

Tracing Eurydice:
Adaptation and Narrative Structure in the Orpheus Myth

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Master's Thesis

in

The Department of Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Media Studies) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2013

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

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AbstractTracing Eurydice:
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The primary purpose of this thesis is to postulate a working method of critical inquiry into the processes of narrative adaptation by examining the consistencies and ruptures of a story as it moves across representational form. In order to accomplish this, I will draw upon the method of structuralist textual analysis employed by Roland Barthes in his essay *S/Z* to produce a comparative study of three versions of the Orpheus myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. By reviewing the five codes of meaning described by Barthes in *S/Z* through the lens of contemporary adaptation theory, I hope to discern a structural basis for the persistence of adapted narrative. By applying these theories to texts in a variety of different media, I will also assess the limitations of Barthes' methodology, evaluating its utility as a critical tool for post-literary narrative forms.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Peter van Wyck, for his reassurance that earlier drafts of this thesis were not *necessarily* indicative of insanity, and, hopefully, for his forgiveness of my failure to incorporate all of his particularly insightful feedback.

I would also like to thank Matt Soar and Darren Wershler for agreeing to actually read the peculiar monstrosity I have assembled here. Particular thanks to the former for his patience in waiting for the delivery of overdue research work while I frantically finished typing the words that follow.

Further thanks are due to Concordia University, and in particular the Department of Communications, for providing me with the opportunity to work on this project over the past year.

Finally, I would like to thank Sally Mayas, who has provided me with invaluable emotional support throughout the writing process, despite my frequent bouts of pouting, despair, and general unpleasantness. None of this would have come together without her.

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Introduction

To persist means to affirm the Irreducible of literature, that which resists and survives the typified discourses, the philosophies, sciences, psychologies which surround it, to act as if literature were incomparable and immortal...to persist means, in short, to maintain, over and against everything, the force of drift and of expectation. And it is precisely because it persists that writing is led to shift ground.

– Roland Barthes, *Inaugural Lecture*

Collège de France, January 7th 1977

Describing the prominence of narrative adaptation is something of a superfluous task. There are video games based on movies based on comic books, and there are books based on movies based on video games. There are symphonies based on fairy tales and ballets based on Shakespeare. Some stories will be told and retold, and through their telling and retelling they will inevitably experience change. But through this change, this endless evolution and mutation accompanying the ebb and flow of story as it spills from page to screen to score to screen again: what remains the same? What constant makes these tales recognizable across time and form?

That narrative adaptation is both popular and persistent can thus be taken as a foregone conclusion, but discerning exactly how and why that matters takes a bit more effort.

To better understand the way that narrative persistence is performed by adapted work, I will be drawing upon the theory of textuality and method of textual analysis developed by Roland Barthes in his 1970 essay *S/Z*. By attempting to emulate the structuralist semiotic maneuvers that Barthes deploys in his study of Balzac's short story *Sarrasine*, I will endeavor to discern a working model for examining the migration of narrative across media. In so doing, I will also undertake a systematic critique of Barthes' method, testing his ideas against the representational functions of a variety of different sign systems.

My primary concern here is the movement of story, and the examination of the sort of critical method and theory which enable its analysis. As a result, the texts that I have chosen for my research are somewhat arbitrary: any set of adapted works should, hypothetically, yield similar results when placed under the sort of scrutiny that I will undertake here. That being said, it is worth mentioning why I have chosen the works that I have: the Orpheus myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *The Song of Orpheus* from Neil Gaiman's comic book series *Sandman*, and Terry Cavanagh's video game *Don't Look Back*.

The longevity of the Orpheus tale makes it a particularly interesting subject for this sort of study. Since I am operating under the assumption that certain stories possess some sort of quality (or set of qualities) that facilitates their continued retelling, the most persistent narratives *should*, in theory, offer the most pronounced examples of whatever this quality may be. That the tale in question has demonstrated a particular propensity for adaptation, inspiring a growing canon of operas, symphonies, films, graphic novels, and

video games, only serves to further emphasize this point. In addition, the age of the story places it squarely within public domain: intellectual property policies do not bear directly upon the revisitation of this particular tale.

The brevity of the text is also ideal - the translation of this portion of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is scarcely more than a hundred lines long. This is also true of the adaptations I have chosen - Gaiman's revisitation of the myth occupies only a single issue of the voluminous *Sandman* series, and Cavanagh's *Don't Look Back* can be played in its entirety in less than an hour. The concision of these works will allow me to perform a much more rigorous analysis of their narrative structures than would be possible had I chosen a longer source text.

Form is also an essential quality of these latter two works. Much of the previous scholarship concerning adaptation has focused on the movement from text to screen. By choosing a comic book and a video game, I hope to expand the scope of such research to account for media which cannot be structurally reduced to purely literary or cinematic terms. In so doing, I also hope to challenge the flexibility of Barthes' methodology, assessing how capable it is of accounting for forms that have not been explicitly addressed in his work.

In order to better understand the theoretical premises of *S/Z*, it is useful to situate the essay in the context of Barthes' work more generally. The 1967 essay "The Death of the Author," for example, readily evidences Barthes' preoccupation with many of the major concepts that would lead to the creation of *S/Z*. The references to Balzac's *Sarrasine* that bookend the piece are certainly very telling, but it is the essay's radical

new approach to the project of textual interpretation that is most germane to the project at hand. Essentially, Barthes seeks to debunk approaches to literary analysis that provide singular, definitive readings of written works by relying upon postulations of authorial intent. Instead, he argues, texts are inherently plural - all writing presents the possibility of a wide range of multiple and varied interpretations:

A text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture... Once the Author is gone, the claim to ‘decipher’ a text becomes quite useless. To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing. ¹

Since the act of interpretation – reading, in this case – is so highly susceptible to such a myriad of influences and alterations, authorial intent is an inadequate means for approaching textual analysis. To put the problem more simply: “How can we know anything about the intentions, the awareness, the attitude of a dead author or of imagined beings (a narrator, an implied author) that have no existence apart from the words attributed to them?” ² As a solution, Barthes effectively calls for a shift away from author-centered trends of literary criticism towards a model that takes the plurality of the

¹ Barthes, Roland. “The Death of the Author.” 1967: 4-5.

² Rosenthal, Peggy. “Deciphering S/Z.” 1975: 130-1.

text as its starting point. Literary scholarship, he claims, should seek to examine the structures that enable this entire spectrum of possible interpretations, and to discern the mechanisms whereby such a spectrum is expanded or limited.

Barthes further clarifies this idea in his essay “From Work to Text,” released a year after the publication of *S/Z*:

The Text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an *irreducible* (and not merely an acceptable) plural. The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the Text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the *stereographic plurality* of its weave of signifiers.³

With the text thus left open to its many interpretations, the stage is effectively set for *S/Z*'s unique approach to textual analysis. Central to this method is the distinction between what Barthes refers to as readerly (*lisible*) and writerly (*scriptible*) texts. “The readerly is defined as a product consumed by the reader; the writerly is a process of production in which the reader becomes a producer: it is ‘ourselves writing.’”⁴ However, to say that a text is readerly is not to preclude it from a multitude of readings, to assign to it a single definitive meaning. Instead, the designation indicates limitation – these texts

³ Barthes, Roland. “From Work to Text.” 1971: 3.

⁴ Johnson, Barbara. “The Critical Difference.” *Diacritics* (1978): 4.

are *incompletely* plural. The distinction, then, is not between singularity and infinity, but between different magnitudes of plurality.

As a pair, these concepts allow us to consider a body of polysemous (moderately plural) texts that conveniently contains the vast majority of literature. Acknowledging that these texts are only *modestly* plural allows us to hypothesize a narrative structure that acts as “an average appreciator which can grasp only a certain median portion of the plural.”⁵ A structuralist approach to textual analysis is only possible under these conditions, where the text is inescapably plural, but not infinitely so.

According to Barthes, the foundation of such an approach is the study of connotation. “Semiologically, each connotation is the starting point of a code...the articulation of a voice which is woven into the text.”⁶ Barthes’ proposed study of *Sarrasine* seeks to focus on these connotations “in order to observe therein the migration of meanings, the outcropping of codes, the passage of citations.”⁷ The codes thus become the very basis of his method, and by locating, naming, and enumerating them, he strives to discern an “average appreciator” for the “modestly plural” text, not to “manifest a structure,” but to “produce a structuration.”⁸ This is the entire project of *S/Z*, which breaks Balzac’s original text into fragments in order to examine the way that these various codes function within writing.

Peggy Rosenthal’s article “Deciphering *S/Z*,” published in 1975 shortly after the work’s English translation, emphasizes the significance of this approach:

⁵ Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. 1970: 6.

⁶ Ibid. 9.

⁷ Ibid. 12.

⁸ Ibid. 20.

His application of this vocabulary (semiotics) to a literary text in *S/Z* is an important step in the development of semiology because it dramatizes, as the use of only traditional literary-critical vocabularies wouldn't, that a literary work is a cultural artifact like any other, that it creates its meanings in much the same way that everyday speech or a wrestling match or a TV commercial do, and that we can understand what makes it different, what makes it 'literature,' only if we understand first how it is *like* so much else of what we do, read, see.⁹

As Rosenthal clearly illustrates, *S/Z* is a highly generative piece of writing, allowing a huge amount of *new* work to be done. This becomes even more readily evident when we consider *S/Z*'s applicability to non-literary media, as Judith Mayne does in her article "*S/Z* and Film Criticism": "The preciseness with which Barthes deals with his object 'literature' carries with it, in counterpoint, a gesture of destruction of the object itself as a homogenous block with clearly defined boundaries. Hence it is tempting - and justifiable - to perceive Barthes' analysis of *Sarrasine* as pertinent to all sign systems."¹⁰ This, however, is not to say that the application of Barthes' method to other media is straightforward, or that it is indeed appropriate.

The idea that Barthes' method cannot be replicated in the study of other works is especially threatening to the proposition of using his work to build a theoretical model for the study of narrative adaptation. Critics of his work begrudgingly accept the death of the

⁹ Rosenthal, 135.

¹⁰ Mayne, Judith. "S/Z and Film Criticism." *Jump Cut*. 1976. Online.

author and the plurality of the text, but claim that the system of analysis deployed by *S/Z* may be too particular to Balzac's *Sarrasine*: "Its system of codes 'is not systematic enough to be applied easily by other analysts to other texts.'" ¹¹ This may very well be the case. The following chapters will test this assertion by attempting to apply Barthes' system to three different texts. Either result should be informative. Indeed, the inability of his approach to textual analysis to reckon with the various media examined here will perhaps prove just as illuminating as its undaunted success.

Having established the plurality of the text, Barthes is left with the task of teasing out the various mechanisms of connotation that open Balzac's story to its many different possible readings. In order to better examine this interplay of signifieds, Barthes divides *Sarrasine*, the "tutor signifier" of *S/Z*, into a series of brief, contiguous fragments which he refers to as *lexia*, or units of reading. Importantly, this division is "arbitrary in the extreme; it will imply no methodological responsibility, since it will bear on the signifier, whereas the proposed analysis bears solely on the signified." ¹² This leaves Barthes' method open to replication in other texts and other sign systems; if the division is arbitrary, we run no risk of fragmenting the text incorrectly.

Within the first sentence of *Sarrasine*, Barthes identifies five major codes of connotation, under which all acts of narrative signification can be grouped. These five codes will be the basis for my comparative study of the Orpheus tale and its adaptations, and I will endeavor to use them as a means of understanding which parts of a narrative persist across multiple versions, and which wither and fade in the retelling. I will briefly

¹¹ Rosenthal, 143 (quoting Scholes, 1975: 155).

¹² Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. 13.

describe these codes in the order that Barthes introduces them: the hermeneutic, the semic, the proairetic, the symbolic, and the referential.

The hermeneutic code, or voice of truth, is primarily responsible for propelling a story forward; it introduces enigma, proposes the questions that the narrative must eventually resolve. “Under the hermeneutic code, we list the various (formal) terms by which an enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed.”¹³ The semic code, or voice of person, deals with “signifiers par excellence,” elements “which can combine with other similar elements to create characters, ambiances, shapes, and symbols.”¹⁴ Femininity and wealth are two of the earliest examples of the semic code found in *Sarrasine*. This does not necessarily mean that these are dominant narrative themes, only that these ideas are connoted by various narrative elements.

The proairetic code, the voice of empirics, consists of actions and small narrative sequences; it is not unlike the *fabula* of the Russian formalists. “The proairetic sequence is never more than the result of an artifice of reading...its only logic is that of the ‘already-done’ or ‘already-read.’”¹⁵ For Barthes, naming these sequences is a sufficient means of accounting for their plurality – the proairetic is the most *readerly* of the five voices; bound to a temporally specific series of actions, this code is irreversible, and thus not left open to a diverse body of interpretations.

¹³ Ibid. 19.

¹⁴ Ibid. 17.

¹⁵ Ibid. 19.

The symbolic code describes the realm of metonymy and metaphor. Of all the codes, it is perhaps the most elusive, the most *writerly*; it is “the place for multivalence and for reversibility.”¹⁶ Rhetorical techniques such as antithesis play a prominent role in this code, since they lay the groundwork for a “vast symbolic structure,” which lends itself to multiple thematic variations. Finally, the referential code, the voice of science, connotes meaning through the mobilization of common bodies of knowledge such as medicine, psychology, literature, or history. It is easy to anticipate how highly relevant this code will be for coping with the challenges of adapted narratives. Bodies of popular knowledge change dramatically across time and culture, and the epistemological assumptions of one story may thus bear diminished relevance upon its future adaptations. At the same time, by entering in to an intertextual relationship with an especially persistent narrative, adapted works claim earlier versions as an assumed body of knowledge. This additional layer of referentiality will clearly provide a generative point of distinction in the analysis of these stories.

This is clearly only the most cursory overview of these codes – outside the boundaries of an actual narrative text, it is rather difficult to understand their precise function. Barthes’ himself relies entirely on Balzac’s *Sarrasine* to demonstrate the appearance and behavior of this system, and does not attempt to define any of the codes until *after* he has begun his “reading” of the story. I will likewise rely on the texts examined in the following chapters to clarify exactly how the codes work together to

¹⁶ Ibid. 19.

structure a range of possible interpretations, as it is by examining these stories that I have come by my own understanding of Barthes' system.

Importantly, adaptation is not an explicit concern of Barthes' work, and the particular problems posed by the movement of texts across media are never addressed directly in *S/Z*. But by nuancing Barthes' theory of polysemous textuality with some of the ideas posed by the growing field of adaptation studies, we can begin to develop a conceptual schema that is capable of coping with the unique challenges of narrative migration.

Invoking an appropriate body of literature by which to study narrative adaptation is somewhat difficult. This is largely due to the substantial amount of literature that exists on the subject. However, a large portion of this writing is not readily applicable to the task at hand. Much existing criticism focuses specifically on the translation of one medium into another, (from novel to screen, for example), rather than on adaptation as a general logic of narrative transmission and reception.¹⁷ Many other works fail to attend to Barthes' ideas about the death of the author, and continue to rely on assumptions of fixed meaning, authorial intent, and fidelity. If we choose to move away from these sorts of discussions, and if we ignore comparative analyses of specific works in favor of theorizations of adaptation as a discrete representational process, a few areas of particular pertinence become apparent.

In order to consider the most literal implications of referring to this specific intertextual maneuver as adaptation, we may consider the literature that has emerged

¹⁷ See: McFarlane, Brian. *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*. 1996.

around evolutionary biology – adaptation of a different sort. The most noteworthy example, Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, was perhaps the first to use the term adaptation to refer to the phenomenon of biological evolution - the gradual historical mutation of lifeforms to better survive in their native environments. The crux of his theory is the notion of natural selection, the “preservation of favorable variations and the rejection of injurious variations.”¹⁸ Although Darwin is clearly referring to the adaptation of *species*, the parallel to contemporary theories of narrative adaptation is readily discernible: to survive, to *persist*, a text must adapt to new cultures and new climates of representational practice.

Granted, the object of study at hand (narrative) is not a biological entity, and the applicability of Darwin’s work is perhaps limited to metaphor, since it is not a theory of narrative or text as such. Richard Dawkins begins the work of extending this metaphor to the consideration of cultural work in the *The Selfish Gene*, stating: “cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission in that, although basically conservative, it can give rise to a form of evolution.”¹⁹ Dawkins coins the term “meme” to refer to this cultural equivalent of the gene, a basic unit of cultural reproduction and transmission that is similarly susceptible to mutation and evolution. Although this idea conveniently expands the metaphor of Darwinian evolution to the cultural realm, it is too imprecise to incorporate into an effective model of analysis. With neither formal nor substantive properties to be studied, the meme itself is still only a metaphor, albeit an intriguing one.

¹⁸ Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species*. 1859: Online source. (<http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/origin.html>)

¹⁹ Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene*. 1976: 203.

The second body of literature of particular relevance to the work of this thesis is perhaps the most prolific, as well as the most varied – the study of narrative more generally. Narrative has preoccupied many scholars in a variety of fields. Russian Formalists like Vladimir Propp²⁰ sought to distill folk narratives to a core group of recurring character types, moral themes, and literary techniques. Anthropologists such as Claude Levi-Strauss²¹ and comparative mythologists like Joseph Campbell²² further scrutinized the substance of such tales, the former postulating a model of myth built around the prominence of binary oppositions, (“Mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions towards their resolution”),²³ and the latter discerning a pervasive *monomyth* based heavily on the archetypes of Jungian psychoanalysis.

Importantly, neither Propp nor Levi-Strauss pretend that they are developing a grand theory of narrative as such. Propp’s work focuses largely on a specific subset of Russian fairy tales called “wondertales,” while Levi-Strauss concerned himself primarily with a comparative study of global mythologies. Despite this, several ideas of primary concern to the work at hand are very evident in their work. Propp, for instance, directly compares the variations of the wondertale with the Darwin’s work on evolution:

The Darwinian problem of ‘the origin of species’ arises in folklore as well...Both fields allow two points of view: either the internal similarity of two externally unrelated phenomena cannot be traced to a common genetic root (theory of spontaneous generation) or else this morphological

²⁰ See: Propp, Vladimir. *The Morphology of The Folk Tale*. 1928.

²¹ See: Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*. 1958.

²² See: Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 1949.

²³ Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*. 1958: 224.

similarity results from a genetic tie (theory of origin by metamorphoses or transformations traceable to certain causes.)²⁴

Levi- Strauss is similarly intrigued by the repetition and variation of narrative, and similarly troubled by the critical shortcomings of notions of fidelity and authenticity, against which he posits a notion of persistence predictive of later theories of intertextuality:

A problem which has, so far, been one of the main obstacles to the progress of mythological studies [is], namely, the quest for the *true* version, or the *earlier* one. On the contrary, we define the myth as consisting of all its versions; or to put it otherwise, a myth remains the same so long as it is felt as such.²⁵

Many other points of common concern appear in these sorts of works. Can a “story” be considered separately from the means of its transmission? If so, what are the primary elements of story? What are its most basic signifying units? What are the fundamental differences between the “classic” and the “modern” text? Between “myth” and “realism”? Although none of these address the problem of adaptation directly, it is easy to see how such concerns bear upon a theory of adapted narrative.

However, without elaboration, the work of these thinkers is not entirely capable of accounting for the problems of intertextuality posed by the study of adaptation. Their

²⁴ Propp, Vladimir. *Theory and History of Folklore*. Trans. Ariadna & Richard Martin. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984: 82.

²⁵ Levi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*. 1958: 216-7.

concern with the repetition of a single model ignores the possibility of works that present multiple simultaneous intertextual connections, allowing for readings informed by several texts at the same time. Given the specificity of their objects, there is no also consideration given to the representational practices of other media. Such totalizing models of myth preclude the importance of context in the formation of experience, effectively ignoring constructivist models of communication – there is no room for history or ideology to bear upon the meaning of these works. Although such analysis may prove effective for structurally simplistic forms such as fairy tales, it does not readily accommodate the complexity of more contemporary narrative media.

The best way to approach adaptation, then, is to draw lightly from a wide assortment of these sorts of theories, cherry picking, as it were, from various moments of thought. Mobilizing such a diverse body of ideas in chorus is not a particularly straightforward task, but it is accomplished with some success by Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation*. The book draws upon an impressively wide array of critical thought, (including much of the literature reviewed above), and as a result reads more like a primer on adaptation than a single coherent theory as such. Hutcheon's work is perhaps the most thorough investigation of narrative adaptation to date, and the text is an invaluable tool for tracing the multitude of representational processes at play within adapted work.

Hutcheon's theory effectively states that adaptation functions simultaneously as three distinct but interrelated phenomena. Firstly, it is a *formal entity or product*, "an

announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works.”²⁶ This transposition can involve a shift in genre, medium, or context, which in turn can also indicate a shift in ontology, as with fictional dramatizations of historical or biographical works. Secondly, adaptation is a *process of creation*, the mobilization of a privileged interpretation of an existing work as a basis for the generation of a new product. Finally, adaptation is a *process of reception*: “Adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation.”²⁷ This last idea is especially important for dismissing the rhetoric of fidelity that has plagued many early approaches to the study of adaptation.²⁸ An adapted work is not just a diminished copy of the original; “Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication.”²⁹

Considering adaptation as a process of reception is also vital for considering the complex networks of interpretation created between adapted works and their sources. The work of Gerard Genette becomes particularly useful for discussing the inherently palimpsestic nature of adapted work, and his working vocabulary is useful for navigating the labyrinthine webs of intertextual fields. Using his terminology, we can refer to the source work in a series of adaptations as the *hypotext*, and the various other works that derive therefrom as *hypertexts*. Genette’s concept of the *paratext* is also particularly intriguing. The term most readily refers to the ensemble of texts that surround a written work, (such as book jackets, prefaces, and tables of contents), but it also provides a

²⁶ Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. 2006: 8.

²⁷ Ibid. 8.

²⁸ For example: Orr, C. “The discourse on adaptation.” *Wide Angle* 6.2, 1984: 72-76.

²⁹ Hutcheon, 7.

compelling way of theorizing the relationship of works in an intertextual network. Each paratext “constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, an influence that...is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it.”³⁰

This term reveals an important truth about reading narrative adaptations: each individual product, or hypertext, provides a point of entry into an intertextual network that contains all of the various adaptations of a hypotext. Each of these points of entry will mark the readers’ interpretation of other works in the intertextual field; reading a book before watching the movie it is based upon will provide a very different experience from watching the movie before reading the book. Julie Sanders makes this explicit in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*:

Most formal adaptations carry the same title as their source text. The desire to make the relationship with the source explicit links to the manner in which the responses to adaptations depend upon a complex invocation of ideas of similarity and difference. These ideas can only be mobilized by a reader or spectator alert to the intertextual relationship, and this in turn requires the deployment of well known texts or sources.³¹

Adapted works must thus be seen as inherently palimpsestic and intertextual, and it will be essential that the textual analysis proposed here find a way to account for these qualities.

³⁰ Genette, Gerard. *Paratexts*. 1987:2

³¹ Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. 2006: 22.

