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Myth Conceptions

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“It’s a Musical!”: Orpheus and Eurydice Take On the Moulin Rouge

(“A Musical”)

The Orpheus and Eurydice myth has evolved over thousands of years and has inspired much modern media. One example is *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, a stage adaptation of Baz Luhrmann’s film *Moulin Rouge!* (2001, Bazmark Productions). Luhrmann was inspired by Orpheus and Eurydice and incorporated themes from the story into his film (Hawbaker). In 2019, *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, the stage adaptation and jukebox musical, made its Broadway debut. *Moulin Rouge!* (the film) draws inspiration from Orpheus and Eurydice and explores what happens when a hero tries to rescue their love from perceived danger; however, the musical adaptation provides a retelling more relatable to current audiences because the original film is more than 20 years old.

Moulin Rouge! tells the story of Christian and Satine and Christian’s attempts to save Satine from the nightclub, the Moulin Rouge, where she is the star. Christian is a young writer who moves to Paris in 1900 (“Truth Beauty Freedom Love”). He decides to go to the Moulin Rouge so he can get a job writing, and there he meets and falls in love with Satine (“The Sparkling Diamond”, “Shut Up And Raise Your Glass”). However, Satine is being married off to the Duke by Harold Ziegler, the owner of the Moulin Rouge, because the Duke will provide enough money to turn the club into a real theater (“Sympathy For The Duke”). Satine and Christian begin to have an affair, which Christian writes into his show (“Elephant Love Medley”, “Backstage Romance”). The Duke soon recognizes the infidelity, and he threatens to kill

Christian (“Only Girl In A Material World”). Satine and Christian decide that it is in their best interest to not continue their relationship and Christian almost kills himself because he cannot be with her (“Crazy Rolling”). Christian and Satine almost escape the Moulin Rouge, but Satine ends up dying from illness. She ends the show by asking Christian to share their story with the world and tells him that she’ll love him forever (“Your Song Reprise”). *Moulin Rouge!* tells the story of Christian and Satine’s love and fate and how the two intertwine. (*Moulin Rouge! The Musical*)

Because *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* is a retelling of the original myth, many of the themes appear in both renditions. The first theme that is similar between the two is love. Christian and Satine fall in love, however, where their story differs from the myth is that they’re never allowed to be in love. Their relationship is always forbidden. Satine tries to push Christian away because she knows that they won’t be able to be together: “No no no, because you’ll be gone in a day or two.” (MRB Musical, 2019). However, she caves, and admits that she is in love with Christian: “How wonderful life is while you’re in the world.” (MRB Musical, 2019). Orpheus and Eurydice’s love is permitted but love across realms is challenging for them to maintain. Both couples face adversity in terms of their love and the continuation of it, whether they are not able to outwardly express their love or be separated by death.

The second theme prevalent in both iterations is fate and trying to change fate. In *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, Satine and Christian can never be together. There is no mention or allusion to beliefs in higher powers in the musical, but it doesn’t mean that Christian and Satine aren’t destined to not be together. Because of Christian’s status and Satine’s forced marriage to the Duke (and Satine’s untimely death), there is no feasible way for the couple to stay together. Orpheus and Eurydice also have a fate destined for them, and while it’s not quite the same story

as Christian and Satine's, it is tragic. Fate affects both couples by causing them pain and hardship within their relationship. Both groups, but mostly the men, also try to change their fate, which isn't destined for them. Orpheus travels into the Underworld to save his wife and he is actively trying to manipulate their fate. Christian clearly wants to be a hero in this story: "My heroes had the heart to lose their lives out on a limb/and all I remember is thinking 'I wanna be like them'." (MRB Musical, 2019). He wants to save Satine because he loves her but also because he believes it is his duty as a man to try to manipulate fate and rescue a woman.

The final theme that is seen in both works is rescuing one's love from perceived danger, specifically, when Orpheus attempts to save Eurydice from the Underworld and Christian tries to save Satine from the Moulin Rouge. In both instances the men are interfering with their destiny, and their attempts never end how they would like them to. Christian loses the love of his life and Orpheus dies due to the heartache he experiences from losing Eurydice. In Ovid's variation of the original myth, Orpheus and Eurydice get to spend eternity together in the Underworld: "He came upon his lost Eurydice... here now they walk together side by side... now there is no longer any danger when Orpheus looks on Eurydice." (*Metamorphoses* 11.87-94). The only closure the audience of *Moulin Rouge!* gets is that Christian will continue to tell the story of Satine and their love. This theme can also be viewed in a patriarchal/misogynistic view, because in both stories the men are saving the women without thinking about if they're capable of managing their situation on their own. Before Christian got to the Moulin Rouge, Satine had already been working there for some time, so she was probably capable of maintaining herself. Orpheus never even thinks about Eurydice's wishes and just waltzes into the Underworld to bring her back. Both men believe that they must save the women they are in love with, which could be more uncomfortable to a current audience because we have strayed farther from

traditional gender roles, so modern audiences can look at this aspect of the stories with a critical eye. Because *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* is a modern retelling of the myth, the same themes are seen in both works, however, they are shown to the audience in different ways in order to keep the story fresh and interesting.

Moulin Rouge! The Musical and the story of Orpheus and Eurydice share many themes, which one would expect, considering the movie that the musical is based on was inspired by the myth. The themes of love, fate (and trying to change fate), and rescuing love from perceived danger are large components of both stories, and both men take similar approaches just to end up with similar results. Both Christian and Orpheus fall in love with women and are then faced with circumstances that cause them to not be able to be with their love, which they then try to change, and they both fail. *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* explores Christian and Satine's love story and how they try to change their fate and stay in love but end in tragedy, which relates to how Orpheus tries to save Eurydice from the Underworld and change their fate.

Works Cited

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