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It's An Old Song, But We're Gonna Sing It Again: The Myth of Orpheus & Eurydice in Modern and Postmodern Theatrical Performance

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*It's An Old Song, But We're Gonna Sing It Again: The Myth of Orpheus & Eurydice in
Modern and Postmodern Theatrical Performance*

by

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to everyone who has influenced my career in theatre and who has given me the means to get this far in my academic career. I especially want to thank my professors at both Converse College and the University of South Carolina for pushing me to explore new avenues, try new things, and reach past my limits to new horizons.

ABSTRACT

Since theatre was established as an art form, productions have adapted myths into performance, creating an array of theatrical texts based on the oral practice of storytelling of ancient civilizations. This concept of adaptation, where playwrights draw from stories of the past in new works, has expanded in recent years to include new scholarship regarding the dramaturgy of theatrical adaptations and what it means to adapt a work, whether originally for theatre or not, into a text meant for theatrical performance. One such myth that has captivated audiences since its first recorded utilization has been the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and many playwrights have tried their hand at creating their own unique theatrical performances based around the myth of the original ill-fated lovers. The myth, both because of its easily recognized archetypes and the lasting quality of its themes, has continued to fascinate and inspire works of art, music, and literature, as well. How, then, does the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice adapt so easily to contemporary performance through various styles and methods employed by a diverse array of playwrights, and how does the myth evolve based on the playwright's use of their own distinctive voice?

This research will explore the idea of theatrical adaptation of myth, the implementation of a story, whether based in historical fact or not, from the past that evolves within a new work created for modern performance, in relation to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice through its representation in multiple works of modern and

postmodern performance in the 20th and 21st centuries. These works will include: Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*, Tennessee Williams' *Orpheus Descending*, Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus*, Anais Mitchell's *Hadestown*, and Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*. Each playwright created their own unique interpretations of the myth when bringing the story to the stage, and each production has found new ways to showcase the intrinsic power of adapted myths in performance for modern audiences. This is done by the use of universal truths and archetypes held within the myth, ones that are often shared between the five above works, while also employing specific themes and styles specific to the playwright. Additionally, outside forces, such as the prevailing theatrical forms of the playwright's time and societal influences, were influences upon the way each story was told, further showcasing the timeless nature of the myth and its ability to adapt to suit various playwright's needs. However, despite the myriad differences between the works based on the playwright's unique interpretations, many of the plays share strong similarities, both based on the use of archetypal traits of the characters and because of the similarities in how the playwrights interpreted the myth to fit the tastes of their audiences. This research will focus on analyzing each version of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice listed above through both the playwrights' adaptations of the myth within the scripts themselves and through the interpretations of the works from the creative teams who utilized the scripts for live performances. The works will also be compared to each other and placed within their respective performances through production reviews and academic analyses to showcase both how the myth has captivated audiences in different ways and how the myth has evolved through modern theatre history to bring new audiences to performances.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The adaptation of classical myths and legends has always been a powerful venue for playwrights to explore when creating new works for the stage, and adaptation has continuously influenced theatrical productions throughout the written history of performance. In this context, the creation of new works of theatre has been greatly affected by works of the past, whether in theatrical form or not, as playwrights utilize the archetypes and narratives of well-known myths and legends when creating new works for the stage. One such story that continues to excite theatre audiences in a multitude of forms is that of Orpheus and Eurydice, a myth originating before written Greek history that evolved into a popular myth in Roman stories and into various iterations across time through operas, works of visual art, and songs among many others. Writers of various styles have tried their hand at creating their own iteration of Orpheus and Eurydice, and each has uniquely taken aspects of the original story while simultaneously creating new elements for each of the characters that have in turn also been passed down to new versions of the tale. The story itself contains universal archetypes and is easily transposed to new generations because of its resounding themes and because of its ability to connect with audiences in new and unique ways. In other words, the story thrills because it is repeatable and yet completely unique in each iteration that it is told. Even in the versions of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth from the ancient world, namely in the recreation of the

myth by Ovid, the story can easily adapt to a new audience or evolve to fit a new narrative that evokes a powerful emotional response.

Although the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is one that is fairly well known, this paper will focus on multiple modern adaptations of the myth, including two that premiered in the early 20th century and three that have premiered within the past twenty-five years. This will include: Jean Cocteau's *Orpheé*, Tennessee Williams *Orpheus Descending*, Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*, Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*, and Anaïs Mitchell's *Hadestown*. This discussion of the myth and its adapted forms will be divided into three parts, beginning with an introductory summary of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth itself and of the current field of adaptation studies in regards to theatrical performance. The second section will deal with two of the plays, *Orpheé* and *Orpheus Descending*, as they are considered non-contemporary pieces because of their earlier publication and their similarities in thematic focus and style based in older periods of theatrical performance. The third part of this paper will focus on the three other works, *Metamorphoses*, *Eurydice*, and *Hadestown*, as they are all more contemporary productions that share common elements based in contemporary adaptation styles and are all written by a female playwright. Repeated motifs that will be discussed amongst all five of the plays include: themes of wealth and references to impoverished artists, Orpheus as an artist or as a muse of other artists, the influence of previous adapted texts on each adaptation, themes of musical or poetic strength, use of audience interaction, among many others. Other themes utilized by one of the plays, or in a select few of the plays, showcase the variety of the artistic interpretations of the myth and the ability of myths to evolve to suit different narratives throughout time and will also be discussed.

This paper will also examine the plays listed above through the lens of live performance. Because theatre, like its origins in oral storytelling, is a combination of written text and live performance, both form the origins of ritual and modern performance giving a unique duality to myth in public performance for both ritualistic purpose and audience enjoyment. Because each of the authors chose to create their unique interpretation of the myth for live performance on a stage, it is imperative to note the techniques utilized in each of the works that utilizes this live element to evolve the myth to captivate a new audience as they tell the story live in front of them. This will include the use of specific elements held within the scenic and costume designs, the use of reviews from live performances, and the interpretation of the current events that surrounded the openings of the adapted texts. In each play, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice utilizes this powerful ability to evolve and to repeat to tell the mythic story through a new lens and to captivate a new audience, and by examining the plays through the lens of their respective live performances, one can further delve into how the myth has adapted to suit the needs of new audiences.

What do theatre practitioners gain from the study of mythic adaptations? Jane Barnette, author of *Adapturgy*, argues both that “the history of theatre *is* a history of adaptation,” and that live performance is a way to deepen conversations regarding a primary source and long dead authors (Barnette 1). Theatre creates a physical manifestation of a story, an adaptation of real life, and humans intrinsically enjoy watching stories that they are already familiar with and can relate to. Reminiscent of the retellings of Greek myths on the stages of Athens in the fifth century BCE and beyond, the retellings of Orpheus and Eurydice’s doomed love story showcase the playwright’s

unique visions when taking the story and making it their own. In Jean Cocteau's *Orphée*, the elements of existentialist and surrealist thought create a new perspective to Orpheus and Eurydice's mythical story through an obsession with death, mirrors as windows to the underworld, and a mythic love story tinged with the added suspense of a failing marriage. In Tennessee Williams's *Orpheus Descending*, the story is taken far from its original place and time to a rural Southern town to display a story that barely touches on the original myth but still highlights certain relevant traits and archetypes of the mythic story. In Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*, the myth appears in the middle-point of a vignette-styled production through which Zimmerman utilizes a multitude of Ovidian tales of transformation through performances whose early reception were clouded by the September 11th attacks. In Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*, the story shifts to focus wholeheartedly on the female protagonist of the original myth who is usually ignored once she is turned back towards Hades' realm. Lastly, Anais Mitchell's *Hadestown* employs a collaborative process to transform the myth into a Broadway musical, taking elements of folk rock and new elements of staging style to transform the show into a closer analysis of the musical elements of the original Orphic myths juxtaposed with contemporary themes such as climate change and capitalistic greed.

Why, additionally, do playwrights often choose classical works as inspiration for their plays? Sarah Ruhl argues that "if it is true... that there are only two or three basic human stories worth telling" then adaptation should not be considered as a lesser form of art because "the contribution of the playwright is not necessarily the story itself," which had already been created, "but the way the story is told, word for word" (Ruhl, *100 Essays* 25). Despite this intrinsic belief in the importance of telling stories that have

already been told, it is no secret that “myths are frequently best known in the form they have assumed within the canon” and that playwrights who attempt to write their own adaptations “immediately find their work measured against this regardless of the intentions of a new work or attitudes towards the old” (Babbage 3). It is important to note that every version of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice that is known now is an adaptation as any possible written origins of their doomed love story have been lost or never existed in written form. When looking at the adaptations spoken about above, and considering that the myth may have never originally existed in one singular, written form, it is much easier to separate the adapted works from the mythic narrative that we do have from the Classical Era to delve deeper into the playwright’s intentions and to examine why the play was created for that audience at that place and time.

CHAPTER TWO

MYTHIC AWARENESS & THE ORIGINS OF ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Although historians do not have an exact date or location regarding the origins of the mythic lovers, iterations of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice can be seen throughout ancient Greece and Rome with elements of the Orphic myths found among the remnants of early written texts and art from well before concrete knowledge of the Mediterranean region exists. The myth itself is one that most will be familiar with, whether or not one associates the story, or the archetypal themes presented within it, with the names Orpheus and Eurydice. It is also unique in that this narrative has had a “continuous history for over two and a half thousand years” with multiple adaptations of the story continuously being presented in various forms throughout history (Dawson, 245). Because myths are not fixed narratives but are instead usually built from multiple iterations of stories with vastly differing narrative arcs, it is hard to signify one specific version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth that is *the* myth, but there are four distinct events that are necessary within classical and adapted versions of the narrative to be considered a true version of the myth. These elements that constitute the “mythic pattern” are listed by Terence Dawson in *The Orpheus Complex* as the following:

- A: The ‘death’ literal or metaphorical of Eurydice and her descent into an ‘underworld’
- B: The grief of Orpheus
- C: The descent of Orpheus into the ‘underworld’
- D: An endeavor by Orpheus to return to life with Eurydice. (Dawson, 246)

Other scholars have also utilized this myth as a justification for their beliefs regarding the use of myths and the continued prevalence of their stories. Edward Burnett Tylor, a founder of the field of anthropology says, in part, that mythology “is a natural and regular product of the human mind reacting to particular circumstances” with particular “characteristics sufficiently specific to enable historians and anthropologists alike to recognize it immediately wherever it appears” (Detienne 9). The German philosopher Schelling, additionally, argued that “a basic inclination of the human mind is manifested in mythology” with “the meaning of myth [lying] in what it recounts, not elsewhere” (Detienne 9). This was furthered by Romantic historian Karl-Ottfried Muller who would argue for “stripping away from myths the concretions that... rendered them unrecognizable” in an effort to reveal “home-grown stories” that can be placed into their original “historical and geographical contexts” (Detienne 10). Mythic narratives, then, are the unique combination of universal archetypes and ancient stories that assist in telling the world both what it has in common and what has happened in humanity’s past. Myths, the stories that these archetypal qualities are based on, combine these universally resounding themes with ancient stories that can be universally told and understood by audiences in any time or place.

Although the origins of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice are unknown, Orpheus’ origin as the possible son of a Muse and a human prince of Thrace are passed down from ancient Greece. It is also possible that the myth of Orpheus evolved out of a past version of a god of vegetation or even of death. “A ‘generation before Homer’” is typically the time period associated with Orpheus, who was thought to have grown up in Thrace, as “a devotee of the god Dionysus, ... [as a] son of the musical muse Calliope,”

and often described as being “gifted with Apollo’s own lyre” due to his musical abilities (Zabriskie 427). As Thrace was “regarded as the original home of music,” this association of Orpheus as a Thracian Prince with the creator of divine music would make sense (Marlow 362). Other iterations of the myth claim that Orpheus was the son of Apollo, a possible reason for the association of Orpheus to the lyre and lyric poetry, but the common iterations of Orphic legend point to Orpheus having a mortal father and thus unable to be a god or immortal. The Muses, whom Orpheus is frequently associated with, had voices that were “lovely beyond compare,” and by having this direct association, along with the musically-blessed lyre of Apollo, Orpheus would have made music that no one could resist (Hamilton 139). Modern audiences often associate Orpheus with writing, music, and lyrical poetry, along with the connection to the myth of Orpheus and his wife. Marcel Detienne, in *The Writing of Orpheus*, speaks of this when he says,

His voice is one that sang before articulated speech and one whose exceptional status ... assigns Orpheus to the world of music before poetry, music without words, a domain which he imitates nobody, for he himself is the beginning and the origin... When Orpheus’ song sounds forth, it has never been sung before. Its importance lies in its effects rather than its content... which attracts around the voice all living beings, both animate and inanimate. (Detienne 133-34)

Tales of Orpheus’ life, his travels to the underworld, and the violent nature of his death are filled with “undercurrents of some deeper, long-lost tale or custom... mysteries, religious rites associated with various gods and performed by people who were first initiated and formed a select and close body,” with these rites being called “Orphic mysteries” (Marlow 366). As a poet and musician, Orpheus is also unique because he

“did not rely on the power of his music exclusively: he also took physical action, journeying to the underworld in person and attempting to retrieve his beloved in person” an action that led to his portrayal as a writer of heroic poetry and myth and as a figure in those same mythic tales (Tueller 107). Orpheus, then, becomes a figure that has multiple connections to artistic talent, music and poetry, and religious cults shrouded in mystery on top of his association with his ill-fated love story and his tragic death, creating a confusing mythic figure that often stands for multiple ideas at once.

In most iterations of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, a few key elements are usually preserved. In most, characteristics ascribed to a musician or performer are often given to Orpheus, and often writers will adapt the story of Orpheus because of their connection to his identity as an artist. In *Orpheus and Eurydice: A Creative Agony*, Beverly Zabriskie describes Orpheus’ musical history with the following,

As a musician, Orpheus traversed the ancient world. While even Odysseus... was bound to the mast to resist the Siren’s song, Orpheus’ compelling voice, his only weapon, protected the sailors from shipwreck on the seductive sisters’ treacherous shores. When on land, playing like Apollo himself, his music charmed animals and birds, and so touched trees and rocks that they uprooted themselves to follow his melodies. (Zabriskie 428)

Another element of the original myth that is utilized by all adaptations is the truly agonizing moment when Orpheus looks back at Eurydice on their way out of the underworld, the fatal glance that solidifies Eurydice’s fate again and again in adaptations of the text. It is a moment that, despite being frequently repeated in multiple forms of media, continues to effect audiences, as Eurydice’s second death is seen “as more tragic

than her actual death, perhaps because it is truly irrevocable, or perhaps because [Orpheus'] simple, arbitrary gesture of looking backwards has such grave consequences" (Chirico 168). However, this moment is represented in vastly different ways by modern adaptation; these variations will be discussed in the examples below. Other prevalent thematic archetypes permeate the adapted stories of Orpheus and Eurydice and are often associated with the myth despite often only being loosely present to in ancient Greek and Roman literature, pottery, or in other art forms. One of the prevalent themes of the myth and adaptations of it throughout history is that of Hermes as a psychopomp figure, or as a guide specifically to Orpheus as he travels to the underworld despite still being alive. Another is the dichotomy of Orpheus as a follower of either Apollo or of Dionysus—both representations factor into a modern audiences' view of Orpheus as each god has tinged the view of what the muse's son would have been in Greek and Roman society. Apollo influences the view of Orpheus through his musical and poetic representations as the god who bestowed Orpheus with the lyre on which his music was built-- references to Apollo as a possible "choral leader" of the Muses is another possible connection to Orpheus' lineage, and others argue that iterations of Orpheus were also tinged with the idea that he may have been Apollo's son, as well (Woodard 39). Orpheus is connected to Dionysus through their shared connection with religious mysteries and cult followings, and the female figures that tear Orpheus to shreds at the end of his life are often attributed to being followers of Dionysus and his Bacchic rituals.

In his lifetime, Orpheus is forced through two "violent separations," with the first occurring on the day of his wedding to Eurydice when she is bitten by a snake, or in some versions attacked by "the brute rapist Aristaeus," a tragic event that abruptly ends her life

(Zabriskie 428). Very little is known about Eurydice's life prior to Orpheus. In some tellings of the myth, references to a breath being taken by Eurydice once she has been reunited with Orpheus suggest that "the myth originally had a happy ending," but versions of this story no longer exist (Tueller 100). As a mythic character, Eurydice is limited as she is "never really a woman, always an allegory" and her "only recorded words were sighs of pain" (Wroe 105). In some forms of the myth, Eurydice is thought to be a dryad. In many versions, she is given no dialogue or clarifying information, but is instead a speechless figure utilized as a tool for Orpheus' mythic quest to Hades and nothing more. In every iteration of the myth, it is known that Orpheus loves Eurydice, and Orpheus must try to gain Eurydice back from death, but traits of that quest or the origins of the love itself vary.

The second violent separation in Orpheus' life comes after his trip to the underworld, as Orpheus' body is violently separated from itself and the "rebirth of the demi-god is symbolized by the Muses' salvaging" his head, an object that "continues, even after his death, to sing" (Thompson 89). This tearing apart of his body, similar in many ways to the trope of the resurrected god present in many ancient myths across the world, comes from the jealous anger of the Bacchantes who are angered by Orpheus' scorning of women following the death of his beloved. This Orphic tradition, one that is "consistently misogynous," argues that Orpheus voice could "triumph over anything except the female species, before which it was powerless" (Detieenne 164). The Orphic legend, and the traditional religious practices that surround it, are shrouded in secrecy and few remaining texts give scholars clarifying information on the dynamics of the Orphic cult. Orpheus, then, is seen as a "figure on the border of fact and myth" who was known

as “the patron not only of music but of religious mysteries, not associated with romantic love but rather with sacred rites” (Marlow 362). The cult of “Orphism, a mystery cult” has few existing texts remaining but did have something to do with dying as “practitioners received instructions on what to do after death” (Dawson 247). By being an artist in both poetry and song, and based on the Greek ideals surrounding “the consequences of artistry [and] perceiving creative work as an intersection of gods and humans,” ancient audiences would have “fantasies of the price of extraordinary or ‘divine’ talent” being enacted upon Orpheus when thinking of the fate of him and his wife (Zabriskie 433). The disembodied head of Orpheus also continues “an independent existence after his death” as it continues to create music and tell prophecies of the future despite being separated from his body (Marlow 365).

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, then, does not intrinsically deal with a mythic origin for an element of nature or a pseudo-scientific explanation for the unexplainable, as many myths do, but instead deals with a love story ended too soon and a doomed man forced to deal with the loss of both his love and his life. Additionally, the myth thematically utilizes a mortal hero’s journey to the underworld, a journey that is only given to few characters in Greek myth but is very well known from its few uses. Orpheus, as a figure of myth, attempts “a self-willed journey as a living man not only into the grave, but also beyond it into Hades of the dead,” a venture that few attempt and even fewer succeed (Zabriskie 430-1). In fact, the ability to travel to the underworld “was not given to ordinary mortals... some especially favoured mortal was occasionally allowed to summon shades to converse with him” like Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, but that was rare (Marlow 368). It is possible that Orpheus’ ability to travel to Hades was “due to the...

belief that he was a god... associated with the after-life of the soul” (Marlow 368). This journey and subsequent loss of Eurydice is something that even a contemporary audience can relate to; everyone has been affected by the death of a loved one or the sudden loss or a death of someone too young or too healthy. Edith Hamilton, in her pivotal work *Mythology*, discusses this idea when she says,

Myths are early science, the result of men’s first trying to explain what they saw around them. But there are so many so-called myths which explain nothing at all. These tales are pure entertainment... This fact is now generally accepted; and we do not have to try to find in every mythological heroine the moon or the dawn in every hero’s life a sun myth. The stories are early literature as well as early science. (Hamilton 10)

In the remains of ancient Greek literature, there are indeed multiple references to Orpheus and Eurydice, the Orphic mysteries, and the dismemberment of Orpheus. It is also important not to confuse a myth “with any single adaptation of it” but to consider that “myth is a pre-text” where “as soon as it is written down, it ceases to be a myth” and instead becomes one version of the narrative surrounding a mythic story (Dawson 246). Texts of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth can be considered “mosaics of citations that are visible and invisible, heard and silent” connections to previous texts or works of art that may not exist anymore for modern scholars to analyze (Hutcheon 21). In Plato’s *Symposium*, scholars have pointed out Plato implies that “Orpheus could have saved his wife from death by dying in her stead” but that Orpheus “was too cowardly” and instead was “punished by the gods for his lack of courage, for they showed him merely a phantom of his wife and did not give her to him” (Marlow 364). Plato, additionally,

argues that Orpheus' death was ordained by the gods as "punishment for his cowardice in refusing to die for Eurydice," and was a means of preventing him from ever being able to die (Marlow 364). Other texts from earlier periods must have existed, as the myth evolved in Greek culture, leading to versions of the myth that would have been known to Ovid and Virgil, but are not known to scholars today. One major shift was the representation of Eurydice as a human figure leaving Hades and not a shade, and "that more familiar mechanism, in which Orpheus' beloved dies twice, is usually thought to be a Hellenistic creation" (Tueller 104). Additionally, the use of Hades and Persephone is another mythic trope that is present in some Greek versions of the myth, and three poems about Persephone are attributed to Orpheus as an author (Wroe 108).