When undertaking this sort of comparative study, it is very tempting to focus primarily on the ways in which the later texts deviate from their predecessors. Frequently, these differences are generative points of analysis, revealing changes in representational practice that correspond to historic shifts in social and cultural context. But attending exclusively to these points of difference invites several assumptions that will inevitably alter the conclusions we may derive from such work. Of primary concern here is the risk of developing a reliance on the idea of a definitive “original” text. To presuppose the existence of a single “authentic” text from which various other adaptations derive is to ignore the whole project of polysemous textuality by effectively resurrecting the author. To function as an adaptation, a work must necessarily establish an intertextual relationship with a hypotext – the work that is being adapted. In many instances, this relationship may be obvious, as is the case with most cinematic adaptations of novels. We can say, without fear of error, that the movie *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is an adaptation of the Hunter Thompson novel of the same title. But as an intertextual network expands, these lines of filiality begin to blur. The novelization of a movie, for example, may be written from the film’s screenplay before the movie has even been made, and as a result may bear a diminished resemblance to the work that it claims to adapt. Julie Sanders renders this idea rather explicitly: “To tie an adaptive and appropriative text to one sole intertext may in fact close down the opportunity to read it in relationship with others.”³²

³² Ibid. 35.

A clearer and more immediately relevant example of this phenomenon can be found by looking at the history of the Orpheus myth itself – the very object that I will be studying throughout the following chapters. Although we can trace the origins of the myth, it becomes impossible to locate a single definitive text from which all later works derive. The version of the tale offered in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is one of the earliest written accounts, but even this cannot be read as a singular authentic version. Like many of the myths in the *Metamorphoses*, the Orpheus tale derives from a tradition of oral storytelling, evolving over several centuries of telling and retelling before finding the stability of written text. As such, one cannot assert that the version of the tale offered up by Ovid is, in any definitive sense, the original. Furthermore, a slightly different version of the Orpheus tale exists in Virgil’s *Georgics*, a text that predates Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* by approximately three decades³³, (the latter tentatively dated at AD 8, and the former at 29 BC).

The problematic relationship between intertextual referentiality and the myth of filiality is especially evident in media with heavily dialogic art historic trajectories. Continuing to use the Orpheus myth as a case study of sorts, there is perhaps no form that illustrates this point quite so well as opera. The story of Orpheus and Eurydice has been a consistent favorite of operatic composers, with well over 60 different operas and operettas offering variations of the tale³⁴. One could trace a substantial history of operatic form using only these examples, from Jacopo Peri’s *Euridice* at the turn of the 17th century to Philip Glass’s 1993 *Orphée*, a chamber opera composed as a soundtrack for

³³ See: Wilkinson, L.P. *The Georgics of Virgil: A Critical Study*. 1969.

³⁴ See Appendix II for a list of various Orphic adaptations.

the Jean Cocteau film of the same name. Understanding the relationship between these works becomes increasingly complex - they are not simply revisitations of an allegedly “original” version of the Greek tale, but are rather commentaries on new developments in operatic aesthetics. They refer endlessly to any number of other works in the intertextual network, performing the dialogic functions of citation and quotation, of satire and critique.

A comprehensive analysis of this operatic tradition is well beyond the scope of this paper, (and well outside the realm of my scholarly expertise), but the myth of filiality can be effectively dispelled by drawing on one particular example: the connection between Ovid’s text and Baz Luhrmann’s 2001 cinematic musical *Moulin Rouge*³⁵. Although some structural similarities may still be found, comparing the text of the *Metamorphoses* to the text of Luhrmann’s screenplay is an insufficient means of tracing the relationship between the two works. To do so would ignore the film’s deliberate citation of Jacques Offenbach’s *Orpheus in the Underworld*³⁶, the 1858 operetta that introduced the “Infernal Gallop,” better known as the “Can-can,” the infamous dance-hall favorite that provides the cultural backdrop for *Moulin Rouge*. Furthermore, the Offenbach operetta itself cannot be linked directly to the Ovid “original” - the piece is in fact a scathing satire³⁷ of Christoph Willibald Gluck’s 1762 *Orfeo ed Euridice*³⁸, a composition that notoriously rewrote the ending of the tragic myth, happily reuniting its two titular lovers. Even Gluck’s revision must be further nuanced, written as it was in

³⁵ *Moulin Rouge*. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. 20th Century Fox, 1941.

³⁶ *Orphée aux Enfers*. Composed by Jacques Offenbach. 1858.

³⁷ See: Munteanu, Dana. "Parody of Greco-Roman Myth in Offenbach's Orphée aux enfers and La belle Hélène." *Syllecta Classica* 23.1 (2013): 77-101.

³⁸ *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Composed by C.W. Gluck. 1762.

response to the entire tradition of Italian *opera seria*, as an attempt to simplify the genre's increasingly complicated musical and narrative style. In addition to all of this, we have Luhrmann's frenetic appropriation of modern pop music, itself a telling commentary on the history of music production.

This is not to say that an analysis (or any reading, for that matter) that fails to adequately attend to these trajectories is somehow rendered invalid. Adhering to Barthes' ideas on the plural text, we see that this is only one of many possible readings of *Moulin Rouge*. A reader/spectators' awareness of the other hypertexts in an intertextual network will inevitably alter the meaning they derive from an adaptation, but this does not imply that the experience of the *unaware* reader/spectator is therefore *meaningless*. A conceptual model capable of tracking the movement of the plural intertext, however, must be able to account for both possibilities. As a result, the notion of the "authentic" text is an inherently flawed theoretical premise for the work I will be attempting here.

Disparities in edition and translation further exacerbate the difficulty of staking definitive claims to originality - some translations, for example, have rewritten the entire text in rhyming couplets, whereas others (including the Ovid translation I will be using here) have not. The problem of translation invites further consideration – to establish a functional definition of what adaptation *is*, it becomes essential to delineate what it *is not*. Insofar as adaptation consists of the transposition of narrative from one sign system to another, there are certainly a number of very obvious parallels between adapted and translated work. This has given rise to a prominent conceptual schema in adaptation studies based around the search for equivalences, where the role of the adaptor is

essentially to translate the “themes, events, world, characters, motivations, points of view, consequences, contexts, symbols, imagery, and so on”³⁹ of a work for the representational constraints of a new medium or genre.

This may be an apt premise in many cases, where the primary concern of the adaptor is strict narrative fidelity. But by adhering to Barthes’ theory of the polysemous text, we see that even the most skilled translation can only transpose a single privileged reading, and that the new work produced will be inevitably open to a wide range of various interpretations. Narrative meaning cannot achieve the sort of fixity assumed by a model of equivalences. Such a model also excludes the critical and reflective possibilities of the adapted text. By altering the time, place, and form of a hypotext, adaptations are fully capable of satire and critique, rhetorical techniques that would not be available to a piece of direct translation.

Drawing such a distinction between translated and adapted work poses an additional set of concerns. If an adaptation differs primarily from a translation through its capacity to creatively deviate from its source, at what point does an adapted work begin to differ so starkly that it can no longer be considered an adaptation at all? This problem prompts Julie Sanders to draw a further distinction between adaptation and appropriation: “An adaptation signals a relationship with an informing source text or original...On the other hand, appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain.”⁴⁰ While the difference certainly bears mentioning, these categories remain a bit unwieldy. Is the mark of

³⁹ Hutcheon, 10.

⁴⁰ Sanders, 26.

distinction primarily a paratextual one, demonstrated by the adapted works' willingness to indicate its source? Or do these two products simply belong to different modes of production, the results of distinct authorial logics?

These questions are of immediate concern to the task at hand - if Gaiman's *Song of Orpheus* and Cavanagh's *Don't Look Back* are appropriations rather than adaptations per se, then they can no longer be seen as valid examples of adaptive narrative structure more generally. But without further clarification, it is difficult to decide how we should categorize these pieces. On the one hand, both indicate a relationship to the Orpheus myth in their titles. Although it is unclear whether the hypotext in question is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Virgil's *Georgics*, or some other version, both of these works establish a clear connection to the Orpheus tale as an intertextual network - they refer to the myth as an assumed body of knowledge. By this criteria, they are adaptations. On very much the other hand, both works can certainly be seen as "decisive journey(s) away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain," and would therefore, by Sanders' reckoning, fall under the category of appropriation. The problem with this distinction here becomes readily evident - it is based upon an assumed quantity of change, but does not provide a clearly defined metric for its measurement. There is no way of telling how much variation is *too much* variation.

The following chapters will assess whether the ideas outlined in *S/Z* may begin to address these sorts of basic shortcomings in contemporary approaches to the study of adaptation. By framing the analysis in terms of narrative persistence rather than textual change, Barthes' codes may begin to provide a more precise indication of how much

resemblance these works bear to one another. By avoiding the temptation to map meaning on to these stories, they may begin to trace the narrative structures that make their continued retelling so meaningful.

The first chapter attempts to apply the method of *S/Z* directly to the text of the Orpheus story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This experiment not only assesses the extent to which Barthes' approach to textual analysis can be effectively applied to texts other than *Sarrasine*, but also helps to develop our understanding of Barthes' theory of polysemous textuality more generally. By separating the ideas of *S/Z* from the Balzac tutor text, it becomes much easier to understand how such a system of analysis may or may not be able to cope with narrative more generally, rather than just with *Sarrasine* in particular. At the same time, this analysis begins to break down the Orpheus myth according to the functions of the five codes, laying the foundation for the comparative work of the following chapters.

With the basic functions of Barthes' method as well as the key features of Ovid's version of the Orpheus narrative established, the second chapter begins to address the particular problems posed by adaptation. This section compares the representational processes of written text to those of the graphic novel, giving due consideration to how these differences in narrative technique may require us to adjust our application of Barthes' system of codes. This system is then applied to *The Song of Orpheus* portion of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* in order to examine the structural transformations of the Orpheus narrative as it moves into the comic form, allowing us to consider which aspects of the story remain stable despite the adaptive process.

The task of the third chapter is similar, interrogating how narrative functions differ within an interactive medium. Drawing upon debates about the role of narrative in video games, the chapter begins by once again by considering what sort of alterations must be made to Barthes' codes in order to make them applicable to interactive media. I then play through Terry Cavanagh's *Don't Look Back*, searching for evidence of these narrative functions, and comparing their behavior to the previous two works.

Finally, the thesis concludes by summarizing the findings of the preceding analyses, noting the trends that have become most apparent. These findings are then used to re-examine Hutcheon and Sanders' work on adaptation, assessing what Barthes' method may contribute to the ongoing development of adaptation theory.

And so it goes. The polysemous text sings its many and varied meanings through the voices of these five codes in chorus; the task at hand is discerning which sing most loudly, which fade with time, and which simply change their tune.

Chapter 1

“Every body is a citation: of the ‘already-written.’

The origin of desire is the statue, the painting, the book.”

–Roland Barthes, *S/Z* 33

At the onset of this little project, we are presented with two separate but clearly related tasks. First, the method of textual analysis that Barthes uses to parse through the polysemous chorus of Balzac’s story must be replicated, or at least emulated, upon the pages of an entirely different tale. In the simplest of conceptions, this process entails the division of the text into lexia, followed by the enumeration and description of the various codes operating within each fragment. Second, it will be necessary to reflect upon the revelations and limitations provoked by the entire process of analysis. The working hypothesis here is not that Barthes’ technique will work perfectly, but rather that fragments of his theory may provide generative points of analysis.

Integral to this assumption is the belief that Barthes’ theoretical maneuvers can be considered separately from his particular mode of analytic practice. This will become a particularly necessary assumption when considering adaptations in different media – it seems unlikely that a video game may be carved up into lexia without allowing for a certain freedom of interpretation. But, then again, allowing for freedom of interpretation seems to be entirely the point.

Before beginning, the process of fragmenting or “starring” the text into its constituent lexia merits some further discussion. Although Barthes claims that this process of division is entirely arbitrary, the actual practice of such fragmentation raises several questions. As it is used in *S/Z*, the division of lexia demonstrates a certain geological impulse; by taking a core sample from the text, we may examine the various strata that compose it. This metaphor reinforces Barthes’ assertion that the separation of lexia is entirely arbitrary – if the codes lie beneath the surface of the text, we may bore into it at any point to reveal the layers of polysemous signification operating within.

But this metaphor, and indeed the whole method of analysis that it represents, also indicates the fundamentally destructive nature of Barthes’ technique. The gesture of fragmentation invoked by *S/Z* is also an act of symbolic violence towards the coherence of the text. When considering the Orpheus myth in particular, this is a cause for additional concern. Not only are we shattering the story itself, we are also cutting the tale in its entirety from the pages of a larger work – in this case, *The Metamorphoses*. Even if we consider Ovid’s work to consist of a series of distinct and separate tales (which they are not), the surgical excision (castration?) of this one section of the text results in a number of radical structural alterations to our reading. We deprive the work of its previous paratextual and contextual confines. This essentially renders the text increasingly plural, as these structures no longer impose any limitation upon our reading. This is perhaps appropriate, as the *Metamorphoses* in its entirety derives from an oral

tradition of storytelling¹, meaning that any paratextual cues are necessarily artifacts imposed by the transposition of the work to a published, written form.

While the very idea of mimicking Barthes' method thus already presents a worthy challenge, the task of successfully applying his five codes of interpretation complicates the task at hand even further. It becomes immediately evident that these "voices" may not be quite so easy to discern outside of Balzac's work. The hermeneutic code, as Barthes uses it in his analysis of *Sarrasine*, seems somewhat ill suited to breaking down the work of Ovid. The sort of enigma that lies at the core of this code is much more symptomatic of modern literature than mythic narrative. The mythic world is archetypal – all of its elements are already known. The proairetic code effectively accounts for the sequencing of narrative action, but these actions are not movements towards the solution of some great mystery. Is it possible that Ovid's text is somehow *too readerly* for Barthes' technique to function properly? If such is the case, the implications may be profound – how can we expect to apply this method of polysemous textual analysis to stories in other media if it cannot even account for an earlier version of literature?

The possibility is certainly there. Barthes' theory of polysemous textuality is predicated on the "modestly plural" text – an incomplete moment between the polar absolutes of the readerly and the writerly. The former, in theory, would dictate a singular, definite meaning; only one reading would be possible. The question then becomes: is such a narrative possible? Or is it instead, like the readerly, simply an ideal type, the sort of story that we can theorize, but cannot actually buy in a book store?

¹ Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were in fact written, but functioned largely as a collection of oral mythology. See: Graf, Fritz. "Myth in Ovid". In *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 108-121.

This begs the question: what is story? If we are attempting to locate a structural basis for narrative persistence, then this is clearly the easiest answer: the story is what remains the same across all of the multiple versions spawned by adaptation. But this term is too imprecise to function as a generative critical concept. What do we mean by story? Does it consist only of the sequence of narrative events, the plot, the proairetic code?

To even begin addressing these sorts of questions, it becomes immediately necessary to develop a more nuanced explanation of the hermeneutic and proairetic codes. It is not sufficient to dismissively claim that these two codes together compose the “story” of a text. Although it is very easy to conflate these two terms with one another, it is also very clear that they operate in a way that is very different from the other three “voices”:

The five codes mentioned, frequently heard simultaneously, in fact endow the text with a kind of plural quality...but of the five codes, only three establish permutable, reversible connections, outside the constraint of time (the semic, cultural, and symbolic codes); the other two impose their terms according to an irreversible order (the hermeneutic and proairetic codes). The classic text, therefore, is actually tabular (and not linear), but its tabularity is vectorized, it follows a logico-temporal order. It is a multivalent but incompletely reversible system.²

² Barthes, *S/Z*. 30.

Insofar as the hermeneutic and proairetic codes are involved with the temporal sequencing of narrative actions, they become immediately comparable to the fabula and syuzhet of Russian Formalism. Following from the work of Vladimir Propp, fabula are used to describe narrative events as they happen in actual chronological order, whereas syuzhet describe events as they unfold through narrative. The difference is most readily apparent in nonlinear stories that rely heavily on flashback or flash-forward. *Citizen Kane*³, for instance, begins with the titular protagonist's death, but is followed by a series of flashbacks which intercut the film's standard temporal progression. The fabula, in this case, would be arranged chronologically, in the order that the events occur over time, whereas the syuzhet would follow the order of portrayed events, beginning with Kane dropping the snow globe.⁴

Although these theoretical concepts (hermeneutic, proairetic, fabula, syuzhet) all share an object of analysis, they are each used to very different ends. The system of codes developed by Barthes for *S/Z* represent an active movement away from the structuralist impulse of his earlier work, most notably his *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative*⁵, which in and of itself signals a departure from the analytical practice of Todorov and his adherents.

³ *Citizen Kane*. Dir. Orson Welles. Perfs. Orson Welles, Joseph Cotten. RKO Radio Pictures, 1941.

⁴ This cursory explanation of Formalist terminology does not take into account the extensive critique that these terms have been subjected to. Suffice it to say that any attempt to divide something so complex into distinct categories such as "narrative" and "story" (or *histoire* and *discours*, or *fabula* and *syuzhet*) has been met with some form of critical opposition.

See: Pier, John. "On the Semiotic Parameters of Narrative: A Critique of Story and Discourse." In *What is Narratology?: Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*. Ed. Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003. 73-98.

⁵ Barthes, Roland. "An introduction to the structural analysis of narrative." *New Literary History* 6.2 (1975): 237-272.

Raymond J Wilson does an excellent job of tracing the evolution of the codes of *S/Z* to Barthes' earlier *Introduction*. He likens the functions of the hermeneutic code to "nuclei", "cardinal functions" that open and close narrative sequences: "The nuclei correspond to the enigma code (or hermeneutic code) because mysteries involve nuclei: perhaps the story presents a closing nucleus, making the reader wonder what the opening nucleus could have been, or the reverse, where the reader encounters an opening nucleus and is made to wonder what the closing nucleus will be."⁶ The proairetic code, on the other hand, is the theoretical descendent of Barthes' "catalysers," random actions within the sequences opened and closed by nuclei. In *Introduction*, Barthes provides the example of a fragment of narrative where the telephone rings. The ring is a nucleus, which begins a sequence that ends with the phone either being answered or not:

In the case when the character answers, the catalysers would be the fill-in events between the phone ringing and the character answering: a character takes his or her feet off the desk, looks at the receiver, puts out his or her cigarette, reaches for the receiver, etc. While nuclei are consecutive and consequent, catalysers are merely consecutive...Barthes' catalysers, being distinguished from nuclei precisely by not being hinge events, are largely optional and arbitrary.⁷

With the distinction between the hermeneutic and the proairetic thus (tentatively) clarified, all that remains is to see how readily they may be applied to the new text.

⁶ Wilson III, Raymond J. "A Map of Terms." *The American Journal of Semiotics* 15.1/4 (2008): 275.

⁷ *Ibid.* 270.

Whether these (or any of the other codes, for that matter) will serve as functional criteria for the analysis of the Orpheus myth is perhaps best demonstrated through trial and error.

In order to actually stage such a trial, I will here attempt to observe the function of Barthes' five codes within the text of Ovid's telling of the Orpheus myth. This observation, in turn, necessitates an attempt at replicating Barthes' method of analysis from *S/Z*, fragmenting the text into its constituent lexia and enumerating the various codes operating within. I will thus be using the same system of annotation that appears in Barthes' analysis of *Sarrasine*:

HER.	—	Hermeneutic Code
ACT.	—	Proairetic Code
SYM.	—	Symbolic Code
SEM.	—	Semic Code
REF.	—	Referential (Cultural) Code

For the most part, the appearance of each of these codes will be accompanied by a piece of explanation, which will interrupt our reading of the Ovid text, (shown in italics), with a corresponding Barthesian analysis of each lexia.

(1) Truly Hymen there was present during the festivities of Orpheus and Eurydice, but gave no happy omen, neither hallowed words nor joyful glances;

Hymen, traditionally represented as a young man carrying a burning torch, is the Greek god of marriage ceremonies. His presence at weddings typically signified that the union would be a fortunate affair – the “happy omen” that we here find lacking. *(REF. Greek mythology.) With access to the referential code, we are made aware of impending tragedy. The god of marriage does not smile upon Orpheus and Eurydice, this much is clear. But what fate will befall the couple? Infidelity and infertility are certainly possibilities, (the former is included prominently in various revisitations of the tale), but nothing is yet decided. **(HER. Enigma 1: postulation)

(2) and the torch he held would only sputter, fill the eyes with smoke, and cause no blaze while waving.

Hymen’s torch “fills the eyes with smoke.” In addition to the ill portent signaled by Hymen’s troubled state, the smoke here causes blindness, pointing towards the significance of the gaze. The seme of visual persistence – the continuity between what one believes to exist and what one can actually observe – becomes a pivotal point in the myth’s plot, and one of the most persistent qualities of the narrative itself.

However, it is perhaps worth recognizing the danger posed by framing a reading in anticipation of future narrative events. There is something of a contradiction, for example, in S/Z’s analysis of *Sarrasine* – Barthes, already knowing the tale in its entirety, is able to find signs for castration throughout the text well in advance of any direct narrative revelation about La Zambinella’s identity. He reads the story within the context of it being always already read. If meaning resides outside the text, then it is easy to see

how we can find traces of whatever we feel particularly predisposed towards discovering. Indeed, this is precisely the way in which adaptation structures the consumption of intertextual works, by calling particular attention to preconceived points of similarity and difference.

All of this, however, is not to invalidate such readings, nor to point to any flaw in Barthes' analysis of Balzac. Rather, my point here is simply one of caution, one with which I believe Barthes himself would readily agree. While we should embrace and celebrate the contributions of such analysis, we must not take them as the final word – we must not allow any one reading to close the text. *(SEM. Vision.)

(3) The result of that sad wedding, proved more terrible than such foreboding fates. While through the grass delighted Naiads wandered with the bride, a serpent struck its venomous tooth in her soft ankle—and she died.

Here we have a simple proairetic sequence – walking through a field – which ends in Eurydice's death, quickly resolving the enigma of Hymen's ill omen. * (ACT. Wandering in field.) ** (HER. Enigma 1: Resolution – Eurydice's death.)

The Semic Code, as Barthes applies it to *Sarrasine*, seems to pertain most directly to cultural stereotypes, particularly those that are connoted rather than signaled outright. Wealth and femininity are prominent examples of the Semic Code provided by the analysis of *S/Z*, where the appearance of such semes are meant to structure our reading of Balzac's text.

It is easy to thus conclude that the migration of the Semic Code gives rise to the primary themes of a story – femininity and wealth are certainly both very predominant narrative tropes within *Sarrasine*, and this predominance does limit the plurality of meanings available to the reader. Once again, however, we encounter some problems when attempting to translate these ideas for application to different literary forms more generally, and to the Ovid text in particular.

Connotation is a bit of a stumbling block in this regard. Although all of the codes theoretically function through connotative acts, the Semic Code in particular seems to rely solely on implication rather than overt description. In *Sarrasine*, for instance, Barthes does not locate the sense of wealth within the direct discussions of the Lanty family's fortune, but instead through the location of their house on the Fauborg St. Honore.

The mythic text, so readerly as it is, is heavily inclined towards a denotative mode of description. Can we say that song, for example, is a sense of the Orpheus myth? It is certainly a theme, but not a connoted one. We begin to see that these codes function not as a way of enumerating discrete narrative moments, of listing causal sequences of events and themes, but rather as a tapestry of potentialities. Although the codes seem less amenable to the mythic text and its readerly proscriptions, in this regard these are precisely the stories which best demonstrate the veracity of Barthes' claims. There is so little room for interpretation in the mythic narrative that the entirety of their significance must reside outside the text itself. The stories can mean everything, but this meaning is

not a revelation of prose, but rather the product of their potential use-value, a potential which is enabled by the very simplicity of the mythic structure.

The utility of the mythic narrative resides in its capacity for appropriation, in its susceptibility to metaphor. The meaning of the myth is located here, where its whole structuration enables the realization of ideas that reside outside the text entirely.

