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A Ticket to the Underworld: Classical Reception and Hadestown

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ABSTRACT

The 2019 Broadway musical, *Hadestown*, tells the stories of two sets of ancient lovers—the mortals, Orpheus and Eurydice, alongside the gods, Hades and Persephone—within a dystopian, capitalist society that is wrecked by divinely caused climate change. In this paper, I examine *Hadestown* through the lens of the literary, archaeological, and historical records of Ancient Greece and Rome from the Archaic Greek period through the early Roman Empire. I argue that *Hadestown* was created in hopes of using the two intertwined ancient stories to depict modern issues such as neurodivergence, substance abuse, climate change, refugee crises, industrial capitalism, and poverty. By using traditions surrounding death and marriage from both the ancient Greco-Roman world and New Orleans communities, *Hadestown* visually and aurally supplements the stories of *katabasis* that are central to the myth. In the process, the writer, Anaïs Mitchell, and the rest of the production team also conveyed issues of reimagining female agency, the representation of autism spectrum disorder, and the cyclical nature of stories in myth. In particular, I suggest that *Hadestown* represents Orpheus, in a manner opposite to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, as an autistic young man who is sensitive to the desires of others despite his hyper-fixation. The representation of Orpheus as autistic can be seen both through the visual representation of Orpheus and the dialogue surrounding him. “*You might say the boy was ‘touched’*” (Mitchell, 2019) is a line from Hermes that is repeated multiple times throughout the musical. This line interacts with the popular sayings that led to the creation of the puzzle piece symbol that represents the hate group Autism Speaks, such as the idea that autistic people have

‘a piece missing’ and are ‘touched in the head’. I argue that *Hadestown* creates a dialogue with many of the problematic topics that affect modern American society.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
Abstract	i
Chapter 1 The Curtain Rises	1
Chapter 2 Our Lady of the Underground	28
Chapter 3 Wherever He Is Now	52
Abigail D. Mason	85
EDUCATION	85
AWARDS, GRANTS, AND HONORS	85
RELATED EXPERIENCE	85
LANGUAGES	86

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Chapter 1

The Curtain Rises

“Once upon a time there was a railroad line,”¹ Hermes sings as the musical *Hadestown* opens to the *a cappella* sounds of a train coming down a track. The folk musical tells the stories of two sets of ancient lovers, the mortals—Orpheus and Eurydice, alongside the gods, Hades and Persephone. In myth, Orpheus was a young man who braved the underworld in an attempt to get his bride back from an untimely death, only to fail at the last moment. In contrast, Persephone was abducted by Hades to become his wife and the queen of the underworld. After eating the food of the dead, Persephone was restricted to the underworld for several months every year. The central theme of both myths is that of *katabasis*, an Ancient Greek term (*κατάβασις*) for a “way down” that is most commonly used to describe a descent to (and often subsequent ascent from or *anabasis* – *ἀνάβασις*) the underworld by mythic and literary figures. The musical sets these stories, and the *katabaseis* they portray, in two ‘towns’ within an industrial world for which climate change is in full swing. The first town is the unnamed place where the train line to the underworld originates. The second town is the eponymous Hadestown, the home of Hades and his society of oppressed workers. In this chapter, I will introduce *Hadestown*’s central themes, characters, and settings, discussing topics such as neurodivergence, substance abuse, climate change, refugee crises, industrial capitalism, and poverty. I will also address some instances of

¹ 1.1 (Mitchell, 2019)

visual reception of classical materials through costuming and staging and some of the places from which the creator, Anaïs Mitchell, draws inspiration.

The set and theming of *Hadestown* ended up being formed around the look of Preservation Hall in New Orleans, a venue known from the 1950s onward for Black acoustic jazz in the French Quarter.² Preservation Hall is an old wooden structure with a wrought iron gated door, exposed wood beams, and floorboards. *Hadestown* on Broadway blends this inspiration with its off-Broadway iterations of the set, which initially consisted of a wooden amphitheater of audience seats circling a plain wood stage with a large decorative tree set beside the bandstand. In the world of the living, the set remains like this, a worn, cozy jazz hall. However, when the characters fully transition to Hadestown at the end of Act 1, the set breaks apart and expands. The high-powered lights flash to life and intensify as the scene progresses and stay lit once the transition has been completed. This simple change in lighting and the size of the set causes *Hadestown* to feel drastically different from the overworld. With every element of its design, *Hadestown* takes the ancient myths of Orpheus, Eurydice, and Persephone and updates them for modern audiences and modern problems. *Hadestown* draws overt parallels between Eurydice and the refugee crisis through her representation as a displaced person and her choice to try for the American Dream presented by Hadestown; the musical also uses the relationship of Persephone and Hades to represent the growing issue of climate change, and more subtle references to neurodivergence can be seen in Orpheus's character. *Hadestown* updates these myths such that

² (Schechner, 2021)

people across many walks of life and vast age ranges can relate to and empathize with the ancient characters and their stories.

Hadestown uses what the Actors Equity Association³ terms non-traditional casting. Non-traditional casting can be defined as casting actors of differing ethnicities in roles where the character's racial identity is not key to the role. In the case of *Hadestown*, the casting calls was specifically written to say that “actors of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds are encouraged to apply”⁴ in their casting call, adding that they welcomed actors of “all ethnicities, gender identities, and body types.”⁵ The cast of characters is comprised of a small group, all introduced to us in the opening number. Hermes splits the group in two in his introduction, dividing them into gods and men—our introductions go in that order.

Road to Hell opens curtains to a scattered grouping of gods. Just to the side of center stage, the three fates sit at a bar several steps higher than the main stage. “*And there was three old women all dressed the same / And they was always singing in the back of your mind / Everybody meet the Fates!*”⁶ Similar to the Furies in Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*, these three female deities function as a kind of chorus. In press interviews, it was revealed that each actress was assigned a specific fate and each one used her to influence her character choices, but in the performance itself, the trio of sisters is never identified by appearance, name, or purpose.⁷ Dressed almost identically, the three women wear layered gray dresses, patterned to look like snakeskin, with black leather

³ (Wilson, 2021)

⁴ (Musicals, n.d.)

⁵ (Musicals, n.d.)

⁶ 1.28, 30, 31 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁷ (*Backstage Photos & Interviews with The Magnificent Fates of Hadestown*, Jewelle Blackman, Yvette Gonzalez-Nacer, and Kay Trinidad, n.d.)

harness cinching at the waist and over their shoulders. Their hair is hidden in matching turbans adorned with feathers.

Sitting high on a balcony, nicknamed the oyster platform, at center stage is Persephone who is fanning herself disinterestedly. “*And a lady stepping off a train / With a suitcase full of summertime / Persephone, by name!*”⁸ In Greek myth, Persephone is the goddess of springtime, renewal, and death. Because of this she is often portrayed as a young woman, stemming from her other name in the Greek tradition, *Kore*, meaning young girl. The Persephone of *Hadestown*, however, is an older woman. Casting calls suggest a range of 40s to 60s for an actress. However, Amber Grey, the performer in every stage version since the first Vermont performances until her final bow on Broadway on February 19th, 2022, was born in the year 1982 and was forty years old at the time of her final performance. In her introductory lines from *Hermes*, Persephone descends from her balcony to join the mortals at the main stage, dancing alone and then with *Hermes* before returning to her place. In the first act, Persephone wears a bright green calf-length dress with a lace bodice, lace-ruffled shoulders, lace-ruffled half sleeves, and lace cut out from waist to hem. Sporting a long curly hair-do with pink orchids pinning the hair back, Persephone also wears black, heeled boots and dark tights. During her moments of *katabasis*, Persephone dons a knee-length, oversized fur coat with dyed ombre green wrists and hem. Starting in the song, *Why We Build the Wall*, we see Persephone fully as the queen of the underworld rather than as the goddess of spring, with an identical dress in coal-black, hair pulled back in a snood

⁸ 1.35, 37, 38 (Mitchell, 2019)

with a crown of black chrysanthemums, a flower associated with mourning in Europe, Asia, and New Orleans.

Next to Persephone, sits her husband, Hades. *“If you ride that train to the end of the line / Where the sun don’t shine and it’s always shady / It’s there you’ll find the king of the mine / Almighty Mister Hades!”*⁹ Hades, as the god of death and riches, is portrayed as an intimidating figure in musical and myth alike. Meant to emulate the look of a mob boss,¹⁰ Hades is dressed in a dark gray three-piece pinstripe suit with a matching tie, light gray shirt, sunglasses, and a black leather duster, with pale snakeskin boots. Anaïs Mitchell, the playwright, took the ideas central to the ancient Hades and Pluto myths—control, wealth, isolation—and put them into her modern interpretation as a capitalist, mafia-esque, owner and foreman of a mining town.

Hermes is appropriately the only god to stand among the mortals, moving easily from stage left to center stage for his self-introduction. *“And a man with feathers on his feet / Who could help you to your final destination / Mister Hermes, that’s me!”*¹¹ Hermes is dressed in a silver suit and vest that were chosen to tie him visually to the Fates.¹² In *Hadestown*, Hermes fulfills the roles of narrator and mentor, providing context both within the story and beyond the fourth wall for the audience. While Hermes has no specific connection to storytelling in ancient myth, his role as messenger and psychopomp (leader of souls to the underworld) make him an ideal character to fulfill both roles.

⁹ 1.44, 46, 48, 49 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹⁰ (Fierberg, 2019)

¹¹ 1.55, 57, 58 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹² (Fierberg, 2019)

With Hermes as the narrator, the audience is given a unique perspective on storytelling, where the narrator is telling a story from three points of view. While Hermes is an active participant in the story, he also has the knowledge of the musical's ending through having lived it before, and is able to break the fourth wall to be in the moment with the audience. Hermes has many lines like this one that grow progressively more somber as we see the ending of Orpheus and Eurydice's story grow closer. "*See someone's got to tell the tale / Whether or not it turns out well / Maybe it will turn out this time.*"¹³ In *Hadestown*, the oral tradition that likely spawned the ancient myths of Orpheus is brought to the table as communal storytelling, and the rediscovery of forgotten stories, through this *Hadestown* takes the key aspects of Orpheus and Eurydice's story and molds it into a form that fits the current era. This fits closely with many of the modern issues referenced by the musical's treatment of refugees and cultural diaspora, and Hermes' role as narrator can be seen as a reference to West African griots.¹⁴ Griots were oral historians often functioning as the advisors of rulers and were respected as leaders in their own right as the holders of cultural knowledge in myth and history. In this vein, Hermes acts as both an advisor, both to Orpheus and Hades, and a storyteller, to both the characters and the audience, in *Hadestown*.

"Now," as Hermes says, "*not everyone gets to be a god.*"¹⁵ There are only two distinct mortal characters in *Hadestown*, but the story also includes three collectives: the aforementioned Fates, and then a separate Chorus and the Band Troupe. The Chorus takes up half of the cast, comprised of a handful of actors, not specified to be in any ratio of gender, race, or age. The

¹³ 1.60-63 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹⁴ ("Flowers for Hermes," 2020)

¹⁵ 1.70 (Mitchell, 2019)

chorus is dressed in “rustbelt colors”¹⁶ for the first act, with a mismatch of warm clothing including plaid flannels, boots and beanies. In the second Act, the chorus become Hades’ workers and dress in dark leather overalls with knee-high boots, with bandage chest binders. The Chorus of *Hadestown* is more than the typical ensemble of modern musical theater. An ensemble is a general name for the group of unnamed characters that receive very few or no lines and act as dancers who have some group singing lines. *Hadestown* had the smallest ensemble on Broadway in the 2018-19 season, even including the Fates into the group. In actuality, the Chorus of *Hadestown* is deliberately meant to echo ancient Greek tragic tradition in providing a chorus.

Orpheus is the first of our mortal protagonists to be introduced and he receives the longest introduction, with eight lines from Hermes.

