ORPHEUS:
THE ADAPTATION OF MYTH FOR THE THEATRE

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**Introduction**

As the house lights come down, the audience finds itself in an extended moment of darkness. This darkness, the customary transition from house lights to stage lights, holds its place a little longer than what seems normal. At the edge of that dark moment, a soothing, female voice in the darkness begins to speak. Her words are harsh, repulsive, and uncomfortable:

> Humans fill their lives with distraction and frivolity. I don’t blame them; they’re terrified, and any occupation that distracts them from their terror can seem a welcome pursuit. For there is a particular question that gnaws at the human soul night and day, and when one fears the uncomfortable truth which answering that question may bring, it is easier to live in the dark shadow of a question than it is to step in to the blinding light of an answer, especially when that answer may very well be: “Yes, I am alone in the world.”

The owner of the voice proceeds to strike a match, illuminating a deathly pale face. She lights two candles, introduces the leading couple, and ushers in the start of the play.

With these moments, *Orpheus*, a new play and my BFA thesis production, began. This production was an adaptation of a Greco-Roman myth, making use of non-traditional storytelling forms to tell its story. Rather than placing the primary emphasis on the spoken word, this production made use of choreographic elements to convey many key moments of the story. I wrote, produced, and directed the play in collaboration with a full company of student actors, managers, and designers. The play saw three performances at Ohio University’s Ridges Auditorium from February 28 to March 2, 2010, which drew large audiences and enthusiastic audience feedback.

This ultimate goal of this production was the theatrical adaptation of a myth.
The myth I chose for adaptation is one of the iconic myths of Western civilization. In Greco-Roman mythology, Orpheus is the greatest musician in the world, and on the day of his wedding, Eurydice, his bride, dies from the bite of a snake. Orpheus, finding his wife's death unbearable, travels to the Underworld to attempt her rescue. When he arrives, he pleads before the throne of Pluto, the Ruler of the Underworld, for Eurydice's life, expressing his grief through beautifully mournful songs. Moved by Orpheus' sorrowful music, Pluto permits Eurydice to follow her husband back to the living world. The Ruler of the Underworld does not let Eurydice go too easily, however, placing one condition in her return: until both lovers step foot into the light of day, Orpheus may not look back at his bride or else lose her once again. With Eurydice close behind, Orpheus returns the way he came and steps out into the light of the world, but as he exits, he turns too soon. Eurydice, several steps behind her husband, had not yet made her full exit from the Underworld. Their eyes meet briefly before she is called back to the land of the dead, lost forever to Orpheus. In despair, the poet wanders the living world until he meets his own death.

This series of events is drawn from the Orpheus stories of Virgil and Ovid. These narratives are the two earliest, complete versions of the story, and they create the basis for the traditional events of the Orpheus myth. While these two stories have strong distinctions in characterization, tone, and style, the events of their narratives are largely the same. These similar event structures in the Orpheus stories of Virgil and Ovid create the traditional Orpheus myth structure.

My play, *Orpheus*, was not intended as a faithful repetition of Orpheus traditions. In my process of adapting of the myth, I made many changes, which
included the addition and subtraction of characters, as well as the alteration of key events within the narrative structure. Through the use of substantive changes to the nature of the story, I sought to create an adaptation which transcended the traditional structures of the Orpheus myth.

Despite its age, contemporary storytellers continue to hold interest in the retelling and adaptation of this inherited myth. In one relatively recent theatrical adaptation of the myth entitled *The Hip Hop Waltz of Eurydice*, many of the traditional conventions were completely distorted. Anne Bogart\(^1\) recalls witnessing this production:

> I attended a loud, aggressive, and theatrically ambitious production… entitled the *Hip Hop Waltz of Eurydice* at the Los Angeles Theatre Center… Orpheus was played by a bald woman on a motorcycle and Eurydice by a long-haired man in drag. The play featured extensive video footage, an athletic capoeira chorus, a 15-foot high dildo and loud, loud music. (And Then You Act 66)

Adaptations such as these raise a question: what stories are the audiences experiencing? Are the audiences experiencing faithful retellings of the Orpheus myth, or have the adaptations diverged so far from their source material that it is an entirely different story? For the *Hip Hop Waltz of Eurydice*, I think the answer lies somewhere between these two poles. While the Orpheus stories of Virgil and Ovid did not feature motorcycles, a capoeira chorus, and a giant dildo, nor did they feature reverse gender casting, they did feature something else that Bogart comments on:

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\(^1\) Anne Bogart is the Artistic Director of SITI Company and a major pioneer of the Viewpoints technique, which was a major tool in the development of my production.
Despite the visual and aural assault and intense theatricality, I was tremendously touched and moved. After the curtain call, I turned to [my partner] Tina, pointed at a tiny photograph in the program showing Orpheus and Eurydice, head tilted tenderly toward one another, and said, “Look Tina, that’s us!” Notwithstanding the high decibel noise, the show was, at its core, a delicate love story about two individuals devoted to one another. I felt that it was about me; it was about us. (And Then You Act 66)

Despite the many divergences from tradition in the *Hip Hop Waltz of Eurydice*, it maintained a major point of contact with tradition in its love story.

It can be said that the story of Orpheus and Eurydice is comprised on many components. In his book, *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet*, Charles Segal identifies what he describes as a triangle of “fundamental elements in the myth” composed of three points: death, art, and love (2). He goes on to say that:

The meaning of the myth shifts as different points [take prominence]: love-death, love-art, art-death. On the one hand, Orpheus embodies the ability of art, poetry language—“rhetoric and music”—to triumph over death; the creative power of art allies itself with the creative power of love. On the other hand, the myth can symbolize the failure of art before the ultimate necessity, death. (2)

I propose that adaptations are distinguished from original stories through the presence of points of contact with components of their source materials. An adaptation grows from its source materials through these points of contact. How these points of contact are used develop the nature of the adaptation. The *Hip Hop Waltz of Eurydice*, according to Anne Bogart’s account of that adaptation, seems to have grown primarily from the love component of Segal’s triangle. This point of contact (and any others that might exist) tethers it to the original myth.

My adaptation of the Orpheus myth greatly varied from of the traditions of the Orpheus myth, telling a different story, but maintaining several key points of contact
with the original myth. My adaptation grew from primarily from the components of love and death. In the following chapters, I will establish the composition of the original stories, the process by which my story diverged from those stories, and then I will identify my own adaptation.
Chapter 1:

The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations and the Orpheus Story Archetypes

If one is to identify how an adaptation evolves from the story of Orpheus, identifying the elements of the story is a logical place to begin. Two problems, however, emerge when one attempts to answer this simple question. First, there is not a single story from which the basis of Orpheus tradition emerges, there are two: the Orpheus story of Virgil and the Orpheus story of Ovid. As a result, I could not point to one story as the basis of Orpheus tradition, so I chose to examine both stories together.

The second problem, which poses the greater dilemma, is the question of how to define, dissect, and analyze a story. Merriam-Webster defines a story as an “account of incidents or events.” Leaving aside questions of “meaning” or the “author’s intent,” this definition suggests that the raw components of a story are not the characters, the setting, or the manner of storytelling, but what happens. As previously argued by Segal, the story of Orpheus is a triangular relationship between the fundamental elements of love, death, and art. These components are the true spirit of the narrative, but without a structured series of events to act as a body containing that spirit, there can be no story. If the traditional Orpheus stories house questions of love, death, and art, what are their structures used for housing?

To identify story structure, I have turned to the work of the French writer, Georges Polti, for guidance. While there are, without questions, many legitimate methods by which this problem can be addressed, I am drawn to Polti’s work because he specifically concerns himself with the events, or as he calls them “situations.”
Georges Polti, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, put forth what he called “The Theory of the Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations.” In his book, he defined and codified thirty-six dramatic situations around which he asserted all of storytelling is based. For Polti, there is no possibility of “imagining” anything new or original in the telling of stories. It is impossible for the storyteller to dream up new and undiscovered situations because, in all of possibility, there are only thirty-six (134). Originality for the storyteller exists not in the creating of anything new, but in the choices involved in the retelling of things old. Polti calls this the “Art of Combination,” (134) as it literally involves making choices about how to combine preexisting devices and situations. How does the storyteller craft the particular details of a situation? How does he or she place situations in relation to each other? To Polti, the art of storytelling is the art of retelling, and the art of retelling lies in the choices of dramatic situations.

Polti defines these dramatic situations as “[springing] from a conflict between two principle directions of effort” (130). In this assertion lies the three necessary components of a dramatic situation. The first requirement is two opposing characters, a protagonist and an antagonist, who put forth the conflicting “directions of effort.” The second component is a trigger for the conflict, another character that disrupts the equilibrium (which may in fact be anything including a person, an object, a memory, or many things all at once). The third component is an action by which the conflict of the opposing forces is made manifest.

Each of the thirty-six situations is unique because of its specific recipe of variation between these three components. If one changes the protagonist/antagonist
relationship (for example, they may be friends, lovers, enemies, strangers, etc.), the nature of the trigger (instrument, disputed object, or impelling force), or the nature of the action (be it murder, deception, seduction, etc.), then one has changed the nature of the situation. There is also a rule of essentialism to observe when examining these components. Surface values matter little in determining the state of a situation; of key importance is the essential nature of each component. Polti names as an example the action of murder, which may be reduced to anything containing the same essential energy, including “a wound, a blow, an attempt, an outrage, an intimidation, a threat, a too-hasty word, an intention not carried out, a temptation, a thought, a wish, an injustice, a destruction of a cherished object, a refusal, a want of pity, an abandonment, a falsehood” (129). The details of the larger component do not matter. When those details are stripped away, at its core exists an essential energy that defines the situation.

By examining the Orpheus stories of Virgil and Ovid (or any stories) through the lens of Polti’s theory, they can be reduced their “essential” stories, or their situational progressions. If we use the comparison of a story as a living body, the situational progression is the skeleton upon which everything else is placed. The situations are forms for containing content, but they are the most irreducibly basic forms capable of containing narrative content. It is the relationship of the situations within the structure of a narrative that creates the essential story. A story can be told and retold throughout history with changing names and locations, but if the situational progressions remain untouched, the essential story remains intact.
Ovid’s story of Orpheus, found in Books Ten and Eleven of his larger work, *Metamorphoses*, contains a progression of seven dramatic situations. These situations are: (1) Disaster, (2) Daring Enterprise, (3) Supplication, (4) Obstacles to Love, (5) Loss of Loved Ones, (6) Falling Prey to Cruelty or Misfortune, and (7) Recovery of a Lost One. It is these situations in this order that create the essential story of Ovid’s Orpheus.

The story begins in a state of calm. It is the day of Orpheus and Eurydice’s wedding; there is no conflict and great happiness is expected. This calm is unexpectedly disrupted, however, when Eurydice is killed in an unprovoked act of fate: “The outcome was even worse than foreshadowed: the newly-wed bride, / while taking a stroll through the grass with her band of attendant naiads, / suddenly fell down dead with the fangs of a snake in her ankle” (*Met. 10.7-10*).

This event brings the story into Polti’s sixth situation, “Disaster,” which he defines as “Fear, catastrophe, the unforeseen; a great reversal of roles; the powerful are overthrown, the weak exalted” (29). What should have been a day of great joy and celebration for Orpheus became a day of grief and mourning. To fit the technical definition of a “Disaster,” Polti requires that two elements be in place: “a Vanquished Power” and “a Victorious Enemy or a Messenger.” In this story, the Vanquished Power is Orpheus, the protagonist, who has lost his bride. There is, however, no individual or group that caused this disaster; her death was an unprovoked twist of fate, so the Victorious Enemy is less obvious to place. This character does not announce itself, but it is death itself that becomes Orpheus’ antagonist. The forces of
death appear here for the first time, and Orpheus’ subsequent journey aims to conquer this adversary.