The semes of sex and gender are not as pronounced in Ovid as in Balzac, but they are still clearly present. Eurydice wanders through the grass with delighted Naiads, forming a frolicking women's camp, not at all unlike the one described in *Sarrasine*. The tableau, though brief, portrays Eurydice as the virginal child-woman. The fatal serpent bite falls on the flesh of her "soft ankle," her the fragility of her sex acting as her Achilles' heel. Eurydice never speaks, and we are thus deprived of any insight into her psyche. Instead, her character is simply a container for these signs of archetypal femininity. *** (SEM. Femininity.) **** (SYM. Child-woman)

*(4) After the bard of Rhodope had mourned, and filled the highs of heaven with the moans of his lament, determined also the dark underworld should recognize the misery of death, he dared descend by the Taenarian gate down to the gloomy Styx. * (ACT. Lament.) ** (SEM. Song)*

In *S/Z*, Barthes quickly locates a grand symbolic structure in Balzac's use of opposing spaces. The narrator of *Sarrasine* sits on a window threshold, regarding both the cold darkness of the exterior garden and the warm revelry of the party inside. Barthes

finds that this use of antithesis foreshadows the story's thematic concerns with the difference between male and female, life and death, and the transgression of both posed by the castrato: "The antithesis is a wall without a doorway. Leaping this wall is a transgression. Subject to the antithesis of inside and outside, heat and cold, life and death, the old man and the young woman are in fact separated by the most inflexible of barriers: that of meaning. Thus, anything that draws these two antipathetic sides together is rightly scandalous." ⁸

In Ovid, this structuration is substantially less nuanced. Life and Death are overtly spatialized by the diegesis, where the land of the living sits literally atop the underworld, home to Pluto, Persephone, and the souls of the departed. Orpheus' quest, "rightly scandalous" in its own right, is thus primarily a deconstructive one – he seeks to invert the symbolic order by entering the world of the dead to retrieve Eurydice. *** (SYM. Antithesis: Life/Death – transition.)

*(5) And there he passed through pale-glimmering phantoms, and the ghosts escaped from sepulchers, until he found Persephone and Pluto, master-king of shadow realms below: and then began to strike his tuneful lyre, to which he sang: *(SYM. Man-King, Woman-Queen.)**(ACT. Singing.)*

In *S/Z*, Barthes draws upon all three of the "reversible" codes to describe competing aspects of femininity. In addition to the "seme" of femininity, which we have already located at the moment of Eurydice's death, Barthes also frequently deploys the

⁸ Barthes, *S/Z*. 65.

cultural code to cite “female psychology.” He also occasionally invokes the symbolic code to position female characters according to various archetypal roles. We have already seen this as well, with Eurydice performing the part of the virginal girl-child. But upon reaching the rulers of the underworld, Orpheus is confronted with a very different sort of symbolic female figure – the woman-queen, Persephone. “Reversing his own symbolic role, he [appears] in the passive position of a dominated subject.”⁹

For Barthes, the transition from girl-child to woman-queen is contingent upon the development of agency on the part of the female subject, which moves her into the “castration camp” of empowered women. In Ovid, however, Persephone need not demonstrate any such agency, since she is always already the archetype of the queen-woman. She is not a character in the same way as Balzac’s Mme. de Lanty, we need not understand her in terms of motivation and psychology. Persephone (and likewise Pluto) are simply signifying functions – she implies divinity, sovereignty, and feminine majesty without any narrative development. This is precisely the function of the symbolic code, to provide a structuration of meaning, to draw a map by which we may navigate the text.

(6) *“O deities of this dark world beneath the earth! this shadowy underworld, to which all mortals must descend! *(SYM. Antithesis: Spatialization of Life/Death.)*(SEM. Inevitability.)*

⁹ Ibid. 63.

(7) If it can be called lawful, and if you will suffer speech of strict truth (all the winding ways of Falsity forbidden)

Though the fragment of Ovid under scrutiny here appears as a simple block of written text, it demonstrates an enormous amount of tension between competing representational forms. Performed aloud at the time of its creation, *The Metamorphoses* would have offered a nested narrative structure weaving together mimesis, poesis, and diegesis. The narrator, performing the part of characters such as Orpheus, would be imitating or representing these personae, thus rendering the text mimetic. That a character such as Orpheus would give his own account of events, as in his appeal to Pluto and Persephone, his report would be considered diegetic. Insofar as this appeal is sung to the accompaniment of a lyre, it is also lyric poetry, a particular subset of poesis.

Importantly, all of these forms of representation occupy a problematic position in relation to the Platonic ideal of truth; as diminished attempts at emulating this ideal, copies of copies, none of them are fully capable of making claims to truthful representation. It is particularly interesting, then, that Orpheus chooses to preface his song with this appeal: *“If it can be called lawful, and if you will suffer speech of strict truth (all winding ways of falsity forbidden).”* This appeal seems to be in direct conversation with the text of Plato’s *Republic*:

If the poets speak truly, why then we had better be unjust, and offer of the fruits of injustice; for if we are just, although we may escape the vengeance of heaven, we shall lose the gains of injustice; but, if we are unjust, we shall keep the gains, and

by our sinning and praying, and praying and sinning, the gods will be propitiated, and we shall not be punished. “But there is a world below in which either we or our posterity will suffer for our unjust deeds.” Yes, my friend, will be the reflection, but there are mysteries and atoning deities, and these have great power.¹⁰

The function of the poet, by this account, is precisely to thwart the divine mechanisms of the Gods – a function which makes Orpheus, the bard of bards, particularly well suited to the task at hand. This relationship between “truth” and its representations becomes particularly interesting in connection with Barthes’ thoughts on realism in literature: “Thus, realism (badly named, at any rate often badly interpreted) consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy of the real.”¹¹ Granted, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* can be in no way considered a realist text. In the context of adaptation, however, there is something very telling about the continued tension between representation and reproduction. If the story is already a copy of a copy, what relationship will the adaptation of that story bear to truth, to the real? The theoretical premise of *S/Z*, already post-structuralist, here begins to descend uneasily into the underworld of postmodernism. As reading is rendered increasingly plural, the search for the “truth” of a narrative becomes increasingly impossible. Perhaps this is why adaptations are so frequently viewed with such trepidation: with each new version of a text, the networks of possible meaning continue to expand, threatening to obliterate narrative’s capacity to

¹⁰ Plato. *Republic*. Book II.

¹¹ Barthes, *S/Z*. 55.

represent anything at all. Myth, however, seems to function in direct opposition to this concept. The process of repetition and revisitation distills rather than dilutes, constraining the plurality of the work within the context of the history of its retelling, thus ensuring the persistence of the most essential qualities of the narrative.¹² *(SYM. Truth: Replication of Bodies.)

*(8) I come not down here because of curiosity to see the glooms of Tartarus, have no thought to bind or strangle the three necks of the Medusan Monster, vile with snakes. But I have come, because my darling wife stepped on a viper that sent through her veins death-poison, cutting off her coming years. If able, I would bear it, I do not deny my effort -- but the god of Love has conquered me -- a god so kindly known in all the upper world. We are not sure he can be known so well in this deep world, but have good reason to conjecture he is not unknown here, and if old report almost forgotten, that you stole your wife is not a fiction, Love united you the same as others. *(SYM. Antithesis – Life/Death.)*

Again, we find that the use of the Referential code is central to Orpheus' appeal. He compares his own love of Eurydice to Pluto's love of Persephone, which drove the lord of the underworld to abduct his future wife from the world of the living, using a pomegranate-based ruse to trick her into residing in the underworld seasonally. The comparison is appropriate – in both cases, the boundaries separating life and death are transgressed in the name of love. The imposition of additional myths upon the Orpheus

¹² The metaphor of evolutionary biology here resurfaces – reproduction is the necessary means of transmitting genetic information. The replication of texts, like the replication of bodies, thus ensures the survival of a work through the transmission of narrative structure.

tale through the referential code helps to give the text a certain modicum of fixity: we must now read the story within the context given to it by the story of Pluto and Persephone. ******(REF. Mythology: Pluto and Persephone's courtship.)

It may seem premature to already be framing potential readings of the Orpheus myth in terms of intertextuality, but the referential code consistently positions the narrative in terms of other myths, of other texts.¹³ This further problematizes our ability to lay claims to the “originality” of any one version of a text, since our reading is always already structured by such other works. This is not to say, however, that Ovid's version of the Orpheus tale is already necessarily an adaptation as such. Adaptations are a very particular form of intertextual work, marked not by fidelity or filiality to a mythical origin text, but by a network of repetition and difference, of reiteration and variation.¹⁴ This collapses the distinction between adaptation and appropriation, as Sanders has defined it,¹⁵ but maintains a separation between acts of adaptation and acts of citation or quotation. Both deploy the referential code to access external texts as assumed bodies of knowledge, but whereas citation may refer to *any* text, an adapted work always involves reference to earlier versions *of itself*. The adapted work is thus always both a palimpsest and an intertext. Ovid's Orpheus is certainly the latter, and the version we are examining

¹³ “Traditionality of mythical narrative means intertextuality, in the sense that a later text is relying on and answering to an earlier one.” (Graf, Fritz. “Myth in Ovid”. *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie. 2002: 110.)

¹⁴ “Part of both the pleasure and the frustration of experiencing adaptation is the familiarity bred through repetition and memory...as audience members, we need memory in order to experience difference as well as similarity.” (Hutcheon, 21-22.)

¹⁵ See: Sanders, 26.

is certainly the former as well, each act of translation and revision functioning simultaneously as gestures of erasure and re-inscription.

But the Ovid text is not reflexively palimpsestic; it does not call attention to itself as a version in a series of revisions. This moment of reflection is a defining feature of the adapted narrative, as it is this moment that plunges the work into the depths of the intertextual network that constitute it. The texts of this network function not unlike Barthes' codes – it is by passing through them in chorus that we come to create meaning, but that meaning is both open and fluid, varying according to the readers' awareness of each voice singing the story.

Importantly, defining an adaptation as a reflexively palimpsestic intertext removes authorial intent from the discussion – it does not matter whether or not the writer *meant* to adapt a certain work if their creation does not call attention to that work, or rather, if the reader of that work is unable to attend to its various intertextual connections. The author, declared dead by Barthes, remains at rest, further reemphasizing the centrality of the reader. The question that remains is whether or not we can make sense of these aspects of narrative adaptation on a structural level more generally, and in terms of Barthes' codes in particular.

(9) By this Place of Fear, this huge void and these vast and silent realms, renew the life-thread of Eurydice. All things are due to you, and though on earth it happens we may tarry a short while, slowly or swiftly we must go to one abode; and it will be our final home. Long and tenaciously you will possess unquestioned mastery of the human

race. She also shall be yours to rule, when full of age she shall have lived the days of her allotted years. So I ask of you possession of her few days as a boon.

In terms of the overall structure of the story, Orpheus' appeal to Pluto and Persephone is but one beat, a moment of equivalent significance to Hymen's ill omen. It poses an enigma, an opening nucleus: will Eurydice be revived? Why, then, does the song itself account for such a substantial portion of the story? Eurydice's death, by comparison, takes a mere sentence (*a serpent struck its venomous tooth in her soft ankle and she died*). The reason for this difference is perhaps best explained by the enormity of Orpheus' task – it is not every day that a mortal manages to barter for the resurrection of a loved one. *(HER. Enigma 2: Request.)

(10) But if the fates deny to me this prayer for my true wife, my constant mind must hold me always so that I can not return -- and you may triumph in the death of two!"

While he sang all his heart said to the sound of his sweet lyre, the bloodless ghosts themselves were weeping, and the anxious Tantalus stopped clutching at return-flow of the wave, Ixion's twisting wheel stood wonder-bound; and Tityus' liver for a while escaped the vultures, and the listening Belides forgot their sieve-like bowls and even you, O Sisyphus! sat idly on your rock!

The series of referential codes at the end of this lexia provides a sort of shorthanded citation of these other stories. As with the previous mention of Pluto and

Persephone's courtship, this invocation essentially performs the same role as a paratextual cue – it forces us to read the active narrative within the context of these other stories, limiting the range of potential meanings we may extract from the text. In order to attend to the way this limitation works with any sort of precision or specificity, it is necessary to review the stories that have been referenced.

Tantalus is the son of Zeus and the nymph Pluto. Once an inhabitant of Olympus, he was expelled for sacrificing his son Pelops, boiling him into a stew and serving it to the Gods. Outraged by this combination of human sacrifice, cannibalism, and infanticide, Tantalus was sent to Tartarus, the deepest portion of the underworld. There, he was punished by being made to stand in a pool of water that would recede whenever he attempted to drink from it, beneath a fruit tree, the branches of which would rise up any time he tried to pluck its fruit.

Ixion's tale is similar. Expelled from Olympus for lusting after Zeus's wife Hera, he was bound to a fiery, winged wheel, which never ceased turning. The titan Tityus, a pawn coerced by a jealous Hera into trying to rape Zeus's consort Leto, spends his eternity stretched out upon the rocks of Tartarus as vultures peck incessantly at his liver.

The Belides, known alternatively as the Danaides, guilty all of slaying their husbands on their wedding night, must endlessly try to fill a perforated vessel with water. The futility of their task is mirrored by Sisyphus, punished for a lifetime of trickery and deceit with the task of pushing a boulder up a hill – a boulder which has been enchanted to always roll backwards, regardless of the efforts of the pusher.

These referential codes, spoken in chorus, require that we attend not only to the themes of eternity, inevitability, and futility shared by these stories, but also to the power of Orpheus' ballad. The impact of his performance is truly staggering, bringing to a halt all of these eternal acts of endless repetition. This may begin to explain why the Orpheus tale is so frequently retold – adaptation is also a gesture of ongoing repetition. *(REF. Mythology: Prisoners of Tantalus.) **(SYM. Repetition.)

Structurally, these events are also the purview of the Proairetic code: they are catalysers, moments of delay in between the postulation of the hermeneutic enigma and its conclusion.)*** (ACT. Pause.)

(11) Then Fame declared that conquered by the song of Orpheus, for the first and only time the hard cheeks of the fierce Eumenides were wet with tears; nor could the royal queen, nor he who rules the lower world deny the prayer of Orpheus;

The gravity of Orpheus' performance is again emphasized here: his song has moved even the immortal rulers of Hades. *(SYM. Man-King, Woman-Queen.)

(12) so they called to them Eurydice, who still was held among the new-arriving shades, and she obeyed the call by walking to them with slow steps, yet halting from her wound.

Eurydice still bears the trace of her death. Having not yet imbibed the waters of lethe, the river that brings complete forgetfulness, she maintains the memory of her fragility, her mortality. *(SEM. Femininity)

(13) So Orpheus then received his wife; and Pluto told him he might now ascend from these Avernian vales up to the light, with his Eurydice;

Eurydice is returned to Orpheus, thus resolving our second Enigma – the lovers have successfully reunited. *(HER. Enigma 2: Resolution.)

(14) but, if he turned his eyes to look at her, the gift of her delivery would be lost.

The terms of the agreement are set: Orpheus may bring Eurydice back to the world of the living, but only if he does so without turning back to look upon her. The story's final enigma – will Orpheus look back? – is thus perhaps the most enigmatic; no reason is given as to *why* Orpheus may not look back, only that it must be so. But this uncertainty is entirely the point. Like so many elements of the mythic narrative, the doubt instilled by this accord is archetypal. *(HER. Enigma 3: Postulation.)

*(15) They picked their way in silence up a steep and gloomy path of darkness. *(ACT. Ascent.) **(SEM. Darkness.)*

(16) There remained but little more to climb till they would touch earth's surface, when in fear he might again lose her, and anxious for another look at her,

Given no specific reason for his doubt, Orpheus in turn must doubt everything. This fear in turn becomes symbolic – it is a structure upon which we may map out fear and self-doubt in any form. This illustrates the appropriative capacity of myth. Since this doubt is not psychologically motivated by any one cause, it becomes a sign for doubt more generally, allowing this moment in the story to function not only literally, but also metaphorically. *(SEM. Doubt.)

*(17) he turned his eyes so he could gaze upon her. *(ACT. Gaze.) **(SYM. Antithesis: Life/Death – consequences of transgression.)*

(18) Instantly she slipped away.

The final enigma of this story – will Orpheus and Eurydice return to the world of the living? – is resolved at the moment when Orpheus turns back, violating his accord with Pluto. In many ways, this is the single most poignant moment in the Orpheus myth, the most memorable gesture in the entire tale. Eurydice's death at the fangs of a serpent, while tragic, is also unremarkable. That she is destroyed a second time by the power of her husband's gaze, however, is truly transformative.

Within the context of critical theory, a great deal of significance is placed upon the power of the gaze. It is not at all difficult, for example, to draw parallels between this

narrative event and the feminist film theory of Laura Mulvey.¹⁶ Just as Eurydice's archetypal femininity doomed her in her mortal life, Eurydice's position as the object of Orpheus' gaze always already necessitates her destruction as a subject of the discourse. Orpheus' decision to look back is motivated by fear (*in fear he might lose her again*) and anxiety (*anxious for another look at her*) – extending these motivations to involve the fear of the symbolic Other and the castration anxiety provoked by Eurydice's "lack" entails only the most cursory application of psychoanalytic theory.¹⁷

It is also very telling that castration is such a particularly poignant concept within Barthes' analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine*. Granted, *Sarrasine* is a story about the titular sculptor's tragic infatuation with the castrato Zambinella, a narrative premise that renders such tensions painfully opaque. However, what is most relevant for adapting Barthes' reading of *Sarrasine* to the analysis of the Orpheus myth is not necessarily a politics of gender as such. Instead, what is most readily applicable is the way that Barthes understands castration as a fundamental threat to the symbolic order established by Antithesis. Just as La Zambinella represents a transgression of the opposing categories of male and female, Eurydice threatens to transgress the boundaries that separate life and death, light and darkness, silence and song:

“This is what happens when the arcana of meaning are subverted, when the sacred separation of the paradigmatic poles is abolished, when one removes the separating

¹⁶ See: Mulvey, Laura. "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema." *Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism* (1975): 438-48.

¹⁷ See: Lacan, Jacques, et al. *Écrits: The first complete edition in English*. 2006.

It should be noted that the current project does not engage with psychoanalytic thought in any substantial way. The above examples are only mentioned by way of acknowledging the prevalence of these ideas within the history of these discourses, and not as a meaningful interrogation of psychoanalytic theory as such.

barrier, the basis of all ‘pertinence,’... The major figure of rhetorical wisdom, Antithesis, cannot be transgressed with impunity: meaning (and its classifying basis) is a question of life or death.”¹⁸

In both Balzac and Ovid, then, there is a threat that antithesis, the basis of reasoning, the very foundation of meaning, may be compromised. Due to the impossibility of existing outside of this symbolic order, the threat of such a transgression necessarily results in destruction.* (HER. Enigma 3: Resolution.)

(18) He stretched out to her his despairing arms, eager to rescue her, or feel her form, but could hold nothing save the yielding air.

The symbolic division of the living and the dead is also the separation of the corporeal and the ethereal. Orpheus’ reach is a signifier searching for a signified, but the gesture is ultimately a sign for loss and regret. *(ACT. Reaching.) **(SEM. Touch.)

*(19) Dying the second time, she could not say a word of censure of her husband’s fault; what had she to complain of — his great love? *(SEM. Femininity.) **(SYM. Child-woman)*

(20) Her last word spoken was, “Farewell!” which he could barely hear, and with no further sound she fell from him again to Hades.

¹⁸ Barthes, S/Z. 65.

Even in her second death, Eurydice is plagued by the weakness of the servile child-woman. When she speaks – her only word of dialogue in the entire story – she can barely be heard. She fawns over her husband to the last, refusing to find fault in his moment of weakness. She is deprived of agency in both life and death, and remains a hapless victim of the narrative.

*(ACT. Erasure)

There is a post script of sorts that appears elsewhere in the *Metamorphoses*, where a forlorn Orpheus withdraws into the woods, singing to animals and giving his love “to young boys only.” His refusal to take another woman as his lover ultimately leads to his destruction, dismembered at the hands of enraged Maenads, female worshippers of Dionysius.

As this is typically treated as a separate tale, it has been excluded from the analysis here. Although the violent scene provides a much more climactic conclusion than Eurydice’s silent erasure, it does not contribute anything further to the comparison at hand. Since most adaptation of the Orpheus myth end with the destruction of the protagonist’s backward glance, I too will stop the story here.

Having parsed through the story, we can begin to make a preliminary map of how each of the codes behaves throughout. This will provide a valuable basis for our comparison of the written version to its later adaptations in other media.

The symbolic code acts to provide an overarching structure for the story. It creates a general map of the story space, dividing it into the world of the living and the world of

the dead, the realm of morals and the realm of the gods. Through the consistent reiteration of antithesis, it establishes a grand symbolic order; these two worlds must remain separate for this order to prevail, and any attempt to transgress this structure must be punished. To this extent, the Orpheus story is very similar to *Sarrasine*. In the latter, the primary distinction of antithesis is the separation of male and female, and La Zambinella, the castrato, threatens this order by virtue of his/her resistance to being positioned as a subject within either pole. Orpheus' attempt to return the deceased Eurydice to the world of the living is similarly threatening, and the act is punished accordingly.

The referential code consistently positions these structures within the context of other narratives. This further develops the diegesis, inscribing history upon the story world in order to reify the dominance of the various symbolic codes. The proliferation of referents helps to fix the story within a larger narrative economy, portraying the Orpheus myth as but a single moment in an endless repetition of story. Through this code, meaning is divorced from the individual story, and repositioned within a larger intertextual network, a movement which seems appropriate given the excision of the Orpheus tale from the larger corpus of the *Metamorphoses*.

The hermeneutic code divides the story neatly into three acts: the wedding, Orpheus in the underworld, and his return to the surface. The proairetic code propels the story from one enigma to the next, moving the narrative from the postulation of each hermeneutic code to its resolution and onward to the next enigma.

This leaves the semic code, which proves to be the most difficult to understand as a general function, and in many ways seems to be the least applicable to the mythic form, as discussed previously. At the very least, however, the semic code provides the story with some badly needed specificity. The semes of sight, femininity, and song grant the Orpheus myth its particular flavor, separating it from otherwise similar tales about the taboo of transgressing the symbolic order.

All of this is not to say, however, that these codes translate perfectly. Aside from the aforementioned difficulty with the imprecision of “connotation,” Barthes’ method is cumbersome and unwieldy, awkward and clunky. But this iterative and fragmented approach to textual analysis is not altogether without its advantages: although tedious, the technique is a very effective means of teasing out the precise differences between the codes by constantly comparing them against one another. The other unspoken advantage of attempting to replicate Barthes’ style of analysis is that it is well suited to my own style of writing. I tend to think in fragments rather than flows, and I find it easier to express my findings in scattered, iterative shards than in lengthy diatribes. This affordance is perhaps not worth the headache caused by the rest of the process, but it has provided some small consolation.

Having been so deeply immersed in this framework, it is difficult to assess whether or not the codes form a truly comprehensive outline of narrative structure. Certainly, none of them seem altogether superfluous, and it is difficult to imagine getting rid of any one of them entirely. Perhaps the most obvious threat posed by Barthes’ method is that of reduction. It seems entirely plausible that in the attempt to make the text

conform to his system of codes, (something of a structuralist impulse), the story may become overly distilled. Thus boiled down to its essence, is it not possible that something vital to the story has evaporated, lost to the angel's share? Certainly, the entire premise of *S/Z* is a movement away from structuralism as such, predicated on precisely this sort of criticism, but is the gesture of plural textuality a sufficient remedy for such shortcomings?