On the road to hell there was a railroad line

And a poor boy working on a song

His mama was a friend of mine

And this boy was a muse’s son

On the railroad line on the road to hell

You might say the boy was ‘touched’

¹⁶ (Schechner, 2021)

Cos he was touched by the gods themselves

*Give it up for Orpheus!*¹⁷

Hadestown draws on a varied and wide selection of sources to inspire its portrayal of Orpheus, as the figure has more than two millennia of visual and literary appearances. A little naive and with his head in the clouds, Orpheus is portrayed with both the best and worst characteristics attributed to poets and musicians, following a trend that has existed for the past few centuries. Orpheus is so hyper-focused that he misses his first cue for his introduction while working on his melody. He is portrayed with a dreamlike quality as he seems to wander in and out of reality. In appearance, heritage, and relationships, Orpheus is the personification of the meeting of the two worlds of immortal and mortal. He wears the same faded ‘rustbelt’ palette as the chorus, with a faded red bandana around his neck and a worn white T-shirt, but he also wears an old, oversized pair of grey dress pants with leather suspenders. The pants are intended to visually confirm the association between Hermes and Orpheus, as a mentor-mentee or even father-son relationship, appearing as if Orpheus is wearing a cuffed, old pair of Hermes’ pants.¹⁸

Our final character is Eurydice who receives a minimal introduction.

There was one more soul on this road

Girl, come on in from the cold!

On the railroad line on the road to hell

¹⁷ 1.82-3, 85-8, 90-91 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹⁸ (Fierberg, 2019), (Schechner, 2021)

There was a young girl looking for something to eat

And brother, thus begins the tale

Of Orpheus ... and Eurydice!¹⁹

Clutching at a long, oversized, dark gray plaid trench coat with a leather rucksack, Eurydice enters from stage right with a feather in her hair. She wears a patterned orange scarf as an ascot with a black slip dress and a black vest underneath her coat with black leggings and heavy-duty black boots. All of the black clothing was an intentional move, as Eurydice is an outsider and outcast among the chorus. She is tied visually to her coming fate, matching the palette and costuming of Persephone in Act 2.

While *Road to Hell* serves to introduce us to our cast in the most basic sense, the second song, *Any Way the Wind Blows*, serves two purposes. Firstly, it works to set the scene and make us familiar with the dystopian world of climate change and capitalism caused by the gods. Secondly, the song serves the purpose of introducing the Fates and Eurydice in more detail. The song is considered an “I Want” song in theater; its purpose is to establish the primary motivation of the singer, and it often foreshadows the antagonists. The song is sung by Hermes, Eurydice, and the Fates. As the song starts, the lights go down on the stage, only leaving spotlights on the five people who are singing, with the chorus remaining unlit on the stage.

Hermes stands in front of a silver vintage-style stereo microphone as he begins to narrate. He describes Eurydice as a well-traveled, world-weary young woman who had experienced the

¹⁹ 1.93-95, 97, 99-100 (Mitchell, 2019)

horrible state of the world. “*Weather ain’t the way it was before / Ain’t no spring or fall at all anymore / It’s either blazing hot or freezing cold / Any way the wind blows,*”²⁰ Eurydice sings.

The abduction of Persephone is the etiological myth that describes the origin of the seasonal cycle. The specifics change from myth to myth, but with Persephone in the underworld, Demeter searched for her, causing the crops to fail from her inattention. Famine and cold came upon mortals without Demeter’s protection. With Persephone gone, the world began to experience its first winter, and even once Persephone was found, the deal that was struck, for her to remain with Hades for a portion of the year and in the world of the living for the rest, meant that the world would experience the change of seasons every time she reunited with her husband. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is the primary text from which *Hadestown* draws this myth, with Persephone remaining with her husband for six out of every twelve months, and those six months in the underworld creating the fall and winter seasons.

In *Hadestown*, this cycle is tampered with. Persephone remains with her husband for longer and longer, and when she returns to the overworld, everything blooms into the full heat of summer. This disrupted cycle is discussed many times throughout *Hadestown*, with the full details and implications of the myth being rediscovered by Orpheus as he writes his song. As a result of this disorder to the seasons, some mortals—most notably Eurydice—are nomadic, traveling from place to place in search of food and shelter. “**Eurydice:** *Do you hear that sound? / Move to another town / Ain’t nobody gonna stick around / Fates:* *When the dark clouds roll / Any way the wind blows.*”²¹ While the Chorus and Orpheus seem to have lived on the railroad

²⁰ 1.122-125 (Mitchell, 2019)

²¹ 1.131, 133-6 (Mitchell, 2019)

line for long enough to have known Persephone well, Eurydice indicates a different life where everyone is on their own and has no expectations of others. Earlier versions of this song reference the disparity in blunter terms. Anaïs Mitchell wrote the earliest version of *Any Way the Wind Blows* while living in New York City shortly after the birth of her first child during Hurricane Sandy and the California wildfires. Inspired by these events, Mitchell gave Eurydice such lines as “*Strange things happen when the seasons change / In the east, they got a hurricane / While the west is going up in smoke.*”²²

“*You met the Fates, remember them? / Always singing in the back of your mind,*”²³

Hermes reintroduces the trio of sisters in this song. As was previously mentioned, the three Fates act as a single entity in *Hadestown*, showing little individuality aside from the instruments they each play. The Fates fall in between the different groups, standing apart from the living and dead. In both Greek and Roman myth and religion, the Fates were marginal goddesses. The *Moirae* and *Parcae* have their roots in childbirth rather than death. The *Moirae* are associated with the cult of Eileithyia, goddess of childbirth, with the names Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos meaning ‘the spinner,’ ‘the allotter,’ and ‘the inflexible’ respectively. The *Parcae* are named Nona, Decima, and Parca after two of the months of gestation in pregnancy and the word for a midwife respectively. Due to their roles as lot givers, there are three times when the Fates would appear in myth, at birth, at a wedding, and at a death or funeral, and they would rarely appear as a trio outside of the first two. The Fates also waver between being independent arbiters and subservient minor goddesses. In Homeric epics, the gods are unable to control the *Moirae*, who

²² Page 28 (Mitchell, 2020)

²³ 1.141, 43 (Mitchell, 2019)

oftentimes are able to enforce their will even against the wishes of the gods. Similarly, Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* and Hesiod both make reference to the gods, including Zeus, being subject to the rule of the Fates. In cult and most other settings, however, the *Moirae*—and subsequently the *Parcae*—play second fiddle to the Olympians, especially Zeus in his epithet of Moiragetes and the goddesses Hera, Artemis, and Aphrodite in their roles associated with marriage and childbirth.

With their presence at both birth and death, then, the Fates are often peripheral characters in ancient and modern stories alike. Frequently relegated to passive roles that are given brief mention by more critical characters, the Fates are represented in a variety of ways. In Homer's works, the Fates are occasionally represented as a singular female deity, *Moirai* (*Moirai Krataia*), and the many *Moirai* or Spinners (*Klothai*). They are rarely physically present in tragedy or literature beyond a few small instances like Meleager's birth and their killing of Agrius and Thoas in the *Gigantomachy*.²⁴ In modern stories, the Fates almost always appear in their trio for very brief periods to deliver vague insight into the destiny or death of a character. For example, in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, the Fates appear in the first and last book as independent arbiters of life and death, giving a vague warning of an important death to young Percy and then, at the conclusion of the books, confirming the destiny that was foretold had come to pass.²⁵

In *Hadestown*, the Fates play a similar liminal role to their ancient origins. Visually, they are portrayed as subordinate to Hades, with the leather harness tying them in with the Workers

²⁴ 1.6.1-2 Apollodorus's *The Library* (Henderson, n.d.)

²⁵ (Riordan, 2005)

along with Hades' leather trench coat.²⁶ These harnesses also tie the Fates into ancient depictions of the other chthonic trio of women, the Furies, who have emphasized criss cross chest garments in the Eumenid Crater from the fourth century CE.²⁷ However, dramatically, the Fates act in no one's best interests beyond the surface level. Hermes sings, "*Always singing in the back of your mind...*"²⁸ They act as Eurydice's id, no morals, no ties, they represent her will to survive and thrive in any situation. The Fates also act like the devil on Hades' shoulder in later songs, causing issues both for Hades and Orpheus. In *Any Way the Wind Blows*, we see them specifically in their context as Eurydice's conscience and motivation.

Eurydice is the one character in *Hadestown* that, by necessity, greatly differs from her mythological self. Little of Eurydice is seen in ancient myth and literature, she receives no monologues or poems as Orpheus does, and in many stories, she is either dead within the first stanza or dead from the outset. While Eurydice as the wife of Orpheus is attested since at least the 5th century BCE—most notably appearing in Plato's *Symposium*—in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Eurydice dies in line 10 with only this said about her leading up to her death,

...nam nupta per herbas

dum nova naiadum turba comitata vagatur,

occidit in talum serpentis dente recepto.

²⁶ (Fierberg, 2019)

²⁷ (Euménides, 380 C.E.)

²⁸ 1.143 (Mitchell, 2019)

For while the new bride was roaming through the grasses, accompanied by a crowd of naiads, she died having received a fang of a snake in her ankle.²⁹

She is only mentioned by name twice in Ovid's poem. This is in direct contrast to the Eurydice introduced to us in the first song, on stage from the curtain's rising until the curtain falls. Eurydice's passive role in ancient depictions of the myth leaves her as a blank slate character in modern interpretations of the myth. Because of this, Eurydice has been interpreted in wildly different manners even in the last decade of popular media interpretations. In the book, *Wake, Siren*, a recent modern retelling of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Eurydice is depicted as a victim of domestic abuse from "O." who runs away to Cobra Club, owned by "HayDaze" and "Penny", on her wedding day. In Supergiant's *Hades* video game, Eurydice is a dryad, content with her fate in the fields of asphodel after dying from a snakebite and frustrated with the refusal of her husband, Orpheus, to accept her death. These two works exemplify the effort by modern authors to contextualize such 2D figures from classic and classical stories. Is Eurydice a victim of circumstances, people, or simply life? *Hadestown* blends the two common interpretations together. Our Eurydice is a headstrong and independent woman who is aware of her worth and knows what she wants, she is unafraid to ask for help—"Anybody got a match?"³⁰, but is also not used to relying on anyone else.

The Eurydice in *Hadestown* is in direct dialogue, then, with other popular audience works that retell and reimagine stories from recent times to ancient times. The movement towards

²⁹ 10.8-10 Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Henderson, n.d.), personal translation

³⁰ 1.142 (Mitchell, 2019)

fleshing out characters and figures as three-dimensional people with their own motivations, inspirations, and faults has been rising across different media types. Examples can be seen across literature as with the example of *Wake, Siren*, in popular culture with the retellings of the relationship of Hades and Persephone as a consensual decision reached by adults, and in theater like the recent changes to the staging of *The Phantom of the Opera* on Broadway to give Christine agency in her relationship with the Phantom. In line with similar precepts, *Any Way the Wind Blows* foregrounds Eurydice's struggle to survive and her determination to fend for herself. As the song begins, Eurydice holds a hurricane candle in her knapsack that she unwraps from its cloth, which becomes a kerchief around her neck. Striking the match as Hermes finishes his reintroduction of the Fates, Eurydice lights the candle only for one of the Fates to blow it out immediately. "*People turn on you just like the wind / Everybody is a fair weather friend / In the end you're better off alone / Any way the wind blows*"³¹ Eurydice sings her lines glaring at the Fates. The Fates in this moment are both the voice of Eurydice's innermost thoughts, in their responses to Eurydice's lines, and the actors of her fears, in repeatedly blowing out her candle. *Hadestown* centers the action of the musical around Eurydice in many ways. Despite Orpheus's descent to the underworld (and therefore Hadestown) being the more well-known aspect of the musical, it is Eurydice's choice to leave that receives five full songs from her perspective solely about her decision to go to Hadestown. Orpheus's descent only receives two dedicated songs in comparison.

