

Eurydice: Dead Women Tell Tales

What is the difference between an adaptation and a retelling?

Memoire 2021/2022

Alex Evans, 2cG

Directeur de memoire: Carole Flesch

Introduction

I've been involved in theatre from an actor's perspective since I was 7. It has always been something that I enjoyed, but I've never had the opportunity to be more involved in the process of creating a production. I knew from the start that I wanted to write a play for my memoir this year; the only issue was what to write about.

A year or so ago, I read a fantastic book called "If We Were Villains", by M. L. Rio. I originally planned to adapt the first part of the book into a play, but I ran into a rather large issue. When I thought a little more about staging and the other details of adapting it, I realised that it wasn't particularly well-suited to the stage. I still think it would make a good short film, especially considering the detailed characters that really drive the plot and push each other to extremes, but a short film wasn't my goal.

When looking for other stories I could adapt that were more suited to stage performance, I rather obviously fell back on my love of Greek mythology. There are certain challenges that come with adapting stories that are so old and have been told in so many ways while keeping your retelling interesting *and* relevant to the source material, but they are challenges I think I will enjoy.

The Idea

Over the summer, I read Pandora's Jar by Natalie Haynes. It's a book that explores 10 different women in Greek myths, and how our perceptions of them have changed over time. Women like Pandora, whose story was influenced by a mistranslation and conflations with the biblical story of Adam and Eve, or Medea, who was misrepresented in the 1963 film "Jason and the Argonauts" which ended up being the only mainstream perception of her character. One of the women in the book was Eurydice, a woman whose story centers around being her husband's wife.

Haynes mentions two more modern retellings of the myth, both being poems in which Eurydice is given her own voice. The one that stuck out to me was a poem by Carol Ann Duffy, published in her collection "The World's Wife" in 1999. According to Haynes, Duffy's Eurydice isn't very fond of Orpheus. She sees him as a "self-satisfied stalker" and would much rather stay in the Underworld than follow him home, going so far as to try and trick him into turning around. The problem that Haynes highlights is that in many different versions of the myth, Eurydice doesn't get to say what she thinks, or what she wants to do in the situation. We tend to just assume that she wants the same thing he does, but we don't ever ask her.

I think the idea behind Duffy's poem is very interesting. Why hasn't anybody considered what Eurydice wants? What if she does want something different? However, the crucial difference between my perception of Eurydice and Carol Ann Duffy's is that I think she does want to be with Orpheus, to be alive. We should absolutely ask Eurydice what she thinks of the situation, not because I think that she would object but because there is such incredible tragic potential in her experience. The story of Orpheus and Eurydice is a tragedy when told from Orpheus' perspective, the idea of losing the person he loves most only to lose her again when he was so close to saving her is painful. For Eurydice, she loses the person she loves most, *and* she dies. Twice. She was so close to being able to live again, but she didn't quite make it. Orpheus and Eurydice are famously in love, and therein lies the key to their story. It is about loving, both despite and because of loss.

I wanted to give Eurydice a say in her story, I wanted to make her an independent, well-rounded woman, without having her turn away from love or femininity. An issue that I have noticed in a lot of modern media is that strong female characters often get reduced to physically strong, badass women. This can result in great characters, like Rosa Diaz in Brooklyn Nine-Nine, but it also means that many female characters (and even women in real life) must be tough, completely independent, and "not like other girls" to be worthy of respect or appreciation. It isn't anti-feminist to want love, and it isn't a bad thing if you don't. Everyone has their own desires, and I feel that there should be more variety in the women we see in media.

Although, Eurydice hasn't always been voiceless in her story. In Virgil's *Georgics*, one of the oldest surviving complete versions of the story, she is one of the only people who doesn't

speak. Admittedly, most of the story is told indirectly and not through monologues or dialogue, but her misfortune is still the main focus of the dialogue that is present. Eurydice is the only person to speak for almost all the poem, and she speaks for the first time in death. Later, Orpheus speaks too, but only to call out for Eurydice once he has been decapitated, as his head floats down a river. In the poem, the only people who speak are those who are already dead.

I combined these different things to come up with a concept for my own play. A retelling of the myth from Eurydice's perspective, where the audience could only hear the dead. For storytelling purposes, I decided that the gods would be able to speak as well, especially since they can't really be classed as living if they can't die. Once I had come up with a concept I was pleased with and felt like I wanted to work on, I could move on to the next step.

Developing the Idea

Before I could start writing, there were certain aspects of the idea that I wanted to develop further, especially things like the relationships between the characters and the more visual aspects.

Orpheus and Eurydice vs. Hades and Persephone

There are two very visible relationships in the story, that of Orpheus and Eurydice but also that of Hades and Persephone. In the play, both of these relationships are depicted in a different way, to reflect the characters and their situation.

On one hand, we have Orpheus and Eurydice. They are young, they are tragic. Their story is about them losing each other too quickly, tearing through realms to find each other only to get lost again. There are certain similarities with Romeo and Juliet, both stories show young, intense love that always ends too soon. I wanted to portray Orpheus and Eurydice's relationship as puppy love. It's sweet, it's genuine, and it has that new, "honeymoon phase" feeling to it. A key point is that they don't have enough time with each other, they never will.

On the other hand, Hades and Persephone have nothing but time. They haven't quite been around since the beginning of time, but they might as well have been. Orpheus and Eurydice's story is fraught with death, loss, and time running out, but Hades and Persephone are immortal. I wanted their relationship to feel more familiar, more domestic and less formal in moments when they are alone. I didn't want to portray them as an old married couple, because as gods they should feel ever so slightly untouchable, but they are still visibly in love with each other. They fit into each other's lives like they have always been there, and always will be.

Orpheus and Eurydice's relationship is expressed mostly through silent scenes, Eurydice's fond memories and Orpheus' desperation to find her again. Anything expressed through memories automatically seems idyllic, which adds to the puppy love feel I wanted to give them. Hades and Persephone were a little more of a challenge. Both characters have a certain duality, because they are gods, rulers of the Underworld, as well as the "people" they are in private. As rulers, they have a certain authority and a certain distance from each other and the mortals around them. However, I wanted some of the fondness they have for each other to break through, which I think it does with the teasing in scene 3. In scene 4, Persephone refers to Hades as "more like home [...] than the overworld ever was", which reflects the way they feel about each other in private.

Hades and Persephone's "meet-cute"

The story of Hades and Persephone is another well-known Greek myth, with lots of romanticised retellings. However, at its core, it is not a particularly good love story, at least not

by modern standards. Essentially, Hades kidnaps Persephone, then when her mother, Demeter, tries to get her back, he tricks her into eating a pomegranate so she has to stay in the Underworld forever. In ancient Greece, kidnapping women as a display of affection was considerably more okay than it is now, but it did leave me with a dilemma when it came to writing the play. Should I address the way Hades and Persephone first ended up together, should I let it affect the way they interact in the play? In the end, I made the decision not to include it. The story I want to tell in *Eurydice* is Eurydice's story, and I didn't want to take away from that.

Eurydice and Persephone

Another relationship I wanted to explore more is the relationship between Eurydice and Persephone. There are many aspects of their experiences that are either very similar or complete opposites, so it's very interesting to explore that. For example, both of them came to the Underworld from the Overworld, but Eurydice died and will stay in the Underworld forever, and Persephone has a little more of a choice (other than when she was kidnapped) and returns to the Overworld for half of every year. They are also both loved by someone, and the way those relationships are portrayed affects the way they relate to each other.

