The significance of Orpheus's Myth in Sarah Ruhl's Eurydice: An Intertextual Approach

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Abstract:

      This paper compares the contemporary myth of *Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl with the Greek mythology of Orpheus, drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality and Carl G. Jung's concepts about myth. According to Julia Kristeve, the term "intertextuality" refers to interpreting the meanings of literary texts in the light of other texts. This paper reveals the comparabilities between Eurydice and the Greek mythology "Orpheus." Both stories share some features like aspects of character and ways of narrating while it differs with regard to the plot and images. The main focus of this study is to shed light on parallels, additions and their functions. The playwright uses the Greek myth to represent modern hero myth in a male dominated culture. It deals with love, loss, death and reminiscence. The play deals with incompatible notions such as forgetfulness, memory, happiness, grief, the real world, the underworld, despair, hope, uncertainty and faith. The study shows that the playwright uses a classical myth about two lovers to put into focus father/daughter relationship. This asserts that some old myths are timeless, and each generation is capable of reinventing and reproducing them. Moreover, modern generation can create its modern hero myth to ennoble its heroes and idealize their experiences.

Key Words: Intertextuality, myths, father/daughter relationship, parental love.

ملخص:

تقارن هذه الورقة بين مسرحية "يوريدس" لسارة رول و الأسطورة اليونانية لأورفيوس وذلك فى ضوء نظرية "التناص" لجوليا كريستيفا ومفاهيم كارل ج. جونغ عن الأسطورة. وفقاً لجوليا كريستيفا، فإن مصطلح "التناص" يشير إلى تفسير معاني النصوص الأدبية في ضوء نصوص أخرى. تقارن هذه الدراسة بين مسرحية "يوريديس" والأسطورة اليونانية "أورفيوس". يشترك كلا العملين في بعض الجوانب مثل جوانب الشخصية وطرق السرد في حين أنها تختلف فيما يتعلق بسير الأحداث والصور. تركز هذه الدراسة بشكل رئيسي على أوجه التشابه والإضافات ووظائفها. تستخدم الكاتبه الأسطورة اليونانية حتى تستعرض أسطورة البطل الحديث في ثقافة يهيمن عليها الذكور. تتناول المسرحية بعض المفاهيم مثل الحب والخسارة والموت والذكريات، وتلقى الضوء على بعض المفاهيم المتضاربة مثل النسيان والذاكرة والسعادة والحزن والعالم الحقيقي والعالم السفلي واليأس والأمل وعدم اليقين والإيمان. تستخدم الكاتبة الأسطورة كلاسيكية عن عاشقين لتلقي الضوء على علاقة أب وابنته. وهذا يؤكد أن بعض الأساطير القديمة خالدة، ويستطيع كل جيل تقديمها بشكل مختلف. علاوة على ذلك، يمكن للجيل الحديث خلق أسطورة بطل حديث لتمجد حياة وتجارب أبطال هذا العصر

Introduction:

Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* (2003), which is inspired by the ancient Greek mythology Eurydice and Orpheus, is a transformation or regeneration of the Greek myth of Orpheus, drawing upon intertextuality. This alteration of the story and concentration on parental live reveals the effect of modern social and cultural influences. It reveals the conflict between romantic love and familial love. It deals with love, loss, death and reminiscence. Charles Isherwood considers the play an "appealing story of the tremendous power of love, and of its fragility" (n. pag.). It sheds light on incompatible notions that exist at the same time such as forgetfulness, memory, happiness, grief, the real world, the underworld, despair, hope, uncertainty and faith.

This paper offers an examination of Ruhl's play which represents father/ daughter relationship. Firstly, it gives brief definition of

intertextuality as a theoretical background. Secondly, the study makes use of Carl G. Jung's theory about myth and the function of myth for moderns. It is used to highlight the significance of reinventing traditional myths and the production of modern hero myths. It puts into focus the changes that are imposed by the playwright in this modern adaptation of the myth. Finally, it offers a detailed analysis of the play, characters and themes.

Ruhl's *Eurydice* has received critical attention of different scholars. Published studies include two MA theses and some scholarly essays. The first thesis, "Balancing the Mythic and Mundane: A Director's Approach to Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*" (2009) by the director and actress Amber McGinnis Jackson, deals with some issues that are related to design, structure, content and performance processes. The second thesis, "The Fluidity of Collaboration: Directing Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*" (2016) by Keltie Redfern Forsyth, analyzes style, audience, space, time, characters and design of the play. Charles Isherwood's article, "A Comic Impudence Softens a Tale of Loss" in *The New York Times* (2006), talks about the character's painful choices. John Lahr's article, "Gods and Dolls: Sarah Ruhl Reimagines the Orpheus Myth" in *The New Yorker* (2007), suggests that Ruhl's play is a dream of love and loss. Michael Feingold's article, "Mything Persons" in *The Village Voice* (2007), sheds light on Ruhl's regeneration of the Greek myth. Victoria Pagan's article, "*Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl: The Power of Pretence" in *Society for Classical Studies* (2015), deals with the play as a familiar love story. Ara Vito's article, "Sarah Ruhl's Eurydice: A Contemporary Myth" (2015), explores the struggle of a girl who is torn between the world of the living and the underworld.

