

Hadestown: Reconsidering revolution and
class dynamics in the US through
Broadway, the Great Depression and
Greek mythology



Universidad de Oviedo

Autor/a: María Amorín Triana
Tutor/a: Laura Martínez García
Grado en Estudios Ingleses
2021/2022
Mayo 2022

Table of contents

1.	Introduction.....	2
2.	History and plot of <i>Hadestown</i>	6
3.	The characters of <i>Hadestown</i>	13
3.1.	Orpheus and Eurydice	13
3.2.	Hades and Persephone	20
3.3.	Hermes, the Fates and the Company.	28
4.	Casting and race in <i>Hadestown</i>	34
5.	Conclusion	38
6.	Bibliography.....	39

1. Introduction

In the year that Trump is elected president, the song-writer Anaïs Mitchell finally brings her project to East Fourth Street in New York: *Hadestown*, a musical in which one of the main songs is titled “Why We Build the Wall”. Written by Mitchell and directed by Rachel Chavkin, this reimagining of Greek mythology, uses imagery from 1930s America to comment on capitalism. This essay analyses the relevance of this musical both in its cultural context of present-day America and as a part of Broadway. As there is no official live recording of any of the productions of this musical or filmic adaptation, my two main elements of study will be the album *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)* (2019) and the book *Working on a Song: The Lyrics of Hadestown* (2020).

The position that Broadway musicals hold as cultural elements in the collective American imagery is very peculiar. Broadway lacks the accessibility of Hollywood as well as the high consideration that opera has traditionally had. It is true that musicals have found their place between opera and theatre in terms of audience and tone, but this particular situation has relegated them to being overlooked and under-appreciated in cultural studies while being generally appreciated by Americans. The fact that characters suddenly burst into song, an elemental feature that makes musicals as appealing as they are, is possibly responsible for their predetermination to stay low-brow. As for terminology, Broadway is defined by Merriam-Webster as “the New York commercial theater and amusement world.” (2022). This refers to the physical space in Broadway Street and its crossing streets where the most reputed theatres of New York are found. The term Broadway also refers, in a more abstract sense, to the industry of musicals that are produced in those theatres. Thus, when a play or musical is performed somewhere else in New York, it is said to be off-Broadway. *Hadestown* had its Broadway debut in 2019, but it had been produced off-Broadway since 2016.

Despite its position as mainstream culture, Broadway is a place for social commentary, introspection and history making. Its position in the American imaginary has allowed musical creators to pose questions about the memory of History and collective identities in America that are easier to understand than theatre, and opera, while being just as insightful. Broadway musicals are written in the language of their audience and use catchy songs that repeat lyrics so that messages come across more clearly. Broadway writers, even in their attempts to elevate their productions, have never failed this principle: musicals require a ruthless amount of singing. Instead, they have regarded song as the one element that gives musicals power. They accept music as the one thing that separates musicals the most from verisimilitude, rejecting

the belief that, in order to be taken seriously, a production needs to be realistic. This is why musicals are worthy of analysis in cultural studies, for they defy the definition of low-brow and high-brow cultural elements and they reflect their society and comment on it just like other texts.

As for their target audience, Broadway musicals follow the path of many other genres: they were conceived for a particular social group and respond to the needs, interests and knowledge of that group. Their origins as an easier-to-follow alternative to opera for the middle-upper classes have shaped the way they tell stories and what stories they decide to tell. In origin, Broadway musicals were not especially expensive, they have rather become so with the decades, possibly because they now require more expensive productions than ever and because of the raising demand. Moreover, Broadway has almost become a tourist attraction and part of the New York experience. The gradual changes in ideology in the liberal upper-middle classes that exploded with Trump's election account for the evolution, though arguably superficial, that has been seen in Broadway in the last decade. From more diverse casts to themes that are more critical of certain American ideologies, but always contended in the interests of upper-middle class Americans. On top of that, musicals are more accessible now with more filmic adaptations being made and the existence of streaming platforms such as Spotify. Nonetheless, the people who get the full experience of watching Broadway performances live are still the ones who can afford the sometimes-steep prices.

As stated, the evolution of Broadway musicals paralleling the developments of the upper-middle classes is something that can be felt in the themes that musicals have tackled through the decades. A great overview of the thematic development of Broadway musicals can be found in Charlotte Greenspan's article "Death Comes to the Broadway Musical". To understand this evolution, we must take the historical background into account. For instance, early musicals used to have happy endings and hyper-positive messages, serving as a form of escapism, such as *The Red Mill* (1906). This heritage can still be felt in the present panorama of musicals, a great example of this is the highly popular *Mamma Mia* (1999), or adaptations of rom-coms and early 2000s American coming-of-age films: *Waitress* (2015), *Legally Blonde* (2007), *Mean Girls* (2017).

The aftermath of WWII and the holocaust as well as the feeling of unrest with the Civil Rights Movement account for a great shift in Broadway. As explored by Greenspan, musicals lose their innocence and the theme of death appears in the picture, bringing with it a new seriousness. With titles such as *The Sound of Music* (1965) and *West Side Story* (1961), with their commentaries on totalitarianism and racism. It is from that point onwards that musicals

evolve to reflect their society in ways that feel more adequate for the audience. Relying on History, past and present, to discuss social issues becomes a much more common practice in Broadway musicals, as was the case of *Evita* (1978). It is important to note that these examples give the audiences some distance, as they choose foreign or past events, which still serve as a comment on universal issues. More modern instances of this would be the English production *Six* (2017), that revisits the lives of Henry VIII's wives, and *Hamilton* (2015), considered the pinnacle of modern Broadway in its retelling of the War of Independence and the political foundation of the United States. Both of them choose events from centuries ago that are, as a matter of fact, well-known for the average audience. This proves that the past is revisited in both Broadway and West End (London) productions even nowadays to make people reflect on those periods of History and comment on how History is (re)written.

Regardless of the topic, tone or historicity of the musical, one feature most of them have in common is their connection with counterculture. Broadway musicals have traditionally been spaces for queer individuals to have a voice in the American imaginary. Queerness is a specifically present feature in some musicals after the Civil Rights movements. This materialises in musicals such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), which takes elements of Stoker's *Dracula* and Shelley's *Frankenstein* in a queer retelling. The AIDS crisis and its aftermath is represented in *Rent* (1996), among others. Queer analysis also exists for musicals that do not necessarily have an overt queer reading, such as *Wicked* (2003). In the article "‘Defying Gravity’: Queer Conventions in the Musical ‘Wicked’" by Stacy Wolf, argues that "Wicked signals that it will follow the conventions of mid-twentieth-century musical theatre, but queerly, with two women as the musical's couple." (Wolf 2008, 2)

One of the most central elements of musicals is the technique of adapting or retelling stories that the public is familiar with. This technique is essential to musicals as it is an easy branding technique for writers. Broadway musicals, even if popular, are particularly hard to sell because they are expensive and long. That is the reason why musicals resort to themes and stories that the audience knows well, like the adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* in *West Side Story* (1961). Having experimentation come from other aspects of the works is the nature of modern Broadway and just like in Shakespeare's plays, the originality of Broadway musicals is not really in the plot, but in the way these well-known stories are re-written, adapted, reinterpreted and re-told through music, scenography, song and costumes. It is, again, the embracing of its nature and the acceptance of its limitations that allows writers to push the limits of the act of retelling. *Hamilton* (2015) is the perfect example of this, the backbone of the story of this musical is well-known for the average American, but its originality comes from the use of rap

music. Another musical that portrays this is *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) which, as mentioned before, takes elements from two of the best-known Gothic novels in the English language and merges them into a somewhat parodical reinterpretation of the genre. Moreover, having the villain be unapologetically queer was, and still is, ground-breaking. Instead of fighting against the characterisation of queer people as monsters that corrupt others to their own sexual advantage, this musical embraces this prejudice in a playful tone. It is common practice among the most successful Broadway musicals to retell well-known stories and rewrite narratives in American culture.