Following the disaster of Eurydice’s death is Polti’s ninth situation, “Daring Enterprise,” defined as a “clever plan” or “bold attempt” (36). In response to the disaster, Orpheus attempts a journey into the Underworld to rescue his dead bride:

“When Orpheus, the Thracian bard, had indulged his grief to the full / in the air above, he felt he must also appeal to the shades, / and dared to descend to the river Styx through the Taenaran gateway” (*Met.* 10.11-3). Polti requires that a “Daring Enterprise” contain the elements of a “Bold Leader,” “an Object,” and “an Adversary” (36). This situation fulfills all those as Orpheus (the Bold Leader) seeks to reclaim Eurydice (the Object) from the forces of death (the Adversary), which never give back a life once it has been taken. This scenario even perfectly fits a specific variation Polti names for this situation called the “Adventure Undertaken for the Purpose of Obtaining a Beloved Woman” (37).

In the third situation of Ovid’s tale, Orpheus pleads before the throne of Pluto and Persephone:

‘You powers divine of the subterranean kingdom,

I, Orpheus, implore you, unravel the web of my dear Eurydice’s early passing…

I beg you to let me enjoy her.

If fate forbids you to show my wife any mercy, I’ll never return from Hades myself. You may joy in the deaths of us both.’

(*Met.* 10.17, 31-2, 37-9)

The situation presented here is “Supplication,” for which Polti requires three parties to be at play: “a Persecutor, a Suppliant and a Power in authority, whose
decision is doubtful.” Polti also subdivides this situation into three classes, and the particulars of Orpheus’ situation qualifies it as the third class, “Supplication of the Powerful for Those Dear to the Suppliant,” which splits the suppliant into two people, “the Persecuted and the Intercessor” (13, 14-5). In this situation, the “Persecuted” is Eurydice, who is the object of the plea, and the “Intercessor” is Orpheus, who pleads on her behalf against the “Persecutor,” the forces of death. The “Power in authority” is Pluto, who holds the power to hold or release Eurydice from death. In pleading for the resurrection of Eurydice, Orpheus is arguing for aid from Pluto against her persecution by the forces of death.

The fourth situation, “Obstacles to Love,” is created when Pluto and Persephone, moved by Orpheus’s plight, grant him a conditional return of his wife. They allow his to take Eurydice with him, but stipulate that he may not look back at her as long as they remain in the Underworld: “Orpheus was told he could lead her away, on one condition: / to walk in front and never look back until he had left / the Vale of Avérnus, or else the concession would count for nothing” (Met. 10.50-2). This situation is Polti’s twenty-eighth situation; it requires “Two Lovers”—Orpheus and Eurydice—and “an Obstacle” (93-7)—Pluto’s command that Orpheus not look back.

Just as Orpheus passes the barrier between the living world and the Underworld, he looks back too soon: “But Orpheus was frightened his love was falling behind; he was / desperate to see her. He turned, and at once she sank back into the dark. / She stretched out her arms to him, struggled to feel his hands on her own, / but all she was able to catch, poor soul, was the yielding air” (Met. 10.56-9).
With his impatient act of love, Orpheus enters the fifth situation of his Ovid’s story, “Loss of Loved Ones.” This is Polti’s thirty-sixth and final situation, which requires a “Kinsman Slain” (Eurydice), a “Kinsman Spectator” (Orpheus), and an “Executioner” (117).

The role of the executioner, like the role of persecutor in the previous situation of “Disaster,” is difficult to pinpoint. While death had been Orpheus’ adversary in past situations, in this case death did not play a role in Orpheus’ fatal backwards glance. It could be reasoned that Pluto, for setting the condition that now requires Eurydice to return to the Underworld, is the executioner. Pluto is not directly involved in Orpheus’ action, however, so this does not work. As to perpetrator of the action, it could be argued that Orpheus should hold the title of executioner, but Ovid’s text exonerates him as innocent. If the executioner must be tied into Orpheus’ action, the question becomes who or what compelled Orpheus to look back. According to Ovid’s text, the answer is love.

Just as the forces of death have played Orpheus’ enemy and Eurydice’s persecutor, in a cruel twist of fate, the forces of love, which compelled the protagonist to take his journey in the first place, play the executioner, causing the failure of the journey: “And now, as she died for the second time, she never complained / that her husband had failed her – what could she complain of, except that he’d loved her? / She only uttered her last ‘farewell’, so faintly he hardly / could hear it, and then she was swept once more to the land of the shadows” (Met. 10.60-3). In Ovid’s telling of the story, Orpheus only fault is that he loved, which is readily dismissed by Ovid as no fault at all. Whereas, until this point, the two lovers had been innocent victims of
death, in this twist of fate they become victims of love, and love becomes Eurydice’s executioner.

Following this failure, the story enters a new situation, “Loss of Loved Ones,” of which Polti says, “Here all is mourning” (117). Unable to return to the Underworld for a second attempt, Orpheus mourns, swearing off the company of all women, and he wanders until his own life is ended in an encounter with an angry group of maenads who tear him to pieces:

Those impious women destroyed him, and through those lips, whose wonderful songs had attracted the rocks and touched the hearts of the beasts, his souls passed forth with his breath and melted into the winds.

Orpheus’ limbs lay scattered around; but his lyre and his head were thrown into the river Hebrus. (Met. 11.41-3, 50-1)

This event, Orpheus’ death, creates the penultimate situation, “Falling Prey to Cruelty or Misfortune.” Polti describes this situation saying, “To infinite sorrow there is no limit. Beneath that which seems the final depth of misfortune, there may open another yet more frightful.” The situation requires “an Unfortunate” and “a Master or a Misfortune” (35). After the loss of his wife, Orpheus (the Unfortunate) has little more to lose except for his own life, and he loses it (the Misfortune).

Not all is forfeit for this protagonist, however. His death comes as a blessing in disguise, ushering in Ovid’s final situation, “Recovery of a Lost One,” which requires a “Seeker” and a “Found One” (Polti 115). Upon his body’s destruction, Orpheus’ spirit (the Seeker) is released into the Underworld where he is reunited with his lost love (the Found One):

Orpheus’ shade passed under the earth. He recognized all
the places he’d seen before. As he searched the Elysian Fields, he found the wife he had lost and held her close in his arms. At last the lovers could stroll together, side by side—or she went ahead and he followed; then Orpheus ventured in front and knew he could now look back on his own Eurydice safely. (*Met.* 11.61-6)

With this seventh and final situation, Ovid’s Orpheus story reaches its conclusion. The story is this sequence of seven situations: (1) Disaster, (2) Daring Enterprise, (3) Supplication, (4) Obstacles to Love, (5) Loss of Loved Ones, (6) Falling Prey to Cruelty and Misfortune, and (7) Recovery of a Lost One.

Ovid’s account of the myth, however, is only one version. Virgil’s Orpheus narrative preceded Ovid’s, and scholars believe that Ovid wrote his narrative in direct parody of Virgil’s (Segal 54). Though both crafted by writers of the same period and culture, the tone and the portrayal of the characters in the two narratives are strikingly different. Orpheus, for example, is a romanticized and sympathetic character in Ovid’s narrative, but, as we will soon see, Virgil creates a harsh depiction for the poet. Despite this, the structures of the essential stories remain largely the same, only deviating in two key locations.

The first divergent event in these stories transpires at the moment of Orpheus’ backwards glance. As noted previously in Ovid, when Orpheus looks back at Eurydice, he is held completely blameless for he was only obeying the dictates of his love. Virgil’s Orpheus, however, is held fully to blame for his action:

> a sudden madness swept through the incautious lover, forgivable—if only the Dead knew how to forgive. He stopped and on the very brink of light looked back on his Eurydice—a mindless act, his goal annulled. That instant his hard work emptied out, the agreement with brutal Death shattered. Three times thunder crashed over Averno’s swamps.
‘Orpheus,’ she cried, ‘what terrible folly has brought perdition to you and hapless me?’ (Virgil 4.488-95)

This event declares Orpheus’ guilty for his “terrible folly” and changes the nature of the situation. Whereas Ovid created the conditions for “Loss of Loved Ones” by casting the action as an innocent gesture outside of the protagonist’s control, Virgil’s creates the conditions for “Fatal Imprudence” by placing culpability directly on Orpheus for his action. The situation of “Fatal Imprudence” requires the protagonist to function as “The Imprudent” whose act of rashness or indiscretion results in a “Victim” or “Lost Object” (Polti 61). In this case, Orpheus imprudent backwards glance results in the second death of Eurydice.

The second divergent event of Virgil’s story is actually the absence of an event. In Ovid’s story, after his death, Orpheus is reunited with Eurydice in the Underworld, but there is no similar happy ending for Virgil’s imprudent protagonist. Virgil’s story concludes with no spiritual reunion, only Orpheus dead and torn to pieces with his severed head floating down a river:

But Thracian women, riled by his heedlessness invading their nocturnal rites, their god-drunken revels, ripped his young body to pieces and flung them hither and yon. But even when the river Hebrus that flowed though his father’s kingdom rolled his head, torn from its marble neck, tumbling it midstream, the voice and the cold tongue kept singing with fading breath, Eurydice, oh poor Eurydice! ‘Eurydice,’ echoed the banks down the river’s length. (Virgil 4.520-7)

As if feeling the need to punish Orpheus for his imprudent backwards glance, Virgil paints a pessimistic ending for his protagonist. There is no allowance for Ovid’s seventh situation, “Recovery of a Lost One.” Without the transcendence from death
into second life, Virgil’s story stands one situation shorter, leaving its audience with “Falling Prey to Cruelty or Misfortune” as its final event.

These two deviations create diverging situational structures for the two traditional stories. First is Ovid’s optimistic, seven-situation structure, already established, which is: (1) Disaster, (2) Daring Enterprise, (3) Supplication, (4) Obstacles to Love, (5) Loss of Loved Ones, (6) Falling Prey to Cruelty or Misfortune, and (7) Recovery of a Lost One. This second structure, Virgil’s pessimistic, six-situation structure is: (1) Disaster, (2) Daring Enterprise, (3) Supplication, (4) Obstacles to Love, (5) Fatal Imprudence, and (6) Falling Prey to Cruelty or Misfortune.

These two structures form the essential stories of each narrative, and while they possess significant discrepancies, they are more similar than they are different. These two essential stories follow so closely on each other that they can be called variations on the same story. These two situational progressions form what I will call for the Orpheus story the “Virgilian Archetype” and the “Ovidian Archetype.”

These two structures collectively form the traditional events of the Orpheus myth. They already contain deviations from each other, and with each new retelling of the myth, its story may evolve further as new deviations occur through adaptation process. Every Orphic adaptation of Western civilization’s last two millennia can be traced back to these two ancient stories. The same is true or Orpheus the play, my contribution to the vast field of Orpheus story descendants. It was also from the Orpheus stories of Virgil and Ovid that my BFA thesis production evolved.
Chapter 2:

Adapting the Orpheus Myth

My adaptation of the Orpheus myth grew from the Ovidian and Virgilian traditions, but it also strongly broke with those traditions. I decided early in the process of adaptation that it was not my intention to faithfully retell the Orpheus traditions as they were, but to begin with the traditional story structures and find my own narrative. My initial interest in this project was the prospect of investigating questions of the human relationship to death and mortality in the form of a physical theatre performance. In terms of the first interest, the Orpheus myth roots itself in questions of man’s relationship to death. As such, the myth was a rich vehicle for my investigation, but it was not the object of that investigation. I placed a higher priority on the authenticity of the exploration than on faithfulness to convention, and this freed me to maintain or break traditions at the service of the investigation.

Rather than strict adherence to the story archetypes of Virgil and Ovid, I chose to use those structures as a basis from which to deviate. In some cases, certain elements of the myth were downplayed. For example, the character Orpheus, in both Virgil and Ovid, is the best musician in the world and he uses his songs as the greatest tool while traveling the Underworld. This is the element of “Art” which, if you recall from the Introduction, Segal lists as one of the three fundamental elements of the Orpheus myth, but this element was not emphasized in my narrative. My Orpheus sang, but the plot never hinged on his musicality. Other times, elements of the myth were pushed into greater prominence. For example, the traditional Orpheus spends a few moments pleading with Pluto for the return of his wife before his request is
granted, and my story expanded on this relationship. Recognizing this as a point of interest for myself in the investigation of death, I chose to rest the entire dramatic conflict of my story on the opposition of Orpheus and the Lord of the Underworld. These deviations, however, are changes of scale and focus, and while essential to understanding how my Orpheus story has diverged from its ancestors, the changes that created the greatest impact on the nature of the story were deliberate changes to the situational structure of the story.