³¹ 1.147-50 (Mitchell, 2019)

Similarly, the Orpheus in Broadway's *Hadestown* acts notably different from the multitude of depictions of Orpheus across ancient literature. In ancient sources, Orpheus is a confident young man, the son of a Muse and either Apollo or a king of Thrace. He is confidently placed among the great heroes such as the Argonauts and is one of the few characters who successfully entered and left the underworld in a katabasis. Even Odysseus, renowned for his cleverness, does not fully enter the underworld due to the dangers present and the warnings of Circe. *Hadestown*'s Orpheus is, in contrast, a naive young man, aware that the world is imperfect but blinded to the harsh reality. From the moment he collides with Eurydice at the end of *Road to Hell*, Orpheus is lovestruck and faltering. When Eurydice asks “*Anybody got a match?*”, he immediately begins fumbling through his apron and pockets to get a box of matches for her, proudly presenting it only to have been beaten to the punch by Hermes. The actions and personality of Orpheus throughout the musical have led to some people on social media to believe that Orpheus has autism spectrum disorder, which becomes more evident in later songs.³²

In order to analyze the character of Orpheus through the lens of autism spectrum disorder (also referenced as ASD), I will reference the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, hereafter referenced as the “DSM-5”. This manual provides the standard criteria for a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder in the United States. An ASD diagnosis with the DSM-5 requires that the person in question exhibit “persistent deficits”³³ in three outlined areas of social communication and ability as well as in at least two of the four outlined areas of “restricted, repetitive behavior”.³⁴ The social

³² Two of many possible examples on this dialogue are cited here: (*Hadestown / YMMV*, n.d.), (St. James, 2019)

³³ (CDC, 2020)

³⁴ (CDC, 2020)

communication and ability deficits are labeled as A1-3, and the restricted behaviors are labeled B1-4. These criteria will be defined more specifically throughout the paper as they become applicable. The first major instance that Orpheus's autistic behavior is referenced by another character is in *Any Way the Wind Blows*.

In *Come Home With Me*, Orpheus continues to act in a characteristically neurodivergent manner. Hermes and Orpheus exchange a sweet familial conversation in the first few lines of the song, with Hermes cautioning Orpheus to behave in a more subdued manner.

Hermes: You wanna talk to her?

Orpheus: Yes

Hermes: Go on...

Orpheus –

Orpheus: Yes?

Hermes: Don't come on too strong

*Orpheus: Come home with me!*³⁵

Despite the advice from Hermes, Orpheus immediately asks Eurydice to come home with him. However, this request is not done in an arrogant or otherwise confident manner, instead Orpheus is simply nervous and blurting out the first thing that comes to mind, thrusting a paper

³⁵ 1.190-6 (Mitchell, 2019)

flower he had made towards Eurydice. This moment breaks the tension both onstage and in the audience from the somber, desperate tone of *Any Way The Wind Blows*. The song showcases a common belief that autistic people can be difficult to understand or come off as more forceful than neurotypical people due to a tendency to be overly literal and blunt when talking with someone new. Because of this, Eurydice and Orpheus rely on Hermes, throughout the song, to be an intermediary as Orpheus comes on too strong despite Hermes' warning, and Eurydice struggles to take his words as anything other than a particularly deranged set of 'pick up lines.' "**Eurydice:** *Is he always like this?* / **Hermes:** *Yes...*"³⁶ These exchanges, while humorous, heavily lean on the issue of misunderstandings between neurodivergent and neurotypical people. When Orpheus's first attempts at engaging with Eurydice fail, Hermes chimes in with a suggestion:

Hermes: *Tell her what you're working on!*

Orpheus: *I'm working on a song!*

It isn't finished yet

But when it's done, and when I sing it

*Spring will come again!*³⁷

Orpheus's song, which he works on throughout the musical, is the focus of *Wedding Song, Epic 1, Epic 2, Chant, and Epic 3*. "*It's an old song / A song of love from long ago / Long*

³⁶ 1.200-1 (Mitchell, 2019)

³⁷ 1.210-14 (Mitchell, 2019)

time since I heard it though.”³⁸ The story of *Hadestown* revolves around Orpheus’s efforts to write a song so beautiful that it will fix the issue of fluctuating seasons that is causing famine in the mortal world. We first hear Orpheus’s melody in *Wedding Song*, as a simple melody with no lyrics and little accompaniment. However, that simple melody produces a wondrous effect. As Orpheus finishes singing, the poor newspaper flower in his hands transforms into the red carnation that remains throughout the rest of the musical. In Epic 1, Hermes reveals that what Orpheus has truly done is that he has reinvented a melody from when Hades and Persephone first fell in love. Through discussing the origin of Orpheus’s song and the story that it tells about the origin of seasons, Epic 1 dives into the topic of oral tradition with etiological stories. *Hadestown* works from the premise that the story of Hades and Persephone has been passed down to Orpheus by Hermes—“*Remember the tale I told you once? / About the gods?*”³⁹—and that Orpheus unconsciously elaborated that story into our key melody and then in the Epic songs he incorporates the melody into the myth at the prompting of Hermes. “*Tell it again, though...*”⁴⁰

Epic 1 gives us the full perspective on how the world and the relationship of Hades and Persephone crumbled to pieces. From the beginning, we see an obvious contrast from the mythic versions of Ancient Greece and Rome. Myth places Persephone as an unwilling bride in a marriage with a man she does not love, but *Hadestown* uses a different interpretation that has grown in popularity over recent years. Orpheus explains, “*The lady loved him and the kingdom they shared / But without her above not one flower would grow.*”⁴¹ Even as a character that

³⁸ 1.300-2 (Mitchell, 2019)

³⁹ 1.306-7 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁴⁰ 1.314 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁴¹ 1.324-5 (Mitchell, 2019)

dislikes Hades and Hades, Orpheus fully acknowledges the agency of Persephone in the chthonic marriage.

Not only did Hades choose Persephone, but she chose him and the underworld in turn. However, both Orpheus and Hermes note that her choice has had a large effect on the world of the living. *Hadestown* and ancient myths agree that the seasonal cycle and the agricultural calendar were created by the *katabasis* of Persephone. *Hadestown* presents a slight change from the traditional myth of Demeter's grief and anger causing winter in refusing to allow crops to grow while her daughter is in the underworld. In the musical, Persephone's presence alone is what causes the seasons to change rather than her mother's grudge. In fact, Demeter is only mentioned twice in the entire musical and neither instance is by name or regarding Persephone's stay in the underworld.

The myth of Persephone's abduction, indeed, is one that greatly varies across the different cults of ancient Greece and Rome. While *Hadestown* draws from the version most Americans will know, where Persephone's descent into the underworld marks the harvest and the beginning of winter, another version is key in the relationship of Persephone and Eurydice in *Hadestown*. Contrary to the well-known version with the *katabasis* of Persephone causing winter to begin, there is another myth found at sites like Lokri, a Greek colony that was a part of *Magna Graecia*. This alternate version of Persephone's descent has Persephone descend in the spring as crops are planted and then she resurfaces as the harvest begins. One key aspect of the cults that are known to foster this version is that they frequently associate Persephone with fertile marriage and the rituals of birth, marriage, and death. The cult at Lokri commonly used motifs of the bride of Hades in their funerary traditions for young women, which will be discussed later. The

springtime *katabasis* of Persephone focuses on the idea of Persephone's annual cycle as a symbol of the planting and harvesting of grain. While *Epic 1* only vaguely mentions the ever-present issue of Persephone remaining in the underworld, Orpheus's lines reference her return as prompting the planting of crops and the migration of wildlife, hinting at the version of the myth that is more familiar to modern American audiences. However, *Hadestown* pulls from multiple sources of the myth across the musical, including both the more familiar Athenian version and the version from Lokri. *Epic 1* foregrounds the myth of Hades and Persephone in preparation for Persephone's return in *Living It Up On Top* as summer returns with her.

Living It Up On Top gives us the first real glimpse of Persephone as a character; as before, we had only seen her in the introductory number and as a far-off presence on the balcony. *Hadestown*, portrays Hermes as a brotherly figure to Persephone, jibing at her for her lateness throughout the song. Persephone barely acknowledges his words carrying on as if she has all the time in the world to enjoy the world of the living. At one point, Persephone sings "*Let's not talk about hard times / Pour the wine in summertime!*"⁴² This song and these lines begin to reveal the core causes of climate change in the world of *Hadestown*, as Persephone acknowledges that the world of the living is struggling due to her relationship with her husband and that she herself is struggling in her relationship with Hades. The relationship between Hades and Persephone is perhaps the most important one in the musical both in terms of the amount of classical reception and in terms of the level of effect on the story. Persephone's acerbity regarding her marriage and

⁴² 1.376-7 (Mitchell, 2019)

continual moves is the key factor in the events that follow including the temptation from Hades towards Eurydice to come to Hadestown.

In *Way Down Hadestown*, we get our earliest glimpse at a *katabasis* as well as a large amount of foreshadowing of the central conflict of the musical. “**HERMES** blows the train whistle.”⁴³ the script instructs. The piercing sound is a signal for everyone to shift gears from the love and warmth of *All I’ve Ever Known*, where the young lovers make vows to each other and revel in the summer that Persephone had brought them. This change in atmosphere is most apparent in Persephone who has changed from the energetic, tipsy excitement of *Living It Up On Top* to the wistfulness of *All I’ve Ever Known* and now the desperation and despair caused by the immediate preparation for her departure to the underworld. Persephone stumbles away from where she was seated at the sound of the train whistle before hopelessly addressing the ground lift in center stage, “*Oh come on! / ... / That was not six months!*”⁴⁴ The vibrancy of summer wilts into a fast-paced song inspired by New Orleans funeral parades. Hermes uses the moments between Persephone’s despair to warn Eurydice and Orpheus away from the allure of Hadestown. These warnings do seem to make Orpheus nervous; he changes from acting like a newlywed who wishes to keep his wife close to someone who is trying to keep a loved one away from a cliff’s edge.

Persephone’s lament forms around and inside of Hermes’ warnings. At the beginning of *Way Down Hadestown*, Persephone stumbles around before downing the rest of her flask. While

⁴³ Stage direction between lines 1.506-507 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁴⁴ 1.509, 512 (Mitchell, 2019)

always linked with alcohol, Persephone becomes further entrenched in substance abuse in darker ways during *Way Down Hadestown*. Persephone receives a musical interlude with what is called her stomp solo. A choreographed dance where Persephone stomp-jumps while bent 90 degrees forward. This dance was created by Amber Gray after being given the note that Persephone is attempting to exorcise her demons before confronting them. After her stomp solo, Persephone seems to decide that avoidance is better than confrontation and sings: “*Give me morphine in a tin! / Give me a crate of the fruit of the vine! / Takes a lot of medicine / To make it through the wintertime.*”⁴⁵ Persephone begs for drugs from Hermes as she faces a return to her life below ground. The first drug mentioned, morphine in a tin, was a common (illegal) piece of kit for coal miners who would bring it with them into the mines in case of a collapse.⁴⁶ The tin was used either so that they could numb their pain while waiting for rescue, or to allow them to take their lives on their own terms. This idea of Persephone needing to numb the pain or otherwise control the manner of her death, however impermanent it may be in her case, is also reflected in Eurydice’s solo song *Flowers*, which takes place after she has assumed a position as a second Persephone figure. In *Flowers*, Eurydice comes to the realization that she regrets coming to Hadestown and references that she has begun to lose her memory of the world above and consequently her emotions have dulled.

What I wanted was to fall asleep

Close my eyes and disappear

⁴⁵ 1.552-5 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁴⁶ Pages 85-6 (Mitchell, 2020)

...

“You won’t feel a thing,” he said,

“When you go down

Nothing gonna wake you now”

...

Walking in the sun

I remember... someone

*Someone by my side*⁴⁷

Both Eurydice and Persephone describe a numbness that occurs in Hadestown, due to some supernatural force or due to a choice to self-medicate. The numbness, memory loss, and references to a peaceful death or ‘going down’ to sleep can all be viewed through the lens of anesthetics as a death or *katabasis*. This idea of dying and anesthesia falls in line with Persephone’s request for Hermes to “*Give me morphine in a tin!*”⁴⁸ as a reference to the coal miners’ practice for use in cave collapses. At this point in *Way Down Hadestown*, Persephone also swings into a state of drunkenness or other inebriation that lasts 20 songs. This thread ties neatly into the concept of increasing female agency in modern adaptations of myth. We see

⁴⁷ 2.147-8, 153-5, 166-8 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁴⁸ 1.552 (Mitchell, 2019)

Persephone has both willingly entered a marriage with Hades and has, in her regret, taken control of her time in Hadestown by utilizing and abusing different substances.