The musical *Hadestown* (2016) is a clear result of its heritage. It is as much an innovative piece as an amalgamation of all that came before. *Hadestown* uses the technique of retelling but chooses Greek mythology, which the general American audience does not necessarily know. Furthermore, it picks a somewhat abstract setting that resembles 1930s America, taking inspiration from the Dust Bowl, New Orleans and industry, which is particularly innovative for Broadway as musicals tend to be centred around New York and it uses jazz and minimalistic music instead of the typical Broadway sound that is easily marketable. Generally speaking, *Hadestown* uses the past of America to talk about its present and vice versa.

The Dust Bowl is the period in the 1930s of strong dust storms that happened in the centre of the United States. This meteorological crisis, together with the economic depression of that decade, contributed greatly to the misery and desperation of the population of the US. The landscapes of the Dust Bowl are characterised by deserted plains covered in dust, destroyed and isolated wooden homes as well as travelling starving people. The pictures by Dorothea Lange are some of the most recognisable representations of the era (*History* 2020). *Hadestown* drives from this famous imagery to set its tone and accompany its themes.

2. History and plot of *Hadestown*

Hadestown was first performed in 2006 as a very small theatrical production in Vermont written by Anaïs Mitchell with the help of Michael Chorney and Ben t. Matchstick. In 2010, it turned into an album that was performed as a concert. After moving to New York, Mitchell met director Rachel Chavkin and playwright Ken Cerniglia, who helped turn the original work into a musical. This led to its off-Broadway debut in 2016 which was followed by the 2017 Edmonton and the 2018 London productions. In 2019, *Hadestown* finally had its Broadway debut at the Walter Kerr Theatre. As of 2022, performances of *Hadestown* in New York are still held in that theatre.

The story of *Hadestown* retells and refashions Greek mythology with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as its central story, but with the gods Persephone, Hades and Hermes as decisive for the plot too. The Fates are also present in the musical. The following will be an account of the original myths of the gods and mortals that are revisited in this musical, using the book *Classical Mythology A to Z* by Annette Giesecke as a main source. In Greek mythology, Hades was the god of the Underworld, evil in nature and feared by mortals. Persephone was the goddess of the harvest and daughter of Zeus and Demeter, goddess of agriculture. One day, while she was picking flowers, she was abducted by Hades and taken to the Underworld. In a state of depression, Demeter refused to make harvests grow. Eventually, Hades agreed to let Persephone go back, not without tricking her into staying in the Underworld for some months every year. This myth was used to explain the passing of the seasons: Persephone's time in the Underworld coincided with autumn and winter, whereas her time back with her mother brought spring and summer (Giesecke 2020: 54–55, 87–88). Orpheus was a poet as well as the son of a muse. He married the nymph Eurydice, who died after being bitten by a snake. Orpheus travelled to the Underworld to retrieve her and moved both Hades and Persephone with his music. The lords of the Underworld allowed both Orpheus and Eurydice to return to the Overworld, as long as Orpheus walked in front without looking back; but Orpheus did turn to see if Eurydice was following, which led to her being taken to the Underworld again (Giesecke 2020: 229–230). Hermes was a messenger god, responsible for the communication between gods and humans as well as a guide to the Underworld (Giesecke 2020: 62–63). Finally, the Fates were the ones who determined people's destiny, most often three women representing the cycle of life who had their discrepancies with the gods (Giesecke 2020: 49).

Hadestown retells and refashions these myths with Hermes as the narrator, Orpheus and Eurydice as the main characters, Hades as the villain, Persephone as a somewhat morally grey lead and the Fates as representatives of people's anxieties and worries. This musical chooses an ambiguous and abstract setting, Hermes sings during the first song, "Road to Hell": "Don't ask when, brother, don't ask where / It was the road to Hell, it was hard times / It was a world of gods and men" (De Shields 2019b, 0:30),¹ which could roughly describe any time in History. It is, nonetheless, highly reminiscent of 1930s America and the Dust Bowl in its scenery, sound and style. With its underlying themes of climate change and industry, the setting of this musical feels almost post-apocalyptic. Moreover, the scenery is somewhere between a circular Greek theatre and a New Orleans bar, heavily charged with industrial imagery.

Hermes introduces this world to the audience slowly throughout the musical. In the first song, he lets people know that there is a railroad through which people go to hell, thus adapting Charon's boat (Giesecke 2020: 32–33) to this American post-industrial setting. Moreover, the underworld is awfully poor because of the dreadfully long winters, intense summers and lack of autumns and springs². This is both reminiscent of the Dust Bowl and the effects that climate change is expected to have in the future. It is in this setting that Orpheus is presented as a poor young boy with a talent for song-writing and storytelling that grants him the ability to change the world.

Additionally, we are told that he is working on a song and that Hermes is helping him. He immediately falls in love with the hungry Eurydice, whose strong character and deep distrust of people have helped her survive in a world that is not safe or welcoming. Her distrust may come from the Fates, who accompany her and whisper negative things in her ear. Because of her personality, when the young Orpheus approaches her, she is automatically doubtful of his intentions, rejecting him with an ironic tone in the song "Come Home with Me". However, her curiosity as to how far Orpheus's promises of bringing spring back can go keeps her interested in engaging Orpheus in conversation. In "Wedding Song", Orpheus sings a part of the melody that he is writing to Eurydice and, upon hearing it, she is convinced of his supernatural talent.

¹ For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that whenever songs are cited, the surname of those singing them will be used in the reference. Furthermore, any reference lacking a page number has been taken from an electronic source, which has no page numeration.

² "Weather ain't the way it was before / Ain't no spring or fall anymore / It's either blazing hot or freezing cold / Any way the wind blows." (Noblezada 2019a, 0:36)

Through Hermes's teachings to Orpheus, we learn that the young boy's melody is an old song that represented Hades and Persephone as young lovers. In "Livin' It Up on Top", the goddess Persephone comes back to the overworld later than she should but with an unapologetic attitude, eager to celebrate the arrival of summer. The audience learns that the marriage of the two gods has decayed overtime with Persephone's resentment against her husband and Hades's jealousy when she is not near him. It is the toxic dynamics in this marriage that have altered the course of the seasons.

Orpheus and Eurydice's love comes to its climax in the summer, and they give themselves to the other completely in "All I've Ever Known". Their peace is disrupted by the early arrival of Hades in the Overworld in "Way Down Hadestown" (the first time the city is openly mentioned) where the jealous Hades comes pick Persephone up as she complains: "That was not six months!" (Gray 2019d, 0:14). The narrator, Hermes, uses this opportunity to give the audience more insight into what goes on under Hades's rule in the Underworld. Through Hermes,³ we learn people sell their souls to Hades to escape poverty and that the souls under his control are exploited workers in Hadestown, which is an amalgamation of industries from mining to metal manipulation.

Hades and Persephone head back to Hadestown. With their departure comes the return of darkness and cold to the Overworld, and Orpheus begins to focus more thoroughly on putting his song together, leaving Eurydice behind. She resigns herself to this neglect silently as she understands the importance of his work but feels disregarded and lonely. A vulnerable Eurydice is approached by a seductive Hades in "Hey, Little Songbird", a song in which he tries to persuade her to come to the Underworld with him, and is later scared by the haunting Fates in "When the Chips are Down". This, together with her hunger, desperation and solitude, leads to her making the decision of selling her soul to Hades which, in turn, leads to her parting for Hadestown in "Gone, I'm Gone". After Orpheus snaps out of his artistic obsession, Hermes tells him about Eurydice. The young boy decides to go after her with the directions and help of Hermes and his song as protection. The first act ends with the song "Why We Build the Wall", Hades's big number where, by asking his workers questions in a discourse-like tone, we are introduced to his brainwashing techniques⁴.