The answer, at this point, is still uncertain. It remains a distinct possibility that the use of Barthes' system obfuscates what is most meaningful about the text, but no telling examples of such have yet been evidenced; thus far the codes have proven to be rather useful, at times even revelatory. But can this system be readily applied to texts in other media? If the movement of a story from one medium to another necessarily provokes change, then it seems logical that Barthes' system must require a similar transformation in order to function outside of written literature – to remain relevant, to survive, the system must *adapt*, or, in this case, be adapted. If this much can be accomplished, the codes should begin to provide a more concrete sense of how these changes occur at a structural level, and which aspects of the narrative persist despite changes in form and time.

Chapter 2

The portrait...is not a realistic representation, a related copy...it is a scene made up by blocks of meaning, at once varied, repeated and discontinuous...the meanings are cubes, piled up, altered, juxtaposed, and yet feeding on each other...the figure is not the sum, the frame, or the support of the meanings; it is an additional meaning.

–Roland Barthes, S/Z. 61.

Imposing the analytic method of *S/Z* upon any text other than *Sarrasine* has proven to be a challenging task. Different literary forms and genres seem to necessarily subvert and distort the function of Barthes' codes to at least some small degree. Given that Barthes' mode of analysis is fundamentally concerned with the structuration of meaning, (even if the technique itself represents a shift towards post-structuralism), none of this should come as any surprise. The very notion of applying Barthes' method to the mythic text, is, to a certain extent, a regressive proposition – the entire project of *S/Z* represents an attempt to establish a critical model for the increased complexity of modern narrative, an attempt based on the understanding that earlier narratological models¹ built around the analysis of structurally simplistic stories like fairy tales lacked the capacity to accommodate these new styles of writing. The mythic text, exemplified in this case by Ovid, is fundamentally different from the modern text, exemplified in this case by

¹ Propp and Levi-Strauss, for example.

Balzac. That Barthes' method can be viewed as even somewhat backwards compatible, as it were, must be viewed as a significant accomplishment.

No matter how different these two literary forms may be, however, they still share the inescapable commonality of medium, of being written text. Applying Barthes' method to an entirely different form will thus necessarily require an entirely different set of transformations.

To even endeavor such an application of this method relies heavily on a few assumptions. First, that Barthes' whole schema is in fact a theory of narrative as such, unfettered by the limitations of medium specificity, rather than simply a theory of literary analysis. Second, it relies on the assumption that a story can be considered as something distinct from its particular representation. Form and content, though clearly interrelated, must be considered as distinct entities.²

In order to test these assumptions, as well as the general utility of Barthes' method to different media, I will be examining *The Song of Orpheus*, a revisitation of the Orpheus myth from a few chapters from the voluminous *Sandman* series of comic books. The comic book offers an interesting liminal space between narrative media – it is both graphic and literature, yet it is also its own form entirely. This liminality is in fact essential to the way comics structure narrative meaning, requiring the reader to fill in the narrative space between panels.

Normally panel pictures represent clearly distinct moments of an ongoing event that cannot be fully seen. It is crucial to narrativity in graphic

² Of course, both of these assumptions were also fundamental to the work of the previous chapter, but the ideas perhaps bear repeating.

narratives, therefore, that the reader-spectator recognize the possibility of alternative consequences between the panels. The space in between, also known as the gutter, is the manifestation of the simultaneous discontinuities of space and time. As a symptom of the spatialized illusion of time, the gutter requires the spectator-viewer to conceive of the meaning of the transition and possibly imagine actions that are not drawn, but which must necessarily take place between the images.³

This aspect of graphic narrative is particularly interesting within the context of Barthes' notions of the readerly and the writerly. On the one hand, the comic form is necessarily a writerly text – narrative coherence is entirely dependent upon the reader imposing their own interpretation upon the enigmatic gutter, the space between panels. On very much the other, graphic narratives restrict a certain amount of imaginative work by actually furnishing images for what could otherwise only be described. While narrative is thus rendered increasingly plural, a stop clause of sorts is imposed upon the diegesis, closing off speculation about the way the world and its characters actually look.

When we read a text, we construct time, space and action from the necessarily disjunctive information we receive, but adaptations into movies or graphic novels frequently have to show what is only implied in the text. Famously, every text contains innumerable gaps that need to be filled in by the reader's imagination...Any adaptation to a visual art must

³ Mikkonen, Kai. "Remediation and the Sense of Time in Graphic Narratives." In *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form*, edited by Goggin, Joyce, and Dan Hassler-Forest. 2010: 78

present the audience with completed images...But because of its sequential nature, the comics medium will necessarily employ its own ‘poetics of absence,’ leaving a considerable part of the action in the gutter, and occasionally omitting some of the possible images either to kowtow to the censor’s stern gaze, or to demand that the readers take over some of the imaginative work.⁴

The addition of imagery also affects the way we must think about each of Barthes’ codes as they might function within the comic form. If we consider the referential code to be the home of intertextual signifiers, for example, we must now consider that comic book imagery is capable of citing visual texts in addition to literary works. The right combination of image and text may prompt a graphic narrative to be read within multiple art historic contexts simultaneously.⁵

The visual also bears substantially on the way we must conceive of the symbolic code. Antithesis, for example, may now be conveyed in pictorial as well as literary terms, visual juxtaposition rendering explicit many of the structural oppositions that would be limited by the capacities of metaphor in a written text.

The semic code is similarly affected by the addition of graphic elements, as visual cues are just as capable of connotation as written narrative, if not even more so. Had

⁴ Vanderbeke, Dirk. “It Was the Best of Two Worlds, It Was the Worst of Two Worlds: The Adaptation of Novels in Comics and Graphic Novels.” In *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature: Critical Essays on the Form*, edited by Goggin, Joyce, and Dan Hassler-Forest. 2010: 115-6.

⁵ Although I will certainly endeavor to call attention to any such visual allusion in “The Song of Orpheus,” I am not much in the way of an art historian, and may fail to recognize some of these cues. Fortunately, the model of polysemous textuality conveniently accommodates the possibility of a reader being oblivious to such intertextual signifiers.

Balzac's *Sarrasine* been rendered as a graphic novel, the illustrations of the Lanty's manor on the Fauborg St. Honore would signify wealth far more directly than in the original text, which relies on the readers' familiarity with the socio-cultural geography of Paris. In this instance, we again see how the addition of visual narrative elements limits the plurality of the text by rendering explicit elements of the narrative that may have previously gone unnoticed by some readers.

This leaves only the two temporal codes, the hermeneutic and the proairetic. The latter we may expect to function very similarly; the code of actions shall remain the code of actions regardless of whether those events be described in writing or portrayed by drawing. The former, however, continues to prove a bit more fickle. The hermeneutic code continues to function around the postulation and resolution of enigma, but the addition of visual elements once again allow for new types of enigmas to be posed.

Sensory diegetic images show the physical reality world of the story.

These are primarily images of what can be seen – characters, structures, objects, etc. – but can include anything, such as sounds and smells, that constitute the sensory environment of the fictional world. Non-sensory diegetic images show the internal reality of the characters in the story.

These images represent thoughts, emotions, and attitudes that are part of the diegesis, but not accessible to the senses...Hermeneutic images do not represent either the physical or mental reality of the fictional world; they

are not meant to be part of the diegesis. These images...are often explicit attempts to influence the interpretation of the story.⁶

All this being said, we can begin to imagine the possibility of these codes being used to analyze a graphic narrative – in chorus, they remain capable of accounting for the different representational practices inherent to the comic form. Maintaining Barthes' *method* of discerning the location and function of these codes, however, poses a bit of a problem.

Without writing directly upon the pages of a comic, there is no way to replicate the precise relationship between the object of study and its critique that is demonstrated by *S/Z*. It is impossible to interrupt and fragment the text within the confines of a traditional essay form in the same way that Barthes manages with *Sarrasine*, and as a result there will necessarily be a greater physical and critical distance between the analysis and the tutor text.

Perhaps this is nothing more than a technicality – it is still certainly possible to perform an analysis along Barthes' guidelines that applies his theories of polysemous textuality, even though the execution and presentation of this analysis will appear a bit differently. The most significant difference here is that the analysis does not actively interrupt the reading, but instead looks back upon it. At best, it may surround or accompany the graphic narrative as so many footnotes, as a grand amalgamation of paratext. However, this, in its own way, seems entirely appropriate. Rather than tearing

⁶ Duncan, Randy. "Shape and Color as Hermeneutic Images in *Asterios Polyp*." In *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods*, edited by Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan. 2012: 44-5.

the text apart, rending it open in search of the codes of meaning within, a paratextual system of analysis remains at the periphery, indicating the various structural cues that may bear upon the plurality of meanings at play without necessarily imposing them upon the reader. The codes function within a system of polysemous textuality precisely because they will not always bear equally upon all readers. Perhaps it is better that the sort of analysis undertaken here remain in the margins, where it can be either thoughtfully read or ignored entirely.

The other challenge when applying the method of *S/Z* to *The Song of Orpheus* in particular is at this point a familiar problem. Just as the Orpheus myth was torn from the pages of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* without proper regard for context or continuity, so to is *The Song of Orpheus* being displaced from the rest of the *Sandman* series. Looking at just these few chapters, it will seem as though characters are being introduced for the first time, even though they would have already been well established by previous issues if the series was read in its entirety. Similarly, structural and stylistic trends that have developed across the course of the series become less apparent when only such a brief segment is read in isolation. This will present a much greater challenge in *Sandman* than in Ovid; although chapters of the series are distinct and episodic, they do maintain a loose continuity within a larger narrative structure.⁷

There is a caveat here that is worth noting. Although the division of a text into its constituent *lexia* may be "arbitrary to the extreme," the decision to excise a fragment of a narrative from the context of a larger work is an altogether different proposition. What

⁷ I will do my best to account for any significant background, but with five collected volumes of work preceding the issue under analysis, a few details will inevitably slip through the cracks.

makes *lexia* different from *fabula* or *syuzhet* is that a given *lexia* need not correspond to any particular narrative event; the unit is arbitrary to the extent that any given piece of text may be examined and still allow for the enumeration of the various codes of meaning operating within. But if the length of the entire text is altered, for example by choosing to exclude latter chapters from the analysis, our sense of the total structure of the narrative becomes necessarily incomplete. The section of Ovid's work examined in the first chapter can thus not be read as an analysis of the *Metamorphoses* in its entirety, or even of the complete Orpheus myth, since the later epilogue detailing Orpheus' death was not included.

The later chapters of *The Song of Orpheus* do provide a revisitation of this scene, but since that portion of Ovid's text was not examined, and since the entire task at hand is to stage a comparative study that will allow for an analysis of narrative persistence in adapted work, it seems appropriate that this portion of *Sandman* remain unvisited here. But taking this liberty presents us with a further problem: if we neglect the final chapter of *The Song of Orpheus* because we did not examine the same portion of Ovid's text, then why should we bother attending to the other passages that appear in *Sandman* but not in the *Metamorphoses*? The experiment would still be somewhat valid, as it would enable us to focus solely on the way the graphic narrative form alters the retelling of the mythic text. However, this focus on form would prevent us from examining the narrative itself. Even though the primary objective here is the study of narrative persistence at a structural level, this persistence is best understood *through* change, evidencing which aspects of the story endure *despite* the necessary alterations of adaptation.



Figure 2.1 – Wine-Dark Sea

The very first panel of *The Song of Orpheus* radically structures the way in which the following story will be read. The textual narration, signified by pink tinted rectangular text boxes, immediately poses two intertextual referents: “wine-dark sea,” channeling the frequent refrain of Homer’s epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and “Eurydice,” which instantly establishes a relationship between this work and the Orpheus myth. The reference to Homer may here be slightly confusing, as the Orpheus myth is not featured in either of Homer’s epics. It seems most likely that the line is here meant to signify a narrative tradition rather than any particular text, situating the following work as a piece of epic Greek storytelling. To readers familiar enough with the myth to attend to the

referential cue “Eurydice,” all of the subsequent events will be read with this relationship in mind, prompting particular attention to be paid to points of difference and repetition. This in turn also posits the story’s first major enigma: How is this text related to the Orpheus myth?

The evaluation of a comic book adaptation of a literary work will hover between two poles: on the one hand, it will be impossible to ignore the fact that it is an adaptation, and thus the relation with the source must be explored. This does not only include direct adaptations, but also revisions that interfere with the source texts and occasionally offer radically different perspectives or narrators...The natal cord that links the work to its source cannot be cut successfully without dismissing some of the important aspects of the adaptation, so that it does indeed refer to its source and offers some commentary on it.⁸

This question will propel the narrative forward in a unique way for those readers who are able to attend to the sorts of intertextual connections drawn by the referential code. *(HER. Enigma 1: Postulation.)*(REF. Homeric Epic.) ***(REF. Orpheus myth.) ****(ACT. Dreaming)

The first page also poses a rather obvious and important challenge to Barthes’ system of analysis. Although narrative is constructed sequentially in comics – the page is read from left to right, top to bottom – the tabular arrangement of the panels also conveys

⁸ Vanderbeke, 107.

all of this information simultaneously. Unlike the Ovid text, where we are unable to read multiple parts of the narrative at the same time, the illustrated page can be read in its entirety at once. The page as a whole is thus its own signifying unit, as are individual panels, as are the spaces between panels, and as is text: the comic form presents an explosion of signifiers which operate simultaneously. Barthes hints at such a possibility in *S/Z* in his description of the representational functions of portraiture:

The portrait arises from the fact that in their superimposition the multiple codes undergo a shift: their units are no longer in the same place, do not have the same size, and this disparity, built up unevenly, produces what we call the ‘shifting’ of the discourse...when two codes function simultaneously but according to unequal wavelengths, they produce an image of movement, an image of life.⁹

On the first page, for example, we see Orpheus floating in the sea at either dawn or dusk, but also simultaneously speaking with his father, Morpheus, in a garden at night. This arrangement is clearly meaningful, but can we interpret this sort of meaning by using Barthes’ codes, or is it necessary to elaborate on his existing model? To simply posit an additional “visual code” would be more problematic than useful. Images are capable of just as many various signifying functions as text, and attempting to group them all under a single code would be directly at odds with the spirit of Barthes’ theories of textuality. Conversely, were we to go so far as to double the system of codes to account

⁹ Barthes, *S/Z*. 60-61.

for a “visual cultural code” and a “visual hermeneutic code” and so on, the whole project of elaboration would become essentially redundant.

In the case of the first page, such postulation may be strictly unnecessary. The arrangement of the page is certainly meaningful, here establishing a thematic destabilization of notions of space and time, but this meaning is consistent with the functions of Barthes’ symbolic code. The spatial configuration of the page here serves as a metaphor for the structuration of the diegesis – in the realm of Dream, here an inhabitable space as well as a psychic state, time and space do not conform to the rules of the physical world. Although it remains to be seen whether or not additional codes may eventually be necessary, Barthes’ model here seems to accommodate the graphic narrative form. *(SYM. Spatialization of Dream.)

Orpheus here also posits our second major enigma –what is the meaning of his dream? Read within the intertextual network of the myth, we can anticipate the tragedy that will befall Orpheus and Eurydice, but this does little to explain his dream of the wine-dark sea.

*(HER. Enigma 2: Postulation – What is the meaning of Orpheus’ dream?)

If song is a defining semic quality for Orpheus, then dream is certainly the signifier par excellence for his father, Morpheus, the titular Sandman. The character is immediately recognizable within the context of the series, easily identified by his white skin and his black hair and eyes, a color scheme further emphasized by the ephemeral white-on-black of his speech balloons. It is perhaps insufficient to say that dream is a

prominent quality of Morpheus as a character, since within the context of the *Sandman* series he is the actual embodiment of dream.

Simply put, the Endless are a group of seven siblings who embody different fundamental aspects of existence: Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Despair, Desire and Delirium.

“The Endless are merely patterns. The Endless are ideas. The Endless are wave functions.

The Endless are repeating motifs. The Endless are echoes of Darkness, and nothing

more.”¹⁰ The Endless are thus individually the embodiment of particular senses, and as a

group, an entirely different level of symbolic order, neither gods nor men. *(SEM.

Dream.)

On the following page we are given our first paratextual cue, the title *The Song of Orpheus: Chapter One*. This further clarifies the intertextual relationship between the graphic work in front of us and the classic Greek myth. If the previous page is thus considered a prelude, the immediate story begins with the act of awakening. Orpheus, laying in the nude in a posture of repose reminiscent of 16th century Italian art, is shaken into consciousness by a satyr, who explains that he has been crying out in his sleep. This poses an additional level of structural antithesis, opposing sleep to wakefulness. Unlike other instances of antithesis, however, the boundary between sleep and wakefulness is readily permeable. This structuration thus serves to problematize other symbolic oppositions, such as life and death, by showing that such fluidity is indeed possible, while at the same time acting primarily to uphold and maintain the prominence of such

¹⁰ Gaiman, Neil. *Sandman*. Vol 2. #48.

distinctions. *(ACT. To wake: to cease dreaming.) *(SYM. Antithesis: Dream/
Wakefulness) ***(REF. Orpheus as nude in repose.)

As Orpheus wakes from his dream, we notice that this story begins slightly before the events described by Ovid; the wedding has not yet started. This expansion effectively functions as a frame for the Orpheus myth – it surrounds it with new material and additional characters, thus creating a new context for the story without actively erasing or replacing it. The most immediately noticeable addition of this framework is the character of Aristaeus, the satyr that wakes Orpheus from his dream. In Greek mythology, Aristaeus is a minor god associated with tasks such as farming and beekeeping. That he is here portrayed as a satyr rather than a human is demonstrative of the appropriative capacity of myth; earlier versions of the Orpheus tale, excluding Ovid but including Virgil, seem to have combined and altered different aspects of these legends. Given the confusion entailed in parsing through the roots of these various versions of the character, it is perhaps sufficient to acknowledge two referential cues at stake within the context of this particular comic. There is a connection to be made to the whole intertextual network of Aristaeus as a minor character in the Greek pantheon, and as a key player in certain versions of the Orpheus myth, most notably Virgil's *Georgics*, which concern themselves primarily with farming. That Aristaeus is depicted as a satyr is already meaningful – through the referential code, we know that these goat-men are closely associated with Dionysius, and thus notorious for their love of wine and women. *(REF. Aristaeus, Satyr.)

Reminiscing on his departed wife, Aristaeus states a simple truth: “People die. You get over it. It’s part of life.” This is the first of many instances of foreshadowing, each of which serves to reinforce the predominance of the division between the living and the dead – an antithetical opposition which we already know to be of utmost importance to the Orpheus myth.

*(SYM. Antithesis: Life/Death.)

Orpheus refuses to make the traditional oxen sacrifice at his wedding on the grounds of compassion.¹¹ This can be read as a possible transgression of a symbolic order – it does not threaten the grand structuration of the antithesis of life and death, but it still threatens to break with tradition, and thus with the symbolic order of history. This in turn hints at the ill portent signified by the sputtering of Hymen’s torch in the Ovid text, a torch which can be seen in the background of the first image on the next page. *(SYM. History: Transgression.) **(SEM. Flame: Hymen’s Torch.)

On the following page we meet Orpheus’ mother, Calliope. This relationship is consistent with Greek mythology, from which we learn that Calliope is not only Orpheus’ mother, but also the muse of epic verse, frequently considered to be the inspiration for Homer’s epics.¹² Orpheus is traditionally thought to be the son of Calliope and a Thracian king – that his father in the context of this story is instead Morpheus,

¹¹ “No living thing is to die at my wedding, Aristaeus. I do not hold with sacrifice.”

¹² This in turn is consistent with the early invocation of the “wine-dark sea” as a general sign connecting this work with the narrative history of epic verse in the Homeric tradition.

referred to in these chapters as Oneiros¹³, from the Greek term for the embodiment of dream, is thus at odds with classic mythology, but serves to effectively establish his importance within the larger narrative arc of the *Sandman* series. *(REF. Calliope.)

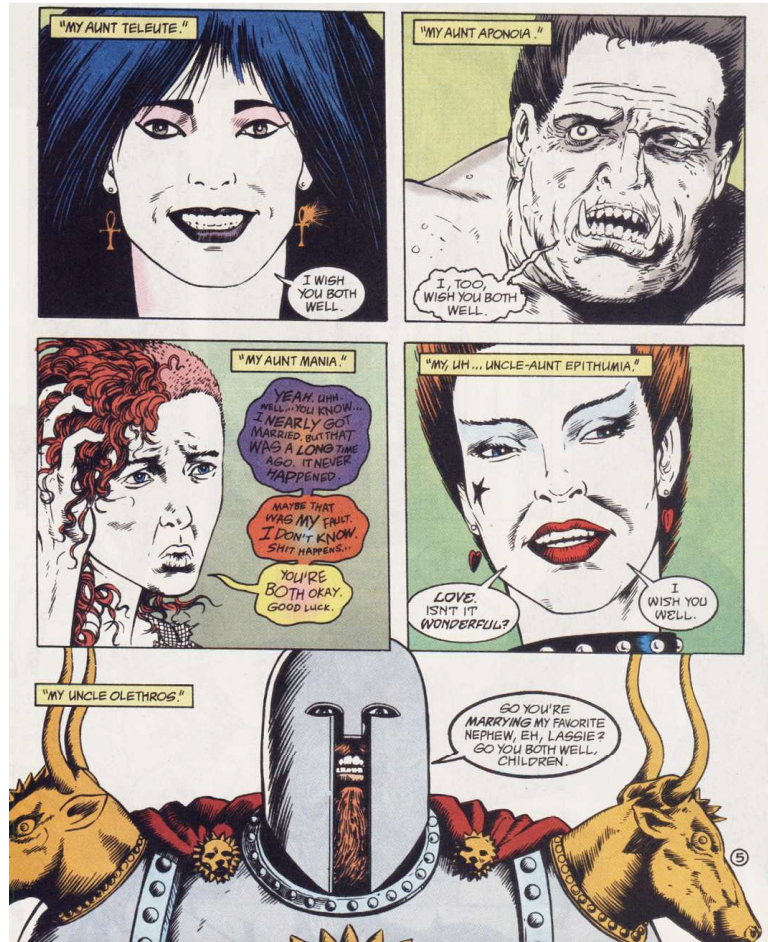


Figure 2.2 – *The Endless*

Next we have the introduction of Orpheus' aunts and uncles (and uncle-aunt), the extended family of the Endless, where we are presented with our first instance of anachronism. Although the speech and appearance of most of the main characters seems

¹³ It is interesting that Gaiman would choose to have Dream referred to as Oneiros here, rather than Morpheus, as he is referred to in much of the series, since Morpheus is still the name of the Greek god of Dream, the son of the god of Sleep. It is likely to differentiate the Endless from Gods as such - hence Destruction is Olethros rather than Ares, and Death is Teleute rather than either Hades or Persephone. This differentiation is consistent with the way in which the Endless stand outside of traditional distinctions between gods and men, between living and dead.

to be consistent with the ancient Greek setting, this does not hold true for many of the Endless. Desire (Epithunia), for instance, bears the vestiges of an androgynous glam-rocker in addition to his/her toga, while Delirium (Mania) wears the asymmetrical hair and ripped fishnet top of a punk. These seemingly minute representational choices reinforce the previously established fact that the Endless operate outside of the traditional structuration of time and space, but here also indicate that they may exist at multiple points in time simultaneously. This in turn gives further credence to the grim foreshadowing that these characters consistently offer. When Destiny (Potmos) says “What must happen will happen. That is the way of it,” we understand this to be true because for the Endless, these events have already happened. The use of anachronism is also a marker for the reflexively palimpsestic nature of the work at hand – it imposes the signs of modernity on top of the text of the classic mythic narrative, indicating a fundamental awareness of the story’s status *as adaptation*, as simultaneously ancient and modern. Inevitability becomes a much more substantive symbolic structure in the adaptation than in the earlier text, since with adaptation the story is always already written, and thus the ending is always already known. *(SEM. Anachronism.) **(SEM. Inevitability.)