One of these deliberate revisions occurred in a question about Orpheus’ failure. In developing the play, I began to wonder, “What happens if Orpheus succeeds?” I was curious as to how altering the outcome of this pivotal moment would change the story and play on audience expectations. As American playwright Sarah Ruhl notes, she has great interest in working with established myth because of “the notion that the stories have a larger reverberation if they’ve been told many times and if many people know them” (Ruhl). This larger reverberation is due to the expectation created in an audience by previous experiences with the myth. If an audience has past experience with a story, and they are encountering a new version of that story, then they have expectations, created by their past experience, that they can use to evaluate their current situation.

Sarah Ruhl’s recent adaptation of the Orpheus myth, *Eurydice*, retells the story from perspective of Orpheus’ wife, Eurydice, and it was a large influence in the development of my own adaptation.
Audience expectations can serve as a detriment to an artist working with a well-known story, but an effective artist can shape these expectations to his or her benefit. By acknowledging the existence of these expectations, the artist is presented with the choice to maintain or to break with expectations, adding another level to the art of storytelling. An audience member who has previous knowledge of the myth experiences these choices, especially choices to break with convention, differently than one who is experiencing the myth for the first time. If there is a change to the story, and no past experience to test it against, the change goes unnoticed, but if there is past experience, the audience member can take note of the change and will realize that the artist is up to something.

When wrestling with the decision to deviate from Orpheus’ traditional failure to save Eurydice, I was emboldened by the stories of Virgil and Ovid, which also disagree over this detail of the story. Unlike Virgil and Ovid, however, I did not address this change in the crisis of Orpheus’ backwards glance, judging him guilty or innocent for his action. After Orpheus’ heart betrays him, as tradition dictates, I gave Orpheus an opportunity that convention never offered the poet. My Orpheus is given the choice to exchange his life for Eurydice’s, to confine himself to Hell so that she can once more walk freely in the living world, and he chooses to sacrifice himself. Those familiar with the myth noted the deviation, and that note shaped their experience of it, and those unfamiliar accepted it for what it was, and that acceptance shaped their first experience with the myth.

The process for shaping my own adaptation of the myth, and choosing which traditions to break and which to maintain, was not a straightforward journey. This
process involved a lot of decisions that were in a constant state of revision and adaptation until the opening night (and in one particular case, beyond the opening night) of the production. At the outset of conceiving *Orpheus*, my only firm idea was the creation of an original, narrative-based performance that employed my passion for ensemble-based physical theatre in the investigation of the human relationship with death. While I eventually arrived at the Orpheus myth as the subject for this play, the first narrative idea I conceived of had no contact with Orpheus or Greek mythology.

*The Isle of the Dead*[^3], a painting by nineteenth-century, symbolist artist Arnold Böcklin, inspired my original production concept. This painting depicts a man as he is arriving by boat on an island. The sky, the ocean, and the exterior of the island are bright and calm, but the innermost regions of the island, where the man’s destination undoubtedly lies, are painted with an all-consuming darkness. I was fascinated by

![Arnold Böcklin’s The Isle of the Dead](image)

[^3]: Arnold Böcklin’s *The Isle of the Dead*. This is the third version, painted in 1883.
this painting for its physical representation of the metaphysical journey all men and women take between the states of life and death. My original intent was to tell the story of the man on the boat as death consumes him on his journey into the Isle of the Dead.

It was not until ten months prior to the opening of my production, while sitting in the audience for another piece of theatre, that the thought of the Orpheus myth as the vehicle for this exploration occurred to me. The piece that sparked my imagination was a movement piece created by a group of high school students. At a moment in this piece, several female movers wearing white wedding dresses dragged their own limp bodies across the stage with their arms. While engaged in this image, I imagined a story of dead brides at the River Styx, and then of the dead bride of Orpheus and his journey to save her from the Underworld. This was the moment of epiphany that brought me to the Orpheus myth.

Many of my earliest ideas for harnessing the Orpheus myth were far more radical departures from tradition than the result of my final product. In my first draft, I decided that I wanted to tell the story of Orpheus as a tale of sin and redemption. I recast the Greek Underworld as the Christian Hell and Orpheus as a murderer, guilty of killing his wife Eurydice in an act of blind rage. Regretful of his actions and seeking forgiveness for himself and restoration for his wife, Orpheus traveled to Hell to find Eurydice. The protagonist was presented to the audience as the innocent husband that expectation and tradition dictate, but as the story progressed, his guilt was revealed. Orpheus was not the innocent protagonist of tradition, venturing boldly into the realm of the dead to save his wife from a twist of fate, he was allowed into
Hell so that he could be punished for his sins. This draft cast Orpheus’ antagonist as a satanic, male chorus leader named Lead, the ruler of Hell whose pleasure was to torment Orpheus for his crime.

Of the drafts I wrote, this draft was, in many ways, my most radical departure from tradition. As it turned out, the casting of Orpheus as a homicidal husband resulted in a loss of a fundamental element of the myth I wanted to maintain: the love story. This version became a story of redemption, substituting Orpheus’ loving quest to restore his wife with a personal quest to restore himself. The love component of Segal’s triangle of fundamental elements was greatly diminished, leaving me with only the death element of the triangle in a prominent position. As Segal comments, the meaning of the Orpheus myth is defined by how a storyteller uses the interactions of these elements against each other (2). With death serving as the only dominant element of my story, there was no drawn conflict between the values of love, death, and art, which defines the Orpheus myth. This lack of conflict left my first draft missing a vital component, and in subsequent drafts I made the decision to maintain love and death as strong foundations to my story. These two elements became a primary conflict of my final story, as was reflected in the play’s tagline, “Can love conquer all?”

While almost everything in my first draft changed over the course of multiple rewrites, there were two details that survived and evolved into essential components of the final story. The first was the setting of Hell, the realm of sin and temptation. By maintaining Hell as Orpheus’ testing ground, I was able to tell a story in which
Orpheus was in more than just physical danger, but also in danger of sacrificing his journey to the indulgence of sinful temptations.

The second detail to survive was Orpheus’ satanic antagonist. In the stories of Virgil and Ovid, Orpheus’ primary opponent was death, disembodied and untouchable, but I chose to translate that opponent into a physical body. In my first draft, that adversary was called “Lead,” and in later drafts s/he simply came to be called “Death.” Almost all the details of this adversary (including name, gender, objective, romantic entanglements, etc.) went through multiple revisions in subsequent drafts, but his/her position as the ruler of Hell and the master of the dead was constant. As the play evolved, this adversary became more deeply entrenched in the identity of the story, and the evolution of the antagonist parallels the evolution of the story itself.

The process of casting was a benchmark in the development of my story. Not until I possessed a full cast of actors did the story of my Orpheus adaptation begin to take its final shape. I was able to find everyone I needed for the roles of Eurydice and the six-person Chorus at the audition I held, but I was not able to find actors for the roles of the protagonist and the antagonist, Orpheus and Death. While frustrating, my inability to cast these roles at my auditions led me to two unconventional casting choices, which became two of the most influential elements in the shaping of the story.

There was an auditioning actor who fit my vision of the moment for Orpheus’ character, but he declined when I offered the role to him. I spent some time looking for another actor to play Orpheus, but I was not able to find an available actor with
whom I was comfortable carrying the role. Without another actor to step in, I decided to play the role myself, acting simultaneously as the director and title actor. Unlike my original actor choice, I did not fit my vision for the role, so I necessarily adapted this vision. Rather than a bold protagonist, taking matters into his own hands to rescue his wife, Orpheus became more passive, less defiant and more along-for-the-ride. This Orpheus was led by the nose, thrown around, and easily manipulated by other characters, allowing events to happen to him while offering minimal resistance. Not until a critical moment of decision towards the end of the story did he make his bold and defiant claim for his wife.

For the role of Death, I did not find an actor at auditions that fulfilled my idea of the character. My vision at the time for the antagonist had been a grotesque, androgynous male figure. At this point in the script development process, I had conceived to deviate from mythic traditions by giving Death an unconventional motivation. It is traditional that Eurydice’s death is arbitrary and accidental; Eurydice is killed by a snakebite, which no one planned or orchestrated. The forces of death, the primary antagonist of Virgil and Ovid, were not an autonomous being capable of making decisions, so they could not chose to kill Eurydice or possess a motivation for her death. My antagonist, however, was the embodiment of those forces in a human-like character that was an autonomous being capable of making decisions and possessing motivations. This new autonomy provided the opportunity to endow Eurydice’s death with a greater purpose by using it to fulfill an orchestrated agenda. Death’s agenda, for which Eurydice’s demise served as an instrument, was to lure Orpheus into Hell.
If my Death sought to lure Orpheus into Hell, the question became why he wanted to do so. At the time, I conceived of a variation on the archetypical Faustian bargain wherein Death attempts to lure Orpheus into a situation where he can corrupt the poet and steal his soul. I did not have the chance to find greater specificity in this concept, leaving certain questions (like why Death wanted Orpheus’ soul in the first place) unanswered, before my casting choice for this role resulted in a change of concept.

As I was searching for an actor to play the role of Death, I causally mentioned the search to a female peer of mine. She commented how amazing it would be to play such a role, so I offered it to her and she accepted. Though I had conceived of Death as a male role, being familiar with this actress’ work and having long held her in high regard, I was more than glad to adjust my concept in order to collaborate with her. The alternative casting choice provided me with both a gracious, talented collaborator who was a joy to work with and an element missing from the story.

The female casting of Death led me to a change of perception for the character and to a new vision for the play’s story. With this male to female gender shift, I saw the possibility for a love triangle between the three primary characters that became the driving action of the story. Rather than a luring Orpheus into Hell to steal his soul, Death’s motivation became a more personal one: she had fallen in love with the poet. This new conception of Death was of an immortal suffering from mortal pangs of love, and who desired to quench those pangs by making Orpheus her eternal bride.

In contrast to the first draft of the script, which lost the Orpheus myth’s fundamental component of love, this new conception intertwined the elements of love
and death. Orpheus’ love for Eurydice now needed to be strong enough to not only to
overcome the laws of life and death, but also the temptation of falling into the arms of
another lover.

Once the show was cast, the story continued to develop through the rehearsal
process. Until this point, I have only discussed the adaptation of the story itself, but
the forms of presentation are also of importance when adapting a work for the stage.
The rehearsal process shaped both of those elements, and the two performance
techniques we practiced, Pilobolus-based Nontraditional Partnering and Anne
Bogart’s Viewpoints, played a large role in that process. In our early rehearsals we
put the story of Orpheus aside almost entirely so that we could focus on developing a
group capacity for these two techniques. Once we all possessed a familiarity for
working within these two forms, I introduced the Orpheus story into our technical
work, using these two techniques to explore the Orpheus narrative while discovering
new twists and methods for telling it.

Nontraditional Partnering, the first technique we started our work with, is a
dance composition technique characterized by multiple dancers using each others’

\[\text{The dance company that conceived and developed this technique, Pilobolus Dance
Theatre, has often been characterized as very athletic and gymnastic in their
employment of it (Brown 167). Pilobolus and Nontraditional Partnering developed
accidentally in 1971 at Dartmouth College though the dance experiments of four male
college students and their teacher, Allison Chase. The four students, who were not
dancers, were tasked with composing their own choreographic work, and they began}\]
bodies as support structures for the creation of stage movement. It distinguishes itself as a dance choreography technique through the incorporation of collaborative improvisation and weight sharing (Wade). We started our investigation of this technique on the first day of rehearsal with simple weight sharing relationships based around nonverbal, duet-based improvisation work. In some of these relationships, two movers would grip each other by the wrists, sending their weight away from each other, or press their palms together, sending their weight into each other. As the company grew more comfortable and skilled with these simple weight-sharing relationships, we progressed to more complicated and impressive feats of nontraditional partnering.