Charon, The Ferryman

In the play, there is a deliberate distinction between the living and the dead, especially when it comes to talking, because the audience can only hear the dead. The Ferryman, or Charon, is the Greek equivalent of what we see as the Grim Reaper. In Greek times, people would bury their dead with a coin in their mouth so they could pay the ferryman to taxi them across the river Styx (or the Acheron, depending on the version) into the Underworld. If they couldn't pay, they had to wait on the shore for a hundred years until they were allowed to cross over. This makes Charon almost a bridge between life and death. So, if Charon isn't mortal then he isn't living or dead, and despite being a minor god, he is usually recognised as a psychopomp (a guide of souls). I decided that, as a stepping stone inbetween the worlds of the living and the dead, Charon would be able to speak, but he isn't particularly chatty. The audience can hear him, and Eurydice does speak to him, but he is reluctant to have a conversation with her.

Time Period

When retelling a myth, or when putting on a production of something like Shakespeare, one of the first choices you have to make is when the story should be set. I knew from the start that I didn't want the play to be a period piece. I didn't want to have tunics or the same methodically rhythmic language that Homer wrote. On the other hand, the play is a relatively conceptual one and it works with colours and lighting and a minimal set. It would feel tacky to have a truly modernised play in that context, and I didn't want the play to be a Percy Jackson style retelling. So instead, I settled on something inbetween. I wanted the play to be more character driven, and to feel like it could have been anywhere, in any period, as opposed to ancient Greece, or

modern America. This did have its own difficulties, like trying to make sure that costumes were coherent with one another without feeling aggressively attached to a specific era.

Visuals

Like I said above, the play works with colours, lighting and a minimal set. This means that most of the detailing and a lot of the storytelling comes from the way the stage and the actors look. This influenced casting, costumes and lighting. I wanted there to be a clear visual contrast between Orpheus and Eurydice and Hades and Persephone. First of all, Orpheus and Eurydice are around the same height, but they are shorter than Hades and Persephone. On top of that, they wear different colours. Orpheus and Eurydice wear white, and Hades and Persephone wear black. The ensemble, who are the dead souls in the Underworld, wear different shades of gray. This is because they aren't alive anymore, or trying to cling onto life like Eurydice is, but they aren't gods like Hades and Persephone. For the lighting, I wanted there to be a difference between the Overworld and the Underworld. Hopefully, when it comes to a lighting rehearsal, it will be possible to have different coloured lights for both places. The Overworld should have a clear, white light and the Underworld should have a more yellowish light, to show that it feels slightly cramped and dingy, not as open as the Overworld.

Staging

Another way to distinguish between the Underworld and the Overworld is the staging. I decided to have the Underworld be more towards stage right (which is the audience's left) and the Overworld more stage left (the audience's right). However, the main issue I had with staging was how to show Orpheus and Eurydice's journey towards the Overworld. The stage is a limited space, so they couldn't really just walk from one realm to the other without the journey being over in seconds. In the Broadway musical "Hadestown" they solved this issue by having part of the stage rotate. The actors walk on it like a treadmill, which you can see in a video linked on page 55. This was definitely not a possibility for me, because it would be expensive and would permanently alter the venue. One possibility would be to have the actors walk on the spot, but I honestly cannot imagine that looking good. In the end, I cut up the journey to the Overworld into three sections. Orpheus and Eurydice will freeze, Eurydice turns slightly towards the audience to deliver a monologue, then we return to the Underworld for a few moments. When the lights go up on Orpheus and Eurydice again, they would be slightly further along than they had been before. This repeats inbetween sections, until Orpheus makes it to the Overworld, turns around, and loses Eurydice forever.

Steps of Writing

Before writing the play, I had only ever written short stories before. The kind that don't need much planning, that you can just sit down and write if you know where you want the story to go. When I attempted to write something longer, my passion for the idea always fizzled out before I could make significant progress on it, which I needed to avoid when writing this play.

Plan

The first thing I did was think about how I was going to approach it. Because the play isn't an original story, I had to make sure I incorporated all the necessary elements of the story. The way I approached it was to make a list of all the key plot points, a list that went like this:

- Silent beginning

The first scene of the play is silent, because both Orpheus and Eurydice are still alive, and so can't be understood by the audience.

- Eurydice's death

For Eurydice's death, I wanted to make sure that it didn't seem cheesy or overdramatic, because it's the start of her story rather than the end. In the play, we don't actually see Eurydice die, but from scene 2 we can hear her speak.

- Ceremony/journey to the Underworld
- Introduction of Hades + Persephone
- Relationship Persephone + Eurydice

This one isn't necessarily a plot point, but I wanted to build up the relationship between the two characters early on to highlight the differences and similarities I've already mentioned.

- Gift/Offering
- Orpheus' arrival
- Bargaining

I wasn't originally sure how to portray this. In the myth, Orpheus begs Hades for Eurydice, and they come to a compromise. Because Orpheus doesn't speak, I decided to have this discussion between Hades and Persephone instead. I wanted to make sure I avoided Persephone being very lovely, forgiving and pleasant, because she is more than just Hades' wife. She is the queen of the Underworld as well as the goddess of spring. In the play, Persephone is the one who defends Orpheus and Eurydice, for logical reasons as well as emotional, but she is also the one who proposes the catch that is their undoing.

- Journey to the Overworld
- Turn around, isolation
- Journey to the Underworld II

- Arrival
- Loss of hope, surrender

Until now, Eurydice has refused to accept the Underworld. She stays adamantly confident that things will get better, and that she will see Orpheus again. Once she loses both him and her second chance at life, she finally succumbs to her own death.

- Orpheus' arrival II

When Orpheus comes to the Underworld for the second time, he is dead. This means that he can finally be understood by the audience and is able to speak. His only line in the play is "Eurydice", to show that he isn't alive anymore and to show that Eurydice is still his priority.

Write

When it came to writing the play, I found that it was easiest to just sit down and write it in chronological order. I went from bullet point to bullet point, and then filled in any gaps later on to make sure the transitions between them were smooth and felt like a story rather than a storyboard.

There are certain things that I had to pay attention to when writing, especially since the story is an original one. I had specific versions of the characters in mind, that I felt fit both their personalities in wider mythology and their role in the play. Staying true to characterisation was something that I had to be mindful of, because they weren't characters of my own creation. When writing about original characters this isn't really an issue, because they are blank slates who can be anything, but mythological characters are already relatively well known. I think that I managed to put my own "spin" on the characters and make them my own, rather than just copies of other versions of them, although I did have to make sure that I didn't make them into something entirely different.

I also wanted to play to have a certain feel. The concept is that Eurydice is telling her own story, as opposed to the story being told from Orpheus' perspective again. I wanted it to feel like an interrupted monologue, like Eurydice is narrating (without explicitly being a narrator) but is interrupted by things unfolding in her present. I had to find the balance between monologue and dialogue, so it didn't become monotonous but still kept the "interrupted monologue" feeling.

Edit in Rehearsal

Once the play was written and rehearsals had started, there were still a few changes to be made. In the read-through, I heard the play out loud for the first time. There were certain things that were more repetitive than I wanted them to be, so a few lines were changed or even partly cut.

Adaptation or Retelling?

When I was writing the play, I realised that I didn't really know *what* I was writing. A play, yes, but I didn't come up with the story myself. Was I writing an adaptation of the original myth, or a retelling? What is the difference?

To start with, an adaptation is when you take a story and tell it using a new medium. The most well-known cases of this are usually book to screen adaptations, like the "Harry Potter" films or the Netflix series "Heartstopper", which is an adaptation of Alice Oseman's graphic novels.

There are other ways to adapt things. Dennis Kenny's award-winning musical "Matilda" is an adaptation of the Roald Dahl book, and some films are adapted into books.