Most of the Endless are inconsequential within these particular chapters of *Sandman* – only Dream, Death, and Destruction play prominent roles. Among these, only Dream is given a unique speech balloon. Although Delerium, Despair, Destiny, and Desire also each have their own typographical signatures, Destruction’s balloons are

marked only by a slightly thicker outline, and Death's speech appears identical to other regular human characters. *(ACT. Introductions.)

Hymen's torch appears again, and the God is invoked by name (here Hymenaeus), and more blatant foreshadowing is laid forth as the priest binds the newlyweds "Until the sundering of death." *(ACT. Wedding.) **(SEM. Flame.) *** (SYM. Antithesis: Life/Death.)

The flame from Hymen's torch seems to creep across to the adjacent page, becoming the bonfires that illuminate a now intoxicated Aristaeus. The flames of virginal purity are now the raging fires of lust. *(ACT. Party.) **(SEM. Flame.)

Amidst the revelry following the wedding ceremony, Aristaeus pulls Eurydice aside to ask if she will help him with a problem. This poses a minor, but important, enigma – what does Aristaeus want? The unsavory nature of his intentions are hinted at on the following page, where he is shown swathed in darkness. *(HER. Enigma 3: Postulation. What does Aristaeus want?) **(SEM. Darkness.)

Here we see one of the first blatant inconsistencies with Ovid's version of the Orpheus myth. Rather than stumbling upon a serpent while frolicking with delighted nymphs, Eurydice meets her fate while attempting to escape the drunken satyr. This is a significant departure from Ovid's portrayal of Eurydice as the virginal girl-child – here she meets her demise because she is the object of sexual desire. This is particularly interesting, given that nothing about Eurydice's illustrated portrayal is overtly

sexualized.¹⁴ She knees Aristaeus in the groin, avoiding the satyr's lust through power and agency, but she is still a victim to the inevitability of fate, the powerful foreshadowing of the narrative, and the venomous teeth of the serpent. *(ACT. Rape.) ** (SYM. Woman as object of desire.)



Figure 2.3 – Eurydice & Serpent

A four panel sequence at the bottom of the page shows Eurydice running away from the satyr, gradually approaching a sleeping serpent. This sequence slows time drastically by minimizing the amount of action between panels, building suspense and once again demonstrating the inevitability of fate. *(SEM. Inevitability.) ** (HER. Enigma 3: Resolution.) *** (ACT: Death.)

¹⁴ Surprising, perhaps, given the frequent criticisms of the excessively sexualized representation of females in comics more generally.

See: “The Hawkeye Initiative” <http://thehawkeyeinitiative.com/> and Blanch, Christina, “Sex and Superheroines.” (<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/13/showbiz/comic-book-heroes-oped-superheroines/index.html>)

It is important to note that although Eurydice is never pursued by the satyr Aristaeus in Ovid, this alteration is not Neil Gaiman's invention – this is how Eurydice meets her demise in Virgil's version of the Orpheus myth in the *Georgics*. This could force us to question which version of the myth Gaiman has chosen to adapt – Virgil's account did precede Ovid's by about twenty years, so perhaps this should rightly be considered the authentic original. But to make this consideration is to ignore the most vital part of myth as such, and also to disregard the critical foundation of the analysis posed here. Myth is not a single fixed text; it is a fluid and evolving structure. This is what makes studying myth within the context of adaptation at once so fascinating and so frustrating. The “source text” at stake here is no one version of the myth, written or otherwise. Instead, it is the entire history of the story in all of its various tellings and retellings. This is made evident in other parts of *Sandman* where portions of the Ovid version of the myth are considered that bear no mention in the *Georgics*, as we will see later in the chapter.

This is precisely why the suggestion at the heart of this project moves away from critiques of difference and inconsistency in adapted works, and towards a structural consideration of similarity, of narrative persistence.

Hymen's torch has now become Eurydice's pyre. This is the third time fire has been used, each time connoting a completely different concept. “The more signs there are, the more the truth will be obscured, the harder one will try to figure it out. The connotative signified is literally an *index*: it points but does not tell; what it points to is

the name, the truth as name; it is both the temptation to name and the impotence to name.”¹⁵ The plurality of the connoted sign thus points to the progression of the hermeneutic code, an index for the progression of the narrative: Hymen’s torch implied foreshadowing; the wedding bonfire postulated the enigma of Eurydice’s fate; the funeral pyre burns as evidence of its resolution. *(SEM. Flame.)

Orpheus stands atop a cliff, looking over the funeral below. Again we see the power of Orpheus’ musical abilities – he plays his lyre “like a song from a dream,” which, fittingly, opens a portal to his father’s realm, the Dreaming. As he steps through the portal and onto the steps of Dream’s palace, designed according to the conventions of Hellenistic architecture, we are presented with another minor enigma: what does Orpheus want with his father? *(ACT. Opening.) **(SEM. Song.) ***(HER. Enigma 4: Postulation. What does Orpheus want from Dream?)

Orpheus’ exchange with his father immediately clarifies this enigma by introducing the threat of his transgression: he proposes to retrieve Eurydice from the underworld, troubling the separation of the realms of the living and the dead. Dream refuses to help his son, or even to speak further on the matter. In response, Orpheus severs ties with his father, declaring that he is no longer Dream’s son. This creates a conflict between father and son that is both personal and archetypal. On the steps of Dream’s palace, a brazier burns with the fires of a new enigma: will Orpheus retrieve Eurydice? This passage of the hermeneutic code thus occurs earlier than in the Ovid text, where Orpheus’ intentions are not made explicit until his appeal to Pluto and

¹⁵ Barthes, *S/Z*. 62.

Persephone. *(ACT. Severance of ties.) **(HER. Enigma 4: Resolution.) ***(SEM. Flame.) ****(HER. Enigma 5: postulation.)

The nature of the conversation also demonstrates a recurring theme in Sandman's revisitation of mythic story: reflexive skepticism. By portraying the characters of legendary tales as actual human agents rather than mere allegorical symbols, the adapted work forces us to question the assumed legitimacy of mythic narrative. This imposition of realistic psychology effectively debunks notions of textual authenticity, while also allowing the adaptation to stage specific critiques of the adapted work: "The potential for an artistic comment, a creative dialogue with the text, or a subjective and imaginative perspective on the original does not lie in the aspiration to match the work in its own field. Instead, the very difference between the original and the adaptation allows for a new encounter, a tension that leads to an interaction between the two works of art."¹⁶ The interaction here, then, is not an attempt at repeating any one particular version of the Orpheus myth, but rather a reflection upon the function of myth more generally.

*(SEM. Reflexive skepticism.)

Orpheus returns to the cliff overlooking Eurydice's funeral, where he apparently contemplates suicide before his uncle, Destruction, appears to dissuade him. It is interesting that by mocking Orpheus for his melodramatic posturing,¹⁷ Destruction ultimately seems to be questioning the gravity of the Orpheus myth. It is particularly fitting that Destruction be the one to stage this critique – by adhering to a model of adaptation based on fidelity, the adapted work always threatens the destruction of the

¹⁶ Vanderbeke, 117.

¹⁷ "I think you are more in love with the idea of your dead love than you ever were with the girl herself."

source text. Destruction's brusque critique here reduces the original myth to a handful of simple signs – Orpheus and Eurydice are not in love as such, but are instead simply a sign *for* love. The inevitability of Orpheus' plight as the protagonist of an always already written story is thus his true tragedy. He must always try in vain to rescue Eurydice in order to complete the story, and thus ultimately reaffirm the symbolic order that his endeavor seeks to upend. *(SEM. Reflexive skepticism.) **(SEM. Inevitability.)

Throughout *The Song of Orpheus*, the protagonist is constantly reminded that there are always “rules and conditions.”¹⁸ This is, of course, closely tied to the sense of inevitability – another fact that Orpheus is repeatedly advised to attend to, since the existence of these rules and conditions is, in short, inevitable. But this constant chiding also serves another purpose, as a sign for structuration more generally. The antithetical opposition between life and death has already been shown to play a prominent role in organizing the diegesis, but “rules and conditions” do not necessarily speak to antithesis exclusively. Rather, they simply re-emphasize the importance and preeminence of symbolic order as such: “In narrative...the symbolic and the operative are non-decidable, subject to the rule of an *and/or*. Thus, to choose, to decide on a hierarchy of codes, on a predetermination of messages, as in secondary-school explications, is *impertinent*, since it overwhelms the articulation of the writing by a single voice.”¹⁹ “Rules” are thus a function of the symbolic code in its entirety, extending the threat of transgression beyond the compromise of antithesis to include the violation of any order of power – including,

¹⁸ Here once again restated by Destruction, who explains that if Orpheus seeks Death's help to retrieve Eurydice, “There will be conditions, but then, there always are.”

¹⁹ Barthes, *S/Z*. 77.

for Barthes, the power of the polysemic text. To violate the rules of antithesis is to impose a stop clause on the reading, thus closing the discourse, and thus destroying the plurality of the text. *(SYM. Symbolic Code: Rules and Conditions.)

Destruction creates an endless explosion, which creates a portal to Death's realm in the same way that Orpheus' song created an entrance to the Dreaming. This allows Orpheus to travel from the world of the living to Death's house – a space that is entirely separate from the spatialization of death that is the Greek underworld.*(ACT. Destruction: Opening.)

*(SYM. Antithesis: Spatialization of Life/Death – Transition.)

As Orpheus enters Death's house, we immediately begin to see further use of anachronism, which once again posits the timeless nature of the Endless. By the end of the page, the scene has proved too much to bear for Orpheus,²⁰ and Death obligingly transforms the setting to “the kind of thing you'd expect to see.” The comparison between Death's house and Dream's palace is thus rather striking. While the latter adheres to a visual style consistent with the story's time period, the former keeps a small, messy apartment with worn out furniture. The difference, as ever, is meaningful – Dream seeks to maintain a sense of order and propriety, while Death seems to care more about casual comfort. This is further reflected in their respective behavior towards Orpheus. Dream refuses to help, while Death ultimately obliges his request. *(SEM. Anachronism.)

²⁰ “This place is so strange to my eyes”



Figure 2.4 – Death's House

Orpheus pleads his case to Death, who constantly reminds her nephew of the order of things, the inevitability of death, and the preeminence of rules and conditions. * (SYM. Symbolic Code: Rules and Conditions.) **(SEM. Inevitability.)

At some point during their discussion, Death claims that Herakles was not in fact the hero of popular legend, but rather a liar and a drunk. This furthers the story's open tension with the idea of mythology as such – it is a blatant attack on the notion of authenticity and originality. This assertion also further humanizes the Orpheus myth, transforming the figures of legend into regular people, individual characters with human motivations and human flaws. *(REF. Herakles.) **(SEM. Reflexive skepticism.)



Figure 2.5 – Death's Gaze

Death's gaze here causes un-death, its own sort of destruction. It allows Orpheus to travel to the underworld so long as Death never takes him. In short, he is now unable to die. If Orpheus' gaze imparts a second death to the already deceased Eurydice, then Death's gaze preemptively revokes Orpheus' right to a death of his own. By the grand structural calculus of the diegesis, death is a zero sum game. By denying Orpheus the end to which he is entitled, Death has simply balanced the equation. *(SEM. Gaze.) **(ACT. Departure.)

Orpheus' descent into the underworld is represented in a wordless two page spread. There is very little sense of continuity between the panels, obfuscating the passage of time – this portion of his journey could take mere minutes or many hours. *(ACT. Descent.) **(SEM. Time.) ***(SYM. Antithesis: Spatialization of Life/Death – Transition.)



Figure 2.6 – Descent

Orpheus eventually reaches the river Styx, where he seeks passage from the ferryman Charon, who requests that the bard sing for him. Song is only implied through dialogue and affect – Orpheus and Charon speak of singing, and we see the ferryman’s tears, but there is no visual representation of played song. The page is silent – music exists only in the gutter, in the space between panels. This is perhaps appropriate, as Barthes himself describes music in direct opposition to sight: “The voice is a diffusion, an insinuation, it passes over the entire surface of the body, the skin; and being a passage, an abolition of limitations, classes, names....it possesses a special hallucinatory power. Music, therefore, has an effect utterly different from sight.”²¹

²¹ Barthes, *S/Z*. 110.

Representing Orpheus' song with floating musical notes would cheapen the transcendental power of his voice, and this experience is instead portrayed through the seen transformation of corporeal forms. *(SEM. Song.) **(ACT. Ferryman's Passage.)

***(SYM. Antithesis: Spatialization of Life/Death – Transition.)

This same process is repeated on the following page, where Orpheus lulls Cerberus to sleep with his Lyre. Orpheus using music to soothe the savage beast Cerberus is a common feature of many mythic narratives, (excluding Ovid, again), but its use here is peculiar for several reasons. First, we never see the actual beast, but only its shadow – an index for the creature itself. Second, the event here precedes Orpheus' meeting with Pluto and Persephone. In Virgil's *Georgics*, however, Orpheus tames Cerberus through the same song that he uses to plead his case to the lords of the underworld, the same song that halts Ixion's wheel and Sisyphus's rock. The order of events portrayed here is perhaps more logical, as Cerberus was charged with keeping the living out of the underworld and the dead within – a guardian of the spatialized division between life and death. *(SEM. Song.) **(REF. Cerberus.) *** (ACT. Taming the beast.)

In another wordless page, we are shown the enormity of the underworld, demonstrated by Orpheus' gradual movement towards two distant black obelisks through a silent throng of pale spirits. The sheer number of souls, alongside the size and gravity of the distant black structures, serve to emphasize how minuscule and out of place Orpheus is in this world. *(ACT. Passage.)

Orpheus finally arrives at his destination, and we discover that the once distant obelisks are in fact thrones, the royal seats of Hades and Persephone. Their gigantic

stature, towering over the pale teeming masses below, provides a far more substantial indication of their roles as Man-king and Queen-woman than text could ever afford. This is further indicated by the unique, heavily serifed fonts given to the couple for their speech balloons. These vocal signifiers are particularly interesting when we consider that Orpheus, despite being immeasurably smaller than the God-couple he is addressing, speaks with similar authority. Although he does not possess a unique typographical voice, his speech is given equal space on the page. Barthes' assertion bears repeating: "The voice is a diffusion, an insinuation, it passes over the entire surface of the body, the skin; and being a passage, an abolition of limitations, classes, names."²² *(SYM. Man-King, Woman-Queen.)

Again, Orpheus begins to play his lyre silently, our only clue that his fingers are actively strumming found in a slight close up on his hands. At the top of the following page, he begins singing, indicated only by the italicization of his speech balloons. The lyrics, though slightly different from those found in the Ovid text examined in the first chapter, we may assume have been taken verbatim from an alternate translation²³. We may even lift a portion of the previous analysis to parse through portions of the song:

*"I sing of only two things: love and time. I journeyed to this world below,
to which all born as mortals must descend in time. I came to plead with
you, great king, great queen. I sing an honest song, and I will tell the truth,
unvarnished and in my own way."*

²² Ibid. 110.

²³ However, the lyrics are likely taken from a translation of Ovid rather than Virgil, as the *Georgics* do not include any mention of Orpheus' actual song.

Many of the elements of the lyrics described in Ovid remain intact here. The appeal to truth remains as an expression of the tension between competing representational forms, here further complicated by the illustrated depiction of sung verse. Orpheus also calls attention to the opposition between life and death, framed in terms of inevitability. *(SYM. Antithesis: Spatialization of Life/Death.) **(SYM. Truth: Replication of Bodies.) ***(SEM. Inevitability.)

As with the earlier examples of Orpheus' song, we find that the power of his music is not indicated by any portrayal of the actual sound of his voice or his lyre, but rather by the affective response that these solicit. In this case, we see the previously immobile hordes of the departed as they are whipped into a frenzy of emotion, just as with Charon the ferryman. They rise up like a tidal wave to surround the balladeer. *(SEM. Song.)

“And love is known here too, if all the tales of passion, aye, and rape so long ago have any truth or honesty to them. They say you two were bound as one by love.”

In this version also, Orpheus appeals to the story of Hades and Persephone, employing the referential code to implore that they interpret his plight within the context of their own narrative. *(REF. Mythology: Pluto and Persephone's courtship.)

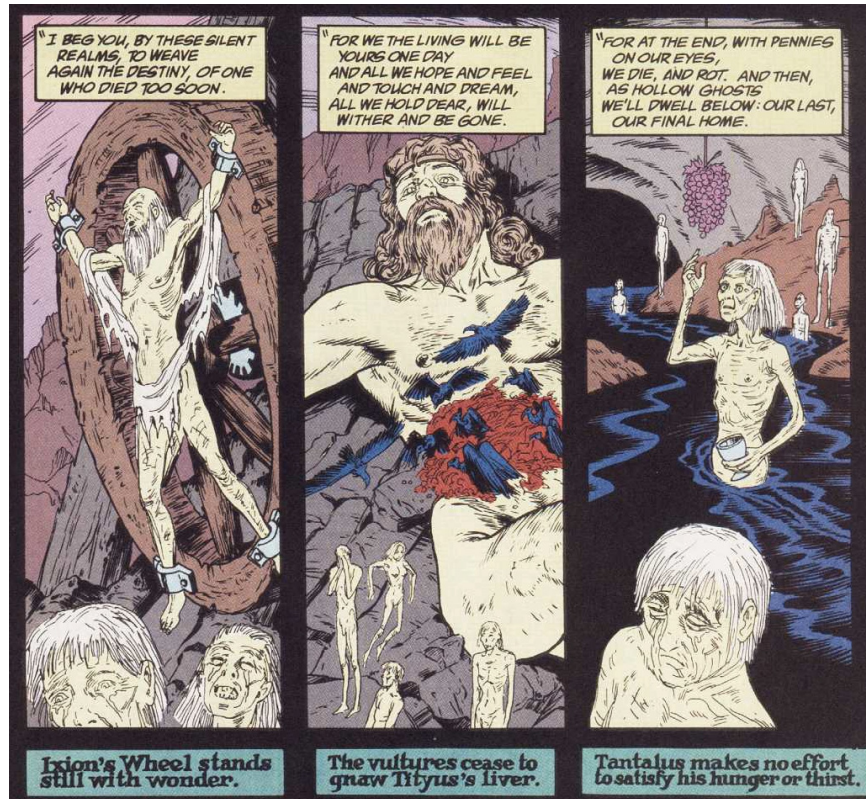


Figure 2.7 – Prisoners of Tantalus

The next few verses continue to invoke the same of inevitability²⁴, but these lyrics are placed as off-panel sound on top of images of the other inhabitants of Hades. We also once again see the same serial invocation of referential codes for the mythic acts of eternal repetition, including Ixion and Tityus. Since we can now actually *see* the prisoners of Tantalus, we learn that they cease their ceaseless tasks during Orpheus’ song, the lyrics of which are shown simultaneous to their portrayal, rather than after the song has concluded. *(SEM. Inevitability.) **(REF. Mythology: Prisoners of Tantalus.) ***(SYM. Repetition.) ****(ACT. Pause.)

Finally, Orpheus makes his request, restating the driving enigma of the chapter. Importantly, in the comic we are aware of Orpheus’ intent before he descends into the

²⁴ “For we the living will be yours one day.”

underworld, since he has already made his initial appeals to Dream and Death. *(HER. Enigma 5: Resolution.)

Again, Orpheus strikes an accord with the lords of the underworld, and again the terms of this accord are set: he must return to the surface without faltering, speaking, or looking back. As in Ovid, this posits another enigma: will the lovers return to the surface?

*(SYM. Symbolic Code: Rules and Conditions.) **(HER. Enigma 6: Postulation.)



Figure 2.8 – Doubt and Look Back

In the comic, we notice that Orpheus' return to the surface is markedly darker than his original descent, the dramatic silence of his original voyage replaced by a consistent narration of his growing doubt. This culminates in a four panel sequence as Orpheus slowly turns back, convinced he is “the butt of Hades’ joke.” This sequence bears a striking structural similarity to the four panels portraying Eurydice’s death; both sequences function in the same manner as a slow motion shot in a film, effectively

prolonging the moment just before an inevitable trauma – in this case, the look back. *

(ACT. Ascent.) **(SEM. Darkness.) *** (SEM. Doubt.) **** (ACT. Gaze.) ***** (SYM.

Antithesis: Life/Death – consequences of transgression.)



Figure 2.9 – Erasure

A similar sequence is presented on the following page, as Eurydice disappears back into the underworld, saying only “Orpheus? My love?” as she fades and recedes across the space of five diminishing panels. This portrayal of Eurydice’s destruction is much more in tune with the Ovid version of the myth (“What had she to complain of? His great love?”) than with Virgil’s, which allows her a lengthy rebuke against Orpheus’ idiocy before casting her back to the underworld. *(ACT. Erasure) **(SEM. Femininity.) *** (SYM. Child-woman.) **** (HER. Enigma 5: Resolution.)

The final page also offers an interesting, if minute, addition to the story – Orpheus’ reaction. Although both Ovid and Virgil go on to write about Orpheus’ later fate, neither describe his distress immediately following the second death of his nearly-retrieved bride. His reaction is not particularly interesting, and certainly not surprising, but the way it is represented is rather unique: his movement out of the cave and into the light is mapped backwards, from right to left across the page, all within a single image rather than in separate panels, his form increasing in size, color and detail. His final anguished cry, a simple scream of “No!”, is also unique – it is the only time the balladeer’s voice is ever represented in anything other than conventional speech balloon typography. This takes the place of his attempt to reach out, as it is described in Ovid. Here, Orpheus has finally come to realize the futility of his efforts, and the inevitability of fate. His anguish is as much an expression of regret as of surrender. *(SEM. Inevitability.) **(ACT. Anguish.)

And so the story ends very much as we may have suspected it would all along. However, due to our excision of these few chapters from their larger work, our first enigma remains unresolved: what is the meaning of Orpheus’ dream? Were we to include the final chapter and the epilogue, we would learn that Orpheus, as in other versions, is savagely dismembered by the Bacchante, his severed head tossed into the wine-dark sea. In *Sandman*, however, the story does not end here. Having sacrificed his own death so that Eurydice may be allowed another, Orpheus is unable to die, even though all that remains of him is a severed head. The head of Orpheus becomes a recurring figure in the *Sandman* series, appearing in several other issues set at various points in time. All of this

to say that Orpheus' dream was simply prescient; it was, as his father explained, "a memory of the future."

Other than the addition of outside characters such as Dream and Death, this is *Sandman's* most substantial deviation from previous versions of the myth. Even though Orpheus fails to retrieve Eurydice, he still successfully transgresses the symbolic division of life and death by virtue of his newfound immortality. However, this immortality is not a sign of triumph, but rather a marker of tragic irony; his un-death serves as a punishment, a constant reminder about the sanctity of "rules and conditions."

Having thus parsed through the graphic text, a few important points of interest begin to emerge. First, it is evident that although each of Barthes' five codes are variously applicable to the comic form, there are also longer moments within the work where none of the codes are particularly apparent. This is also true of written work – there are some lengthy passages in *Sarrasine* that are similarly bereft of exposition in *S/Z* – but these moments in the comic form feel more drastic, more frustrating. Perhaps this is related to the comparative ease with which Barthes' method manages to cope with the unique representational processes of graphic narrative as a form. Although there are a number of places that seem fairly devoid of meaningful narrative signification, there are no apparent instances of fundamental resistance to Barthes' framework of interpretive codes.