“*With Persephone gone, the cold came on*”⁴⁹ In *A Gathering Storm*, Hermes returns our focus to the young lovers and the impact of climate change and a swiftly oncoming winter on the inhabitants of the mortal world. With the immediate threat of starvation and hypothermia, Orpheus and Eurydice react in very different ways. Eurydice is the pragmatic planner of the pair, prioritizing their physical needs over less utilitarian desires. “*The wind is changing / There’s a storm coming on! / ... / We need food / We need firewood.*”⁵⁰ Eurydice also expects Orpheus to see the need to work together to provide for themselves, but Orpheus is entirely distracted. At the reminder of his hyper fixation, the song to fix the seasons, Orpheus is consumed by the need to finish his song in order to put the world to rights. He is unable to notice the very present danger of the storm above him,⁵¹ and is deaf to Eurydice’s pleas for help or her resignation to his state of hyperfocus, “*Okay / Finish it.*”⁵²

Anais Mitchell notes in her book, *Working On a Song*, that a discussion with Reeve Carney in London led to this song’s final version. The ending of the song leads us to the inevitable conclusion that “*we can’t blame Orpheus for who or how he is, but we also can’t blame Eurydice for leaving him.*”⁵³ The idea that Orpheus is “*touched by the gods*”⁵⁴ returns in *A Gathering Storm* after it was first mentioned in the opening number, and showcases the autistic

⁴⁹ 1.610 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁵⁰ 1.621-2, 624, 626 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁵¹ Page 94-5 (Mitchell, 2020)

⁵² 1.632-3 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁵³ Page 95 (Mitchell, 2020)

⁵⁴ 1.618 (Mitchell, 2019)

characteristics of Orpheus in *Hadestown*. At this moment, Orpheus clearly displays three characteristics that are part of the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder. First, Orpheus is suddenly unable to participate in a back-and-forth conversation with Eurydice due to hyper fixation which falls into criterion A1:

*Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, ranging, for example, from abnormal social approach and failure of normal back-and-forth conversation; to reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; to failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.*⁵⁵

Orpheus goes from engaged in the conversation: “*He came too soon / He came for her too soon / It’s not supposed to be like this / ... / I have to finish the song*”⁵⁶ to being unresponsive to Eurydice’s continued conversation with him. This same section also showcases criteria B2 and B3 of the ASD diagnostic criteria:

*2. Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, ... (e.g., extreme distress at small changes, difficulties with transitions, rigid thinking patterns, ...). 3. Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus (e.g., ... excessively circumscribed or perseverative interests).*⁵⁷

While the Chorus and Eurydice are unhappy with the quick transition to winter, Orpheus is the only mortal character who becomes incredibly distressed by Persephone’s departure. As is described in the autism spectrum disorder diagnostic criteria (B2), autistic people can have great

⁵⁵ (CDC, 2020)

⁵⁶ 1.611-3, 619 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁵⁷ (CDC, 2020)

difficulty in accepting changes to their routines or differences from their expected outcomes.

With Orpheus, this manifests in his refusal to process that Persephone has left for the underworld and his determination to fix things so that the world returns to 'normal'. Additionally, criterion B3 comes up repeatedly throughout the musical, as Orpheus's focus on his song can easily be described as a special interest or a highly restricted, fixated interest which Orpheus becomes hyper fixated on from the song *A Gathering Storm* through *Gone, I'm Gone*, after which he 'wakes up' and immediately searches out Eurydice, only to find her missing.

Chapter 2

Our Lady of the Underground

Epic 2 tells the story of Hades and Persephone's love a second time through Orpheus's meandering thought process after Persephone's departure to the underworld. In Chapter 2, I argue that *Hadestown* positions Eurydice and Persphone in a continual dialogue that references both the cyclical nature of the story, oral story-telling and the intergenerational transmission of violence. I argue that Persephone is depicted as a maternal figure to Eurydice through her familial actions and advice-giving and that Eurydice is positioned as a Kore figure through the reception of the bride of Hades tradition that originates from cults such as Lokrian Persephone. I utilize archaeological and literary evidence to support this theory of Eurydice as Kore.

In *Chant*, the audience watches as the divide within each pair of lovers grows wider and sees the tired but happy chorus transform into the beaten and depressed workers' chorus. An interesting facet of the entire show is that there are only two sounds that are not cued or performed from the stage, and this includes the mechanical sounds of *Hadestown* which are largely made *a cappella* style by the workers. *Chant* begins with the sound of the workers mining to the sound of harsh strings and drums. The workers' chorus sings the same mantra throughout the song, and indeed throughout most of their appearances in the musical.

Oh, keep your head, keep your head low (kkh!)

Oh, you gotta keep your head low (kkh!)

If you wanna keep your head (huh! kkh!)

*Oh, you gotta keep your head low*⁵⁸

This mantra is a reflection of the harsh environment of *Hadestown* and the tactics that Hades uses to keep his workers oppressed. Between this mantra, Orpheus refines his melody and his song about Hades and Persephone's relationship and Eurydice tries to acknowledge and embrace his neurodivergent traits. Initially, Eurydice is unable to reach him but asks Hermes two questions, "*Is it finished? / Hermes: Not yet*"⁵⁹ and "*Is he always like this?*"⁶⁰ to which she receives a nod from Hermes. Despite this, Eurydice continues on in her journey through the cold repeating that she is "*Trying to trust / That the song he's working on is gonna / Shelter us*"⁶¹ but intermixed within her lines about her faith in Orpheus are lines by the Fates that attempt to induce doubt in Eurydice "*There is no food left to find / Hard enough to feed yourself / Let alone somebody else.*"⁶² Afterwards, the Fates steal her coat and knapsack, which contains all of the food and firewood that Eurydice has managed to collect, despite her pleading. As she is exposed to the elements and starvation, Eurydice calls out to Orpheus before falling to the ground.

The Broadway version of Eurydice has much greater faith in Orpheus and understanding for his obliviousness than the version of Eurydice presented by the New York Theater Workshop. In that version, Eurydice criticizes Orpheus for not helping her, and many of the lines that are delivered by the Fates on Broadway were originally assigned to Eurydice. From the start of Chant in the NYTW version, Eurydice does not understand why Orpheus won't help her.

⁵⁸ 1.659-62 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁵⁹ 1.697, 699 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁶⁰ 1.701 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁶¹ 1.707-9 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁶² 1.759-61 (Mitchell, 2019)

Lover, while you sing your song

Winter is a-comin' on

See, I'm stacking firewood

See, I'm putting by some food

Orpheus!

All the pretty songs you sing ain't gonna

*Shelter us!*⁶³

In direct contrast with the lines by Broadway's Eurydice, this early version of Eurydice has no faith in Orpheus or his song and is desperate for him to give up and help her. The NYTW Orpheus is also much different from Broadway's Orpheus, as the former does not possess any notable neurodivergent traits that would explain or excuse his behavior towards Eurydice, his only explanation is his arrogance.

On Broadway, the pair of godly lovers is similarly out of tune to the NYTW version of the mortal couple. Persephone arrives in Hadestown to 'unnatural' brightness and heat that disgust her despite Hades' claim that he caused these things to occur through his industrial complex in his desire and despair for his missing wife. In the ancient Mediterranean, the marriage of a woman was often viewed similarly to the death of a maiden and vice versa. In

⁶³ Page 108 (Mitchell, 2020)

many patriarchal traditions, a wedding is like a funeral for the bride's family as the woman becomes a part of her husband's family and leaves her own. Ancient iconography incorporates marriage scenes into funerary monuments for women, especially women who died prior to a marriage of their own. In these monuments, the deceased is a *kore*, both in reference to their unmarried status and to Persephone's original name in myth. Within this dual symbolism, we see an unmarried woman's death as a fictional marriage to Hades with the woman taking the role of a Persephone figure. Funerary monuments that depict the deceased as a deity, are neither common nor incredibly rare. Notably, these monuments tend towards depicting deceased women rather than men, and the women are generally represented in word or image as chthonic goddesses such as Persephone and Hecate. *Hadestown* explores this theme of death as marriage within the relationship between Hades and Eurydice in various songs. The New York Theater Workshop version of *Hadestown* had presented this theme in more blatant terms, but it still remains in the Broadway version. Hades and Persephone's fight in *Chant* sets the stage for Eurydice's choice to abscond to the underworld. "*If you don't even want my love / I'll give it to someone who does / someone grateful for her fate / someone who appreciates / The comforts of a gilded cage.*"⁶⁴ This theme of marriage and affairs is played out across the songs and imagery of *Hadestown*. After the arguments in *Chant*, Hades returns to the surface and finds Eurydice in the song *Hey, Little Songbird*.

⁶⁴ 1.794-8 (Mitchell, 2019)

Hadestown presents a unique relationship between Eurydice and Persephone. In Act One, Persephone views Eurydice wistfully, dispensing advice regarding being satisfied with your life despite minor issues to Eurydice in *Living It Up On Top*.

Now some may say the weather ain't the way it used to be

But let me tell you something that my mama said to me:

You take what you can get

And you make the most of it

*So right now we're living it.*⁶⁵

As Persephone delivers this line, she slings an arm around Eurydice's shoulders and taps her on the tip of the nose. From both her lines and stage directions, Persephone is depicted frequently as a maternal figure to Eurydice in Act One including in *Way Down Hadestown*, where Persephone and Hermes warn Orpheus and Eurydice about the reality of Hadestown. However, Eurydice is drawn in by the Fates who continue to describe the wealth and opulence that Hades controls.

Fates: *Mister Hades is a mighty king*

Must be making some mighty big deals

Seems like he owns everything

⁶⁵ 1.394-99 (Mitchell, 2019)

*Eurydice: Kinda makes you wonder how it feels...*⁶⁶

The theme of maternal advice, and even affection, continues throughout the rest of the musical and is perhaps more evident as Eurydice steps into the role of a Kore figure more obviously. Specifically, we see Persephone make direct parallels between herself and Eurydice in a section of *Chant (Reprise)* that was cut in Broadway rehearsals.

At the start of *Chant (Reprise)*, the mortal characters, including Orpheus, Eurydice, and the workers' chorus, ascend on the center lift and their singing causes Hades to spring into action. As Orpheus and Eurydice have managed to spark a rebellion among Hades' disenfranchised workers' chorus.

Hermes: Now everybody knows that walls have ears

Orpheus: Is it true?

Mortals: Is it true?

Hades: What's that noise?

Hermes: And the walls had heard what the boy was sayin'

Orpheus: Is it true?

Mortals: Is it true?

⁶⁶ 1.594-7 (Mitchell, 2019)

Hades: Its the boy!

Hermes: A million tons of stone and steel

...

Echoed his refrain...⁶⁷

The panic inspired in Hades by the idea of Orpheus formenting rebellion manifests in him calling the workers' chorus back to work with a loud factory whistle that cues directly after the last line above sung by Hermes as Hades pulls a chain from the stairs to the balcony. This sound causes all of the mortals bar Orpheus to fall to the ground and begin working once more, only to rise one by one as they remember their doubts about Hades and his iron grip on the inhabitants of Hadestown. Hades then comes down to face Orpheus directly, causing the workers's chorus to fall back to their knees. His tirade is only barely composed of threats against Orpheus and is better described as a bitter monologue about being left by a lover from a bitter old man. It also highlights the dual nature of Hades and Persephone's relationship. Hades feels betrayed by Persephone always leaving him behind and so he showers her in gifts made from his industrial wasteland. However, throughout the musical both Hades and Persephone acknowledge that those gifts are traps and only manifesting the gilding on the cage he wishes to keep her in.

