, used as a motive for all of his actions starting from the moment he kills the boar, I wanted to remind everyone— especially Marino— that that is not the story we're interested in telling.

Once we'd put both pieces of choreography together and confirmed that it worked, we split off more separately to work on two separate sections. Schinsing worked with Marino, Feeney, Fernández, and DeLuco to fill in the choreography that they're doing while Atalanta's Focus Solo is happening. This section, which I began calling the Failed Attack Diagonal, featured their failed attack attempts, which were portrayed by positioning them in a diagonal line facing downstage left (foreshadowing; this is where the boar will die) and having them advance forward and spin into retreat over and over again, all on separate, rapid, disjointed rhythms. Schinsing's optimum goal with this moment was to somehow ensure that no adjacent dancers in the line were ever doing the same part of the movement at the same time, which proved to be quite difficult with how quickly they were moving. Meanwhile, since Studio 2 had become available, we opened the temporary wall, and Cindric, Acosta, and Ciraco went over to the other side of the room to devise a fight sequence for Meleager and the uncles ([3:33](#)-4:08) that was made up of styled fight-like movements and a few moves of actual fight choreography, which I

assisted with. We requested that Marino, Feeney, and Fernández learn their respective parts in the fight by our next rehearsal. 📺 Uncles/Meleager Fight Sequence.MOV

We briefly discussed Atalanta's perspective on this entire section, since that's something no classical translation, at least that we could find, ever covers; how does she feel about being presented with the honor of the hunt, having it stolen before she can receive it, and having these men fight and die over whether or not she, as a woman, deserves it? Is she involved in their argument? Does she try to stop it from becoming physical? Is this misogynistic display at her expense incredibly upsetting to her? Schinsing offered a very different scenario: perhaps it isn't that important to her at all, and they're getting caught up in this triply fatal fight over her honor when really, she holds little interest whatsoever in who takes home this piece of the prey, though they'd ever consider asking her opinion. This alternative was so intriguing and potent to all of us that we immediately decided it was the angle we'd take for this piece.

For the next two weeks, the dance department was in technical rehearsals and performances for *Dance Adelphi*. Both of these weeks consist of lots of long hours and late nights and are very physically and mentally demanding. Therefore, we all felt it was best to refrain from holding rehearsal during this time to avoid putting any more on the casts' plates and to prevent overexhaustion. Unfortunately, I began technical rehearsals for the Department of Theatre's workshop production the very next day after *Dance Adelphi*'s closing performance, which then meant that my schedule became very packed. Therefore, the next rehearsal held for this process was on May 1, 2025 at a time where I was largely unavailable, save for the hour before and ten minutes at the end.

May 1, 2025

Cindric came an hour early today so we could meet and discuss the plan for the rehearsal and what both of our thoughts were on the section she was completing to ensure that we were on the same page about what needed to be done and how. Our aim for this rehearsal was to stitch the large segment we'd built on April 6 (Cindric's audition choreography, manipulated by each dancer, then performed aggressively while facing different directions and coming in and out of synchrony like colleagues who have the same training but are not working well together) into section two between the First Blood Duet and the Boar Death Duet. We spoke about suggesting an inner monologue to the dancers along the lines of "That should have been me," or "Now I need to prove myself over this woman," or "This woman has embarrassed us all as warriors," in order to spark the inner turmoil and imbue the movements with aggression, frustration, and jealousy. Cindric also planned to weave the one-to-two step partnering encounters between the boar and each hunter into this section, as discussed on April 6.

While she was unsure whether they'd have time to work on the end since it was a relatively shorter rehearsal than we typically had, we discussed our thoughts anyways just in case there was any time to start creating a rough shape to fill in at the next rehearsal on Sunday. I've considered several possibilities for how the piece could end, but none of them seemed quite right to me. I was sure that I did not want to end on Meleager's Death Solo, but that is how the myth of the Calydonian Boar Hunt concludes. I'd been thinking as well how Atalanta's "end" is no proper ending— she's turned into a lion as a punishment for an act she did not have the autonomy to willingly commit. In some versions of the myth, there is nothing more to the story at all, and in others, like Ovid's telling in *Metamorphosis*, Atalanta and Hippomenes, once transformed, become "fearful to others, [and] tamely bite on Cybele's bit", meaning they're

forced to pull the chariot of the Greek titan Rhea (Ovid Book X 280). It's a terribly anticlimactic story, but the more I thought about it, the more I felt that we should acknowledge it in the piece instead of ignoring it. Cindric has been an advocate of at least incorporating some form of a race into the piece as a reference to the footrace myth since very early in the process, so this was very welcome news. She suggested that we give Ciraco and DeLuco each a "homework" assignment: before rehearsal on Sunday, create a short traveling phrase for their characters in the footrace.

