

Black Orpheus, Myth and Ritual: A Morphological Reading*

HARDY FREDRICKSMEYER

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Black Orpheus (*Orfeu Negro*; M. Camus, 1959) drew on classical myth and ritual to win the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and the Oscar for Best Foreign Film. Yet no one has analyzed the film with reference to its classical background. This paper argues that the film closely follows two narrative patterns (Separation-Liminality-Incorporation and the Heroic Journey) employed by the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and related stories. This morphological approach reveals the cinematic Euridice as a "female adolescent initiand" whose loss of virginity and death are foreshadowed from her first scene. The film's setting of Carnival promotes Euridice's adolescent initiation as it duplicates ancient Greek Dionysian festivals. Orfeu emerges as not only a shamanistic hero, but also an associate of Apollo and, antithetically, an avatar of Dionysus and substitute sacrifice for the god. Finally, the film not only replicates but also reinvents the ancient, rural and European myth of Orpheus and Eurydice by resituating it in a modern city of the Africanized "New World."

A Stephanie, la compagna della mia vita

Black Orpheus (*Orfeu Negro*; M. Camus, 1959) explodes on the screen as a sensual *tour de force* of color, music and dance, all framed by the rhapsodic beauty of Rio de Janeiro during Carnival. Critical and popular admiration for these audio-visual qualities help to explain why *Black Orpheus* won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, and the Oscar for Best Foreign Film, and why it remains one of the most successful films of all time with a Latin-Amer-

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ican focus.¹ Critical response to the film's narrative qualities, on the other hand, has been more divided, and tends to fall into two opposite camps. In one camp are those critics who praise *Black Orpheus* for drawing on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice that has moved audiences since antiquity. "The film's appeal, no doubt, derives from the timeless charm of the old legend itself."² In the other, much larger camp are those who criticize the film for failing to draw on the myth. "This samba drama is supposed to be based on the classic legend of Orpheus and Eurydice. Some parallels may be detected, but to us this seems an innocent conceit, unless you want to claim all sad love stories come from the same original source." "There is no point in calling your characters Orpheus, Eurydice, and Hermes ... [without conveying] something of the implications," and so on.³

Despite these disparate assessments of the film's relation to the myth, both groups share the same omission: neither reaches its conclusion by analyzing the film with close reference to the myth. Consequently, neither group identifies much beyond the film's *explicit* correspondences with the myth. These correspondences include the names Orfeu, Euridice, Hermes and Cerberus that are used in the film and come directly from the myth.⁴ The name

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1. See Perrone 171 on the popular success of *Black Orpheus*.
 2. "New Wave" 115. See also Beckley. Segal 163 seems to fit into this camp when he speaks of the "many ... correlations" between the film and the myth. At the same time and without elaborating, he calls these correlations "artificial." I do not share Segal's view but will not take time in this essay to respond to it. Here, I am concerned primarily with evaluating the extent and variety of associations between the film and the myth. Other than Segal and Henry (see below), criticism on the film's narrative qualities was published shortly after its release, in popular periodicals or film journals, and by non-classicists. More recent work has focused on the film's socio-political content for which *Black Orpheus* has drawn considerable fire. Especially Brazilian critics argue that the film's Franco-Italian production and its foundation in classical Greek myth create a Eurocentric vision of Afro-Brazilian exoticism that conceals Brazil's real-life racial and political inequities. See for example Veloso, and Silveira. See Perrone for an overview of the socio-political critique up to 1998. Though most of this critique can be linked to the broader trend of post-colonial criticism fueled by E. Said starting with his book *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), *Black Orpheus* was faulted on socio-political grounds even before its release. While writing the screenplay, M. Camus and J. Viot collaborated with the Brazilian author and composer V. de Moraes, and drew extensively on his play *Orfeu da Conceição* (1953, staged in 1956) that made the myth Afro-Brazilian for the first time. Yet Moraes refused to sign co-authorship of the script and rejected *Black Orpheus* partly on the basis that the film's audio-visual splendor conceals the dire conditions of Rio's black population that his play underscored, and "encloses [them] in an idealized happiness which can do no damage to the social order" (Nagib 26). See also Stam 174.
 3. Crowther, Hatch 59, respectively. See also Goddard, Kaufmann, Alpert, Fragoso, Shipman.
 4. See *PW* or Roscher for the extensive list of ancient authors and *LIMC* for the iconography that collectively relate the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, though not always in the same way. The literary version of this myth that I use in this paper and summarize below in the body of the paper follows the accounts of Vergil (G. 4.453-527) and Ovid (*Met.* 10.1-85, 11.1-84), because it is probably these on which *Black Orpheus* mostly relied. Moraes, in the introduction to the second



Figure 1: Roman marble relief (Louvre Ma 854) with title of film superimposed from *Black Orpheus*

“Orfeu” in the film’s title is superimposed in the opening shot over a Roman marble relief (Louvre Ma 854) that depicts the moment when Eurydice is surrendered to Hermes for her final trip to the Underworld (Figure 1). The clerk who issues Orfeu and Mira a marriage license says that Orfeu’s fiancée must be named Euridice, since they love each other as everyone knows from the ancient story. Orfeu reminds Euridice of the myth, as evidence that she must

edition (1960) of his play *Orfeu da Conceição* on which *Black Orpheus* draws, quotes M. Meunier’s mythology handbook, *La Légende Dorada de los Dioses y de los Heroes* (= *La Légende dorée des Dieux et des Héros* [Paris: Albin Michel, 1945]), to provide the audience with the play’s mythological background. Meunier’s handbook, in turn, reproduces the accounts of Vergil and Ovid. Of these two ancient authors, Vergil (G. 4.453-64) alone includes a predator of Eurydice, and Ovid (*Met.* 11.50-5) alone relates that the head of Orpheus, after being severed from his body by female followers of Dionysus, floated down the River Hebrus and across the sea to Lesbos, where it received protection. Hermes plays a role only in iconographic versions of the myth. In the few other places in this paper where I address scenes in the film that I believe draw on other aspects of the myth included in only one of these two authors, or in neither, I indicate the author. Medieval and Renaissance verse and lore also employed the myth, and in the Baroque period Orpheus became the patron saint of opera (see Perrone esp. 172 note 2). More recent iterations of the myth are too numerous to list here (for these up to 1989, see Segal esp. 200 note 1). But, among the more notable in addition to *Orfeu da Conceição* and *Black Orpheus*, R. M. Rilke wrote 55 “Sonnette an Orpheus” (1922-23), J. Cocteau treated the myth entirely metaphorically in *Orphée* (1949), C. Diegues set the myth again in Rio but now highlighted the poverty and violence of *favelas* in *Orfeu* (1999), and the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble presented J. Vieira’s new version of *Black Orpheus* (2003).

love him.⁵ These observations are only a start. I will identify other correspondences between the film and the myth, some of which are (it seems to me) fairly obvious and others more obscure.