But it takes more than singin' songs

To keep a woman in your arms

⁶⁷ 2.393-401, 404 (Mitchell, 2019)

Take it from a man no longer young

If you want to hold a woman, son

Hang a chain around her throat

Made of many karat gold

Shackle her from wrist-to-wrist

With sterling silver bracelets

Fill her pockets full of stones

Precious ones, diamonds

Bind her with a golden band

*Take it from an old man*⁶⁸

In modern media, there is a common motif of marriage as a shackle or a ball and chain. And though this symbology is more commonly applied to men, here Hades applies it to his relationship with Persephone, wishing that he had shackled her to him earlier in their relationship. During this monologue, Orpheus is the one directly addressed and stands at center stage, but Hades and Persephone circle him. After a brief interlude by the chorus, there was another verse in *Chant (Reprise)* that was sung by Persephone and was addressed to Eurydice

⁶⁸ 2.426-437 (Mitchell, 2019)

which had to be cut for time in the Broadway previews. These sections that dated back to the New York Theater Workshop production described how Hades had changed since their relationship had begun and advised Eurydice about unhealthy relationships, including the relationship between Eurydice and Hades.

When I was a young girl like you

Sister, I was hungry too

Hungry for the underworld

When I was a young girl

Now you know know how it tastes

The fruit of Mister Hades' ways

Sister it's a bitter wine

Spit it out while you still have time

Take it from a woman of my age

Love is not a gilded cage

...

Love was when he came to me

Begging on his bended knee

...

That's when I became his wife

But that was in another life.

That was in another world

When I was a young girl⁶⁹

Once again, while this verse is framed as advice from Persephone to Eurydice, it is also Persephone venting her frustrations at Hades and responding to his advice to Orpheus. In the NYTW production of *Hadestown*, the relationship between Hades and Eurydice has a much stronger sexual component than is present in the Broadway production. This change is most prevalent in both *Chant (Reprise)* and *Way Down Hadestown (Reprise)*, where the New York Theater Workshop version has incredibly different lyrics than Broadway's final lyrics.

Eurydice: *But I don't understand,*

Fates: *You said this was the promise land?*

You sell your soul,

You get your due.

That is all we promised you.

⁶⁹ Pages 193-4 (Mitchell, 2020)

...

Eurydice: But don't you see?

It's different with me?

Fates: Different than who?

They thought they were different too!

Down in the river of oblivion,

You kissed your little life goodbye

*And Hades laid his hands on you*⁷⁰

This section in *Way Down Hadestown (Reprise)* implies two key facts about the relationship between Hades and both Eurydice and the rest of the workers' chorus. First, Eurydice and the Fates reference that Eurydice had thought that she was coming to Hadestown in order to be a concubine of Hades. This is in direct contrast to the Eurydice on Broadway who seems to have known that she was going to become a manual laborer with the sexual overtones being less explicit in the narrative. The second area of note in the NYTW version of *Way Down Hadestown (Reprise)* is implied by the Fates in response to Eurydice's confusion about her role in Hadestown. The Fates tell Eurydice that "*They thought they were different too!*"⁷¹ as they gesture to the workers' chorus, indicating that Eurydice may not have been the first mortal

⁷⁰ Page 156 (Mitchell, 2020)

⁷¹ Page 156 (Mitchell, 2020)

brought to Hadestown under false pretenses, and possibly even sexual pretenses. Because of the sexual implications of Eurydice's relationship with Hades, Persephone's advice from *Chant (Reprise)* rings more true in the NYTW production than in Broadway, which is in part the reason that it was cut from the final Broadway version. On Broadway, Eurydice has already come to regret her choice by the time *Chant (Reprise)* begins, so Persephone advising her to begin regretting her choice felt superfluous to team dramaturgy (Anais Mitchell's nickname for her team of producers).⁷²

Despite the exclusion of the Persephone verse from the Broadway version, *Chant (Reprise)* continues to exemplify the maternal relationship between Persephone and Eurydice. From lines in *Living It Up On Top* and *Chant (Reprise)* along with lines about Eurydice's role as a replacement for Persephone in *Chant*, it is possible to assign Eurydice to the role of Kore, or young Persephone, and, by depicting Persephone in a maternal fashion, it is possible to assign Persephone to the role of Demeter. In *Hadestown*, the only references to Demeter are when Persephone relays advice from her mother, in turn the only direct advice given by Persephone is addressed to Eurydice. In each case throughout the musical, when advice given from divine to mortal characters, it comes from a parental point of view, as can be seen by the three pathways of advice in *Hadestown*: Hermes to Orpheus, Persephone to Eurydice, and Hades to Orpheus. This idea of a cyclical story of maternal advice regarding unhealthy relationships could be inspired by real life cycles of abuse or by myths of Demeter and Persephone. Psychologists study the correlation between adults who experience intimate partner violence and children whose parents

⁷² Page 196 (Mitchell, 2020)

experienced intimate partner violence through the model of Intergenerational Transmission of Violence.

It is commonly held at this time that children whose parents experience or perpetrate intimate partner violence are more likely to experience or perpetrate intimate partner violence themselves.⁷³ This idea can also be examined in the myths of Persephone and Demeter, as Persephone's birth is most frequently described as the result of Zeus raping his sister. This is in parallel to the most common myth about the relationship of Persephone and Hades, where Persephone is kidnapped and then raped by Hades. Although *Hadestown* does not reference Persephone as being a victim of sexual assault or as being a child conceived from an instance of rape, it is incredibly unlikely that Anais Mitchell and the other collaborators on *Hadestown* were unaware of these mythic and literary traditions.

Hey, Little Songbird continues the thread of comparison between Eurydice and Persephone, as Hades steps off the center lift where he and Persephone argued in *Chant* as it descends to take Persephone to Hadestown. As soon as he steps off the lift, it begins to descend quickly, and Persephone lifts her face as if drowning. The stage goes dark as the song starts leaving only Eurydice and Hades to be dimly lit in the area between the amphitheater-like steps of the stage. Both Hades' and Eurydice's lines in *Hey, Little Songbird* focus heavily on natural world imagery and metaphors. Eurydice is referenced as a songbird, a diamond, and a canary in a coal mine. The Fates, and the world at large, are referenced as vipers and vultures. This heavily animal-focused imagery plays into the other aspect of this song, which is the idea of Hades as the

⁷³ (Black et al., 2010)

snake in the grass. In the Ovidian version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth presented in *Metamorphoses Book 10*, Eurydice is bitten by a snake hidden in the grass while enjoying the company of nymphs. The section on her death in this source, was also quoted above:

...nam nupta per herbas

dum nova naiadum turba comitata vagatur,

occidit in talum serpentis dente recepto.

For while the new bride was roaming through the grasses, accompanied by a crowd of naiads, she died having received a fang of a snake in her ankle.⁷⁴

And these lines provide the visual and auditory basis for the moment of Eurydice's *katabasis* in *Hadestown*. In the introduction to *When the Chips are Down*, Hermes directly names the Eurydice and Hades as "*Songbird versus Rattlesnake*."⁷⁵ The metaphor of Hades as the snake in the grass which killed Eurydice is heavily implied throughout the musical, and is referenced through many different media. As was discussed earlier in the paper, Hades wears snakeskin boots, one of three kinds of obviously animal-derived clothing in the show, the others being Hades' leather coat and Persephone's fur coat. These shoes are a small visual hint towards the common association of Hades in *Hadestown*, tying a visual indicator in his costuming to the auditory indicators used frequently throughout the songs *Hey, Little Songbird*, *When the Chips*

⁷⁴ 10.8-10 Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Henderson, n.d.), personal translation

⁷⁵ 1.844 (Mitchell, 2019)

are Down, and *Gone, I'm Gone*. In the three aforementioned songs, there is a repeated use of sounds similar to that of a rattlesnake's signature rattle, created through cymbals and the sounds of the coins that act as tickets for the train to Hadestown within a coin bag held by Hermes.

The rattlesnake symbolism that is attached to Hades also leads into a connection to Christian iconography through the depiction of Hades as a metaphorical snake in the grass. The idea of the snake in the grass can easily be transformed to the snake in the garden from the parable of Adam and Eve. The Orpheus and Eurydice myth can be viewed as a parallel parable to the story of Adam and Eve. In this parallel, Eurydice as Eve is tempted by Hades as the snake in the garden, to grasp the forbidden fruit, or security, against the commands, or advice, given by God, or rather Hermes. This is an example of a popular aspect of syncretism in myth and religion.

Oftentimes in modern media, Hades is viewed as a devil figure. This representation stems from the same Christian iconography of the underworld as hell, rather than being the home of all of the dead – moral and immoral. Hades as the devil can be seen in many instances of popculture including Disney's *Hercules* where he acts as the primary antagonist. In *Hadestown*, this portrayal of Hades as a devil is continued in many ways. Most notably, Hades is dressed in blacks, silvers, and reds in a look inspired by mob bosses, Hades' voice is also a natural baritone and is usually singing as a bass in Patrick Page's portrayal, both things that are associated with villains in modern musical theater. The temptation presented by Hades to Eurydice in *Hey, Little Songbird* is also easily correlated to the idea of a devil figure, as Satan was portrayed as the bringer of temptation across the Bible and specifically in the Gospel of Luke 4:13 which says,

“When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came.”⁷⁶ This same story from the Gospel of Luke is also when the devil tries to tempt Jesus as he has fasted for forty days, and is at his most vulnerable. Hades also comes to Eurydice when she is at her most vulnerable. In the song prior, *Chant*, she slowly loses hope and faith in Orpheus as she is starving and freezing, unable to gain his attention as he works on his song. The parallel between Eurydice and Jesus occurs with each having temptation come in the form of a devil figure at a time when they are most vulnerable due to hunger. The devil in the story from the Gospel of Luke tries to induce doubt in Jesus, which is also applicable with several of Hades’ lines in *Hey, Little Songbird*.

Hey, little songbird, let me guess

He’s some kind of poet, and he’s penniless

Give him your hand, he’ll give you his hand-to-mouth

He’ll write you a poem when the power is out

Hey, why not fly south for the winter?⁷⁷

Hades as a devil figure causes Eurydice to doubt the promises made by Orpheus and tempts her to come down to Hadestown in order to find a new promise of safety, security, and satiation. Unlike the devil in Luke, Hades succeeds both at creating doubt and tempting Eurydice away from her promises to Orpheus. Both Eurydice and Orpheus can be viewed as savior figures in

⁷⁶ Gospel of Luke 4:13 (*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*, 2004)

⁷⁷ 1.834-8 (Mitchell, 2019)

Hadestown, although Eurydice is a failed savior figure due to falling to temptation. Despite this, Eurydice does first fail to resurrect as Orpheus fails to save her and then subsequently does resurrect at the end of the musical when the story's cyclical nature emerges in the final song. Orpheus steps into the role of a savior after Eurydice's fall to temptation and attempts to save both her and then the workers' chorus in *Come Home with Me (Reprise)* and *If It's True*.

This idea of temptation, doubt, and devil figures being correlated can also be applied to the Fates in *Hadestown*, as in five different songs they act as figures of temptation and doubt. In *When the Chips Are Down*, the Fates convince Eurydice that she should take Hades' offer. The Fates imply that if she does not take the offer and betray Orpheus, then Orpheus will betray her.

Take if you can, give if you must

Ain't nobody but yourself to trust

...

Aim for the heart, shoot to kill

*If you don't do it then the other one will*⁷⁸

The Fates are then acting as temptresses, in an unconventional sense, encouraging Eurydice to doubt her new marriage. The Fates also try to get multiple characters from Orpheus and Eurydice to Hades to doubt themselves and their relationships in the songs *Any Way the Wind Blows*, *When the Chips Are Down*, *Nothing Changes*, *Word To the Wise*, and *Doubt Comes In*.

⁷⁸ 1.868-9, 874-5 (Mitchell, 2019)

Sinking below the ground, Eurydice sings to the absent Orpheus “*But I’m already gone/ I’m Gone*”⁷⁹ and with that Eurydice is swallowed by the darkness of the underworld as the center of the stage descends on an elevator. At this moment, we see Orpheus not as a sympathetic character but as a forgetful husband who has failed to notice his wife starving as she tries to provide for them both. When Orpheus comes onstage, he is looking for his wife and probes Hermes for answers on her whereabouts. Hermes leaves no doubt about his opinion of these circumstances, and here we begin to confront the two varying views of death and the underworld shown in *Hadestown*. “*Down below / Six-feet under the ground below / She called your name before she went / But I guess that you weren’t listening*”⁸⁰ Hermes tells Orpheus, showcasing the line between life, death, and servitude in *Hadestown*. In the musical, Eurydice has left for the eponymous town as a worker hoping to gain access to food, shelter, and heat. She is not dead but “*Dead to the world anyway*”⁸¹ as Hermes explains later in *Way Down Hadestown (Reprise)*. In contrast to the myths where it is a matter of unfortunate circumstance, Eurydice chooses to sacrifice her freedom for perceived comfort and opportunity in *Hadestown*.