Because of the prevalence of universal themes, representations of Orpheus and Eurydice in classical literature and art are frequent, and representations of Orpheus often underscore the importance of his voice and writings and his status as either a musician or as a denizen of the underworld. One Etruscan piece shows Orpheus surrounded by animals with lyre in hand, another conveys an image of Orpheus in the underworld with dead followers carrying scrolls to emphasize his association with written words, still another only shows Orpheus' head reciting hymns after he is torn apart and strewn across Lesbos (Detienne 135). Orpheus is also depicted in sculpture fragments found at Delphi from the sixth century BC, most likely on his journey with the Argonauts who he was "invited to accompany" because of his "magic powers as a musician" (Marlow 362-3). In yet another piece, Orpheus is portrayed as being "dressed in Thracian fashion, holding his lyre and accompanied by two women, both Muses, one of whom is presenting him with an open book, a papyrus scroll, beneath which the painter has depicted a half-open chest

of books” showcasing both his connection to music and writing (Detienne 133).

Eurydice, however, is mostly pictured with Orpheus, a result of her sole association with Orpheus and the lack of her own established narrative. The most well-known reference to the myth in ancient art comes from “copies of an Attic relief” from the fourth century BCE, where the “names of Orpheus, Eurydice, and Hermes” are inscribed (Bowra 121). This tableau of Eurydice behind Orpheus, her hand stretched out to him, and Hermes behind them, is directly utilized by multiple productions cited in this paper. It is especially important to note Hermes in his role as an escort of souls to the underworld in this relief, as he is often utilized in adaptations of the mythic lovers as an escort of Eurydice or even as a confidant of Orpheus. Other illustrations of Eurydice portray her as a second to Persephone in Hades, or in some an equal to Persephone, another mythic figure and member of the underworld who was pulled against her will, and before her time, to the realm of the dead. Eurydice, because of her lack of appearances in ancient lore, often is limited to being a reference to Orpheus’ personal tragedy and “becomes another casualty of a creative but careless mate” (Zabriskie 437). Orpheus, though unnamed, also appears to be represented in a variety of other art in various forms, such as a piece of pottery that “shows a young man writing something down while near him a disembodied head is apparently singing” a theme that is so prevalent in Greek pottery that scholars are “certain that the head is the head of Orpheus, and that this is a graphic way of depicting poetic inspiration” (Marlow 365). Additionally, the portrayal of Orpheus as both a representative of music and of writing was also a traditional Greek thought, as “numerous images depict Orpheus’ decapitated head surrounded by papyrus rolls,” a representation of the mythic figure that linked him to both the “presence of song and the

meditation of writing given the textual practices associated with him in the late Classical age” (Young 10).

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice, also, has multiple ties to fifth-century BCE tragedy and the possible origins of the idea that Orpheus could have saved Eurydice by giving up his own soul in exchange possibly originate from tragic adaptations of the mythic narrative (Tueller 104). References to Orpheus and Eurydice permeate ancient Greek theatre, although any complete theatrical versions of the myth or of its titular characters have been lost. This utilization of mythic adaptation in Greek tragic performance originates from the “long history in the West of *imitatio* or *mimesis*... what Aristotle saw as part of the instinctive behavior of humans and the source of their pleasure in art” (Hutcheon, 20). Aeschylus references Orpheus in *Agamemnon*, and Euripides mentions Orpheus in his last work, *The Bacchae*, when the chorus chants that Orpheus, “... led the forest trees along, led the wild beasts with his song” (Euripides 21). On a similar note, “Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, who is presented as a follower of Orpheus, ascribes importance to... the cult of ‘the many writings’” attributed to followers of Orpheus and alludes to the “ceremonies born from a book” often described as “Orphic literature” and the cult of Orpheus associated with poetry and writing (Detienne 134). Fragments of the play *Hypsipyle* by Euripides, possibly produced close to the end of the playwright’s life, show portions of Orpheus’ Argonautic journey (Marlow 363). Yet another play fragment, this time by Aeschylus, tells the story of the “women [who] murder Orpheus in a frenzy induced by Dionysus, who, being the god of wine, women and song, was apt to do” (Marlow 365).

Despite the multitude of references in ancient Greek art and writing, the two most well-known and frequently referenced versions of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice come from Roman writers. Specifically, the fourth book in Virgil's *Georgics* and the tenth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, both writing at the of the 1st c. BCE (or early 1st c. CE), are the most commonly studied versions of the Orphic myths and the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Past utilization of the myth in adaptations and the popularity of the myth "owes its interest almost entirely to Virgil's treatment of it" (Marlow 361). However, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the version of the myth most often referenced by contemporary adaptations by modern playwrights, both because of its wide availability and because of its easily adapted style. The core of Ovid's version of the myths is "an ancient spiritual belief that love, ever changing, is the guiding force of the universe," an element that is well-showcased in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice (Garwood 70). As a figure in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and as a narrator for other myths in Ovid's collection, Orpheus bridges the gap between the Greek and Roman stories and "stands as this triumphal epic's Greco-Roman centerpiece, appearing at the point where the epic begins its evolution out of the Greek past and into the Roman present" (Young 5). This version paints Orpheus as both "an erotic Greek lyricist" and as a "Roman love elegist," and this Orpheus is so distraught by the loss of Eurydice that he "haplessly besieges the gates of Hades, starving, crying, and clothed in rags" (Young 7). Additionally, Ovid's version shows a shade of Eurydice who "still limps from the snakebite that recently killed her" (Young 20). The connection of Eurydice's death by snakebite with her marriage day, another piece that existed in previous works and Ovid's adaptation, showcases "the true Hellenistic taste which liked to dwell on the pathos of death in the newly wedded"

(Bowra 114). The Roman poets do differ in their interpretations of the myth, specifically in Eurydice's actions after Orpheus looks back towards her-- Virgil has Eurydice chide Orpheus, while Ovid's Eurydice has a more restrained, melancholy response (Bowra 114). It is possible, however, that Virgil and Ovid drew their inspiration from a "single Hellenistic poem" of the myth, one that "made a vitally important change by turning the recovery of Eurydice, whether complete or temporary, into a tragic loss" (Bowra 125).

On another note, it is also important to recognize other popular adaptations of the myth following the Roman versions, as many of the specific tropes and archetypes of the myth seen today come from more recent changes made to the myth. These are influenced by the changing sentiments of the differing periods-- Terence Dawson, in *The Orpheus Complex*, argues about this idea when he says,

Contemporary adaptations inevitably carry the associations of the changing concerns of every phrase in the evolution of the mythic pattern... The predominant concern of Medieval and Renaissance adaptations is moral action. In the Romantic period, the predominant concern is individual identity. In the Modernist period, the predominant concern is creative identity. And the predominant concern of the most interesting recent adaptations is a determination to move beyond the impasse traditionally seen as implicit in the mythic pattern. (Dawson 250)

In Medieval and Early Modern adaptations of Greek myths "allegorical interpretation of the ancient myths is the hallmark" as the mixture of interpretations and combinations of mythic stories showcase works "whose authors and readers often assume a composite and variegated profile of Greek mythic figures" (Woodward 9). Medieval

authors also utilized the myth “to illustrate how one’s passions could lead one astray” a trope also utilized in medieval morality plays (Dawson 246). Allegorical adaptations of the myth were popular, such as an *Auto Sacramentale* by Calderon de le Barca “in which Orpheus represents Christ who would like to save Eurydice (i.e. fallen human nature), but only if she is willing” (Dawson 246). The Orpheus of Renaissance-era Europe was “an intermediary [figure] hovering between the divine and human worlds” as he was a figure who was able to “traverse the liminality of the grave, to dare the descent into death to redeem another, was presented centuries before the Christian era” (Zabriskie 443). Iterations of Eurydice in this period, additionally, often connected her further to Persephone, a connection that showcases itself in many of the plays written about below (Wroe 108). The moment of looking-back by Orpheus was also found in many folk tales, including those of the Grimm collections, as it represented a “primitive element of fear in the presence of the supernatural” that felt intrinsically human (Marlow 368).

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is utilized as a central argument for the discussion on mythic awareness, an idea that still inspires the continued prevalence of mythic adaptations. Ideas surrounding mythic awareness, in part, were established by the work of nineteenth and twentieth century psychologists, such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Jung, a strong believer in the idea of the collective unconscious, where societal ideas and themes are felt across time and space by everyone, helped to push for the use of myth in art and theatre to further connect an audience thematically to the artist’s intentions. Jung argued that “the symbols recurrent in myth, dreams, folklore, and delusions arise from archetypes in the collective unconscious” which can “find their way into all imaginative discourse via the personal

unconscious of the creating subject and, underlying that, the collective unconscious” of humanity (Lucente 58-9). Themes such as love, loss, and death, central to the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, can be seen as a “guiding force of the universe” by their repeated use in works across time and their ability to transcend time (Garwood 70). The central idea of Jungian collective unconscious states that “that of which we are unconscious [of] is always pushing toward consciousness” (Lounsbury 3). The changes in psychological belief associated with Freud and Jung fused directly into the repeated interpretations of myths by nineteenth and twentieth century playwrights and can be seen very well in many French surrealist playwright’s works like those of Jean Cocteau. For these twentieth century works, Orpheus symbolized “the faculty of man to charm his unconscious powers” and the ability of man to create “by the strength of the imagination, by the exercise of the right kind of art, by the beauty and measure and proportion of music, music... the art of feeling” (Zabriskie 437). Staged adaptations of the myth do exist in this period, as well, including an operatic version from Vienna in 1762 that “ends with a resuscitation of the twice-lost Eurydice,” a reversal of the usual ending of the production (Simpson 445).

Why, despite the multitude of various iterations of the myth and the confusing lack of knowledge regarding the myth’s origins and true intentions, does the story of Orpheus and Eurydice continue to be retold again and again through art, literature, and performance? When looking at myths in the context of modern adaptations, it is important to first recognize and allow the “fascination that mythology and its imaginary representations continue, as always, to exert upon us and upon the history of our most intimate thinking” (Detienne 3). One possible argument is human fascination with those

who came before them and the similarities between the two despite the passage of time—Zabriskie argues in *Orpheus and Eurydice: A Creative Agony* that, “lyrical accounts of their unchosen fate and chosen destiny sounded the hopes and despairs of archaic times, when raw emotion was closer to its natural source, when the most searing of human tendencies were figured as divine” (Zabriskie 428). Stories that deal with relatable tropes, like those in *Orpheus and Eurydice*, continue to be utilized as a means of accessing those innately human aspects of myth, as they are easily transposed from their origin to any time and place by their relatable nature. Although in some traditional definitions of the word, “‘myth’ has been the term... for falsehood... the word has retained a connotation of higher truth” as myths often deal with archetypal themes that reveal truths about humanity and the unchanging norms of human emotion and action (Lucente 50). These “Archetypal Motifs cannot be collapsed into personal accounts or human personalities,” but are instead comprised of a “narrative unfolding of an epiphanal moment, a crucial tension, a common challenge or a chronic complex” (Zabriskie 436). The reading of mythological text, then, can be utilized as the “fully symbolic representation of inner passions, natural phenomena, and, with later corruption, legendary class-symbols,” and can be analyzed across time to create a “comprehensive history of human perception” (Lucente 54). The idea of creating new adaptations with prevalent myths, such as the story of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, can open up the audience up to a story that they may already be familiar with and can be a means of inviting “audiences to contemplate themselves through a collective dream,” something that is both relatable to them but distant enough from them for enjoyment to still be had (Chirico 149). Additionally, the myth represents the feeling of innocent love and loss, and *Orpheus* represents, in part, an

“archetype of the human heart’s deepest feelings and their utmost expression in poetry and music” (Garwood 74). Modern adaptations of the myth continue to be created because of the timeless themes of “love, death, beauty, loss, and redemption through art,” themes that are universally acknowledged and easily understood by most audience members (Simpson 445). Additionally, Greek mythology overall continues to attract contemporary writers and creators as they have “discovered in some of the foundation narratives of their tradition both a source of humanistic questioning and a site of formal experimentation” (Casado-Gual 65). Recognizable motifs, such as “love and loss, marriage and death, success that is failure, descent and ascent, ascetic sacrifice and orgiastic demise, dismemberment and reunion” are found in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and “resound in countless creations and innumerable lives” through their universal recognition across time (Zabriskie 444). Another enduring motif is the idea of “borders: those between speech and song, human and divine, childhood and adulthood, [and] the living and the dead,” all borders that are relatable to the universal human experience in some form and are easily recognizable to any audience (Craig 129).

CHAPTER THREE

ADAPTATION WITHIN AN EVOLVING THEATRICAL FIELD

When looking at works of adapted texts, especially in the context of live performance, it is important to note the field of adaptation studies, as it is a field that is influencing both the way that the work is being adapted and how it is being performed. How is an adapted text challenged by the expectation of live performance? How does the original story influence an adapted work when the adaptation is written expressly to be performed instead of read? The definition of adaptation is often highly contested, both inside and outside of the field of theatre, and it has only been in more contemporary studies that adaptations have been afforded their own field as more academics come to understand the power of adaptation in various forms of media outside of written text. Because of the variety of possible adaptations, the definition of the word “may be willfully and/or unwittingly... distorted, parodied, and subverted” and must take into account possible adaptation styles such as “juxtaposing different sources, compressing, or expanding sections of larger works, and adding new material to the old” (Laera 4). Adaptation is, according to Linda Hutcheon in A Theory of Adaptation, an “announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works,” a utilization of the original text to create something based off of, or completely subverting, the original text for a new audience (Hutcheon 7).

The history of adaptations, despite scholarship only recently acknowledging adaptation as its own unique field, has been a long and varied one. From the ancient

Greeks, we learn that “Aristotle insisted on the special value of poetic representation (explicitly defined as including ‘tales about the gods’)” and through this poetic adaptation of myths and legends was “a truth that was ‘greater’... and thus potentially universal” revealed to an audience (Lucente 52). In the context of adaptation of Greek myths and legends for the theatre, then, it is important to note that the earliest theatre texts of Ancient Greece were often mythic adaptations and that theatre in its “founding moments was an act of adaptation from what we might readily call culturally specific grand narratives... Greek Tragedy, that original and originating form in Europe at least, is an adaptation of epic, recited sources... at the foundation of Greek theatre, is an act of discursive embodiment through the adaptation of pre-existent narratives” (Ley 204). The utilization of adaptation in the Greek theatre, as myths were often adapted through multiple live productions in competitions such as the City Dionysia, allowed the original form of the myth to evolve yet “continued to contain its story even beyond the conscious knowledge of the individual speaker” (Lucente 53).

Despite the prevalence of adaptations from the very start of recorded theatre history, adaptations are still often compared harshly to their original form and the “heart of much adaptation theory has been the desire to compare the adapted artwork to the source to discover either what is different or what is similar (rarely both)” (Barnette 21). In earlier studies of adaptation in the mid-twentieth century, academics had a hard time pushing past the limitations imposed on adaptations and were often only able to compare an adaptation to its original written form instead of giving it its own unique scholarly study. This led to contention in more contemporary studies of adapted works as artists pushed further away from the original source matter in many of their adapted tales and

were creating works that were vastly different from the original on which they were based. If the adaptation was one that was “perceived as ‘lowering’ a story,” then the response was “likely to be negative” as even in “our postmodern age of cultural recycling” the debasement of a classical story for adaptation still made audiences apprehensive (Hutcheon 3). This can be seen in many of the works based on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice-- as time has progressed, the story has broken further and further from the original mold of the myth. However, because of the “cyclical reoccurrences” prevalent in adaptations, these prevalent issues continue to come about as adaptation is intrinsically a “spiral that keeps turning on itself” (Laera 3). “Fidelity criticism,” how close an adaptation is to its original work, had been the prevalent means of analyzing an adaptation, but recent scholarly work has pressed past this analysis style to see how an adapted text can stand on its own in relation to, and outside of, the world of the original text (Hutcheon 6). In 2010, the publication of the book *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches*, along with other contributing factors in the field of adaptation studies, helped to “reframe the scholarship... [towards] a multivalent intertextual analysis that values popular culture equally with canonical literature” (Barnette 11). This shift helped to push the popularization and academic study of adaptations that were more loosely based on their original subject matter and were instead created with the purpose of entertainment over academically focused copies of the original source. This does not mean that critics have changed when it comes to favoring fidelity to a classic text, and many critical analyses of contemporary adaptations are “skewed to favor fidelity, which is to say accuracy (as defined by the critic) to the original author’s intent (as understood by the critic)” (Barnette 76). Plays written after 2010 that are based on the myth of

Orpheus and Eurydice, in this paper namely *Hadestown*, best reflect this change, while others written prior to this shift for contemporary production, especially *Eurydice* and *Metamorphoses*, contain a much stronger academic focus on original source matter whether they subvert the original topic or not.

The issue of fidelity criticism also reaches conflict quickly in regards to many classical myths and legends as there is no one original text that is being adapted—instead, adapters look to multiple already existing and adapted forms of the story to create their own interpretations, creating chains of adaptations that pull inspiration from variations of the text that showcase different motifs or utilize different tropes that follow, or completely subvert, the myth. The theories of adaptation, then, usually assume “that the story is the common denominator, the core of what is transposed across different media and genres,” but that is not always intrinsically the case (Hutcheon 10). This does not mean that an adaptation has to be a direct copy of the text, nor does it mean that it is inherently lesser than an original text. Adaptation is meant to be a “derivation that is derivative—a work that is second without being secondary,” and should not be considered lesser because of its direct connection to another work (Hutcheon 9). Additionally, the text of an adaptation itself does not take away from the original source text, either, and is instead a means to “keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise” (Hutcheon 176).