³ "Everybody hungry, everybody tired / Everybody slaves by the sweat of his brow / The wage is nothing and the work is hard / It's a graveyard in Hadestown" (De Shields 2019e, 2:41).

⁴ "Because we have and they have not / Because they want what we have got / The enemy is poverty / And the wall keeps out the enemy/ And we build the wall to keep us free" (Page 2019d, 2:08).

Act II begins with Persephone's account of what goes on in Hadestown when her husband is not looking in "Our Lady of the Underground". Meanwhile, Eurydice begins to regret her decision right after signing her contract with Hades and the Fates show her the conditions under which people live there in "Way Down Hadestown (Reprise)": they are deprived of life, nameless, constantly bent and doomed to work for eternity. Eurydice begins to forget her past life and her own name, remembering only the flowers of the overworld but unable to name her lover. Orpheus eventually gets to Hadestown and Eurydice's memories come back after seeing him. Orpheus begs Eurydice to come back with him but she knows that is not possible. Hades interferes and dismisses Orpheus reminding him that he decides who gets in and who does not: Eurydice is forced under contract to stay there, but Orpheus is not welcome. Alone and still in the Underworld, the young boy begins to sing about how unfair this system is in "If It's True", wondering why the powerful have the right to decide the way things work. His song is heard by the workers, sparking a revolution in the Underworld. Meanwhile, Persephone's heart begins to soften towards the young lovers and she tries to persuade Hades to let them go unsuccessfully.

Hades notices the revolt with Orpheus as a leader and, perhaps affected by his wife's earlier words, decides to give Orpheus the chance to sing him a song. Orpheus sings the complete version of the melody he has been working on, highlighting the similarities between him and Hades as two men who know what love feels like and who, at one point, have felt like they would do anything for their lover. Hades is moved by the song; Orpheus's power has broken his hard shell. Hades and Persephone share a moment of tenderness after being reminded of their early days as a couple. Orpheus and Eurydice prepare to leave the Underworld while a conflicted Hades ponders his options. The Fates sing to him about the consequences of this decision in "Word to the Wise".⁵

Hades finally decides to let them go, but, as was the case of the original Greek myth, he does so under the condition that they cannot walk together: Orpheus will walk out first and Eurydice will follow him. They begin their journey and, right at the end, Orpheus turns his head to see if she is behind, thus dooming them to be apart forever. A devastated Hermes reflects on the outcome of the story while expressing how the improving relationship between Persephone and Hades has begun to bring the seasons back to normal.

⁵ "If you tell 'em no, oh, you're a heartless man / And you're gonna have a martyr on your hands / If you let 'em go, oh, you're a spineless king / And you're never gonna get 'em in line again / Damned if you do / Damned if you don't / Whole damn-nation's watching you" (Blackman et al. 2019b, 0:34).

The second to last song is a reprise of the very first song of the musical (“Road to Hell (Reprise)”) where Hermes reminds us that the story is circular and that it will be sung again once it is finished.⁶ Although Hermes repeats his lines from the first song, his tone is now extremely different: while in Act I he is lively, in Act II he is heartbroken and exhausted, a god witnessing the downfall of humanity from his position of immortality. Nonetheless, Hermes ends this second to last song in a tone of hopefulness. The last song of the musical “We Raise Our Cups” works as an epilogue, an anthem of praise for Orpheus’s bravery led by Persephone and Eurydice.⁷

The circularity of the plot of *Hadestown* is the backbone of its underlying message. From the repetition of songs from the first act into the second one, to the explicit references to the restart of the story; the circular nature of Mitchell’s production is undeniable. At the end of the musical, the audience is left with conflicting feelings and with the realisation that the central element of *Hadestown* is not the love story but rather change: however devastating the separation of the two lovers and the death of Eurydice is, it shows how sacrifice and suffering are a necessary element in revolution. Without taking away from the tragedy of Eurydice’s death, Mitchell decides to highlight the state of affairs after Orpheus’s revolution. Orpheus and Eurydice’s love is the element that moves the plot and what pushes Orpheus into his heroic arc, but, the final message is what the young poet has managed to change with his quest and what he has not.

Mitchell’s stance on revolution is made clearer through the changes that she allows her world to have at the end of the musical. She steps away from hyper-positive messages by portraying how revolution requires sacrifice and how social change is most likely gradual and not radical. At the end of the musical, spring comes back, alluding to the restoration of normality, but there is no comment made on whether Hades has left his tyranny behind. After hearing Orpheus’s song, Hades is decided to let him go, but still wants to maintain his place as the ruler of Hadestown. This leaves the audience assuming that Hades has not given away his position and power, and that while he may have become a more understanding boss, he remains a boss, nonetheless.

⁶ “It’s a sad tale; it’s a tragedy / It’s a sad song / But we sing it anyway / Cos here’s the thing / To know how it ends / And still begin / To sing it again / As if it might turn out this time / I learned that from a friend of mine” (De Shields 2019c, 1:38).

⁷ “Some flowers bloom / Where the green grass grows / Our praise is not for them / But the ones who bloom in the bitter snow” (Gray and Noblezada 2019, 1:10).

Orpheus's song has helped Hades and Persephone fix their marriage, but it has not been enough to change the world completely. Mitchell's underlying message is that the powerful will often give in to a certain extent by granting small mercy to the oppressed, but always under their conditions and their comfort. In the end, Hades and Persephone still maintain their positions as king and queen of the Underworld and while they get a happy ending, Eurydice is dead and Orpheus is left alone and devastated.

It is interesting to consider the aforementioned target audience that Broadway musicals have, and how it may be relevant in the case of *Hadestown*. This is explored in “‘Let Our Freak Flags Fly’: *Shrek the Musical* and the Branding of Diversity”, which is an analysis of the relevance of *Shrek the Musical* in the context of Obama's presidency. In this article, we read: “politically progressive musicals are relatively scarce, because the genre historically has catered to upper-middle-class audiences that would prefer for politics to be left at the stage door” (Brater et al. 2010: 155). Mitchell's decision to embed her ‘radical’ social message in a genre that has this audience creates an interesting effect, which is one of the reasons why *Hadestown* stands out among other musicals. This phenomenon in relation to *Hadestown* more specifically is expressed in Nia Wilson's article “*Hadestown*: Nontraditional Casting, Race and Capitalism”:

The audience's relationship to the presentational storytelling of Hermes and company mirrors Hades's relationship to Orpheus's song, inviting the spectators to consider their own access to economic and social power. Of course, this is perhaps unintentionally ironic, given the cost of tickets to a hit Broadway musical. (2021, 192)

Hadestown leaves it for the audience to interpret its message and what they do with it. Mitchell does not give a solution to the bigger problem she portrays in her work, abstaining from giving her judgement. By putting *Hadestown* on Broadway and, consequently, addressing this message to the middle and high American classes she is posing a question to her audiences. We can safely assume that the vast majority of *Hadestown* audiences are not equivalent to Hades –CEOs of millionaire companies– nor Orpheus –starving homeless people–, they are most likely somewhere in between. Rooting for the protagonist, a rather natural position for most fictional works, turns into a moral challenge in *Hadestown*: if they are wealthy enough to be in that theatre, they cannot be on Orpheus's side without, at least, criticising the system they are benefitting from. *Hadestown* is, unlike most musicals, uncomfortable.

In the context of a highly capitalist country (the USA), this musical criticises the inner workings of the system and its basis in industrial America. Mitchell's insightful account of American society is undoubtedly ground-breaking for Broadway. She finds ways to comment

on modern-day America despite how disconnected the setting and plot of *Hadestown* are with 21st-century capitalist America. She uses songs to reflect the role that art has in social revolutions and identifies immortal gods with the wealthy American ruling class and struggling mortals willing to sell their souls standing for the working classes. All of this contributes to a conversation about modern America in more interesting ways than a highly realistic production would. This technique of displacement is what allows *Hadestown* to give audiences a fresh perspective over the country and the world they live in.