After briefly summarizing the plots of the myth and the film, I discuss parallels between the musicality of the mythic Orpheus and that of the cinematic Orfeu. I then try to identify further correspondences between the myth and film by explicating their underlying form or morphology, as follows. I isolate two narrative patterns: Separation-Liminality-Incorporation, referred to from here on as SLI,⁶ and the Heroic Journey.⁷ After describing each pattern, I analyze its employment in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and other related myths, and then show how the film closely follows this employment.⁸ While there is something unavoidably Procrustean about fitting particular stories to given, stock narrative patterns, this morphological approach can nevertheless help to clarify the film's relation to ancient Greek myth and ritual, and also contribute meaningfully to our understanding of the film itself. Euridice is revealed as a "female adolescent initiand" whose loss of virginity and death at the hands of a predator are foreshadowed from her first scene. The film's setting of Carnival is shown to promote Euridice's adolescent initiation as it duplicates ancient Greek Dionysian festivals. Orfeu emerges as not only

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5. These metatheatrical allusions by the clerk and Orfeu to the classical myth are atypical of modern film in which the characters are usually ignorant of their associations with antiquity. Despite Orfeu's awareness of these associations, he seems entirely shocked by the loss of Euridice. Perhaps we should infer that it is particularly with respect to his musical prowess that Orfeu sees himself as a modern iteration of his ancient predecessor.
 6. Lincoln 234 and others identify what I call the SLI pattern by the terms "separation, liminality, reintegration." Some scholars use other, similar terms. Dowden (1992) 104, for example, speaks of "separation, transition, incorporation." I draw from both sets of terms. Recognition of this pattern began with studies in structural anthropology and especially the A-B-A pattern that van Gennep argued structures "rites of passage" marking basic life changes (birth, puberty, marriage, and death). In his formulation, this "schema" consists of "separation, liminality (*en marge*), and reintegration." In the last of these three stages, the individual is reincorporated into society with a newly acquired status or identity (as an adult rather than an adolescent, for example). Death is unique among the life changes marked by rites of passage in that, while there is incorporation (according to many belief systems), it is into the spirit world. See also Turner. On rites of passage specifically in the Greek world, see among others Brelich, Calame 1977 and 1999, Sourvinou-Inwood, and Dowden 1989. On the relation between Greek rites of passage, the SLI pattern, and myth, see Dowden (1992) esp. Chapter 7 and (1999) esp. 224-27. On the general agreement among classicists, especially since Burkert 1983 (1972 in German), that myth and ritual are intimately connected, see Von Hendy 266-70.
 7. On the Heroic Journey, see Sowa esp. 212-26 and the literature cited there. This pattern overlaps with the well-known "Hero Pattern" identified by Raglan (178-79).
 8. I use the narrative patterns of SLI and the Heroic Journey for interpretive convenience to show how closely *Black Orpheus* follows the underlying narrative structures of the myth. I am not implying that the creators of the film recognized these patterns and consciously followed or manipulated them, though I would suggest that they were sensitive enough to respond to them imaginatively.

a shamanistic hero but also an associate of Apollo and, antithetically, an avatar of Dionysus and substitute sacrifice for the god.⁹

In the penultimate section of this paper I suggest why many critics have overlooked or even denied the film's close relation to the myth. While the film's employment of stock narrative patterns makes *Black Orpheus* by definition formulaic, at the same time the film achieves originality in ways that have perhaps obscured for critics the relation between the two stories. As one author writes, "a successful formulaic work is unique when, in addition to the pleasure inherent in the conventional structure, it brings a new element into the formula, or embodies the personal vision of the creator."¹⁰ In accord with this statement, *Black Orpheus* effects originality and reinvents the ancient, rural and European myth of Orpheus and Eurydice by resituating it in a modern city of the Africanized "New World." Further, the film transforms certain elements of the myth's SLI pattern while still maintaining its essential structure. Ultimately, then, this paper suggests a dualistic relation of similarity and difference between the film and the myth that hopefully reconciles the previous, monolithic interpretations of *Black Orpheus* as either a modern version of the myth or a complete departure.

In attempting to explicate the myth and the film's underlying narrative patterns, I take as my theoretical point of departure the descriptive and linearly sequential analysis associated with Russian formalism and such works as V. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*. "In this type [of analysis], the structure or formal organization of a ... text is described following the chronological order of the linear sequence of elements in the text"¹¹ Yet, I also go beyond strict formalism, which deals with the structure of text alone and lacks concern for context, when I take account of Afro-Brazilian culture as depicted in the film and how it combines with the particular visions of the film's creators to reshape the film's formulaic narrative patterns into something unique. With this combination of approaches I hope to appeal to different audiences. One includes my fellow classicists, especially those interested in using *Black Orpheus* to teach classical myth and ritual. The other audience includes cinephiles without specialized knowledge of myth and ritual per se.¹²

I. Summaries of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and the film *Black Orpheus*

On the day of her wedding to Orpheus, a musician and disciple of Apollo, Eurydice goes to a meadow with other nymphs, and dies from a snakebite while fleeing the advances of a rustic demi-god named Aristaeus (see above,

9. Whether of Orfeu or Orpheus, I use the term "shamanistic" in this paper loosely to mean "a person with extraordinary influence in the spirit world" rather than to identify either figure literally as a shaman. Bremmer 36 observes that Orpheus, unlike numerous other ancient Greek miracle workers, is never included in ancient catalogs of shamans. For that matter, Bremmer esp. Chapter 3 persuasively rejects altogether the existence of shamans in ancient Greece, *pace* Meuli, Dodds, and others.

10. Cawelti 12.

11. A. Dundes in his Introduction to Propp (xi).

12. Rather than narrow the readership of this article, I include some information well-known to classicists.

note 4, on the particular version of the myth that I summarize here). Refusing to accept her death, Orpheus descends into the Underworld through a cave or grotto at Taenarum (on the southern tip of the Peloponnese), crosses the River Styx, and encounters Cerberus and various spirits of the dead. Finally, he sings so movingly that Hades grants Eurydice's release. But he breaks the god's injunction not to look back at her before they reach the Upperworld, and loses her forever. After returning to the Upperworld, he rejects all women and eventually is killed and dismembered by resentful female followers of Dionysus called Maenads (meaning "Crazed Ones," and etymologically cognate with the Greek term *mania*, from which "maniac" derives). Finally, his severed head floats down the River Hebrus and across the sea to Lesbos, where it is protected, and his spirit rejoins Eurydice in the Underworld.

In the film, Euridice goes to Rio de Janeiro during Carnaval in the late 1950s to escape a menacing stranger in her village. She falls in love and sleeps with a musician named Orfeu, but dies from electrocution while fleeing the stranger who has followed her to the city. Orfeu contacts her spirit by singing in a Macumba ceremony (that combines indigenous Brazilian, Yoruba, and Christian elements), but he looks behind himself for the source of her voice and loses her forever. He is killed the next morning by his jilted fiancée Mira, as he carries the body of Euridice to his hut. Further details of the film and myth emerge shortly.

II. Musical echoes of Orpheus in Orfeu

Orpheus in classical myth plays the lyre, and is recognized as the foremost musician in the world. His music is so powerful that its influence extends beyond the human realm to enchant wild animals, stop birds in flight, and uproot rocks and trees. Through his music he possesses even the shamanistic skill to triumph over death: he sings so enchantingly to Hades and Persephone that they grant Eurydice's conditional release from the Underworld. Finally, classical myth both explains and underscores the musical prowess of Orpheus by making him a disciple of Apollo, the god of music.

Orfeu in the film either literally or figuratively echoes all these qualities of his mythical predecessor. He plays the guitar, a modern relative of the lyre; he is a premier musician; his musical influence extends to animals and the inanimate world; and he too can triumph over death. Orfeu's premier status as a musician and singer is marked when the *escola de samba* (samba school) that he leads wins first prize in Carnaval's highly competitive, climactic *desfile* (public parade), and a policeman describes his singing (and dancing) as "*formidável*" (awesome). His ability to enchant animals is shown when a hodgepodge of creatures (a cat, dog, goat, rabbit, rooster, and pigeons) that live in his hut appears to listen attentively as Orfeu sings. Twice Orfeu demonstrates his influence over inanimate objects. After finishing a song, he points to the inscription on his guitar, "Orfeu is my master," and tells his young friend and protégé Zeca, that, as long as he (Orfeu) lives, the guitar can be mastered by him alone. Thus the film marks him as having control over his guitar like that of a human master over his slave. In another scene, Orfeu says that he can make the sun rise with his song, and on the following morning he appears to do so. In response to Orfeu's feat, Zeca says, "It's true [he really can make the sun rise]!" Last, Orfeu's voice wins him at least temporary victory over death

when he sings (if only briefly and in a state of shock) to gain conditional contact with Euridice's spirit.