The paper intends to answer two questions: What are the intertextual influences of the classical Greek myth of Orpheus on Ruhl's play? What is the significance of reinventing traditional myths in this play? Answering such a question needs answering three sub-questions: (1) Why does Ruhl use the Greek myth to tell the story of *Eurydice*? (2) What is the significance of the transformations Ruhl imposed in her adaptation of the myth? (3) What is the impact of these changes on the production of a modern hero myth?

Myths exit in different cultures. They are used by ancestors to figure out the reasons behind the existence of things before the advent of scientific knowledge. They give a reasonable answer to the mind and presents a comforting power to the psyche. They reproduce the experiences of human beings throughout history, as they are used to explain and answer different questions related to humans existence and beliefs. Therefore, some ancient myths still reverberate today and are adapted by modern dramatists because they depend on the audiences' interpretations and responses to the story or tale. Myths can be reinvented or adapted by new generations in the sense that characters and themes can be added to the story of the myth. For example, the story of Eurydice was adapted many times by different writers. Although the adaptations preserve some of the original characters and themes, Sarah Ruhl's adaptation gives this myth another dimension which concentrates on the father/daughter relationship rather than the male/female romantic love.

The Greek myth tells that Orpheus, a singer, is the son of the god Apollo. His mother is the muse. He plays the lyre skillfully to the extent that his music charms whoever listens to it. His wife died. He goes to the underworld to bring her back to life. However, there is a condition that he must not look at his wife until he reaches the world of the living. He fails to abide by the condition and loses his wife for good. There are different versions of the same story, as it continues to develop with time and is subject to new readings. In later versions of the story, Orpheus is the son of Greeks deity. In the Romans times, Orpheus story develops into a tragic story of a great lover who lost his wife It is believed that Virgil is the one who gives the tragic ending related to the obligatory condition that prohibits Orpheus to look at his wife. According to earlier versions, Orpheus succeeds in his quest. In Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, he builds on Virgil's tragic story (Jackson 23-24). By the middle ages, the figure of Orpheus gains its Christian appeal, as he is perceived as a Christ-like figure as is manifested in the Spanish religious drama *El Divino Orfeo* (*Divine Orpheus*) by Calderon de la Barca. In this version, Orpheus fights the Prince of Darkness to save the character of Eurydice, here named "Human

Nature." However in the renaissance period in Europe, Orpheus was seen as a representation of nature, art, music and religion combined. The myth was also adapted by John Milton, and other writers who give voice to Eurydice such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Robert Browning. Modern writers were also inspired by the myth like Edith Sitwell and Muriel Rukeyser. In the twentieth century, the myth started to be used as a basis for different plays such Jean Cocteau's *Orphee* (1926), Jean Anouilh's *Eurydice* (1941) and Tennessee Williams's *Orpheus Descending* (1955) (25-27).

The idea of the **influence** of predecessors on the formation of the identity of the author was presented by Harold Bloom. Influence is described as "a complex intertextual process and psychic dynamism implied in shaping one's literary identity—a writer exposed to anxieties of being influenced by some great precursor searches for his own poetic vision by engaging in an interpretative and transfigurative struggle with his predecessor" (Juvan, Marko 5). Although influence plays a major role in forming author's identity, it does not describe intertextual alterations. It "is a hypothetical psycho-social and cultural force that in the historical discourse of receiving and producing texts motivates intertextual analogies and transformations" (6).

The theory of **intertextuality** appears in the 1960s. The theory does not only concentrate on the influence of previous texts on a text, but it extends to shed light on the interpretations or the reception of the text (Juvan 2). Unlike influence, intertextuality subverts self-contained nature of texts. It stresses the connection or interaction between past texts and contemporary texts. Here, the author occupies two roles; the reader and the source of interpretation. His interpretations of past texts are used deliberately or unconsciously when he/she writes a new text. Thus, intertextuality rebukes the notion of originality as the author is usually influenced by other texts.

Intertextuality offers a new understanding of influence. As influence concentrates on the boundaries and cause/effect relationship between texts, intertextuality shows an interactional relationship between the text and its context. Theories of intertextuality rebukes the basic principles of influence. Juvan argues:

it revealed the socio-political power of influence—of hierarchy, colonialism, and hegemony—as well as its negative and positive role in identity formation. For these reasons intertextuality in literary scholarship provoked the appearance of polycentric and pluralistic models of influence as discursive force and other inter-literary relations. It made central the interactive, dialogic or bi-level contacts between a literary text and a literary or non-literary context whose national framings are no more self-evident. (7)

The word "intertextuality" is coined by Julia Kristeva, a French linguist. According to Kristeva, the term "intertextuality" refers to interpreting the meanings of literary texts in the light of other texts. Kristeva explains, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of *intersubjectivity*" (37). Intertextuality is the transformation of other texts that influence the author during the stage of identity formation. According to Kristeva, the word is a "signifier" of thought. She studies the status of the word or what she calls the connection between the word and the space, i.e. the articulations and functions of the word within a text. She defines what she calls the "three dimensions of textual space." She suggests that these dimensions are "writing subject, addressee and exterior texts. The word's status is thus defined *horizontally* (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as *vertically* (the word in the text is oriented towards an interior or synchronic literary corpus)" (36-37). The coexistence of both axes reveals that each word/ text is interconnected with other words/texts, and any text is just a transformation or may be an interpretation of others text/texts.