A retelling is when you take a story and tell it in a new way. This can be as simple as telling it from the perspective of a different character, or changing the ending, but it can also be changed so much that you might not recognise the original story and still be a retelling. For example, George R. Martin has said that he considers "Game of Thrones" to be a retelling of the War of the Roses, which is a real historical event. Madeline Miller's "The Song of Achilles" is another very popular retelling, where the story of the Iliad is centred around Achilles and his companion Patroclus. In turn, the Iliad is a retelling of the Trojan War, which may also have been a historical event. The interesting thing about retellings is that most stories we consider to be original could also be retellings of another story. In episode 8.6 of the podcast "Writing Excuses", one of the hosts mentions that her book "Shades of Milk and Honey" has been called a retelling of Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice", even though she didn't write it as one. She goes on to argue that both books are retellings of "Beauty and the Beast", which is a retelling of Apuleius' "Cupid and Psyche".

It is possible for something to be both an adaptation and a retelling. "10 Things I Hate About You" is a 1999 romantic comedy written by Gil Junger. It is also based on Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew". The film can be classed as a retelling due to its contemporary setting and differences in characterisation. It also doesn't have the same framing device as the original play, in which the story is told as a play being put on at a party. It is also an adaptation, because the medium changes from stage production to film. To stick with Shakespeare, the 1996 "Romeo + Juliet" starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Clare Danes is usually seen as an adaptation and not a retelling, despite its contemporary setting, because it follows the original script. The 2021 film "The Tragedy of Macbeth" made by A24 (the same film studio responsible for Greta Gerwig's Ladybird, Ari Aster's Midsommar, and HBO's Euphoria) is also purely an adaptation, as it follows the original script and is set in Shakespeare's time, more or less.

I would definitely consider "Eurydice" to be a retelling. It follows an already existing story, told from the perspective of a different character, and it highlights parts of the story that aren't usually shown. I do not think that it counts as an adaptation, despite the fact that Virgil's

Georgics (which includes the oldest surviving complete version of the story) is a poem, not a play. I think this because such poems and epics were usually performed verbally and there have been so many other stage productions of Orpheus and Eurydice's story, like Hadestown. I also retold the story itself, as opposed to taking a specific non-play version of it and translating that to the stage.

Rehearsal Process

The rehearsal process was something I felt a little more sure about. I had been involved in rehearsals as an actor before, so I thought I had a vague idea of how it worked, whereas writing a play was something completely new.

Casting

Right at the beginning of this project, I knew that I couldn't follow a classic casting process. Traditionally, when the production of a performance begins, directors will invite actors to audition and choose the best person for the role. This is a very time-consuming process, and I didn't really have that much time. I also needed to be sure that I could count on the cast and that I could trust them to do what I needed them to do. For these reasons, I decided to ask people I already knew. I have known everyone in the main cast for years, both as actors and as friends, and I knew what they were capable of. The cast was already set in stone by the time I had finished writing the play.

Read-Through

A read-through is the first step of rehearsals. The cast all sit down and read the script out loud together, to help them start engaging with each other and their characters. This is also where I made final changes to the script and answered any questions the cast had.

Blocking

The next step is to block the scenes. Blocking is when you go through the script in detail and decide where the actors are going to stand and move. This is a crucial step for any production, but especially for mine, as the play is a very visual one. There is a visual difference between the Underworld and the Overworld, and I wanted the whole thing to look composed rather than casual. Something I brought into the blocking process is position to the audience. To me, when a character is turned more towards the audience, then they are more emotionally open, and when they are turned away, they are closed off. I tried to incorporate this into the staging in subtle ways. For example, Eurydice is almost always tilted towards the audience, and whenever she turns, she turns towards them. The Ferryman always turns away from the audience, and generally avoids standing directly in the light of the Overworld and the Underworld. Hades and Persephone turn in different directions depending on how they are behaving in that scene, but when they stand together, they always turn towards each other. Another way Hades and Persephone's relationship is shown visually is the way they are positioned around a podium. The podium is the only set piece, and it is used in both scenes where only Hades and Persephone are present. In scene five, when they interact with each other in a peaceful, almost domestic way they sit on it together. In scene eight, when they are fighting, they both stand at opposite ends of the podium, leaning on it as though they are arguing at a dinner table, or

disagreeing in a war room. Either way, the podium serves as a visual divide between the two, and when they make up at the end of the scene, they stand together in front of it.

Monologue Work

Eurydice has so many monologues in the play that a large part of the rehearsal process involved sitting down with the actor who plays her. We went through all of the monologues and longer lines word for word, and precisely workshopped things like tone, rhythm and emphasis.

Nonverbal Scene Work

A lot of the performance is nonverbal, especially the first scene and Orpheus' performance. For these nonverbal scenes, it was important that it didn't look like the characters were having a conversation that the audience can't hear, or like a television show with the volume off. It involved a lot of body language and facial expressions, and we ended up choreographing the first scene almost as if it were a dance. This involved a lot of trying things out and just running through it multiple times over until it stuck, but a large part of it is still improvisation. No matter how well we blocked or choreographed a scene, much of it still comes from spur-of-the-moment decisions that the actors make, especially since we didn't get to rehearse in the performance space until the very end, so everything had to be readapted.

Lighting Rehearsal

About two weeks before the performance, we had our first lighting and tech rehearsal. This involves getting the whole cast together, along with the tech team and any props that might affect lighting and staging, and running through the whole script cue for cue. The play is very dependent on lighting, so we really had to try things out and see how they looked. Sometimes there were multiple different lighting combinations in a single scene. These kinds of rehearsals can be a little frustrating or tedious as an actor, because they involve so much standing still and waiting around. As a director, it was very exciting. It was so fantastic to finally see the play start to come together, and it made me feel a lot more hopeful about what the finished project would be.

Incorporating the Ensemble

So many complications came up surrounding the ensemble when I tried to incorporate them into the rehearsal process. There were permission slips that had to be written and signed, I didn't really know how many students would be willing and able to take part, and most importantly, I had to find a member of school staff who was willing to be present on Friday night and take responsibility for any students under 18. I asked some of my teachers and members of the theatre and music departments, but I couldn't find anybody.

I realised a week and a half before the performance that I probably wasn't going to be able to find anybody and still have time to rehearse with the ensemble. In the script, the ensemble (or

The Dead) mill around the underworld and help with entrances and exits, so we couldn't just put them in the performance and hope for the best. On April 29th, I made the definitive decision to cut the ensemble from the production.

I cannot begin to describe how disappointing that was. A huge part of the original concept was reliant on the ensemble. Originally, there was supposed to be a very clear difference between the non-verbal scenes at the beginning and the moment that Eurydice stepped into the Underworld and the stage exploded with noise. It was supposed to look like the busy place it had to be, filled with souls who all have their own stories and lived their own lives. Instead, the stage is empty and much quieter than I wanted it to be. There are even a few lines that no longer make sense. For example, in scene three, Eurydice mentions that she feels as if she will "never be alone again" when she steps into the Underworld for the first time. I think I will have to change this line, but I'm not sure what to change it to.

Run-Through

On the 2nd of May, we had the final run-through. This was essentially our dress rehearsal, which is where you run through the whole performance with costumes, props and lighting as if it were the real performance. We only had a couple of hours, as it was the only time when the performance space was free. We didn't get to run it all the way through as I had hoped, because we ended up having to reset the lighting and go through all the cues again. On the whole, it didn't go badly but I definitely feel that we would have benefitted from having a "proper" top to bottom run-through aswell.

Organisation Outside of Rehearsal

Although I was fairly confident in my ability to run the rehearsal process, there were lots of things that I had to organise on top of that, some of which I hadn't even considered in advance.

Organising the Space

One of the first things I had to do was find somewhere we could perform the play. Because the project is part of my memoire, I was able to use the school auditorium, but that still had to be organised. I had to find a date that wasn't already booked, and I had to make sure I had permission from the board of directors. The process of reserving the room was a little more complicated than I had anticipated and took considerably longer than I planned for. This meant that there weren't any dates available before the deadline for my project. Thankfully, I was able to get an extension for my paper so the play could go ahead at the beginning of May.