I also shared with her a beneficial note Professor Orion Duckstein had offered me on Scholarship and Creative Works Day regarding gender and physicality. Something we've been very careful about as we've developed this piece is balancing the importance of establishing the characters' genders for the sake of getting the message about toxic masculinity across, while steering clear of any movements that are overly stereotypical in their gender presentation and risk rendering our portrayal reductive. Orion's suggestion was to direct our efforts towards the characters' centers, instructing the dancers playing men to keep their centers low and lead from the gut while Ciraco is directed to push all of her extensions to the absolute maximum and elongate every movement as much as possible. This would,, in theory, separate Atalanta much more clearly by her lines and length while avoiding any kind of reductive feminine or masculine stereotypes that the audience might pick up on. This is a convention we want to establish and drive in during the introductory travel phrase, and then keep sustained until the end.

During a ten minute break from my Theatre dress rehearsal, I was able to return to the studio to watch and record a rough-draft run of everything we've created up to this point all put together, which was very exciting. After they'd completed two runs and Cindric had given them a few notes on momentum and style, we scheduled a short spacing rehearsal in the Olmsted Theater for Monday, May 5. This will be an opportunity for us to run the entire piece from start

to finish in the performance space to make any adjustments to the spacing based on the dimensions of the stage. Since this will be in the middle of a weekday, only the cast and I will attend this rehearsal, and I will send a video of the run(s) with a quick update to Cindric and Schinsing summarizing how it went and any potential issues that arose. They will then compile some notes and adjustments for the cast based on what they observe in the video(s).

May 4, 2025

I was still in the middle of a performance of the Department of Theater workshop production when this rehearsal started, so I was not present for the beginning, but Cindric, Schinsing, and the cast filled me in on everything I'd missed. They worked out various notes on timing, spacing, and movement scale, and then Schinsing sat down with the cast and provided them with a more detailed rendition of the footrace and lion transformation myths since we're now integrating those stories. I arrived not long after this, and just as they were about to do a full run of everything we'd choreographed so far, so I was able to record it. Schinsing was still trying to figure out a system that would help get them more discordant with each other during the Failed Attack Diagonal. They came up with a few potential solutions, like the person who starts the sequence (Marino) giving an audible cue like a sharp breath as she starts, or everyone calling out their numbers as they go through the cycles, but ultimately Cindric and I expressed to her that we personally were not particularly concerned with a few moments of simultaneous movement here and there; they are all missed attacks, and the sequence is so fast and deregulated that any synchrony is bound not to last long. While this conversation took place, Acosta asked me for my thoughts on his death position. I never expected to have to research what wild boars look like when they die, and it wasn't the most pleasant topic I've ever explored, but I found a

few images that weren't too gruesome and we modeled his position off of them: lying limp on his side, his arms and legs straight out and crossed over each other, and his head slightly tucked down.



At this time, Feeney and Fernández had to leave for another rehearsal, and we had to switch from Studio 1 to Studio 3. Once we were resettled, we asked Ciraco and DeLuco to perform the footrace phrases they'd produced. We had them do them separately first, then together, then Schinsing asked them both to do their phrases twice in a row, traveling from upstage right to downstage left, with Ciraco looping back around after her first run. Schinsing decided to have Atalanta start a bit further back on the diagonal, because she would always give her suitors a headstart before beating them regardless. Cindric told us that to her, DeLuco's phrase felt like it was representative of Hippomenes throwing the apple, so she suggested that DeLuco could do her phrase three times in a row, and each time she completes a cycle, Ciraco has to loop back around, as if Atalanta is going after the apple that was thrown. To take the choreographic symbolism even further, she asked Ciraco to learn DeLuco's phrase and switch to it on each loop-back, picking up the apple-throwing phrase like she's picking up the apple. I added that if we manipulated their pacing and the space each cycle took, we could ensure that Hippomenes would just barely make it to the finish line before Atalanta even after all the ground she lost in her three loops. We did this by condensing DeLuco's footwork to prevent her from getting too far on each cycle and told her to stay slow and steady and having Ciraco's phrase propel her aggressively forward each time so she continues to pull ahead until the final apple-throw cycle.