Despite the prevalence of adaptation studies programs being housed in university English departments, “the field... is necessarily transdisciplinary” and requires the utilization and study of a multitude of academic interests and fields to fully comprehend it (Barnette 12). Adaptation studies are multidisciplinary because to study adaptation, one

must utilize the study of multiple relevant fields regarding both the original text and the adapted form of the new text. The textual analysis of both the original and the adaptation are also necessary to create a well-rounded analysis of an adapted work. Additionally, the theatrical field and adaptation have intrinsically been connected since early recorded history, when Greek playwrights adapted their own stories and legends into productions for the stage. The City Dionysia festivals, in an essence, were contests of adaptation as Greek playwrights created their own interpretations of classical myths and legends surrounding events such as the Trojan War and the creation of Greek city states. This lends strong credence to the argument foundational to adaptation studies that they are inherently just as powerful as an original text because their adaptations origins can be traced to some of the first recorded texts of antiquity. This also lends favor to the argument that adaptations prove that “there is no such thing as an autonomous text or an original genius that can transcend history, either public or private” and that no text does not connect in some way to any other (Hutcheon 111). No text, even in antiquity, can say it is entirely original and not based, even loosely, on another work or narrative from real life experiences. Additionally, the argument has been made that “every live staging of a printed play could theoretically be considered an adaptation” as each performance becomes a new and adapted version of an original text that will never be created the exact same twice (Hutcheon 39). Margherita Laera, in *Theatre and Adaptation* argues that adaptation is an inherently theatrical convention as it “it contains, extends and multiplies those principles that are already at the core of performance: restored behaviour, representation of the world and a relentless repetition lacking the exactness of machines” (Laera 3). Contemporary adaptations, beginning in the modern period with the works of

Bertolt Brecht and his contemporaries, emphasize an interest in creating new adapted works for the stage that ignore the rules of fidelity criticism and instead create theatrical adaptations that work alongside their adapted texts but in new and unique ways. By analyzing the “re-creations of ancient myths in contemporary plays” scholars are able to observe “the cultural (dis)continuities that define our time” and find what is truly important to modern society that reveals itself in adaptations of stories known by the majority (Casado-Gual 66). Additionally, contemporary adaptations, especially in the realm of postmodern theatrical productions “articulate polysemic meanings that speak directly to viewers, while revealing the formal, thematic, and, ultimately, philosophical concerns of contemporary authors in the postmodern world” (Casado-Gual 66).

In the world of theatrical performance, especially in the commercial ventures of large Broadway theatres, the need to find productions that will be “safe bets with a ready audience” gives a steady place for adaptations to be utilized to fill seats and sell tickets (Hutcheon 87). Because of this, the world of contemporary theatre and adaptation are often heavily intertwined, and major productions will always be inundated with adapted productions for the stage. In the context of “today’s globalized world, major shifts in a story’s context,” such as a shift in setting or central protagonist, “can change radically how the transposed story is interpreted, ideologically and literally” and can entice audiences to see an old story in a new light that brings to mind contemporary thoughts and beliefs (Hutcheon 28). New adapted theatrical works have continued to move the field of adaptation in new directions and provide more definitive processes for both playwrights and production directors to create new adaptations through live performance. The field of live performance is moving towards one that wholeheartedly accepts

adaptation as a form that deserves its own merit, especially when considering that “theatre is in its constitution is a derivative artform, and derivative means adaptive” (Ley 203). One such work is *Adapturgy* by Jane Barnette, which places the field of adaptation into the field of dramaturgy and creates a guidebook for those who wish to create new works or stage new productions of older works based on adaptation. Her argument is based around the idea that the “dramaturgical sensibility proves inescapable in the process of adapting for the stage” (Barnette 3) and that “limiting the focus to adaptations of literature for the stage assures that we are also focusing on the transformation of an experience that is individual and imaginary (reading) into one that is collaborative and embodied (theatre)” (Barnette 22).

Playwrights seem to be aware of this pervasive use of adaptation, and many argue for it as a positive method for both new production work and pedagogical use for students studying to be future practitioners of theater. Sarah Ruhl, the playwright of *Eurydice*, argued that “novels become movies, essays become movies, novels become plays, old novels become new novels... So little seems to rest, sacred, in its primary form” (“Re-Runs” 283). Ruhl, in this text, later explains that many of her works are adaptations and that adaptive texts are a fundamental part of modern theatrical practice. Jane Barnette furthers this argument by placing the field of theatrical adaptation into the lens of live performance by discussing the views of those working on a production when she says,

These pleasures are experienced not just by the audience of stage adaptations, however. The creative team— including actors and designers as well as technicians— is likely to feel a renewed respect or interest in both the source and the medium. This is especially true for the adapters themselves. There is perhaps

no greater way to engage with a source than adapt it. Adapting requires a level of awareness and contemplation that simply reading a novel cannot match. With regard to the adapters target medium— in this case live performance— in the process of imagining the source for the stage, adapters must connect to and define what they consider theatrical. In doing so they must also consider their potential audience members, engaging with the questions enabled by the spectator-based adapturgy model. This concentrated attention to the languages of the stage has the potential to sharpen the adapters’ commitment to the art of theatre, invigorating their creative process. (146-147)

In theatre, the need to adapt a text to fit the needs of live performance also effects the adaptation itself. The necessity of changing the length of a text to fit within a roughly two-hour time frame for live production leads to the adapter needing to become adept at “subtraction and contraction” to fit the necessary length, while others have to “expand their source material considerably” to make the narrative of an adaptation fit the timeframe of a traditional stage performance (Hutcheon 19). Theatrical production, because of its live nature, must also take into consideration the “technical constraints of different media” leading to shifts in narrative to fit the theatrical form that will “inevitably highlight different aspects of the same story” (Hutcheon 10). One example of this can be seen in two adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*— in Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencratz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the lives of two minor characters are considerably stretched to fit a traditional performance length, while in Heiner Muller’s *Hamletmachine*, the traditional tale is shortened to a ten-page narrative meant to considerably shorten the traditional tale to just over fifteen minutes. When creating new

theatrical adaptations, the “material, public, and economic as much as the cultural, personal, and aesthetic” of the world of the original text should be considered, as the creation of a new adaptation has to work well with the original text while simultaneously fitting the constraints of a modern audience’s worldview to be successful (Hutcheon 28). Jane Barnette, again, summarizes the conflicts and successes of theatrical adaptation well when she says,

Aside from this fact, however, the unique demands of stage adaptation are also multivalent: to make live theatre out of a source, one must create an event that can be taken in by spectators within a limited time frame. One can put down a novel and pick it back up, but one generally sees theatre in one outing, and typically (though not always) the expectation is that the event will be between one and three hours long, with intermissions expected after approx. an hour to an hour and a half worth of stage action. Thus, the very act of adapting a source for the stage necessitates a consideration of time— the compression of time as it occurs in the novel, but also the concentration of attention as it must occur for spectators watching the event unfold. (79)

In the context of live stage adaptation, it is also important to consider the knowledge that a live audience will have about the original text that has been adapted before taking their seats in the theatre. Sarah Ruhl again brings up another important argument when discussing the works of adaptation—How does theatre ensure that everyone who is paying for a ticket knows the foundational story the text is based on, or, alternatively, should they know? She says regarding this,

Now what if we don't know Greek mythology? Not many of us are incredibly intimate with the Greeks anymore. What is the experience of seeing *Medea*, for example, without knowing she'll eventually slaughter her children?... Watching [*Medea*] I felt as though I were going to vomit. Certainly this was Aristotelian terror. I knew what was going to happen, it happened, and I was startled into nausea by a strange hybrid of the ancient and the modern—a kind of ancient inevitability up against a tinny radio with bad reception. It was in that place—between the familiar and the unfamiliar—that my gut got all riled up. (“Re-Runs” 286)

Theatre can provide the means to educate an audience about the basics of the world of an adaptation through the actions of the actors and the world of the play as it represented on the stage. This is best seen in adaptations that provide a basic explanation of a myth, such as the introductory song of the musical *Hadestown*, but is less evident in other adaptations that are more truthful to the myth and instead stay close to the text of the original story. Because of this adaptability, adaptation is also used in pedagogical means, as well. Chicago's Lookingglass Theatre developed a set of productions from adaptations that sprouted out of Northwestern University's program as a “pedagogical technique designer to aid with the teaching of literature” (Jones 22). It is easy to see why “teachers and students provide one of the largest audiences for adaptations” (Hutcheon 117). The ability of a production to tell a story by utilizing visual and aural means allows a performance to further the pedagogical approach of adaptations and give audiences the means to further understand a classical text. It is, then, important to note that one main question asked by theatre producers when selecting new shows is “why now...why here,

for this audience?” which are questions that can be answered by better understanding the basic tenets of theatrical adaptation and the utilization of adaptation for pedagogical and entertainment purposes simultaneously (Barnette 18). When one looks at adaptations of adaptations, such as the texts of some of the plays in this paper, one must remember that the text will be “haunted at all times” by the prior text as its “presence shadows the one we are experiencing directly” (Hutcheon 6).

The popularity of adaptations leads academics and audience members alike to wonder again and again why adaptations continue to fill seats and how adaptations maintain popularity over time in new forms. Linda Hutcheon, in her pivotal text on adaptations, argues that adaptations succeed because of their “mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty” (114). It is the ability of an audience to know what is going to happen while simultaneously wondering what new choices the adaptation will make that continues to entice audiences to see new versions of the same stories. Despite the prevalence of fidelity criticism, it is important to note that adaptation often works because of the “urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question,” an urge that is just as “likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying” (Hutcheon 7). Adaptation can also utilize the subversion of a classical text, even something as simple as “telling the same story from a different point of view” can create a new adaptation that has a “manifestly different interpretation” (Hutcheon 8). It is important to note that in all adaptations there will “inevitably [be] difference as well as repetition,” as no adaptation will be a direct copy of the original or any version that came before it—the “real comfort lies in the simple act of almost but not quite repeating, in the revisiting of a theme with variations” (Hutcheon 114-5). It is in this sense of repetition

mixed with the new that audiences are able to comfortably get brought into the world of an adaptation. The repetition of adaptation, in an essence, is like a ritual, one that brings a “fuller understanding, and the confidence that comes with the sense of knowing what is about to happen next” while simultaneously keeping the audience on their toes just enough to entice them to pay attention (Hutcheon 114). Sarah Ruhl, despite arguing that “Americans are obsessed with originality—the new voice, the new story, and the latest artistic trend” also argues that we also “live in a culture that wants stories to be recognizable, capable of being branded” and that we live in “an era of recycling recycling” as new adaptation continue, again and again, to be produced and become successful in all forms of popular media (“Re-Runs” 283).

CHAPTER FOUR

TWENTIETH CENTURY ADAPTATION THROUGH TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND JEAN COCTEAU

When looking at contemporary adaptations of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth in theatre, two plays from the 20th century have to be analyzed first to both demonstrate what came before recent adaptations and how adaptations worked prior to the influence of contemporary performance styles. The stories of Tennessee Williams and Jean Cocteau have many similar stylistic elements, and both playwrights utilized a fascination with the Orphic myths to influence multiple works throughout their careers. Both Cocteau and Williams heavily rely on adaptations, in one form or another, throughout their writing, and both also heavily rely on strong symbolism and metaphor in their works to pull the audience into the world that they hoped to show. The playwrights were also aware of each other—Cocteau even chose to adapt Williams’ *Streetcar Named Desire* in 1949 (Collard 506). In both Williams’ and Cocteau’s versions of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, audiences can begin to see how adaptations have evolved over time to further stray from the simple iteration of a story to a utilization of elements of that story within the playwright’s new work that call to mind the original tale but do not have to be direct copies of it. Modern producers of adaptations are “no longer content to produce variants of the Augustan myth” but instead hope to “explore the implications of the mythic pattern in new and extraordinarily diverse ways” (Dawson 249).

Jean Cocteau (1889-1963) was seen as a “French paragon of hybrid artistry” as he reached popularity for his “stage dramaturgies and feature films” along with his “poetry and novelistic work--” Cocteau created his artistic works with “equal enthusiasm through imaginatively idiosyncratic” themes and often utilized adaptations of classical myths and legends to tell his stories combined his own unique artistic style (Collard 505). Cocteau was known best for his work in film and theatre, and his unique style continues to intrigue contemporary audiences. He was also known for his frequent use of adaptation and for how his adapted texts showcased his personal aesthetic. Over the course of his career, Cocteau would write plays based on myths such as Oedipus and Antigone, the legends of the Arthurian court, and folk tales such as *Beauty and the Beast*. *Orpheé* was first produced in 1926 by the *Theatre des Arts* in Paris and was first written in 1924. In this first iteration of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth created by Cocteau, he strives to create a version of the story that conforms to his ideals as a theatre artist in early 20th century France while still maintaining some semblance of the original myth based on the tropes prevalent in the original mythic story. Cocteau, possibly because of his personal connections to the myth of the spurned artist, frequently utilized motifs and elements of Orpheus’ story within his theatrical and filmed productions, but none connect as thoroughly to the myth itself as the theatrical production of *Orpheé*. The story itself stays very close to the original archetypal elements of the myth in some ways yet strays very far from the original myth in others. One element at the opening of the production that strays far from the original myth is Orpheus’ horse, a character that tells prophecies through the stomping of his hooves. It is the horse, through Orpheus, that declares in the first scene, “Lady Eurydice will return from the underworld,” a prophecy that goes

directly against the mythic origin by declaring that Orpheus will succeed in his quest to bring back Eurydice from the dead (Cocteau 6).

Tennessee Williams (1911-1983), similarly, is often described as an “ardent reviser” and is known for being an “adapter of his own and other artists’ works” (Collard 505). It is no surprise, then, that his work and Cocteau’s are often compared, as Williams was very likely to have been influenced by Cocteau’s earlier form of the myth when writing his own interpretation of Orpheus and Eurydice. Williams also had strong connections to the stories of Greek mythology, because as an “invalid child, reading voraciously in his grandfather’s classical library” he would have learned much about the myths that he often utilized in his texts, including that of Orpheus and Eurydice (Hale 22). *Orpheus Descending* opened in 1957 at the Martin Beck Theatre in New York and was described as being “...based on a mythicized story which is reenacted in a demythicized version” (Thompson 83). In the play, Val Xavier, an Orphic character, serves as the outsider of a small, southern town who “helps a shop owner’s wife momentarily forget about her miserable marriage and provokes the wrath of the village’s male inhabitants” which results in both his and his Eurydice’s brutal deaths (Collard 508). Based on Williams’ earlier published version of the myth, titled *Battle of Angels*, *Orpheus Descending* has been described as “consistently undervalued by those who failed to notice that it contained William’s most honest and comprehensive view of his personal aspirations as an artist and of the purposes of art” (King 134). Williams, in the introduction to the published version of *Orpheus Descending*, describes his reasoning for writing this version of the play, saying,

Why have I stuck so stubbornly to this play? For seventeen years, in fact? Well, nothing is more precious to anybody than the emotional record of his youth, and you will find the trail of my sleeve-worn heart in this completed play that I now call *Orpheus Descending*. On its surface it was and still is the tale of a wild-spirited boy who wanders into a conventional community of the South and creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop. But beneath that now familiar surface it is a play about unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people and the difference between continuing to ask them... and the acceptance of prescribed answers that are not answers at all, but expedient adaptations or surrender to a state of quandary. (VI)

Over the course of their careers, both Williams and Cocteau wrote multiple iterations of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and both utilized multiple artistic formats in their pursuit of adapting the myth. There are many reasons why both playwrights each took multiple turns with the myth—both artists would have felt a strong connection to the myth of Orpheus, as both saw Orpheus as an ill-fated artist who was unlucky in love and even unluckier in his pursuit of artistic merit. His loss could have possibly highlighted the artistic and personal struggles that Williams and Cocteau both suffered from over the course of their lives. Both playwrights also utilized different new artistic forms from their normal style when creating their adaptations of Orpheus, possibly because “adapters are often drawn to a challenge they believe can be best explained through their home medium” (Barnette 47). Cocteau would utilize poetry, theatrical performance, and film in his multiple versions of the Orphic myth, while Williams

utilized theatrical performance along with a poem sharing the same name, and later a film titled *The Fugitive Kind*, in his attempts to create his adaptation of the Orphic legend.

Within the context of the multiple rewritten versions of the Orphic myths created by Williams and Cocteau, it is interesting to note that both writers faced a storm of criticism and bad luck surrounding the productions of their Orphic texts. A mirror shattered in the final rehearsal for the original French production of *Orphée* at Cocteau's own apartment, and both an earthquake destroying the theatre and the sudden death of the actor playing Orpheus occurred during productions of *Orphée* in Mexico soon after (Oxenhandler 88-9). Despite the shocking tragedy that seemed to surround this play, Cocteau remained immensely fascinated by the myth, and it remains a major theme in many of his films, namely *Orpheus*, *The Youth and Death*, and *The Testament of Orpheus*. On the other hand, Williams faced severe backlash for his initial production of *Battle of Angels*. The production was "faced with closure by the police" and was closed by the Theatre Guild after audience and critic reviews deemed the show violent and immoral (Hale 25). Even in his introduction to *Orpheus Descending*, William's describes the morning after the opening of the original *Battle of Angels* as holding "an air of gentle gravity... so much like the atmosphere that hangs over a home from which a living soul has been snatched by the Reaper--" a connection to both sudden death and the gravity of it that showcases itself in many iterations of the Orphic myths in 20th century writer's versions of the story (v). *Battle of Angels* "suffers even more than its revised version from excessive symbolism, extraneous anecdotes, and theatrical pyrotechnics, which lead to a frenetic climax" that left audiences both confused and concerned as they left the theatre (Thompson 95). Because of this, it took seventeen years before a new production of the

Orphic myth was staged by Williams, and *Orpheus Descending* “kept the Greek legend but downplayed the religious references” to prevent the closure of the production (Hale 25). Williams also created a filmed version of *Orpheus Descending*, titled *The Fugitive Kind*, in 1960, and he also created a poem titled *Orpheus Descending* before the subsequent play was published (King 133). It wasn’t until much later, in 1989, when a revival production starring Vanesa Redgrave was created that rebranded the play into a tragedy that the play was established as one of Williams’ more critical successes (Hale 25).

Both plays also faced heavy criticism and are often regarded negatively because of their heavily metaphorical style and the bogging down of the central action of the play by a multitude of themes. In the creation of adapted texts, playwrights will sometimes assume that audiences will be able to use their own knowledge of an adaptation to fill in the blanks of what is showcased in the production, but sometimes they can rely on this too much and may cause the audience to miss some of the details. It is possible to see the overall dramatic conflict in both Williams’ and Cocteau’s works, but this “conflict is often submerged or sidetracked while the play focuses on other considerations... spectacle, fantasy, [and] the fairy tale atmosphere” being some of the many elements that overwhelm the central action of the play (Oxenhandler 154-5). For *Orpheé*, the use of multiple complicated motifs, such as mirrors as the path for the dead and the character of Heurtebise as an angelic figure guarding the characters of the play, bog down the central mythic theme of the production and can lead to confusing interpretations of the play by the audience as they try to piece together Cocteau’s complicated exploration of the myth. The complicated “forces which drive Cocteau’s characters relate to no context, either in

the work or in the world,” leading to the audience needing to find within this complicated world the needs of the characters that “remain below the surface, are deflected and suppressed, so that they express themselves only in highly metaphorical and allegorical forms which dimly shadow forth their true meaning” (Oxenhandler 6). When it comes to *Orpheus Descending*, critics have often complained that the play “bewildered its audience with excessive signaling” and complicated the mythic themes of the play with multiple references to Christian allegory and references to a multitude of other classic works (King 142). The title of the play leads the audience towards “expectations of a strict allegorical correlation” between the mythic characters and the play’s protagonists, however, “the play does not fulfill” that expectation (Thompson 83). Instead, the play is loosely based on the myth, and the references towards Orpheus and Eurydice are difficult to find without close inspection of the text, leading to confusion from audience members who may have not been adept enough in their knowledge of the myth to inherently understand the references Williams was making. Although the “...first-night reviews of the play in 1957 were somewhat mixed,” with some praising William’s complication of the original mythic narrative, many critics were quick to point out that its “meaning [is] obscured by a deluge of symbolism” that, similarly to Cocteau’s play, lead the audience to feel conflicted regarding what specifically the playwright wanted them to focus on (Thompson 95). In the instance of *Orpheus Descending*, “because the presence of the Orphic myth is made known by extrinsic rather than organic means, the determinants of the myth’s original plot too often seem superimposed onto the human conflicts integral to the drama,” while in *Orphée* the myth is more integral to the story but often times

overwhelmed by outside metaphorical and allegorical meanings that hide the mythic story amongst other elements that hide it from the audience (Thompson 83).