Any text is not a dependent or subjective unit of meaning. Actually, it is a consequence of previous texts or a part of an interpretation process which leads to new transformations of the text as a final stage. The result is a new script that carries traces of previous works. This script should be considered in relation to its social, cultural context. María Jesús Martínez Alfaro argues:

> The concept of intertextuality requires, therefore, that we understand texts not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical, as traces and tracings of otherness, since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures. Rejecting the New Critical principle of textual autonomy, the theory of intertextuality insists that a text cannot exist as a self-sufficient whole, and so, that it does not function as a closed system. (286)

Intertextuality is based on a reciprocal relationship where the author is influenced and acts as an influence. It reveals cultural, political, religious, moral ideology. The author could deliberately choose to use or depend on previous texts or make direct references to it.

According to the aforementioned concept of intertextuality, Ruhl reinvents the Greek myth to indicate that people can go through mythic experiences. Her play is considered an interpretation to the Greek myth and a response to the death of her father. She regenerates the myth to introduce a modern hero myth that is influenced by contemporary social and cultural context. In this regard, she occupies the role of the interpreter as she presents a new interpretation of the Greek myth. Meanwhile, she embodies the heroine's psychological struggle after the death of her father. She transforms the myth into a specific, original work that represents other forms of love that could trespass romantic love. The play suggests that familial love is more liberating and fulfilling than romantic love. It represents the heroine's personal liberation from psychological struggle. The playwright finds what she wanted in a myth in which she tells a modern hero myth. Here, the Greek myth is used to idealize and enrich the heroine's experience. It also represents the experience of loss of a loved one as a universalistic experience that trespasses human beings' categorizations of love relationships as romantic, familial or platonic. The play gives an empowering and engaging message, as it presents an adaptation of the myth in a modern context that suits contemporary cultural changes.

Carl Jung studies myth as a way to understand human mind and behavior. **Raya A. Jones** argues, "Jung articulated an understanding of myth that was new at the time: myth as being not about the world but about the mind" (621). Jung theorizes myth in order to help psychologists explain human psyche. In this case, his theory of myth refers to mythmaking as a part of a psychological process rather than a cultural activity. In order to explain the relationship between myth and human psyche, he sets a causal relationship between three domains; "body, psyche and culture." Here, myth represents the archetype that is a reflection of instinct. Jones believes, "Archetypes in turn give rise to the motifs that are expressed in concrete symbolic productions such as actual myths" (623). However, there is no guarantee that individual's experience of a certain situation could give rise to certain mythic themes. Jones adds, "We can only see the connections historically, after the fact, when we have the 'full picture' so to speak" (624). As the process of mythmaking represents the mind, the resulting story participates in forming personal identity and reveals individual's image of the self. **Jones argues,** "Although people might be unaware that their narratives communicate particular self-images, those images are intrinsic to the person's conscious orientation towards the events being narrated" (625).

As myths play an important role in developing the human psyche, they also continue to affect the human mind after maturity stages. According to Carl G. Jung, "the human mind has its own history and the psyche retains traces left from previous stages of its development. More than this, the contents of the unconscious exert a formative influence on the psyche" (106). Therefore, hero myths have a psychological importance in people's lives, as it is a part of the history which affects the human psyche. Although there are various hero myths, they are similar and they have a universal pattern. They exist in different cultures despite the fact that they did not have that direct contact with each other. For example, there is a widespread tale which exits in different cultures that describe "a hero's miraculous but humble birth, his early proof of superhuman strength, his rapid rise to prominence or power, his triumphant struggle with the forces of evil,

his fallibility to the sin of pride *(hybris),* and his fall through betrayal or a " heroic " sacrifice that ends in his death" (110). Here, Jung refers to the collective conscious and collective unconscious that support the development of the psyche. The hero, here, reflects human conflict, struggle and evolution Therefore,

> the essential function of the heroic myth is the development of the individual's ego-consciousness — his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses—in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him….That is to say, the image of the hero evolves in a manner that reflects each stage of the evolution of the human personality. (112)

While myths are reflection of the human psyche and they take place in the mind, they are a means of expression of external and internal conditions. However, myths are not direct references to the external world; they are used as symbols to interpret what is going in the human psyche. They are a means to communicate unconscious psychological needs. According to Jung, "Myths are original revelations of the preconscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings, and anything but allegories of physical processes" (qtd. in Segal, Robert A. 67). In modern times, myths do not deal with gods or give an explanation of the physical world; nonetheless, they shed light on what is going on in the internal world, which contributes to the development of the mind. Segal believes, "For Jung, myth is no more about gods than about the physical world. It is about the human mind. Myth must be read symbolically…and the symbolized subject is a process…but the process is an inner rather than an outer one" (69). Accordingly, hero myths are just projections of the unconscious or are produced by different unconscious i.e., it is inherited. This impersonal unconscious refers to what Jung calls collective unconscious. Segal states, "Jung uses myths to *establish* the collective unconscious. The first step in the proof is the demonstration of the universality of motifs, and myths

provide evidence of that universality" (70). However, there is no definite interpretations of the content of the collective unconscious or meanings of myths. It is just a trial to describe rather than specify the subject matter of myths. Therefore, Jung only presents possible interpretations of myths not specific interpretations that are applicable to all of them.