Once we'd constructed the full footrace ([3:48-4:39](#)), we ran it with music, adding in Marino and Acosta (Marino's Death Solo takes place at the same time, and Acosta is in the

downstage left corner in his death position) to ensure that it would work. It was a bit difficult to envision the proper diagonal trajectory for the race since Feeney and Fernández are both also in death positions on stage left, but we approximated their positions for today and will confirm on Monday during the spacing run that the path we've set does not result in anyone being trampled. We were very satisfied with the way Meleager's Death Solo culminated right in front of Atalanta as she finished the last loop. Having the race run directly through the scattered corpses on the stage was a really powerful image, and Acosta put it quite aptly: "the race of the patriarchy is littered with death."

The last step in our choreography was the resolution. The only characters still alive are Atalanta, Hippomenes, and Althaea (Meleager's mother, who is in the upstage right corner). To reference back to the very start of the piece where civilization had come from stage right to encroach on the natural world on stage left, we decided to have Atalanta and Hippomenes transform somewhere center, symbolizing that they're caught between society and nature when they transform. As a theatrical storyteller, I really needed to include a moment for Atalanta to take in his victory in stillness, allowing the audience to watch the realization hit her in real time: her ever-successful plan had ultimately failed. Schinsing gave DeLuco a phrase to circle around Ciraco with, and I directed her to treat it like a victory lap. We then had Ciraco copy the phrase with a distinctly different energy, that of someone being compelled to fall into synchronization (and marriage) with someone out of dutiful obligation. For the final moment, we needed to figure out how to transform them into lions, and I found myself coming back to the day that Cindric and Schinsing had playfully spun themselves into the Sphinx-like pose. They were surprised at first when I brought it back up since it had been a joke, but we asked DeLuco and Ciraco do try it anyways, and it actually didn't look ridiculous at all, especially once we tweaked the ending pose

so their hands were outstretched more like paws and one foot was pointed up in a position that was vaguely reminiscent of a tail. I ensured that Atalanta ended up on stage left, closer to the “nature side”, while Hippomenes ended on stage right, closer to “society’s side”. We tried a version of the choreography where Atalanta is forced to participate in a partner move with him that takes them into the Transformation Spiral, but Cindric simplified it by requesting that Hippomenes just pull Atalanta towards him (4:39-5:02). This better indicates the clear relationship between the two characters and, furthermore, represents Aphrodite’s control over him, illustrating that Atalanta’s fate, which wouldn’t be so bad (she was already known for her prowess as a hunter and runner as a human!) if it weren’t for the extra curses of fear, compliance, and eternally pulling a titan’s chariot, is the result of patriarchal dominance.



Design Elements

Costumes

Creating the costume design for this piece was one of the most challenging parts of the whole process. Something I’ve been so grateful for during my time in the Adelphi Department of Theatre has been the opportunity to experience as many aspects of theatre as my heart and mind desired. As someone who loves to learn every possible thing about their passions, I was eager to try a little bit of each discipline, and I was very fortunate to have that opportunity, whether it was through my production assignments, classwork, volunteering, being on the Performing Arts Center technician crew or even, for a brief stint, the administrative staff. The one area I had the last interaction with, though, was the costumes department; the full extent of my experience lies

in having fulfilled one single Wardrobe Supervisor role my sophomore year. This was mostly by choice— while I enjoy wearing them, I’m personally rather uninterested in being involved in the curation or creation of them whenever possible. Therefore, I felt quite clueless about how to dress my cast for this piece. From a logistical and environmental standpoint, I was not willing to purchase all new costumes, and thrifting secondhand was unrealistic (partially due to my schedule; partially due to the fact that finding sets of four or more matching piece was quite unlikely, so I was aware that I would need to find ways to use whatever already existed in the Dance Department costume storage.

From my early conversations with Professor Duckstein, I determined that I would be using the costumes to help depict gender since most of my cast was playing a different gender than how they identify. When Schinsing and I spoke about costumes during a concept meeting, I established that I wanted to have them wearing something referential to traditional Ancient Greek clothing, like tunics that resemble the short chitons men wore. This sparked an idea from Schinsing about gender expression: women traditionally wore longer chitons that went to their ankles, so putting Atalanta in a longer dress or tunic would differentiate her from the rest of the hunters. Furthermore, one possible way of illustrating her ability to not only keep up with but surpass the men might be for her to pin or tie up her skirt to match the length of their tunics.