“*To the end of time / To the ends of the earth*”⁸² Orpheus’s promise of the lengths he will go to reunite with Eurydice is notable for its allusion to the qualities of the underworld in Greek myth. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus sails to the edge of the underworld in order to seek counsel from the blind prophet Tiresias. Odysseus is instructed by Circe to let the north wind guide him to the intersection of three underworld rivers, the Acheron, the Pyriphlegethon, and the Cocytus. This

⁷⁹ 1.898-9 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁸⁰ 1.923-6 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁸¹ 2.136 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁸² 1.930-1 (Mitchell, 2019)

journey takes Odysseus to one edge of the mortal world as it intersects with the house of Hades and Persephone. In this way, Odysseus completes a very minimal *katabasis* or journey down to and up from the underworld, as he never physically crosses the rivers that act as borders to Hades' realm and Odysseus does not descend underground as *κατα-* means to descend or go down. Orpheus receives instruction from Hermes that is as vague as Circe's instructions to Odysseus.

How to get to Hadestown

You have to take the long way down

Through the underground

...

Ain't no compass brother

Ain't no map

Just a telephone wire

And a railroad track

Keep on walking and don't look back

*'til you get to the bottom land*⁸³

⁸³ 1.945-52 (Mitchell, 2019)

The parallel instructions of following a singular feature until the protagonist has reached the underworld rivers provide an important contrast between the certainty and motivation of ancient heroes and this modern Orpheus. The help that Orpheus receives in *Hadestown* is given by a god and in some ways is more concrete than Circe's aid in the *Odyssey*. However, Orpheus faces much more opposition in his *katabasis* than Odysseus does, in part due to the fact that Odysseus only seeks knowledge while Orpheus hopes to reclaim the life of Eurydice.

In *Hadestown*, the journey to the underworld takes place via a train for those brought to the underworld in death. This idea of a train ride as the vehicle to reach the underworld is in reception of the Ancient Greek idea of a ferry to cross the styx and a psychopomp to bring them to the ferryman. There is also a possible line of influence from the idea of trains as the vehicle to journey west in the United States. As the underworld is frequently placed on the western edge of the world, including in the *Odyssey* and in Ancient Egyptian mythology, where West is associated with death due the setting of the sun in the West which leads to necropolises being on the western bank of the Nile River. The trainline of *Hadestown* also draws inspiration from multiple modern ideas. In the United States, western expansion of the country led to people leaving for the West, often by train, to seek their fortune in new lands. This was especially true in times such as the Gold Rushes, which often spurred technological advancement and the creation of new settlements. The trainline in *Hadestown* likely is also in reference to the movement of disenfranchised populations, by choice or by force, via train. Trains were commonly used by disenfranchised populations as modes of transportation due to the possibility of train hopping, a practice of jumping onto a moving, often cargo, train to avoid paying for passage. The train could also represent the transportation of refugees or non-combatants as

reference to situations like the evacuation of London during the London Blitz of World War 2 or like the modern refugee situation from the Ukraine into surrounding countries such as Poland which is occurring both by foot, car, and train.

In Greco-Roman mythology, Hades and Pluto are known as the gods of the dead but also the gods of wealth, precious metals, and gemstones. *Hadestown* takes a very similar view on Hades; he is represented as the sole proprietor of wealth, comfort, and luxury in the postapocalyptic world that the musical is set in. Depending on the singer, the view of *Hadestown* shifts from an idealized place similar to Elysium, to a dystopian industrial labor camp. In the Broadway version of *Hadestown*, the Fates and Hermes portray opposing views of Hadestown in the same song, *Way Down Hadestown*. These views grow less blatant in the in the versions subsequent to the New York Theater Workshop version of the musical, and Orpheus's lines are reworked and reassigned to Hermes. Initially in the NYTW version, the Fates tempt Eurydice with views of luxurious wealth "*Everybody dresses in clothes so fine / Everybody's pockets are weighted down / Everybody sippin' ambrosia wine.*"⁸⁴ The lines that the Fates deliver to Eurydice promise a type of paradise where there is comfort and security in every way someone could hope for. These descriptions of life in Hadestown match well with the Greek ideas of the Islands of the Blest and Elysium, the often-conflated idyllic areas of the underworld that are described as allowing the dead to lead a life as easy as the gods in a winterless sanctuary.⁸⁵ The descriptions of Hadestown by the Fates and the ideal areas of the underworld in Greco-Roman myth line up well in their promises of leisure, security, and comfort for the inhabitants. The lines

⁸⁴ Page 88 (Mitchell, 2020)

⁸⁵ (Kearns, 2012), (Warmington et al., 2012)

delivered by Hermes on Broadway, however, paint a very different picture of life in Hadestown. “*Everybody hungry / Everybody tired / Everybody slaves by the sweat of his brow / The wage is nothing and the work is hard / It’s a graveyard, in Hadestown.*”⁸⁶ This description of Hadestown leans towards the idea of the fields of punishment or Christian purgatory. But contrary to most depictions of the afterlife, the inhabitants of Hadestown are not immoral or being punished for their actions in life but are normal people who are forced into eternal subjugation. The inspiration for *Way Down Hadestown* includes the refugees Anais Mitchell saw while taking a trip from Texas to Mexico and the border towns that are impacted by refugees and the companies that seek to exploit the vulnerable populations.⁸⁷ One lyric remains almost entirely intact since the earliest iterations of the song, before *Hadestown* or as it was initially called, *A Crack in The Wall*, was even a concept.

Follow that dollar for a long way down

Far away from the poorhouse door

You either get to hell or to Hadestown

*Ain’t no difference anymore*⁸⁸

These lines reflect one of the overarching themes of *Hadestown*, which is the dystopic reality inherent in the American Dream. All of the mortals in the world of the living are unemployed according to Hades, unable to farm due to the irregularities in the seasons. The security and

⁸⁶ 1.566-9 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁸⁷ Pages 83-4 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁸⁸ 1.529-32 (Mitchell, 2019)

opportunity offered by Hades, or implied by the Fates, is a tantalizing ideal that mimics the idea of the American Dream. The American Dream of being able to start fresh and work your way out of poverty and into wealth is inherent in the Broadway version of *Hadestown's* lure to Eurydice and the workers' chorus.

Why We Build the Wall also begins the presentation of Hades as a leader. Specifically, Hades can be viewed as either a hegemon or cult leader starting from this song. *Why We Build the Wall* is centered around a call and response chant between Hades and the workers' chorus. The call and response always culminates in Hades referring to the workers' chorus as "*My children, my children*"⁸⁹ which is a common tactic of hegemons to place the oppressed group as requiring their guidance and supervision. The idea of an unrelated, elder male father figure is also central both to Christian practices and many cults that are derived from Christianity. This repetition and idea of twisted fatherhood is in direct contrast to the sibling-like camaraderie showcased by Hermes and Persephone in songs such as *Road to Hell* and *Our Lady of the Underground*.

Throughout *Hadestown*, we see a repetition of certain ideas such as the maternal relationship of Persephone and Eurydice and the paternalistic leanings of Hades. Despite the outward similarities of the two ideas, much of the relationship between Persephone and Eurydice is based in the similarities in their attitudes and situations which leads Persephone to give advice to Eurydice in hopes of preventing the younger woman from making the same mistakes as she had. In contrast, the paternalistic attitude and verbiage of Hades is a tool to retain control over

⁸⁹ 1.1009 (Mitchell, 2019)

his oppressed workers' chorus and a tactic to justify that control by infantilizing their ability to make decisions for themselves.

Chapter 3

Wherever He Is Now

“*Persephone: Hades, I know this boy / Hades: One of the unemployed? / Persephone: His name is Orpheus! / Hades: You stay out of this!*”⁹⁰ Orpheus’s appearance in *Hadestown* lights the sparks of dissent within the workers’ chorus and Persephone against Hades. In Chapter 3, I continue to argue for the representation of Orpheus as autistic, discuss the continued parallel between the mortal and immortal relationships in *Hadestown*, specifically focusing on the similarities between Orpheus and Hades, and the reception of Hades and the Fates through the pivotal moment of Orpheus looking back at Eurydice in *Doubt Comes In*.

Papers completes the introduction of Hades as a hegemon or cult leader that was begun in *Why We Build The Wall*. While this song is short, Hades’ distaste for outsiders becomes obvious, and he begins to seem almost unhinged in comparison to his earlier haughty disposition. The lines quoted above are a brief exchange between Hades and Persephone before Orpheus even has the opportunity to speak up at the beginning of *Papers* that showcase the contempt that Hades holds and fosters for those in the mortal world that are not a part of his capitalist structures. Hades speaks with notable condescension and derision when he asks Persephone where she knows Orpheus from, and easily shuts down the still inebriated goddess. In addition to these lines from Persephone, Eurydice also tries to save Orpheus from himself and from Hades during this song, “*No! / Orpheus, you should go.*”⁹¹ These attempts fail quickly and when

⁹⁰ 2.207-10 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁹¹ 2.217-8 (Mitchell, 2019)

Orpheus tries to stick up for himself, Hades becomes hysterical with laughter before revealing the one aspect of Eurydice's death that is able to crush Orpheus's spirit.

She couldn't go anywhere

Even if she wanted to

...

That everything and everyone

In Hadestown, I own!

But I

Only buy

What others choose to sell

Oh

You didn't know?

She signed the deal herself

And now she –

Orpheus: *It isn't true*

Hades: *Belongs to me*

Orpheus: It isn't true.

What he said

Eurydice –

Eurydice: – I did.

*I do.*⁹²

Hades' presentation of the fate of Eurydice and his ownership of her is deliberately mocking and cruel towards both of the young lovers. He emphasizes several aspects that are crucial to the version of events as told by *Hadestown*, namely that this was a willing, though uninformed, exchange of services between himself and Eurydice, who unintentionally drives the knife in further. Eurydice's language when she confirms Hades' words references the implications brought up verbally in *Chant, Hey Little Songbird*, and the outro of *Why We Build The Wall*, as well as visually in *Our Lady of the Underground*. Eurydice's service to Hades is not just manual labor but holds a heavily implied sexual component that Hades weaponizes against Persephone, which is echoed in the lines "*I did. / I do.*"⁹³ that force the audience to recall traditional wedding vows. The revelations and admissions from this short song, along with a 'fight call' in which Orpheus is beaten up by the worker's chorus, set up another moment in which the Fates act as both the conscience and antagonists to the young lovers.

⁹² 2.223-42 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁹³ 2.241-2 (Mitchell, 2019)

Nothing Changes is an entirely *a capella* song sung by the three Fates, and the only song that does not receive any form of accompaniment from either the band or chorus. The Fates verbalize the darkest thoughts of Orpheus at this moment, as he realizes that Eurydice's disappearance was entirely voluntary and that to attempt to change anything, he must face down a god who holds him in utter contempt.

In *If It's True*, Orpheus confronts the reality of the situation between himself, Eurydice, and Hades and manages to accidentally spur the workers' chorus into dissent. "*Is this how the world is? / To be beaten and betrayed / And be told that nothing changes / It'll always be like this.*"⁹⁴ From the beginning of *Hadestown*, Orpheus is portrayed as an idealistic young man whose head is perpetually in the clouds, blinding him to the harshness of reality. *If It's True* represents Orpheus beginning to come to terms with the reality life has left him and imagining what he can do about it. Orpheus's response to the situation revealed by *Papers* may also be connected to the DSM-5 criteria B2 in the autism spectrum disorder diagnostic criteria. Criteria B2 encompasses extreme distress at transitions and differences in routines or expectations. This insistence on sameness is clear in Orpheus's lines at the beginning of *If It's True* which have him questioning the foundations of his world due to his realization that Eurydice's disappearance did not occur as he had thought.