As we began incorporating the technique into the development of the theatrical presentation, we discovered it served our expression of the relationship between Orpheus and his adversaries. A large section of the second movement of the piece came to be composed of dance pieces in which Orpheus is preyed upon by thuggish male demons, seductive female demons, and their leader, Death, who takes full control of Orpheus when the others are through. When exploring the physicality of Orpheus’ struggles against these hellish opponents, the work of this technique became an effective physical expression for the manipulation I sought to communicate.

Robby Barnet, one of those four students, has said that “when we moved it wasn’t with a trained dancer’s body. Because of our athletic background, instead of doing extensions and doing turns on center, we started by holding onto each other” (Brown 169).
The other technique used in our rehearsal process, Viewpoints, made famous by American theatre director, Anne Bogart, is a method for observing, responding and existing in relationship to the external stimuli that surround an individual at every moment. The Viewpoints technique breaks awareness of these external stimuli down into nine points of awareness (or viewpoints) of space and time.\(^5\) In defining Viewpoints, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau in their book, The Viewpoints Book state:

- Viewpoints is a philosophy translated into a technique for (1) training performers; (2) building ensemble; and (3) creating movement for the stage.
- Viewpoints is a set of names given to certain principles of movement through time and space; these names constitute a language for talking about what happens onstage.
- Viewpoints is points of awareness that a performer or creator makes use of while working. \(7-8\)

A common practice for exploring and experimenting with the Viewpoints is the use of group improvisations that ask the practitioners to focus on individual or collective viewpoints and on the relationships created in time and space through those viewpoints. One of the keys to success in these improvisations is to lose the need to “be interesting.” Rather than trying to make things happen to keep an audience interested, the practitioners must realize that there is already so much going on in time and space. By taking an interest in anything else outside oneself, the practitioner becomes fascinating to watch, much more so than if he or she tried to do interesting things.

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\(^5\) The nine Viewpoints are Tempo, Duration, Kinesthetic Response, Repetition, Shape, Gesture, Architecture, Spatial Relationship, and Topography (Bogart Viewpoints 8-12).
things. Bogart and Landau suggest that this requires “extraordinary listening, generosity and artfulness” (Viewpoints 71).

As we began developing the performance material for Orpheus, Viewpoints improvisations became one of our most valuable tools. It was a strong vehicle for discovering particular moments and images for the choreographic elements of the production, but it also shaped the show in unexpected ways. As we progressed in our practice with Viewpoints, we began experimenting with the Viewpoints as a vehicle for character exploration and development. On several occasions, we began a Viewpoints improvisation with the guideline that we place the idea of our characters in the back of our minds and with the permission to engage and speak to each other if it happened organically.

In one of these improvisations, I partnered with the actress who played a character named Mina, a young girl who is trapped in the space between Earth and Hell. We entered the improvisation with our characters in mind, but without imposing our characters on the improvisation. Our interactions with each other in these improvisations provided incredible revelations into our characters’ relationship and what we wanted from each other. I found myself following Mina around, trying to comfort her, as she was very intent on not being touched. In one moment, I asked her about her parents. “Where are your parents? Did you know them? Why are you all alone?” It was in the proceeding dialogue that we shared an epiphany about the relationships of these two characters. I decided that Orpheus and Eurydice were Mina’s parents, but she was never born because of Eurydice’s premature death. This revelation led me to rewrite the script, changing the position of the character of Mina
in her relevance to the plot. Through the use of Viewpoints improvisations grounded in character, we stumbled upon stage-worthy dynamics in the story’s character relationships that we were not able to discover through simple discussion.

These were the three phases of evolution for my Orpheus story. I started with the traditional stories of the myth, and then I conceived of a show that changed those stories. Once I had a concept, I cast the show and found actors to embody that concept. With actual persons ready to take on the roles of the story, my story took its first step out of the realm of the conceptual and into practice where limitations made evolution and new ideas necessary. Without a male actor to play Death, I was forced to rethink of the nature of the character, which led me to cast a woman and change the nature of the protagonist/antagonist relationship. In the third and final phase of crafting this Orpheus story, we had to put the concept into practice, and the forms through which we explored this story helped us put everything together.
Chapter 3:

A New Orpheus Adaptation

At the end of the development process, I arrived at an Orphic story that descended from the Orpheus traditions of Virgil and Ovid, but also stood as its own viable adaptation of the myth. Growing out of the conflicts between two of Segal’s fundamental elements of the myth, love and death, I crafted a story that deviated from the archetypical situational structures. In the design of my structure, I did not seek to throw away everything I inherited from Virgil and Ovid; in doing so I would have lost the narrative elements of the Orpheus myth that made it a rich area of investigation. Instead, I sought to make deliberate and specific changes at key moments within the preexisting structures. As a result, my primary tools in altering situational structure were the addition and substitution of situations, never subtraction. By this I mean, when deviating from the Ovidian and Virgilian Archetypes, I never completely eliminated a situation from the traditional structures. In several cases I altered the details of an event, which altered the nature of the situation, resulting in the substitution of a new situation for a traditional situation. In one case, I added a new situation for the purpose of enhancing certain qualities of the story I wanted to tell. These were my tools for adapting the story structure for my production.

To recall, in Chapter One I broke down the two Orpheus Story Archetypes of Ovid and Virgil. The Ovidian Archetype is a seven-situation structure: (1) Disaster, (2) Daring Enterprise, (3) Supplication, (4) Obstacles to Love, (5) Loss of Loved Ones, (6) Falling Prey to Cruelty and Misfortune, and (7) Recovery of a Lost One.
The Virgilian Archetype, similar to Ovid’s, but with key differences, is a six-situation structure: (1) Disaster, (2) Daring Enterprise, (3) Supplication, (4) Obstacles to Love, (5) Fatal Imprudence, and (6) Falling Prey to Cruelty and Misfortune. My adaptation grew out of these traditional structures into a different story with a divergent situational progression.

The first divergence of my story occurs in the first situation. In both Virgil and Ovid, the event of Eurydice’s death is a “Disaster.” Her demise is an unprovoked act of fate that the protagonist, Orpheus, has no control over. In my adaptation of the story, however, the details of this event transform it into an alternate situation. The initial alteration is a shift of protagonist from Orpheus to Eurydice. While Orpheus is protagonist for most other situations in the structure, he is not in this first situation. Eurydice plays this role, and as the situation’s protagonist, her actions directly contribute to the outcome of her death.

Just before her wedding to Orpheus, Eurydice is approached by the character of Death who chips away at the bride-to-be’s confidence in her upcoming marriage, and then entices her into a deal. If Eurydice consents to Death’s arrangement of an opportunity, she promises to reveal the strength of Orpheus’ love by organizing a test to prove himself. When Eurydice agrees to the bargain, she unwittingly forsakes her life, which becomes the object of Orpheus’ test. As the day advances, she suddenly dies in Orpheus’ arms during their wedding dance together.

Just as in Virgil’s account of Eurydice’s second death, which is a Fatal Imprudence” resulting from Orpheus’ folly, in my adaptation Eurydice’s first death is a “Fatal Imprudence” resulting from her own folly. In my rendering of this event,
Eurydice naively places her trust in an untrustworthy individual, making a bargain with Death without carefully considering the consequences, and the cost of this mistake is her life. This “Fatal Imprudence” takes the place of the “Disaster” in Virgil and Ovid’s versions of the myth.

Eurydice’s death leads to the second situation of the play, in which the role of protagonist shifts back to Orpheus. As promised in Death’s bargain, Orpheus is confronted with a test of his love for Eurydice. Just as in the archetypical stories, Orpheus is called to venture into Hell to save Eurydice from eternal death, and he responds accordingly, embarking on a journey into the land of the dead. Just as in Virgil and Ovid, this situation is the “Daring Enterprise.” This situation remains in tact, not diverging from the archetypes in any significant ways. Some of the superficial aspects of the story have changed, but these changes have no lasting impact on the nature of the situation itself. In both stories, Orpheus takes up his daring enterprise to enter the land of the dead and rescue Eurydice.

The third situation is the only situation with no origin in the archetypes. When Orpheus arrives in Hell the strength of his love is tested. In one of the most choreographically intense sections of the show, Orpheus is physically battered by three male demons and sexually tempted by three female demons. Of both dangers, the women present the primary threat as their sexual enticement intoxicates Orpheus, for example, the Archetypical Orpheus chooses to take the journey to the Underworld of his own accord, but my Orpheus is visited by a supernatural entity named Charon who entreats him to do so.
nearly succeeding in making him forget Eurydice. If he forgets Eurydice and surrenders himself to the physical pleasures offered to him, he will become lost and his journey will be forfeit.  

This situation is Polti’s “All Sacrificed for a Passion,” which requires “The Lover; the Object of the Fatal Passion; [and] the Person or Thing Sacrificed” (Polti 77). In this case, the demons succeed in causing the Orpheus (the Lover) to lose himself in sexual ecstasy (the Object of the Fatal Passion) at the risk of losing Eurydice (the Person Sacrificed). As he continues to lose himself, Orpheus passes from the hands of the demons into the hands of Death who continues to prey on Orpheus in this manner. In this sexual passion, Orpheus becomes vulnerable and easily manipulated, and it is not until Death tries to eliminate his memories of Eurydice that Orpheus musters the strength to rebel. He overcomes and conquers his passions, rendering further attempts of manipulation powerless.

7 This section of the show (which was one of the show elements to receive the most enthusiastic audience response) included two movement pieces set to music, the first being Elvis Costello’s *This Is Hell* and the second being Tom Waits’ *Temptation*. In the first piece Orpheus is chased, spun, teased, beaten, and manipulated by the demons of Hell trying to destroy him. In the second, Orpheus and a female demon share a short movement duet that repeats five times with increasing speed. As the tempo of the dance picks up, Orpheus loses himself in it, surrendering himself physically to the sexual temptations of his demon partner.
With temptation defeated, Orpheus refocuses on his objective and, with Death’s captive audience, demands Eurydice’s return. This next situation, a substitution for the “Supplication” of Pluto in Virgil and Ovid, becomes Polti’s twelfth situation, “Obtaining.” In this situation, which requires “A Solicitor and an Adversary Who is Refusing,” the solicitor uses force, diplomacy, or some other means in an attempt to gain an object from his or her adversary (Polti 46).

While the Orpheus of the archetypical stories pleads before Pluto, a neutral party, for aid against the forces of death and the return of Eurydice, my Orpheus must coerce Death, an adversarial party to release his bride. In both cases, the object to be gained is Eurydice, but the nature of Orpheus’ relationship to the decision-maker has changed. The archetypical Orpheus must, as Polti’s definition of Supplication dictates, beseech a “Power in authority, whose decision is doubtful” (Polti 16), but there is no doubt as to how Death is inclined to decide, as her motives lie opposed to Orpheus’ success. As a result, begging the decision-maker is not enough, Orpheus tries all sorts of coercion to defeat his opponent, but success only arrives once he breaks her heart.

Death, who loves Orpheus and craves for him to love her in return, is rejected by the poet and, for the first time in her existence, experiences emotional pain. She grants Orpheus the return of his Eurydice, but the return is conditional. Like Pluto, Death tells Orpheus he can have his wife back as long as, until they both exit Hell, he

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8 Alternatively, the situation of “Obtaining” may have an “an Arbitrator and Opposing Parties” (Polti 46).
does not look back at her. Unlike Pluto, however, this condition is given as an act of spite. Death, knowing that he will not be able to fulfill this condition, wants Orpheus to experience the pain of losing his wife for a second time. Death’s release of Eurydice is an act of revenge for the heartbreak Orpheus has caused her. These details do not change the nature of the next situation, however, which, like the archetypical structures, is “Obstacles to Love.” In all three versions, the two lovers are presented with the same obstacle regardless of the motivation behind its presentation.

The sixth situation of my adaptation, the second death of Eurydice, follows the Ovidian Archetype. While Virgil places the blame for the backwards glance on Orpheus, creating a situation of “Fatal Imprudence,” this Orpheus, just as Ovid’s, is innocent for his actions, creating the “Loss of Loved Ones” situation. When Death releases Eurydice back to her husband, Orpheus receives a damaged Eurydice who retains no memories of her past life. She silently and obediently follows Orpheus towards the Gates of Hell, but Death has created a trap to ensure their failure. At the Gates, Death places a daisy, an object strongly tied to Orpheus and Eurydice’s romantic memories. Just as Eurydice is passing through the Gates, she catches sight of the daisy and her memories momentarily flood back into her. She stops and calls out Orpheus’ name, causing him to look back prematurely and violate the condition. The two lovers are separated as Eurydice is revoked into Hell and Orpheus is banished to the living world.