Costumes and Props

For costumes and props, I had to work with what I had as much as I could. All of the costumes are things that I, or other actors, already owned, and I made most of the props myself.

- Flower crown

The "flower crown" that is used in the play is actually a table wreath that I bought. I had to pluck it and bend it a little to get it to fit on Eurydice's head, but it worked well enough. It looked considerably better than the kind of flower crown I had seen in stores, that looked a little more like daisy chains.

- Coin

The coin that Eurydice gives to the Ferryman to pay her passage to the Underworld is a circle of cardboard that I spray painted gold. It doesn't look like a coin close up, but from a distance it looks round and metallic. The audience will understand that it's a coin, partly because The Ferryman calls it a coin. It also looks more realistic than using a real coin, because real coins are so small that it would be difficult to tell what it is.

- Bandana

In the script, Eurydice wears a bandana. It starts off as white, but changes to grey and black as she gets more used to being in the Underworld. It would have been a lovely visual representation of that, but it ended up being scrapped for the sake of time.

- Crowns

The crowns that Hades and Persephone wear were definitely the most time consuming prop/costume pieces that I made, but I think it was worth it. The idea behind the headpieces is that they look like a mix between a crown and a halo, because of their status in the Underworld

and their status as gods. To make them, I attached different sized zip ties to a headband and painted them gold.

Advertising

Towards the very end of the rehearsal process, I had to advertise the play as well. A friend of mine, Eli Sluyter, was kind enough to make a poster for me to use. I advertised mainly through social media and word of mouth, but I also had the help of Chelsea Studios, who put up posters and advertised on the school website. Advertising was probably one of the most difficult parts of the process, because it would be disappointing if it feels like we are performing to an empty room. So far, not many people are coming to see the performance, at least not on Friday night, but I am hopeful that that will still change.

Difficulties I Faced

Throughout the project, there were a few problems that came up. Some of which were just unlucky, some were unavoidable risks and some were things that I hadn't realised needed to be done.

First of all, there were lots of things I needed to get permission for. Getting permission from the board of directors to perform in the auditorium was difficult. I didn't hear back from them for a few weeks, and if they had any potential issues, they didn't communicate them to me, so all I could do was wait. I also needed permission for the cast members who aren't Ermesinde students to be in the building, so rehearsals had to stop completely until I heard back from them, which put me weeks behind in the rehearsal process. I also needed parental permission from the parents of the students who are part of the ensemble, but I couldn't get that permission until I found a member of staff to be present for the performance in case of emergency. In the end, I had to make the decision to not have an ensemble at all. This was not an easy choice to make, but there was nothing I could do.

Other than the ensemble, the cast is relatively small. This means that if anybody was missing, then the rehearsal usually couldn't go ahead. There were multiple occasions where rehearsals had to be cancelled day-of because somebody dropped out at the last minute. In general, this made rehearsal very difficult, especially at the beginning of the rehearsal process. We missed so many rehearsals right at the beginning that we ended up starting the rehearsal process almost a month later than planned. Despite having a small cast, planning rehearsals was much harder than I had hoped it would be. There were only 5 of us in total, but we were quite restricted by everyone's different schedules, school and otherwise. This wasn't too much of an issue at the beginning, as we managed to find a day that we could meet every week. Towards the end of the rehearsal process, rehearsing once a week wasn't really enough and so this became a much more prominent issue.

Another thing that happened towards the end of the rehearsal process was the one thing that I had been hoping we wouldn't have to deal with. The actor who plays Eurydice unfortunately got covid. She was ill for a while, though ultimately fine, but we missed two whole weeks of rehearsal when it was probably most crucial to be rehearsing at all.

I am writing this passage on April 23rd, two weeks away from the play, and I feel like I am running on fumes. At the moment, I still have to finish making props, advertise, organising filming, learn my lines, have a lighting rehearsal, start to incorporate the ensemble into rehearsals, and write up most of the written part of my memoir. We haven't yet been able to do a full run through without scripts or do a single rehearsal in the performance space, and it looks as though the first time we will be able to run in through with all the different aspects will be the first performance. As well as the play, I still have to stay on top of my schoolwork and other extracurricular activities I signed up for. Everybody else in my house is covid positive, which I am trying very hard to avoid catching so I don't have to cancel the play altogether.

I have never been under this much pressure in my life. I am so in love with this idea, and so proud of the script I wrote that I want more than anything for the final product to be something I can be proud of. At the moment, I don't know if it is going to be what I hoped it would, and I'm not sure how to deal with that. I don't want to disappoint the cast, the people who are coming to see it, or myself.

When starting with this project, I had no idea just how much work it would be. Looking back, it seems foolishly optimistic to think that I could do it all by myself. There are so many tiny things that I wasn't even thinking about at the beginning that I now need to stay completely on top of, like taking bookings, advertising, and finding staff members to help out at performances. Lots of things that I really need to do can't be done until something else has been done, like how I can't rehearse with the ensemble (or have a definite idea of how many people there will be in the ensemble) until they have parental permission, but I can't ask for parental permission until I can find somebody willing to take on responsibility for them.

In professional and larger-scale productions there is a whole team of people who do what I am trying to do on my own, and I can see why. I don't know what I am doing at all, but I have jumped right into the deep end. I love this project so much, and I hope I can remember how to swim before opening night.

Before You Read

There are certain things in the play that require a little bit of background knowledge of Greek mythology, which I plan on informing the audience of.

Persephone's Name

Throughout her lifetime, the goddess Persephone is known by two names. The first is Kore (pronounced KOR-reh), which is the name given to her by her mother. It means “girl” or “maiden” in ancient Greek. When she married Hades and becomes queen of the Underworld, she became known as Persephone (pronounced pər-SEF-ə-nee) which means “bringer or death”

Ferry Fare

I mentioned this earlier, when explaining Charon’s role in the play and in mythology. In ancient Greece, dead people would be buried with a coin so they could pay the ferryman to take them across the river. If they were buried without a coin (if their loved ones couldn’t afford to spare one) or if their bodies were unburied, the Greeks believed that they would have to wander the shore for one hundred years before they could cross.

Asphodel

The Fields of Asphodel is the part of the Underworld where most souls end up after death, those who lived ordinary lives. The Mourning Fields, also referenced in the play, are home to the souls of those who wasted their lives on unrequited love (according to the *Aeneid*, another work by Virgil). Elysium is almost the Greek equivalent to heaven, where souls live a pleasant afterlife. These souls are usually close to the Gods in some way, or were exceptionally great or righteous, so they tend to be demigods or heroes, like Achilles or Peleus. Tartarus isn’t technically part of the Underworld, as it is described as being below it, but it holds the souls who are being punished in the afterlife, as well as the titans (who ruled before the Gods).

Hades' Dog

Guarding the entrance to the Underworld is a giant (usually) three-headed dog named Cerberus, who is referenced in the play as being Hades’ dog. Persephone calls him a “big ugly brute” which is intentionally teasing Hades, because Cerberus is not a large multi-headed hound on purpose. That is just one of the risks when you are the child of Echidna (a half-woman, half-snake monster) and Typhon (a monstrous giant with a hundred snake heads).

In Gaia's Name

When Orpheus first arrives in the Underworld, Hades says “Who in Gaia’s name are you?”. Gaia is the personification of the earth, so this line is like saying “who on earth are you?”. Although, the line delivery is supposed to make it sound more like “who the fuck are you?” because Orpheus’ presence in the Underworld is so strange.

Hades' Age

Persephone calls Hades “old man”, because he is the oldest of the gods (and the first to be eaten by Cronos, the king of the titans, which also means he was the last one out). Persephone, on the other hand, is the child of Zeus and Demeter and comes a generation after her husband.