When looking within the context of the plays themselves, one can see that the similarities between the productions do not end with the myth or the conflicts that surrounded their productions. Within the context of both adaptations of the Orphic myth, the plays showcase the idea that “adapters must understand the language of their chosen medium” and that theatre “can accomplish that [which] other media (film or dance, say) cannot” through its utilization of a live audience and performance methods (Barnette 142). One such element that both playwrights utilize in this respect is the repetition of text and visual cues to further the thematic connections the playwright’s hoped the audience to see and to further the utilization of the myth in their adaptations. Not only do we see repetition through the utilization of the myth through multiple projects by both playwrights, but one can also see repetition as a central theme within the texts of the plays. Cocteau’s production opens as Orpheus and Eurydice are seated in their kitchen discussing a horse that Orpheus has been trying to communicate with for some time. Eurydice begs Orpheus to give up on his dream of getting the horse to speak to him, and he insists that the horse is helping him to write new poetry and that he must keep trying because society expects him to write. The repetition of this fight at multiple points over the course of the following scenes, with Eurydice demanding that Orpheus stop trying to seek inspiration from places that he shouldn’t and Orpheus demanding that Eurydice allows him to seek his creative inspiration, reaches a boiling point when Orpheus angrily turns around, sending Eurydice back to the underworld. Although Williams utilizes repetition much more in his original *Battle of Angels*, where the play’s Eurydice, Myra,

“loses the man she cares about two times” instead of just once, it is still easily distinguished in the text of *Orpheus Descending* (Collard 509). Val is plagued from the very beginning of the play by a repeated issue with women flirting with him and attempting to bring him back into his blasphemous lifestyle, and his life has been cyclical as his inability to settle into one place has caused him to move again and again. This need to escape the burdens of his past life leads to Val’s attempt of an “Orphic quest to escape his corrupt past” (Thompson 83). Two examples of dialogue, however, give the best example of repetition in the play as they repeat two important thematic words in juxtaposition with each other. Carol, one of the women of the play who hopes to gain Val’s love but cannot stray from her chaotic and sinful lifestyle, declares to Val early in the play,

Take me out to Cypress Hill in my car. And we’ll hear the dead people talk. They do talk there... but all they say is one word and that one word is ‘live,’ they say ‘live, live, live, live, live!’ It’s all they’ve learned, it’s the only advice they can give. Just live. (Williams 40)

This is directly juxtaposed by Lady’s line a few pages later at the beginning of the next scene when she also exclaims to Val, “I wish I was dead, dead, dead” (Williams 44). Additionally, the last scene of the play, when Lady’s shop is being set on fire, is repetitive stylistically with the death scene of her father that happens before the play begins but is described by multiple characters over the course of the play. In both scenes she is pregnant with a child that she should not have, and in both scenes the fire burns the orchard—in the original fire, it is her father’s orchard that is burnt down, in the final

scene of the play it is her shop that has been meticulously decorated to look like her father's orchard in an effort to bring back the idealistic memories of her childhood. Thematically, we also see many similarities between the plays, although many of the elements of those themes are utilized in varying ways to further emphasize the playwright's personal style. In both plays, we see an Orpheus who has not reached the potential of his character— in neither play has Orpheus reached a point of being a well-known, established writer or performer, nor has either been lucky enough to find a love often portrayed between Orpheus and Eurydice in the context of the original elements of the myth. This utilization of Orpheus as a spurned artist, with “themes of persecution and of alienation, from society and from Self,” is central to both productions but in different ways (Oxenhandler 8). In *Orpheé*, Cocteau presents an Orpheus that is a writer and not a musician, a focus on the mythic origins of Orpheus associated with his cult of writing instead of his focus on musicianship. Cocteau connected strongly to the idea of Orpheus as a poet, as he believed that as a poet himself that “poetry is the only truth, the only way of life, the only means of approaching essential reality” (Debrix 8). Cocteau creates an Orpheus that has already seen some success as a poet, but who is losing his popularity, and is thus so distracted from his own conflicts in his career that he cannot acknowledge Eurydice who is starving for his attention. Cocteau's Orpheus “presents a surprisingly passive and seemingly not very creative Orpheus” who is now being controlled by the futuristic premonitions being “dictated to him by a horse” as he tries to gain back his popularity in writing by using the horse's words (Collard 507). Eurydice demands the removal of the horse and repeats multiple times that Orpheus is both ignoring her and focusing on the horse too much while gaining nothing from it. She says in the play,

See how nervous that horse makes you! You used to laugh, kiss me, throw your arms around me. You had a good job. The world was in the palm of your hand. Why, they couldn't wait to read your poems and everybody in Thrace knew them by heart as soon as you wrote them down. That's because you sang of the sun, because you were a priest singing of the gods. But then that horse came into your life. We moved to the country. You quit your job and stopped writing. Now you spend your time petting that horse, interrogating that horse, waiting for that horse to answer you. It's ridiculous! (Cocteau, 107)

Orpheus retorts back to her, "I was so successful I was overripe, beginning to rot, and I stunk of it," solidifying the idea of Orpheus as the spurned artist unsuccessful and resentful of his art (Cocteau 107). Eurydice, shortly after this exchange, is poisoned and brought to the underworld by Death, an action that wouldn't have occurred if Orpheus has been paying attention to his wife. When he returns from the underworld with her, Orpheus must not look upon his wife, but begins to threaten to look back at her as they start to fight after she insults his inability to write new work. Orpheus then learns that a crowd has gathered to kill him and "that the horse has tricked him: his poem '*Madame Eurydice reviendra des enfers*' ('Madam Eurydice will return from hell') contains the obscene acrostic '*Merde*' ('shit'), and he is declared a fraud" (Patterson, "Orpheus"). The use of the acrostic of *Merde* as the inciting factor for Orpheus' death, despite it being there unknowingly to Orpheus, shows "that even without wanting to, a poet must insult his public" (Oxenhandler 95). After Orpheus' death, the police come to find his body, as a crowd has gathered to mourn him a representation that "public opinion has swung in

favor of Orpheus... the ironic posthumous glory paid to so many poets” (Oxenhandler 92).

On the other hand, Williams shifts his focus to an Orpheus that is a musician and not a poet, despite his earlier iteration of the Orpheus myth, *Battle of Angels*, focusing on an Orpheus that was a writer as he was in Cocteau’s play (Collard 507). *Orpheus Descending* contradicts this original idea by presenting an Orpheus that is “far from the all-powerful musical master and sage that we find in antiquity,” but is instead a musician that represents “the original penniless poet, with nothing to offer but his song” (Oosterhuis 103). The character of Val Xavier is described in the character descriptions as a “young man, about 30, who has a kind of wild beauty about him... his remarkable garment is a snakeskin jacket... he carries a guitar which is covered with inscriptions” (Williams 26). Val is linked with those in the city who are described as ‘other,’ because of his identity as an outsider and his bohemian-musician style, despite multiple attempts to disassociate himself from them. Val is also given the “mythical attributes of Orpheus,” including a powerful musical prowess and a skill with words that links him to the archetypal embodiment of inspired poetic and musical expression” synonymous with Orphic myth (Thompson 84). This link “foreshadows Val’s own violent victimization by and martyrdom to the forces of hatred, oppression, and bigotry” at the end of the play, as he is violently murdered by the citizens of the small southern town that he hopes will become his new home after giving up his vagrant lifestyle (Thompson 85). Val’s fatal attraction to women is a direct reference to the downfall of Orpheus when confronted by the Thracian women after the death of Eurydice. However, his one true love is his guitar, which he describes as his “life’s companion” that “washes me clean like water when

anything unclean has touched me” (Williams 50). His guitar is coupled with his snakeskin jacket, which serves as the primary metaphor of the play, the emblem of Val, the vagabond musician with guitar” and becomes the metaphor that “suggests the Orpheus legend on which the drama is based” (Hale 22).

Thematically, another element that is shared between the two plays that furthers the strength of the mythic narrative in the text is the utilization of fantastical elements. These elements provide a mythical quality to the production and allow the audience to feel a sense of unease that allows the characters to feel more supernatural in nature despite being entirely human in the context of the story. In both plays, the timelessness of the story leads to the mystical nature of the play, by both playwrights utilize the timelessness of the story to enhance the timelessness of the myth by creating “an unworldly resonance for the spectator; the setting lifts the individual out of ordinary time and the present moment, and places him in “mythic time”—an ambiguous term for the timeless quality myths manifest” (Chirico 153). The original timelessness of the myth itself, then, is given to the new versions of the story by the playwrights who take their stories out of the original world and place them in others. This mythical feeling is more easily seen in Cocteau’s production but felt in Williams’ production. In *Orpheé*, the stage directions at the start of the play instruct that the décor in Orpheus’ apartment should be “reminiscent of a magician’s parlor and take on a magical quality that enhances the overall symbolic quality of the play” (Cocteau 2). Text at multiple points throughout Cocteau’s play also utilize this mythical, magical feeling, such as when Heurtebise remains floating on the stage when Orpheus yanks a chair out from under him or the use of mirrors that allow Orpheus to pass through them into the realm of death. This

utilization of mirrors helps the audience to “grasp the myth’s fuller intent” as, like the characters who travel to the underworld through the mirror, we must look back at living to “reflect on it as if beyond the looking glass” (Zabriskie 438). At one point, Orpheus declares to Eurydice, “We bump into each other in the dark; we’re up to our necks in the supernatural, playing hide-and-seek with the gods. Who really knows anything at all?” (Cocteau 108). At another point, Heurtebise tells Orpheus, “You’ve done the impossible before” to which Orpheus responds, “The impossible is what I’ve lived for,” another reference to this mythic and fantastical quality of the play (Cocteau 140). The character of Death, similarly, is commanded by the stage directions to dress and act in an otherworldly way, complete with “a mask on which is painted a pair of big blue eyes” as she “never quite seems to establish contact with the rest of” the characters of the play (Cocteau 100).

Similarly, in *Orpheus Descending*, the characters and story are enhanced by the mythical quality of the play placed into the world by Williams by the stage directions and direct audience interaction throughout the play. In the first scene of the play Williams has Beulah, one of the women of the town, directly address the audience. The stage direction commands, “Beulah switches in the chair and fixes the audience with her eyes, leaning slightly forward to compel their attention... she rises and comes straight out to the proscenium... This monologue should set the nonrealistic key for the whole production” (Williams 15). Another character, Vee Talbot, represents an oracle-like figure as she paints religious images that foretell events of the play, goes partially and then completely blind, and claims to have visions. She says of this, “I paint a thing how I feel it instead of always the way it actually is. Appearances are misleading, nothing is what it looks like to

the eyes. You've got to have- *vision- to see!*" (Williams 82). The mystical idea of fate is also utilized in Williams play through multiple references throughout the dialogue, including Val describing the autographs on his guitar as being from people whose names are "written in the stars" and Val's belief that he is fated to die in a tragic way from the start of the play (Williams 51). Throughout the play, Val's dialogue is "consistently dreamy, other-worldly, poetic" compared to the dialogue of other characters that contain many "Southernisms" that help to establish the Southern town atmosphere," giving the Orphic character an otherworldly quality unmatched by anyone else in the play (Hale 23).

Another thematic element that heavily permeates both plays is the presence of death, or death as a physical character, in the play. In *Orpheé*, Cocteau utilizes the personification of Death as a character, an element that occurs in several of his other creative works, and creates Death as "a beautiful young woman in a bright pink evening gown and fur wrap... her hair, gown, wrap, shoes, gestures, and manner of walking are in accord with the latest high fashion (100). Death establishes herself quickly as a mystical character in the play, as a plant in the audience is asked by Death for a watch, a move that is meant to make the audience remember that they could be aiding death at any moment. Dialogue in the play, additionally, references death and dying constantly throughout the production. In one instance, Eurydice tells Orpheus, "I don't count any more. I could die, and you wouldn't even notice," to which he replies, "We were already dead without noticing it" (Cocteau 110).

Death also follows Williams' characters from the beginning of his play. Dolly, one of the members of the town, describes the husband of Lady Torrance, Jabe, as living on death's door from the very start of the play. She says about his doctor, "I guess he

signed Jabe Torrance's death warrant with just that single silent motion of his hand" (Williams 13). Jabe, the sick husband of Lady, spends the majority of the play hovering in the space above the action of the play, representing the impending quality of death and serving as a figure foreshadowing the deaths of the characters below him. Lady references this in the play when Jabe knocks on the walls, to which she tells Val, "Death's knocking for me! Don't you think I hear him, knock, knock, knock?... Ask me how it feels to be coupled with death up there, and I can tell you. My skin crawled when he touched me. But I endured it" (Williams 135). Additionally, in scene two of the play, Lady and Val talk about a bird that only lands when it dies, a moment that foreshadows their deaths as Lady wishes she could be as free as that bird, when she can only truly reach that freedom with her death (Williams 57). Another moment comes when Lady is speaking about her abortion, when she says, "I wanted death after that, but death don't come when you *want* it, it comes when you don't want it!" (Williams 78). At the end of the play, when the town is coming for Val, Lady reverts against this idea of death when she tells Val that she is pregnant and exclaims, "you've given me life, you can go!" before they both meet their untimely death by not parting (Williams 140).

The moment referenced above is immediately followed by one that is essential to the archetypal mythic legend and is utilized in both productions—this is the moment that Orpheus and Eurydice look at each other after Orpheus has turned around for one last final time before Eurydice is brought back to the underworld. However, the similarities in the fatal glance in the plays are few and far between as both playwrights deviated from the normal archetypal moment in their plays. In *Orpheé*, the moment becomes cynical, as Orpheus turns back to look at Eurydice spitefully during an argument. The argument has

cyclically continued for a long portion of a scene, as Eurydice and Orpheus refuse to acknowledge the pieces of the other that they hate and continue to cycle back to the same arguments, before Orpheus finally reaches a boiling point and turns towards Eurydice three separate times, each time leading to her crying out for him to be careful. When he does turn around, it is because he trips soon after, and the stage directions say that Orpheus cries out as if in pain and Eurydice stares back in horror before she collapses and disappears. He exclaims, “Oof! Now I feel better” to Heurtesbise after Eurydice exits the stage, insinuating that they would have felt no happiness even if Eurydice had been able to stay and insisting to Heurtebise that he tripped on purpose to make her leave (Cocteau 136). In *Orpheus Descending*, Lady is shot by her husband, and this sudden death in Val’s arms by her husband is metaphorically Hades ripping Eurydice away from Orpheus leading to her death. Jabe exclaims “Buzzards! Buzzards!” as he shoots Lady, another reference to death and dying as he takes his wife’s life in shop that she was trying to make her own (Williams 141). Val’s moment of looking back comes as Jabe has just shot Lady, when she is being held up by his arms. The stage directions read, “She turns to face him, still covering Val with her body, her face with all the passions and secrets of life and death in it now, her fierce eyes blazing, knowing, defying and accepting” (Williams 141). This final moment seals Val’s fate, as well, as he is unable to escape his death by not running away as she dies. This moment is also altered from the archetypal myth as Val is not motivated to look back out of disobedience to the rules of the underworld, but instead the gesture becomes “a gesture of love and selflessness” showing that the playwright hoped to “invest Val with an elevated moral stature which has its analogue in Christian rather than pagan myth” (Thompson 86).

In both iterations of Orpheus in the early twentieth century, we see an Orphic figure who ultimately meets his end in a way that is similar to that of the original myth, unlike other contemporary adaptations of the myth that instead focus almost exclusively on the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. In the original iterations of the myth “Orpheus so loved Eurydice that after her death he roamed over the mountains charming the hearts of women by his music but scorning them all alike” and because of this feeling of distraintment it was with a sense of “jealous revenge that a troupe of Bacchantes tore him limb from limb” (Marlow 365). *Orpheé* showcases this with a group of women tearing Orpheus to pieces over a poem, which they have been told insults their intelligence by mocking them. Heurtebise tries to hide Orpheus, to which he responds “It’s no use trying to avoid the inevitable” a reference to the inevitability of his death and the following of the mythic archetypes of the story (Cocteau 139). Following this, Orpheus’ severed head is returned to the stage after he is killed and tells the police that come to investigate that he is indeed not Orpheus but is instead “Jean Cocteau,” subverting the original ending of the play by connecting the story back to the playwright and his connection to the poet (Cocteau 145). In *Orpheus Descending*, the moment of looking back leads to Val’s “own violent analogue of Orphic dismemberment: immolation by blowtorch, administered by the play’s male counterparts to the Maenads” (Thompson 86). The women of the play do not commit the violent act, but they push their husbands towards the violence, ultimately being the cause of the brutal death. The violence of the Bacchantes, then, becomes the violence of a pack of men pushed by herd mentality and their own small-minded beliefs. Val foreshadows this in the scene before when he tells Lady that he must leave because

he's "been threatened with violence if I stay here," proving that Val knew that he had to leave but refused to until it was too late in attempt to save Lady (Williams 131).

Both plays also thematically have an overall looming feeling of loneliness and regret, especially in regards to the two protagonists of the original myth as they move towards the conclusion of the mythic tale. This is shown in multiple ways, including references in the text to the character's thoughts but also in the multiple references to the inevitability of their fates and the looming sense of doom that accompanies this. Both *Orpheé* and *Orpheus Descending* also heavily deal with themes regarding the effects of one's past and dealing with the consequences of past actions. Cocteau utilizes Heurtebise, a character that he invented to serve as a guardian angel for characters in a collection of his plays and films, as a channel for this regret when he declares to Orpheus after he sends Eurydice back to Death,

She was a perfect lady. You didn't realize it until you lost her for the first time, and now you've lost her again—stupidly, tragically lost her, lost yourself, killed her when she was already dead, played with life and death as if you were playing just another game. Because she is dead, twice dead. And she won't come back again. (137)

Additionally, in the beginning of *Orpheé*, the dialogue between Orpheus and Eurydice is filled with references towards their regret in their personal lives as well as regrets towards their marriage. This regret of the past also shows in the marriage between Orpheus and Eurydice, and multiple instances in the dialogue between these characters shows them to be talking to each other without actually listening to what the other is

saying. One example of this dialogue occurs when the couple discusses their current situation, when they say,

Orpheus: Someone has to make a scandal, throw a bomb. Someone has to clear the air or we'll all suffocate. I can't breathe anymore.

Eurydice: But we were getting along so nicely

Orpheus: Too nicely

Eurydice: You were in love with me.

Orpheus: I am in love with you.

Eurydice: You're in love with the horse. (Cocteau, 109)

This is followed soon after by Orpheus kissing Eurydice “halfheartedly” after saying “don't be stupid” before returning back to his work with the horse (Cocteau 109). This “one-dimensional characterization of Orpheus and Eurydice” as able to argue and find conflict in their relationship like any other couple shows this theme of loneliness and regret within a mythic relationship as something that is “uncomplicated and eminently recognizable” (Oxenhandler 101). Orpheus, as well, complains constantly throughout the first few scenes of the play that he has failed in his career as an artist and has been left behind by the public who used to love him. In *Orpheus Descending*, Val's regret is his past experiences, and he tells Lady that he is over his past as “heavy drinking and smoking the weed and shaking with strangers is okay for kids in their twenties... I'm all through with that route” in the hopes of showing that he regrets his past to prove that he has changed (Williams 32).

In *Orpheus Descending*, the characters of Val and Lady also both show their loneliness and regret in their dialogue. Val discusses his loneliness with Lady when he

tells her that he thought he could find closeness with others through touch, but that he has learned that “We’re all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life!” (Williams 63). Lady is stuck inside of a loveless marriage, one that she learns during the play has been created by her husband after he murdered her father, and she tells one of the other women of the town that “She could live with him in hate... People can live together in hate for a long time, Dolly... Why, some git so they just barely tolerate each other’s existence” (Williams 18). She has been attempting to create the world of her past through the confectionary shop that she runs while her husband is bedridden, but this idealizing of the past leads to her death as she is unable to run and part with the shop that has been her one grounding aspect of her life for too long. When Val tries to convince her to leave with him, the means of saving them both, she refuses and tell him that he “can burn down a woman and stamp on her ashes to make sure the fire is put out” (Williams 132). This is similar to Eurydice’s feeling of loneliness and regret in *Orphée*—both women have been largely ignored by the men in their life and they feel like they have wasted away in the life they have been given. This is an interesting comparison, as it gives the Eurydice’s of the plays a narrative that gives them more voice and agency than the Eurydice of the myth.