Humans can experience different emotions such love, happiness, fear and insecurity. As they are helpless in front of destiny, they forget people, things and events; however, they cannot forget traces of emotional interactions that are deeply inscribed in the psyche or the unconscious. Here, human experiences are controlled by the conscious and the unconscious. Sometimes, they can control, interpret and direct the conscious; however, they cannot define, control or interpret what is going on the unconscious. Segal suggests, "Myths are intended by the unconscious to reveal its contents to those whose myths they are" (72). In this case, Jung's theory on myths concentrates on similarities rather than differences among myths. Myths enable humans to understand or relate to the unconscious and the world. Segal explains, "Myth makes humans fell at home in the world, even if it does so by explaining events in the world" (78). For ancestors, myths used to give them strength to face the outer world; however,

> Myths for moderns do not function to connect the inner world with the outer world, which is now the domain of science. Instead, modern myths function to connect—better, or reconnect—moderns to the inner world. Modern myths still provide meaningfulness, but that meaningfulness now lies entirely within humans rather than also within the world (78).

Modern myths are accounts of personal experiences. They no longer focus on the outer world, because humans already uses scientific knowledge to understand its workings. They are used to understand the inner world which endow meaning to the external world.

Myths have a social function, as they provide role models to be imitated. Still, moderns can invoke traditional myths to project personal relationships. Traditional myths are often updated or revived. They are also transformed to be acceptable to modern man. Segal believes, "A personal myth seeks to nurture those particular aspects of one's personality that have been neglected" (86). Myths are no longer used to project the outer world, as moderns can explain and understand it. However, they still project the thoughts and experiences of human beings.

Ruhl writes *Eurydice* to project feelings of loss and pain. She prefers to share an agonizing experience with the audience instead of receiving psychological therapy. As her father taught her to appreciate literature and love words, his death has a deep influence on her writings. Therefore, she deals with the theme of death in different plays such as *The Clean House, Eurydice,* and *Dead Man's Cell Phone* (Jackson 3-4). In Ruhl's version of the myth, she produces a modern hero myth by giving voice to the often silenced Eurydice and making her the central character of the play instead of the marginal image of the beloved. According to Maia Coleman, Ruhl retells the story of the classical myth of Orpheus from a female point of view (n. pag.). Likewise, Ara Vitro suggests that Ruhl "focuses on a female figure that has not been given a strong voice in previous adaptations, exploring the active inner life of a character that literary history has viewed as passive" (1). Ruhl builds on the original story; however, she adds the character of the father, as the whole play is a commemoration of her father who died of bone cancer. Ruhl believes, "It felt like there was no cultural ritual to organize my feelings. Theater became that for me" (qtd. in Berson, n. pag.).

The play falls within the boundaries of postmodern drama which appears in the mid-20th century. It adopts a new approach to drama arts. It could be defined is a "theatric philosophy emphasizing the fallibility of definite truth" (Alyahya 1). Postmodern drama builds on the audience's interpretations or understandings of the subject matter. It deals with different topics related to contemporary life absurdity

like loss of faith and alienation. It uses intertextuality, hyperreality and parody to criticize human nature, value systems, social progress etc.

The play could be classified as a tragedy. The set of the play is an "all-white room onto which a series of videos are projected" (Coleman, n. pag.). Ruhl uses a digital set that makes use of a compilation of images and videos to make it easier to switch between the underworld and the world of the living. Stage directions are also used as a means of narration. She depends on the audience's imagination and perception of what is happening on the stage. By using these technical devices, she tries to alienate the audience by using some Brechtian techniques which include bare setting, songs, music and direct speech to the audience.

Ruhl does not use the Aristotelian structure of tragedy; however, the concept of the tragic hero applies to the character of Eurydice whose fatal flaw is her hesitation to take action or take a decision at the suitable moment. This flaw contributes to her downfall as she is forced to marry the lord of the underworld and lost communication with her father who dips himself in the River of Forgetfulness. Furthermore, she lost her chance to return to the real world forever. Without Eurydice's flaw, the play could have ended happily. However, her inability to take a decision, whether to stay with her father in the underworld or go back to the world of the living with her husband, results in losing her father, husband and above all her freedom. She is a heroine in the sense that she meets this tragic fate bravely.

The play is divided into three movements. There is no detailed description of the setting of the play, except for "a raining elevator, a water-pump, some rusty exposed pipes, an abstracted River of Forgetfulness, an old-fashioned glow-in-the-dark globe" (331). Ruhl also requires that "The underworld should resemble the world of *Alice in Wonderland* more than it resembles Hades" (332), which asserts her indebtedness to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, as this gives her the ability to depict a dreamlike world. Movement One begins with Eurydice and Orpheus setting on an imaginary beach of the sea. They talk about their passion in life. Orpheus is interested in music, while

Eurydice is into books. It is noted that the characters should look "a little too young and a little too in love" (332). When they discuss their passions, the characters' differences begin to materialize. Eurydice cannot catch up the rhythm, while Orpheus suggests that she should build up her thoughts instead of reading a book. Later on, Eurydice is wedded to Orpheus. Meanwhile, her father writes her a letter from the underworld, giving her advice for her wedding day. After that, he pretends to walk his daughter down the aisle.