It is perhaps partly because of the displacement of the setting, time and characters that *Hadestown* is not recognised among American audiences as leftist propaganda. It is true that the American society and political climate have changed widely from the Red Scare days and criticism of the capitalist system is not as widely rejected as it used to be. Nonetheless, the American society is still highly sensitive to these topics and not used to media with these critical undertones. Proof of this is this claim made in the review “The Liberating, Radical Politics of *Hadestown*” made by Bridget Read for *Vogue*: “*Hadestown*’s politics are not merely progressive –that is, they’re not just anti-Trump. They’re something much bigger: They are radical, worker-driven, dare I say even socialist in their communality” (Read 2019). The fact that the author is highlighting this rather obvious fact about the musical shows that it is, perhaps, not that obvious for American audiences. It is very possible that *Hadestown*’s criticism to capitalism goes simply unnoticed by the majority of spectators.

3. The characters of *Hadestown*

The characters of *Hadestown* and their characterisation aligns with the themes of the musical in different ways. This section will be dedicated to an in-depth analysis of each of the characters, from the elements taken directly from the original myth to the things their characterisation conveys about modern America. This is the most productive way of analysing this musical as each of the characters embodies different themes and messages. They will be divided in three groups: the young lovers, the king and queen of the Underworld and finally Hermes and other relevant characters. Additionally, “Road to Hell”, the first song of the musical in which Hermes introduces the characters, will be the point of reference for my analysis.

3.1. Orpheus and Eurydice

On the road to hell there was a railroad line / And a poor boy working on a song / His mama was a friend of mine / And this boy was a muse’s son / On the railroad line on the road to hell / You might say the boy was “touched” / Cos he was touched by the gods themselves / Give it up for Orpheus! (De Shields 2019b, 3:41)

This is the introduction that Hermes gives to our protagonist, Orpheus, and it highlights the core features of this character: he is naturally talented and he is constantly working on a song. There are two main elements of his characterisation worthy of analysis. Firstly, his evolution throughout the different productions of the musical and his character arc. And, secondly, how *Hadestown* overcomes the challenge of making him stand out as the most talented poet in a cast full of highly trained Broadway actors.

Throughout the productions, Orpheus is probably the character that has undergone the most changes. As of now, this male lead is characterised by his constant positivity and will to change the world. Orpheus knows that there is something wrong with the world but is ignorant as to what is going on in *Hadestown*. He knows his talents and trusts in the ability of his song to change things, but he is not necessarily charismatic. Above all, his arc is about his process of discovering what has caused the downfall of the world, something he learns alongside the audience. However, this has only recently been the case, as his characterisation was different in earlier versions of the musical. In its first productions, Orpheus was a convinced rebel from the beginning, much more confident and able to speak up for himself. This version of Orpheus had knowledge of what happened under Hades’s rule in the Underworld and violently opposed it. Moreover, his personality made him come across as arrogant in his initial interactions with Eurydice.

In *Working on a Song: The Lyrics of Hadestown*, Mitchell reflects on the criticism they got because of this as late as 2017, before the Broadway debut:

The early feedback about our young lovers feeling out of focus had never gone away, and Orpheus often bore the brunt of the criticism. Was he Che Guevara, or Woody Guthrie? A revolutionary or a farm boy? Was he really as confident as he came across in early versions of the show? (2020, 19)

This prompted Mitchell's decision to change her protagonist: Orpheus shifted to a softer, more sensitive poor boy with big ambitions. This change had a very specific effect in various aspects of the musical, mainly the message behind his arc and his relationship with Eurydice. Before *Hadestown's* Broadway debut, Orpheus's character development consisted in him falling in love with Eurydice unexpectedly and deeply and finally taking action on his revolutionary beliefs and confronting Hades to save her. In current productions, however, his arc is rather about him going from his irrational hopefulness to his maturity. In the words of Anaïs Mitchell:

If Orpheus knew everything there was to know about Hades and Hadestown from the getgo, it didn't leave a lot of room for discovery. It was much more satisfying to witness his education and radicalization in real time. (2020, 87)

The moment of realisation happens in "Chant", after Hades has come to take Persephone back to the Underworld. Orpheus sings: "That is why times are so hard / It's because of the gods / The gods have forgotten the song of their love!" (Carney 2019b, 3:45). But it is not until Eurydice is dead in the Underworld and he tries to retrieve her that Orpheus confronts Hades. This gives a much more interesting message. The new Orpheus serves as a parallel to how regular people tend to ignore the problems that do not affect them directly or only partly. Orpheus suffers the effects of the change in the seasons, but he is privileged over the dead people in Hadestown. He, as well as the rest of the mortals in the Overworld, has very limited knowledge as to what goes on in Hadestown. It is only by suffering Hades's tyranny first-hand that Orpheus understands the workings of the system he is under and decides to challenge it. The ignorance that people in the Overworld have as to what goes on in Hadestown is a fundamental element of the plot and having Orpheus blend in was a necessary change.

As regards his relationship with Eurydice, the erasure of his confident and almost presumptuous way of communicating with her when they meet makes for a more interesting development of their relationship. In the initial productions of the musical, his characterisation makes the love story yet another representation of the trope of the pragmatic girl inevitably falling for the arrogant boy who ends up changing for her. His new personality gives their story a completely different tone. Orpheus is naturally kind-hearted and deeply in love with Eurydice

from the moment they first meet. It is because of her past experiences with men that Eurydice doubts Orpheus and her love for him develops as he proves he is truly good. The lines of the song “Come Home With Me” are delivered completely differently by the two versions of Orpheus: “Eurydice: Who are you? / Orpheus: The man who’s gonna marry you” (Carney and Noblezada 2019, 0:14). Moreover, the performance of “Wedding Song” by the original Orpheus and the new Orpheus is almost opposite in tone. In this song, he is trying to convince her that them marrying is a completely plausible option. The original Orpheus is just flirting with her, unintentionally foreshadowing his falling in love with her. Whereas the current Orpheus truly believes what he is saying. About the reason behind the change of tone in these songs, Mitchell says “[it] painted him as cocky, with a machismo incompatible with his ‘sensitive’ soul” (2020, 34). We now have a more relatable and likeable hero that upper-middle classes can root for.

Regarding his characterisation as a poet, Mitchell made some interesting decisions. Orpheus’s musical talent is a vital element of the plot of *Hadestown* and this posed a very specific challenge for the writers. In a production where the intersection of music with storytelling is the norm, performed by every character, making Orpheus the singer and storyteller par excellence is highly complicated. This is done by introducing his melody as the only diegetic music in the production. In musicals, the line between diegetic and extra-diegetic music is sometimes blurred. Most musicals decide to go for a standard of extra-diegetic songs, with occasional references to music being diegetic: in other words, characters in musicals are not aware of their own singing and dancing for most of the duration of the musical. However, because music is the one element that defines the format, this aspect is often undefined and transgressed.

In the case of *Hadestown*, the existence of diegetic music is quite specific as it is reserved for Orpheus’s song, almost exclusively. The song that he is writing throughout the musical consists of a melody sung in *la la las* that begins with a few seconds and eventually turns into a long melody. Orpheus’s melody is often announced as a song, though in different ways, which is what makes it diegetic. The first time the audience hears his *la la las* is after Hermes’s sentence: “A poor boy working on a song” (De Shelds 2019b, 3:46), then after Eurydice’s “You wanna take me home? [...] / Sing the song” (Noblezada 2019c, 1:46), and after Hades’s “Sing a song for me” (Page 2019b, 3:43), among other instances.

Additionally, the melody is given more notoriety in three songs: “Epic I”, “Epic II” and “Epic III”. This trio is used to highlight Orpheus’s role as a storyteller. Moreover, they are used as pauses in the narrative to reflect about the past, and more specifically, to bring flashbacks to the beginning of Persephone and Hades’s relationship. In “Epic I”, the audience learns about the origin of Orpheus’s melody with this introduction:

Hermes: Where’d you get that melody?