My initial, instinctual visualization for the costumes was very neutral in color, because I am unfortunately susceptible to the false perceptions I grew up associating with classical antiquity: white marble statues, sand-colored temples, white togas, and so on. In most of the visual representations of Atalanta’s myths that I’ve been referencing throughout this process, they’re clad in very little clothing, but what they are wearing is quite colorful and saturate. Finally taking note of this detail triggered my memory of the exhibit in the Acropolis Museum,

which I visited during my study abroad trip, that had samples of what the marble statues would have probably looked like in reality, before the paint wore away.



This caused a complete shift in my approach, and it occurred to

me that I had passed right over a bin of simple solid-colored dresses that would work excellently.

There were three color options: dark red, forest green, and navy blue. I began researching how historians think Ancient Grecians associated certain colors, hoping to find some harmony between their color symbolism and ours. I found that red was associated with passion and transition, which was fitting for Meleager also for its symbolism for anger and blood— he kills one creature and two humans over the course of the dance— and fire, his cause of death. I chose to further relate the uncles to each other by putting both in the same color: green, which I choose for its modern associations with envy and greed. According to the sources I found, blue was symbolic of Poseidon, the ocean, and the sky, and Hippomenes is a direct descendant of Poseidon. For Atalanta, we were limited to whichever colors fit Ciraco comfortably from the collection of dresses: out of the options (pale blue, magenta, and orange), I chose pale blue. For one, this ensures that the uncles are the only characters in a secondary color, putting them on a

“different level” than everyone else. Moreover, putting Atalanta and Hippomenes in multiple shades of the same color creates foreshadowing of their entangled fate. Selecting the boar costume was simply a matter of finding loose pants with a loose top in coordinating shades of dark brown that didn’t appear too civilized, which Acosta, who serves as the dance costume storage coordinator, and I accomplished together when we found a disheveled burlap shirt with frayed, unfinished edges and a pair of brown pants he wore in a previous semester’s *Dance Adelphi* performance. For my short cameo at the end of the piece, it felt very full-circle to wear the authentic Greek dress that I bought during my study abroad trip, since that’s where I officially set this process in motion.

When we did our costume run, Ciraco had just finished trying on a few different dress sizes, so I had yet to pin the skirt up to match the length of the men’s tunics as I’d planned. After watching how she moved in the full skirt, I completely changed my mind and chose not to pin her dress. Atalanta was the most skilled hunter in the group and the fastest runner in her region, all in spite of the myriad patriarchal hindrances placed her since the day she was born, which were things she couldn’t just “pin out of the way”. She was also, unfortunately, never free of the restrictions placed on women in patriarchal culture, as evidenced by the end of her story. Additionally, I’m a huge advocate for the belief that women should not have to dress more masculine to be successful or to be perceived as worthy of respect. There is nothing weak or anti-feminist about enjoying conventionally feminine clothing and activities. It is powerful to see women being the best in their field while expressing themselves the way *they* want to, not inhibited by how they’re expected to look, and I feel very strong about conveying that message within the context of this piece.

Lighting

Something about lighting design that I've learned and put into practice this semester with my various academic and professional projects is that there are times when less is significantly more, and I was proud to be able to identify that with my own piece. We have so much happening with the staging, storylines, choreography, and music that I did not want an unnecessarily high number of light cues to make everything too visually overwhelming, taking away from the work instead of adding impact to it. Since most of the piece takes place in one location (until the end, where Althaea is at home in the city of Calydon and the footrace is carried out in Arcadia), I built a

foundational forest look using foliage shadows on the stage and a very subtle green backdrop to start, and once that was established, the majority of my remaining cues were alterations of that look, brightening or isolating different areas of the stage or slightly obscuring the foliage when needed.



There were a few “specialty cues” centering around and highlighting the most major events: the backlights flash a few times in coordination with the “malfunctioning” music as the First Blood Duet commences, the nature-inspired look is drained away when the boar is killed, the color red slowly fades in from the sides during the fight between Meleager and his uncles to give everyone an eerie scarlet glow, along with a flash of red on the backdrop when Meleager kills them.