Eurydice leaves the wedding. She gives a soliloquy complaining about the wedding and the fact that she does not find interesting people there. She reveals that she hates parties especially weddings. Since she longs to be with her father, she maintains that weddings are for daughters and fathers. She repeats, "But a wedding is for a father and a daughter. They stop being married to each other on that day" (345). Later, she meets the "nasty interesting man" who seems interested in her. He tells her that he found her fathers' letter, and he leaves it in his apartment. She leaves the wedding and goes with the nasty interesting man. When they arrive at the apartment, he tries to seduce her. She manages to steal her father's letter from his pocket and tries to escape, but she trips and falls down the stairs to meet her death.

In Movement Two, the setting does not change. It begins with a chorus of three stones who present themselves to the audience. Eurydice appears inside an elevator, where it is raining (359). The elevator is used as a symbol of the relationship/ interconnectedness between life and death while the three stones are used to enforce the laws of the underworld on dead people. They also occupy the roles of the advisors who tell the father and his daughter how they should adapt to living in the underworld. If both characters had followed the instructions of the three stones, they could have avoided the tragic ending.

Eurydice tries to talk to the audience but she cannot, as she now speaks the language of the dead. At this moment, language is useless because it loses its ability to convey meaning. Here, Ruhl uses the Brechtian technique, since the stones break the fourth wall by asking

the audience to pretend to understand her. Eurydice recites how she dies and describes her journey to the underworld. She says; "There was a roar, and a coldness—I think my husband was with me. What was my husband's name?" (360). Forgetfulness plays an important role in helping the characters to adapt to the life in the underworld. therefore, she swims through the River of Forgetfulness which is the reason she forgets everything. She feels desperate, but she does not feel lonely.

The playwright tries to depict a dead person's journey to the underworld. The life in the underworld is depicted as a continuation of the life of the living. Later on, Eurydice arrives at a station. There is also a train. However, the train in the underworld is not like its equivalent in the world of the living. The Big Stone argues, "The train has wheels that are not wheels" (362). If the train signifies time, then its wheels signify the passage of time which is not perceived or noticed by the dead. Therefore, the train has wheels but they are not wheels. Eurydice meets her father, and mistakenly thought he was a porter (363). Eurydice's reunion with her father is confusing, as she is unable to recognize him or to communicate through language. Although they talk to each other, they seem to be complete strangers. The play questions the inability of language to convey meanings or emotions when people feel tremendous psychological pain. Pagan argues, "The narrative conceit of her amnesia powerfully intersects with the commentary on the inability of language to *do* anything" (n. pag.). This underlines the limitations of the language to communicate human feelings of love, loss, anguish and sadness. The play stimulates sympathy towards the characters' helplessness in front of destiny.

Eurydice asks for a room to rest, but dead people are not permitted to live rooms in the underworld. Her father builds her a room of strings to comfort her. Eurydice says thank you as if to a stranger. Ruhl's manipulation of this emotional moment puts into focus paternal selfless love and sacrifice. Pagan believes, "The scene drove home in utter silence that hard reality: sometimes we cannot give as much as we want to give, and in these moments, even genuine gratitude is tainted by pretense" (n. pag). The father tries to teach his

daughter words to help her remember him. This action is faced by complete rejection from the annoying but childish three stones who assert that dead people are not permitted to remember. While her father teaches her words and tells her about music and their family, Eurydice begins to remember her past life. After her father volunteers to read her husband's letter, which she fails earlier to read it by standing on it with her feet, Eurydice wishes she could meet her husband again. She remembers her husband's name which brings about all the forgotten memories. Ironically, when she asks him to tell her the names of her mother, brothers and sisters, he responds that it is not a good idea to remember the past. He says, "It's a long time to be sad" (373). Although he does his best to help her reconnect with past-life memories, he believes that reminiscence could bring torture rather than solace.

During the play, the playwright uses letters as a way of communication between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Because direct communication is hard to achieve, the characters write letter to communicate with their loved ones in the other world. Although there is no postal box or any means to send letters, the characters write letters and drop them on the ground. The intended person receives and reads the message later. For example, Orpheus writes a letter to his wife to tell her that he plays the saddest music. He tells her of a strange dream which signifies that he will die as well. At the end of the dream, he experiences short-term feelings of forgetfulness, which occupy a considerable time in the play. While forgetfulness is spirits passport to the world of the dead, it seems that it is also the only plausible solution for living persons.

The lord of the underworld arrives on a tricycle. He is played by the same actor who plays the nasty interesting man. It is also stated later that his voice is similar to the voice of the nasty interesting man. When he discovers the string room, he threatens that he will dip Eurydice in the river again. Meanwhile, Orpheus makes a plan to go to the underworld. In Movement Three, Orpheus arrives at the underworld; he sings the song in Movement One. As soon as he finished, the stones starts to cry. The lord of the underworld tells

Orpheus that his wife will follow him on the road home, but he is not permitted to look back. He asks Orpheus to abide by the condition, otherwise his wife is gone forever. He declares, "Start walking home. Your wife just might be on the road behind you. We make it real nice here. So people wanna stick around. As you walk, keep your eyes facing front. If you look back at her—poof! She's gone" (391). The lord of the underworld insinuates that Eurydice may like to stay in the underworld, which proves to be true later. It could be deduced that the lord of the underworld is also the nasty interesting man for two reasons. Firstly, they are played by the same person. Secondly, it would make much sense if they are the same person. In this case, Eurydice's first death could be a scam by the lord of the underworld to bring her to the underworld because he takes a liking at her when they meet at the water pump. This suggestion is also affirmed by his marriage proposal to her in the underworld. Another suggestion is that he hears her soliloquy and realizes that she is not happy without her father. Therefore, he helps her to descend to the underworld. When Orpheus comes to rescue his wife from the underworld, he forces this strange condition, because he knows that Eurydice will choose to stay with her father.