Dead Women Tell Tales

The subtitle of the play “Dead Women Tell Tales” is supposed to be an opposite to the phrase “dead men tell no tales”. It’s usually used as a threat, but I thought reversing it fit quite well with the play, since Eurydice tells her story but can only do so after her death.

Eurydice: Dead Women Tell Tales

A retelling of the Greek myth

Written by Alexander A. Evans

Cast (in order of appearance)

Eurydice

Orpheus

The Ferryman (Charon)

The Dead (Ensemble)

Hades

Persephone

Scene One

This scene is silent, or mostly silent. We see two young lovers, ORPHEUS and EURYDICE dressed in white. Although the audience can't hear what they're saying, we can tell that they're the love of each other's lives. They laugh, and run around a bit. ORPHEUS picks EURYDICE up and spins her around, then they slowly calm down. He gives her a flower crown. This scene needs to be workshopped in rehearsal with the actors, as it is non verbal. It's important that it doesn't look as though the characters are having a conversation we just aren't a part of - it is an entirely different kind of exchange. They are visibly at peace with each other and their environment.

The lights go out.

Scene Two

When the lights come back up, the atmosphere has changed. ORPHEUS is kneeling down facing stage right, head bowed. EURYDICE is stood by his back, visibly confused. She isn't wearing the flower crown any more. For the first time, we hear someone speak.

EURYDICE

Orpheus?

ORPHEUS doesn't respond or even recognise that she has spoken. Like how the audience couldn't hear their conversation in scene one, he can't hear EURYDICE.

EURYDICE

Orpheus, please. Talk to me, Orpheus.

She turns slightly towards the audience. She doesn't directly address the audience, she speaks but not to them.

EURYDICE

He doesn't hear me. Why doesn't he hear me? Is he playing a joke on me? Orpheus, this isn't funny. Don't be cruel.

Please, talk to me. Say anything, anything at all. Do you know me no longer? Man of your word, you promised you'd never tire of me.

ORPHEUS picks up her flower crown, briefly holds it in the air then places it down, on a river. EURYDICE doesn't want to let it go, tries to grab it but can't.

EURYDICE

Orpheus, what are you doing? That was a gift, that was from you! I do not wish to be rid of it. Please, my love, don't abandon me. Are you alright? Do you feel ill?

ORPHEUS holds a coin in the air, and places it with the flower crown. The audience should realise now that he is holding her funeral, as per Greek tradition.

EURYDICE

A Drachma? Orpheus, please, talk to me!

EURYDICE picks it up and holds it high above her head to see it in the sunlight, and so the audience can properly see that it's a coin. From the other side of the stage, a voice calls from the darkness. It is the FERRYMAN, her ride to the underworld. He speaks, then steps into the light.

FERRYMAN

He can't hear you.

EURYDICE

Please, sir. Help me, I beg. There's something wrong.

FERRYMAN

It's not my business to interfere with mortals and their ill-fated affairs, I cannot even address the living. What's your name, girl?

EURYDICE realises who she's talking to.

EURYDICE

I'm Eurydice.

FERRYMAN

Always a shame to meet one so young. Do you understand how this works?

EURYDICE

I think so. Either I pay and you take me, or I can't and I stay in the overworld.

FERRYMAN

That's the idea. Left in this realm forever - endless as the cosmos itself.

EURYDICE looks back at ORPHEUS

EURYDICE

And if I never went? I could stay by his side, as I promised to do. Now is my chance, the time to say no. I love him, I cannot leave him. I could walk the meadows with him instead of the fields of Asphodel until the day he dies.

What then? Would we walk along this river together once more? Would he stay here, with me? He would. He promised. He would choose me, just as I chose him. But I have no way of knowing how long I'll walk before I can hold him again.

Is it more painful to be separated from him for as many years as it takes or to watch him from afar? Between life and death, watching from afar. Lost in an inbetween.

Orpheus, my love, it wasn't supposed to end like this.

FERRYMAN

Come on, girl, I have other collections to make. Don't be a fool.

EURYDICE

A fool for him, perhaps, but I am not a fool.

FERRYMAN holds his hand out

FERRYMAN

My payment. The coin.

EURYDICE looks back at ORPHEUS just for a moment, then hands over the coin.

EURYDICE

I love him, and yet I must leave him.

The lights go down, but the scene isn't over yet.

FERRYMAN

Come.

Silence, for a while.

EURYDICE

I didn't even get to say goodbye

FERRYMAN

No one ever does.

More silence.

EURYDICE

Have you ever been in love?

A question asked by a young girl. The FERRYMAN does not respond. He couldn't if he wanted to.

Scene Three

The lights go up on the other side of the stage.

FERRYMAN

This is as far as I go.

EURYDICE steps into the outside of the light, but she is not yet completely illuminated.

EURYDICE

And now I'm alone. Here, on the edge of death, my only thoughts are for Orpheus. With him by my side, I could never need more. His voice, the ring of his laugh. I have barely left, and yet I miss him.

The pain of death is more than I have ever had to endure, yet without him the thrumming of loss in my chest feels ever present, almost worse. When my end came, it was quick. I was over almost before I'd begun.

Standing here, I am only a step from eternity. Everyone ends in this place, walking through Asphodel. Yet without him, I don't think I will ever feel anything other than alone.

She steps into the light of the underworld, and the room explodes with noise. All around the stage and all around the auditorium, people are talking. The underworld is filled with hundreds upon thousands of spirits, each one of them the imprint of a once-living person. Every single one of them is talking, they all have stories to tell or messages to give. The contrast between the silent world of the living and the awkward almost-conversation of the journey has to be huge. The underworld is filled with people, all of them dead. The noise dies down slightly so the audience can hear EURYDICE speak over them, but it doesn't stop.

EURYDICE

Then all of a sudden, I feel as if I will never be alone again.

She is jostled around by THE DEAD, pushed back and forth as they move around. They are almost intrigued by her, but they pay her no mind. They see this all the time. Slowly, their whispers become the word "new" over and over again. EURYDICE eventually gets pushed into the middle, and THE DEAD clear away from her ever so slightly. The whispers get louder and louder - new, new, new - until two new characters arrive on the scene. THE DEAD part for them, and once they are in view the whispering stops immediately.

EURYDICE

This place, it's-

She realises that the whispering has stopped and turns around. She recognises HADES and PERSEPHONE and drops to her knees, apologetic.

EURYDICE

Lord Hades, forgive me, I didn't know-

HADES

Quiet, girl.

The whispering starts again (new, new, new) but HADES waves a hand and it stops immediately.

HADES

I said quiet. What's your name, girl?

EURYDICE

It's Eurydice.

HADES

Lovely. Now move.

PERSEPHONE

Don't be so harsh, darling, she doesn't know where she is. You wouldn't know what that's like.

PERSEPHONE's statement is loaded, but she looks at HADES and smiles. In comparison to ORPHEUS and EURYDICE's relationship, theirs isn't as openly visible. ORPHEUS and EURYDICE's is puppy love and open affection, but theirs had a very different beginning and so manifests itself through gentle teasing and begrudging affection. Crucially, they have all the time in the underworld. They will never end.

PERSEPHONE helps EURYDICE to her feet.

PERSEPHONE

Here. You'll find your way soon enough, Eurydice.

EURYDICE

Thank you, my lady. I apologise.

PERSEPHONE

Go now.

EURYDICE goes, and THE DEAD move around once more. They cover HADES and PERSEPHONE and they exit. THE DEAD swirl around like they did when EURYDICE first arrived. She moves towards centre stage, slowly.

EURYDICE

These fields are larger than I could ever know, no matter how many eternities I spend walking here. Could there be coves hidden from view? Bays with clear water just beyond the horizon? Or is it just fields of wheat, the coves always hidden and the bays always beyond the horizon, no matter how long I spend walking towards them?