Once alone again, Orpheus pleads to Death for a new deal. Death appears, willing to hear his offer, and after a short bargaining process, Orpheus agrees to take
Eurydice’s place in Hell, suffering whatever torments Death can devise so that Eurydice may live again. Traditionally, Orpheus’ death is a senseless act of destruction, resulting in the “Falling Prey to Cruelty or Misfortune” situation. In this adaptation, however, the protagonist’s death is an act of sacrifice, creating the conditions for Polti’s situation, “Self-Sacrifice for Kindred.” This situation requires “the Hero; the Kinsman; the ‘Creditor’ or the Person or Thing Sacrificed” (75). In this event, Orpheus (the Hero) sacrificing his life to Death (the Creditor) so that Eurydice (the Kinsman) can live, fulfilling all the criteria of this situation.

As in Ovid’s version of the myth, this adaptation does not end with Orpheus’ death, leaving one final situation to conclude the story. Also resembling Ovid, my adaptation concludes with the same situation, “Recovery of a Lost One,” but the execution of this situation is different. In Ovid’s story, Orpheus is reunited with Eurydice in the Underworld, but in this story, the poet is never seen again after his death. With one final shift of protagonist, the experiences of the “Recovery of a Lost One” is given to another character, Mina, the daughter of Orpheus and Eurydice.

Mina, who first appears in the play as Orpheus crosses the void between Earth and Hell, is the unborn daughter of Orpheus and Eurydice. As a result of Eurydice’s premature death, Mina never has a chance to be born, leaving her trapped in the space between things. Orpheus is never made aware of the fact that this child is his daughter, and the audience is not made explicitly aware of this fact either until, in this final scene, she refers him as her father and to Eurydice as her mother.

In this final event of the play, Eurydice is returned to life, and as she is passing through the void back to the world of the living, she encounters Mina. This
young girl has been waiting in the void, seeking the parents who never bore her so that she can have her chance to be born. With the arrival of Eurydice, she is now united with her mother, and can join her as she returns to the living world. With this final situation, my Orpheus story concludes.

Taken collectively, these situations create a an eight-situation progression for this Orpheus adaptation: (1) Fatal Imprudence, (2) Daring Enterprise, (3) All Sacrificed for a Passion, (4) Obtaining, (5) Obstacles to Love, (6) Loss of Loved Ones, (7) Self-Sacrifice for Kindred, and (8) Recovery of a Lost One. Growing out of the Orphic structures of Virgil and Ovid, this adaptation maintains roots in tradition while splitting off into its own divergent narrative.
Conclusion

Two unlit candles sit on the stage, representing the snuffed out lives of Orpheus and Eurydice. The pale faced Death steps onto the stage, singing a joyful song as she strikes a match. She touches the flame to the wick of Eurydice’s candle, giving it new life, and then to a third, smaller candle, hidden behind the other two, which belongs to the couple’s daughter, Mina. Singing her cheerful song with a bounce in her step as she departs, she promises that she will meet everyone again. While she does not “know where” and she does not “know when,” she assures everyone that “it won’t be long” until they “meet again some sunny day.” Death disappears behind the stage curtains, leaving the two candles burning on the stage as the stage lights fade to darkness.

Like Mina (the daughter of Orpheus and Eurydice invented for this adaptation of the Orpheus myth) whose candle was left burning on the stage in this final moment, my play also descended from two classic figures. Though different enough from the Orpheus stories of Virgil and Ovid to stand as its own interpretation of the myth, my adaptation is not a wholly original story. While diverging significantly in many key moments, this play was crafted from the elements and structures found in the work of these two poets. It was a liberal adaptation of previous stories, not the original creation of a new story.

Polti’s Theory of the Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations suggests that such creations of new stories might even be impossible. With a finite number of situations from which a storyteller can draw, the potential for originality does not derive from
the prospect of new, never imagined dramatic conceptions, but from the act of

retelling these situations in inventive ways. As Anne Bogart states:

   The act of speaking and describing connects you to all those who have
gone before, who are now dead. Much description is in fact, an act of
redescription. The Greek artists and dramatists, for example, were not
attempting to create anything new. Rather they meant to reconsider
and rearticulate what already existed. Their great works of art and
literature were an attempt to reimagine and retell the stories passed
down to them. We too are the inheritors of a rich history of human
achievement and folly. There is really no need to come up with
anything new. Redescribing what you have inherited will engender all
the novelty and originality you crave. (Bogart, And Then You Act 26)

   In this sense, almost every creative act is an act of adaptation. It begins with
an idea, drawn from the creator’s life, the work of others, or some other source, and is
then it is shaped into a form fitting the circumstances it is created in. This was
exactly my process for creating my play, Orpheus. I began with the general idea for
creating a show that would enable an investigation of human mortality. When I
discovered the Orpheus stories of Virgil and Ovid, I shifted my investigations to fit
these ancient forms. As I worked with these forms over the course of ten months, I
altered the forms to fit my investigations.

   My process of adaptation resulted in a full-length theatre production, the most
ambitious and successful accomplishment of my four years of undergraduate work.
My company and I shared our work with a combined audience of over three hundred
people, exposing many new people to this iconic story of Western Civilization, and
contributing one more work to the ever-expanding body of adaptations that compose
the Orpheus myth.
Works Cited


Appendix A: Orpheus Script

Orpheus

Draft 6

A Play in Three Movements

by

Eric Brakey
Orpheus saw its first production at the Ridges Auditorium of Ohio University from February 28 to March 2.

First Production Cast

Orpheus…………………………… Eric Brakey
Eurydice…………………………… Shiloh Morgenstern
Death……………………………… Dinah Berkeley
Chorus…………………………….. Ashley Bossard (Siren)
Dylan Combs (Charon)
Justin Garman
Sonja Mata (Mina)
Megan Preston
Matt van Slyke
Movement 1 – Orpheus and Eurydice

1.1

As the audience enters, the Chorus stands motionless in the sides of the space like living statues all slightly off center. Black veils cover their faces. Eurydice sits on a piece of red fabric on the stage. Two candles sit unlit in the downright corner of the stage. The Ink Spots’ “Memories of You” plays while the audience enters and finds their seats. Once all are seated and the music concludes, the houselights fade to darkness. The darkness holds for a few moments beyond what is comfortable, Death enters, crosses downstage to the candles, and then speaks.

Death
Humans fill their lives with distraction and frivolity. I don’t blame them; they’re terrified, and any occupation that distracts them from their terror can seem a welcome pursuit. For there is a particular question that gnaws at the human soul night and day, and when one fears the uncomfortable truth which answering that question may bring, it is easier to live in the dark shadow of a question than it is to step in to the blinding light of an answer, especially when that answer may very well be:

Death strikes a match.

“Yes, I am alone in the world.”

Death lights the candles.

Orpneus and Eurydice.

Death blows out the match.

Two mortals seeking haven from the immortal question. Orpheus has chosen a bride. I have chosen to end my solitude. Eurydice will die. I will take her, and then I will have my bride.

Death recedes to the back of the stage, pulls out a juicy red apple and eats it as she watched the events of the next scene unfold.
Lights up. Sounds of calm ocean waves. Eurydice sits alone on a red piece of fabric, looking up at the night sky on a crisp summer evening. Orpheus enters.

Orpheus
Don’t pretend you don’t see me. I’m sorry I’m late.

Eurydice
You know I worry every time.

Orpheus
I know. I was going to be here, I just… something reminded me of you.

What was it?

Eurydice
Close your eyes. Now imagine the orchard right next to the house you grew up in. You’re nine years old. Remember the daisies. A field full of those white and yellow daisies. And remember the huge apple tree at the center of it all.

Eurydice
It seemed much bigger back then.

Orpheus
Those apples in the autumn, they were the best: red, crisp, juicy. Remember the day you found me up in that apple tree. Six years old, short and scrawny. Chip on my shoulder and a tune on my lips.

Eurydice
You fell.

Orpheus
You startled me.

Eurydice
You landed on your head. I thought you’d broken your neck, this little boy I’d never seen before.

Orpheus
I was more resilient than you thought.

Eurydice
Resilient? You kept crying.
But you tried to cheer me up.

The daisies…

You remember?

Of course. I picked some of the daisies in the orchard, built them into a crown, and declared you The Singing Prince.

You told me that in the language of flowers---

---daisies mean innocence and loyal love, and that if you were to be Orpheus, The Singing Prince, you would have to remain innocent and love someone with all your heart.

Orpheus reveals a bouquet of daisies.

Eurydice, can you smell the daisies?

Yes.

Open your eyes.

Daisies. Don’t think this gets you off the hook for being late.

Did you find any while you were waiting for me?

Plenty.
Eurydice
I’m not doing all of the work and letting you reap the rewards. You can find you own.

Orpheus
Come on. Help a Singing Prince out.

*Orpheus and Eurydice look up at the night sky together.*

Eurydice
Fine, there’s Perseus, with a sword in one hand and Medusa’s head in the other, and by right his side is Andromeda, his love.

Orpheus
What did they do to deserve a place in the sky?

Eurydice
Perseus saved Andromeda from a sea monster.

Orpheus
There’s always a damsel in distress.

Eurydice
Andromeda was chained to a rock, ready to be sacrificed to the sea monster, but Perseus found her, slew the monster, and won his bride.

Orpheus
There’s one!

Eurydice
Where?

Orpheus
The Angry Beehive.

Eurydice
Orpheus, that’s not a constellation.

Orpheus
Says who? Who gets to decide which stars are constellations and which ones aren’t? Look right there. You see it? That collection of stars is the beehive and then there are all little stars around it, the angry bees buzzing about their day.
Eurydice
You can’t just point at a group of stars and call them a constellation.

Orpheus
Someone had to. Why else would we have constellations? Just because I’m the first person to recognize The Angry Beehive doesn’t mean its not there.

Eurydice
Okay, what’s the story of The Angry Beehive?

Orpheus
The story?

Eurydice
Every constellation has to have a story, right? Perseus and Andromeda had a story. What’s The Angry Beehive’s story? Is it one of battle between good and evil? Love, intrigue, and loss?

Orpheus
They make honey. Occasionally they sting people.

Eurydice
You see, no story, no constellation.

Orpheus
Fine, there’s another one. You see those two clusters? Two people sitting side by side.

Eurydice
And what are they called?

Orpheus
Orpheus and Eurydice, but their story is still being written.

Eurydice
Well, if it’s a story in progress, I guess we’ll let it count.

Orpheus
I have a song for you.

Eurydice
Then sing to me.

Orpheus (Singing)
(Singing)My prayer is to linger with you
At the end of the day, in a dream that's divine.
My prayer is a rapture in blue,
with a world far away, and your lips close to mine.
Tonight while our hearts are aglow,
Oh tell me the words— (Stops singing) Let’s get married.

Orpheus and Eurydice walk up stage and are joined by Chorus members who dress them in wedding attire as they talk. Eurydice leaves the bouquet of daisies on the red blanket.

Eurydice
Orpheus…

Orpheus
Let’s do it. The whole thing. A big wedding, lots of friends, lots of music… You don’t want to?

Eurydice
No, it’s just that… Well, marriage is something that’s usually proposed in the form of a question.

Orpheus
Eurydice, will you marry me?

Eurydice
Is there a ring?

Orpheus
No ring. I didn’t really think this through… Here.

Death signals one of the chorus members to retrieve a daisy from the blanket and bring it to Eurydice.

There’s no diamond, but that’s 14-karrot flower petal… You better say yes, there’s no return policy on the flower.

Eurydice
I’ll have to find a dress.

Orpheus
It will be perfect no matter what you wear. After all, it’s written in the stars.
The Chorus continues dressing Orpheus and Eurydice.

Death crosses to the blanket of daisies. Grabbing the blanket by two corners, she flings it into the air, scattering daisies across the stage.