Due to fire safety codes in the theater, our dream concept of Althaea entering in a spotlight upstage right after the uncles are killed and striking a match that burns for the duration of the Meleager death solo until she blows it out as he finds his final stillness was not able to come to fruition. As a safe, legal substitution for this moment, I programmed a flame effect for just the strip of backdrop where I would be standing as Althaea, and I mimed a dramatized version of striking a match and holding it up where the fire was burning, then when the Death Solo was finished and the backdrop “flame” extinguished, I gestured blowing out the match. The final



moment was lit by dim, warm-temperature light, relating to the color palette and preferred climate of lions, and ended in a very simple fade to black to match Atalanta's unfortunately anticlimactic ending.



Reflection & Conclusion

The sheer volume of everything I learned during this process is astonishing to me. I've discovered so much about leading a creative process, about effective practices of implementing vast amounts of research into original performance work, and about myself as an individual and as a collaborator. Ironically, my biggest takeaway on the subject of staging non-linguistically when using classical stories to make contemporary statements is something that is not easily put into words: there is a certain balance to be struck between literal and abstract when working non-linguistically in order to reach a deeper level of expression while still guiding the audience through the story. In my experience, we found that the strongest approach involves blending nonliteral movement with identifiable gestures and stage pictures that distinctly depict the crucial elements of plot and relationship. If the positions in which everyone is arranged onstage and the directions and locations being traveled to tell a clear physical story, one has the liberty to make the specific movements as abstract as they desire, though it is beneficial to imbue that choreography with descriptive qualities (joyful, heavy, sharp, passive, etcetera), and one may want to consider at least occasionally returning to the realm of realism with semi-recognizable gestures that give the audience a point of reference when needed for what's happening.

On the subject of audience reception, I had to frequently remind myself that part of creating non-linguistic work, especially when using a lesser-known story, is accepting that the audience will not pick up on every single detail. There is a strong possibility that they will not understand exactly what the piece is about at all; it is more likely that they will have a sense of the themes and recognize certain symbols. However, they also may notice brilliant connections that never even crossed the creators' minds, or appreciate certain elements for what they see reflected in their own life that might be completely different from what the creators had intended.

As my Psychological Acting II professor, Frankie DiCiaccio, proclaimed during our scene analysis session: “humans are meaning-making machines!” As long as the audience interprets *something* from the piece, I have done my job. Professor Duckstein urged me to allow myself freedom from concerning myself over how to execute every intention, staging concept, and tiny referential detail based on how the audience would see it. Ultimately, I should be measuring my success off of the work that was put in, not the audience’s perception, and if I can take a step back and be proud of the outcome *and* the process, I can trust that some way or another, an impact has been made.

Something I really struggled with was not feeling guilty when I received help or let Cindric and Schinsing lead a section or task. I’m used to being one actor or designer in a cast or team of many where I have a set of specific responsibilities; I’ve never been the director or main producer of something, and I had a hard time letting go of the notion that I should be able to do it all myself. There was a piece of me that felt embarrassed at having two choreographers working with me when it was supposed to be my project, but I reminded myself that although I have two decades of experience as a dancer and have gained so much knowledge about staging and physical storytelling from my theatre training, I have done very little with choreography, and Cindric and Schinsing have degrees that involved composition and choreography classes. I have devoted so much time, energy, and thought into this project— structuring the foundational story, directing the staging and character development, and handling all the design aspects. There is no shame— in fact, there is tremendous creative strength and dignity— in allowing oneself to accept assistance and guidance from others and to admit when it might be beneficial to turn to collaborators with greater knowledge and experience in certain areas.

There were also plenty of miscellaneous lessons learned throughout this process. One of these is how many “rabbit holes” and digressions one must go through during research sometimes before they find the most useful pieces of information. Others center around the rehearsal part of the process, like how sometimes, the strongest ideas are born out of humorous moments that aren’t even meant to be useful— having some fun and not taking everything too seriously can lead to some great discoveries, like the lion transformation spiral at the very end of the piece! I determined more useful and efficient ways to document and take notes on a process that I will implement from now on. I also experienced being in a piece while also working on it, which was a dream come true but was also very difficult; watching and adjusting and recording was the priority, which meant I had to be viewing the entire piece from an audience perspective. There was not nearly enough time for me to insert myself into it until our tech run, and the performance was the second time I’d ever done that part. While I had done plenty of thinking and planning regarding what I would do onstage for that segment, I did not have much of a chance to try it out and finesse it, and my timing was not quite exact. Obviously, the directing and designing aspects of my job were of a significantly higher priority, but I still could have portioned out my time a bit more wisely, and if I ever design and perform in a single piece again, I will keep this in mind. Overall, this project has just made me progressively more excited for my future as an artistic professional, and I’m already eager to begin a new one, especially now that I feel confident in my abilities as a self-supporting creator with the ability to produce art from scratch.