I suppose it doesn't make a difference. Truly, I have no need for secret coves or deep blue bays. Not without Orpheus. He takes so much joy in those little things. He watches the way blossoms tumble off the trees with the joy of a child. The world is his muse, and the music he makes mimics her sound. I have been so lucky as to know him, and I will be so lucky again.

The world herself cannot keep him, cannot keep us apart. She may try, but she cannot. I have not ended up in the Mourning Fields, so I know that he longs for me as I long for him. How much longer will it be? I know he will not come for me, he couldn't if he tried, but the Ferryman comes for us all in turn.

Maybe he will come for me, maybe I'll see the world once more.

No. He can't, I won't.

The lights fade to black, very briefly.

Scene Four

When the lights come back up, EURYDICE is sitting down.

EURYDICE

This place doesn't get any easier to bear.

She sits in silence. It's awkward. It's painful. It's waiting.

PERSEPHONE

Eurydice?

She stands up abruptly, but PERSEPHONE motions for her to sit back down.

EURYDICE
Lady Persephone

PERSEPHONE

You don't seem to be adjusting very well.

EURYDICE

(sincerely)

I am not, thank you.

PERSEPHONE sits down beside her.

PERSEPHONE

I admire your resilience, but I think we both know that you can't keep this up forever.

EURYDICE

I suppose not. I can try.

PERSEPHONE sighs, and they sit in silence for a short while.

EURYDICE

I do not know how you bear this place, let alone how you can bear to reign over it. Isn't your mother a goddess of springtime and fruits of the earth? Do you not miss her?

PERSEPHONE

I see you've never met my mother. Of course I miss the overworld, but you forget that I'm only here for half of the year. It's nice to visit my mother, though I miss her less.

EURYDICE

I miss my mother.

PERSEPHONE

Is she here?

EURYDICE

I don't know.

More silence. It gets slightly more comfortable every time.

PERSEPHONE

Eurydice, you really ought to try and belong here.

EURYDICE

I don't! I belong up there, alive!

PERSEPHONE

I know how you feel, believe me, I know. At the very least, you were aware that you'd find yourself here one day.

EURYDICE

It wasn't meant to be so soon.

PERSEPHONE

It never is. When you're so young, the Underworld feels like the worst place in the cosmos. Sometimes, the only thing you can do is leave the old version of you behind. It's difficult, but adjusting is the only way to stay sane here.

EURYDICE realises what she means

EURYDICE

"Bringer of death"

PERSEPHONE

That's me.

EURYDICE

So I should change my name?

PERSEPHONE

You know that isn't what I mean.

Silence.

EURYDICE

I truly hate this place. How am I supposed to stay here? Just me, all alone, walking for all eternity. I don't even know how to be on my own anymore, it's been so long. I don't think I would know how not to be alone either. It has been so long since anything, anything at all.

These fields of wheat are unbearable. All I can see is plains of greyish-gold, all I can feel is the scratches of the crops around my legs, the biting chill of the wind.

If I weren't already dead, I am certain that this afterlife would kill me.

PERSEPHONE

It feels like your world is ending, and in some way it is. I promise you, it won't be so bad for the rest of time. You'll find something or someone, and they will ground you. They'll show you the way things work, help you find your footing. Then one day, you'll realise that they've become more like home to you than the overworld ever was.

Eventually, the wind will become more comfort than cold.

EURYDICE

What if I already found that someone, and left them behind? The someone you speak of, Orpheus was my anchor. Now I do nothing but wait for him, hope that he'll find me when he arrives.

PERSEPHONE

Orpheus?

EURYDICE

A boy I know.

PERSEPHONE

A boy you knew.

Silence, heavier than before.

PERSEPHONE

I must leave you now, but please, think about what I said. I promise I only want to help you.

She stands up and turns to leave, then EURYDICE stands too.

EURYDICE

Lady Persephone?

PERSEPHONE turns back to her.

EURYDICE

I'm sorry. About your mother.

PERSEPHONE smiles briefly, then leaves.

Scene Five

THE DEAD swirl around, and EURYDICE disappears into the crowd. This time, we follow PERSEPHONE. THE DEAD part for her, and she leaves the stage entirely (upstage left). THE DEAD slowly disperse, then when nobody is left on stage, she reenters (downstage left).

PERSEPHONE

Hades?

Hades looks up from where he sits.

HADES

Welcome home, my love.

PERSEPHONE sits down beside him.

HADES

Where were you?

PERSEPHONE

With that girl, Eurydice. I worry.

HADES

You're too good for this job.

PERSEPHONE

Oh, please. You'd get nothing done without me.

HADES

I know, I know.

PERSEPHONE

What have you been doing?

HADES

Nothing out of the ordinary. I walked the dog.

PERSEPHONE

That big ugly brute.

HADES pouts, PERSEPHONE smiles. Ad libbed dialogue, this should be playful teasing between Hades and Persephone to give their relationship a familiar and more domestic feel, and slightly break up the flow of the piece.

HADES

You know, an offering came through today. For one of the deceased.

PERSEPHONE

An offering? We haven't had to deliver one of those in as many winters as I can remember.

HADES

Seems like somebody cares for your Eurydice very much.

PERSEPHONE

Eurydice?

HADES

Eurydice.

PERSEPHONE

Oh, I hope for her sake it's the boy. The poor girl's going mad.

HADES

A boy? Poor thing.

PERSEPHONE

What is it? Can I bring it to her?

HADES

If you wish. It's a flower headdress, I believe. Handmade.

PERSEPHONE

Young love. Remember us?

HADES

Darling, we're almost as old as the earth.

PERSEPHONE

Even you were young once, old man.

HADES

Not when I knew you, aren't you the young one?

PERSEPHONE

Not now I know you.

Ad libbed dialogue, same as before.

PERSEPHONE

I'll take the offering to Eurydice before I leave

HADES

I wish you wouldn't leave

PERSEPHONE

I'll be home before you know I'm gone.

HADES

Oh please, I'll get nothing done without you.

The lights fade to black.

Scene Six

The lights come up, and PERSEPHONE stands amongst THE DEAD again, holding the flower crown and possibly a suitcase. She walks towards the front of the stage and they part for her, and eventually reveal EURYDICE, who is lying down. The bandana on her head is now grey instead of white, as a visual representation of her losing hope and becoming accustomed to the Underworld.

PERSEPHONE

Hello, Eurydice

She sits up.

EURYDICE

My lady.

PERSEPHONE

I have something for you, you've been left an offering.

EURYDICE

An offering?

PERSEPHONE

An offering.

She holds out the crown and EURYDICE's face lights up. She recognises it.

EURYDICE

I knew he wouldn't leave me all alone!

PERSEPHONE

Is it his?

EURYDICE

It's mine. It was a gift from him, however long ago.

She removes her bandana, and replaces it with the crown.

PERSEPHONE

I won't be around for a while, but I hope you'll still consider my advice.

Beat

PERSEPHONE

I'm visiting my mother.

PERSEPHONE leaves, and is swallowed by THE DEAD on her way out. We stay with EURYDICE once more.

EURYDICE

Oh, Orpheus. I knew he wouldn't forget me! And these flowers, they're still so beautiful, so full of life.

And Persephone. How can she want me to accept my fate when he's still out there? How do I just sit here and wither when he still cares? I know she means no harm, but I do not wish to be miserable.

He will come back, he has to. He may not be able to reach me from the Overworld, but he is a boy, not a God. One day, he will become a man, then a very old one, and then I will see him again. He isn't some hero, he's a boy.

EURYDICE speaks this last sentence differently than others might. She speaks of heroes with disdain and "a boy" with so much hope and admiration.

EURYDICE

There is beauty in mortality. I can see it even now, and the end of our brief dance together. Is death not the reason I love him so freely, so fiercely? The Gods in all their glory can never know what it is like to love in defiance of loss. Could Apollo love this ardently? Could Selene? I do not think so.