Death

Love is perhaps the best solution humans can muster to answer the question of loneliness, but human love is a temporary solution to an enduring problem. Humans have their weddings. A man clings to a wife as one flung into a river clings to a rock, not wanting to be swept further downstream. But when you are both adrift in the river of life, any security from this union is an illusion. As the inevitability of death grows closer, the power of human love to fight back the fear of abandonment grows weak. Only an immortal love, planted firmly in the riverbed, can stand against downstream tug towards death. The bride approaches. My own wedding day grows near.

The Chorus finishes dressing Orpheus and Eurydice. Orpheus exits

Eurydice crosses downstage carrying a daisy and singing. She collects daisies scattered across the ground and begins to organize them into the image of a heart on the ground. Though-out this scene, Death breaks the image by tossing flowers away, grinding them into the floor, or other means. Eurydice continues this activity, apparently oblivious to Death’s actions.

Eurydice (Singing)
You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,
You make me happy, when skies are grey,
You’ll never know dear, how much I love you

Death (Singing)
Please don’t take my sunshine away.

Eurydice
Oh! Hello. I didn’t realize anyone was there.
Death
You have a nice voice. Do you sing?

Eurydice
Oh no, Orpheus is the singer. I’m not very good.

Death
No, you are, Eurydice.

Eurydice
Are you one of the wedding guests?

Death
Yes. Call me Joy.

Eurydice
Nice to meet you Joy.

Death
I’m here on Orpheus’ side. I’m well acquainted with his parents.

Eurydice
Orpheus’ parents are both dead.

Death
Yes, that’s true. [Beat] I’m a great bit older than I look, and I’ve known Orpheus’ family a long time. But what are you doing out here? Shouldn’t the bride-to-be be enjoying her wedding day?

Eurydice
Oh, I am. Right now I’m just enjoying it out in the sun, away from all the commotion. So much fuss over a wedding, you can only tolerate it for so long.

Death
Nervous?

Eurydice
Me? Not at all. Well, maybe I was a little at first, but now that its all here… I’ve been dreaming of sharing this day with Orpheus since I was a little girl.

Death
It’s refreshing to see you so confidant. Young brides are usually very apprehensive on their big day. Days like today never seem go the way you expect them to.
Eurydice

Have you been to a lot of weddings?

Death

I’ve witnessed quite a few.

Eurydice

This is my first.

Death

The first wedding you ever experience will be your own? It sounds almost poetic.

Eurydice

I imagine your own wedding always feels like your first. What about you? How did your wedding feel?

Death

I’ve never been married.

Eurydice

Oh, I just assumed… I’m sorry, that was rude.

Death

Not at all.

Eurydice

It’s just that… you’re so beautiful. Surely you could have been married?

Death

Oh, there have been men… and occasionally women, though none as beautiful as you, but they’ve always fallen short in someway or another. I won’t marry until I’ve found my equal: someone romantic with passion and a strong will. The last thing you want to do is rush into a lifelong commitment with some boy who’s untested and unprepared for the realities of marriage. But that’s just me. It seems like Orpheus makes you very happy. He seems like a romantic young man.

Eurydice

Yes, he’s very romantic. He’s always singing.

Death

He sings to you?

Eurydice

Oh yes.
Death
Cute.

Eurydice
On the night he proposed, he brought me a bouquet of daisies.

Death
Are you a fan of daisies?

Eurydice
It’s a long story.

Death
Well, tell me about the night he proposed.

Eurydice
We went out to the beach to watch the stars.

Death
What a very romantic idea. Must be from a very romantic man.

Eurydice
Actually it was my idea. But he sang to me, and when he proposed—

Death
I can only imagine how you must have felt when you saw that ring.

Eurydice
Well, there wasn’t a ring.

Death
Oh.

Eurydice
It was more of a spur of the moment thing.

Death
Oh, so the marriage was an impulsive decision?

Eurydice
Well, no, I’d been thinking about it for a long time.

Death
But for Orpheus it was just an impulse in the moment?
Eurydice
Are you suggesting he didn’t put any thought into it?

Death
I’m not suggesting anything; I’m just listening to what you have to say. Do you think he put thought into it?

Eurydice
Well, no, I guess not. He’s very spontaneous. He just kind of told me to marry him.

Death
Told you?

Eurydice
I mean, at first—but then… I love Orpheus. He’s a great boy.

Death
Boy?

Eurydice
Well, I guess I’ve always thought of him as still a little boy.

Death
Is that what you think? Could a little boy really be prepared for marriage?

Eurydice
No. I mean, oh I’m so turned around. I was trying to tell you how happy I was, and now… I love Orpheus.

Death
Then don’t worry. If you love him, I’m sure you two will be very happy together.

Eurydice
Do you think? If we’re rushing into marriage before Orpheus is ready for this—

Death
I can see why you’re concerned, but you’re about to get married. Is now really the time to be asking these questions?

Eurydice
Now is the only time left.

Death
Eurydice, a wedding can be the most beautiful and frightening moment of your life. I’ve seen some marriages prosper into beautifully woven tapestries, and others fall
apart at the seams. The key is always how well you interlace the threads at the beginning. To start you marriage off strongly, you have to walk into this wedding with confidence and joy.

Eurydice

Confidence and joy.

Death

Life is short, Eurydice. Seize it before it’s gone. Tomorrow you could be dead.

Eurydice

I’ve shaken my confidence. How can I be sure he’s ready?

Death

What if you test him? I could help you do that.

Eurydice

What do you mean?

Death

What if I could help you be sure that Orpheus is ready? What if I could assure you that if you called him, Orpheus would follow you to the ends of the earth?

Eurydice

How could you help me with something like that?

Death

I can give Orpheus the opportunity to prove his love as deeply as Perseus did when he saved Andromeda from that sea monster.

Eurydice

I never told you that. How do you know about that?

Death

If this is what you desire Eurydice, I can arrange it.

Eurydice

What will you arrange exactly?

Death

Just a simple test of Orpheus’ commitment.

Eurydice

Who are you?
Death
I’m someone who wants you and Orpheus to be happy.

Eurydice
Are you an angel?

Death
I have met a few. They’re not the best dinner conversationalists. Look, if you’re not ready for this, you don’t have to do it--

Eurydice
No, I’m ready, I just… How does this work?

Death
Don’t worry about it. I’ll take care of anything.

Eurydice
How will I know when the test has begun?

Death
You’ll just know.

Eurydice
If this is for our happiness… Okay.

Death
Then we have a deal?

Eurydice
Yes.

They shake hands.

Death
Then go. Today is your day. Enjoy your wedding and your much-deserved happiness. I’ll make all the arrangements. See you soon.

Wedding bells ring.

1.5

Orpheus enters and joins Eurydice and Death, who acts as the priest.
Death
Do you, Orpheus, take Eurydice to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death you do part.

Orpheus
I do… and beyond if so necessary.

Death
Do you, Eurydice, take Orpheus to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death you do part.

Eurydice
I do.

Chorus
Then before God, you may now kiss the bride.

They kiss. The Ink Spots’ “Sometime” begins to play. The two dance together. As the dance progresses, the Chorus enters to dance in pairs, and then Death walks across the stage. She snaps her fingers at each couple causing the woman in the pair to die in her partner’s arms and slide to the ground. Each time she snaps her fingers, Eurydice stumbles and clutches her heart, but the two continue dancing. Death reaches Eurydice’s candle downstage, and as Orpheus is dipping Eurydice, she snuffs out the candle and Eurydice dies in Orpheus’ arms. The Chorus carries Eurydice away, leaving Orpheus alone onstage with Death.

Death
Oh Orpheus, I shall be waiting for you. Come my sweet. Come reclaim her if you can. The way has been opened and the palms have been laid. I shall have my bride.

Lights out.
Movement 2 – Into Hell

2.1

Lights up. The sound of waves. We find a disheveled Orpheus alone on the beach at night, sitting atop a blanket of red fabric.

Orpheus (Singing)
I’m making believe that you're in my arms though I know you're so far away, Making believe I'm talking to you, wish you could hear what I say, And here in the gloom of my lonely room we're dancing like we used to do. Making believe is just another way of dreaming, so till my dreams come true, I'll whisper "Good night", turn out the light, and kiss my pillow, Making believe it's you.9

Orpheus lies back and shuts his eyes. A male member of the chorus enters in a black-hooded robe as Charon. Charon is invisible to Orpheus.

Charon
Hello Orpheus.

Orpheus
Who’s there? (Beat) Hello?

Charon
Orpheus.

Orpheus
Where are you?

Charon
You have a nice voice.

Orpheus
Have I gone mad?

Charon
No Orpheus, you’re perfectly sane, you’re just dead and I’m the Grim Reaper here to take your soul.

9 “Making Believe” by the Ink Spots and Ella Fitzgerald
That’s a joke. I thought you humans liked jokes.

Orpheus

You have a morbid sense of humor.

Charon

I guess it comes with the territory, but in all seriousness, we need to talk.

Orpheus

Aren’t we talking right now? Who are you?

Charon

Who I am is less important than why I’m here, but if you need a name to attach to the voice, you may call me Charon.

Orpheus

Alright Charon… you already seem to know my name. What do you want?

Charon

Straight to the point: I might begin to like you after all. I am an agent of law and order. My particular function rests in the transportation of mortal souls to their final destinations. There are strict rules to observe when performing this function, especially in regards to where and when souls are to be taken. Rarely do the rules allow me to establish direct contact with any living being, but yours is a special case.

Orpheus

And why is my case so special?

Charon

The rules were broken. (Beat) Oh, don’t worry; you’ve done nothing wrong. I am here simply to request of you a service.

Orpheus

And that would be?

Charon

I need you to go to Hell.

Orpheus

Is that another joke?
Charon
I’m quite serious, Orpheus. The rules do not permit me to enter myself, so I need you to enter for me.

Orpheus
Why me? What is there in Hell that is so important?

Charon
Your wife—Eurydice—I believe that was her name.

Orpheus
Eurydice is in Hell?

Charon
I understand if this news is upsetting to you, but it is because she is your wife that I have chosen you.

Orpheus
You said that there were broken rules.

Charon
Every mortal being has a predetermined timeline. When you are born, when you die, and everything in between, they were all recorded long ago. Your wife, Eurydice, was supposed to live to a ripe old age, happy and in love with you, but someone broke the rules, and this has created chaos on a level you cannot imagine. One human mortal dies before her predetermined time and the world is different. The events of the future change, things do not happen that were supposed to happen, even people who were meant to be born never come into being.

Orpheus
And who broke the rules?

Charon
Death—

Orpheus
Death?

Death, an immortal being of great power and chaos. It was Death that created a kingdom for itself in Hell, gathering the souls of the wicked souls to use as its instruments. Death broke the rules of the timeline. You must defeat Death.

Orpheus
How do I defeat Death?
Charon
Orpheus, it thinks its in love. We all do silly things when we are in love. (Beat) If you are ready, then take my hand.

Orpheus
For Eurydice, I'm always ready.

Orpheus takes Charon’s hand.

2.2

Two chorus members enter and take the two pieces of red fabric that had been the beach blanket and turn them into the Gates of Hell. Another chorus member enters as Mina, a young girl. Mina sits and pulls the petals off of a daisy as she sings.

Mina (Singing)
You are my sunshine, my only sunshine
You make me happy, when skies are gray,
You’ll never know dear, how much I love you,
Please don’t take my sunshine away.\(^{10}\)

Orpheus
Are we in Hell?

Charon
No.

Orpheus
Then where are we?

Charon
We are nowhere: this is void independent of both space and time. All roads cross this place, but no roads end. Every traveler must pass through here on their way across the worlds to their final destination. Your destination is beyond those gates.

Mina (Singing)
The other night dear, as I lay sleeping,
I dreamed I held you in my arms,
But when I woke up, I was mistaken,
So I hung my head and cried.

\(^{10}\) “You Are My Sunshine” by Jimmie Davis
Orpheus

Who is that child?

Charon

I would not call her a child. She is of no consequence. Let’s move on.

Mina (Singing)

I’ll always love you, and make you happy,
If you will only, say the same,
But if you leave me, to love another,
You’ll regret it all some day.

Mina

I was waiting for you, I was always waiting for you, and now you’re here for the party. Would you like some tea?