Now Eurydice is torn between her desire to go with Orpheus and her wish to stay with her father. However, her father advises her to go with her husband and have grand children and one day they will meet him again (392). Her father warns her about the rules that they should not see each other or she dies another death. Perhaps, he is just giving her a clue as to how she can come back to the underworld. He says, "Don't let them dip you in the river too long, the second time. Hold your breath" (393). As Eurydice hesitates to go to her husband, the little Stone affirms, "Go on. It's him." Eurydice declares, "I want to go home! I want my father!" The other stones urge her to proceed because "Orpheus braved the gates of hell to find you" (395). She intentionally says his name; he turns and looks at her. Then, they are separated. While doing so, Orpheus reprimands her for their irreconcilable arguments which puts into focus the nature of the relationship between the couple. He declares, "I know we used to

fight" (398). Although they seem deeply in love at the beginning of the play, they have mismatched personalities. They have different interests. While he only thinks of music, she can only talk about books. Therefore, she yearns for her father's selfless love, with whom she shares her love for books and words.

Eurydice's father is the source of knowledge and memory; however, holding on to memories proves to be an enduring and painful experience. Previously, he chooses to remember and holds on to the memory of his daughter. When she decides to go to the world of the living, he Feels depressed and dismantles the string room. He exclaims, "How does a person remember to forget. It's difficult" (401). He Feels the pain of separation and loneliness for the second time. He finds out that he cannot live with the pain of reminiscence. Therefore, he decides to dip himself in the river again. When Eurydice returns back, she discovers that her father forgets everything. She lost him for the second time. Additionally, she finds out that he dismantled her string room. She tries to teach him the words, but it is too late as he cannot see, hear or remember her (405). Finally, they are separated. Actually, Eurydice is responsible for losing her husband and her father forever. Apparently, Eurydice is the victim of fate, as she is manipulated by the lord of the underworld. Latently, she is the culprit. At the beginning, she loses her life for trusting the nasty interesting man. Perhaps, she is punished by death because she is not satisfied by her life. She tries to live in two incompatible worlds, that is why she is punished by death twice.

Later on, the lord of the underworld proposes to Eurydice; however, she rejects his proposal of marriage and tells him he is too young. He disregards her rejection and asserts that she should prepare herself for the wedding. At this point, she discovers that she cannot stand against fate. She writes her last letter to Orpheus to apologize for her mistake. At the end of the letter, Eurydice gives instructions to his future wife (410). She drops the letter on the ground, dips herself in the river and lies down next to her father. At this point, Eurydice gains revelation that she is helpless in front of death, since she cannot defeat it. Therefore, she chooses to surrender to her fate, because she

finds out that forgetfulness could be a cure for grief, loss and separation.

At the end of the play, Orpheus appears standing in the elevator. He is happy to see Eurydice. The elevator rains on him, and he forgets. He steps out of the elevator. He picks up the letter and tries to read it. He recognizes that he cannot. He stands on it with his eyes closed. The ending of the play implies that no one can reach his goals in life. You can make plans for your future only to discover that they will end up entirely different from your plans. You cannot force your hopes or desires on the universe. The universe has other plans, and you should comply with them. At some point, you discover that suffering and loss are the pillars of life. Here, the characters recognize that they cannot make things right. They cannot revive the dead, nor can they live with the dead.

The play criticizes the absurdity of romantic love. It suggests that parental love is more important than romantic love. Ruhl's version of the love story between Orpheus and Eurydice insinuates that modern love stories are prone to challenges and struggles that affect the endurance of such relationships. The nature of relationship between Eurydice and Orpheus is revealed by the nasty interesting man and Orpheus himself when he visited the underworld. Both characters shed light on irreconcilable differences and arguments between the couple. Even Eurydice's father doubts the success of such relationship.

Ruhl imposes the role of the father to substitute the role of the lover. Although both characters occupy a significant role in Eurydice's struggle, the sacrifice of Eurydice's father surpasses that of the lover. When Eurydice chooses to leave with her husband, her father prefers to see her happy wherever she intends to go. Meanwhile, when she chooses to stay in the underworld, Orpheus starts to blame her for their arguments and her failure to share his passion for poetry. Here, the role of the lover is put into question and is judged in relation to the sacrifice of the father.

The first movement represents the heroine's longing for parental love. Her argument with her fiancée about his passion for poetry that exceeds his love for her deepens this feeling and confirms the

suggestion that there is no final peace. These circumstances are used as motifs to prepare Eurydice to meet the nasty interesting man who leads her to her death. The funeral scene is not presented on stage, because Eurydice narrates how she moved from the world of the living to the world of the dead. She goes through certain stages that are enforced upon newcomers; which include riding the elevator and being immersed in the River of Forgetfulness. These stages could be seen as purification ceremonies which help the dead person get rid of his/her sorrows or sad memories. At the beginning, death is seen as a resting point, as Eurydice is reunited with her father. It also carries a promise of immortality. Later, death seems to be a confining experience that forces the spirits/ dead people to compliance and humility, as it degrades dead people of their memories.