Beat

EURYDICE

I will see him again. Thanatos may be keeping us apart for now, but he will be the one to reunite us soon enough.

I promise you, Orpheus, I won't lose hope again.

She sits down silently. After a few moments she takes off her flower crown and places it gently in her lap, then replaces her grey bandana.

EURYDICE

No matter how long it takes.

The lights go down but the scene isn't over yet. We hear Hades' voice booming through the darkness.

HADES

Who in Gaia's name are you? How did you get here?

Scene Seven

When the lights come up, EURYDICE's bandana is entirely black. HADES comes through the crowd and THE DEAD part, but stop moving and leave a pathway behind him.

HADES

Are you Eurydice?

EURYDICE

Yes, my lord. What-

ORPHEUS comes running through the crowd. He can't speak, but he's overjoyed.

EURYDICE

Orpheus! What happened?

The two of them try and interact, and the focus shifts to PERSEPHONE, who enters and walks towards HADES.

PERSEPHONE

I came as soon as I heard

HADES
Persephone.

PERSEPHONE

What happened, love?

HADES

I don't-

Eurydice gasps loudly from across the stage

EURYDICE

You aren't dead.

PERSEPHONE whispers something to HADES and they leave, and EURYDICE sits down with ORPHEUS.

EURYDICE

You're not dead! And you came back for me. Oh, I knew you wouldn't leave me here.
How did you do it? Did you bribe the ferryman? Did you swim, did you walk?

You truly came back for me.

She laughs, it's incredible. There's a brief, comfortable silence.

EURYDICE

How long has it been?

More silence, EURYDICE seems to finally realise that ORPHEUS can't speak to her. It isn't a dramatic eureka moment, more like becoming aware of something that is a mild inconvenience at most.

EURYDICE

It doesn't matter, none of it matters anymore. You're here now, and that's all that will ever matter again. Can you stay?

ORPHEUS takes her hands in his

EURYDICE

I don't think I can leave.

She lies down and puts her head in his lap.

EURYDICE

It'll be alright.

The lights go down

Scene Eight

When the lights come up, HADES and PERSEPHONE are alone again.

HADES

He's here for the girl.

PERSEPHONE

I know.

HADES

How did this happen?

PERSEPHONE

She's been insisting he'd come for her one day, though I think she meant in death.
What are you going to do?

HADES

She stays here, and he has to leave.

PERSEPHONE

You know you can't do that

HADES

How's your mother?

PERSEPHONE

My mother is fine, but we have other things on our hands.

HADES

I've told you, I'm sending him away. I can't cater to every mortal man who waltzes in here, and let him leave with the souls of the dead.

PERSEPHONE

Need I remind you that you and I are hardly the most popular of the gods? We aren't Olympians, love, we don't have the luxury of doing whatever we please.

HADES

He may have made his way down here but he is still just a man.

PERSEPHONE

You know just as well as I do that that isn't the case. He may be mortal but he has done something no one ever has, he has made himself a legend.

HADES

There are more than enough legends already

PERSEPHONE

And now there's another. Whatever we do now will reflect on us for eternity, long after Thanatos comes for him. Mortals die, but stories don't. Do you intend to be the villain for all of history?

HADES

What do you expect me to do? I can't just let him whisk her away to the Overworld, we'll be overrun by first light. Mortals aren't unreasonable, they'll understand.

PERSEPHONE

For now, perhaps. One day the intricacies of the affair will be lost in translation. Orpheus will no longer be a man, merely a memory. How much of a man truly remains in the legacy he leaves behind? We need their favour, Hades.

HADES

I need their favour. You're the goddess of spring.

PERSEPHONE

I'm the reason for its absence.

HADES

You wouldn't be considering letting him leave if it was anyone else. If it weren't for your attachment to the girl we wouldn't be discussing it.

PERSEPHONE

My judgement isn't clouded.

HADES

But you see yourself in her.

PERSEPHONE

I do. What of it? She doesn't belong here, not yet. We can't just let them leave, but we cannot keep her here without consequence. You never leave this place, you don't know how feeble their affections are. He has made himself more than mortal through his actions alone, and now she can be alive again. Who are we to keep that from her?

HADES

I'm sure you know all about life, Persephone. You aren't Kore any more.

PERSEPHONE

No matter how I try to bury Kore, she is still my mother's daughter, and the best thing my mother ever did for me was give me a chance. I'm not that girl any more, I haven't been in a long time. Eurydice is, though.

HADES

We cannot allow mortals to bring loved ones back from the Underworld, you know that.

PERSEPHONE

I'm not a fool, darling, I wouldn't make it easy.

HADES smiles

HADES

Of course not.

PERSEPHONE

He trusts her, surely? Then let him trust her. Trust that she will follow until they are beyond our reach.

HADES

And if he doesn't?

PERSEPHONE

Then she doesn't leave.

beat

HADES

Absolving us of blame.

beat

HADES

This needs to work, love. There is so much at stake here.

PERSEPHONE

We can't control that. It has been so since he arrived.

HADES

I trust you.

He takes one of her hands in his, and she touches the other to his face.

PERSEPHONE

I'm not going anywhere.

The lights go down

Scene Nine

When the lights come up again, ORPHEUS and EURYDICE are stood at the edge of the Underworld, preparing to leave. HADES and PERSEPHONE emerge through the crowd of THE DEAD, and HADES commands their silence.

HADES

(to ORPHEUS)

You get one chance. Do not return to this place until it is time.

ORPHEUS looks at EURYDICE once more, then drops her hand and steps into the darkness.

EURYDICE

(to PERSEPHONE)

I know this was you, Lady Persephone. I am indebted to you.

PERSEPHONE

You flatter me. Now go, before I change my mind.

EURYDICE follows ORPHEUS into the darkness. We stay in the Underworld for a few more moments.

HADES

You were right. Life becomes her.

PERSEPHONE

As death becomes you.

Silence

PERSEPHONE

Hades?

He looks over at her.

PERSEPHONE

Thank you.

Scene 10

The lights go down in the Underworld, and come up again on ORPHEUS and EURYDICE. They have separate spotlights, his is brighter than hers.

EURYDICE

I'm coming, Orpheus, I'm here.

EURYDICE reaches out for ORPHEUS' hand, but she misses. They both take a few steps forward. ORPHEUS freezes, and EURYDICE turns towards the audience. Once again she speaks in their direction, but not directly to them.

EURYDICE

This is all I have wanted for so long, and it's so close now. Everything from before is enveloped in mist in my mind. All I remember is Orpheus. Moments of him, with him.

Sunlight on his face and wind in his hair, and now he's here. Right here, with me.

I'm never leaving him again. I'll never take him for granted.

And life! Nobody ever gets second chances, except for me. I had such incredible fortune.

I had Lady Persephone.

Whatever she did for me, it will not go to waste. Once I reach the Overworld every man, woman and child will know her name, her kindness.

I may not remember my mother, but I don't think I need to anymore.

The lights go down on ORPHEUS and EURYDICE, and come up on the Underworld, where HADES commands THE DEAD to move. He and PERSEPHONE push through, and THE DEAD start swirling and chattering again. They say "Orpheus" "Eurydice" and "gone" over and over again.

The lights go down on the Underworld and come up again on ORPHEUS and EURYDICE. This time they are further along the stage, closer to the Overworld. She tries to take his hand again, but misses like before.

EURYDICE

Every step I take is euphoric. I can feel life rushing back into my bones, colouring my cheeks.

I had thought rebirth would hurt. I thought it would feel like falling apart and being pulled back together all at once, collapsing in on myself and being turned the right way round again. But I've never felt so at peace.

The closer I get to the light of day, the less I fear. I have nothing to fear, not anymore. I have been to Hades and back, judged by Gods and saved by them.

