

Metaphorphosis

a game about queer language and legacy
by Gabe Sopocy



Before Playing

Requirements

- 4 players, 60 minutes
- One facilitator: you can choose to play or not. Your role is to read the instructions and send the translated poem to the players once the game has ended.
- Zoom, Discord, or other virtual platform with video and screen sharing ability
- All players should have editor access to the [Google Slides presentation](#)

Documenting Boundaries (3-5 minutes)

Take a moment to discuss player boundaries and areas of curiosity before beginning gameplay. Be aware this game may deal with themes of *death, grieving, transphobia, homophobia, and self-harm*.

- **Lines:** themes or topics players do not want to mention or explore during our game under any circumstances.
- **Veils:** themes or topics players feel is acceptable to mention as though it were happening offscreen, but do not want to explore in depth.
- **Green Lights:** themes and topics players are excited to lean into and explore in depth.

Gameplay

1. Background (Read aloud, 2-3 minutes)

Aunt Dorian, a beloved elder of the queer community, has passed away. Though they knew just about everything about everyone, few people seem to know much about their life before they came out as queer and became Aunt Dorian. They did leave behind one clue, though. Enclosed in their last wishes was a poem—Dorian's story of coming out and embracing their queer identity, using the extended metaphor of the life cycle of a moth.

Four people from Dorian's life have come together to puzzle out the poem. What do these metaphors mean? To whom do they refer? What events took place, and how did Dorian feel about them? They will combine their contexts to translate Dorian's poem and hopefully, gain a sense of closure and understanding in the process.

1. Choose a character. (1-2 minutes)

Read about the characters and choose one who resonates with you. They are numbered, so if players prefer, they can count off from 1 to 4. You can play characters as any gender identity you like. Document your character's name and pronouns so other players can see.

1. **Orlando:** Adult younger sibling. Though they were close as children, the siblings' turbulent teenage years created a rift between them. Estranged, they reconnected six months before Dorian passed away.
2. **Sylvie:** Former bandmate & best friend. As young adults, a shared taste for rebellion and experimental music initially brought Sylvie and Dorian together. As they grew older, however, they strengthened their friendship through mutual hobbies and taking recreational classes together.
3. **Randi:** Roommate & ex-partner. Randi and Dorian's relationship has been through many phases: a torrid romance, a dramatic breakup, and a warm friendship. They eventually realized their similarities made them terrible partners, but excellent roommates.
4. **Tolliver:** Adopted ward. Kicked out of their home as a queer and neurodivergent teenager, Tolliver heard Dorian sheltered other people in similar situations. Tolliver showed up on their doorstep one night and Dorian took them under their wing.

Gameplay Continued

3. Ask each other questions to connect. (10 minutes)

Your characters all knew Dorian at different times in their lives. Take turns interviewing each to develop a better sense of everyone's connections to Dorian before translating the poem. Each exchange should take no more than a few minutes.

1. **Randi, ask Orlando** about a hard lesson Dorian learned growing up in their household.
2. **Sylvie, ask Randi** about how they were able to become close friends after they broke up.
3. **Tolliver, ask Sylvie** about what Dorian was trying to say with their music that their words could not express.
4. **Orlando, ask Tolliver** about how Dorian made them feel safe.

4. Read the poem below. (1-3 minutes)

Read *Imago* aloud. Alternately, you may choose to [listen to a recording of the poem being read](#). You can use an [English language dictionary](#) to translate any of the more obscure words. When you finish reading the poem, move on to the translation process on the next page.

Imago

1

A coruscant egg among a clutch,
underneath a leaf, I weep.
Hatching, retching, I erupt.
The sound of wings drowns me out.

2

I am a Larval Supervillain
With toxic tines and terrible teeth.
The brood colluded to conclude me
And so I snap, erasing half.

3

Triple in size, I metastasize,
I split my blistering skin.
I pupate with purpose; I harden my armor.
While inside, I die and liquefy.

4

I emerge to purge my biology.
To test these salt and peppered wings.
And by and by, the sky is mine.
Drowned out, but never pinned down.

5. Translate the poem. (20-30 minutes)

Read each stanza and take turns translating line by line in this order: 1 Orlando, 2 Sylvie, 3 Randi, 4 Tolliver, or at random, choosing the lines that inspire you. The character most familiar with that era of Dorian's life will document, acting as the final say on the translation and replacing the text on the black card with their [own within the Google Slides document](#). Translate the title of the poem last.

Imago

1

A coruscant egg among a clutch,
underneath a leaf, I weep.
Hatching, retching, I erupt.
The sound of wings drowns me out.

Translation

1

Orlando documents. Each character translates one line into a truth about Dorian's childhood.

1. A coruscant egg among a clutch
2. underneath a leaf, I weep.
3. Hatching, retching, I erupt.
4. The sound of wings drowns me out.

2

I am a Larval Supervillain
With toxic tines and terrible teeth.
My brood colludes to conclude me
And so I snap, erasing half.

2

Sylvie documents. Each character translates one line into a truth about Dorian's young adulthood.

1. I am a Larval Supervillain
2. With toxic tines and terrible teeth.
3. My brood colludes to conclude me
4. And so I snap, erasing half.

3

Triple in size, I metastasize,
I split my blistering skin.
I pupate with purpose; I harden my armor.
While inside, I die and liquefy.

3

Randi documents. Each character translates one line into a truth about how Dorian struggled with their queer identity.

1. Triple in size, I metastasize,
2. I split my blistering skin.
3. I pupate with purpose; I harden my armor.
4. While inside, I die and liquefy.

4

I emerge to purge my biology.
To test these salt and peppered wings.
And by and by, the sky is mine.
Drowned out, but never pinned down.

4

Tolliver documents. Each character translates one line into a truth about how Dorian embraced their queer identity.

1. I emerge to purge my biology.
2. To test these salt and peppered wings.
3. And by and by, the sky is mine.
4. Drowned out, but never pinned down.

Epilogue

Consider Dorian's legacy. (5-7 minutes)

What do the friends decide to do with the poem?

Do they publish it? Where?

- If so, do they decide to share their translation along with it?
- If they decide to keep the poem private, what do they do with the physical artifact?

Debrief (10 minutes)

Let your character go; connect back to your own experiences. Reflect for a moment on the prompts below. If you are comfortable sharing, discuss.

- Do you have an Aunt Dorian in your life? Who are they and what gift of enduring value, physical or symbolic, have they given you?
 - If not, have you ever been a mentor, protector, or role model to someone to whom you were not biologically related? Who, and what valuable gift have you given them?
- If someone wanted to know you deeply, would they learn more from reading a catalogue of your days or exploring your art?

The next chapter

Share your email address so the facilitator can collect the translation you wrote together and send it to the group. You can use the translated page as-is, use the optional template in the appendix, or transform it into any other kind of shared artifact you wish.

Appendix

Sample Translation Artifact

Facilitators can use this as a template or inspiration to create the translated poem document they will send to group members after gameplay concludes.

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And by and by, the sky is mine.
Drowned out, but never pinned down.

Translation

1

Translated line 1
Translated line 2
Translated line 3
Translated line 4

2

Translated line 1
Translated line 2
Translated line 3
Translated line 4

3

Translated line 1
Translated line 2
Translated line 3
Translated line 4

4

Translated line 1
Translated line 2
Translated line 3
Translated line 4

Imago

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