After Orpheus, Eurydice and the workers' chorus descend through the center lift, Persephone confronts Hades in the song *How Long?*. The center lift remains descended through the song, while Persephone and Hades remain on opposing sides of the hole. The song starts with

⁹⁴ 2.267-70 (Mitchell, 2019)

Persephone hurling accusations at Hades; and Hades encouraging her to keep drinking in order to forget.

***Persephone:** What are you afraid of?*

***Hades:** What.*

***Persephone:** He's just a boy in love*

***Hades:** Have a drink, why don't you?*

***Persephone:** No. I've had enough.*

...

***Persephone:** He has the kind of love for her*

That you and I once had.⁹⁵

The idea that Orpheus is similar to a young Hades falling in love with Persephone is repeated in the next two songs and provides a background to *Chant (Reprise)* where Persephone and Hades dispense jaded advice to the young lovers as thinly veiled jabs at their spouse. Hades notably does not deny either that he is similar to Orpheus or that he is afraid of the situation brewing in Hadestown. Both Hades and Persephone now acknowledge the similarities between themselves and each of the younger lovers as well as the similarities between their relationship and that of the younger lovers. Persephone's unwillingness to drink any more is also notable for

⁹⁵ 2.346-51, 354-5 (Mitchell, 2019)

its departure from earlier songs. This is the first verbalization of her change in attitude towards the substances she was using to dull her feelings about her relationships and continued removal from the places she cares about. Persephone takes her last drink on stage during *Way Down Hadestown (Reprise)*, though she still appears tipsy through *Papers*. In the lines following, the married deities say “**Hades:** *The girl means nothing to me.* / **Persephone:** *I know / But she means everything to him.*”⁹⁶ Hades has suddenly shifted from seeking out another woman in order to make Persephone jealous to fearing that he has driven Persephone too far with his actions. This also leads to the first true demand that Persephone makes of Hades, as prior to this she has only made complaints and raised issues with Hades’ actions. “*Let her go.*”⁹⁷

In *Epic 3*, Orpheus sings the final version of his song about the relationship between Hades and Persephone in an attempt to persuade Hades to allow Eurydice to return to the surface with him. In this song, Hades and Persephone are the primary focus and, due to their status as the causes of the divinely-wrought climate change in *Hadestown*, the pair is praised while also having fault laid at their feet. Much of the wording to describe the godly relationship is from earlier descriptions of the relationship between Orpheus and Eurydice in songs like *All I’ve Ever Known*. Throughout *Epic 3*, Orpheus uses his own relationship with Eurydice to describe how he imagines the story of Persephone and Hades’ relationship before it went sour. Initially, Hades mocks the fact that Orpheus has chosen to sing about him in Orpheus’s bid to convince Hades to spare him. “*Oh, it’s about me...*”⁹⁸ After this, Orpheus has to be prompted to continue by Hermes but when he does, he quickly picks up steam. Orpheus may be singing about Hades and

⁹⁶ 2.356-8 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁹⁷ 2.360 (Mitchell, 2019)

⁹⁸ 2.492 (Mitchell, 2019)

Persephone but he is singing to Eurydice, repeating the promises and statements that he had made in *All I've Ever Known* through the godly couple's story.

You didn't know how, and you didn't know why

But you knew that you wanted to take her home

You saw her alone there against the sky

It was like she was someone you'd always known

It was like you were holding the world when you held her

Like yours were the arms that the whole world was in⁹⁹

Orpheus takes the reassurances he told Eurydice in *All I've Ever Known* and applies them to the godly relationship, clearly showcasing that he, at least, understands the similarities between himself and Hades along with the similarities between Eurydice and Persephone. Orpheus specifically reiterates four lines from his pledge to Eurydice,

I don't know how or why

...

But when I saw you all alone against the sky

It's like I'd known you all along

⁹⁹ 2.506-11 (Mitchell, 2019)

...

*Suddenly I'm holding the world in my arms*¹⁰⁰

The impact of the song on both Hades and Persephone is visible throughout, confirming Orpheus's earlier statement that "*And I know how it was because he was like me / A man in love with a woman.*"¹⁰¹ Hades grows almost angry when he hears Orpheus's rediscovered melody and has to be stopped by Persephone from interrogating Orpheus about where he discovered it. Orpheus, however, continues to sing about the relationship prior to the indefinite time when things grew sour before shocking Hades with another statement, "*But what he doesn't know is that what he's defending / Is already gone.*"¹⁰² Obviously, Persephone has not been physically lost to Hades, but, emotionally, Persephone has been distant, having retreated into the haze induced by various substances to escape from her husband. After this statement, when Orpheus begins to sing his melody once more, he pauses and allows first Hades and then Persephone to join in and take over.

As Hades and Persephone harmonize with Orpheus's rediscovered melody, the stage directions read "*Magic. The melody spontaneously produces a flower, surprising them both.*"¹⁰³ At the end of *Epic 3* there is an 'instrumental' which showcases the reactions of Hades and Persephone to the completed song. Hades bows and offers the carnation to Persephone as Hermes begins to narrate for the audience.

¹⁰⁰ 1.485, 487-8, 498 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹⁰¹ 2.498-9 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹⁰² 2.528-9 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹⁰³ Stage direction between lines 2.537-8 (Mitchell, 2019)

This poor boy brought the world

Back into tune, is what he did

And Hades and Persephone

They took each other's hands

*And brother you know what **they** did?*

They danced...¹⁰⁴

Persephone tucks the carnation into Hades' breast pocket just over his heart as the pair begin to dance to the sounds of Orpheus continuing his melody. The godly lovers remain in an embrace as Eurydice and Orpheus discuss their relationship in *Promises*. Orpheus's autistic traits come to the forefront once more as Eurydice approaches him saying, "*You finished it... / **Orpheus:** Yes / Now what do I do?*"¹⁰⁵ Orpheus's difficulty in imagining what he should do, now that there is no more work to be done on his song, correlates back to the diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder. Specifically, criteria B2 and B3, insistence on sameness and "highly restricted, fixated interests"¹⁰⁶ respectively, match with the difficulties that Orpheus is currently experiencing. Eurydice responds to Orpheus's confusion on how to live now that he no longer has a purpose through his music with a easy response, "*You take me home with you / Let's go / Let's go right now / **Orpheus:** Okay, let's go - how?*"¹⁰⁷ Eurydice gives confidence to Orpheus with her words,

¹⁰⁴ 2.540-5 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹⁰⁵ 2.551-3 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹⁰⁶ (CDC, 2020)

¹⁰⁷ 2.554-7 (Mitchell, 2019)

assuring him that not only does she want to return with him, but also that she believes that Hades will allow them to leave together.

With confidence instilled in him by Eurydice, Orpheus turns to Hades, interrupting the embrace between the godly lovers, where they still stand swaying to the unheard noise of the melody.

Hermes: And so, the poor boy asked the king

Orpheus: Can we go?

Hermes: And this is how he answered him

*Hades: I don't know*¹⁰⁸

This song, *Word to Wise*, focuses on how Hades came to the decision both to allow Orpheus the chance to save Eurydice and to put stipulations on that allowance. Following the revelation that Orpheus was able to finish his song and bring the relationship between Hades and Persephone back into a semblance of order, Hades falters when confronted with the idea of breaking his contract with Eurydice. The Fates then take over to vocalize the innermost fears and doubts of Hades in this moment. The song gets its name from the Fates' proclamation that they are providing advice, "*Here's a little tip / Word to the wise / Here's a little snippet of advice.*"¹⁰⁹ The advice provided by the Fates is two-fold, however, as it is both advice on how to trick Orpheus

¹⁰⁸ 2.601-4 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹⁰⁹ 2.623-5 (Mitchell, 2019)

into failing, and it reveals their opinion of Hades and tricks him into worsening his own relationship with Persephone.

Men are fools

Oh, men are frail

*Give them the rope and they'll hang themselves*¹¹⁰

Hades ponders the hell of his own creation that he is left in after receiving this advice from the Fates. His internal monologue and eventual decision comprise the song *His Kiss, The Riot*. The song begins with Hades cursing Orpheus in an amusing manner.

The devil take this Orpheus

And his belladonna kiss

Beautiful, poisonous

Lovely! Deadly!

Dangerous, this jack of hearts

*With his kiss, the riot starts*¹¹¹

Contrary to Chapter 2's discussion of Hades as a devil figure, Hades curses Orpheus here by hoping that the devil will claim him. This is despite Hades being both ruler of Hadestown which

¹¹⁰ 2.626-8 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹¹¹ 2.629-34 (Mitchell, 2019)

is repeatedly referred to as no different from hell, and Hades himself being likened to a devil figure in multiple songs and through visual association. The botanical references to Orpheus encompass the continued theme of natural world imagery from Hades that can also be seen in *Hey, Little Songbird*, though it is notable that Orpheus is represented as flora in contrast to Eurydice's representation as fauna. The 'belladonna kiss' referenced by Hades can be viewed through multiple lenses, two of which are most applicable to Hades' character. The kiss could be seen as referential to the kiss of Judas that marked Jesus for crucifixion and death, in modern culture a Judas Kiss can mean "an act of betrayal, especially one disguised as a gesture of friendship."¹¹² Despite the fact that Hades and Orpheus were not truly amicable at any point in *Hadestown*, the idea of an act of harm disguised as an act of friendship can be seen easily in this situation as Orpheus hopes to repair Hades' marital relationship but instead dooms both of them to doubt. This same principle can be seen in the *bacio della morte* or kiss of death that has become a fixture of popculture in recent decades due to the influx of mafia movies. Likely inspired by the kiss of Judas, the kiss of death was believed to be used to mark out targets for assassination by mafia members. This explanation also fits well with Hades in *Hadestown* as he was inspired by the stereotypical American mob boss idea in both aesthetic and character.

As *His Kiss, The Riot* concludes, Hades falls into the trap that the Fates have laid for both himself and Orpheus as he informs Hermes of the terms of the deal.

Let them go, but let there be some

¹¹² "Judas Kiss" (*Oxford Languages and Google - English | Oxford Languages*, n.d.)

Term to be agreed upon

Some... condition

Orpheus, the undersigned

Shall not turn to look behind

She's out of sight!

And he's out of his mind

Every coward seems courageous

In the safety of a crowd

Bravery can be contagious

When the band is playing loud

Nothing makes a man so bold

As a woman's smile and a hand to hold

But all alone his blood runs thin

And doubt comes

Doubt comes in¹¹³

¹¹³ 2.646-61 (Mitchell, 2019)

As Hades informs Hermes of the terms of the contract between himself and Orpheus, the band grows louder and louder, reaching a crescendo as Hades references them. But slowly as Hades returns to looking at the carnation, the accompaniment falls silent and the final line above is spoken to a silent theater. It can be assumed that the final two lines cause Hades to realize the depths of the similarities between himself and Orpheus, as they mimic lines from *Epic 2*, where Orpheus tries to rationalize the failing relationship between Hades and Persephone that fuels Hades to collect his wife from the world of the living ever earlier and allow her to depart from Hadestown ever later.

And for half of the year, with Persephone gone

His loneliness moves in him, crude and black

He thinks of his wife in the arms of the sun

And jealousy fuels him

And feeds him, and fills him

With doubt that she'll ever come

Dread that she'll never come

*Doubt that his lover, will ever come back*¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ 1.639-46 (Mitchell, 2019)

Roughly one thousand lines prior to Hades setting the terms of his contract with Orpheus, the latter foreshadows the reasoning that Hades uses to rationalize his decision. At the core of both male leads in *Hadestown* is doubt; they doubt themselves, their relationships, and their worth without their self-proclaimed purposes. The parallel grows throughout the performance as the audience is introduced to Hades in a role other than the antagonist and as Orpheus can be seen to lose his faith with the aid of the Fates in *Doubt Comes In*.

Wait for Me (Reprise) begins with Hermes informing Orpheus and Eurydice that Hades has decided to allow them to leave, much to their disbelief. Immediately, the couple and the workers' chorus turn to leave, only stopped by Hermes' quiet comment, "*There's bad news, though.*"¹¹⁵ As he describes the conditions set by Hades, Hermes sits, facing away from the audience and the mortal couple, only turning when asked why these terms have been set by first Orpheus and then Eurydice. Hermes' answer reminds the audience and the characters that while Hades is a sympathetic character in his love for Persephone, he is also a hegemon that thrives on control, dominance, and power.