Part of this may be precisely because the work at hand is an adaptation. While other graphic narratives may pose moments of representational logic that do not readily conform to a theory of polysemous textuality, *The Song of Orpheus* is, at least to some extent, bound to the context of the Orpheus myth. On the other hand, a theory based on

the possibility of multiple and varied interpretations *should* be able to account for a reading of the work that *fails* to attend to its many intertextual cues – even someone unfamiliar with the Orpheus myth can read these chapters of *Sandman* and find them meaningful. On a structural level, however, it is difficult to see how any reading could fail to consider the prominence of the various other codes: the fundamental opposition between life and death, the senses of song, repetition, and inevitability, the destructive capacity of the gaze. Though a “naive reader” may be incapable of attending to the critical and reflexive relationship between the adaptation and its hypotext, these aspects of the story seem to remain stable; consistent; inevitable.

The question then remains: what about the comic form is fundamentally different from the written text? In many respects, *Sandman* may not be the ideal text from which to draw any sweeping conclusions about the nature of graphic narrative. The style of the illustration is basically realistic, rather than symbolic or abstract, and as such, parts of the story read more like an illustrated version of the Orpheus myth than as an adaptation as such. There is a relative dearth of “hermeneutic images,” of enigmatic graphic signifiers that may structure a reading apart from the textual narration. But despite all of this, *The Song of Orpheus* is clearly a comic, a comic which is clearly different from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and a comic which is clearly an adaptation of the Orpheus myth, and is thus demonstrative of a few key points of interest. Foremost among these is the way in which the graphic narrative is able to represent time. The arrangement of panels may create an affective experience of time either speeding up or slowing down, and the arrangement of pages allows for the signification of simultaneity as well as simultaneous

signification. This is perhaps why so many of the “lexia” examined in this chapter have contained multiple semes, multiple referential cues, and multiple instances of symbolic structuration.

This simultaneity is indicative of the general explosion of signifiers in the comic form. Because the graphic narrative is capable of so many representational acts, communicating at the levels of image, text, page, and gutter, *Sandman* demonstrates a certain exaggeration of the structures of the Orpheus myth, which can be seen in the multiplication of Barthes’ codes. This explains how such a mythic story could be rendered in such a relatively realistic way – the proliferation of codes prompts the text to become less abstract, less symbolic, less *mythic*, and somehow more literal.

This is certainly due to the increased function of the semic code, the heightened treatment of mythic figures as realistic characters. But at the same time, it is also due to the reflexive nature of the whole story. *Sandman* continuously calls attention to the inherent artifice of myth. In turn, the entire work becomes more realist by virtue of its insistence upon the impossibility of conveying the real through narrative representation. “Discourse has no responsibility vis-a-vis the real: in the most realistic novel, the referent has no ‘reality’: suffice it to imagine the disorder the most orderly narrative would create were its descriptions taken at face value, converted into operative programs and simply *executed*. In short...what we call ‘real’ ...is never more than a code of representation (of signification).”²⁵

²⁵ Barthes, *S/Z*. 80.

The graphic narrative's capacity to simultaneously convey the mythic and the real, to render visible the tension between hypotext and hypertext, makes the comic form ideally suited to the project of adaptation more generally. *The Song of Orpheus* presents a story that is both timely and timeless, at once ancient and modern. That so much of the story remains intact despite such substantial differences in time, space, and form is a testament to the persistence of mythic narrative, and serves as an ideal example of the capacity for structural appropriation that has kept these stories so vital for so long.

Chapter 3

The reader is an accomplice, not of this or that character, but of the discourse itself insofar as it plays on the division of reception, the impurity of communication: the discourse, and not one or another of its characters, is the only positive hero of the story.

–Roland Barthes, *S/Z*. 145.

The proposition of analyzing the narrative structures of a video game is rather fraught with peril. A longstanding dispute exists in the field of game studies between “narratologists,” those who seek to examine games within the theoretical traditions of more conventional narrative media such as drama, film, and literature, and “ludologists,” those who claim that such approaches are generally inapplicable to interactive media, and who instead advocate the use of critical frameworks centered on philosophical constructions of games and play more generally.¹

It thus becomes necessary to clarify the intentions of the current project as they relate to this debate. On the one hand, I make no claim that narrative is a medium specific feature of the video game form. Many scholars² have pointed out, for example, that we would be hard pressed to find any sort of meaningful narrative premise underlying the mechanics of a game such as *Tetris*, and I wholeheartedly agree. On very much the other hand, narrative certainly *can* be a meaningful structural feature of *some* games, and this is

¹ See: Wardrip-Fruin, Noah, and Pat Harrigan. *FirstPerson: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*. MIT Press, 2004.

² See: Juul, Jesper. “Games Telling Stories.” *Game Studies* 1.1, 2001. (<http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/>)

most certainly the case with the present object of study, Terry Cavanagh's *Don't Look Back*. It is this game in particular that I am interested in, as a specific example of the adaptation of mythic narrative into an interactive form, and I do not suggest that any of the arguments that follow should be applicable or relevant to the study of games more generally.

But the tension between ludology and narratology is not only important for the way that it has shaped the history of video game theory. It also speaks directly to the apparent contradictions of narrativity in interactive media. With video games, the text no longer demonstrates the stability inherent to more traditional media; the game necessarily changes with each playing, and the played "text" thus varies from player to player. Notions of polysemous textuality are still applicable, insofar as we can expect a variety of readers/players to arrive at a wide range of different possible meanings from their engagement with the work. But when the work at stake is a video game, we must confront the fact that each player will experience a fundamentally different text, since the game necessarily changes as a result of player action:

Diegetic media [are] not able to break [their] inherent binary structure.

Narrative authors...only have one shot in their gun – a fixed sequence of events...But traditional narrative media [lack] the 'feature' of allowing modifications to the stories, even if exceptions happen in oral storytelling and drama performances. In such media, it is always possible for an audience to go through several iterations of a story. In a game, going through several sessions is not only a possibility but a requirement of the

medium. Games are not isolated experiences: we recognize them as games because we know we can always start over.³

As with the graphic novel, the primary tension between a played game and a read text concerns the representation of time. Jesper Juul articulates this conflict succinctly in his article “Games Telling Stories” :

In the classical narratological framework, a narrative has two kinds of time, the *story time*, denoting the time of the events told, in their chronological order, and the *discourse time*, denoting the time of the telling of events (in the order in which they are told). To read a novel or watch a movie is to a large extent about reconstructing a story on the basis of the discourse presented... The game constructs the story time as synchronous with narrative time and reading/viewing time: the story time is now. Now, not just in the sense that the viewer witnesses events now, but in the sense that the events are happening now, and that what comes next is not yet determined...It is impossible to influence something that has already happened. This means that you cannot have interactivity and narration at the same time.⁴

Within the context of narrative adaptation, this description seems to state that games are fundamentally incapable of conveying an existing narrative while remaining truly interactive. If the game were to adhere to the narrative structure of an existing story,

³ Frasca, Gonzalo. "Simulation versus narrative." *The video game theory reader* (2003): 227.

⁴ Juul.

then all of the future events of that story would always necessarily be predetermined, ultimately rendering the player's actions inconsequential. However, as Juul clarifies, "the more open a narrative is to interpretation, the more emphasis will be on the reader/viewer's efforts now. The difference between the now in narratives and the now in games is that first now concerns the situation where the reader's effort in interpreting obscures the story – the text becomes *all* discourse, and consequently the temporal tensions ease. The now of the game means that story time converges with playing time, *without the story/game world disappearing*."⁵ Playing time, that is the time of the player's interaction with the game, becomes functionally simultaneous to the discursive time of the narrative.

The conflict can thus be reframed in terms of Barthes' notions of the readerly and the writerly. The adapted text, as the bearer of an always already known narrative, is inescapably readerly; our interpretation is rendered increasingly singular since it the adapted work is inevitably read within the context of its hypotext.⁶ The video game, however, is inescapably writerly; the text does not exist without the active performance of the player. How, then, do we approach the problem of textual analysis given these conflicting claims to the polysemic nature of such a work?

A structuralist approach, such as the one that will be deployed later in this chapter, remains highly feasible. The goal here is to understand the way that the aesthetics and mechanics of the game structure a limited plural of potential experiences and meanings.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "This closure defines the opening of the text into a space that has been named *intertextual*. The text is traversed by texts that write it and that it writes: to read open the scene of the text finally is the act of decipherment that constitutes in its attention to the texts crossing the text the scene on which the text plays."

– Peters, Cleanth. "Structuration of the Novel-Text: Method & Analysis." *Signs of the Times: Introductory Readings in Textual Semiotics*. ed. Heath, Stephen, Colin MacCabe, and Christopher Prendergast, 1971: 74.

Importantly, the connection of the interactive work to the adapted myth is only a *possibility* of reading, and not a necessity; it is only one of the various structures affecting our interpretation of the work. By examining these structures, rather than the specifics of a single given play through, we may begin to arrive at a better understanding of the similarities that this game shares with other versions of the Orpheus myth.

However, interactivity is not the only challenge posed by trying to apply Barthes' method to *Don't Look Back*. The method deployed in *S/Z* is a form of textual analysis, and although we may certainly consider *Don't Look Back* as a media text, and thus a valid object of study within Barthes' framework, the game itself is nearly devoid of written language. *Sandman* added visual representations to its retelling of the Orpheus myth, but still relied heavily on the use of writing to move the story forward while situating the work within an intertextual network. This will necessarily alter the way we are able to attend to intertextual referents, as well as the way we are able to understand how the game's design can be understood in terms of Barthes' codes more generally.

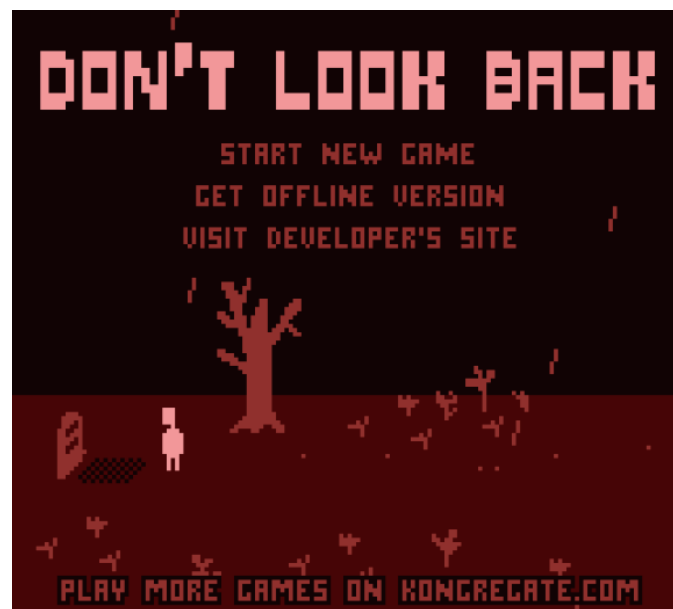


Figure 3.1 – Title Screen

Like many games, *Don't Look Back* begins with a menu screen. The title of the game is displayed prominently, but at this juncture such a paratextual cue is an insufficient means of creating any obvious intertextual connections. We may suspect that the game has something to do with the Orpheus myth, but it remains equally possible that the title is referencing the D.A. Pennebaker documentary about Bob Dylan of the same name⁷, or perhaps the song of the same name by the band Boston⁸, or perhaps even the Biblical story of Lot⁹. This ambiguity prevents us from framing our experience of the game within the context of any one of these possibilities from the onset.

Aside from this enigmatic paratext, the most striking feature of the menu screen is something we have not encountered in any of the other works examined thus far – sound. Although there is nothing particularly complex about the sound of rain that plays endlessly during this first screen, the very existence of any auditory component whatsoever once again bears substantially on our ability to successfully apply Barthes' framework to this particular text. Just as *Sandman* required that our system of analysis adapt to the representational practices of graphic narrative, *Don't Look Back* now requires us to take both sound and interactivity into account as processes capable of conveying a wide range of meaning on a structural level.

Sandman's illustrations created the potential for visual manifestations of the referential code, and here we see that the visual style of *Don't Look Back* also establishes meaningful associations with art history. Obviously, the simple pixel-based graphics of

⁷ *Don't Look Back*. Dir. D.A. Pennebaker. Leacock- Pennebaker: 1967.

⁸ Boston. "Don't Look Back." *Don't Look Back*. Epic: 1978

⁹ See: Genesis: 19; 15-24.

the game speak to a very different tradition of representation than the painterly graphic novel. Rather than recalling the gestural language of Italian Mannerism, *Don't Look Back* pays homage to the style of early 8-bit consoles like the Atari. This remediation of the aesthetics of early video games eschews the graphic capabilities of contemporary game design in favor of structural simplicity, avoiding the realistic in favor of the iconic. *

(REF. 8-bit gaming.)

Since the title is an ineffective intertextual referent, the first passage of the hermeneutic code is not the enigma of adaptation. We cannot yet ask how the game relates to the Orpheus myth, and we would not expect a player's experience of the game to be driven by an attentive comparison of points of similarity and difference to the Orpheus story. The title screen does, however, post our first major enigma. The nameless and faceless protagonist of the game stands in the rain next to a grave, but the inscription on the headstone is illegible. This becomes the first question driving a narrative reading of the game: who does the headstone belong to? The grave is clearly a source of motivation for the played protagonist, but not yet for the player. We do not know who has died or how, nor do we have any clear understanding of our goals and expectations as a player. Deprived of any meaningful narrative motivation, the only way to resolve this initial enigma is simply to play on. The grave indicates a prehistory, an ideal positive state before the death of the unknown departed. As Juul explains, "We are presented with an ideal story that we have to realize using skill...it is the role of the player to recreate this original positive state. This is, of course, a sequence often found in folk tales: an initial state, an overturning of this state, and a restoration of the state...As players we are

fighting to *realize* an ideal sequence of events, but the actual playing is not in this sequence.”¹⁰ *(HER. Enigma 1 – postulation.)

By means of facilitating this play, a simple didactic instructs the player how to control the protagonist by using the arrow keys to move the pixelated character to the left or right. These controls allow the player to progress to the next screen, off to the right-hand side. The game, it would seem, reads like a book, with action progressing from left to right. The player is in fact prevented from moving to the left past the tombstone, forcing the game to progress in a fixed linear fashion.

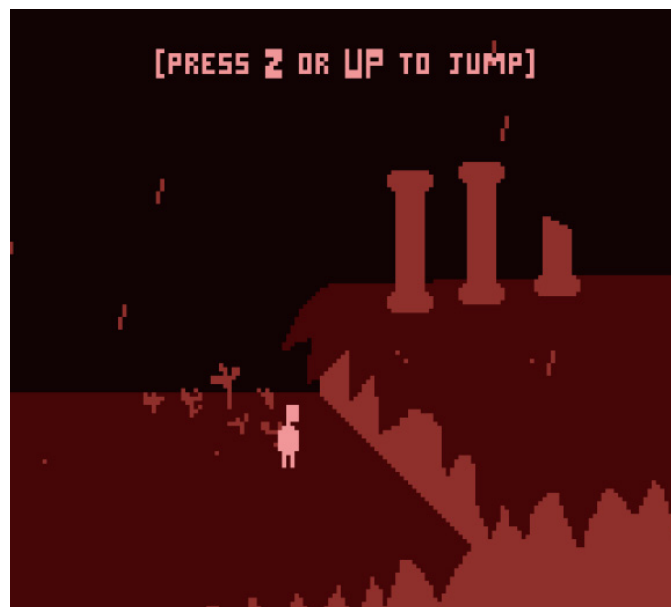


Figure 3.2 – Didactic with Ionic Columns

The second screen provides another didactic explaining how to jump, and provides a small obstacle which allows this new movement to be meaningfully executed. The background of this screen also provides an interesting visual referent: a set of ionic columns, one of which has crumbled and broken in half. These columns are a classic feature of Greek architecture, and taken together with the game’s title, they begin to

¹⁰ Juul.

signal an ancient Greek diegesis, and thus a possible connection to the Orpheus myth. *
 (REF. Ionic Columns.)

The following screen shows only the edge of a cliff. Although the player may move back to either of the previous two screens, it is clear that the only way to progress further is to jump. This is reminiscent of Orpheus' threat of suicide following Eurydice's death, at least as it is portrayed in *Sandman*. In this case, however, the inevitable jump is not fatal, and the player lands safely at the base of the cliff. The jump also triggers a musical cue, a simple but haunting duet of synthesized string instruments; the first of several themes that play as the game unfolds.



Figure 3.3 – Grove with Serpent

After leaving the base of the cliff, we are presented with a familiar scene: a serpent in a grove of trees. Allowing the serpent to come into contact with the protagonist triggers a symbolic death – a harsh sound effect accompanied by an iris transition to black and back again, placing the player once again at the beginning of the screen. Importantly, this death is never permanent. There is never a final “Game Over” screen,

and the player is allowed to fail as many times as they may need in order to complete a given screen. By this point, we can thus see that two of the key structural features of the Orpheus myth are manifested in the game's mechanics. Because the player must always move forward in a linear fashion in order to progress through the game, the sense of inevitability is present. Because the player must repeat each screen until they manage to achieve this progression, the sense of repetition is also apparent. However, within the context of the game, these concepts no longer operate under the semic code. In both the *Metamorphoses* and *Sandman*, repetition and inevitability function at the level of connotation. In *Don't Look Back*, however, these ideas are incorporated into the actual mechanics of gameplay, and thus operate at the symbolic level: "The antithesis separates for eternity; it thus refers to a nature of opposites, and this nature is untamed...The Antithesis is the figure of the *given* opposition, eternal, eternally recurrent: the figure of the inexpiable."¹¹ This is perhaps best demonstrated by the impossibility of enumerating repetition as such; we can observe the movement of the symbolic code, but cannot locate it at any one moment in the game text. Although we can continue to rely on Barthes' system of codes as a way of understanding the narrative structures of the game, it seems that we would be best served by discontinuing the attempt to "star" and "enumerate" the lexia of the game text – the interactive form is too fluid for such a method.

At this point, however, the game mechanics take an abrupt departure from the Orpheus myth. If the player succeeds in escaping the serpent, the protagonist obtains a gun on the following screen, along with a third and final didactic explaining its use. The

¹¹ Barthes, *S/Z*. 26-7.

gun is possibly, although not necessarily, an anachronistic device. Although the Ionic columns indicate ancient Greek architecture, their state of disrepair could signal a modern time period. This, of course, does nothing to reconcile the presence of the firearm with the Orpheus myth more generally. By all accounts, Orpheus was a peaceful chap, far more inclined to sing ballads than shoot bullets. The gun does allow the player to go back and exact swift justice upon the serpent from the previous screen, should they be so inclined, but this is apparently not enough to satisfy the protagonist, and the game must go on.

After a quick hop across a pit of spikes, the player comes to the mouth of a cave. Some sort of winged creature, perhaps a bat, flies towards the protagonist, but this threat is easily dispatched with the newfound pistol. From this point on, much of the game does not exhibit any substantial narrative similarity to the Orpheus myth. The cave itself is meaningful, establishing a diegetic structuration of surface and underworld, the now familiar spatialization of the antithetical opposition of life and death. Much of what transpires within the cave, however, is largely inconsequential in terms of narrative progression. There are more bats and snakes and spiders. There are falling stalactites. There are even a number of obstacles that have no clear correlation to actual objects, such as strange squiggly lines that destroy the player character when touched.

These features provide ample support for ludologists' claims about the nature of games. It would be nonsensical to describe these events in terms of Barthes' codes, even if all players played the game in the exact same way. We can perhaps imagine a frenetic series of passages of the proairetic code, something to the effect of (ACT: Jump) (ACT:

Shoot) (ACT: Dodge) (ACT: Shoot) (ACT: Jump) (ACT: Pause) (ACT: Jump), but such an exercise would be both tedious and pointless.¹² These are aspects of the game that have no bearing on our sense of the story as such; they are instead signs of the game *as game*. The referential code is perhaps still at stake, as many of these moments recall features common to the genre of platform games. The challenge of jumping from platform to platform while dodging rhythmically launched fireballs may resonate with players familiar with the early titles of the *Super Mario Bros.* franchise, but none of these aspects of the game function as intertextual connections to any one specific work. These moments must instead be read as a sort of nostalgic ode to a particular moment in the history of the medium, which can structure the player's experience in meaningful ways, even if it has no bearing on the narrative as such.

This being said, there are certainly still moments in the game that are highly reminiscent of the Orpheus myth. At one point, the protagonist falls downward for several consecutive screens, landing in complete darkness. This recalls the proairetic sequence of descent, which brings the player character to the “vast and silent realms” of the underworld, which in turn invokes the sense of darkness, the absence of light that prevents the function of the look.

After emerging from the darkness, the player passes through another set of ionic columns before being suddenly faced with a demonic hound. The music changes to a harsh and foreboding requiem, accompanied by the snarling growls of the monster. The beast is clearly evocative of Cerberus; although we only see one head, the player must

¹² Further pointing to the limitations of applying the method of starring and enumeration to the video game form.

successfully shoot the hound three times in order to proceed. This is clearly a passage of the referential code, and although this moment further reinforces the game’s connection to the Orpheus myth, it also signals a major departure from earlier versions. The player does not lull the beast to sleep through the power of song like Orpheus, but instead dodges his advances in order to shoot him from behind. This displaces the semic function of lyric song as a combination of mimesis, poesis, and diegesis – the player is not able to proceed by virtue of their ability to appeal to the “true” or the “real.” Instead, the game progresses through a path of destruction, far more consistent with the tropes of a revenge narrative than with the romantic idealism of the Orpheus myth.

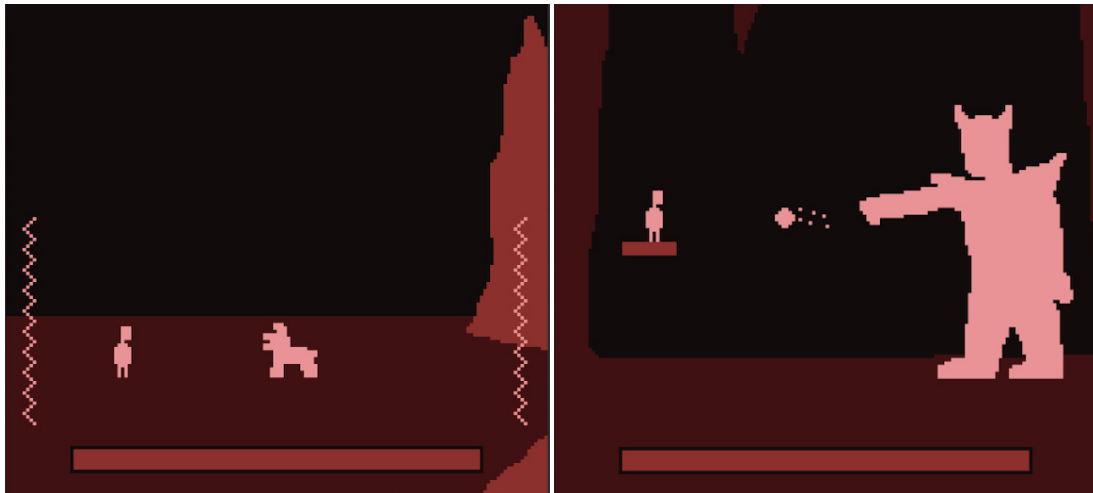


Figure 3.4 – Cerberus and Lord of Underworld

This same tension is evident several screens later. The player falls down a crevasse and is confronted with a faceless giant, clearly meant to signify the lord of the underworld, here the “big boss” of the game. The same aggressive requiem from the Cerberus fight begins to play, and the player must attempt to shoot the giant in the head while coping with an amalgamation of all the previous challenges: the boss summons spiders, bats, and stalactites while shooting fire balls, and the head can only be reached

by jumping up platforms which constantly dissolve and reform. Once again, although the “characters” themselves here seem to reposition the game within the narrative structure of the Orpheus myth, the nature of their exchange represents a substantial departure. Once again, the power of Orpheus’ sung appeal is replaced with a frenetic barrage of pixelated bullets.