It seems that the danger of man's happiness comes from man himself. When Eurydice lives happily with her fiancée, she finds it difficult to stay away from her father. As soon as she moves to the underworld to live with her father, she starts to feel bored and longs to return to the world of the living. As she seems undecided, she falls victim to the rules of the underworld. Apparently, she cannot live in the two worlds at the same time. This raises a vital question: How can she succeed in choosing between two different worlds without losing the other?

Eurydice is not presented as an invincible character; on the contrary, she is victimized by her naïve choices which make her a prey to the scam of the nasty interesting man. Perhaps, this ending or the sacrifice of the hero is employed as a punishment for the heroine's indecision, which sheds light on the weaknesses and conflicting sides/ desires of humans. Here, the playwright uses the myth to demonstrate the weakness rather than the invincibility of the hero in modern myths.

As Eurydice is weaned away from her father, her archetype/ role model, she looks for a substitute in Orpheus's love as a part of a healing process; however, he is preoccupied by his passion for poetry that trespasses her love for her. As a result, she feels alienated and finds solace in the remembrance of her father. Later, she prefers to

stay in the underworld, because she dreads to lose her identity in a patriarchal marriage.

Generally, the hero could succeed or fail in his mission in traditional myths. In the case of Eurydice, she is defeated by external forces that surpass her human nature as a mortal who is restricted by her own limitations. Sometimes, the only plausible solution for humans is to surrender to fate and to accept their weaknesses instead of losing themselves in a fruitless quest for defeating destiny. Eurydice's heroic defeat gives birth to a contemporary heroine who is considered an extension of traditional hero myths. In this case, the hero is a woman in order to shed light on ignored experiences of women in literature. Therefore, the myth is used as a source of strength in order to idealize female personal experience.

Ruhl uses a non-linear plot that reaches different climatic moments **which positions Ruhl's play within postmodern drama genre.** Michael Feingold maintains that "she changes her story's ground rules every few minutes, with a tiresomely whimsical fecklessness" (n. pag.). As Ruhl uses the drama to project her feelings of sadness and melancholy after her father's death, it is expected to find the play full of emotional moments that come at the expense of the plot. John Lahr suggests, "for Ruhl—expression is an end in itself" (n. pag.). **She transforms the Greek myth that represents a male-centered culture into a modern myth that underpins female-based experience.**

In fact, Ruhl's forces hurdles in front of the characters to prevent their reunion. Rooney argues, "But in a performance steeped in artificiality, she creates hurdles that impede empathetic involvement" (n. pag.). Nevertheless, the characters' spontaneous and emotional reactions stimulates sympathy. Ruhl believes that the characters' actions should not be predictable. They "need not be restricted to objective action" (Jackson, 8). This unpredictable spontaneity motivates and incurs sympathy. Isherwood maintains, "I fought off tears for half the play, not always successfully" (n. pag.).

The play does not present a direct message or enforce a certain interpretation of the modern hero myth. It reflects the inner struggle of

human psyche when they are faced with unbearable feelings of loss and reminiscence. Ruhl maintains, "I don't want to smooth out the emotions to the point where you could interpret them rationally, so that they have a clear reference point to the past" (Lahr, "Surreal", n. pag.). She uses the myth to mix the mythical with mundane life experiences in order to convey a truthful experience. The result is a modern hero myth that portrays contemporary feelings of loss and psychological anguish.

Ruhl makes changes to the play regarding who should bear the responsibility for the failure of Orpheus's quest. Orpheus is blamed in older versions of the story, while in Ruhl's version Eurydice is to be blamed for their separation. The playwright delivers personal experiences through mythic stories. Thus, she renders personal experiences as a new but familiar myth. Through repetition of old stories, she gives the audience a comforting experience. According to Jackson, "Ruhl observes how audiences seek comfort in the familiar through plots, songs, church services, movies, or television shows. She attributes this comfort to the predictability it offers us as human participants in a largely unpredictable world" (33-34).

Ruhl's *Eurydice* differs from the aforementioned versions of the Greek myth by Virgil or Ovid (which source). In Ruhl's story, the protagonist is caught between romantic love and familial love. This inner conflict is the driving force of the plot of the play. The audience sympathizes with Eurydice's hesitation and undecided mind. Because of a spontaneous decision, she loses autonomy and is forced to abide by the rules of the underworld and marry the lord of the underworld. In a move to relief herself from the horrible consequences of her actions, she dips herself in the River of Forgetfulness. Her fatal mistake is that she wants to live between two mismatched worlds. It could be assumed that the protagonist's journey is inspired by the playwright conflict to hold on to her father's memory or let go and live. The play reveals that this could be an excruciating conflict anyone could go through. Therefore, Ruhl's modern myth is considered "intensely autobiographical" (Pagan, n. pag.). It could be seen as a surrealist way to look back at death. Ruhl uses the play to

create "an opportunity to explore conversations that she might have with her own father if she were to meet him in the underworld" (Jackson 31). The play underpins the necessity of accepting and surrendering to inescapable events such as death, separation and loss.