In both plays, the playwrights highlight the mythic narrative with their own unique artistic styles that sometimes lead to the subversion of the classical mythic narrative. Cocteau regarded himself “primarily as a poet who experimented with different media and genres” and in his theatrical adaptation of the Orphic myth this poetic nature is evident throughout the text (Clergue 21). Cocteau utilized his plays as unique narratives that served as the “changing scenery before which the drama of the Self is acted,” an idea

that the playwright's own personal beliefs, wants, and needs are showcased in the play as a comparison to the needs of the self for other people (Oxenhandler 7). This can be seen best in *Orpheé* when Orpheus' head claims that he is in fact Jean Cocteau and even gives the police Cocteau's true address, as Cocteau saw vast connections between himself and the failing poet. This also shows Cocteau's utilizations of characters that "do not have the fullness or roundness that we have learned to expect in the heroes of the classic or naturalistic drama" but are instead "vehicles of ideas or personifications of a single obsession which they repeatedly act out with a dreamlike monotony" (Oxenhandler 26). In *Orpheus Descending*, the world of the play as a rural Southern town is a direct utilization of Williams's style in his version of the myth. Williams, additionally, utilizes a mixture of allegories to Greek myth, Christian imagery, and pagan beliefs in his play to create a narrative that mixes various references into sometimes confusing comparisons in the characters portrayed in Williams's simple Southern setting. Val is theorized to be a "triadic image" of Dionysus, Orpheus, and Christ, a "combination that parallels the evolution from violent Dionysian rituals to the worship of the calmer Orphic rites to the eventual movement towards Christian religious domination" (Thompson 89). All three of these figures are also met with violent deaths by dismemberment or bodily destruction, as well, making Val a human representative of three figures through his violent destruction and dismemberment where his snakeskin jacket is found after his death. This snakeskin jacket could also be a myriad of possible references, including Dionysian references to wild nature or the Judeo-Christian notion of the snake in the garden of Eden. Sarah Ruhl, whose version of the Orphic myth is discussed later in this paper, said of Williams, "[He] redirects our eye to the moment; every moment is emotionally or aesthetically important

for its own sake, rather than having an additive effect” (*100 Essays* 34). Additionally, the characters of Lady and Jabe Torrance can be argued to reference the mythic narrative of the abduction of Persephone, as well. Lady’s family had succeeded in the past with their vineyards, as if the child of Demeter who helps the growth of plants on the earth, but a mysterious fire kills her family and leave her in the hands of Jabe. This abduction from her life is similar to the abduction of Persephone, even regarding the abduction occurring in a field. This abduction is similar in nature to Eurydice’s death and sudden movement to the underworld, as well, but one of the other members of the town furthers this narrative of Lady as Persephone when she says that “Jabe Torrance bought that woman... when she was a girl of eighteen,” similarly to Persephone’s abduction being allowed by Zeus (Williams 14).

When it comes to the practical elements of both productions, the playwrights hoped to move the setting to a modern setting, in an effort to “domesticate the source, making it more familiar to their peers” (Barnette 44). For *Orpheé*, Cocteau outlines his requirements for the set, costumes, and other various elements in the introduction published with the script. Despite aiming for a dreamlike or mystical atmosphere in the play, Cocteau’s staging notes insist that the clothing and setting “conform with the place and period in which the play is presented” where Orpheus and Eurydice should be dressed in “simple country clothes, as far as possible in no identifiable style” from the contemporary period (100). This contemporary realism melded with the dreamlike quality of the text and staging elements of the production, gives the audience the ability to see the play as something that could both realistically happen and as something that is too far-fetched, a combination that leaves the audience wondering if the mythic narrative

could realistically happen in the world around them. The setting is further described as “A room in Orpheus’ country cottage... a curious room, reminiscent of a magician’s parlor...one senses here the presence of occult forces... even the most ordinary objects take on a mysterious glow.” (Cocteau 100). This utilization of a setting that is both realistic and dreamlike showcases the argument that “Cocteau is a rationalist without a rationale... he places his characters in the world and then proceeds to make that world uninhabitable for them” (Oxendhandler 28). In this play, that idea manifests by creating mythic characters that are trapped in a non-mythic world, with staging elements and costumes that are so simplistic in nature that the characters feel trapped inside of a box too small for them to break out of. Cocteau states something similar to this in the directions for the production when he says, “this set matches the people and actions of the play in the same hard, naive manner as the fake perspective of the photographer’s backdrop matches the subjects of his pictures” (101). Cocteau, additionally, is very strict on his setting, and argues that one “must neither add nor subtract a chair or change the disposition of doorways and windows” as the elements of the staging “down to the last detail, plays its part in the action” (101).

On the other hand, Williams’ play presented its own unique challenges when staging the production. In early productions, the technical effects needed were often too complicated to create, “as the crew tried to translate into reality the author’s imaginings: off-stage trains, hound-dogs, thunder, lightning, calliope music, and the final holocaust” (Hale 25). This setting is described by Williams in the text preceding the play as representing “in a nonrealistic fashion a general drygoods store... in a small Southern town” where the “the ceiling is high and the upper walls are dark, as if streaked with

moisture and cobwebbed [and] a great dusty window upstage offers a view of disturbing emptiness” (11). The only specific costume reference comes from Val’s snakeskin jacket, an object that is thematically so important to the text that it cannot be left out of the staging of the production.

To conclude, when looking again at how the mythic narrative translates into the themes of the plays and the overall adaptations themselves, it is the differences between the texts that should be noted to showcase how the mythic narrative is utilized uniquely by the individual playwrights. *Orpheé* is a special exception to the rule of the other plays in this paper as it is the only play that deals with the effects of Eurydice’s return to the underworld on Orpheus directly after the tragic glance. In the play, Orpheus is warned that a large group of women is coming to kill him, convinced that a poem that he wrote has been a secret code to insult them. Orpheus says about this, “Their hate runs so deep it’s a religion to them” a reference to the possible reasoning for the dismemberment of Orpheus in the Greek myths (Cocteau 138). This manifests on the stage with the head of Orpheus, played by the actor with their head placed on a podium, speaking to the audience and the others in the scene in a way reminiscent of the Orphic oracle. The utilization of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice by two of the most well-known playwrights of the early twentieth century is no coincidence, and the fact that both playwrights utilized similar thematic elements and elements of the mythic narrative to tell their stories showcases the ability of myths to adapt to the needs of writers across time who have stories that they hope to tell. Despite the conflict that plagued the original productions of both playwright’s utilization of the mythic narrative, both Cocteau and Williams continued to be fascinated with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and utilized

the myth in various artistic works over their careers. Additionally, the mythic awareness necessary to understand the works of Cocteau and Williams is evident, as neither playwright utilized explanations of the myths and instead assumed the audience would understand the often-complicated metaphorical and allegorical connections to the myth that were in their plays. Postmodern playwrights, as well, have taken the idea of mythic awareness as utilized by Cocteau and Williams and used it to their advantage in the reworking of classic myths and older stories. At its most basic level, the use of myth in modern works “provides abundant opportunities for the playwright to theatricalize myth as a hybrid of antiquity” and modern culture and gives playwrights a way to access the “cathartic effect[s] of an ancient Greek drama” for contemporary audience enjoyment (Garwood 71-8). Williams and Cocteau understood this pull towards adaptation as a means of unlocking a new understanding of classical texts, and their interpretations of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth are inundated with their thematic explorations of the meanings of that myth to both modern audiences and themselves.

CHAPTER FIVE

POSTMODERN ADAPTATIONS BY 21ST CENTURY FEMALE PLAYWRIGHTS

When looking at contemporary adaptations of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, three major productions are important to study both because of their references to past adaptations of the myth and because of their unique interpretations of the mythic narrative. These productions, additionally, are all successful adaptations of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth that were written by female playwrights. Although that is far from the only similarity between the works, it is important to note first because of the unique postmodern take that each of the three female playwrights, Mary Zimmerman with *Metamorphoses*, Sarah Ruhl with *Eurydice*, and Anaïs Mitchell with *Hadestown*, take when adapting the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice for the stage.

In each of the three plays, to begin, the initial creative process takes place, at least in part, through a collaborative process. The production elements of each of the plays also share many similarities, with the postmodern qualities of the productions showcasing that “classical myths sustain postmodern forms of artistic expression” (Casado-Gual 65). This harkens back to the idea that postmodern productions of myth-based stories will often “seize every opportunity to parody all previous versions of the mythic pattern,” and use elements of “self-conscious referentiality” to bring the playwright’s own beliefs into the text of the myth (Dawson 250).

Additionally, each of the plays utilizes elements of the mythic figures of Orpheus and Eurydice that come directly from the ancient narrative of the myth, while each playwright simultaneously utilizes elements of the figures from more contemporary adaptations, highlighting the palimpsest-like quality of mythic adaptations to stack elements of multiple works on top of each other to create new adapted versions of the story. Similarly to the Williams and Cocteau adaptations, Orpheus personifies the personal connections of the playwrights to the artistic world combined with the qualities associated with Orpheus through Orphic legend, but he is presented in various ways in each of the works. Each of the myths, on the other hand, takes a new alternative view on the character of Eurydice, giving agency to her voice that has not been afforded before, an element possibly caused by the fact that the productions analyzed in this section of the paper are all written by female playwrights.

Thematically, each of the plays also deals with the loss, regret, and sudden death of Eurydice and its effect on both herself and Orpheus. One pivotal moment that shows this is the staged moment of the tragic glance by Orpheus that is shown in each of the three plays, and the continuation of the effects of that glance on the characters is shown uniquely in each of the works. Why do most plays revel in the sad ending of the original myth? One reason could be the cathartic nature of the ending, based on the idea that “the drive to perceive and share meaning is a consistent human quality across cultures and throughout history” (Lounsbury 3). Another could be the belief that grief is a universal idea that can be understood by anyone, and “Orpheus is an archetype of the human heart’s deepest feelings and their utmost expression in poetry and music” giving him an

almost “immortal” quality as he continues to repeat his quest to save his doomed wife throughout time (Garwood 74).

5.1 THE ENSEMBLE AND POSTMODERN CATHARSIS THROUGH MARY ZIMMERMAN’S *METAMORPHOSES*

Chronologically the first contemporary production of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice considered in this paper, *Metamorphoses* premiered under the name *Six Myths* in 1996 at Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois. The title *Metamorphoses* would appear in 1998 during the subsequent Looking Glass Theatre production, where the production would receive critical acclaim for playwright Mary Zimmerman’s retellings of Ovidian myths for theatrical performance. The play would go on to a 2001 Off-Broadway run at the Second Stage Theatre and a Broadway premiere the next year at the Circle in the Square Theatre. Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses* utilizes a unique combination of Ovid’s myths, ensemble-centered performance, and contemporary connections to create a production that stylistically summarizes many of Ovid’s most well-known stories.

Because the story of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* spans a “period from the creation of the world through the reign of Julius Caesar,” the actors and playwright jointly chose certain thematic elements to highlight within the production before selecting the sections of Ovid’s tales that they wanted to perform onstage (Jones 20). Described as a play that “splices antiquity and the avant-garde together,” *Metamorphoses* utilizes multiple scenes of various individuals myths that shift between stories with little to no transitions and unify through the use of a small set of actors to portray multiple characters and the unifying thematic elements of the myths themselves (Garwood 70). The production also presents myths in vague textual settings with little physical setting determined by the stage design, a means of giving the play a timeless aesthetic that can bring an “audience

to a shocking place where ancient traditions crashed like powerful waves against the mean destructive shores of modern life” (Jones 21).

In regards the creation of the initial script, Zimmerman hoped to combine her own writing with ensemble-based inspiration to create a production that merged her unique adaptation style with the needs of an ensemble pre-casted to perform in the play.

Zimmerman herself argued that “group projects work especially well” when creating myth-based productions because they can assist with “dispel[ing] the myth that creative work typically represents the output of a solitary artists, struck by inspiration” much like mythic adaptations help to achieve through utilizing adaptations of past works (McKinnon 59). Zimmerman’s writing style is distinctive as she almost always bases her script around a pre-existing text and because she writes her scripts in rehearsals in conjunction with her actors. Because of this, Zimmerman’s creation and writing occurs “in rehearsal with her actors, a flexible approach that necessitates early conversations with designers (and means she typically writes to fill their choices, rather than the other way around)” (Barnette 14). This semi-devised style makes subsequent productions of her works difficult because they are written expressly for a specific group of actors and designers, but productions of *Metamorphoses* have occurred at a multitude of regional theatres and universities and have had much success because of the story’s adaptability to new audiences and ability to mold to fit new production designs. Zimmerman says of her writing process,

Only once have I ever written a script before beginning rehearsals, and I’ve never typed a word of a play that didn’t already have a scheduled, not too distant opening night... It is made by who we are, who we are together, the

circumstances of production, and the conditions of the world as they exist and change throughout our rehearsal process. We can't know what the piece will become, but it is inescapable. ("The Archeology" 25)

Because of the choices made regarding the selection of specific Ovidian myths in the collaborative research and rehearsal process, the selection of myths followed a thematic through line of love, loss, and utilized elements relevant to water that became central to the set design. Sarah Ruhl, who also utilizes the Ovidian myth in her adaptation, argues that,

[Ovid's] emphasis, in terms of story, is on transformation rather than a scene of conflict or rational cause and effect. Gods become swans, people become trees, people fall in love and die, the supernatural world is permeable. This story structure is reminiscent of fairy tales... One thing becomes another thing... And there is no clear moral. If there can be said of verisimilitude in Ovidian form, it is the sort that imitates dreams or the unconscious. Perhaps change is all-important in most dramatic forms; in the arc of the play, change is usually of the moral variety—a lesson learned. But in Ovidian form, the play takes pleasure in change itself, as opposed to pleasure in moral improvement. We now live in an age where people crave magic and transformation. (*100 Essays* 32)

It is not surprising that Orpheus and Eurydice, one of the most well-known of Ovid's myths, becomes one of the central pieces of the show. Located in the center of the production, Orpheus and Eurydice's story is told in two distinct iterations, a unique facet of this production as it is the only play that repeats the narrative of the myth twice. When the original production of *Metamorphoses* reached audiences in New York in 2001,

reviews were mostly positive but not altogether exciting. However, the events on September 11th of that year, which coincided with the rehearsals and opening of the Broadway production of *Metamorphoses*, brought an additional layer to the audience's reactions to the piece that had never been considered. Reviews of the production directly mentioned this association of the play's opening with the tragic event, with one saying that "Zimmerman may be known for dusty old texts and archetypal myths," but her productions receive the "biggest and most emotional responses when the contemporary world is suffering through a crisis with a specific geographic and historic reality" (Jones 19). Other reviewers recalled the loss of the characters in the play and how it would reflect the current losses of many in the city, a cathartic effect of the play that gave audiences an avenue to feel the emotions they needed to feel. Another described the show as a "theatrical jewelbox spilled over with love and sincerity" and insisted that audience members around him "cried their eyes out" during preview performances (Garwood 76). Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* argued that sorrow was the unifying feeling of the audience, and argued that Zimmerman "gives physical life to the forms that grief assumes... [including] the insistence on re-remembering that which causes most pain: the final glimpse of a loved face, the moment that swallows a life" ("Theatre Review"). Zimmerman herself speaks about her ability of theatrical production to speak to the emotions of a time and place when she said,

Theatre has a chance to be an art form that can respond very quickly to the events of the world if we let it. It is made up of living human beings who... are leading lives both inside and outside the 'drama' at all times... If allowed, they can carry

the world inside, into a text in the making that may embrace it. (“The Archeology” 33)

Zimmerman’s dramatization of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, despite being a very small portion of the overall production, demonstrates the powerful emotional connections that an audience can have with the story and allows the audience to be entranced by the story as the mythic figures break out of the traditional mold of storytelling to recite a poem based on their mythic narrative after having performed the actions of that myth before the audience. Zimmerman’s handling of the myth also shows the need for performance adaptation to “dramatize description, narration, and represented thoughts” and the complications that can arise when translating those textual elements to visual performance (Hutcheon 40). The myth itself is told twice in the play, back-to-back, but in two very distinct forms. By treating the audience as a new type of audience, one that is listening not to a play but to a poetry reading, the audience is pulled into the world of the play and made the audience of the performance within the performance.

In the first version of the myth in the production, Orpheus and Eurydice are introduced by a Narrator who directly addresses the audience and says, “You’ve heard of Orpheus, the greatest musician of all time, and his wife Eurydice? His was the unluckiest of wedding days” (Zimmerman, *Metamorphoses* 41). This is immediately followed by a tableau-styled scene where the couple enters and assumes a position reminiscent of a wedding altar as the narrator becomes the priest and wedding bells sound. As the mythic characters reach towards each other to kiss, the sound of a snake bite is heard, Eurydice grabs her ankle, and Hermes comes to lead Eurydice to the underworld. This is followed by narrators telling of Orpheus’ “descent into hell as red lights, music, and loud sirens

envelop players in Ovid's underworld scene" (Garwood 74). Much like the Ovidian version of the myth, Eurydice's shade limps from the snakebite during the remainder of the scene. Another narrator says, "Orpheus and Eurydice: Number One: Ovid, A.D. 8," giving the audience the direct reference and the context that the myth is going to be based on that specific iteration of the story (Zimmerman, *Metamorphoses* 41). As he speaks, the stage directions explain that "the underworld materializes around" Orpheus" as the audience sees "Persephone and Hades; The Fates, snipping their threads, A Sisyphean Character; and various Denizens of the Underworld" enter and take their places in the vignette of the underworld portrayed on the stage (Zimmerman, *Metamorphoses* 41). This physical manifestation of the underworld was not used by Cocteau or Williams but is used by the other two playwrights spoken about in this paper. Following this adaptation, however, the utilization of the physical realm of the dead onstage stays throughout contemporary adapted performances. As Orpheus speaks to the figures of the underworld, he "kneels in a shower of water pouring down from above," an image that is repeated again in Ruhl's *Eurydice* a few years later (Zimmerman, *Metamorphoses* 42). Hades and Persephone grant his wish to take Eurydice, and the myth progresses following the archetype of the mythic narrative. As Eurydice is pulled away from Orpheus by Hermes and returned to the underworld, the motion of her removal is repeated multiple times by the actors. This repetition is narrated by various figures around the mythic lovers and includes lines such as "Is this a story of love and how it always goes away?" and "Is this a story of an artist, and the loss that comes from sudden self-consciousness or impatience?" showcasing the mythic archetypes and the thematic elements of the myth that Zimmerman hoped to showcase through her portrayal of the

myth (Zimmerman, *Metamorphoses* 44). Before Eurydice can leave, the mythic lovers and Hermes break out of their configuration and create a triangle onstage before they begin the second iteration of the myth.