The associations with Apollo that Orfeu shares with Orpheus are marked throughout the film. Numerous traditions at least since Euripides (fr. 781 Kannicht), including the mythology handbook on which *Black Orpheus* relied (see above, note 4), have identified Apollo with the sun god Helios. Thus, when the film associates Orfeu with the sun, it connects him also with Apollo. Orfeu dresses as the sun god for the parade, dances and sings before a huge symbol of the sun, and remains dressed as the sun for the rest of the film, including in the scenes that most closely relate him to his mythical predecessor, such as during his figurative descent into the Underworld and aborted recovery of Euridice. The film's opening sequence foreshadows this association with Apollo as well as Orfeu's death, when it shows a kite that looks like the sun fall precipitously to earth down the very cliff where Orfeu later meets his death.¹³

III. The narrative pattern of SLI, and its employment in myth and the film

The SLI pattern structures transitional rituals, including adolescent initiation into adulthood (see above, note 6). This pattern correspondingly structures also the narratives of myths that symbolize adolescent initiation. While different iterations of this pattern may contain numerous distinctive features, the overall pattern is essentially invariable. The following schema contains features typically associated with the pattern in female adolescent initiation myths.

- (1) Separation
 - (a) A nubile maiden
 - (b) Leaves her village.
- (2) Liminality
 - (a) She goes to a meadow, woods, beach, lake, or stream.
 - (b) Gathers flowers, and/or
 - (c) Dances, often with other maidens or nymphs.
 - (d) She is chased, abducted, raped, and/or killed by a sexual predator, sometimes despite the efforts of a non-sexual protector figure. Alternatively, she is sometimes transformed into a new form, such as a tree or bird, before or after the predator catches her.
- (3) Incorporation

Sometimes she rejoins society as a mother and/or wife.

Classical female figures other than Eurydice whose myths follow some version of the above schema include Persephone, Europa, Io, Iphigenia, and Daphne.¹⁴ Before we discuss Eurydice, certain aspects of this schema require further explanation. Adolescent initiation rites (as opposed to myths) often

13. Henry 346 argues that the "principal motif in the film is that of Orfeu as a sun god, and the film itself [is] ... a solar myth."

14. On the pattern for male as well as female figures, see Padilla Parts One and Two, and Lada-Richards esp. Chapter 2.

include a symbolic death of the initiand, invariably followed (in the case of a female) by her (re)incorporation into society as a prospective wife and mother. While some myths have the initiand make a similar return, other myths have the girl literally die or be metamorphosed in (2) (d), and never return to society as a wife and/or mother.¹⁵ These last two versions of the SLI pattern are nevertheless homologous to the first. Symbolic death in ritual, and death or metamorphosis in myth all mark the loss of the initiand's pre-sexual status. Myths in which the maiden experiences death or metamorphosis thereby conflate the SLI pattern that marks adolescent initiation (separation, liminality/transition from adolescence to adulthood, (re)incorporation into society as a wife and/or mother) with the structurally homologous pattern that marks death (separation, liminality/transition from life to death, incorporation into the spirit world).

One of the female adolescent myths relevant to our discussion (as will become clear later) especially exploits the structural homology between the two types of SLI patterns associated with adolescent initiation and death. In her well-known story, Persephone is abducted into the Underworld by Hades and made his Queen. This abduction of Persephone simultaneously signifies rape and death, and her being made Queen of the Underworld simultaneously signifies (re)incorporation into society (even if in the Underworld) as a wife, and incorporation into the spirit world.¹⁶ Moreover, the association in Persephone's myth between sex and death is reinforced by the role of her mother, the fertility goddess Demeter. When Persephone is abducted into the Underworld by Hades, Demeter makes a parallel withdrawal from the world as a regenerative force and thereby induces global sterility. Another aspect of the Persephone myth we should note is that it combines two versions of the SLI pattern marking adolescent initiation that are as a rule mutually exclusive. Persephone dies in step (2) (d), when abducted by Hades into the Underworld and made his Queen, and nevertheless experiences step (3), (re)incorporation into society (in the Upperworld), when she returns each year from the Underworld to initiate spring.

The liminal phase of the SLI pattern, in which the girl is raped, dies or is metamorphosed, occurs in places outside the normalcy of the domestic and civic environment.¹⁷ Consequently, the protective norms of society no longer obtain, and the girl is more vulnerable to sexual predation. Such locations are often rural, in which case they also help topographically to signify this transitional phase of her life as different from her childhood, early adolescence and adulthood, all of which are associated with the village. The nymphs who

15. Metamorphosis is a multiform of death, since the initiand ceases to exist in human form. One difference between straightforward death and metamorphosis in myths is that the latter introduces an additional, etiological element. For example, the metamorphosis of Daphne into a laurel tree as she flees Apollo marks her adolescent initiation and in addition explains why laurel leaves were sacred to the god. See Harris and Platzner 957-58.

16. On the SLI pattern in the widely discussed myth of Persephone, see Jeanmaire, Lincoln, and Foley 96.

17. The term "liminal" derives from the Latin *limen* meaning "threshold," and in the context of female adolescent initiation myths signifies that stage of a girl's life in which she crosses over the threshold between adolescence and adulthood.

sometimes accompany her, when the liminal phase of her story is rurally situated, are likewise nubile, divine girls who live outside human civilization and often signify imminent or newly experienced sexuality.

While the liminal zones of myth and ritual are often rural, liminality is also a state of being that can characterize an entire city and its denizens. This was the case at Athens and other Greek cities, especially during Dionysiac festivals at year's end (from which Brazilian Carnival in part derives, as we will see below). The liminal elements of these festivals included irrationality, public inebriation and revelry, suspension of class distinctions, spirits roaming the streets, and eroticism. For example, the oldest of the festivals of Dionysus at Athens, the Anthesteria (Blossoming), probably included a ritual called the *katagôgia* (the "bringing home" of Dionysus), in which an image of the god was brought into the city, possibly in a ship-chariot.¹⁸ Dionysus, the god of the irrational, thereby symbolically took control of Athens like a conquering hero and suspended its societal norms.¹⁹ The second day of the festival or *Choes* (Wine Jugs) included a public drinking contest, in which individuals drank up to two and half liters of wine, and then went "rambling [through the streets] in drunken revelry" (Aristoph. *Ran.* 217). The preceding events, like the rest of the festival, included slaves and laborers (and even children). Also on the second day, celebrants roamed the streets in grotesque masks and disguised as spirits of the dead. Erotic elements of the Anthesteria included a "sacred marriage," in which the wife of the city's religious head, the *archon basileus*, was given to Dionysus.²⁰ While the question of how this "marriage" was consummated remains unanswered, one distinct possibility is that the "bride" had sex with the *archon basileus* impersonating the god.

The Anthesteria not only converted Athens into a liminal place, but contained elements that associated themselves explicitly with adolescent initiation. The aforementioned "sacred marriage" during the Anthesteria reenacted a myth according to which a maiden named Erigone had once been given in marriage to Dionysus. Another ritual performed during the Anthesteria, in which girls dangled on swings, harmlessly reenacted another version of the Erigone myth. After finding the murdered body of her father Ikarios, the first vintner, Erigone hanged herself. Both versions of the Erigone myth reenacted during the Anthesteria, the sacred marriage and the death of the maiden, signify adolescent initiation.