In Ruhl's *Eurydice*, Orpheus's character does not receive much change, as he appears as a lover and musician. He meets his downfall because of his love for his wife. He uses his passion for music to evoke his wife's love. When she died, he used his music to retrieve her from the underworld. His despair is quite apparent in the letters he writes to his wife. Unable to live with his memories, he commits suicide and gives up his life altogether. Ironically, he is punished by oblivion as well.

The playwright chooses to make the world of the living look like the world of the dead. She does not specify a certain time for the events. However, she uses the lord of the underworld to hold dominance in both worlds. Additionally, he appears as a spoiled child in the underworld who stubbornly and successfully forces others to succumb to his orders. Therefore, he manages to force Eurydice to marry him, as he says, "I've made my choice" (408).

The three stones, who are presented as the chorus, are enforcers of law in the underworld. They give advice to Eurydice follow her husband. Meanwhile, they sympathize with the characters' sad fate and are also angry when they trespass the rules. When Eurydice returns to the underworld, Big Stone exclaims, "You should be with your husband" (403). They "hold much in common with the choruses of frogs or birds in Aristophanes' *The Frogs* and *The Birds*. As the stones function as "nasty children at a birthday party" they also offer a great deal of comedic relief throughout the play" (Jackson 68).

The play is written in verse rather than prose. Language is used to refer to connection and disconnection at the same time. For example, repetition is used as a technique to "create connectedness between the lovers, having one person repeating the other person's words and phrases, or even actions" (Vito 2). Language is also used to convey disconnection as Eurydice fails to communicate with her father when she dies after being immersed in the River of Forgetfulness. When she dies a second death, language loses its ability to convey meanings or

emotions. Additionally, pauses are also used to "evoke unease or uncertainty" (Vito 3). This is quite clear when Eurydice descends to the underworld and forgets everything about her life among the living, even her husband's name. Pauses are used to convey character's doubt and confusion toward puzzling changes that take place after their death.

The play ends by the characters' choice to live in oblivion, because reminiscence is painful. As the events of the play continue to unfold, the audience is faced with tragic endings. Firstly, the father dips himself in the river. Then, Eurydice is going to marry the lord of the underworld. Finally, Orpheus arrives in the underworld and is rained by the waters of forgetfulness. It is not stated whether it is an accident, natural death, or he just commits suicide after failing to retrieve his wife from the underworld. At this moment, the three characters are caught in forgetfulness. Although they share the same world, but it cannot be concluded that they are united. They are with each other in the same place but their memory, which symbolizes their whole being, is gone. Lahr argues, "Identity is memory; when memory disappears, the self dissolves and love with it" (n. pag.). The ending of the play arouses various opinions about Ruhl's drama. David Rooney believes that the play is "clouded by mannered writing that's less mature, veering frequently into poetic preciousness—starting with the lower-case title" (n. pag.). Meanwhile, Isherwood suggests that "it may just be the most moving exploration of the theme of loss that the American theater has produced since the events of Sept. 11, 2001, although Ms. Ruhl began work on the play before that terrible day" (n. pag.).

The pace of action of the play rises and falls in a series of unpredictable events. There are different climatic moments which underpin modern hero myth struggle in life. For example, Eurydice's decision to go with the nasty interesting man ends with death. Additionally, there is that moment when she violates the condition enforced by the lord of the underworld so she can stay with her father. During these moments, the playwright goes back and forth between the world of the living and the underworld to give lightness to the scenes. Ruhl uses a comic touch which is represented by the three stones. She believes that lightness is taking a step back "to be able to

laugh at horrible things even as you're experiencing them" (qtd. in Lahr, "Surreal," n. pag.).

Ruhl's *Eurydice* is a speculation about life and death. It reflects mythic reality that changes always to the worst. This instability is reflected on the underworld, where the characters meet an inconclusive future/ ending, which incite the audience to compare between the characters' present and past situation. The play compares between romantic love in the real world and parental love that trespasses the rules of life and death. Thus, the play put into focus the devotion and sanctity of parental love. Eurydice's refusal to go back to the real world, in the original myth, is here justified by Eurydice's decision to stay with her father. However, The play ends with a hanging question: Does Eurydice's decision to return to the underworld signifies a real or a meaningless physical reunion with her father?

Conclusion:

Eurydice presents a modern hero myth to idealize father/daughter relationship. It focuses on female experiences and parental love instead of the traditional love story. It reveals that accepting and surrendering to inescapable events such as death, separation and loss is a part of the process of healing. It highlights hero myth personal experiences in contemporary times. Thus, the playwright makes a modern hero myth that gives the audience a soothing effect. Ruhl manages to wave familiar myths with mundane life circumstances.

Ruhl's play acknowledges the inevitability of death and the unavoidability of loss. It perceives death as a beginning of another life. It depicts the heroine's hesitation between two conflicting roles, whether to be a wife or a daughter. It tells the story of Eurydice who is torn between romantic love and paternal. *As the myth is used to reflect* and reproduce the experiences of the human psyche throughout history, Ruhl uses it to describe the heroine's inner conflict. The myth is thus used to reconnect to the human mind and to reflect upon inner world struggle in modern times. She reinvents a hero myth that portrays the heroine's agonizing psychological pain when losing a loved one.

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