In the second scene of Orpheus and Eurydice in the play, *Metamorphoses* utilizes the myth uniquely by reciting portions of a poem, written by Rainer Maria Rilke, that also tells the story of the doomed lovers. This doubles the repetition of the myth by providing two individual versions of the myth within the play while also having the actors repeat the actions multiple times over during each iteration of the play. This is highlighted physically by the actors, who recite the poem in a cyclical style and physically circle around each other on the stage, giving the repetitive nature of the second iteration a further physical manifestation. Similar to the playwrights of other works in this paper, specifically Jean Cocteau and Sarah Ruhl, Zimmerman was also highly influenced by the 1908 poem “Orpheus, Eurydice, Hermes” by Rainer Maria Rilke. Although this production pulls from a multitude of source texts, the utilization of Rilke’s poem stands out in stark contrast from other productions because it is quoted directly within the dialogue of Orpheus and Eurydice’s scene. The narrator opens the second version of the myth in Zimmerman’s play with the line, “Orpheus and Eurydice: Number Two. Rainer Maria Rilke, A.D. 1908” (*Metamorphoses* 45). This scene of poetry recited aloud is then juxtaposed with the first scene, as there is no special lighting and no utilization of the pool onstage, a way to free the words of the poem from the stylization of theatrical production and allow them the chance to be spoken freely in the powerful style of poetry. The scene creates “a poetic bridge between myth and modernism, artistic process and its inviolate root in the unconscious...” by giving the audience both a traditional staged

version of the performance immediately followed by the poetic reading of the myth (Garwood 71). The inclusion of text from of a past adaptation also encourages audiences to embrace the “palimpsestuous pleasures of adaptation” and allows them to see the “source and the medium into which it has been adapted differently” to further their desire to learn more about the story and be enticed into the adapted world of the play (Barnette 146). The repetition of the text through poetic quotation from the Rilke poem is also a Brechtian technique that separates the audience from the work in an effort to increase the educational outreach that the work allows. It should be noted that the original production was created under sponsorship from Northwestern University, a program that hosts productions that are often “developed first as a pedagogical technique designed to aid with the teaching of literature” (Jones 22). By pulling the audience out of the world of the play through this distancing effect, then the audience is able to see both how the mythic figures work outside the realms of the realistic and how their mythic narrative translates across time to different spaces and textual mediums. Sarah Ruhl touches on an idea similar to this in regards to adaptation when she says,

...their distancing effect pulls us deeply towards an in-between space—the place between knowing and not knowing, the present and the past. I believe that it is inside this space between the unknown and the known, the ancient and the modern, that the invisible life occurs on stage. (“Re-Runs” 288)

Additionally, the design of the production directly impacts the telling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth while also enhancing the mythic quality of the production. The play has a sparse set, with an “open, even floor” that allows for multiple bodies to be on the stage at once—Zimmerman requests this as an “open space is more flexible in

terms of what it can ‘take on’ to represent” over various scenes of vignette-styled production (“The Archeology” 26-7). The play text requests an “elegantly spare mise-en-scene [that] creates a supernatural continuum where outdoors, indoors, and scene changes coexist” with only a “fancy chandelier [that] dangles overhead” and “a doorway” on the stage left side established as permanent set pieces during the production (Garwood 71). This open design is coupled with a massive pool that takes up the center of the room, one that can be entered and walked through, but one that also allows actor to sink underneath and disappear from view. The pool allows the audience to see a reflection of the characters, one that harkens back to the reflection of characters in adaptation, and also gives the story a mythic quality through the magical reflections of the chandelier and other lighting instruments in the water. Zimmerman, additionally, speaks about the challenges of designing for a myth-based production in her essay on the play when she says,

However poets, novelists, scientists, and anonymous tellers of ancient myths aren’t the least concerned with whether or not what they describe can be realized in the stubbornly material world of the stage, nor with such niceties as unity of time and place. So my set designer has two problems to contend with: the original text was never intended for the stage, and our script of that text does not yet exist. (“The Archeology” 26)

In regards to the elements of design within the telling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth in the play, it is specifically noted that “the chandelier is fully illuminated” during the wedding of Orpheus and Eurydice, a brief happy moment amongst many other sad moments in the play (Zimmerman, *Metamorphoses* 41).

Although the pool, the largest and most prominent set piece of the production, is not expressly used within the Orpheus and Eurydice scene it is in much of the production, Orpheus is showered with water as he begs for Eurydice's return in front of Hades and Persephone. This shower of water motif is also in Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*. Zimmerman speaks about water in the production when she says,

...water is an ancient and cross-cultural symbol of transfiguration... Perhaps because it is so transformative and so mutable itself, water easily takes on a wider variety of symbolic resonances... it easily slips into manifestation of sloppy drunkenness, of grief and tears, of sexual excitement... The water itself became a kind of eloquent text, alternately muted and voluble. ("The Archeology" 27).

When looking at the central themes of the production, and specifically within the scene of Orpheus and Eurydice, we see that Zimmerman's work furthers the "premise that myth is a public dream, a place where our collective vulnerability can be aligned with wise and mysterious archetypal forms" a message that is specifically spoken about in the play and referenced thematically throughout (Garwood 76). Each of the individual myths utilized in *Metamorphoses* brings home the central thematic element of love and transformation, an element best shown at the end of the play when the actors gather on stage as themselves to say, "Let me die still loving, and so, never die" (Zimmerman, 83). In the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, themes of forgetting and reoccurrence are also touched on, as the narration of the characters around the doomed lovers speaks about the inability of Orpheus to go back and retry his retrieval of Eurydice but is instead doomed to repeat it. Orpheus, because of his archetypal stance in myth, "can only move forward in time" much like "mortal love and feeling only move forward," leading to a figure who

can only repeat his mistakes but can never truly go back to fix what he has done. (Garwood 74). This is shown in the dialogue when one of the narrators asks the audience “Is this a story of how time can move only in one direction?” as the characters repeat the moment of Orpheus’ fatal glance (Zimmerman, *Metamorphoses* 44). The theme of forgetting is seen best through Eurydice, whose only dialogue in the poem is when Hermes tells her that Orpheus has turned around, to which she responds “Who?” (Zimmerman, *Metamorphoses* 47). This moment, more prominent in the play by Sarah Ruhl, reminds the audience of the horror felt by the living about the inability to remember or be remembered after death.

The replication of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice twice, and the repeated imagery of Orpheus’ turn towards Eurydice highlight the repetition both in the play and in many adapted texts overall. It is used as a thematic means of unlocking the repetitive nature of retelling myths as well and the retellings of those myth across time. In the first iteration of the myth, as Hermes is pulling Eurydice away from Orpheus, Eurydice repeats the word ‘farewell’ each time. That moment of parting, so intrinsic to the overall archetype of the myth and audience’s recognition of the story, is a central motif that is repeated to further emphasize its importance as “watching the players repeat the same action brought the point home” in way that was incredibly theatrical in nature and, to some, “a little unnerving” (Garwood 74). In this moment, additionally, the stage directions command that “Orpheus turns around; as he does, Hermes lifts Eurydice and pulls her away as she and Orpheus reach for each other” (Zimmerman, *Metamorphoses* 43). This is immediately followed by Eurydice saying “Farewell,” before the scene resets,

the characters return to their original positions, and Orpheus turns around yet again.

Sarah Ruhl touches on this idea of repetition in her writings when she says,

Spiritual practices all involve repetition and variation—daily prayers, weekly communion, fasting, and holy days. With repetition of the outward form, the inner value reveals itself and, one hopes, changes for the better. Theatre, then, becomes a radical spiritual form in our age of mechanical reproduction, because it is a form of repetition very difficult to sell. It's impossible to sell the oral tradition. It changes as we tell it. ("Re-Runs" 289)

Zimmerman also repeats the mythic archetype of a mortal traveling to the underworld in her production through her retelling of the myth of Eros and Psyche. In Eros and Psyche's tale, "the human Psyche struggled to reunite with her mysterious husband, the god Eros, by obeying an angry and jealous Aphrodite's demand that she cross the Styx... overwhelmed by her task, Eros himself entered the unerotic underworld to rescue and raise her to Olympus" (Zabriskie 431). It is no surprise thematically that Zimmerman focuses on two of these myths as they both highlight themes regarding the love overcoming obstacles to (hopefully) bring forth a happy ending. It also shows the humanity intrinsic to the myths—who wouldn't go into the underworld if given the chance to get back someone they loved? Additionally, the use of the myth of Myrrha, a mythical character who is cursed by Aphrodite to fall in love with her father, is a story that is told in the Ovidian version of the myth by Orpheus, a utilization of another element of the Orphic legends that further solidifies the myth's importance within the overall structure of the play.

In her creation of *Metamorphoses*, Mary Zimmerman utilizes many of the traditional structures of the archetypal myth in her reproduction of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Although the play only utilizes the myth for a very short amount of time, the myth is central to the overall thematic narrative of the play and is located in the middle of the production and repeated to further the importance of the story to the overall narrative of the play. Zimmerman uses the moment of looking back by Orpheus, the traditional archetypes of the underworld and its figures, and the traditional narrative of the death of Eurydice, to ensure that the audience will understand which story she is hoping to retell. However, by combining this mythic performance with another poetic adaptation of the myth, Zimmerman also subverts the traditional mythic narrative and allows the adaptation of an adaptation to take center stage, further highlighting the necessity of adaptations to also adapt each other in contemporary performance. Coupled with the timeless and heavily metaphorical set design and the connections of thematic elements across the narratives of multiple myths told consecutively through an estimated ninety-minute run time, the play shows the ability of mythic adaptations to mold to contemporary and postmodern productions styles to continue to entice new audiences.

5.2 ROLE REVERSAL AND FEMINIST INTERPRETATION THROUGH SARAH RUHL'S *EURYDICE*

Eurydice is a dynamic, captivating play written by Sarah Ruhl that premiered at Brown University in 2001 before moving to multiple locations before its Off-Broadway run at the Second Stage Theatre in 2007. The play draws inspiration heavily from the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, specifically the Ovidian myth and the Rainer Maria Rilke poem that also influenced *Metamorphoses*. What makes Ruhl's interpretation of the story unique is her concentration not on Orpheus, the musician and possible son of a Greek

God, but instead on his wife Eurydice, as she is sent down to Hades. Ruhl also pulls inspiration from other stories, including the Rainer Maria Rilke poem that was also utilized by Mary Zimmerman in *Metamorphoses*. As shown by the title, Ruhl centralizes her version of the myth around Eurydice instead of Orpheus, contrary to the original myth that places its concentration on the Orphic story. This unique utilization of the myth is challenging, as there is little information about Eurydice from historical sources, and past adaptations of the rarely concentrate on her experiences once she has been sent to Hades. Eurydice, also, is not a very well-known story to modern audiences, despite the continued popularity of the myth. Ruhl speaks about this, and how she utilized the myth in her play, when she said,

My own love for the Greeks has nothing to do with the language of smug expertise... Instead, I'm interested in how the Greeks can refract in the gut. When my play *Eurydice*... was done at the Madison Repertory Theatre, a number of subscribers called the box office complaining that they couldn't pronounce the play's name. And yet prior knowledge of the myth wasn't at all a prerequisite for experiencing the play in the gut. ("Re-Runs" 287)

The subversion of the original protagonist of the story allows the audience to take in a new point of view, one that has not been given ample time in previous versions of the myth. This, in part, is a facet of the postmodern interpretation of the play and shows the "dialogical relationship between classical and postmodern culture [that] can be detected through the reformulation of the plays' symbols as well as through their focus on certain mythic stories which nurture" the story that the new playwright hopes to tell (Casado-Gual 68).

Ruhl's adaptation illustrates her argument that "we live in an age of cultural recycling" as her play draws on multiple motifs and themes from past adaptations along with many of the archetypal elements of the original mythic narrative ("Re-Runs" 283). However, the play subverts these elements by making Eurydice the protagonist, giving the feminine voice the chance to weigh in on the traditional narrative often given to Orpheus. This idea of allowing the adapters to "take liberty with characters when adapting them from page to stage" is not new and is often used when a playwright hopes to push "a revisionist or revolutionary cause" (Barnette 81). Specifically, Ruhl's play explores the idea of Eurydice as the central character over Orpheus, giving the central narrative to the marginalized and underrepresented character of the original myth. By doing so, Ruhl allows the narrative to shift to Eurydice's experiences instead of focusing solely on Orpheus as he tries to reach her. Despite this move, the style of Ruhl's play "eludes any overtly feminist statements or modifications of the narrative" that could inhibit or impede the "mechanisms of universal identification embedded in the myth" that allow it to transcend across time and place (Casado-Gual 70). This is not the first time that Eurydice has been given some agency in adaptations of the myth-- in "opera history, Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* marked the first successful installment of the genre in which an emotional vocabulary and gender difference constitute central themes" (Simpson 446). As opposed to Jean Cocteau's Eurydice, who exclaims, "I won't open my mouth" to Orpheus as she feels ignored and neglected by him, this version utilizes Eurydice's narrative to tell the other side of the story and allows the audience to see what she sees after her death (105). In an interview about the work, Ruhl explained,

There have been so many renditions of the myth... and every sort of male artist has kind of cut their teeth on Eurydice. But you don't hear much about her from a woman's viewpoint... I think Eurydice is complicated because she's human, which was the point of me revisiting her. Anyone who bravely faces her fate could be heroic. Maybe that's all we can ask of someone. (Berson, "Sarah Ruhl's Eurydice")

Because she is sent to the underworld on her wedding day, Eurydice must relearn what it means to be human from her Father, who had died before her and had retained his humanity despite being dipped in the River Styx, before attempting her escape from the underworld and ultimately returning when Orpheus fails his doomed quest to retrieve her.

The play opens with Orpheus and Eurydice on the beach. Orpheus, much like his character is in other iterations of the myth, is distracted by his music. He is described as a young, naïve version of the mythic Orpheus, and he often gets lost in the world of his music when speaking to Eurydice during the first scene of the play. Similarly to Cocteau, we see "Orpheus [as] a mediocre musician so distracted by his own sense of his talent that he can never hear Eurydice" (Craig 121). Eurydice speaks about her books and tells Orpheus that "There were-stories- about people's lives-- how some come well-- and others come out badly" (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 10). This foreshadows their own tragic fate, as if Eurydice is reading a narrative based on their own tragic myth. As they walk on the beach, Orpheus proposes with a piece of string, reminiscent of a string of fate tying the characters together, and Eurydice says yes. This string could also reference the "Ovidian and Senecan versions of the myth" where there is a moment that the "threads of

Eurydice's life" are being spun together in the underworld (Bowra 117). The scene shifts to a dimly lit location outside of their wedding. Eurydice goes to get water, where she runs into a Nasty Interesting Man who says that he has a letter from her father. She follows him to his apartment, where she falls down the stairs and is sent to the Underworld. Her father greets her at the entrance, but she has lost her memory and has to spend an extended period of time learning from her father to regain it. Reminiscent again of the strings of fate, Eurydice's Father constructs her a room of string in the underworld to protect her and make her feel at home while she remembers her past. At the same time, Orpheus is determined to find a way into the Underworld to save Eurydice and bring her back to the world of the living, and he decides that he will use his musical talents to "[go] the way of death" and travel to the underworld to save her (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 52). Despite not being the central protagonist of the story, the grief of Orpheus, and his quest to save Eurydice because of it, are necessary for the mythic pattern of the story, and they have to be included in some way for the story to retain its mythic power (Dawson 246). Orpheus finds a note that when played allows him to travel to the Underworld, where he is greeted by the Lord of the Underworld. He states that Orpheus must walk towards the gate without looking back- if he does this, Eurydice will follow him. Eurydice, however, calls out his name and causes him to turn around. This sends her back into the Underworld to her father, who has since bathed himself in the river to lose his memory. Devastated, Eurydice decides to join him, subsequently taking her memory and her voice.

As in the other adaptations discussed, the moment of turning back is immortalized in this production, as well, but Ruhl also adds new elements to this moment to further her thematic exploration of the original myth. In *Eurydice*, the characters quickly speak over

each other, attempting to get their final words in as they are forced back into their own respective worlds. The myth itself, then, is preserved in that the ending stays the same, but it is Eurydice who initiates the turn back in this production. According to the stage directions, Eurydice “increases her pace” and “catches up to him” as he is walking away, but she makes the mistake of saying his name causing him to startle and turn around (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 60). This fatal glance is capitalized in the stage directions, giving emphasis to those who read or stage the production, and reads,

HE TURNS TOWARD HER, STARTLED.

ORPHEUS LOOKS AT EURYDICE.

EURYDICE LOOKS AT ORPHEUS.

THE WORLD FALLS AWAY. (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 60)

A reversal of the moment before, Orpheus looks back at Eurydice when he emerges from the elevator as he has come back again. The rain in the elevator begins and he forgets who he is or what has happened before. This haunting moment shows us Orpheus as the one who forgets, as the one who makes it into the underworld, if only following in Eurydice’s footsteps, but in an echo of what is normally shown only of Eurydice.

As in the previous productions spoken about in this paper, the idea of repetition is again a central piece of the play. Sarah Ruhl has written about her experiences with adaptations and repetitions in her article “Re-Runs and Repetitions,” in which she argues,

When we re-tell an ancient story, we repeat the story without reproducing it exactly. Theatre in general is a medium of live repetition rather than mechanical reproduction. An actor biologically cannot repeat a performance, even though they perform the same play night after night. An exact reproduction would be not

only undesirable, but also impossible. And so it is that when we tell a tale over again, it changes, never static... The story changes slightly every night but leaves a primal mark through repetition. (289)

The naming of the mythic characters, an element also present in the two other contemporary productions discussed in this paper, is given considerable power in this production through the repetition of the names and the reverence given to those names. The characters speak each other's names in a reverent way that harkens back to the power of their names for each of them in the myth. Additionally, the dialogue of the play often places the names in their own sentences, showing any actor that they must further emphasize that name as it is its own unique thought in the context of the story. As the mythic lovers are backing away from each other after Orpheus has looked back at Eurydice, Orpheus speaks the following,

Eurydice! WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR CENTURIES! I want to reminisce! Remember when you wanted your name in a song so I put your name in a song- when I played my music...At the gates of hell...I was singing your name...Over and over and over again...Eurydice! (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 62-3)

The naming of Eurydice, giving her name the power that is associated with the mythic image of the figure, allows the audience to connect the young and innocent figures before them with the mythic figures that have existed throughout recorded time. When the Nasty Interesting Man, this plays version of Hades, enters he asks Eurydice who she is supposed to be marrying. She names Orpheus and says, "Maybe you've heard of him. He's kind of famous. He plays the most beautiful music in the world, actually" (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 23). The Nasty Interesting Man ironically claims that Orpheus' name is not

very interesting and it's one that he has heard before, a reference to the repetition of the names of the mythic figures in history through adaptations of their story. In the sixth scene of the play, the only text that appears as Orpheus realizes that his wife is missing is the repetition of "Eurydice? Eurydice!" (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 27). Ruhl herself speaks about this concept, and her interpretation of the repetition of the mythic names of the characters, when she says,

Tragedy has proper nouns... is this because tragedies are about the loss of one individual soul? The tragic perspective privileges one person over the continuity of the system... after *Hamlet*, Hamlet is dead forever, keeps dying, keeps on being dead. (*100 Essays* 10)

Themes surrounding the mythic lovers also center around ideas of young love and fated love, both elements presented in other adapted iterations of the myth. Eurydice and Orpheus' love is described in the Ruhl's author's note in the front of the script as a love that is "a little too young" (*Eurydice* 5). This naivety helps to highlight the changes that the characters go through over the course of the play, and it shows the sad effect of that love on the characters at the end. Orpheus tells Eurydice that "I play the saddest music now that you're gone" in reference to this innocent, yet devastating, loss of love (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 36). Their love is not the only love that is shown throughout the script, however. The love of a father and his child is also shown through Eurydice and her Father, who are both able to overcome the effects of the underworld to understand and speak to each other. Their love is also a tragic one, as the Father must watch Eurydice lose and regain her memories just to give up his own before she can return to him.

Another major element of the script is the effects of memories and the loss of those memories. Eurydice loses and regains her memories over the course of the script, and she must deal with the emotions associated with the memories that she gains back. When we first see Eurydice, she is speaking of her love of books- later, when we reach the underworld, Eurydice no longer understands what a book is. When she enters the underworld, she says to her Father, “There was a roar, and a coldness- I think my husband was with me. What was my husband’s name?... How strange. I don’t remember” (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 28). It takes time and effort from her father to help her regain her memories. He explains to her that he is “one of the few dead people who still remember how to read and write... That’s a secret... If anyone finds out, they might dip me in the River again” (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 15). Even Orpheus, still among the living but attempting to travel to the world of the dead, has a nightmare about forgetting, and says in a letter to Eurydice, “I woke up and the window frightened me and I thought: Eurydice is dead. Then I thought- who is Eurydice?” (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 39). The idea of memories weaves throughout the play, as Eurydice’s Father uses stories from his life to help her remember and to reconnect. However, the recollection of those memories can be both happy and sad as memories do not always carry a positive connotation with them. When Eurydice attempts to follow Orpheus, the scene shifts back to her Father, who has a haunting monologue to the audience where he recalls the directions towards his childhood home before he dips himself back into the river to forget the loss of his daughter. This moment, and others like it, isn’t horrifying to the characters, as they are already dead, but “for us, alive and watching [them], it is a reminder of the precariousness of life and of language, which suddenly feels like a leaky vessel” (Craig 121).