This next matter is a bit of a digression, and it’s rather vulnerable, but I feel that it’s incredibly important to my development as an artist. I had varying degrees of “Imposter Syndrome” throughout this process and, honestly, my last four years in college, because I felt

like I'd convinced the outside world and the Honors College and everyone else that I was an academic on the same level as the other Honors students, when really I was memorizing scripts and learning how to talk in a British accent while my Honors peers were memorizing every bone in the body and learning how to solve the climate crisis. It sometimes felt like what I was doing had less value. Perhaps there will always be a part of me that worries I'm not contributing enough to the world, like I could have or should have picked a more significant and impactful career. It felt wrong, sometimes, to be having so much fun creating my thesis, like my project was too enjoyable to be equivalent to the "proper thesis", like I wasn't working hard enough. But when I began to put together my Scholarship & Creative Works presentation, I realized just how much content I had, just how much of myself I'd brought into the work and how much I'd gotten out of it. This has meaning. If I can do work that holds a mirror up to society in some capacity, and even one person looks in that mirror and realizes something new, then I've made an impact. Perhaps the dancers will be affected by this work in some way, and that will influence their perceptions or actions. If so, I've made an impact. And if I myself am changed by the work, and I always am, and that in turn changes the way I think or see or act, then I've made an impact. Art is crucial to a functioning society. Humans *need* art, and if they aren't making it themselves, they need to consume it. It is a beautiful notion, to do so much work and still worry that it's not enough, all because it was much too enjoyable to *feel* like "Work". What an honor and a joy to be an artist devoting their life to creation!

Works Cited

- Albert, Liv, and Mari Phillips. "The Gods Were All A Little Gay, Representation in Mythology." *Let's Talk About Myths, Baby! Greek & Roman Mythology Retold*, 11 August 2020, <https://www.everand.com/podcast/590919445/LXXXVII-The-Gods-Were-All-A-Little-Gay-Representation-in-Mythology-w-Myths-Tits-Greek-mythology-loves-a-gay-story-a-queer-story-a-trans-stor>. Accessed 24 November 2024.
- Cartwright, Mark, and Fiona Willis. "François Vase." *World History Encyclopedia*, 25 December 2012, https://www.worldhistory.org/Francois_Vase/. Accessed 3 April 2025.
- El Karfi Azzarone, Saadia, and Defne Koyluoglu. "Martha Graham's Night Journey." *JSTOR Daily*, JSTOR, 30 June 2023, <https://daily.jstor.org/martha-grahams-night-journey/>. Accessed 4 May 2025.
- "Free To Be You and Me - Princess Atalantis." *YouTube*, 4 August 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuyRi2yWWSQ>. Accessed 24 April 2025.
- "The Hunt of the Calydonian Boar » Norton Simon Museum." *Norton Simon Museum*, <https://www.nortonsimon.org/art/detail/M.1975.21.P>. Accessed 12 March 2025.
- Johnson, Lauryn. "Getting to know Errand into the Maze." *Vail Dance Festival*, 22 July 2023, <https://vaildance.org/errand-into-the-maze/>. Accessed 4 May 2025.
- Kamen, Deborah. "Naturalized Desires and the Metamorphosis of Iphis." *Project MUSE*, 2012, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/577592%20>. Accessed 24 April 2025.
- Miller, Madeline. "Myths - Myth of the Week: Atalanta." *Madeline Miller*, 23 April 2012, <https://madelinemiller.com/myth-of-the-week-atalanta/>. Accessed 21 April 2025.

Ovid. *The Metamorphoses*. Translated by A. Kline, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014. Accessed 3 May 2025.

Poynton, Bella. *Medusa Undone*. 3 22 2015. Accessed 24 10 2023.

Wiener, James. "Ancient Hairstyles of the Greco-Roman World – World History et cetera."

World History et cetera, 9 December 2015,

<https://etc.worldhistory.org/interviews/ancient-hairstyles-of-the-grecoroman-world/>.

Accessed 14 April 2025.

"Wild Boar Thriving in the UK! - Rewilding." *YouTube*, 2 June 2021,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPUJ8PbFoIk>. Accessed 22 March 2025.