This explicit association in the Anthesteria between Dionysiac festival and adolescent initiation exploits the fact that the two are structurally homologous rites of passage. Both involve a period of cultural inversion to negotiate between two states of being: winter and spring on the one hand, and adoles-

18. On the Anthesteria, see esp. Pickard-Cambridge 1-25, Burkert (1985) 237-42 (= [1977] 358-64) and (1983) 213-43 (= [1972] 236-69), Parke esp. Chapter 8, and Kerényi esp. 185-93.

19. On the theme of Dionysus the conqueror, see Otto 77-8 (= [1933] 73-4) and 197-98 (= [1933] 178-9). On Dionysus as the god of the irrational and the "wild spirit ... who mocks all laws and institutions," see Otto 105 (= [1933] 96) and Chapter 7 *passim*.

20. This sacred marriage was in part "a fertility ritual, which symbolized the union of the god of fruitfulness [of the vine] with the community represented by the wife of its religious head" (Pickard-Cambridge 12).

cence and adulthood on the other.²¹ Apparently aware of this homology between Dionysian festival and adolescent initiation, in the *Bacchae* Euripides has Dionysus introduce the celebration of his cult to Thebes in part by imposing on the city liminal qualities that result in the death of the virginal initiand, Pentheus.

Let us now turn to the myth of Eurydice. With some unusual modifications, it follows all the stages of the SLI schema enumerated above.²² In accord with the pattern, Eurydice is (1) (a) a maiden, who (b) leaves her village, and (2) (a) goes to a meadow. However, she goes through these stages as a newly-wed on the day of her wedding. Most versions of the myth seem to suggest that she has not yet consummated her marriage, but the fact that she is a bride nevertheless makes her atypical of female adolescent initiands in myth. Next,



Figure 2: Eurydice from *Black Orpheus*

following steps (2) (b) and (c), while in the meadow Eurydice collects flowers and dances with maidens. In fulfillment of (2) (d) she is then killed by a sexual predator. On one level he kills her only indirectly, since she dies when bitten by a snake as she flees his advances. On another level, the snake can be understood as a multiform of the predator, since snakes have been associated with the male organ since antiquity.²³ The myth of Eurydice consequently parallels that of Persephone by exploiting the homology between two types of the SLI pattern, one that marks the transition from adolescence to adulthood and the other that marks the transition from life to death. In stage (3) Eurydice experiences an unusual, aborted (re)incorporation. She almost returns to society

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21. See Cook (1995) 143 on the homology between adolescent initiation and another year-end festival at Athens called the Arrephoria.
 22. Classical scholars have recognized that the story of Eurydice follows a narrative pattern, but (as far as I can tell) offered little in the way of concrete analysis. In his commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for example, Anderson 476 says only: "the maiden (or here, young wife) in the meadow ... constitutes a stock theme, often the prelude to a contrasting scene of rape or violence."
 23. See Harrison Chapter 8 and esp. 266-68 on the snake as a phallic symbol and *daimon* of male fertility in Greek antiquity. See also Cook (1914-40) 1.394 on the Thracian-Phrygian Zeus who mated with Kore in the form of a snake.

but ultimately must remain in the Underworld. Orpheus sings to Hades to gain her release, but breaks the condition that he not look back at her until they reach the Upperworld, and she returns forever to the land of the dead. Again like the myth of Persephone, that of Eurydice thereby combines (albeit incompletely) two versions of the SLI pattern marking adolescent initiation that are as a rule mutually exclusive: Eurydice dies in step (2) (d) and nevertheless almost experiences step (3), (re)incorporation into society as a wife.

The iconography of the Eurydice myth (as seen in the marble relief with which the film opens) involves another unusual element, namely the explicit inclusion of Hermes. The roles of Hermes in classical myth include that of



Figure 3: Mira from *Black Orpheus*

the Psychopompos or guide who escorts (-pomp) the souls (psych-) of the dead to Hades. For a Greek audience perhaps all stories that concerned death at some level implied the involvement of Hermes. But the story of Eurydice is the only female adolescent initiation myth to make that involvement explicit, when Hermes escorts her on her final journey to the Underworld.

Black Orpheus, as I now hope to show, also adopts the SLI pattern, and includes the myth's particular modifications. This close relation of the film to the myth in turn reveals the cinematic Euridice as a modern, female adolescent initiand whose loss of virginity and death at the hands of a predator are repeatedly foreshadowed starting from her first scene on the ferry. In fulfillment of stage (1) (a) and (b) of the pattern, the film implies that Euridice is a maiden, and explicitly says that she has left her village. Her virginity is implied in numerous ways. She is shy, modestly dressed in a high-cut, white dress (in her first scene), wears her hair in pigtails, and no make-up or jewelry (Figure 2), all of which virginal characteristics are highlighted by their sharp contrast with the erotic characteristics of Orfeu's fiancée, the sex kitten, Mira (Figure 3). A blind vendor and others repeatedly call Euridice "child" and remark on her innocence. The vendor also places around her neck a paper garland made to look like freshly cut flowers, often a symbol of virginity (as well as its imminent loss). As for (1) (b), leaving her village, Euridice tells her cousin Serafina that she came from her village directly to Rio to escape a menacing stranger.

The second or liminal phase of Euridice's story begins when she sets foot in Rio during Carnival. We saw earlier that the worship of Dionysus con-

verted ancient Greek cities such as Athens into liminal places associated on more than one level with adolescent initiation. During Carnival, Rio and other modern cities experience a similar conversion, in part because Carnival derives from ancient Dionysiac festivals at year's end, and retains many of their elements.²⁴ On its European rather than West African side, Carnival descends from the Anthesteria and other Greek festivals honoring Dionysus, such as the Rural and City Dionysia. The Romans adopted such festivals as their Saturnalia and Bacchanalia in honor of their version of Dionysus, Bacchus (a name used sometimes also by the Greeks). The Roman and other pagan celebrations subsequently informed Roman Catholic festivities, including that of a raucous festival called the *entrudo* which the Portuguese exported to Brazil in the early eighteenth century. Finally, the *entrudo* combined shortly after its introduction to Brazil with Afro-Brazilian festivities of West African origin, and this combination continues to evolve.

It is so obvious as to require little explanation that modern Carnival shares liminal qualities with the Dionysian festivals from which it descends, including celebration of the irrational, public inebriation and revelry, unification of normally disparate socio-economic groups, associations with the dead, and eroticism.²⁵ Further, Carnival is also a rite of passage that negotiates through its liminality between winter and spring. Consequently, it shares with ancient Dionysiac festival the quality of being structurally homologous to adolescent initiation (i.e., structured according to van Gennep's A-B-A pattern, on which see above, note 6). Perhaps in appreciation of some of the relation between ancient celebrations of the god and its own modern celebration, Louisiana calls the Sunday before Fat Tuesday "Bacchus Sunday," and one of the most important troupes and floats is called "Bacchus." Further, Mardi Gras and Carnival feature a "King" who replicates one of the roles of Dionysus during his ancient festivals. The King ("Rex" in New Orleans, and "Momo" in Rio) serves as a "Lord of Misrule" who symbolically and literally presides over these festivals' suspension of societal norms, much as the Greek god symbolically took control of Athens and oversaw its cultural inversion when an

24. On the association of Carnival with European antiquity, see McGowan and Pesanha 37, Schindler 10, Eneida 14-15, Tassin and Stall Chapter 1. I would imagine that the association of Carnival with Dionysiac festival suggested itself spontaneously to the creators of *Black Orpheus*. At any rate, Moraes explicitly related the two in an interview, when he described the black Carioca (resident of Rio) during Carnival as "a Greek ... marked by the Dionysian feeling of life" (47). I have been unable to locate any scholarly work on Carnival's roots in African religion, though they are undoubtedly strong. According to the most commonly known theory, the term Carnival derives from the Latin phrase *carne[m] levare*, meaning "to remove meat" (at the start of Lent), which became popularized as *carne vale*, meaning "farewell to meat." On the etymology of the term Carnival, and Carnival's history since its introduction to Brazil, see Botting 164 and Chapter 6 *passim*. The same celebration goes under various names in different places, including *Fasching* in Germany, and Mardi Gras (Shrove Tuesday) in Nice and New Orleans.