Charon

We’re not here to see you.

Mina


Orpheus

How do you know me?

Mina

She’s waiting, waiting, waiting for you. I hear her singing your name.

Eurydice?

Orpheus

Please don’t go. Don’t go to her. Stay here with me. We can play. I promise not to play with you like she will.

Mina

Have you seen my wife, Eurydice?

Mina

No one sees. No one listens. Yes, I did see. I saw the bride. I saw her passing through, carrying a song, singing daisies. Through the gates. No one ever comes out. No one except her. You do not want to go through the gates. She has already forgotten me, and you will to. Don’t fall.
Who is this girl?

You have to listen. Don’t fall.

A lost soul, wanted neither by Heaven nor Hell.

How does one belong to neither one place nor the other?

This is a place of dead possibilities. Ideas that never came to fruition come here to die, and those who never lived come here to be forgotten. They can belong to neither Heaven nor Hell for they are neither worthy nor wicked. Our journey does not concern her, however, and our time is short. Let us go.

If you go that way, you must listen to what it says:
Through me the way into the suffering city,
Through me the way to the eternal pain,
Through me the way that runs among the lost,
Abandon every hope, who enter here.\(^{11}\)

What is your name?

My name? I don’t remember a name.

Well, you need a name. How about Mina? My wife once told me that the name Mina designates someone who is very brave. Do you like that name? If you’re all alone here, you must be very brave—

You’re going to leave me.

How long have you been here, Mina? Did you die? Do you have parents? Mina, why are you all alone in this place?

\(^{11}\) From Dante’s *Inferno*, translated by Allen Mendelbaum
Mina
Always and forever alone. No one to tell me why.

Orpheus
I am also alone. I’ve lost my wife and I need to find her.

Mina
Do not go. Do not fall. It is not a happy place to where you go.

Orpheus
That is why I must go. I hear her screaming in my mind. I cannot leave her there.

Mina
Well, he must do what he must do, but he must take care:
Beware how you come in and whom you trust,
Don’t be deceived because the gate is wide.¹²

Charon
It is time to go.

Orpheus
I must leave you now, Mina. I hope you find someone. No one should be alone.

Mina does not respond. Orpheus begins to leave.

Mina
Wait! If you only remember one thing, remember this: don’t forget Eurydice. As long as you remember and your purpose is clear, she can’t hurt you. Don’t fall among the lost.

Charon
I can take you no further than the Gates. When you enter you will be on your own.

Mina
Don’t fall. Don’t fall. Don’t fall.

Orpheus enters the gates. Lights out.

Mina (Singing)
You told me once dear, you really loved me,
And no one else would, come between,
But now you’ve left me, and love another,

---

⁵ From Dante’s *Inferno*, translated by Allen Mendelbaum
You have shattered all my dreams.

2.3

Lights up.

Eurydice runs on in her wedding dress. The chorus sits on the sides of the space. They whisper to Eurydice, taunting her with things that were said in her dealing with Death several scenes prior. Eurydice lifts her hands to her ears and all the whispering ends, except for one group, “Do we have a deal?” Death enters and the two dance together. In this short dance, Death takes control of Eurydice.

Lights out.

2.4

The entire chorus enters in darkness. Lights up on Orpheus in a pile of corpses composed of the Chorus. The sound of flies. Eurydice’s voice echoes through the space three times calling “Orpheus.” With each call, the voice increases in urgency. Orpheus pulls himself out from the corpse pile. As he does so, we hear the sounds of the sticky corpses being pulled off. Orpheus rises and walks forward.

Orpheus

Eurydice.

The corpses all silently rise, as if slowly pulled by marionette strings. They stand and are still.

Eurydice.

The corpses heads slowly turn to stare at Orpheus.

Eurydice!

The corpses snap to attention. Elvis Costello’s “This Is Hell” begins to play, and a movement piece between Orpheus and the Chorus ensues in which the Chorus torments him and each
other. As the music subsides, the six have Orpheus pinned on the ground.

2.5

Siren
Don’t tear him apart yet, not till we’ve had a chance to play.

They back off of Orpheus.

Go, I claim this one for me. He looks like fun.

Three of the chorus exit, and three members of the chorus, 2 men and a woman, Siren, remain. They circle Orpheus like a pack of hyenas.

What do you think, boys?

Male Chorus 1
One like him, Siren: heart still beating, blood still pumping, breath still breathing.

Male Chorus 2
Should we cut him vertically?

Both Male Chorus
Or diagonally?

Siren
Neither. Leave the sweetie to me.

Orpheus
Don’t test me demons.

Siren approaches Orpheus.

Siren
Who’s testing? We’re just going to have a good time.

Orpheus
I won’t abide you standing in my path. I don’t belong in this place.

Siren
That’s what the all say, but the truth always is, if you are here, you are here for a reason.
Siren lowers Orpheus onto his back and begins to straddle him.

Orpheus
I am here for a reason, I’m here to find—

Siren
Shhh.

Siren begins to undress Orpheus.

Male Chorus 1
Just let Siren have a little taste.

Male Chorus 2
You’ll taste pleasure like you’ve never had before.

Siren
Boys, I can’t work while your watching. Turn around.

They turn around.

Now, just let me in. Let all your worries melt away.

Orpheus
I’m a married man.

Siren
That’s too bad. You know what? I won’t tell if you don’t.

Orpheus
Stop. (To himself) Don’t fall. Don’t fall. Don’t fall.

Siren
Just forget your troubles. Forget your wife.

Siren begins to hum. Orpheus is hypnotized by Siren’s beauty and music. Just as Orpheus is about to kiss her, he cuts through her mental hold with a song.

Orpheus (Singing)
My prayer is to linger with you
At the end of the day, in a dream that's divine.
My prayer is a rapture in blue,
with a world far away, and your lips close to mine.

Siren

Heavenly voice.

Orpheus

Get off me, demon. I have to find my bride.

Male Chorus 2

His bride?

Male Chorus 1

Is he?

Siren

The Singing Prince. Here for the wedding, are you?

Male Chorus 1

Is he the bride?

Male Chorus 2

Or the groom?

Orpheus

I am the groom.

Male Chorus 1

Are you now?

Male Chorus 2

I thought we already had a groom.

Siren

The groom’s seat at the table is filled, so it cannot belong to you. Do you even have an invitation?

Orpheus

Who is the groom?

Siren

Death has chosen a bride. The table is set and marriage feasts are prepared.

Orpheus

Eurydice is my wife! Death cannot have her!
Siren
Perseus saved his bride from the grip of the sea demon. Can you save your bride from the maw of Death?

Orpheus
Where can I find, Eurydice? Tell me!

Siren
Poor little boy, lost and alone.
She is waiting for you.
She’s been waiting a long time.
Tell me how to find her.

Male Chorus 2
The dead forget certain things.

Male Chorus 1
When you arrive here,
You must forget.

Both Male Chorus

Siren
I hear her voice. She calls you her Singing Prince. She waits for you in white. Go to her. Find her, but first you must forget Eurydice.

Never.

Orpheus

Siren
Your will is strong now, but will it be there when you need it most? She is not far. She will find you, dressed in white.

Yes?

Orpheus

Siren
She is waiting for her Singing Prince.

All exit except Orpheus.
2.6

Orpheus stands alone and a female chorus member enters. She attempts to seduce Orpheus, but he resists. The two move together, and as they continue, Orpheus begins to submit himself to her. Once he has become completely submissive, she exits, leaving him alone as if it were a dream.

2.7

Orpheus stands alone in the space for a moment. He stands in the space a moment unsure. A women dressed in Eurydice’s white wedding dress and veil enters.

Eurydice.

Orpheus

The chorus enters. The women all wear black veils including Eurydice who is hidden among the Chorus. As the enter, they all speak amongst themselves, creating a cacophony of senseless chatter (this can also be layered with voiceover if decided). Siren steps out, pulls up her veil, clears her throat, and everything silences. There is a short beat followed by musical accompaniment and Siren beginning to sing. As Siren sings, the chorus, Orpheus, and the lady in white join in male/female pairs. They begins to waltz, the woman laying dead in their partner’s arms, except for Orpheus, who lays dead in the arms of the lady in white. Throughout the dance, the men switch partner, throwing their dead partner to the next partner.

Siren (Singing)

Now in Vienna there's ten pretty women
There's a shoulder where death comes to cry
There's a lobby with nine hundred windows
There's a tree where the doves go to die
There's a piece that was torn from the morning
And it hangs in the Gallery of Frost
Aey, aey, aey, aey
Take this waltz, take this waltz
Take this waltz with the clamp on its jaws

Oh I want you, I want you, I want you
On a chair with a dead magazine
In the cave at the tip of the lily
In some hallway where love's never been
On a bed where the moon has been sweating
In a cry filled with footsteps and sand

Aey, aey, aey, aey
Take this waltz, take this waltz
Take its broken waist in your hand
This waltz, this waltz, this waltz, this waltz
With its very own breath of brandy and death
Dragging its tail in the sea

Orpheus pulls up the veil of the woman in white, revealing it to be Death. All the other couples stop dancing, but Orpheus and Death continue.

And I'll dance with you in Vienna
I'll be wearing a river's disguise
The hyacinth wild on my shoulder
My mouth on the dew of your thighs
And I'll bury my soul in a scrapbook
With the photographs there, and the moss

And I'll yield to the flood of your beauty
My cheap violin and my cross
And you'll carry me down on your dancing
To the pools that you lift on your wrist
Oh my love, oh my love
Take this waltz, take this waltz
It's yours now, it's all that there is. 13

The song, music, and dance end abruptly.
Death holds Orpheus in her arms.

Siren

You may kiss Death’s bride.

Lights out.

13 “Take This Waltz” by Leonard Cohen
Movement 3

3.1

*Death’s voice is heard singing in the darkness. The song is prerecorded.*

**Death (Singing)**

I don’t want to set the world on fire,
I just want to start a flame in your heart.
In my heart I have but one desire,
And that is you, no other will do.

I’ve lost all ambition for worldly acclaim,
I just want to be the one you love.
And with your admission that you feel the same
I’ll have reached the goal I’m dreaming of.

Believe me.

I don’t want to set the world on fire,
I just want to start a flame in your heart.\(^\text{14}\)

*Lights up. Orpheus is unconscious and alone on stage. He is outside in an orchard. The stage is lit in warm colors and we hear the sounds of birds chirping.*

*Death enters and rushes to Orpheus who begins to wake.*

**Death**

Are you alright, little boy?

**Orpheus**

My head hurts.

**Death**

You fell.

**Orpheus**

I fell?

\(^{14}\) “I Don’t Want to Set the World on Fire” by The Ink Spots
Death
Yes, do you remember? You fell out of the apple tree. You hit your head pretty hard. I heard you singing up there, and I called out to you. I think I surprised you. You slipped and fell. I was scared. I thought maybe you’d broken your neck.

Orpheus
Where am I?

Death
You’re in the orchard by my house. Can you remember?

Orpheus
I remember now.

Death
What’s your name?

Orpheus
Orpheus.

Death
Well hello there, Orpheus. Call me Joy. How old are you?

Orpheus
Six and a half.

Death
Well then, I’ve got you beat by a lot, ’cause I’m nine!

Orpheus rubs his forehead.

Is your head okay?

Orpheus
It really hurts.

Death
What if I made something for you? Maybe it will make your head feel better.

Orpheus
What is it?

Death
A daisy crown.
Orpheus
A daisy crown? That’s stupid. How is a daisy crown going to make my head feel better?

Death
Because this is a magical daisy crown. The magic will heal your head, and anyone who wears the crown will become a prince.

Orpheus
I get to be a prince?

Death
Yes, but what kind of prince will you be?

Orpheus
There’s kinds of princes?

Death
There’s plenty of kinds. There’s nice princes and mean princes, forgetful princes and thoughtful princes. What will Prince Orpheus be known for? What are you good at?

Orpheus
I’m good at climbing trees.

Death
Orpheus, the tree-climbing prince! That doesn’t sound right. You were singing before. Do you sing a lot?

Orpheus
Sometimes, when I hear music in my head.