Orpheus: I don’t know – it came to me / As if I’d known it all along

Hermes: You have / It’s an old song / A song of love from long ago / Long time since I heard it, though [...] / Remember the tale I told you once about the gods?

Orpheus: Which ones?

Hermes: Hades and Persephone / Remember how it used to be / Their love that made the world go round? (Carney and De Shields 2019a, 0:01)

Hermes then encourages Orpheus to tell the story of Hades and Persephone’s love. Orpheus sings the myth of these two gods’ love. Orpheus’s tale finishes with him explaining that the arrangement between Persephone and Hades is the reason behind the passing of the seasons. Orpheus’s retelling of the story serves as a reminder of the myth for the audience. This is done because Mitchell was aware that “[the] audience might not have Mythology 101 at the forefront of their minds and might need a reminder about Persephone and the six-months-above, six-months-below situation that was so essential to [the] plot” (Mitchell 2020, 53). Thus, “Epic I” does three things: firstly, it introduces the origin of Orpheus’s melody; secondly, it presents Orpheus as a storyteller; and, thirdly, it prevents *Hadestown* from disregarding the lack of background knowledge of its audiences.

After Hades comes pick Persephone up, bringing winter back, Orpheus sings “Epic II”. For the original Orpheus, this was a time to show his hate for Hades. For current Orpheus, however, this song is almost sympathetic with Hades, an explanation for his actions, especially in the first half of the song. He sings: “for half of the year, with Persephone gone / His loneliness moves in him, crude and black / He thinks of his wife in the arms of the sun / And jealousy fuels him” (Carney 2019c, 0:35). Orpheus understands the pain that Hades must have gone through every year and sees that that feeling has built up as Hades’s resentment. In the second half of the song, however, Orpheus grows critical of Hades. Having learnt more about Hadestown under Hades’s rule, Orpheus reflects his disapproval. He sings: “With a million hands that are not his own / With a million hands he builds a wall / Around all the riches he digs from the earth [...] / His rivers surround him / And drown out the sound / Of the song he once heard: la la la la la la la” (Carney 2019c, 1:25). It is in this song that Orpheus goes from the innocent and selfish lover to a committed man who sees the world with more clarity.

The second song in the trio of “Epics” serves again, to paint Orpheus as a storyteller, but also to foreshadow his role as a leader. By showing his understanding nature towards the villain of the story, his qualities in telling other people’s stories are highlighted as well as his kind-hearted nature. Additionally, this is when we first see Orpheus criticise Hades, a foreshadowing of him becoming the leader of the revolution against the king of the underworld, a king that, according to this song and its reference to Orpheus’s melody, has forgotten what love is and, consequently, has become a tyrant.

“Epic III” is the song that Orpheus sings to Hades at the end of the musical, after he rebels against him. Before this song, Orpheus has sung another solo which shows his anger coming to its climax: “If it’s True” is the song of a heart-broken Orpheus expressing the unfairness of the system they are under in Hadestown. That is why, the tone of “Epic III” is quite surprising. After his moment of anger in “If it’s True”, both the audience and Hades himself expect a confrontational Orpheus. Instead, he shows his naturally sympathetic side. In “Epic III”, Orpheus paints Hades as a man who is in love, desperately trying to keep what he once had. Mitchell adds on to the tone of compassion in Orpheus’s song by alluding to the similarities between the young boy and the king of the Underworld; she draws parallels with the lyrics of the song “All I’ve Ever Known” from Act I, when Orpheus and Eurydice express their love for each other. In “All I’ve Ever Known”, Orpheus sings “All I know’s you’re someone I have always known [...] / Suddenly I’m holding the word in my arms” (Carney 2019a, 2:16); whereas in “Epic III”, he sings to Hades “It was like she was someone you’d always known / It was like you were holding the world when you held her” (Carney 2019d, 1:42). The fact that Orpheus stops seeing Hades as his enemy and is able to speak to him with empathy catches everyone off-guard and makes Orpheus even more appealing.

These three songs are vital for Orpheus’s characterisation and, consequently, for the plot of the musical. It is crucial to portray Orpheus as a storyteller and a poet efficiently because his talents are central to the plot. This is true to his character too, showing Orpheus’s growing anger as he develops as a character and balancing it with his empathy is a necessary element in order to resolve the plot effectively and to make audiences root for him. As a matter of fact, it is his good nature that allows him to change Hades’s heart.

As for the female lead, Eurydice, the second song in *Hadestown*, “Any Way the Wind Blows” serves as her introduction. Hermes sings “Eurydice was a hungry young girl / A runaway from everywhere she’d ever been / She was no stranger to the world / No stranger to the wind” (De Shields 2019a, 0:19). This song is one of the most reminiscent of the Dust Bowl imagery in the musical: the female lead is portrayed as constantly migrating, searching for

shelter or food; she is characterised as resourceful, independent, distrustful and pragmatic. She has no hope for this world changing, nor does she trust other people going through the same as her. In a way, she embodies the resourceful people who managed to survive in this dire situation. Despite her main characteristic being her pragmatism, Eurydice has an underlying hopeful soul that she rarely shows to others. This aspect of her character gives her humanity and, at the end of the day, she is just a young girl fighting to survive another day, which requires a degree of hope. For that reason, in her introductory song, she is given, as Mitchell calls it, “an ‘I Want’ moment, very Eliza Doolittle” (Mitchell 2020, 28), where she imagines a better life. By this, Mitchell most likely refers to the song “Wouldn’t It Be Lovely” from the 1964 film *My Fair Lady*. This film was an adaptation from the musical by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe (where this song is present too), which was in turn an adaptation of George Bernard Shaw’s 1913 play *Pygmalion*. In “Wouldn’t it be lovely”, the protagonist, Eliza Doolittle, sings “All I want is a room somewhere / far away from the cold night air / [...] warm face, warm hands, warm feet” (Lerner and Loewe 1956, 0:32–1:00). This clearly parallels Eurydice’s “And sometimes you think / You would do anything / Just to fill your belly full of food / Find a bed that you could fall into / Where the weather wouldn’t follow you” (Noblezada 2019a, 2:25).

Eurydice’s character development depends on her relationship with Orpheus and what he teaches her, especially in relation to her hopefulness. This, rather than coming across as diminishing her character, helps us understand why she falls in love with him. Orpheus gives Eurydice the feeling that she can be openly hopeful, that she can talk about how she has found a reason to live, which she values more than anything else. Eurydice goes through a roller-coaster of emotions and changes throughout the musical, and the high that her relationship with Orpheus gives her in the middle of Act I, accounts for the dramatism of her emotional breakdown a few songs later. His turning back to writing his song after winter comes back makes her feel left behind. Having experienced hope, having had a taste of what it is to love and be loved in return, this very hungry girl is left craving love more than she ever did. For this reason, Eurydice’s hate for the situation she is in grows even bigger than at the beginning of the musical. She cannot feel betrayed because she understands the importance of what Orpheus is doing, but her depression leads to her eventual breakdown. In “Gone, I’m Gone” she decides to use the ticket to Hadestown that Hades gave her and leaves singing: “Orpheus, my heart is yours / Always was, and will be / It’s my gut I can’t ignore” (Noblezada 2019b, 0:03).

The creative choices made when adapting Eurydice from the myth are particularly relevant. Instead of having her die because of a snake bite in a clearly passive death, she is given apparent agency over her fate. In fact, the conditions of her death could be interpreted as a feminist retelling of the original myth because she is given the chance to make the final decision for herself. Nonetheless, when analysing this in depth, we see that the passivity of her death remains a prevalent factor. Although not by accident, she dies as a result of the conditions she is under and it is made clear that dying is not what she wants, she is rather pushed into her death by external forces. As it is sung by the Fates when they persuade Eurydice: “You can have your principles / When you’ve got a bellyfull” (Blackman et al. 2019a, 1:06). With this, Mitchell indirectly points to arguments against the illusion of choice under extreme conditions of poverty.