25. See Bakhtin's definition of the carnivalesque and his analysis of Renaissance Carnival (such as the *entrudo*) as a temporary liberation from and suspension of norms and prohibitions (esp. 10). The Brazilians even have a special expression for the fulfillment of an illicit sexual fantasy during Carnival: *namorado de Carnaval*, or Carnival affair. See Botting 171.

image of him was carried into the city. Simultaneously, the King's role replicates that of the *archon basileus* whose job it was literally to oversee the ritual dissolution of normalcy during Dionysiac festivals in Athens.

By duplicating ancient Greek Dionysian festivals, Rio in *Black Orpheus* is converted into a liminal place that promotes Euridice's adolescent initiation and, by doing so, parallels the meadow in the myth of Eurydice. Nor does the film delay in representing Rio as a threat to Euridice's virginity and life. The moment she sets foot onto the pier she becomes trapped by throngs of street vendors, and ghoulishly-masked male revelers and dancers (Figure 4) whose frenetic movements, reinforced by disorienting camera shots, seem to carry a subtly erotic menace that briefly unnerves Euridice. And when Euridice es-



Figure 4: Masked dancer from *Black Orpheus*

caped from the pier, she literally gets swept up onto a streetcar driven by Orfeu called *Babylonia*, a name that brings to mind the physical and moral chaos of the biblical city (as well as identifies the streetcar with one of Rio's seven great hills known as *Babylon*).

The three ways so far discussed in which the opening passage of the film follows the SLI pattern of the classical myth are that Euridice (1) (a) is characterized as virginal (though not as a newlywed, like Eurydice), (1) (b) has left her village, and (2) (a) enters a liminal zone. Next, Euridice (2) (b) wears a garland of paper flowers in several scenes after she sets foot off the ferry. In fulfillment of (2) (c), Euridice dances in the company of other girls (though not exclusively) when she rehearses for and participates in the climactic parade of *Carnaval*. Of the girls among whom Euridice dances, her cousin and loving companion in Rio, *Serafina*, most closely parallels the companions with whom the mythic Eurydice dances in the meadow. At the end of both dance scenes Euridice (2) (d) flees a threatening stranger, and at the end of the second dance scene she dies, though not directly at the hands of her pursuer. Euridice is electrocuted while fleeing the stranger just as Eurydice treads on a snake while fleeing *Aristaeus*. That Orfeu is responsible for electrocuting Euridice adds an irony to the film absent from the myth, and deepens the pathos of the protag-

onist who not only loses the object of his love but also contributes to her death (as well as to her failed recovery).

It should be noted that the threat posed by the stranger in *Black Orpheus* is less overtly sexual than that posed by Aristaeus in the myth. Euridice tells Serafina early in the film that the stranger is not interested in sleeping with her. Whether she is right about the stranger's intentions or merely naïve remains uncertain since she dies before he catches her in their last scene together. But even if she is right, the threat of physical violence is nevertheless very real, and the stranger's treatment of Euridice carries a sexual undercurrent. Dressed as death (in a skeleton costume), the stranger says in the first sequence in which he chases Euridice that she will belong to him later. In the next chase scene, when Euridice stumbles into the stranger's arms, he sensually strokes her hair. These scenes in combination characterize the stranger as a sexual threat more like the King of the Underworld, Hades, in the myth of Persephone than Aristaeus in the Eurydice myth. Hades abducts Persephone from a meadow and *then* makes her his wife in death rather than rape her immediately in the meadow. Like Persephone, Euridice will be Death's bride. At the same time, even if *Black Orpheus* defers some of the predator's sexuality to his implied marriage to Euridice in the afterlife, we should note that it is Orfeu to whom Euridice loses her virginity while in the liminal zone. This represents a significant departure from the myth that I will address when discussing the film's originality.

The film's employment of the final stage of the SLI pattern closely follows that of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Like her mythical predecessor, Euridice experiences an aborted (3) (re)incorporation. During a Macumba ceremony, her spirit is allowed to speak with Orfeu through an old woman as long as he does not try to identify the source of her voice. But he cannot help himself and her spirit returns for good to the world of the dead. (The film's penultimate scene involves a second, pseudo-(re)incorporation of Euridice, when Orfeu carries her lifeless body home in his arms, like a groom about to carry his bride over the threshold.)

Black Orpheus follows the myth also by explicitly including a figure named Hermes, who mediates between the Upperworld and the Underworld, and plays a psychopompic role. In the film, the status of Hermes as a mediator figure is marked by the fact that he manages the tram depot called Terminus. On the film's literal level this name identifies the last station in the line, like the Termini station in Rome. On the figurative level the name Terminus, like the adjective "terminal," signifies "the end of life" or that moment when we cross over from the world of the living into that of the dead.²⁶ Hermes in the film plays a slightly different psychopompic role than does his namesake in the classical myth. He does not escort Euridice's soul to the Underworld, but he does facilitate her death and partial recovery by Orfeu. When Euridice encounters Hermes as she flees the stranger for the last time, Hermes directs her to hide in the Terminus depot, where it is dark, there is no one to protect her,

26. The name of the tram depot also recalls the Roman god called Terminus whose function paralleled one of the functions of Hermes. The Romans marked boundaries with stones sacred to Terminus just as did the Greeks with representations of Hermes called *hermai*.

and she dies. (While the liminal zone in *Black Orpheus* has been transferred from a rural to an urban landscape, as discussed earlier, the location of the Terminus depot and of Euridice's death on Rio's outskirts approximates more literally the rural setting of Eurydice's death in the myth.) Later, when Orfeu cannot find Euridice, Hermes provides him with the official documents Orfeu needs to retrieve Euridice's body from the morgue.

IV. The narrative pattern of the Heroic Journey, and its employment in the myth and film

In the narrative pattern of the Heroic Journey, the hero:

- (1) Loses someone or something.
- (2) Journeys in search of the person or thing lost.
- (3) Meets two helpers.
 - (a) The first of these is usually a young, female figure, and directs the hero to the second helper.
 - (b) The second helper is usually an old, wise, male figure who provides information to facilitate the hero's journey.
- (4) Visits many places, sometimes including the Land of the Dead. In this phase of the Heroic Journey, often described by the Greek term *katabasis* (descent), the hero:
 - (a) Descends,
 - (b) At night,
 - (c) Through a cave, grotto, or other opening in the earth's surface,
 - (d) Past physical tokens of demarcation, and/or
 - (e) Across a boundary,
 - (f) Into a dark and dank Underworld,
 - (g) Where he encounters monsters such as Cerberus, and the King and sometimes Queen of the Underworld.
- (5) Finds the object of his pursuit, or finds that it is unobtainable.
- (6) Returns home, but only at the cost of the death of a substitute or substitutes, who are either the hero's companion(s) on the journey, or the object of his pursuit.
- (7) Finds devastation at home caused by his absence.²⁷

27. On the Heroic Journey as a whole, see above, note 7. I use a modified version of Sowa's schema (212-16). On the *katabasis* in particular, see also Holtsmark esp. 25-6, and Crane 92-108. The term *katabasis* (descent) signifies the imagined orientation of the Land of the Dead or Underworld relative to the Land of the Living or Upperworld.