Why build walls?

Make folks walk single file?

Divide and conquer's what it's called

Orpheus: It's a trap?

¹¹⁵ 2.669 (Mitchell, 2019)

*Hermes: It's a trial*¹¹⁶

Orpheus is hesitant to believe in Hades' ability and willingness to honor the deal presented by Hermes, and repeats that final question multiple times, first to Hermes and later to himself as he struggles to lead Eurydice and the workers' chorus to the surface.

The mortal couple reaffirm their trust in one another and their self-confidence before setting off, and each group in *Hadestown* receives an aside about the coming *anabasis* to be led by Orpheus. Persephone and Hades discuss their relationship as Persephone softens from Hades' willingness to change.

Persephone: Hades, you let them go

Hades: I let them try

Persephone: And how 'bout you and I?

Are we gonna try again?

Hades: It's time for spring

We'll try again next fall.

Persephone: Wait for me?

*Hades: I will*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ 2.685-689 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹¹⁷ 2.729, 731-2, 734, 736-9 (Mitchell, 2019)

To Persephone, the terms set upon Eurydice's release do not matter, only the fact that Hades allowed the young pair, who she sees herself and Hades in so strongly, to leave at all matters. The timeline of the musical is also brought into question by this dialogue, as it implies that possibly an entire year has passed since the opening song, *Road to Hell*. The musical began in winter and, although it was implied many times that the winter had elongated through the typical springtime, Hades now declares that it is time for the subsequent winter to be over. It is also notable that the typical anxieties of the relationship between Hades and Persephone have been reversed. Previously, it was Hades who grew anxious that their relationship would fail over the course of the warmer months, but now Persephone worries about his faithfulness when she departs while Hades is content to wait and 'try again.' When the immortal couple separates for the spring, Hades gives the carnation back to Persephone as the song continues around them.

It is at this moment that the Fates begin to sow doubt in Orpheus's mind, "*Who do you think you are? / Who are you? / Who are you to lead her?*"¹¹⁸ The Fates begin their mantra that will repeat many times throughout *Doubt Comes In*. The Fates act in two ways that are easily confused in *Hadestown*. First, the Fates act as the conscience or inner monologue to Eurydice, Hades, and Orpheus. Secondly, the Fates act as antagonists to all four leading characters throughout the musical. At times, it can be difficult to discern which role the Fates are acting as in any given moment as they tend to only voice the negative thoughts of a character which lines up incredibly closely with the antagonistic force of their actions overall. In the final songs of the

¹¹⁸ 2.745-7 (Mitchell, 2019)

musical, the two manners in which the Fates act are virtually impossible to separate. Hermes hints at this idea of a mental battle to escape Hadestown in several lines:

I'll tell you where the real road lies

Between your ears, behind your eyes

That is the path to paradise

*And likewise the road to ruin*¹¹⁹

As *Wait for Me (Reprise)* draws to a close, Eurydice mimics the earlier lines of Orpheus in the original *Wait for Me*, but with much greater confidence, as the company (minus Orpheus) echo her. Eurydice's confidently belting voice is swallowed by darkness and quiet.

The stage during *Doubt Comes In* is dimly lit and filled with fog, heavily utilizing the rotating, concentric circles to portray the long walk of the company's *anabasis*. Orpheus attempts to break the silence with his melody as he begins to walk, but when no one echoes him it only serves to create doubt in whether anyone is walking with him.¹²⁰ *Doubt Comes In* went through many iterations throughout the creative process, with a steady progression in changing from a jealousy-based doubt in Eurydice's faithfulness to an existential doubt in Orpheus's own self-worth and abilities. The staging emphasizes Orpheus's point of view by continually shrouding Eurydice and the rest of the company in darkness, hiding them from both Orpheus and the audience except for during their specific spoken parts. The Fates remind the audience of this

¹¹⁹ 2.755-8 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹²⁰ Page 241 (Mitchell, 2020)

throughout their early lines, “*Doubt comes in / And meets a stranger / Walking on a road alone.*”¹²¹ They continually frame Orpheus’s lines in the framework of his loneliness in the journey. There is an additional point to be made from the lanterns carried by the Fates during this scene. The Fates create some of the only illumination on stage with ‘gas lanterns’ that each one carries and lights during moments when they question Orpheus’s journey and undermine his certainty.

Fates: Where is she now?

Doubt comes in

Orpheus: Who am I?

Why am I alone?

Fates: Doubt comes in

Orpheus: Who do I think I am?

*Who am I to think that she would follow me into the cold and dark again?*¹²²

Orpheus gets stuck in his own head regarding several points throughout *Doubt Comes In*, beyond his general existential questioning. First, he questions why Eurydice would be willing to return to a world where she starved and froze, effectively abandoned by her husband due to his hyper-fixation on his work. Despite their reaffirmation of their commitment to one another in

¹²¹ 2.786-8 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹²² 2.790-800 (Mitchell, 2019)

Promises, Orpheus is unable to believe Eurydice's words when he is left alone which is typical for many neurodivergent people in relationships as they, like Orpheus, have already experienced a partner breaking their word when times got tough. Orpheus then questions why Hades would allow him to leave with Eurydice, unable to believe Hermes was correct when he was reassured in *Wait for Me (Reprise)*.

Who am I against him?

Who am I?

Why would he let me win?

Why would he let her go?

Who am I to think I that he wouldn't deceive me

*Just to make me leave alone?*¹²³

Orpheus has lost all of his bravado from *Papers* and has become aware of how small and insignificant he is in comparison to Hades. Remembering how Hades had laughed and sneered at him and his attempt to return Eurydice to the world of the living, Orpheus is unable to remember how affect Hades had been by his song or unable to see why Hades would change face so quickly. Orpheus grows manic at the thought that he is walking to the surface alone with

¹²³ 2.818-23 (Mitchell, 2019)

Eurydice trapped in Hadestown, questioning again that Hermes was correct and eventually joining in with the Fates' repetition of "*Where is she?*"¹²⁴

Is this a trap that's being laid for me?

Is this a trick that's being played on me?

I used to see the way the world could be

But now the way it is is all I see , and

Fates and Orpheus: Where is she?

*Where is she now?*¹²⁵

Orpheus's desperation and despair grow as he sings these lines. The stage begins to brighten in contrast to the darkness of his lyrics, the workers' chorus has been transformed back into the Chorus and stand at the stage right entrance, meanwhile Eurydice and the Chorus begin to sing, reaffirming that they are not only following Orpheus but believe that he will deliver them to safety. As the band builds to a crescendo, Eurydice sings with the Chorus echoing her, "*And the darkest hour / Of the darkest night / Comes right before the —*"¹²⁶ Eurydice gasps. The stage has returned to the arrangement from the beginning of the show, only devoid of furniture. Orpheus is about to reach the stage left entrance when:

¹²⁴ 2.834 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹²⁵ 2.826, 829, 831, 833-5 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹²⁶ 2.843, 845, 847 (Mitchell, 2019)

(ORPHEUS pauses... then he turns)

Orpheus: It's you

Eurydice: It's me

Orpheus

Orpheus: Eurydice

(EURYDICE descends to the underworld.)¹²⁷

At the last moment, when everything appears to be finished in the favor of the young lovers, Orpheus turns back, stunned to see Eurydice following behind him. Eurydice, then at center stage, delivers her lines half-sobbing as the platform immediately begins to descend. Upon Orpheus saying her name, she collapses to the ground which quickly appears to swallow her, returning her to Hadestown, alone. Orpheus's last line in the musical is there, just Eurydice's name, as he confronts the fact that he has failed to save her because of his own doubt.

The theater is silent.

When Eurydice is gone from view, Orpheus slowly turns and walks out of the stage left entrance as the rest of the company stands stock still for a moment before the Chorus exits. Center stage is dominated by the gaping hole left by Eurydice's forcible return to Hadestown, while Hermes walks slowly to center stage to look down and address the audience.

¹²⁷ Stage direction before 2.858 - stage direction after 2.851 (Mitchell, 2019)

It's an old song

And that is how ends

That's how it goes

Don't ask why brother, don't ask how

He could have come so close¹²⁸

Accompaniment from the band falls away as Hermes alternates between singing and speaking. The refrain from the opening number reappears in *Road to Hell (Reprise)* as Hermes reminds us that, from the beginning, the audience was warned that it was 'a tragedy' but that the company would keep singing it anyways.

Cos here's the thing

To know how it ends

And still begin

To sing it again

As if it might turn out this time

I learned that from a friend of mine¹²⁹

¹²⁸ 2.855-9 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹²⁹ 2.866-71 (Mitchell, 2019)

The idea that Hermes and possibly others were aware of the tragic end of Orpheus and Eurydice's story brings both peace and confusion to the story's end. It is impossible to know whether the story has changed over the course of the retellings, but the idea that the story is everchanging fits in with both the musical's beginning in community theater and with the stories' beginnings in oral tradition and oral culture. To emphasize this fact, the song *Road to Hell (Reprise)* first appeared in the previews for the New York Theater Workshop version, and it wasn't until the subsequent version in Edmonton that the cyclical nature of the story was fully developed into the '*Groundhogs Day*-style'¹³⁰ that exists in the Broadway version. The stage remains somber even as the Chorus slowly begin to return to the stage.

At Hermes' next line, the band begins to pick up with a softer version of the melody from *Living It Up on Top*. Meanwhile, the Chorus slowly filter into the inner stage, avoiding the still present hole caused by Eurydice's descent.

Hermes: *See, Orpheus was a poor boy*

(EURYDICE appears, with overcoat, backpack, and candle, as in the beginning)

Eurydice: *Anybody got a match?*

Hermes: *(offering a match) But he had a gift to give*

Eurydice: *Give me that*¹³¹

¹³⁰ Page 251 (Mitchell, 2020)

¹³¹ 2.873-6 (Mitchell, 2019)

‘As in the beginning’ Eurydice appears in the doorway on the stage right side and the cast begins to sing the story once again. The company becomes more and more lively as Hermes continues to sing and Persephone is returned to the world of the living “*With a love song.*”¹³² And the company, only missing Orpheus, reiterates much of the refrain from the original *Road to Hell* about revisiting this old, sad, love song again and again until:

ORPHEUS appears, as in the beginning. EURYDICE and ORPHEUS see each other, as if for the first time.

*End of Play*¹³³

And finally, the young lovers are both reunited and introduced, just as the play both is ended and is begun again.

The characters of *Hadestown* represent the change in attitude towards female and neurodiverse individuals. Orpheus shows the strong contrast between the musical role of a vulnerable, insecure man and ancient literature’s pompous hero through moments of eagerness and insecurity. The larger presence of Eurydice in *Hadestown* reflects on the minimized role of women in ancient myth and literature. The musical *Hadestown* is not just a retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth from Ovid and others in the modern-day. The musical is a reimagining of the intertwining stories of the abduction of Persephone and the rescue of Eurydice that evolves the ancient stories into something new that recognizes the impact of climate change, refugees, and capitalism within the familiar bounds of the myth. *Hadestown* exists within a

¹³² 2.893 (Mitchell, 2019)

¹³³ Stage direction after 2.922 (Mitchell, 2019)

broader context of modern popular interpretations of ancient media, making the stories and history of Ancient Greece and Rome feel familiar and welcome to current audiences.

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Vice President '20-21 and President '21-22

05/2019 – Present

Helped facilitate outreach within the Penn State community to promote interest in the field of Ancient Mediterranean Studies. Ran weekly meetings helping bring interest to the department, guide course scheduling and advise on opportunities. Provided information on opportunities within and outside of the department for greater interaction in the field of Classics. Secured full funding to send a group of students to the SCS/AIA annual meeting in January of 2022.

LANGUAGES

English– Native Language

German– B2 level

Latin– Two courses at the 400 level, one audit at the 400 level, two years of teaching and running a bi-weekly Spoken Latin group

Ancient Greek– Two courses at the 400 level