This idea about the illusory nature of choice is linked in Eurydice’s case to the discourses around sex work, agency and body autonomy from modern feminism. The debates in feminism on whether sex work is liberating or oppressive are definitely not new. In the 1992 article “What’s Wrong with Prostitution? Evaluating Sex Work”, Christine Overall reflects on the positions over this debate at the time, “It is a split between an emphasis on sexual freedom and pleasure that views women exclusively as agents, on the one hand, and an emphasis on sexual danger and degradation that sees women exclusively as victims on the other” (1992, 707). Mitchell plays with the dichotomy agent/victim in Eurydice. After realising the consequences of her decision to part to Hadestown, Eurydice feels a victim of her own agency. It can be argued that her death highlights how, when your other option is poverty, starvation and death, you are not truly making the decision for yourself, the decision is made for you by your circumstances, and, since Orpheus is not faced with this dilemma, by your gender. There is, in fact, little space for personal choice in the world of *Hadestown*. The argument that Eurydice made her choice and is, thus, responsible for her own death, is implied throughout the musical, especially by Hades, who does not allow Orpheus take her body back arguing “everything and everyone / In Hadestown, I own! / But I / Only buy / What others choose to sell” (Page 2019c, 1:09), a line that sounds like an excuse since, as the ruler of the Underworld, he is undeniably responsible for Eurydice’s (and the rest of his worker’s) tragic fate. This is Hades’s argument to avoid responsibility for the tragic consequences of his rule over Hadestown, when, in fact, it is because of his jealousy that the world is suffering horrible climate change and it is because of his tyranny that his workers live in appalling conditions. But because he gives people the illusion of choice by granting them tickets instead of dragging them to the underworld, he sees himself as fair and uses this illusion of choice as an excuse.

Eurydice's death can be read as her giving herself and her body to Hades, especially considering the seductive tone in "Hey, Little Songbird", when Hades gives her the ticket. But it may also be read as a suicide: Eurydice cannot take her hunger anymore, she cannot stand another day of desperation and decides to take her own life and go to the land of the dead. Taken the abstract nature of *Hadestown*, both interpretations can co-exist. Either way, the alteration from the original myth in giving Eurydice the agency over her decision to take her life is only apparent. What this adaptation does do is account for a more interesting turn in message in Eurydice's death, tapping into debates about class, gender and choice.

Eurydice's moment of regret once she begins her life as a worker in Hadestown serves as a very specific instance in her characterisation. In "Way Down Hadestown (Reprise)" we learn about the effect that death has on Hades's workers: they no longer care about people's names, they cannot see and they have forgotten their past lives. A horrified Eurydice collects the memories that she has of the underworld in "Flowers" where she cannot even remember Orpheus's name. This clearly represents the loss of her identity, she is no longer the hungry young girl, she is dead, lost in a sea of mindless workers where no one stands out and the main rule is "If you wanna keep your head / Oh, you gotta keep your head low" (Carney et al. 2019, 0:16). This characterisation of Hadestown as a "zombieland" where no one thinks for themselves and where they mindlessly obey the orders of a tyrant to keep a job that only allows them to survive, is a powerful commentary not just on the intersection of class, gender and choice, but also on America. Still, although Eurydice seems to be forgetting her past and herself, there is a moment of hope and clarity in "Flowers" where she remembers a scene of her past life, an instant where her hopeful nature shines through the layers of "fog" that obscure her identity and make her forget who she used to be. The last thing she loses is that memory of a moment when she was by Orpheus's side, though she cannot remember his name.

3.2. Hades and Persephone

Apart from Orpheus and Eurydice, the characters that conform the main cast of *Hadestown* are all deities. Not by chance, the characterisation and development of these characters is much more cryptic than that of humans. Thus, this musical is set in a rigidly polarised world where the gods represent the higher class, and the main human characters represent the lower class. Because we experience the story from Orpheus and Eurydice's perspective, the gods seem unattainable to us and, thus, hard to read. As a result; Hades, Persephone and Hermes are challenging for the audience, making us doubt their intentions.

If you ride that train to the end of the line / Where the sun don't shine and it's always shady / It's there you'll find the king of the mine / Almighty Mister Hades!" (De Shields 2019b, 1:48)

This is the introduction to Hades by Hermes in the first song of the musical "Road to Hell". If we compare this to Orpheus's or Eurydice's respective introductions, the difference in characterisation between gods and humans is clearly noticeable. Even if not in a blatantly explicit way, the introductions for the mortals give us the main aspects of their personalities. This gives the audience the sense that Mitchell has nothing to hide about Orpheus and Eurydice's personalities. In contrast, the gods get much more obscure introductions. This is definitely the case with Hades: we are only told he is "the king of the mine" and "Almighty", which are quite indirect ways of summarising his role in the musical. Despite that, Hades is possibly the most straight-forward in terms of personality and intentions of the three gods. We gradually learn what got him to the point where he is, which helps us understand his development. At the end of the musical, we can easily draw a clear image of who he is and whether he was right or wrong in his actions, unlike with Persephone and Hermes.

One fundamental characteristic of Hades that is already present in his introduction is that he is the embodiment of Hadestown. This is obvious not just because the place has his name, but also because the character (Hades) and the place (Hadestown) always come hand-in-hand in the musical. His personality, his intentions and his deepest fears are directly reflected in what is happening in the Underworld. This references Greek mythology directly as "the god's very name also became synonymous with the Underworld and was accordingly used as a toponym" (Giesecke 2020, 54). The "Americanisation" of this aspect of Greek mythology is done by adding *-town* at the end of Hades's name, mimicking the names of places in the US such as Yorktown, Middletown or Georgetown. A similar effect is created when Hades is referred to as "Mr. Hades", mostly by Orpheus and Hermes.

As a matter of fact, Orpheus and Hermes are responsible for the audience learning about both Hades and Hadestown. While Hermes often tells the audience about the situation in Hadestown, indirectly telling us about Hades, Orpheus tends to talk about Hades's feelings and his past, in a more direct insight into his character. Through these accounts, Hades is characterised as a tyrant who exploits and manipulates his workers to satisfy his incessant need to own everybody and everything. His possessive tendencies lead to the decay of his relationship with Persephone; by holding her too tight, he has eventually suffocated her. It is because of his need to be perceived as strong that he does not refrain from presenting himself as jealous and controlling. In "Chant" he defends his actions to a resentful Persephone:

If you don't even want my love / I'll give it to someone who does / Someone grateful for her fate / Someone who appreciates / The comforts of a gilded cage / And doesn't try to fly away / The moment Mother Nature calls / Someone who could love these walls / That hold her close and keep her safe / And think of them as my embrace. (Page 2019a, 5:40)

There is, however, one aspect of Hades's personality that he does not necessarily want people to know about, but which we learn about throughout the musical: he is deeply insecure. Despite his best efforts to seem untouchable, it is not precisely hard for the audience to understand where his need to be in control comes from. Not too long into the musical, in "Epic I", the audience is told about Hades's deep love for Persephone. Hades's ability to love is knowledge passed down from Hermes to Orpheus, and definitely not a concealed facet. As it has already been explored, Orpheus retells Hades's past through the "Epics"; here, Hades is presented as a romantic at the core who has been corrupted by his own lack of trust and confidence. Furthermore, Hades's presentation as an apprehensive and demanding husband has its foundation in his past as a loving young man, so Orpheus sees this in him before they even meet, perhaps because he relates to the young Hades, but also possibly because it is not that hard to get to that conclusion.