Classical figures other than Orpheus and Demeter, whose myths follow some version or part of the Heroic Journey, include Aeneas, Apollo, Cadmus, Herakles, Menelaus, Nestor, Odysseus, Telemachus, and Theseus.²⁸

The myth of Orpheus follows the stages of the Heroic Journey pattern enumerated above, with two modifications. The first is that the myth omits the two helpers of stages (3) (a) and (b), presumably because Orpheus knows that Eurydice is dead and therefore where to find her soul. The second modification is that the myth of Orpheus transfers the devastation found in stage (7) from the place or persons left behind by the hero to the hero himself. After losing Eurydice forever Orpheus returns to the Upperworld and rejects all women (becoming by some classical traditions [e.g. Ovid *Met.* 10.84-5] the first homosexual). Eventually he is murdered by resentful Maenads (or, in some versions of the myth, simply Thracian women) after they spot him from a hilltop and attack him with rocks and other weapons.

The *katabasis* and death of Orpheus linked him in antiquity with the god Dionysus. Diodorus Siculus says that Orpheus “acted in a way resembling Dionysus” by duplicating the god’s *katabasis* (4.25.4). As Dionysus made a trip to Hades to retrieve his mother (Semele, in some traditions), so Orpheus made a *katabasis* to retrieve Eurydice.²⁹ Orpheus was linked with Dionysus also because his death duplicated certain aspects of the god’s death. As recounted by Callimachus (fr. 643 Pfeiffer) and others, Zeus raped Persephone, sired Dionysus, and made him ruler of the world. Driven by jealousy, Hera sent the Titans to kill, dismember and devour the child. According to Vergil (*G.* 4.522), Ovid (*Met.* 11.50) and others, after being beaten and hacked to death, Orpheus was similarly dismembered by the Maenads.

The classical period linked Orpheus with Dionysus in additional ways. Orpheus was considered not only a poet and musician but also a prophet who promoted the worship of numerous gods, including Dionysus.³⁰ As both a prophet of Dionysus and one who died a similar death by dismemberment, Orpheus can be understood as an avatar of the god and substitute sacrifice for him. Finally, Orpheus was considered the founder of mystery-rites and purification rituals collectively referred to as Orphism that used one version of events following the death of Dionysus to explain its central tenet concerning the dual nature of man.³¹ To punish the Titans for killing and devouring Dionysus, in the myth recounted above, Zeus struck them with lightning. From their ashes arose man, who inherited from the Titans both their sinful-

28. See Raglan Chapter 16 and elsewhere on how the myths of these figures follow some version or part of the Heroic Journey in what Raglan calls the Hero Pattern.

29. See Segal 157-58.

30. See Burkert (1983) 89 note 29 (= [1972] 104 note 29), and 181-82 (= [1972] 203-04) on “Dionysiac-Orphic” initiates, and Harris and Platzner 270-71.

31. Whether there was a *real* Orpheus, his relation to Orphism, and the precise nature of Orphism all remain highly uncertain due to the paucity and inconsistency of evidence. See Guthrie, Burkert (1985) 296-97 (= [1977] 440-42), and Bremmer esp. Chapter 2.

ness and an immortal soul, since they had incorporated into themselves the divine being and immortal soul of Dionysus.³²

Orpheus was associated with Dionysus, and we have seen that he was connected also with Apollo, as his musical disciple. Additionally, Orpheus is supposed to have served as a priest and promoted the worship of Apollo, as he did with Dionysus and other gods. Aeschylus's lost *Bassaridae* (frgs. 23-25 Radt) even has Orpheus come to associate himself exclusively with Apollo, and thereby explains why the female worshippers of Dionysus in particular (and not simply any other, jealous women) killed him. While the ancient sources concerning Orpheus are inconsistent (see note 31), they reveal a duality that cannot be ignored. In one way or another Orpheus is linked with both Apollo and Dionysus, the one god associated by the Greeks with sobriety and rationalism, and the other with intoxication and ecstasy (a polarity fundamental to western thought especially since F. Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*).³³ While music was central to the worship of both gods, moreover, the Greeks felt that the measured tones of the lyre, cithara, and other instruments of Apollo contrasted with the emotionally evocative sounds of the aulos (similar to an oboe or bassoon) that accompanied tragedy and dithyrambs sung in honor of Dionysus.³⁴

Apollo and Dionysus represented mostly opposite qualities to the Greeks, and the relation of Orpheus to both was therefore largely dualistic. Yet, Orpheus was also a mediator figure through his music. It secured him passage between the Upperworld and the Underworld, and perhaps also mediated between Apollo and Dionysus in the *Bacchae* of Euripides. At verses 556-64 the Maenads ask Dionysus, "Where ... do you lead with your thyrsos the bands of revelers? Perhaps in the deep-wooded lairs of Olympus, where Orpheus once playing the lyre drew together trees by his songs, drew together the beasts of the fields" (trans. Buckley). These verses allow for different interpretations, including that of Segal, who argues that "Orphic [i.e., Apollonian] song is here incorporated into Dionysiac ecstasy on the mountainside."³⁵

In *Black Orpheus*, the story of Orfeu closely follows the myth's employment of the Heroic Journey pattern with the exception that it reintroduces stages (3) (a) and (b). It reintroduces these stages presumably because Orfeu initially refuses to accept Euridice's death and consequently does not know where to find her (i.e., in the morgue). Otherwise, *Black Orpheus* closely adheres to the myth's employment of the Heroic Journey pattern and the associations with Dionysus that this adherence implies. The cinematic Orfeu consequently emerges not only as a modern, shamanistic hero but also as an

32. On the transmission of this myth through the Orphic mysteries, see Burkert (1983) 224-26 (= [1972] 248-50). For an alternative view see the recent argument of Edmonds that the human inheritance of guilt from the Titans' crime and divine spark from Dionysus are modern constructs.

33. Dodds 68-9 and Baeumer esp. Chapter 5.2 have shown that the now common opposition of the Apollonian and the Dionysian is not ancient and, though popularized by Nietzsche in the modern era, not original to him.

34. On the dispute in antiquity between proponents of the lyre and the aulos, see West 33, 34, and note 109.

35. Segal 10.

avatar of Dionysus and substitute sacrifice for the god. This association in turn means that Orfeu, like Orpheus, relates simultaneously to antithetical gods, since (as noted earlier) the film links Orfeu also with Apollo.

Let us turn, then, to the first stage of the pattern. Orfeu (1) loses Euridice, and (2) journeys in search of her. He (3) meets two helpers, a policeman and a janitor. (3) (a) The first of these is young (though not female) and directs him to the second. (3) (b) The second helper is an older male figure and wise (as indicated by his philosophical comments to Orfeu about the nature of lost souls, and his knowledge of the Macumba ceremony), who facilitates Orfeu's quest by escorting him to the film's figurative Underworld.