Water has a very strong presence within this play, both physically and metaphorically, much like the physical manifestation of water in Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*. Eurydice is surrounded by water, both at the opening scene at the beach and in the water pump that she sits beside before traveling to the underworld, but metaphorically she is 'thirsting' for knowledge- she speaks to Orpheus of wanting to gain knowledge from the books that she reads. Eurydice strays from her wedding a few pages later to search for water, leading to her encounter with the Nasty Interesting Man and her death. Her thirst becomes her downfall, and when she arrives in the underworld she is saturated in water. Later, Eurydice and Orpheus must travel through a raining elevator to get to the underworld symbolizing this saturation. The underworld also contains a river that takes the memory of those who are dipped in it. Water, and the thirst for it, are shown in many different aspects throughout the script and become a running thematic element throughout the production.

Because the narrative of the traditional myth is subverted through Eurydice serving as the protagonist, the thematic emphasis on speech and voice in the play is important to note. In classical versions of the myth, Eurydice is passed down to us as a "silent, clueless child who never had much to say" whose voice is drowned out by the lyre, by Orpheus, by Ovid and Virgil and Rilke, all of them eager to describe her incomparable beauty and her mute death" but none willing to give her the voice that she needed to tell her own tale. (Craig 121). In the Rilke poem, Eurydice is only granted one word, the word "who?" in reference to Orpheus. This also plays on traditional beliefs in Greece, where "the dirges of bereaved decry that in death, the deceased cannot speak" but that "their appearance is anticipated in dreams, 'a channel through which the dead are

believed to be able to communicate with the living” (Zabriskie 430). This version of the myth, then, allows us to hear the voice of Eurydice throughout her descent into the world of Hades, and furthers the argument that “adaptors refashion old material because they have something to say about it--” In this case, Ruhl hoped to comment on the lack of voice afforded to the central feminine protagonist of the myth (McKinnon 58). In the play, Eurydice loses her ability to speak when she travels to the underworld. The Stones command the audience to try to understand Eurydice, as “She talks in the language of dead people now” and will be unable to speak as the living do (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 27). This also shows the “meditation on the links between speech and loss” that is found throughout the play, as her death causes her to lose her ability to speak reminiscent of the death of a loved one meaning the loss of connection to them (Craig 121). This focus on speech and language also highlights their connection to the Orphic legends and the association of Orpheus with written text, language, and music.

In *Eurydice*, Sarah Ruhl also subverts other original elements of the myth. One example of this is the use of the father figure, a character that reflects Ruhl’s own loss of her father but was not a part of the original myth or any subsequent rewrites of the story before her. This addition highlights the love of a father and daughter and was made by Ruhl because of the death of her own father when she was only 20 years old. The story, she said, helped to give her some peace over the death of her father and helped her to feel close to him again. Another of the mythic elements of the story that has been subverted in both versions is the idea of Hades and Persephone as the rulers of the underworld. The representation of the character of death in Ruhl’s story becomes the Nasty Interesting Man, who lures Eurydice to his high-rise apartment with a supposed letter from her

Father on her wedding day. Shifting to the form of a Child in the underworld, the Nasty Interesting Man demands that Eurydice listen to him because he is “lord of the underworld” and “grows downward... like a turnip” (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 56). Hades in *Eurydice*, then, is represented more like a cheesy yet creepy villain, complete with a tricycle when he is small and stilts to show how he has grown into the powerful ruler of the underworld that Orpheus must reckon with at the end of the play. His demand that Eurydice marry him removes the character of Persephone completely, a shift that takes out one element of the original Greek religious connection in the story. This subversion harkens back to traditional representations of Eurydice as the “handmaiden to Persephone,” and idea that allows Eurydice, as another woman taken too soon from the world above, to be “perceived as having pride of place, equal or superior to [the] queen” of Hades (Zabriskie 439).

The stones as personified characters are another unique element of Ruhl’s story. The stones of the underworld serve at times as the “traditional Greek chorus” as they interact with various characters and narrate to the audience, yet they “mock the very idea of a neutral or collective voice as they contradict and speak over one another” throughout the play (Craig 127). Much like *Metamorphoses* and *Orpheus Descending*, these characters serve as the narration for the scenes located in the underworld. It is the stones who mediate “between the audience and the characters” yet “mock the very idea of a neutral or collective voice as they contradict and speak over one another” (Craig 127). The stones also serve as the rule-keepers in the underworld, helping both the novice Eurydice and the audience to understand the rules of Ruhl’s representation of Hades. At various points in the play, they demand that Eurydice and her father stop singing,

reading, crying, and speaking, as each is an action that is forbidden in the underworld. Megan Craig, in *The Language of Stones*, argues that this is to reinforce the power of language and song in the world of myth and humanity, when she says,

Both singing and string are forbidden in the underworld. Eurydice's father is always breaking the rules... Perhaps it is because the song facilitates memory, like the first tunes one learned as a child that helped to put the letters of the alphabet in order or lulled one to sleep, or a string tied to a finger to remind you not to forget. The underworld is the world of forgetting, the world in which souls have been dipped and made clean... The song blurs the borders between the living and the dead by facilitating a passage from one to the other, the spirit ascending or descending in song. (128-29)

When, later in the play, Orpheus finds the right note to sing to travel to the underworld, he says that his "breath will push me like a great wind into the darkness and I will sing your name"—his voice is the means to bridge the gap between the living world and the dead and the means to which he can reach for Eurydice in the underworld (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 45). That voice is also created through the stones who serve as the interpreters of the dead for the audience who are unable to hear or understand them until "under the right conditions or in the right time (in the theater, in the dark, in grief, or in song)" (Craig 125).

Settings in the world of Eurydice alternate from more realistic to more dream-like throughout the play, leaving the production elements to merge these realistic and nonrealistic elements in the set design for the play. The Lord of the Underworld's entrance is in an "apartment (a large, vacant loft)," yet the world of the underworld itself

is full of talking stones, moving water, and a house built of string (Craig 119). The underworld stage directions read as, “The underworld. There is no set change. Strange watery noises. Drip, drip, drip. The movement to the underworld is marked by the entrance of stones” (Ruhl, *Eurydice* 10). The juxtaposition of nonrealistic and realistic settings blends the “essential elements from the classical narrative with modern details that narrow down the vast atemporality” of the story, despite the inclusion of “numerous anachronisms” that enhance the dreamlike quality of the production (Casado-Gual 67). Orpheus begins the play on a beach with his Eurydice, but after she travels to the world of the dead Orpheus lives in a dream-like world of nothing, an unspecified place where he can appear as necessary to speak of his quest for Eurydice but not shift away from the focus of Eurydice’s underworld. This direction helps the play to transcend time, as the style of costume should change each time it is produced to better reflect the period it is currently in. In *Eurydice*, the story itself does not have an established time period for the human world, although in the first scene Orpheus and Eurydice “wear swimming outfits from the 1950’s” and references are made throughout to music and stories from more modern periods (Ruhl 9). This shift in time could be argued to be a method to enhance the timelessness of the myth by creating “an unworldly resonance for the spectator; the setting lifts the individual out of ordinary time and the present moment, and places him in “mythic time”—an ambiguous term for the timeless quality myths manifest” (Chirico 153). This ambiguous time in coupled with the “minimalistic and mechanized aesthetics of (post)modern architecture and theatrical scenery” through multiple scene changes that are only shown through very small changes to the world around the characters and the establishment of new worlds with small set pieces. Ruhl lists in her introduction to the

play that the set should contain, in some form or another, “a raining elevator, a water-pump, some rusty exposed pipes, an abstracted River of Forgetfulness, and an old-fashioned glow-in-the-dark globe” (*Eurydice* 5). Eurydice’s Father helps to establish the underworld through the creation of a string building around them, the only physical manifestation of the underworld around Eurydice. This simplistic setting is combined with the “different presentational spaces of Ruhl’s piece [that] absorb the past and the present into a symbolic nonspace, which is enhanced by... the conceptual River of Forgetfulness, and the visual paradox of having rain inside the elevator” (Casado-Gual 68). The original timelessness of the myth is given to this new adaptation of the myth who takes Orpheus and Eurydice even further out of the original world they lived in and places them in others that are not entirely physical or combined with audience imagination to enhance the connection the audience can make with the characters. Ruhl speaks about the effects of time and place when she says,

Instead of a primal comfort, in a very good play, what we get is primal recognition. This brand of recognition puts us into contact with the present moment, rather than distancing us from it. And if the goal of art is to put us into contact with the present moment, rather than distancing us from it. And if the goal of art is to put us into contact with the present moment, I would argue that the dialectic between the known and the unknown helps us. The ancient stories help us ironically, to be in contact, really in contact, with our strange contemporary moment. (“Re-Runs” 286)

Sarah Ruhl, in her interpretation of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, highlights many aspects of postmodern production that can utilize adaptation as a means of

unlocking new understanding through an audience's interaction with a myth in new ways. Audiences were thrilled to learn new information about the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice from the female protagonist's point of view, and reviews spoke of Ruhl's play as having "the subliminal potency of music, the head-scratching surprise of a modernist poem and the cockeyed allure of a surrealist painting." (Isherwood, "A Comic Impudence"). Ruhl's production, much like the others in this paper, takes elements from the original archetypal narrative of the characters while also subverting the traditional arc of the story by placing Eurydice as the forefront of the myth. Through this interpretation, the female voice is given new agency in the myth and Eurydice is allowed to tell her own story for the first time. Because of the popularity of this iteration of the myth, an operatic version of the play opened at the LA Opera in 2020, with a libretto by Ruhl and directed by Mary Zimmerman. This operatic version of the myth, combining the expertise of two playwrights spoken about in this paper, is continuing to impress audiences and transferred to the Metropolitan Opera in New York City in December. The ability of the myth to continue to pull audiences to the theatre, despite the outbreak of COVID-19, showcases the ability of Ruhl to utilize the myth in new ways that continues to fascinate audiences.

5.3 *HADESTOWN* AND BEYOND: WHERE CAN THE MYTH TAKE US NEXT?

Hadestown saw its start around 2006, when Anaïs Mitchell partnered with composer Michael Chorney and director Ben Matchstick on the concept for a folk opera originally titled "A Crack in the Wall" where Mitchell played Eurydice in a two-weekend run in Vermont (*Working on a Song* 3). Starting in 2010, what began as a one-act performance would eventually evolve into a folk-styled recorded album, released by

Righteous Babe Records under Todd Sickafoose, who would partner with Chorney later to arrange the musical's numbers. In 2012, Mitchell first met Rachel Chavkin, the New York based director who had recently won accolades for her direction of *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*. This partnership would evolve into the first female writer and director combo to win the Best Musical Tony when *Hadestown* won, along with seven other awards, in 2019. The origins of *Hadestown* are mixed and contain multiple studio album rewrites and rewrites for multiple subsequent staged performances. This twelve-year journey would subsequently end with the opening of *Hadestown* on Broadway, a production that was originally described as a “folk-operatic retelling” of the myth (Rubin 24). The creation of the adapted musical from the original concept album was complicated because of the intrinsic nature of musicals, with conventions “that all operate to structure meaning for the perceiving audience” (Hutcheon 35). Sarah Ruhl, in her essay on repetition in theatre, argues that the idea of the Broadway musical is crumbling when she says,

For one thing, the American musical itself is in a crisis—beleaguered and mocked, with a diminishing ability to sell tickets and with its own lack of appeal to young, diverse audiences. The American musical itself pillages newer forms... in the hopes of rejuvenating itself. In an era of globalized commerce and the corporate media, one hardly knows where to look for authenticity. (“Re-Runs” 285)

It is ironic, then, that a musical based so heavily on adaptation is one that has served as a catalyst for reigniting interest in Broadway for many young audience members, and it has served as a new example of how to diversify casting choices, even in adaptation of

classical myths and legends, to further reach new audiences. The first stage performances occurred on a “bare-bones” set in Vermont in 2006, before the subsequent concept album was released four years later with Justin Vernon of Bon Iver as Orpheus (Venning 514).

Hadestown, much like *Metamorphoses*, was born from a series of collaborations created by the initial writer with other cast members and collaborators through a rehearsal process. Anais Mitchell, the songwriter-turned-musical-composer, described her process as “one of feeling my way in the dark, one foot in front of the next, holding the hands of my collaborators” (*Working on a Song* 1). Rachel Chavkin’s influence on the musical began in 2012 and included “writing, rewriting, and adding music to make the production more digestible,” as she believed that the original story “lacked narrative momentum” despite its audience-enticing music (Rubin 24). The rewrites of the production were collaborative in nature, and the utilization of the myth as a central theme and story point to both the album and the musical helped to alleviate much of the tension that could have occurred during editing discussions, as the myth was able to serve as the final discussion point when changes were considered. Rewrites of the production were created through Chavkin, Mitchell, dramaturg Ken Cerniglia after the 2013 production at the New York Theatre Workshop, and with a full production team for the Olivier Theatre in London and all subsequent productions. The final production takes inspiration from “sung-through musicals like *Les Miserables*” to “enhance the story telling without breaking the poetry of what worked about it as an abstract piece” (Rubin 24). The musical, then, lives in “the recognition that adaptation is both process and product,” and that the creation of new adaptations “requires the theatre artist to hold the contradictory ideas (something new, something familiar) in mind at the same time” (Barnette 18).

Within the musical, multiple tropes and archetypes of the myth are present and utilized to ensure that the audience knows the story and are able to grasp the overall meaning of the musical's story. Hermes' sung dialogue in the opening scene introduces us to the characters of the story and allows the audience to jump into the world of the myth as it stands just before Orpheus and Eurydice meet. The play begins with Hermes, the transporter of souls to the underworld, introducing the audience to the actors and characters of the play. In another similarity to *Metamorphoses*, we again see Hermes as a narrator of the story, harkening back to the idea of Hermes as a transporter of souls to the underworld. This "overarching metatheatrical narrative structure" allows the audience to enter the world of the play through Hermes, and Hermes frequently addresses the audience directly, acknowledging his role as a narrator" (Wilson 190-1). In the text, Hermes introduces himself as the one "who could help you to your final destination" immediately after introducing himself as the one who will undertake the telling of his "sad song" that is the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, connecting him as both the "conductor of souls [and] the conductor of our story" in a way that ties back to the railroad line motif that represents the means of making it to the underworld (Mitchell, *Working on a Song* 13). Unlike other iterations of this trope, in Mitchell's musical places Herme at the end of a physical railroad line that metaphorically represents the end of life and the subsequent journey to the afterlife of Hades.

As in the productions of the early 20th century, Mitchell's Orpheus is established as "far from the all-powerful musical master and sage that we find in antiquity" and instead becomes the embodiment of the "original penniless poet, with nothing to offer but his song" (Oosterhuis 103). However, this Orpheus is one that Hermes claims has been

touched by the gods and is able to utilize his musical abilities to change the world for the better. Hermes explains in the opening song that Orpheus “he had a way with words, and a rhythm and a rhyme, and he sang just like a bird up on a line” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 11). In “Wedding Song,” Orpheus lists his abilities to charm nature with his music. One example of this is when he tells Eurydice,

Lover, when I sing my song,
All the trees gonna sing along,
And they’re gonna bend their branches down,
To lay their fruit upon the ground, ...
The trees gonna lay the wedding table. (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 14)

Unlike the versions of Orpheus from the 20th century, this one is endowed with the gifts that will give him the success in his art, and his musical abilities are able to charm the animals and people around him over the course of the play. When Orpheus is entering the underworld, he sings “I hear the rocks and stones... echoing my song,” a reference to this innate musical ability and possibly a reference to the talking stones of Ruhl’s version of the myth (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 52). Another similarity to *Eurydice* is shown through an Orpheus who is able to use music to travel to the underworld, but this Orpheus’ travels to Hadestown through a ‘back-door’ instead of singing through a straw. Orpheus explains to Eurydice that he was able to enter Hadestown because, “I sang a song so beautiful, the stones wept and they let me in, and I can sing us home again” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 66). Unlike other iterations of the myth, Orpheus in this instance is not a spurned musician, wary of the world around him. Instead, he is much like Ruhl’s Orpheus, innocent and naïve to a fault and unable to keep Eurydice because he is so

distracted and obsessed with the music that he is trying to create. Mitchell differentiates her Orpheus by making him “irrationally hopeful,” something she saw as “inherent in his mythological character” and by giving him a purpose to fix, through his song, the troubles plaguing the world. This is a subversion of Ruhl’s naïve Orpheus who is distracted by his music but never able to expressly explain what the purpose behind his music will be (*Working on a Song*, 34). Hermes describes Orpheus as wearing “his heart out on his sleeve” and being “naïve to the ways of the world” despite his powerful voice and musical ability, and this naivety is his flaw that eventually leads to Eurydice’s journey to the world of Hadestown (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 11). Orpheus explains to Eurydice his purpose in his music when he sings, “I’m working on a song, it isn’t finished yet, but when it’s done, and when I sing it, Spring will come again” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 12-3). This is furthered later in the song, when Orpheus explains that the song will, to fix what’s wrong, take what’s broken, make it whole, A song so beautiful, it brings the world back into tune, back into time, and all the flowers will bloom” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 13). Mitchell, additionally, argues that by “reframing Orpheus as naïve,” the audience is able to empathize with both him and Eurydice as “we can’t blame Orpheus for who and how he is, but we also can’t blame Eurydice for leaving him” when she is starving, and he is too entranced in his music to see it (*Working on a Song*, 95).

Again, with this version of Eurydice much like Ruhl’s version, the audience is able to hear more of Eurydice’s voice and see her own agency in the production. Eurydice is at multiple points described as a young girl who is hungry and is fighting to survive in a system that is set against her. When Orpheus is trapped in the world of his song, trying to find a solution to the problems of the world, she is forced to find a new

means to access food, singing, “It’s my gut I can’t ignore, Orpheus, I’m hungry, Oh, my heart it aches to stay, But the flesh will have its way” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 46).

Eurydice, far from the passive character of the past who was bitten by a snake, makes a conscious choice to join Hades who functions as the counterpoint to Orpheus in *Hadestown* because “Orpheus is poor and powerless; Hades is rich and hence powerful” (Oosterhuis 111). When Hades tries to lure Eurydice to the underworld in “Hey, Little Songbird,” Eurydice is entranced by his power and says, “Strange is the call of this strange man, I wanna fly down and feed at his hand, I want a nice soft place to land, I want to lie down forever” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 43). It is only after she signs her life away to Hades in the underworld that she realizes her mistakes and is unable to return to the world of the living.

Much like in *Metamorphoses* and in the metaphorical references of *Orpheus Descending*, we see the idea of Orpheus begging Hades and Persephone to remember their own love story to convince them to let Eurydice free. This is reminiscent of classical iterations of the myth, and Mitchell hoped that the “beautiful, emphatic gesture” would give the audience an Orpheus who they loved because he was willing to “speak truth to the king” of the underworld to set his love free (*Working on a Song*, 204). Unlike previous iterations of the myth, this production utilizes the story of Hades and Persephone much more, possibly because of the recent rejuvenation in interest in the Hades and Persephone myth and contemporary adaptations of the myth that spin the abduction of Persephone into a love story. Mitchell plays on “an association between two distinct gods, the god of the dead and the god of wealth, that goes back to antiquity” in a way to allow “Hades to be more than a wealthy mad/god but even Wealth itself, just as

Orpheus represents more than simply an artist, but Art” (Oosterhuis 113). This aids the plays thematic “examination of politics and capitalism” by establishing a leader in Hadestown who “who maintains power by keeping us apart and making us feel alone an isolated” (Rubin 24).