Nevertheless, the fact that Hades can love and that the protagonist, Orpheus, is able to see good in him does not take away from the harm done by Hades's actions. As a matter of fact, Hades is a character that serves as a study of evil: he is portrayed as a villain throughout the entirety of the musical. The times he is presented as troubled and nostalgic are only used to give an explanation as to who he has turned into, but never an excuse. In other words, he never receives a redemption arc, which is especially visible in the fact that he does not renounce his power at the end of the musical. The main teaching behind Mitchell's writing in Hades is that a justification can only take you so far. Furthermore, Hades's weakness, rather than humanising him, serves mostly to present Orpheus as the hero: It is by seeing the villain's vulnerability and, instead of attacking him, relating to him that Orpheus's arc comes to its climax.

In this sense, Mitchell applies an almost essentialist view to the characters that are gods, representing them as old, as opposed to those that are human and young. Hades very specifically represents this: because he is Hades, the king of the Underworld, he must be evil and selfish. His self-centred motives never change, they are an essential element to his character. As a matter of fact, and as stated before, he finishes the musical as a happier man, he takes the step to fix his marriage without withdrawing from his position of power in Hadestown. He is still as rich as he was, continues producing more riches in addition to being in a more stable situation with his wife. His character development revolves around his will to

accept his romantic side and be more open and kinder to Persephone. His arc does not address a change of his tyranny, and he is actually rewarded at the end.

Significantly, the song that corresponds to the strongest instance of Hades's manipulation is "Why We Build the Wall". In this song, as explained by Wilson, "The call-and-response structure shows how Hades coerces his Workers into accepting exploitative labor conditions in the name of freedom and protection from outsiders" (2021, 190). This slow-paced song consists of questions about the inner workings of Hadestown that Hades asks his workers to which they respond with justifications. Being asked the questions gives the workers a sense of choice and agency, they feel that they are answering for themselves. At the same time, their discourse sung in unison sounds fabricated, a result of a long process of Hades's coercion. He is so confident in the effectivity of his brainwashing that he dares to ask the workers direct questions, to which they respond what he wants to hear without fail.

Structurally, "Why We Build the Wall" appeals to an elemental feature of music: Repetition. It could easily be argued that most, if not all, pieces of music require a degree of repetition. In the article for *The Guardian* named "Stuck on Repeat: Why We Love Repetition in Music", Tom Service explores how this practice of repetition is quite unique to music as a form of art, as well as the fact that repetition is present in music from all cultures. As the author of the article puts it, "patterns of repetition aren't just musical techniques for composers to play with. They're invitations for listeners to participate" (Service 2016). It is the constant repetition of the lyrics and the addition of new lines that makes the structure of "Why We Build the Wall" stand out, as it exploits this practice of repetition. This is reminiscent of the structure of many traditional and children's songs. The technique of repetition is used in those to create lyrics and melodies that are easy to memorise and reproduce.

An example of this that is particularly similar to the song in *Hadestown* is the Christmas carol "Twelve Days of Christmas". The traditional song is divided in stanzas which are, at the same time, two-part constructions. The first part always consists on the two first lines: "On the first day of Christmas / My true love sent to me", these two lines head every stanza of the song with the alteration of the ordinal adjective before the day. The second stanza begins with "On the second day", the third with "On the third day", etcetera. The second part of each stanza increases in length throughout the song as it describes the gifts given each day. Thus, the second half of the first stanza is a single line: "A partridge in a pear tree"; the second, a two-line one: "Two turtle-doves / And a partridge in a pear tree". This continues until the last stanza, which has a twelve-line end part beginning with "12 drummers drumming" and finishing, again, with "A partridge in a pear tree".

Intentionally, “Why We Build the Wall” uses a similar structure. Each part of the song is divided into two interventions: First Hades’s with his question; second, the workers with their answer. The first stanza goes as follows:

Hades: Why do we build the wall? / My children, my children / Why do we build the wall?
Company: Why do we build the wall? / We build the wall to keep us free / That’s why we build the wall / We build the wall to keep us free. (Page 2019d, 0:46)

Although already repetitive, this structure is used for the rest of the song. Hades’s first intervention continues with that same form: question, double call and repetition of the question. For instance, that first part is followed by his “How does the wall keep us free?” (Page 2019d, 1:10). The workers’ answers always begin with another repetition of the question, followed by its corresponding answer. These answers to Hades’s questions become increasingly longer as the song develops: one line is added to the beginning of the argumentation each time the structure is repeated, and the lines from previous stanzas are sung again. This results in an undoubtedly cyclical discourse that the workers repeat mindlessly. This process of argumentation is completed after four repetitions of this structure with the workers singing:

Because we have and they have not / Because they want what we have got / The enemy is poverty / And the wall keeps out the enemy / And we build the wall to keep us free / That’s why we build the wall / We build the wall to keep us free. (Page 2019d, 2:17)

Every aspect of the song helps Hades achieve the most effective form of manipulation: the given sense of agency, the repetitive and simple sentences, the children song’s structure, and the slow tempo all contribute to this. Hades uses all of this to slowly turn his utterances from questions to statements. As a matter of fact, he finishes the song screaming his discourse in unison with the workers, in a much more dominant tone than the one with which he began the song.

This song has, unsurprisingly, reminded audiences of Donald Trump’s discourses in his 2016 campaign. The symbol of the wall together with the argumentation are very close to Trump’s reasoning. This has somewhat forced Mitchell to clarify the origin of the song and contextualise it in multiple occasions, as it was written for the original album in 2006, like many of the other songs in the musical. Not only was the song not specifically inspired by Trump, but *Hadestown* was written in the aftermath of Bush’s second election. Nevertheless, this knowledge did not stop people from drawing the similarities between Hades’s and Trump’s discourses. In a 2016 interview, Mitchell clarified: “I’m no prophet. The wall is not a new image. It’s a powerful archetypal image, and Trump is simply tapping into that. It works and people respond to it” (Mitchell in Molleson 2016).

As Mitchell indirectly addresses, the fact that Hades is not a parody of Trump does certainly not mean that their similarities are wrongfully drawn by audiences. *Hadestown's* Hades does not represent a new archetype, nor does Trump. Hades represents a capitalist man; that is, not necessarily from the 1930s nor the modern era, but timeless and universally recognised as such. Rather than being inspired by one specific figure, Hades is an amalgamation of the elements common to these men: their ambition, their power, even their whiteness (the actors playing Hades have most often been Caucasian, with the exceptions of the 2021 tour and the Korean production of the musical). Mitchell is aiming at a more timeless, less context-dependent representation of a rich man. The fact that he was written in Bush's times but reminds audiences of Trump's campaign proves that Mitchell is successful in this. As a matter of fact, it could also be argued that Hades and Persephone's relationship is highly reminiscent of the real-life couple formed by Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla, and Grimes, alternative musician. For instance, both Musk and Hades can be described as extreme capitalists whose ideologies and decisions in the running of their respective companies are extremely controversial. Whereas Grimes and Persephone are eccentric celebrities who seek people's attention and publicly admit to not agreeing with their partner's actions while apparently doing nothing to stop them.

As a matter of fact, *Hadestown's* adaptation of the goddess Persephone represents a very interesting instance in the technique of rewriting. Her character is rather difficult to read as it often lies between good and evil, not ascribing to either. She is introduced by Hermes in this way:

And on the road to hell there was a railroad line / And a lady stepping off a train / With a suitcase full of summertime / Persephone, by name! (De Shields 2019b, 1:25)

As is the case with Hades, this introduction is rather obscure. It makes audiences understand she is always travelling, taking the train that divides the two worlds and that she brings summertime to the Overworld. Throughout the musical, we learn that this Persephone is the living image of popularity. she is, as pointed out earlier, the celebrity of this world. To represent the duality of being the goddess of spring as well as the queen of the Underworld, Mitchell decides to go for a two-faced Persephone, a chameleonic attention-seeker.