We have already observed that the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice omits steps (3) (a) and (b) of the Heroic Journey. The creators of the film must have drawn (consciously or not) on some other myth for this part of their story. While we can only speculate about their source, the roles played by the policeman and the janitor recall two famous episodes in the *Odyssey*. In one, Menelaus is directed by the goddess Eidothea to the mantic god Proteus, who provides Menelaus with information necessary for his journey home after the Trojan War. In the other episode, the goddess Circe directs Odysseus to the edge of Hades and the prophet Tiresias, who provides Odysseus with information essential to his journey and ultimate survival at home. In addition, Tiresias enables Odysseus to communicate with deceased relatives and friends, including his dear, departed mother Antikleia. This scene is a *nekuomanteion* rather than a *katabasis*. Through an oracle of the dead (*nekuomantis*) or necromancer, and without entering Hades proper, Odysseus communicates with a deceased loved one. Yet the *Nekuia* (Odysseus's visit to the Underworld in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*) takes on the appearance of a *katabasis*, when Odysseus describes the inner recesses of Hades. The *Nekuia* thereby underscores how naturally one type of scene involving the dead can be used to represent another. As Crane writes, "The combination of *nekuomanteion* and *katabasis* makes sense, because a tour of Hades in some sense complements an invocation of the dead."³⁶

By directing Orfeu to an oracular figure, the policeman in *Black Orpheus* replicates the roles of the goddesses Eidothea and Circe in the *Odyssey*. The role of the janitor in the film replicates those of the seers Proteus and especially Tiresias. The janitor provides information necessary to Orfeu's journey and also enables him to contact a deceased loved one, in part by instructing him in the Macumba ceremony once they have arrived in the Underworld. Further, Orfeu and the janitor remain on the edge of the film's figurative Hades. They never enter that part of the room demarcated by a wooden banister in which the Macumba priest (representing the King of the Dead who resides in the inner recesses of Hades) conducts his ceremony. Consequently, the scene in which Orfeu contacts Euridice represents a *nekuomanteion* more than a *katabasis*.³⁷ Yet, as in the *Odyssey*, the two types of scenes are easily conflated, and

36. Crane 88. See Crane Chapter 4 for a full discussion of the differences between the two types of scenes. As Crane 93 writes, placing this ritual of the *nekuomanteion* near Hades is unnecessary, but dramatic.

37. In depicting Orfeu's contact with Euridice in this way, the film iterates a version of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice found only at Pausanias 9.30.6. After learn-

Orfeu's journey to the Underworld up to the point when he contacts Euridice is characterized largely as a *katabasis*.

Let us resume, then, with Orfeu and his descent into the Underworld. After he (4) has visited numerous places, from a brothel to a hospital to the Bureau of Missing Persons, Orfeu begins his descent with the janitor to a figurative Hades. He (4) (a) descends, (4) (b) at night, and down a spiral staircase with a red glow at the bottom (Figure 5), as if he were (4) (c) entering a cave or other opening in the earth that leads all the way down to the Underworld.



Figure 5: Staircase scene from *Black Orpheus*

This journey next leads him past three candles burning on the street and a gated wall that serve respectively as (4) (d) tokens of physical demarcation and (4) (e) a boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead. While the church basement that Orfeu finally enters is brightly lit (presumably to make the details of the scene visible), the rest of his journey has been (4) (f) into a dark (if not dank) Underworld. When entering the church basement that represents the Underworld, Orfeu (4) (g) encounters a monster of the Underworld, that is a guard dog named Cerberus, then persons possessed by spirits of the dead, and finally the Macumba priest. Orfeu (5) finds Euridice, and wins conditional contact with her spirit during the Macumba ceremony, but ultimately discovers that she is unobtainable, and (6) returns home alone leaving her behind in the Underworld. (Specifically, as in the Orpheus myth, the inability of Orfeu to restrain his desires interrupts Euridice's return and leaves her forever unobtainable.) As for the Macumba ceremony, Orfeu's participation in it represents an additional link between him and Orpheus. Macumba shares at least three points of contact with Orphism that easily could have suggested themselves to the creators of *Black Orpheus*. Both are mystery religions whose core beliefs and practices are revealed only to initiates, both facilitate communication with the dead, and both do so through music.

ing of his wife's death, Orpheus contacted her spirit through an oracle of the dead at Aornus in Thesprotis (across from Corfu), but lost her when he turned around.

The film's penultimate scene follows both the typical version of stage (7), in which the hero finds devastation at home, and also the modification of this stage seen in the myth of Orpheus, in which devastation is transferred onto the hero. As Orfeu approaches the top of the hill on which he lives, he finds his hut consumed by a fire that Mira and other previous lovers have ignited in a frenzied rage (Figure 6). Then, from above him on the hill, Mira strikes him with a rock that sends him plunging to his death. This death of Orfeu closely



Figure 6: Mira and others from *Black Orpheus*

duplicates that of Orpheus in classical myth at the hands of the female followers of Dionysus, the Maenads. They (along with all other women) had been jilted by Orpheus, spot him from the top of a hill, and kill him with weapons that include rocks. As with Orpheus, the fact that Orfeu makes a *katabasis* (or, strictly speaking, *nekuomanteion* characterized as a *katabasis*) links him with Dionysus. Further, as Orpheus promoted the worship of Dionysus as his priest, Orfeu promotes the worship of Dionysus as the director of the winning troupe and foremost performer in the modern Dionysiac festival of Carnival. Finally, like Orpheus, Orfeu shares with Dionysus the manner of his death (by concussion and mutilation, if not actual dismemberment, as he tumbles down the cliff). Consequently, Orfeu too can be understood as an avatar of Dionysus and substitute sacrifice for the god. At the same time, we have seen that Orfeu follows Orpheus also in having numerous ties to the god Apollo. Orfeu therefore shares with his mythic predecessor a dualistic relation to the antithetical gods Apollo and Dionysus. Finally, as was the case with Orpheus and his music, Orfeu by singing not only gains passage between the Upperworld and Underworld, but also mediates between the two gods. In his celebration of Carnival, Orfeu employs the gentle and measured (Apollonian) strains of bossa nova, and also the intoxicating (Dionysian) strains of samba that inspire mass ecstasy on the streets of Rio.

V. The Originality of *Black Orpheus*

Black Orpheus combines the approaches of two types of film based on classical myth that are located on opposite ends of a continuum: one type of film that closely approximates an ancient myth and the other that bears no overt resemblance to the mythic background that nevertheless informs it. The former type of film often sticks closely to both the narrative of a particular myth and its setting (time and place). Cacoyannis's film *Iphigenia* (1977) closely follows the narrative and setting of the myth of Iphigenia and her sacrifice as found in such works as the *Cypria* and Euripides's play *Iphigenia in Aulis*. The originality of such films (in the sense of distinction from their mythic background) can be relatively subtle and, as in the case of *Iphigenia*, often derives especially from the director's use of the camera to visually complement or reinforce the narrative that s/he has closely adopted. For example, according to the *Cypria* Artemis insists that Agamemnon pay for one impious act, the killing of a stag sacred to the goddess, with another impious act, the sacrifice of his own daughter, Iphigenia. Cacoyannis reinforces this association of the girl and stag by having the audience see through the eyes of each during the brief and terrifying moments in which they attempt to flee their killers.³⁸

The opposite type of film, whose approach *Black Orpheus* also shares, does not closely adhere to the narrative or setting of a particular myth. Instead it draws on one or another story pattern common to many ancient myths, and resituates that story pattern in a radically new setting. *Halloween* (J. Carpenter, 1978), *Scream* (W. Craven, 1996), and countless other horror films draw on the SLI pattern, while they resituate it in a suburban landscape, recreate the girl as a "liminal adolescent babysitter ... located at the ambiguous borders between culture and chaos, childhood and adulthood, girlhood and womanhood," and have the girl threatened or murdered by a psychotic sexual predator in the absence of adults.³⁹ *The Deer Hunter* (M. Cimino, 1978), *Apocalypse Now* (F. Coppola, 1979), and *Platoon* (O. Stone, 1986) all involve katabatic journeys set in Vietnam during the 1960s. This new setting transforms the ancient hero's trip to the Underworld into the American soldier's foray into enemy territory. In some cases, the soldier enters this territory / the Underworld through a particularly narrow and dark patch of jungle rather than through a cave, and so on.⁴⁰