Similarly, the themes of loss, death, forgetting the past, and regret are present in this iteration of the myth as it has been in other adaptations of the myth. Death and loss are touched on best by Persephone, who reminisces with the residents of Hadestown when she sings, “let me guess, it’s the little things you miss... I got a sight for the sorest eye, when was the last time you saw the sky?” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 58). Her ability to provide those of Hadestown with the smallest glimpses of the world above allows them to remember the world of their past, and, when Orpheus shows them the way out of Hadestown, allows them to follow him. The idea of forgetting one’s past because of death is expressed through the end of Eurydice’s song “Flowers” when she sings “I remember someone, someone by my side, he turned his face to mine” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 64). She, similarly to the Eurydice of Ruhl’s adaptation, forgets how to speak when she dies, and sings, “I open my mouth and nothing comes out” to the audience before she is sucked into the world of Hades’ realm (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 64). Mitchell argues that she thematically kept returning to the idea of forgetting because the mythic stories regarding the drinking of the River Lethe and the forgetting of oneself had always been the portion of the myth that had “frightened her the most” (*Working on a Song*, 157). Regret is showcased in the lyrics of Orpheus when he tells Eurydice “Whatever happened, I’m to blame” when he enters Hadestown (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 65). Eurydice, a page before, speaks of regret when she sings regarding Orpheus, “You, the one I left behind, if you

ever walk this way, come and find me, lying in the bed I made” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 64). This theme is also seen at the end of the musical, and, similarly to *Metamorphoses*, the narrators of the myth explain the inevitability of the events and the regret of the mythic figures that they could not find a way out of the cyclical situation. Hermes, in “Road to Hell (Reprise)” sings about this when he says,

He could have come so close,
The song was written long ago,
And that is how it goes,
It’s a sad song,
It’s a sad tale; it’s a tragedy,
It’s a sad song,
But we sing it anyway,
Cos here’s the thing,
To know how it ends,
And still begin,
To sing it again,
As if it might turn out this time,

I learned that from a friend of mine. (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 98)

Hermes, additionally, explains this regret of the inevitability of the mythic narrative when he sings, “See someone’s got to tell the tale, whether or not it turns out well, maybe it will turn out this time, on the road to hell, on the railroad line” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 5).

One additional thematic element that is touched on by all previous iterations of the myth discussed in this paper is the moment that Orpheus glances back at Eurydice in

the underworld and the moments that follow. In this production, the moment reaches its climax in “Doubt Comes In” as Orpheus and Eurydice utilize the moving circular set piece in the center of the stage to circle as if they are climbing out of the bowels of the underworld. The Fates speak into Orpheus’ ear, causing him to second guess his belief that Eurydice will follow him, and his naivety is used against him as he believes she would not trust him enough to follow him out of the safe world she has found below. Hades has explained to Hermes his terms that “Orpheus, the undersigned, shall not turn to look behind” as he exits the underworld (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 87). However, it is the Fates that have pushed him toward this idea by insisting that he cannot simply let them go without looking weak, a physical manifestation of the Fates pushing the mythic figures towards their mythic ends at any cost. Unlike other iterations of the myth, Orpheus and Eurydice are able to sing their thoughts aloud as they progress out of the underworld. Orpheus sings of his doubts when he says, “Who do I think I am? Who am I to think that she would follow me into the cold and dark again?” while Eurydice tries to sing to Orpheus that “I am right here...and I will be to the end” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 90). Mitchell hoped to utilize the repeated motif of the “cosmic naming of the lovers” by having them speak or sing each-others names at multiple points, invoking the “star-crossed inevitability of their love,” and it is in the moment where they see each other in the underworld that this motif reaches its climax (*Working on a Song*, 34). As Orpheus turns towards her, the characters say,

Orpheus: It’s you.

Eurydice: It’s me.

Orpheus.

Orpheus: Eurydice. (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 85)

This dialogue is coupled with a stage direction that stresses the movement of the stage back to the world of the above ground, a motion that signifies that Orpheus and Eurydice had almost made it before Orpheus turned back. This moment is immediately followed by the reprise of the “Road to Hell,” the song that brings the audience into the world of Hadestown at the top of the show and reintroduces the cyclical nature of the show at the end as Hermes re-enters the same as he does at the beginning of the show to signify the story starting over. Following two of the quickest changes on Broadway, Orpheus and Eurydice also re-enter, wearing the clothing that they wore at the very top of the show, to reintroduce themselves and begin their love story anew.

In the context of the musical, on another note, certain themes and ideas are added by Mitchell and her creative team to further adapt the text to a current audience and touch on current issues relevant to those coming to see the show. The musical, then, contains techniques of adaptations that “engage in a larger social cultural critique” where the “political and historical intentionality” of the production gives new meaning to the production and allows the revelation of the artist’s intentions for the piece (Hutcheon 95). The production of *Hadestown*, first and foremost, “raises the stakes of Orpheus’ quest by including social and environmental change” (Wilson 188). This is evident in the lyrics of Eurydice, who speaks about the weather changing and the inability to grow food now that Persephone is stuck in the underworld. She sings that, “the weather ain’t the way it was before, ain’t no spring or fall anymore, it’s either blazing hot or freezing cold, any way the wind blows” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 8). Orpheus, by finishing his song and presenting it to Hades, hopes to remind him of his love for her Persephone and allow her to travel

back to the world of the living to fix the broken world above him. However, Eurydice's desperation for food pushes her to her breaking point before Orpheus can finish his song, leading her to sign away her life to Hades out of desperation for safety. One particular basis for the themes unique to Mitchell's adaptation of the myth is her inspiration from Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera*, where the idea of "morality ceasing to exist in desperate conditions" is questioned (Oosterhuis 109). This is evident in the text of many of the songs, where the dreadful conditions of the people above Hadestown are mentioned again and again, eventually leading to Eurydice's willingness to sign her life away to join the workers of Hadestown. The Fates ask the audience regarding this, "Wouldn't you have done the same? In her shoes, in her skin" before telling the audience, "You can have your principles, when you have a bellyful, but hunger has a way with you, there's no telling what you're gonna do" (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 47). This shifts the focus on Eurydice's choice to enter the underworld, as "we, as human beings, have no agency when times are hard" leaving Eurydice to choose against her own personal morality and join the world of the dead (Oosterhuis 117). Additionally, the creation of a mythic love for Hades and Persephone, one that can be fixed to allow the world to go back to normal, is an element not utilized in other adaptations. The dichotomy of the mythic lovers showcases an older mythic relationship of a couple that was "once young and in love" and that creates narrative "song about nostalgia for a lost innocence and love, a performed past that may be impossible to recover" (Venning 515). Hermes explains this to Orpheus, and to the audience, when he sings, "Hades and Persephone, remember how it used to be, their love that made the world go round?" (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 17).

As the only musical adaptation of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth examined in this paper, it is important to note the lyrical repetition so intrinsic to the style of musical theatre. Lyrical repetition is also used by other playwrights hoping to unlock the myth's power in their own adapted texts of Orpheus and Eurydice. Again, much like the other postmodern versions of the myth, repetition plays a huge role in the utilization of the myth. Unlike the other versions, the musical style furthers this motif of repetition as the repetition of musical themes and words helps to further the thematic presence of the myth in the play. Chavkin said of this, "there's hope in the act of simply retelling the story again" (Rubin 24). Hermes opens and closes the musical with the "Road to Hell," a song that introduces and concludes the old mythic legend that they are hoping to reinvigorate on the stage. Hermes sings that "it's an old song... it's an old tale from way back when, it's an old song... and we're gonna sing it again" showcasing the repetition of the song in the musical and the overall repetition of the myth again and again (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 100). This also harkens to the theatrical nature of adaptations, as theatrical practice is to perform a song in a cyclical nature again and again for a live audience across a set period of time. Hermes, as the figure who establishes this repetitive nature of the musical and the myth, "consciously and fluidly passes between the two dramaturgical levels of the *Hadestown*: the self-contained love story of Orpheus and Eurydice and the endless repetition of telling that story over and over" throughout the overall "looping narrative structure of the musical" (Wilson 191). In the reprise of "Wait for Me" at the end of the musical, "the cast sings without amplification, going totally live—the performers and the spectators face-to-face" allowing the audience to have a raw moment with the mythic figures before the play ends by beginning again (Wilson 191). Other repeated words and

lines also showcase connections to other themes and previous productions of the myth. As in *Orpheus Descending*, we also see the repetition of the word ‘alive’ in *Hadestown*. For example, Hermes tells Eurydice that she should marry Orpheus “because he’ll make you feel alive” to which she responds “Alive... that’s worth a lot” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 13). The repeated, wordless musical motif, sung by Orpheus as the beginning of his love song about Hades and Persephone, is another element that is repeated at multiple points throughout the musical. This musical moment was meant to be a “melody Orpheus [had] channeled from the gods themselves” and was described by Mitchell as being “endlessly mythically rich” because it gives the audience a reason to note the importance of Orpheus’ musical ability “in a sung-through musical in which every character is a great singer” (*Working on a Song* 54).

As the only musical in the collection of adaptations, it is important to note the production elements of this text, as musicals are so dependent on their “music, arrangements and orchestrations, staging and choreography...[and] sounds and lights” to tell the story that they hope to tell in musical format (Mitchell, *Working on a Song* 1). Because musicals are so heavily based in technical elements and depend on music to tell their story, the set, lighting, and sound design must coordinate seamlessly to allow the actors the means to tell the story truthfully and without constraint. As in the works of Cocteau and Williams, *Hadestown* is given a more realistic world that allows the mythical elements and characters to stand outside of the normalcy of the world around them. The Fates serve as the reminder that the story is mythic, and that the characters fates will remain unchanged despite their choices in this iteration of the tale. In the second song of the musical, Hermes explains that the Fates are “always singing in the

back of your mind” and are always “close behind” Eurydice wherever she goes, highlighting her importance in the mythic story (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 9). Similar to *Eurydice*, *Hadestown* can be anachronistic at times, with lyrics and set elements that are “suggestive of the American 1930s” melded with a “post-apocalyptic [world which] increases its universality while its Depression-era ambience makes its themes familiar” (Oosterhuis 109). The setting in the script is listed as “not set in a particular time or place” but the set does take “inspiration from the American Depression Era and the city of New Orleans” (Mitchell, *Hadestown*, iii). The visuals had to be “as beautiful and poetic as the music” but Chavkin and Mitchell hoped to avoid clashing the two together (Rubin 24). Because of its contemporary nature, and because of its popularity and recent design, there is significant information regarding the set and costume design aspects of *Hadestown*. Scenic designer Rachel Hauck and lighting designer Bradley King hoped to create a setting that showcased a “timeless New Orleans setting against an industrial version of Hell” through the semi-circular, “three tiered and asymmetrical” stage reminiscent of a Greek amphitheater (Reesman 28). During the first act, as the play shifts into the world of Hades, literal cracks in the wall appear as the stage splits to expose rusty piping and exposed light elements that remind one of a train heading straight towards them. Rachel Hauck said of this,

It’s a very careful balance of architecture and lighting, and a very, very smart direction, to make sure that we don’t lose the characters... But also, if you can’t feel in your gut how scary this place is, it doesn’t have the right impact. The moment where you go from being inside this sweet, small, messed-up bar to

suddenly realizing that that thing is just a tiny cog in the great machine that is *Hadestown*—we rip your chest open when that set comes apart. (Reesman 28)

The early set designs of Hauck showcased an in-the-round set which “primarily consisted of a magnificent warped tree” followed by a proscenium production at the National Theatre with “a multilevel set with a rotating stage” (Venning 514). The tree was meant to be “mythic and represented the earth, [and] the seasons” but was cut because it is never mentioned or referenced in the text (Mitchell, *Working on a Song* 36). The replacement, the centralized and rotating stage piece, would become the centerpiece for subsequent productions and would continue on through the Broadway opening and later touring productions. It is utilized best in the moment of Orpheus and Eurydice’s march out of Hadestown, when Eurydice sings, “I’m coming wait for me” (Mitchel, *Hadestown* 65).

The clothing and prop choices of the production are also imperative to the musical, specifically in regards to how they are used to reveal the mythic narrative of the story. The design team intended to create a “world of myth, particularly through the costumes, which quote... many eras” in an effort to enhance the timelessness created by the set design (Reesman 28). The workers of Hadestown wear outfits reminiscent of early 20th century mine workers, while Hades and Persephone wear beautiful costumes that transport the audience to the world of early 20th century New Orleans. The instruments utilized in the production, additionally, harken back to the mythic story of Orpheus as the mythic musician, with the musicians for the production being placed directly on the stage and in view of the audience. Additionally, Orpheus utilizes live instrumentation to create the mythical Orphic character, but each iteration of Orpheus thus far in *Hadestown* has

utilized a different instrument to achieve this. In the Vermont production, “Orpheus played a banjo,” prior to Broadway it was a tenor guitar, and “on Broadway, a little arch-top electric” (Mitchell, *Working on a Song* 210). Because Orpheus plays his instrument in the production, it was important that the actor playing Orpheus was a master of his instrument, leading to the change. The Fates, similarly, also play instruments during the production, and auditions require the Fates to play instruments for casting directors to ensure that they are able to musically help the show. By having this musical quality intrinsic to the acting and design of the characters, the musical quality of the production bleeds over into the world of the play and the motions of the characters as they inhabit the world.

On a different note, it is also important to note the various changes that were undertaken by the writing team from the original concept album to the Broadway musical, as many of the thematic elements of the story shifted. Mitchell said of these rewrites that many were done out of necessity because “a theater audience demands action from a song... results, revelations, or both” while many of her songs were beautiful but lacked theatrical substance and kept the performance in stasis for too long (*Working on a Song* 25). Some of the original thematic elements were also reminiscent of previous iterations of the myth, highlighting Mitchell’s knowledge of the mythic elements and motifs that are used when telling this tale. In “Any Way the Wind Blows,” the second song of the show, the original lyrics told of Eurydice as moving wherever the wind took her because her “sister’s gone, gone the gypsy route, Brother’s gone, gone for a job done south,” a connection to the southern trope utilized by Williams in his version of the play (Mitchell, *Working on a Song* 25). Another change is in the “Way Down

Hadestown Reprise,” when the Fates sing of Eurydice once she is in the underworld. The original text had the Fates say that Eurydice was someone important once and “used to be a blushing bride” but now she is “like the rest of us” in death—This reinforces the mythic importance of Eurydice and emphasizes that she is otherworldly in life but can die just like anyone else (Mitchell, *Working on a Song* 153). Lastly, in the moments before Orpheus and Eurydice take their final walk out of the underworld, Hermes used to say,

A poor boy and a hungry young girl,
Walking single file, While the music played
Brother, they looked for all the world,
Like they was walking down the aisle,
On their wedding day. (Mitchell, *Working on a Song* 228)

This line is meant to remind the audience of the wedding that was interrupted by the snakebite and Eurydice’s death, despite this moment not occurring in this specific adaptation of the myth. Simultaneously, the lyrical text describes the moment that Orpheus and Eurydice walk out of the underworld on their doomed journey, but this portion of the lyrics was cut despite Mitchell’s insistence that the double “image of the wedding procession” as a comparison to their walk out of the underworld “haunts her still” (*Working on a Song* 228).

Additionally, unlike other iterations of the myth in contemporary performance, *Hadestown* has taken the world by storm and influenced new art and media from young fans influenced both by the popularity of the musical and the lasting connection to the myth itself. New movements in the fields of multimedia storytelling “have championed fan participation and fan-generated content as a welcome demonstration of fan loyalty to

a given storyworld and brand” (Hutcheon 184). This allowed *Hadestown* to explode in popularity as social media and the emergence of new advertising techniques for Broadway shows allowed the show to create a strong presence online (Rubin 24). This also draws notice to the adaptations created by dedicated fans of the musical with new media styles coming into play such as fan art of the characters, new artists performing songs from the musical, and new writing based on the myth that specifically calls attention to the *Hadestown* version of the tale. Video challenges on the social media app TikTok also addressed this need from fans to try their hand at the show, such as the Hadestown Challenge that asked singers to attempt to sing the challenging belting notes sung by Eurydice in the “Wait for Me (Reprise).” This calls attention to the new, young audiences filling seats on Broadway, who are “far from passive recipients of entertainment” and who hope to “participate in the unfolding event with different levels of engagement— experience performances and interactions that ignite their imaginations” (Barnette 149). Additionally, this movement in adaptation has given adapted texts new markets as the limitations of regional productions no longer exists and “audiences are potentially global, connected, and responsive, as demonstrated in the speed of transmission of viral or... spreadable content” (Hutcheon 179). This allows the adaptation to take on new adapted forms outside of itself, with new artists finding inspiration from the adapted text to bring their own adaptations to life to pay homage to the power of the adapted text itself.

Lastly, the production of *Hadestown* does not end on a note that leads the audience to feel like the story of Orpheus and Eurydice is over. Although the musical itself ends with the repetition of the “Road to Hell (Reprise),” the cast brings to life one

additional song following their curtain call titled “We Raise Our Cups.” This musical moment, sung by the cast directly to the audience, reminisces on the mythic belief that by “having been among the dead” Orpheus is no longer able to return to the world of the living or the dead, and will instead linger as he is “suspended between life and death” (Zabriskie 435). Persephone’s call to sing for Orpheus is a means of calling to the Orpheus’ in the audience and those who are listening, to keep the cyclical nature of the story open and to show that it is truly universal. It is also meant to be reminiscent of the Orphic legend, as Orpheus is cursed in some versions of the tale to walk around the world looking for his way back to Eurydice despite his inability to pass on. Persephone and Eurydice sing the following, “Wherever he is wandering, alone upon the earth, let all our singing follow him, and bring him comfort” (Mitchell, *Hadestown* 102). Mitchell, in how she has written this Orpheus as a naïve musician in search of success, gives the audience someone to look up to, as people most can relate to the attempts of Orpheus to succeed, despite failure, again and again. “We raise our cups to Orpheus” Mitchell argues, “not because he succeeds, but because he tries,” a personal connection to her own writing style as her writing process has been one of “failing repeatedly” before ultimate success (*Working on a Song* 255).

To conclude, the idea of myth as an unconscious element of theatre and the intrinsic need of playwrights to create adaptations of myth for theatrical has long been pervasive and will continue to be important to the creation of new theatrical works. This is because the art of theatre “like myth, has long been associated with sacred experiences, in large part due to its origins in ancient celebrations of the divine” (Chirico 154). The inherent connections between theatre and myth, beginning with the earliest performances

held in places such as ancient Greece, showcase the powerful ability of myths to utilize their archetypal narratives and universal themes to connect deeply with audiences throughout time. The utilization of adapted myths by the five playwrights above help to highlight the powerful nature of theatre in society that the unconscious myths utilize to tell their stories and that bring catharsis to new audiences. Playwrights, then, will continue to utilize these myths because of their powerful connections to societal themes and the nature of society itself. The audiences of Jean Cocteau, Tennessee Williams, Mary Zimmerman, Sarah Ruhl, and Anaïs Mitchell, then, become just a few of many who will be inspired by new playwright's versions of the myths on the stage, and the use of mythic narratives in theatre will continue to inspire new playwrights to try their hand at the classic tales. Because the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, the young lovers doomed from the start and forced too early to reckon with death and loss, contains powerful archetypal themes and narratives that audiences will always be able to relate to, it will endure and inspire new playwrights to write their own versions of the mythic tale. This discussion of just a few of those mythic adaptations will hopefully show the intrinsic connections between the play and show the narrative possibilities new adaptations of the myth could have in the future. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, and as theatre practitioners continue to revitalize the world of theatre as productions reopen across the globe, it will be interesting to see what new adaptations take form and what ancient stories are utilized to create these new adapted tales. My hope is that this myth, like it has continued to do across time, will continue to inspire audiences and playwrights and continue to be used in theatrical production in the future.

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