After defeating the giant, the player walks down a darkened corridor to find another figure: his departed lover. The appearance of this figure instantly signifies several things. The sprite features a crudely rendered ponytail, indicating its own gender as female, and thus simultaneously signaling that the player protagonist, by virtue of comparison, is male. That this figure is deceased is made apparent by its ghostly tail and constant floating. Again, the character is nameless; read within the context of the Orpheus myth, she is clearly a Eurydice figure, and within the context of the game itself, she is clearly the spirit of the body buried beneath the headstone from the title screen.

Don't Look Back thus requires that we re-examine the importance of character to a general theory of adaptation. At the most basic level of narrative theory, the story consists only of the events narrated and the order of their telling; story time and discourse time; fabula and syuzhet. But if these same events occur with entirely different actors, is the story still the same? If we follow Barthes’ definition of character, we see that such a transformation can easily be an indicator of narrative change: “The character is a product of combinations: the combination is relatively stable (denoted by the recurrence of the semes) and more or less complex (involving more or less congruent, more or less contradictory figures); this complexity determines the character’s ‘personality’...The

proper name acts as a magnetic field for the semes; referring in fact to a body, it draws the semic configuration into an evolving (biographical) tense.”¹³

Thus, if the semes of a text are edited or altered, our understanding of the characters within that text necessarily changes as well. However, as Barthes goes on to explain, each character may also function as a figure, a chimeric archetype, a shifting passage of the symbolic code: “The figure is altogether different: it is not a combination of semes concentrated in a legal Name, nor can biography, psychology, or time encompass it: it is an illegal, impersonal, anachronistic configuration of symbolic relationships... As a symbolic ideality, the character has no chronological or biographical standing; he has no Name; he is nothing but a site for the passage (and return) of the figure.”¹⁴

Each individual in a story thus functions as a character through the semic code and as figure through the symbolic code. This distinction is particularly relevant when examining mythic narrative, where the various actors are primarily archetypal figures rather than psychologically motivated characters. This difference is highly germane to our analysis of *Don't Look Back*. The protagonist has been deprived of the semic functions that would allow the player to identify him the character of Orpheus. He does not sing, and he is certainly not gentle. However, as the game progresses, it is increasingly possible to understand the protagonist as an Orpheus figure, a figure which seeks to transgress the symbolic order of antithesis.

¹³ Barthes, *S/Z*. 67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 68.

In this regard, the narrative transformations of *Don't Look Back* are completely opposite to the transformations of *Sandman*. Whereas the latter imposes an increased number of semic functions upon Orpheus to allow him to behave as a psychologically complex character, the former strips these qualities away, reducing this actor to his most basic, symbolic and figurative form. This is further reified by the game's visual style, which renders both the protagonist and the ghost in the most basic, symbolic, and figurative terms. The simple, iconic, and anonymous portrayal of the played protagonist is central to the experience of the game, as it is through this avatar that the player is able to move through and act upon the text. The avatar thus performs two roles, acting as both a character within the diegesis and as a representation of the player: "To say *I* is inevitably to attribute signifieds to oneself; further, it gives one a biographical duration, it enables one to undergo, in one's imagination, an intelligible 'evolution,' to signify oneself as an object with a destiny, to give a meaning to time."¹⁵

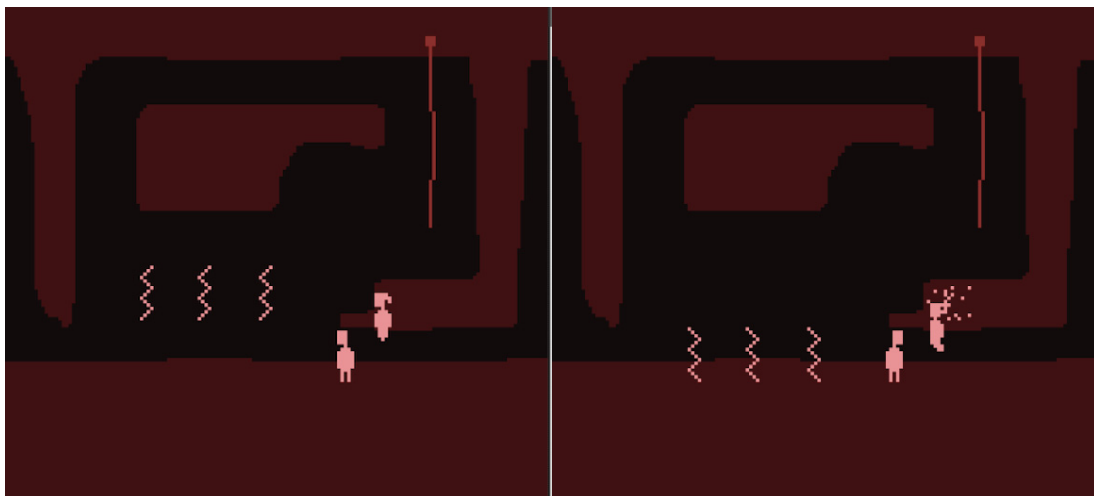


Figure 3.5 – Ghost and Looking Back

¹⁵ Ibid. 68.

Upon reaching the Eurydice figure, (the ghost), the mechanic of the game changes substantially. The direction of play reverses, and the character must return to the surface by moving across the screen from right to left. More importantly, while making this ascent, the player must avoid turning the protagonist to face the right side of the screen – the ghost constantly follows the player, but turning to look at her causes her to dissolve, causing another symbolic death that restarts the current screen. If any doubt remained about the game’s connection to the Orpheus myth, it has vanished by this point. The destructive power of the gaze is directly incorporated into the mechanics of gameplay, once again demonstrating the migration from the semic code of written text to the symbolic code of the interactive game. This transformation also clarifies the ambiguous intertextual signification of the game’s title: the mechanical imperative of *Don’t Look Back* is the same as the condition given to Orpheus by Pluto.

As with the other key points of similarity, however, the gaze mechanic also represents a significant departure from earlier versions of the myth. First, the reason for this mechanic is unclear. In Ovid, Orpheus is forbidden from looking back at Eurydice by Pluto as a condition for his transgressive boon, a simple test of his resolve to prove his worth for such an exceptional favor. This also informs his ultimate decision to look back, as he succumbs to the growing pressures of fear and doubt. In the game, however, this premise has been removed. Having just defeated the Lord of the Underworld, there is no one to invoke such a stipulation on the protagonists’s retrieval of the ghost. This also transforms the significance of the very act of looking. Because the game is designed from a third person perspective, the player can always see the phantom trailing behind the

played protagonist, even when the actual character is facing in the opposite direction. There is thus never any doubt that the ghost is actually there, never any fear that player and character alike have been the victim of some cruel joke. Furthermore, although the gaze is still a destructive function, this destruction is never permanent. Like the other symbolic “deaths” experienced by the player, the look back simply triggers a restart of the current screen, allowing the player to repeat this destructive act endlessly without any significant repercussions.¹⁶

What, then, do we make of the gaze function of *Don't Look Back*? It certainly reifies the symbolic predominance of repetition, but not in a way that is particularly different from the other types of symbolic death visited upon the player throughout the game.¹⁷ Since the gaze function within the game has been deprived of any meaningful diegetic or narrative motivation, it does act as a harbinger of antithesis, meant to punish any actions which threaten to compromise the symbolic order of life and death.

The ludic counterargument here is that the very impulse to try locating a narrative premise for this mechanic is fundamentally flawed – it is simply another way that the game functions *as game*. However, this argument ignores the game's inherent intertextuality. Within the context of the greater textual network of the Orpheus myth, the gaze mechanic can be seen as something of a structural prerequisite: without it, the game could not stand as an adaptation of the Orpheus story. Despite the many ways in which

¹⁶ A luxury that Orpheus would no doubt have appreciated.

¹⁷ There is of course the notable exception that the played protagonist need not actually be harmed in any way to trigger this death-event. That the destruction of the ghost is enough to require the screen to restart is in tune with the sense of inevitability; the game is built to facilitate the eventual completion of the game/story in its entirety.

the game subverts and transforms the Orpheus text, it is the destructive power of the gaze that allows us to definitively recognize the game's relationship to the myth. The mandate "don't look back" thus need not be understood as the imperative condition of Pluto's concession, nor need it be read as the dictate of the game designer/author-as-God. Instead, it is a restraint of the adapted narrative, a requirement of the Orpheus text. Although this certainly does not obliterate the fundamental interactivity of the game medium, it does require that we consider this text in particular in terms of narrative structure.

That being said, after defeating the "big boss" and reaching the ghost, nothing of any particular narrative relevance transpires for some time. This is perhaps fitting, as in the Ovid version of the story Orpheus' return to the surface is similarly uneventful, save for his growing fear and anxiety. In the game, the player gradually ascends back to the game's starting point. There are no enemies on the return trip, only traps and hazards, but navigating these obstacles is further complicated by the player's inability to look or move backwards without destroying the ghost and restarting the screen. Ultimately, the protagonist emerges from the mouth of the cave, skips across the pit of spikes, runs back through the previously serpent-ridden grove of trees, and climbs a rope to the top of the cliff where the game began.

There, with the ghost still following silently behind, the player finds a startling scene: although the protagonist and the ghost enter the screen from the right, another version of the protagonist is already on the screen, staring at the grave in the same way the game began. After a brief beat, both the played protagonist and the ghost dissolve,

leaving the figure staring at the grave site. The sound of rain begins to play, and the title screen appears. The game simply begins again, as though nothing had ever happened at all.

This ending is another rather substantial twist of the Orpheus story. The player can succeed in retrieving the ghost from the underworld, but in the end *both* figures are inevitably destroyed. This is a meaningful transformation of the sense of inevitability: as an adaptation, we would expect the second death of the Eurydice figure, the always already written conclusion of the hypotext. The simultaneous destruction of the protagonist-as-Orpheus, however, comes as something of a shock.

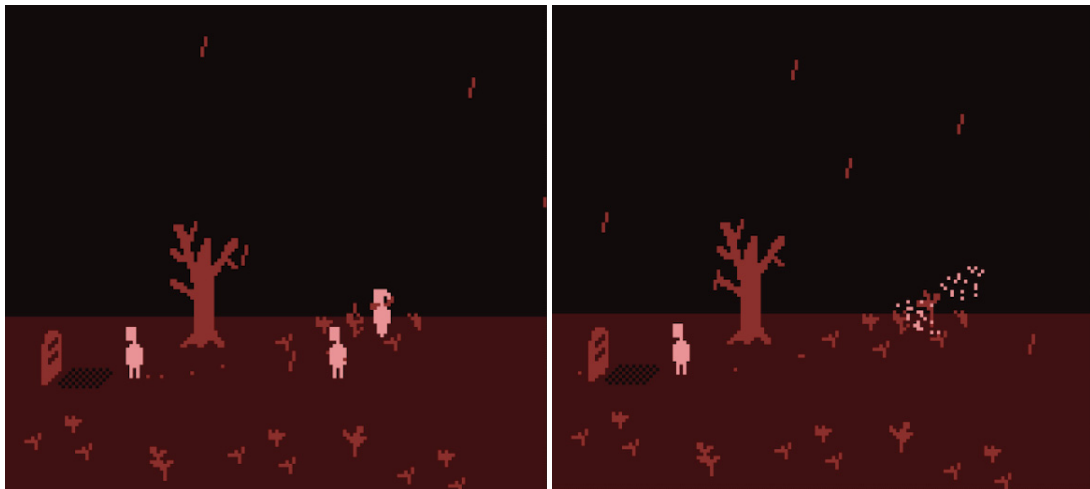


Figure 3.6 – Endgame

Furthermore, there is no gaze involved in this final moment. The player protagonist does not turn and look back at the ghost as in other versions of the story. However, by continuing to look forward, the player protagonist instead sees *himself*. The abstract and wordless design of the game makes the nature of this exchange unclear. Has the journey been a dream? A hallucination? A memory? Whatever the case, this act of reflection, this gaze turned inward at the self, is the only clear reason for this destructive

event: “The same...seen from the other side of the mirror...has a panic function: it is the slash of censure, the surface of the mirror, the wall of hallucination, the verge of antithesis, the abstraction of limit, the obliquity of the signifier, the index of the paradigm, hence of meaning.”¹⁸

But this event is also fundamentally different from earlier versions of the myth in that this moment of destruction is not final. The game simply begins again, and the player can run through the same challenges with the same result over and over again.

This could be read as simply another manifestation of repetition as both seme and symbol. But is it only this? By virtue of turning Orpheus’ sung appeal to Pluto and Persephone into a revenge-driven assault on the “big boss” of the underworld, the game has deprived the story of the referential connections to the prisoners of Tartarus.¹⁹ What was most significant about these references was not that they simply invoked the idea of repetition as such, but that they demonstrated the impact of Orpheus’ song by *stopping* their eternal tasks. It was this moment of rest that made the allusion to the incessant repetition of their punishments truly meaningful. Although *Don’t Look Back* does capture the theme of repetition that Ovid makes so prevalent in his version, the actual game mechanic does not allow for such a pregnant moment of stillness. Each screen repeats endlessly until it is passed, and the game itself can be played over and over without changing the final outcome. The only real moment of stillness comes at the very end of the game, as the title screen reappears and the player decides whether to begin again, or to simply close the window and walk away. Perhaps this ending, then, is simply a sign for

¹⁸ Barthes, *S/Z*. 107.

¹⁹ Ixion, Sisyphus, et al.

pensiveness, for reflective thought as such. Barthes draws a similar conclusion about the ending of *Sarrasine*:

Replete with meaning, it still seems to be keeping in reserve some ultimate meaning, one it does not express but whose place it keeps free and signifying: this zero degree of meaning (which is not its annulment, but on the contrary its recognition), this supplementary, unexpected meaning which is the theatrical sign of the implicit, is pensiveness: the pensive (in faces, in texts) is the signifier of the inexpressible, not of the unexpressed.²⁰

Is this inexpressible perhaps a sign for the impossibility of narrative in interactive media? Or is it simply an unresolved enigma, a new passage of the hermeneutic code that moves the story forever forward, turning endlessly like Ixion's wheel? The game, as a plural text, enables both of these readings – the entire point is that the meaning of this moment cannot be reduced, will not be held captive to a singular explanation.

This leaves us at an interesting place in our analysis. *Don't Look Back* clearly demonstrates moments of similarity across all five codes to both *Sandman* and *The Metamorphoses*, but many of these moments are also marked by substantial transformations. The proairetic code describes the descent into and return from the underworld in all three works, but it is difficult to completely reconcile the “voice of actions” with the constant flux of an interactive form. The semes of inevitability and

²⁰ Barthes, *S/Z*. 216.

repetition are absorbed into the game's mechanic, causing them to function at the symbolic level. The referential code positions the game loosely in terms of the Orpheus myth more generally, but not to any of the other stories or myths invoked by written accounts.

However, it is the transformation of the hermeneutic code that is perhaps the most interesting problem posed by the game. There are minor enigmas which propel the game forward, but these are rendered almost irrelevant by the inescapable linearity of the game. We may wonder about the tombstone at the game's onset, but this enigma is relatively inconsequential, since the game will play out the same regardless. While this passage of the hermeneutic code may not bear on the game as a played text, however, it still bears substantially upon the way the player constructs narrative meaning from the playing experience. The gameness of the game is inescapable, but a story still remains very possible.

To reframe this comparison in terms of narrative persistence, we see that there are still a handful of ways in which the game is identical to the Orpheus story: the spatialization of the antithetical opposition of life and death, and the destructive power of the gaze. But are these similarities alone enough to call this game an adaptation as such? Is it instead more accurate to think of *Don't Look Back* as an appropriation or an homage, as a reinterpretation or a variation? Are the distinctions between these terms actually generative, or are they basically inconsequential? By drawing upon the various analysis performed thus far, we may begin to attempt to reconcile Barthes' theory of polysemous

textuality with contemporary models of adaptation, and in so doing, perhaps find some answers to these questions.

Conclusion

Writing is not the communication of a message which starts from the author and proceeds to the reader; it is specifically the voice of reading itself: in the text, only the reader speaks.

–Roland Barthes, *S/Z*. 151.

Before assessing what the previous chapters may be able to offer towards the elaboration of a general theory of narrative adaptation, it is perhaps most prudent to review, in summary, some of the conclusions provided by the analysis thus far. By reviewing these ideas together, it will be much easier to weigh their relevance against current theories, and to assess what steps may need to be taken to move the discourse forward.

The trends in the analysis that are perhaps most evident by this point concern those aspects of the Orpheus myth that are shared by each of the three works examined here. Whether it be on the pages of Ovid, between the panels of *Sandman*, or on the screen of *Don't Look Back*, this handful of features has remained consistent, allowing us to consider which functions of the narrative are indeed most persistent, as well as how those functions relate to one another across a network of intertextual interpretation.

Most importantly, the analysis has shown that it is problematic to dismissively refer to this body of shared features as “the story” of Orpheus. Such a term seems far too reductive to capture the complex interplay of Barthes’ codes, particularly where this

mode of analysis has revealed points of similarity that persist despite variations in “story” and “discourse,” differences in the arrangement of “fabula” and “syuzhet.” By focusing on the behavior of these individual codes rather than on the stability of a simple sequence of events, we may begin to form a more nuanced understanding of precisely *what it is* that gets adapted. A similar sentiment is expressed by Barthes near the end of *S/Z*: “The end approaches, the end of our transcription as well. We must therefore reexamine one by one each of the Voices (each of the codes) whose grid has formed the text.”¹

This is perhaps best accomplished by turning first to the function of the proairetic code, the voice of actions. Were an idea of “story” to truly be so simple as a narrated sequence of events, we would expect to find many proairetic moments to remain largely intact. Using Ovid as a tentative starting point, we would expect any version of the Orpheus “story” to consist of a wedding, the death of the bride, the descent of the groom into an underworld, the submission of a plea, a moment of pause, the setting of conditions, an ascent back to the surface, a look back, and a destructive moment of erasure. In the case of *Sandman*, we find that all of these moments do indeed survive the translation into the graphic novel form. However, many more passages of the proairetic code appear alongside these “original” actions, as Orpheus’ exchanges with Dream, Death, and Destruction are added to create a sense of continuity with the rest of the *Sandman* series.

In a rather stark contrast to this, *Don’t Look Back* offers a substantially pared down version of the Orpheus myth. There is no wedding, and death is only loosely

¹ Barthes, *S/Z*. 190.

signified as an anterior event by the grave at the game's onset. There is no plea, no conditions are set, there is no meaningful moment of pause, and there is no final look back. Instead, the game offers a radically reduced narrative sequence: death, descent, ascent, and erasure.

Interestingly, all of these events are deeply intertwined with the symbolic code, which establishes several more points of similarity between these three works. Foremost among these, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is the grand structural antithesis of life and death, along with the diegetic manifestation of these concepts into separate and distinct physical spaces. Without these spaces, the proairetic sequences of ascent and descent would not be necessary. The moment of erasure is also closely associated with this antithesis, as the ultimate retribution for the transgression of the symbolic order.

We have also seen how the symbolic code functions across each of these works at the level of figure. This is particularly significant given the relative mutability of the semic code, which is most certainly apparent at the level of character; Orpheus becomes *more* of a character in *Sandman* than in Ovid, but is entirely *reduced* to the level of figure in *Don't Look Back*. The same is true for Eurydice, and even for Pluto, who functions as figurative "Man/King" of the underworld as the game's "big boss."

Even where the semic code has not acted at the level of character, it seems to be the most susceptible to change. Repetition and inevitability remain a common feature of all three works, but operate as a function of the symbolic rather than the semic code in *Don't Look Back*. Similarly, the seme of song disappeared entirely from the video game, even though it was the only form capable of actually producing sound. The only aspect of

the semic code that remained consistent was darkness, a constant feature of the “dark and silent realms” of the underworld, although this too is clearly tied to the symbolic spatialization of antithesis.

The referential code remains vital in positioning these works in terms of one another, but the actual referents deployed within each work maintain very little similarity. *Sandman*, for example, includes the references to Tityus and Ixion mentioned in Ovid, but none of these appear in *Don't Look Back*. Cerberus appears in both the game and the comic book, but the mythical three-headed hound bears no mention in the *Metamorphoses*. However, this should not come as much of a surprise. If the referential code provides “references to a science or body of knowledge...without going so far as to construct (or reconstruct the culture they express),”² and adaptation involves “relocating...source texts not just generically, but in cultural, geographical, and temporal terms,”³ then it makes perfect sense that outdated or unfamiliar “bodies of knowledge” be replaced with more accessible referents.

This leaves us, finally, with the hermeneutic code. We may expect that the postulation and resolution of enigma would remain relatively consistent across versions. Like the proairetic code, the hermeneutic code is irreversibly bound by time; these enigmas should motivate the proairetic code, explaining the movement from one narrative event to the next. This, however, is clearly not the case. *Sandman*, for instance, fundamentally alters the flow of the Orpheus myth by introducing new characters that complicate the movements of the key players. Likewise, *Don't Look Back* removes so

² Barthes, *S/Z*. 19.

³ Sanders, 21.

many figures from the diegesis that we cannot even conceive of the game's narrative in terms of motivations, but can only speculate about the significance of the enigmatic headstone. However, even though these works may diverge from the Ovid text in this regard, they share an important feature with one another. As intertextual works that establish the Orpheus myth as a tentative hypotext, both pieces are inescapably marked by the enigma of adaptation. Our reading of these works is driven not only by our desire to resolve the mysteries posed by their individual narratives, but also by a fundamental curiosity towards the nature of their connection to the Orpheus myth more generally.

But how do these few observations contribute to a theory of adaptation? The most obvious way to consider the utility of these thoughts, and also the most difficult, is to return once again to the theories of Hutcheon and Sanders. This maneuver is obvious simply because Hutcheon and Sanders represent two of the best and most recent attempts to consider adaptation more generally, both having considered a long history of critical works on narrative more generally as well as on adaptation in particular. At the same time, this proposition is particularly difficult, not due to any shortcomings in the analysis performed here,⁴ but rather precisely because these theories are already so well constructed. The work of Hutcheon and Sanders is thoroughly researched and well written, and engages with adaptation as a body of theory far more extensively than I have managed in these previous chapters. So much as I would like to stake claim to some radical new revelation, to put forth some brilliant new idea that would refute the significance of these works and establish my own importance as a theorist of narrative

⁴ At least, *hopefully* not due to any shortcomings of the analysis performed here.

adaptation, it would seem that in the end, this project was never really about that. My work here has been primarily experimental rather than critical, hypothetical rather than revolutionary. But although my analysis may not debunk these ideas, perhaps it can contribute to them, adding some small amount of momentum to the advancement of a worthy discourse.

Notably, Barthes' theory concerns itself primarily with the act of reading, the process of reception, and as such is only capable of addressing one of the three functions of adaptation described by Hutcheon: it gives no consideration to the text as a product, artifact, or commodity, and it pays no mind to the social, cultural, or economic configurations that underly the creation of any creative work. Despite this, the use of Barthes' method of textual analysis raises some poignant concerns with Hutcheon's system of adaptive modes of engagement.