With Orpheus by my side and the past truly behind me, I cannot be hurt. The fates will weave my story until its end, and I say let them! I won't see those cold, grey fields for years, and Orpheus will be with me when I do.

For once, I have all the time in the world.

The lights switch to the Underworld again. THE DEAD are swirling and chattering, but they no longer speak of EURYDICE. They have not forgotten, but they are back to more or less business as usual. The journey to the Overworld on foot is long, the excitement has passed. After a few moments, we switch back to ORPHEUS and EURYDICE, who are very nearly in the Overworld.

EURYDICE

We're almost there, I can feel it. The anticipation is so strong, it's overwhelming. I can think of nothing but the sun on his face, feeling it on mine again. I want to feel the rain, the wind, the warmth. Anything but the biting cold of the Underworld and the damp darkness of this path. I'm so close.

A bright white spotlight (like in Scene One) comes up on stage right.

EURYDICE

Is this what divinity feels like? A body full of new life and a soul full of love?

She reaches for ORPHEUS' hand, and brushes it. He realises, but concentrates on looking forwards.

EURYDICE

Orpheus!

He steps into the sunlight, and his spotlight goes out (to show that he's no longer in the tunnel, he is still more than visible). He breathes a sigh of relief and turns around.

EURYDICE is not yet out of the tunnel. ORPHEUS' face is one of terror, he is distraught. The light goes out, and EURYDICE is left alone, illuminated only by her spotlight. The shock knocks her a few steps backwards.

EURYDICE

No. No, no, no, Orpheus! Orpheus!

Beat

EURYDICE

I was so close.

The lights go down.

Scene Eleven

The lights come back up, showing the length of the “tunnel”. HADES and PERSEPHONE stand at one end, near stage left. EURYDICE comes running towards PERSEPHONE, who takes a few steps forwards and catches her in her arms.

EURYDICE is crying.

EURYDICE

I didn't even get to say goodbye.

Beat

PERSEPHONE

No one ever does.

PERSEPHONE lets her go, and takes her by the hands. She leads her down to the Underworld, and HADES follows behind. The lights go down, then come up again in the Underworld, where THE DEAD move around. There is space for EURYDICE downstage, and she is sitting down. PERSEPHONE crouches next to her, and HADES is stood to the side.

PERSEPHONE

You'll be okay?

EURYDICE

In time.

PERSEPHONE

I cannot stay, but I will return.

EURYDICE nods, and PERSEPHONE leaves. Before following her, HADES turns to EURYDICE.

HADES

I'm sorry it ended like this.

He leaves.

EURYDICE

If that was divinity, then I am truly wretched. Never have I been so close to salvation, only for it to be pulled from my grasp.

When I first arrived here I felt worse than I had ever felt before. Now I have been through it all again, and the pain increased tenfold. Maybe one day someone will have the luck I did not. Maybe she will make it out of this awful place, feel the grass under her feet again. Maybe she will find her lover, stay with them under the stars.

I will rejoice for her when her time comes, but she will not be me. Knowing that is killing me all over again.

Beat

EURYDICE

Lady Persephone was right. I must give in to this place, for my own sake.

The lights go down

Scene Twelve

The lights come back up. EURYDICE is wearing a black bandana. THE DEAD are swirling around, chattering. Slowly, their words turn into “Orpheus” over and over again. They build in a crescendo. Someone is pushing through the crowd. EURYDICE stands up and the voices stop abruptly.

EURYDICE

Orpheus?

ORPHEUS pushes his way to the front.

ORPHEUS

Eurydice.

He falls out of the crowd. ORPHEUS and EURYDICE move towards each other quickly (not quite running), and hug tightly. A very brief moment after they connect, the lights go out.

CURTAIN

The Performances

As the director, the first performance did not go very well. There were some issues with the lighting which resulted in one of Eurydice's monologues being skipped completely. Hades and Persephone's fight scene (scene 8) didn't go as planned either, as one of the actors forgot their lines on stage. This was the first time we had done the whole play from start to finish, and it went about as well as I would have expected a dress rehearsal to go. There were higher stakes, as it was a performance with an audience, so I do think that it would have been beneficial to have a dress rehearsal beforehand. To me, the most disappointing thing about the first performance was that this was the one that was being filmed by Chelsea Studios. It is frustrating that the best video of the play shows the worst performance. However, a few people who were in the audience gave me very positive feedback, so I think that if I didn't know how the play was supposed to go, these things wouldn't have bothered me at all. It was a good performance, but it wasn't what I had hoped it would be.

The video of the first performance is available to watch here: tinyurl.com/eurydice-night-1

The second performance, which was the performance that was open to the public, went considerably better. There were a few hiccups in places, which is always to be expected, but things ran more or less smoothly. There weren't any big mistakes or scene changes, and I am very pleased with how it went. We ended up filming this performance too, and although the video quality isn't great, the performance quality is definitely better.

The video of the second performance is available to watch here: tinyurl.com/eurydice-night-2

Conclusion

This project was so much more than I thought it would be, in so many ways. First of all, I had no idea just how much work it would be. I put a lot of pressure on myself to get it done well and on time, and there was so much more involved in it than I realised at the beginning. I expected that I would know what to do because I had been involved in so many productions, but I have learned so much throughout the whole process. Secondly, I had no idea just how good the play would be. When I first started writing, it was just a concept in my mind and to see it come to life in the way it did was truly incredible. Despite a few disappointing changes that I had to make, the play ended up being so much better than I had imagined. Seeing it go from being an idea I had to a fully-fledged performance just because I had worked to make it one was an amazing feeling. I put so much of myself into this piece, and it means so much that I was able to share it with others.

I love the play I have written. There are so many details I would have loved to further explore in this memoir, so many parallels, references and inspirations that are all included in the text. I have always been good with words, but these are some of the best words I have ever written. I am so in awe of what I was able to create.

I can't say that I have plans to write and create another play any time soon, because to me, this piece was more about bringing the idea to life in the best way possible than writing a play. If I had another idea, I would definitely see it through as best I could, and there is knowledge from this production that I would be able to put to good use if I ever do, but I'm not going to push myself to find that idea for the sake of doing it again.

I want to thank everyone who was involved in this production, the people who helped it become what it was. Those people are the theatre company at Ermesinde, Felix Weis (who was responsible for lighting), the fantastic cast (Caroline Eberwein as Eurydice, Jack Guilfoyle as Orpheus, Emilie Berg as The Ferryman and Daire Kenny as Hades), and George Stiles, a West End composer and producer who was so encouraging during the writing process.

Sources

Haynes, Natalie. *Pandora's Jar: Women in the Greek Myths*. First published 2020 by Picador, London.

Virgil. *Georgics*. Translated by Peter Fallon and Elaine Fantham. This edition was published in 2006 by Oxford University Press, USA.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Translated by Charles Martin. This edition was published in 2005 by the W. W. Norton Company.

Duffy, Carol Ann. *The World's Wife*. This edition was published in 2014 by Pan Macmillan, UK.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charon>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychopomp>

<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/kore>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persephone#Name>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_underworld#cite_note-bux-46

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cerberus>

Hadestown's rotating stage: (video from TheaterMania's Facebook page)

<https://www.facebook.com/theatermania/videos/hadestown-broadway-wait-for-me-reprise/172586436993963/>

<https://writingexcuses.com/2013/02/10/writing-excuses-8-6-retellings-and-adaptations/> (This source is a podcast. A transcription can be found at
<https://wetranscripts.livejournal.com/70759.html>)

<https://the-take.com/read/how-did-the-wars-of-the-roses-inspire-a-game-of-thrones>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/10_Things_I_Hate_About_You

<https://screenrant.com/10-things-i-hate-about-you-shakespeare-differences/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romeo_%26_Juliet

<https://a24films.com/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cupid_and_Psyche