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The Black Orpheus Analysis

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September 19, 2010

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American photographer, Ansel Adams suggests, “Myths and creeds are heroic struggles to comprehend the truth in the world” (Adams). Mythology allows people to learn about and understand various components of life. Famous Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice has been modernly adapted in the 1959 film, *The Black Orpheus*, taking place in Brazil during the Carnaval season. The main character engaged to be married, Orfeu, fatefully falls in love with Eurydice, a young lady escaping evil that follows her by staying with her cousin Seraphina. There are several components of this film that allude to Greek mythology as well as the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice.

The classic Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice has been told for centuries, and continues to be told in with a modern twist in this film. The audience is immediately able to recognize that the story about to be told is that of Greek mythology because at the introduction of the film when the title appears, an ancient Greek male and female engraved in stone are briefly displayed as the background. One may speculate that this image is representative of Orpheus and Eurydice. The movie then continues with the celebration of Carnaval on the streets in a city in Brazil. Music is highly significant in this movie especially during the carnival season as well as a reference to the mythological character Orpheus. As the son of Apollo and the muse Calliope, Orpheus was born with a creative talent with his charming and luring music he would

play. In the film, Orfeu has this skill of the arts as well. It is Orfeu's guitar playing that attracts Eurydice. He sings and plays with great harmony, in which Eurydice is humbled by, and the children of the city look up to him as a role model.

Prior to Orfeu learning of Eurydice's name, he goes to get his marriage license with his fiancée Mira. At the courthouse, Orfeu tells the clerk his name. The clerk then teases Orfeu about who his fiancée should not be someone named Mira, but rather someone named Eurydice. The clerk does this because he knows about the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and the love story they are known for. Later that day, Eurydice coincidentally goes to her cousin's house, which happens to be next door to Orfeu's house. The two see each other, and their destined love together fully is put into place when Orfeu plays a song for her with his majestic voice and smooth guitar skills.

Meanwhile, Eurydice comes to this town hiding from the man who is trying to kill her. During a celebration filled with dancing, joy, and music, the man hunting for Eurydice spots her behind her veil. The man chases her into a warehouse, where Eurydice is accidentally shocked to death when Orfeu turns the power onto the electrical wire. Frantic and troubled, Orfeu could not bear the thought that his love was dead. He then went the top floor of a building containing information about missing people.

Several mythological references appear in these scenes. In the myth of Orpheus, he descends into the Underworld in order to get Eurydice back. Hades, god of the Underworld, strikes a deal with Orpheus that he can take Eurydice, under one condition; Orpheus must not look back at Eurydice until they reach the daylight. Forgetting the deal, Orpheus does turn back to be sure she was following him, and at this point, Orpheus loses Eurydice to the Underworld

(Orpheus). The movie also includes a scene which is very similar to that of the myth. In despair, as the janitor working in the building of Missing Persons leads him down a dark descending spiral staircase then to a house in order to perform a ritual with the purpose of connecting Orfeu to Eurydice's soul. One may compare the similarities between Orfeu descending down the dark staircase to when Orpheus ventures to the Underworld. Prior to entering an obscure house, Orfeu is greeted by a fierce dog which happens to be named Cerberus. As in Greek mythology, Cerberus is the name of the three-headed dog that guards the gates of Hades (Lindemans). When Orfeu enters a room with a crowd of people chanting so that they may reconnect with their lost ones, Orfeu begins his chant, and connects with Eurydice. However, Eurydice warns him not to turn around and look at her because if he did so, she would never be able to reach out to him again. Unable to resist the temptation, Orfeu looks behind him and sees an elderly woman speaking with the voice of Eurydice, then abruptly quitting the spiritual connection, Orfeu loses Eurydice forever just like in the myth.

Debilitated after finally receiving Eurydice's body from the morgue, he ascends up a mountain cradling her in his hands. Mira, standing on top of the mountain is enraged when she sees him with Eurydice. She picks up a stone, and without thought, throws it at Eurydice and misses, hitting Orfeu in the head. Orfeu falls off the cliff, finally landing in a bush with Eurydice still in his hands as they lie dead together. The children, whom admired Orfeu and his music, conclude the movie by playing and dancing to the music on Orfeu's guitar while making "the sun rise".

As Ansel Adams once stated, it is important to have myths in this world just for the simple reason to explain components of life. The film, *The Black Orpheus*, modernly alludes to the great Greek myth of Orpheus and his love Eurydice. Analyzing this film may help better

understand the Greek myth, as well as the ability to create a contemporary version of it.

Elements of the film are influenced by various aspects of the culture of mythology, especially pertaining to this particular story.

Works Cited

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