Black Orpheus combines both approaches. On the one hand, the film largely follows the plot (as well as names) of a particular myth. On the other hand, it resituates that myth in a radically different culture from that of the myth, and also transforms certain elements of one of the myth's narrative patterns while adhering to its essential structure (more closely, in fact, than does J. Cocteau's 1949 film *Orphée*, which likewise combines both approaches). Already with its opening shot the film simultaneously associates itself with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and begins to resituate this ancient, essentially

38. See McDonald esp. 99, and Cacoyannis.

39. Forman-Brunell 254.

40. See Holtsmark esp. 25-7 and 42-8. Obviously, J. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1903), upon which *Apocalypse Now* was based, employs a similarly resituated katabatic journey.

rural, and European story in a modern, urban center of the Africanized “New World.” This opening shot (as noted earlier) explicitly associates the film with the myth by superimposing the name “Orfeu” over an ancient marble relief that depicts Orpheus surrendering Eurydice to Hermes for her final trip to the Underworld. At the same time, linguistic, racial, and geographical information compressed into the title *Orfeu Negro* marks the film’s setting as very different from that of the myth. The title is Portuguese, and the term “negro” identifies Orfeu as black. Both these facts remind the audience (presumably entering the theater knowing something about *Orfeu Negro*) that the film is Brazilian, since this country has the largest population of Portuguese-speaking blacks in the world. In terms of race, *Orfeu Negro* distinguishes itself not only from the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice but also from all previous retellings of classical myths by presenting the first all-black cast.

In its first few moments, then, the film associates itself with the myth and simultaneously locates itself in a radically new setting. This relocation is then reinforced by the film’s first motion sequence. The screen suddenly explodes with Afro-Brazilians in modern dress, dancing and otherwise preparing for Carnival in the hills above Rio, identifiable by the background of Guanabara Bay, Sugar Loaf Mountain, and Corcovado Mountain with its massive Christ the Redeemer Statue (an international symbol of Rio since its completion in 1931). These departures from the myth’s setting are aurally complemented and reinforced from the start. Musical forms identified (at least since the film) throughout the world with Brazil, samba and bossa nova, accompany the film’s action from its first to last scene. Also, throughout the film we of course hear Portuguese spoken. Other changes to the myth follow from the film’s relocation from a rural to an urban setting, some of which we touched on earlier. For example, Orfeu journeys through an urban rather than rural landscape, and Euridice experiences liminality in an urban rather than rural setting. Other differences between the myth and the film that arise from the differences between their settings are too numerous to mention, though the Brazilian martial art capoeira used by Death and Orfeu counts among the most striking.

Black Orpheus further distances itself from its mythical background and effects originality by altering paradigmatic elements of the SLI pattern, as employed by the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, while maintaining its essential structure. The film largely suppresses the sexuality that the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and other female adolescent initiation myths typically associated with a predatory stranger in the liminal zone. I have already argued that the film defers some of this sexuality to the predator’s implied marriage to Euridice in the afterlife (analogous to the marriage of Hades to Persephone in the Underworld). To a greater extent, however, the film transposes this sexuality onto the usually *non-sexual* protector figure sometimes seen in stage (2) (d) of the SLI pattern (though not in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice). In short, *Black Orpheus* has Orfeu play a *sexual* protector figure not found in the original myth or other similar myths. (Protector figures in Greek myth, such as Diktys and Perseus, often marry the girl after saving her, but never before.) This modification introduces a new duality to the film conditioned by western romanticism. On the one hand, the dyad of sex and death that often marks the loss of adolescence in classical myths remains in the film. Euridice’s death

follows closely on her loss of virginity. On the other hand, she loses her virginity in a consensual act of love with Orfeu, so that her initiation into adulthood is beautiful as well as frightening and lethal. This contrasts with the myth's inclusion of attempted rape immediately before Eurydice dies and by the same person indirectly responsible for her death. Her marriage to Orpheus notwithstanding, Eurydice's initiation into adulthood is more unequivocally negative than that of Euridice.

It is worth noting that the film's dualistic characterization of Euridice's transition to adulthood, as both positive and negative, is reinforced by structural parallels. Rio during Carnaval, the setting for Euridice's transition to adulthood, is depicted as alternately positive and negative, sometimes joyous and liberating and at other times threatening and constrictive. Also, the film shows both positive and negative paradigms into which Euridice's sexual adulthood might place her. On the one hand, we see the seductively dressed and dangerous Mira and other previous girlfriends of Orpheus who parallel the Maenads in myth. On the other hand, we also see the modestly dressed and solicitous Serafina who parallels the girls that accompany the mythic Eurydice in the meadow (even if Serafina does have an earthy relationship with her boyfriend Chico).

In addition to making Euridice's transition to adulthood both positive and negative, the film's alteration of paradigmatic elements of the SLI pattern also introduces a new psychological realism. In the myth the love between Orpheus and Eurydice is only implied and only by the fact of their marriage, and he is entirely absent from the central, liminal stage of Eurydice's story. The intensity of his love for her must be inferred as he begins his Heroic Journey. The film, in contrast, makes the intensity of Orfeu's love explicit *before* he begins his journey. From a modern perspective, the film thereby makes his journey and the desperate lengths to which he goes to recover Euridice more psychologically convincing than does the myth (for which, like myth in general, psychological realism is of less concern).

VI. Conclusion: *Vita brevis, ars longa*

This paper hopes to have reconciled previous, monolithic interpretations of *Black Orpheus* as either a modern version of the myth or a complete departure. On the one hand, the film largely echoes the classical myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in its depiction of the musicality of Orfeu, and employment of the narrative patterns of SLI and the Heroic Journey. If I am right, contrary to critics for whom the film bears little relation to the myth, the film is conceived largely in terms of its correspondences with the myth. At the same time, *Black Orpheus* resituates the narrative patterns of the ancient myth in a modern, major city of the Africanized "New World." Moreover, the film transforms elements of the SLI pattern to make Euridice's transition to adulthood beautiful as well as traumatic, and the Heroic Journey of Orfeu more psychologically convincing than that of Orpheus in the myth.

The myth and the film include epilogs characterized by another relation of similarity and difference. Despite appearing entirely different, the epilogues of both stories convey very similar messages about music. Some classical traditions of the myth say that Orpheus, to reward the Lesbians for protecting his severed head after it washed ashore on their island, endowed them with ex-

traordinary musical skill (Phanocles 1.15-22, Powell [Stob. *Flor.* 4.20.47]). This epilog to the myth underscores the transcendence of music. The music of Orpheus survives him, and will find new expression in generations of Lesbian poets (like Sappho) whose lyric songs inspired the rest of the Hellenic world.

In the epilog of *Black Orpheus*, as the ashes of Orfeu's hut still smolder in the background, Zeca plays Orfeu's guitar and seems to make the sun rise. "You are the new Orfeu," a little girl exclaims to Zeca. She then leads him and Benadetto in a joyous dance along the cliff's sun-drenched edge. The camera then fades out and frames the entire film by showing in the final seconds what it did in the first, namely the ancient marble relief that depicts the moment when Orpheus surrenders Eurydice to Hermes. *Black Orpheus* thereby iterates the myth's final message that music transcends mortality. Like the music of his mythical predecessor, Orfeu's bossa nova and samba survive him. Moreover, this music can inspire a joyous celebration of life, as it does for the children in the epilog. But it also can inspire sadness, as it recounts the tragic love between him and Euridice recalled by the marble relief. In both ways, the film *Black Orpheus* endures and enriches our existence as it reinvents the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.

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