Death
Then that’s it: Orpheus, the Singing Prince. Now, Prince Orpheus, you will wear a crown of daisies, so the spirit of daisies must mark your reign.

Orpheus
How do I do that?

Death
Well, in the language of flowers, daisies mean innocence and loyal love. If you are to be Orpheus, the Singing Prince, you must remain innocent and love someone with all your heart.

Orpheus
I don’t have anyone to love with all my heart.
Death

Yes you do.

Orpheus

Who?

Death

Me, silly.

Orpheus

Joy?

Death

Prince Orpheus, we should mark this occasion with a song. What was the song you were singing in the apple tree? I want to hear it again.

Orpheus (Singing)

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,
You make me happy, when skies are grey,
You'll never know dear, how much I love you,
Please don't take my sunshine…
I think I remember—

Death

We are together at long last, my Singing Prince.

Orpheus

I don't know you.

Death

You will come to know me very well. We shall have eternity to share together.

Orpheus

No... no... you aren't her. What is her name? Why can't I remember her name?
Daisies in the spring. Constellations in the night sky. Hair like golden—

Death

Put her out of your mind. Stay here with me. I can give you everything: youth, power, immortality. It will all be—

Orpheus

Can you give me love?

Death

Of course.
Orpheus
Do you know what love is?

Death
I love you.

Orpheus
This isn’t love.

Death
Orpheus, so long as there has been creation, so have I been. I have witnessed the life and death of a trillion souls. None have stirred me as you have. We will spend eternity together. You at my side for all days. With my power sustaining you, you will never die, you will never grow old, you will remain beautiful always.

Orpheus
I don’t want any of that! I want her name! You took her name from me!

Death
Forget her! She is nothing! But you, my love, are something. I can give you anything you desire. Don’t ruin this. Don’t—

Orpheus
Eurydice.

Death
You remember?

Orpheus
I remember everything.

Death
My prince, you can have me for all eternity. She is temporary.

Orpheus
I would like my wife back.

Death
What can she give you? I can give you every—

Orpheus
I don’t want anything you can offer. I only want Eurydice. I reject you. You may think this is love, but it’s not. Whatever it is, it is sick, and twisted, and perverse. I want nothing to do with you.
Death
You can’t reject me. No one rejects me! This feeling? What is this…? It’s like a sense of… It’s like a wave in my chest. It’s cold and clammy and… Oh, I don’t like this. I can’t breathe. Is this…? Are you…? Stop this.

Orpheus
It’s pain.

Death
No, I don’t feel pain. Mortals feel pain, not me.

Orpheus
You can’t feel love if you don’t have the capacity to feel pain.

Death
Don’t you lecture me. You who knows nothing. You who turns away from everything. I ought to crush you like the flea that you are. You are nothing. You are powerless and weak.

Orpheus
Give Eurydice back to me.

Death
You want your wife back so badly? Fine, take her. But I warn you: she is not as you remember.

Death makes a gesture and Eurydice enters.
She is dressed as a member of the chorus. Her expression is vacant and hollow.

Orpheus
Eurydice!

Orpheus runs to Eurydice, but she is unresponsive.

What’s wrong with her?

Death
She’s dead. What did you expect? The dead in my realm are emptied out. They are my instruments, my tools, and I don’t need them for anything else. I have them forget. She doesn’t remember you, she certainly doesn’t remember herself, not that there was much to remember, and she never will again. Everything that was Eurydice is gone.
Orpheus

No. Put her back the way she was.

Death

It cannot be done. Her memories do not exist anywhere for me to put back.

Orpheus

Then I will take her the way she is.

Death

Then I release her from my bond. Leave this place. Go out the way you came and don’t look back. Until the both of you step beyond those gates, if you so much as turn your head in this direction, I will recall your beautiful bride and you will never have her again.

Orpheus

Alright, if that is how it has to be, so be it.

Death

(To Eurydice) Follow him. (To Orpheus) When we meet again, I shall not be so merciful.

Death exits.

3.2

Orpheus and Eurydice are alone on stage.
Eurydice remains behind Orpheus at all times.

Orpheus

Eurydice, are you still there? Are you still following me?

No response.

Please, say something at least.

No response.

We’re close to the gates. Please stay close.

Two chorus members enter and create the Gates of Hell out of red fabric. Orpheus walks through the gates. As he passes through, Eurydice stops just behind the gates, and for a
moment she remembers as if waking up from a dream.

Eurydice

Orpheus?

Orpheus turns back to see Eurydice, but she has not yet passed through the Gates. The Gates close down on Eurydice and drag her back to Hell.

Charon enters.

Orpheus, where’s Eurydice?

Charon

Get me back in there, Charon.

Orpheus

Back into Hell? Orpheus, that’s not possible. We were operating under a very limited window within the rules. Did you fail?

Mina enters.

Mina

No one ever comes out, but you… you didn’t fall among the lost.

Orpheus

Then she’s gone? She’s gone.

Charon

Did you fail?

Orpheus

Yes. She’s gone forever.

Charon

This is unfortunate. If you failed, then our business is done. I must take you back to the living world now.

Mina

Orpheus, if you really want her, you can still get her back.
Orpheus
Mina? What do you mean? I can’t go back in for her.

Mina
I see her. She’s always watching you, and she’s always eager to make a deal. If you can’t go to her, make her come to you.

Charon claps his hands. Mina exits.

3.3

Charon and Orpheus now stand on the beach.

Orpheus
We’re back on the beach?

Charon
Yes. I do not have the time to stand around and loiter with annoying children. I am a busy man whose existence has just become much busier. You are no longer of any use to me. Our dealings are concluded. It seems that this particular battle has been lost. Consequences. Consequences. What can be done to clean up this mess?

Charon raises his hood and disappears to Orpheus’ eyes.

Orpheus
Wait. I need your help.

Charon exits.

Orpheus stands alone for a moment. The ocean waves are calming to his ears as he processes everything that has transpired. He looks to the night sky.

And Perseus saved Andromeda from the sea monster.

Death enters quietly from behind.

Let’s make a deal.

Death
I was hoping you’d say that.
Orpheus
My life for hers. I’ll go with you, marry you, be your prince, but you have to give Eurydice back her life.

Death
Oh, no. That’s not what I want anymore. I want to deliver onto you an eternity of pain and suffering. Your death for her life.

Orpheus
Will I remember?

Death
Yes, it will be more painful that way.

Orpheus
Okay. It’s a deal.

Death crosses to Orpheus’ candle burning downstage. She snuffs it out. Orpheus clutches his chest in pain, collapses, and dies. The Chorus enters and carries him off stage. Death follows.

3.4

Mina enters.

Mina (Singing)
The other night dear, as I lay sleeping,
I dreamt I held you in my arms,
But when I woke up, I was mistaken,
So I hung my head and cried.

Eurydice enters.

Hello.

Eurydice
Hello.

Mina
Are you all alone?
Eurydice

No, you’re here. What’s my name?

Mina

Eurydice.

Eurydice

That’s a pretty name. What’s your name?

Mina

My father once called me Mina.

Eurydice

I like that name. I remember another name.

Mina

What is it?

Eurydice

Orpheus. Can we go?

Mina

Yes mother, we can go. I never liked this place anyway.

Eurydice and Mina exit together, hand in hand. 
Lights fade.

3.5

Death enters.
As she sings, she lights a match, then Eurydice’s 
candle, and then a smaller candle, Mina’s 
candle. Orpheus’ candle remains unlit.

Death (Singing)

We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when, 
But I'm sure we'll meet again some sunny day. 
Keep smiling through, just the way you used to do 
Till the blue skies chase the dark clouds far away.

Now, won't you please say "Hello" to the folks that I know, 
Tell 'em it won't be long, 
'cause they'd be happy to know that when you saw me go 
I was singing this song.
We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when,
But I'm sure we'll meet again some sunny day.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Death exits, leaving the two candles burning in the darkness.}

\textit{End of play.}

\textsuperscript{15}“We'll Meet Again” by Ross Parker and Hughie Charle
Appendix B:

Production Playbill
Acknowledgements

We Would Like to Thank

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Michael Korte, Michael Lincoln, Vladimir Marchenkov,
Laura Parotti, Erik Ramsey,
Lisa Summerscales, Caitlyn Zachry

The School of Theater
Director, William Fisher
Assistant Director, Maureen Wagner
Administrative Assistant, Barbara Fiocchi

The Honors Tutorial College
Dean, Jeremy Webster
Assistant Dean, Jan Hodsen
Administrative Assistant, Kathy White
Administrative Assistant, Margie Huber

The College of Fine Arts
Dean, Chuck McWeeney
Associate Dean, Joseph Lamb
Assistant Dean, Norma Humphreys
Administrative Coordinator, Sharon Ball
Budget Unit Manager, DeAnna Russell

This production is made possible through funding by the Honors Tutorial College and the College of Fine Arts Undergraduate Creative Research Fund

Orpheus
Can Love Conquer All?

February 28, March 1, March 2, 2010
The Ridges Auditorium
**The Company**

**Cast**

Orpheus................................. Eric Brakey  
Eurydice................................. Shiloh Morgenstern  
Death...................................... Dinah Berkeley  
Chorus..................................... Ashley Bossard  
........................................ Dylan Combs  
.......................................... Justin Garman  
........................................ Sonja Mata  
.............. Megan Preston  
.... Matt Van Slyke

**Management, Tech, and Design**

Director / Producer / Playwright............ Eric Brakey  
Thesis Advisor................................ Rebecca VerNooy  
Stage Manager............................... Jenna Perucco  
Assistant Directors.................. Anna Grossman, Rebekah Kay  
Dance Captain.............................. Megan Preston  
Costume Designer.......................... Chelsey O’Herron  
Lighting Designer.......................... Brad Carson  
Sound Designer............................. Evan Harney  
Dramaturgy................................. Molly Hagan  
Light Crew.................. Matthew Benjamin Ziff, Marc Mixon,  
.......................................... Sapan Katwala, Adam Suntken  
Sound Board Operator..................... Beth Miller  
Photography................................... Andrew Poland

**Director’s Note**

The earliest complete stories we have of Orpheus come from the Roman writers Virgil and Ovid. Both of these writers present a vision of Orpheus, the forlorn musician and poet, crossing the threshold between this life and the afterlife in search of his bride. Yet the Orpheus myth predates even those Roman writers: mentions of Orpheus can be found in the writings of the Ancient Greeks. While the writings of Virgil and Ovid are the widest known ancient Orpheus narratives, they are only adaptations of an earlier story. Cultures across the world and throughout history have followed the Roman example, adapting this story repeatedly. Orpheus has appeared time and again as the star of Renaissance operas and classical poems, as well as contemporary films, theatre, and literature.

The Orpheus myth has been re-imagined often in past cultures, and future cultures will continue to adapt this story because of the universal human question at its core. In this retelling of the Orpheus story, the character Death comments, “There is a particular question that gnaws at the human soul night and day.” Mankind continually returns to the Orpheus myth because the story questions the implications of human mortality. How does one love another person knowing that human life is finite? Could love exist in a world where this was not the case? How does one live life when the natural order is for all things to die?

This incarnation of the Orpheus myth humbly asks these questions. We aim not to answer them, but to examine and explore them. The answers, if there are any to be found, are left to you.

Eric Brakey

Director

“Hell lies not in torment,  
Hell lies in an empty heart.”  
-Kahlil Gibran
Appendix C: Production Calendar
Orpheus Project Production Schedule

January 2010

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- Rehearsal: 7pm – 11
- Museum: 10am-12
- Proof: 5pm-7:30
- Dinner w Friends: 5pm-9
- UPP: 8pm
- Win. Dance Concert: 8pm
- Show: 8pm
- Strike: 8pm (M1)
Appendix D:

Production Photos
Orpheus

An HTC Thesis Production
Written and Directed By Eric Brakey

The Ridges Auditorium
February 28, March 1, March 2
8:00 PM
FREE ADMISSION

Can Love Conquer All?

Free Shuttle Service Available To and From The Ridges Auditorium.
Shuttles will leave from the top of Baker Center every five minutes from 7:20-7:50.

This production made possible through funding by
The College of Fine Arts Creative Undergraduate Research Fund and The Honors Tutorial College.