The problem here is not so much with any of the particular observations that Hutcheon offers regarding the movement between the "showing," "telling," and "interacting" modes of engagement, but rather with the very schema by which she divides these categories. For example, Hutcheon is by no means incorrect when she asserts that "in the move from telling to showing, a performance adaptation must dramatize: description, narration, and represented thoughts must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds and visual images."⁵ However, there seems to be a certain lack of precision in the categorization of individual media into the "telling" and "showing" modes of engagement. Her "showing" mode primarily concerns acts of human performance, but

⁵ Hutcheon, 40.

does not include all visual media. This is particularly problematic for the consideration of sequential art like graphic novels, which, as we have seen, occupy something of a liminal space between textual, graphic, and filmic forms. Hutcheon in fact gives very little consideration to graphic novels at all. She does mention them briefly alongside a quick summation the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce, stating that film's reliance upon indexical and iconic signs may make graphic novels more easily adaptable to the screen than written literature⁶. This gesture, however, does little to position graphic novels in any one category, or to explain their unique position between them.

Her treatment of “interactive” media seems similarly haphazard. Much of the theory she cites relies heavily on increasingly outdated arguments about “hypermedia,”⁷ while many of her examples of interactive adaptations are limited to video game extensions of film franchises. Again, her points are not by any means incorrect. It is certainly true that for hypermedia “it is process, not final or finished product, that is important.”⁸ It is also certainly true that in *some* interactive media “the sense of coherence is spatial and is created by the player within a game space that is not just imagined...but also actively engaged.”⁹ These statements, however, provide only the most cursory consideration of what makes interactive forms unique, and problematically renders equivalent the narrative experiences of a hypertext novel and a first-person shooter.

⁶ Ibid. 43.

⁷ See: Murray, Janet. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. 1998.

⁸ Hutcheon, 50.

⁹ Ibid. 51.

The recurring problem with Hutcheon's model, then, is that it consistently engages with adaptation in only formal terms, without giving equal consideration to the transformation of narrative content. Although Barthes' method is clearly marked by a structuralist impulse, it is primarily a theory of text as content, not of medium specificity. This is why we have been able to apply his theories to works in different media, albeit with some difficulty. In terms of adaptation, this allows us to not only observe that the movement from novel to stage involves the translation of written interiority to expressive gesture, but also to consider the specific ways in which such a transformation may alter the range of potential meanings available to a reader/spectator.

We find a similar problem in Julie Sanders's *Adaptation and Appropriation*. Although Sanders maintains the distinction between these two terms throughout her book, dedicating separate sections to each, the actual difference between the two terms is rather loosely defined. According to Sanders, adaptation necessarily involves an attempt at replication or repetition, whereas appropriation represents "a more decisive journey" away from the source text. On the one hand, this distinction makes perfect sense. Obviously, some adapted works maintain a great deal of similarity to their hypotext while others bear only the loosest resemblance. On the other hand, Sanders provides no metric by which to measure these degrees of difference.

In order to clarify this distinction without deferring to postulations about authorial intent, a Barthesian analysis becomes rather useful. Different levels of narrative persistence can be effectively demonstrated by comparing the behavior of Barthes' five

codes of interpretation. Sanders uses Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*¹⁰ as an example of adaptation, as opposed to the musical *West Side Story*¹¹, which she argues is instead an appropriation. Again, parts of this distinction are obvious. *Romeo + Juliet* uses Shakespeare's original text, but simply displaces the spatial and temporal setting of the diegesis. But with *West Side Story*, Sanders argues that "rather than the movements of proximation or cross-generic interpretation that we identified as central to adaptation, here we have a wholesale rethinking of the terms of the original."¹² Barthes' system of codes allows us to make sense of this "wholesale rethinking" in very specific terms. Using Sanders' example of *West Side Story*, we see that the archetypal figures of Romeo and Juliet are maintained, but the psychologically specific characters are replaced with Tony and Maria. The difference between adaptation and appropriation, then, would seem to be largely contingent upon the transformation of the semic code.

This same difference is also apparent between *Don't Look Back* and *Sandman*. The Orpheus of the latter maintains the connotative associations with song so prominent in the works of Ovid and Virgil, whereas the played protagonist of the former is deprived of these passages of the semic code, displaying similarity only at the symbolic level of figure. Would it then follow, by Sanders' reckoning, that *Don't Look Back* is an appropriation whereas *The Song of Orpheus* is an adaptation? To some extent, this makes perfect sense – *The Song of Orpheus* does seem to have much more in common with Ovid than the abstract and interactive *Don't Look Back*. The graphic novel in fact expands

¹⁰ *Romeo + Juliet*. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. 20th Century Fox, 1996.

¹¹ *West Side Story*. Bernstein, Sondheim, and Laurents. 1957.

¹² Sanders, 28.

the semic network of the Ovid narrative, exaggerating the connoted qualities of the central characters while repositioning them within the larger diegesis of the *Sandman* series. This conforms to Barthes' own observations in *S/Z*: "The seme is linked to an ideology of the person...The semes become predicates, inductors of truth, and the Name becomes a subject: we can say that what is proper to narrative is not action but the character as Proper Name: the semic raw material (corresponding to a certain moment of our history of the narrative) *completes* what is proper to being."¹³ The "truth" in this case, the "proper name" at stake between adaptation and appropriation, would be the hypotext. The semic code names the adaptation *as adaptation* by attributing the same "proper name" as the adapted source, whereas the appropriation merely alludes to it.

Even this added precision fails to address one very simple question: so what? Is there any real critical benefit in drawing this sort of distinction in the first place? These terms *do* provide a more nuanced system of classification, but what does that classification really contribute to a theoretical model of adaptation? The separation of these two terms is still based on proximity to a source text, and thus to some extent reliant upon a notion of fidelity. It is certainly worth exploring the points of difference between various intertextual maneuvers, but undertaking such an exploration within these parameters seems to already be at odds with Barthes' theories of polysemous textuality, and thus an ineffective answer to the questions of adaptation.

The best way, then, to make sense of the differences between adaptation and appropriation should perhaps not concern the particular structural transformations of a

¹³ Barthes, *S/Z*. 191.

text, but rather the unique specific experience of the reader-spectator. The whole project of *S/Z* is an attempt to provide a structural basis for understanding the multitude of possibilities that may inform this experience, but imposing terms like “adaptation” or “appropriation” upon this structure drastically limits the plurality of these texts, closing them to the fullness of the rich and varied tapestry of intertextuality. Taking this stance accepts the fundamental differences in the varied intertextual strategies of adaptation and appropriation, but dismisses their reliance on fidelity in favor of a renewed emphasis on the centrality of the reader and the inherent plurality of narrative text.

Of course, there may be a fundamental problem in trying to use the Orpheus myth, in any form, as a tutor text for resolving these tensions. The story is, at its core, a myth, and thus lacking in much of the nuance and complexity that more recent narrative theory has struggled to account for. Even using the method of *S/Z*, which was created as a gesture towards the analysis of modern realist literature, we have come to understand the story of Orpheus primarily in terms of antithesis and archetypal figures. These are the sorts of qualities that were so fundamental to the theories of Propp, Levi-Strauss, and Todorov that were so summarily dismissed in the introduction for precisely this sort of reductive simplicity. Applying any of these theories to the three texts examined here would likely have yielded similar results, and it is difficult to hypothesize as to how Barthes’ system would have worked with a series of more complex modern narratives. As such, the work of this thesis is perhaps an insufficient means of addressing the problems posed by a more general theory of adaptation.

In contradistinction to this, however, the Orpheus story *as myth* proves to be particularly enlightening as a means of examining the very project *of theory*. If, as Barthes claims, “the fundamental character of the mythic concept is to be appropriated,”¹⁴ perhaps this is exactly the point. It is the very simplicity of the mythic form that allows it to be so easily absorbed into different texts, contexts, and discourses, and it is this capacity for appropriation that makes these stories such powerful indicators of not only the narrative transformations of adaptation, but also of the historic progression of theoretical models. Barthes himself says this rather directly in a 1970 interview with Stephen Heath:

“Theoretical” does not, of course, mean abstract. From my point of view it means reflexive, something which turns back on itself: a discourse which turns back on itself is by virtue of this very fact theoretical. The eponymous hero, the mythical hero of theory would be Orpheus, because it is he who turns back on what he loves ready to destroy it; turning back on Eurydice he kills her a second time. We *must* turn back ready to destroy.¹⁵

Reading the inevitable look back as a moment of critical reflection rather than a gesture of transgressive destruction, we can begin to understand the process of reading and theorizing adaptation in a rather different light.

¹⁴ Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. 1972: 119.

¹⁵ Heath, Stephen. “A conversation with Roland Barthes.” *Signs of the Times: Introductory Readings in Textual Semiotics*. ed. Heath, Stephen, Colin MacCabe, and Christopher Prendergast, 1971: 49.

Even though this analysis has not summarily debunked any existing bodies of theory, the reflective gesture, the willingness to look back at and destroy the assumptions of previous configurations of thought, remains a generative act. Barthes wrote his *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* as a response to his intellectual predecessors, and then later wrote *S/Z* in response to his own previous work. In order for theoretical discourse to progress, this willingness to interrogate, dismantle, and ultimately erase predominant trajectories of thought must continue to motivate the production of new critical works. This in and of itself is in no way revelatory, as this impulse towards destructive reflection has characterized the tensions between structuralism and post-structuralism, modernism and post-modernism. What we must take away from this lesson, however, is that even these bodies of thought cannot be considered with any sort of finality. They cannot be seen as a stop clause; they must not limit the plurality of future writing, theoretical or otherwise. We must always look back, prepared to face the consequences of transgressing the symbolic order.

If this is the case, then we see that adaptation is also something of an inevitability. This is perhaps less apparent if we think of adaptation as a mode of production, thus effectively reducing it to the level of genre. It may not even be apparent if we consider adaptations to be products, artifacts capable of revealing the conditions of their creation. But if we view adaptation as primarily a process of reception, contingent upon the ability of the reader to attend to the connection of various intertexts, then Barthes' invocation of Orpheus becomes highly salient. Adaptation, as a form of re-reading, is necessarily a reflective act, and thus destructive.

Reading Orpheus as a metaphor for theory also allows us to assert the centrality of the reader/spectator to the study of adaptation. If Orpheus is the hero of theory because of his willingness to look back and destroy that which he loves, then the reader is the hero of the adapted text, willing to reread story, and thus reflect upon and destroy the memory of the original reading: “Adaptation into another medium becomes a means of prolonging the pleasure of the original presentation, and repeating the production of a memory...adaptation consumes this memory, attempting to efface it with the presence of its own images.”¹⁶

This is perhaps the most significant contribution that Barthes may offer to a theory of adaptation, refuting problems of fidelity not just because of the inconsistencies of the myth of filiality, but because of the primacy of the reader. To understand the polysemous functions of a narrative text, to parse through the networks of signification that structure a reader’s capacity to derive meaning therefrom, we cannot conceive of a hypertext in terms of the historic origins of a work, but must rather defer to the reader as a biographical subject. Meaning will not be structured according to the chronological order in which texts are written, but rather by the biographical order in which those texts are consumed: “Literary ‘structure’ exists as a bond between text and reader. It is more than the formalist operations happening within the boundaries of the written words. It enables the reader to participate in the act of reading and to destroy, as Orpheus did destroy Eurydice, that entity called a text. In its place, the reader projects the structure of the reading as a viable entity accounting for his or her own input into literary transactions.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Ellis, John. “The Literary Adaptation: An Introduction.” *Screen* 23.1, 1982: 4-5.

¹⁷ Champagne, Roland A. “Between Orpheus and Eurydice: Roland Barthes and the Historicity of Reading.” *Clio*, 8.2. 1979: 233.

If we define an adaptation as a reflexively palimpsestic intertext while maintaining this emphasis on the reader, we can begin to make better sense of this tangled mess of intertextual processes. An adaptation is reflexive insofar as it is a re-reading, a look back. This look back is destructive of memory, it erases the pleasure of the original reading with the pleasure of repetition. Upon this new surface of the text, networks of similarity and difference become inscribed. The adaptation is thus palimpsestic; the first writing remains, but its memory is erased and rewritten by these new structures of meaning. Finally, the adaptation is intertextual, as the memories of each text within these networks of meaning will be similarly destroyed and rebuilt by each act of re-reading.

This is likely the reason why adaptations have been so frequently lambasted for their sacrilegious infidelity. There is an inherent fear that adapted works threaten the sanctity of the original. But this originality is not an objective structural quality of the text, and it is not the privileged information of scholarly critique. That which adaptation threatens is memory, and thus history. But each moment of reflective destruction brought upon by adaptation is not a final act of erasure, but the starting point of a new writing, a rebirth of discourse *through reading*.

Accepting this position is by no means a gesture of surrender or defeat. It is, rather, another moment of reflection. Through adaptation, we do not simply look back at a text, but also at theory, at the whole history of representational practices that enable the transmission and transformation of narrative. Through adaptation we find that theory is

not only a lens, but a mirror, a reflective surface which turns text and discourse alike back upon themselves.

This whole thesis, then, has been the construction of a hall of mirrors, an assembly of individual works and moments of critical thought arrayed together in an attempt to see what, finally, looks back at *us*, the reader. Looking down this hallway, through its many repetitions and distortions, we see, in glittering fragments, what may be nothing less than an image of narrative persistence. This is what remains despite the many destructions of the text, despite the many limitations of theory. What persists, is, quite simply, (and tautologically), that which remains.

Perhaps this persistence is best thought not in terms of history, or at least, not in terms of the historical past. Perhaps the persistent text is “a complex of voices suggesting premonitions to its readers about how to re-read in the future.”¹⁸ Perhaps these lingering stories are, like Orpheus’ dream of the wine-dark sea, “a memory of the future.” Perhaps what we see when we stare down the hall of mirrors is simply ourselves looking back, ready to destroy, to reflect, to read again.

¹⁸ Ibid. 236.

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Appendix I : Ovid's Metamorphoses – Orpheus and Eurydice

Source: (<http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/Classics/OvidOrpheus.htm>)

Truly Hymen there
was present during the wedding festivities
of Orpheus and Eurydice, but gave
no happy omen, neither hallowed words
nor joyful glances; and the torch he held
would only sputter, fill the eyes with smoke,
and cause no blaze while waving. The result
of that sad wedding, proved more terrible
than such foreboding fates.

While through the grass
delighted Naiads wandered with the bride,
a serpent struck its venomous tooth in her
soft ankle-- and she died.--After the bard
of Rhodope had mourned, and filled the highs
of heaven with the moans of his lament,
determined also the dark underworld
should recognize the misery of death,

he dared descend by the Taenarian gate
down to the gloomy Styx. And there passed through
pale-glimmering phantoms, and the ghosts
escaped from sepulchres, until he found
Persephone and Pluto, master-king
of shadow realms below: and then began
to strike his tuneful lyre, to which he sang:--
"O deities of this dark world beneath
the earth! this shadowy underworld, to which
all mortals must descend! If it can be
called lawful, and if you will suffer speech
of strict truth (all the winding ways
of Falsity forbidden) I come not
down here because of curiosity
to see the glooms of Tartarus and have
no thought to bind or strangle the three necks
of the Medusan Monster, vile with snakes.
But I have come, because my darling wife
stepped on a viper that sent through her veins
death-poison, cutting off her coming years.
"If able, I would bear it, I do not
deny my effort--but the god of Love

has conquered me--a god so kindly known
in all the upper world. We are not sure
he can be known so well in this deep world,
but have good reason to conjecture he
is not unknown here, and if old report
almost forgotten, that you stole your wife
is not a fiction, Love united you
the same as others. By this Place of Fear
this huge void and these vast and silent realms,
renew the life-thread of Eurydice.

"All things are due to you, and though on earth
it happens we may tarry a short while,
slowly or swiftly we must go to one
abode; and it will be our final home.

Long and tenaciously you will possess
unquestioned mastery of the human race.

She also shall be yours to rule, when full
of age she shall have lived the days of her
allotted years. So I ask of you
possession of her few days as a boon.

But if the fates deny to me this prayer
for my true wife, my constant mind must hold

me always so that I can not return--
and you may triumph in the death of two!"
While he sang all his heart said to the sound
of his sweet lyre, the bloodless ghosts themselves
were weeping, and the anxious Tantalus
stopped clutching at return-flow of the wave,
Ixion's twisting wheel stood wonder-bound;
and Tityus' liver for a while escaped
the vultures, and the listening Belides
forgot their sieve-like bowls and even you,
O Sisyphus! sat idly on your rock!
Then Fame declared that conquered by the song
of Orpheus, for the first and only time
the hard cheeks of the fierce Eumenides
were wet with tears: nor could the royal queen,
nor he who rules the lower world deny
the prayer of Orpheus; so they called to them
Eurydice, who still was held among
the new-arriving shades, and she obeyed
the call by walking to them with slow steps,
yet halting from her wound. So Orpheus then
received his wife; and Pluto told him he

might now ascend from these Avernian vales
up to the light, with his Eurydice;
but, if he turned his eyes to look at her,
the gift of her delivery would be lost.

They picked their way in silence up a steep
and gloomy path of darkness. There remained
but little more to climb till they would touch
earth's surface, when in fear he might again
lose her, and anxious for another look
at her, he turned his eyes so he could gaze
upon her. Instantly she slipped away.

He stretched out to her his despairing arms,
eager to rescue her, or feel her form,
but could hold nothing save the yielding air.

Dying the second time, she could not say
a word of censure of her husband's fault;
what had she to complain of -- his great love?

Her last word spoken was, "Farewell!" which he
could barely hear, and with no further sound
she fell from him again to Hades.

Appendix II: List of Orphic Adaptations and Appropriations

(Please note that this list is entirely demonstrative, and by no means exhaustive. Many of the works listed have not been confirmed. The point here is not necessarily to chart the evolution of the Orpheus tale, but rather to illustrate how extensively it has been revisited.)

Opera

1600 – Jacopo Peri – *Euridice*

1602 – Giulio Caccini – *Euridice*

1607 – Claudio Monteverdi – *L'Orfeo*

1616 – Domenico Belli – *Orfeo Dolente*

1619 – Stefano Landi – *La morte d'Orfeo*

1638 – Heinrich Schütz – *Orpheus und Euridice*

1647 – Luigi Rossi – *Orfeo*

1654 – Carlo d'Aquino – *Orfeo*

1659 – Johann Jakob Löwe von Eisenach – *Orpheus von Thracien*

1672 – Antonio Sartorio – *Orfeo*

1673 – Matthew Locke – *Orpheus and Euridice*

1676 – Giuseppe di Dia – *Orfeo*

1677 – Francesco della Torre – *Orfeo*

- 1683 – Johann Philipp Krieger – *Orpheus und Eurydice*
- 1683 – Antonio Draghi – *La lira d'Orfeo*
- 1685 – Marc-Antoine Charpentier – *La descente d'Orphée aux enfers*
- 1689 – Bernardo Sabadini – *Orfeo*
- 1690 – Louis Lully – *Orphée*
- 1698 – Reinhard Keiser – *Die sterbende Eurydice oder Orpheus*
- 1699 – André Campra – *Orfeo nell'inferni*
- 1701 – John Weldon – *Orpheus and Euridice*
- 1715 – Johann Fux – *Orfeo ed Euridice*
- 1722 – Georg Caspar Schürmann – *Orpheus*
- 1726 – Georg Philipp Telemann – *Orpheus*
- 1740 – John Frederick Lampe – *Orpheus and Eurydice*
- 1749 – Giovanni Alberto Ristori – *I lamenti d'Orfeo*
- 1750 – Georg Christoph Wagenseil – *Euridice*
- 1752 – Carl Heinrich Graun – *Orfeo*
- 1762 – Christoph Willibald Gluck – *Orfeo ed Euridice*
- 1767 – François-Hippolyte Barthélemon – *The Burletta of Orpheus*
- 1775 – Antonio Tozzi – *Orfeo ed Euridice*
- 1776 – Ferdinando Bertoni – *Orfeo ed Euridice*
- 1781 – Luigi Torelli – *Orfeo*
- 1785 – Friedrich Benda – *Orpheus*
- 1786 – Johann Gottlieb Naumann – *Orpheus og Eurydice*

- 1788 – Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf – *Orpheus der Zweyte*
- 1788 – Johann Friedrich Reichardt – *Orpheus*
- 1789 – Vittorio Trento – *Orfeo negli Elisi*
- 1791 – Joseph Haydn – *L'anima del filosofo, ossia Orfeo ed Euridice*
- 1791 – Ferdinando Paer – *Orphée et Euridice*
- 1792 – Peter Winter – *Orpheus und Euridice*
- 1793 – Prosper-Didier Deshayes – *Le petit Orphée*
- 1796 – Luigi Lamberti – *Orfeo*
- 1796 – Francesco Morolin – *Orfeo ed Euridice*
- 1798 – Gottlob Bachmann – *Der Tod des Orpheus/Orpheus und Euridice*
- 1802 – Carl Conrad Cannabich – *Orpheus*
- 1807 – Friedrich August Kanne – *Orpheus*
- 1813 – Ferdinand Kauer – *Orpheus und Euridice, oder So geht es im Olympus zu*
- 1814 – Marchese Francesco Sampieri – *Orfeo*
- 1858 – Jacques Offenbach – *Orpheus in the Underworld*
- 1860 – Gustav Michaelis – *Orpheus auf der Oberwelt*
- 1867 – Karl Ferdinand Konradin – *Orpheus im Dorfe*
- 1907 – Fernando de Azevedo e Silva – *A morte de Orfeu*
- 1913 – Jean Roger-Ducasse – *Orphée*
- 1925 – Gian Francesco Malipiero – *L'Orfeide*
- 1925 – Darius Milhaud – *Les malheurs d'Orphée*
- 1926 – Ernst Krenek – *Orpheus und Eurydike*

- 1932 – Alfredo Casella – *La Favola d'Orfeo*
- 1951 – Pierre Schaeffer – *Orphée 51*
- 1953 – Pierre Schaeffer, Pierre Henry – *Orphée 53*
- 1978 – Hans Werner Henze – *Orpheus*
- 1986 – Harrison Birtwistle – *The Mask of Orpheus*
- 1993 – Philip Glass – *Orphée*
- 1996 – Lorenzo Ferrero – *La nascita di Orfeo*
- 2005 – Ricky Ian Gordon – *Orpheus and Euridice*
- 2010 – Anais Mitchell – *Hadestown*

Graphic Novel

- 1989 – Neil Gaiman – *Sandman*
- 2001 – Alex Simmons & Dwayne Turner – *Batman: Orpheus Rising*
- 2009 – David Mazzucchelli – *Asterios Polyp*

Film

- 1950 – Jean Cocteau – *Orpheus*
- 1959 – Marcel Camus – *Black Orpheus*
- 1999 – Carlo Diegues – *Orfeu*
- 2001 – Baz Luhrmann – *Moulin Rouge*

Painting

1498 – Albrecht Durer – *Death of Orpheus*

1508 – Titian – *Orpheus and Eurydice*

1640 – Aelbert Cuyp – *Orpheus with Animals in a Landscape*

1648 – Nicolas Poussin – *Orpheus and Eurydice*

1861 – Camille Corot – *Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld*

1869 – George Frederic Watts – *Orpheus and Eurydice*

1895 – Henri Martin – *Orpheus in a Wood*

1900 – John William Waterhouse – *Nymphs Finding the Head of Orpheus*

1977 – Marc Chagall – *The Myth of Orpheus*