Persephone's song in the first act is "Livin' It Up on Top", which marks the arrival of spring. In this song, the goddess encourages the people of the Overworld to celebrate and forget about the dark long winter that they have just left behind. She presents herself as the relief of their pain, the diversion that ought to be applauded. In particular, she is asking people to

celebrate her. This can be seen in the lines she sings: “Who makes the summer sun shine bright? / That’s right! Persephone!” (Gray 2019b, 1:21), which are followed by more questions that are always answered with her name, which she encourages people to sing with her. Persephone’s need to receive this attention that the people of the Overworld are giving is easily seen throughout the song. Moreover, she emphasises that effect by making people pity her. She uses the lack of knowledge, and consequent fear, that the living people have over Hadestown to paint her life under her husband’s care as a literal hell. Which it very much is, but in doing so, she diminishes the experiences of the struggling people of the Overworld. An instance of her presenting her situation as much worse than that of the humans is seen in: “If you ain’t six feet underground / You’re living it up on top!” (Gray 2019b, 1:02).

Although “Livin’ It Up on Top” appears before “Why We Build the Wall”, it is not coincidental that Persephone occasionally uses the question-answer structure in her song that we will later see in Hades’s. Persephone’s style in doing this is clearly different from that of Hades: she is much more chaotic, spontaneous, she lacks a clear discourse and she very obviously guides the answers she wants to get. This shows how Persephone is gaslighting the humans, just like her husband, but for different purposes. While Hades needs their completely brainwashed minds to exploit their bodies as workforce, Persephone just manipulates them so that they can admire her. She pretends to love them, to do great sacrifices for them, just so that they can love her back. Her manipulation, rather than being focused on the polishing of the discourse or the feeling of agency in the manipulated, is characterised by smoke and mirrors. She bombards the people of the Overworld with images, reasons to love her and distractions to present herself as both a martyr and a saviour.

This image that she paints of herself begins to appear inconsistent with the arrival of the second act. In “Our Lady of the Underground”, we get an insight as to what Persephone’s life in the Underworld is like. Rather than seeing the life of suffering that she claimed to have, we learn that she has found a way to enjoy herself by, again, making the workers celebrate her existence. With this “diva” moment, Persephone is once again gaslighting both the workers and the audience, making everybody applaud her. In this song, we see that she has found her place in the Underworld as the runner of an illegal bar where she bargains things from the Overworld. She sings:

I can give you what it is you crave / A little something from the good old days / I got the wind right here in a jar / I got the rain on tap at the bar / I got sunshine up on the shelf. (Gray 2019c, 1:16)

Throughout the entire song, she fakes proximity to the workers, pretending to understand their suffering and their melancholy for their past lives. She uses this fake compassion as an excuse to remind them of all the things that they do not have now, enticing their thirst to then give them a glimpse of the things they miss most and which she can provide for them. Persephone positions herself as their saviour just like she did in the Overworld and the workers pay her back with their praise.

In both “Livin’ It Up on Top” and in “Our Lady of the Underground”, Persephone addresses the people as “brother” and uses the pronoun “us” to refer to the problems of both places. In doing this, she is displaying the closeness she needs people to feel to relate to her. This is reminiscent of what celebrities do in the real world, instead of presenting themselves as unattainable figures, they show apparent vulnerability, glimpses into their lives so that we see they are people who struggle, just like us. It is true that the boundaries between celebrities and CEOs are sometimes blurred because they have one thing in common: they want to sell a product. With celebrities I refer to people who depend on and are known mostly for their careers as entertainers: musicians, actors, reality TV stars, etcetera. Because they rely on audiences to keep them relevant and wealthy, they need to be appealing for us. This is done through marketing, TV, social media, interviews and any other possible medium. Celebrities do their best to conceal the fact that they are much closer in position and in wealth to multi-millionaire CEOs than to us and so does Persephone. A way through which both real-life celebrities and the character Persephone achieve the relatability they desire is ‘public intimacy’, which is conceived as the practice of displaying aspects of one’s life which are supposed to be private to the public to appear more approachable (Baruh and Soysal 2010, 393). Persephone talking about her suffering and criticising her husband makes humans feel like she is opening up to them, shortening the distance that separates her from them. Furthermore, this is a false illusion of proximity, as Persephone is not truly revealing what she truly feels. Overall, if *Hadestown*’s Hades can be compared to Elon Musk or Donald Trump, Persephone can be compared to Dolly Parton or Lady Gaga. As a matter of fact, as *Hadestown*’s costume designer, Michael Krass, says himself: Persephone’s dress was inspired by “a ’40s band singer and Dolly in the ’80s and maybe today’s Real Housewives” (Krass in *Playbill* 2019).

Although Persephone’s intentions may not be completely good, she is not characterised as a villain. This is because she is not one: the harm that Persephone does to this world is nothing in comparison to that of Hades. It is mostly him that takes the decisions that push them both into a toxic marriage and make her resent him. Additionally, it is because of Hades that the world is suffering, Persephone is just taking advantage of her position. In doing whatever

she can to enjoy herself, Persephone is not making the situation any worse or any better, despite what she claims. As a matter of fact, Persephone demands people's attention and praise for merely doing her job: bringing spring back, which she does poorly because of her husband. That is, she is never on time when spring is supposed to come and she always leaves early, resulting in the short intense summers and long winters of the Overworld. But it is because of her husband's jealousy that she cannot perform her duty the right way: he is the one not letting her go to the Overworld when it is time for spring and also the one who goes pick her up before than planned. Despite this situation, Persephone does whatever she can to enjoy herself because she is used to a life of privilege and luxury, which undoubtedly makes her selfish, but not necessarily evil. Persephone's deepest crime is not doing what she could to stop the villain earlier. But it could be argued that, although not as much as the mortals, she was a victim under Hades's rule too.

Unlike Hades, Persephone does get a redemption arc: she eventually wakes up and says "I've had enough" (Gray 2019a, 0:18) when Hades offers her a drink as she tries to persuade him to let Orpheus and Eurydice go. She sees the young Hades in Orpheus and her young self in Eurydice, seduced by the Underworld and its promises of a better life. And she finally does what is in her power to change the way of things, because she is the only one that Hades will listen to. Not without difficulty, it is Persephone that helps Hades take the last step to save their marriage and their world.

3.3. Hermes, the Fates and the Company.

We got any other gods? / Oh right, almost forgot... / On the road to hell there was a railroad station / And a man with feathers on his feet / Who could help you to your final destination / Mister Hermes, that's me! / See, someone's got to tell the tale / Whether or not it turns out well. (De Shields 2019b, 2:06)

These are the first lines that Hermes uses to introduce himself in "Road to Hell". Hermes, as the messenger god, is the narrator of this story: he is the one that holds direct conversations with the audience, presenting the action and the rest of the characters to us. However, Hermes is not easily categorised as a narrator due to the abstract nature of both the musical and his character. On the one hand, he acts like an omniscient narrator because of his position as a god; the audience gets the feeling that Hermes knows everything there is to know about everyone in the action. Furthermore, him being presented as the only one who is aware of the circularity of the plot and as the one who decides that this story is going to be sung again gives him a position of atemporality and omniscience.

On the other hand, Hermes also acts as a homodiegetic narrator as he is a character in the musical: he is given a name and a personality, even somewhat of a backstory and an arc. This narrator sometimes steps down from his position of atemporality to talk to some of the characters –mainly Orpheus and Persephone, the reasons behind this will be analysed later–, and he even goes as far as affecting the action on some occasions. Just like in the original myth, in which Hermes “mediated between heaven and earth” (Giesecke 2020, 62), this Hermes mediates between intra-fictionality and extra-fictionality, between the audience and the characters.

Hermes goes widely unnoticed by the rest of the characters throughout the majority of the musical: few characters, godly or human, talk to him directly or even refer to him. Moreover, his introduction is the moment in the musical when Hermes is talked about for the longest time. For this reason, the audience has to rely on what Hermes says about himself and his actions to know Hermes as a character. Following the trend of first-person narrators, Hermes is undoubtedly unreliable. However, he is so at his own expense rather than to his advantage, which is rather uncommon for this type of narrators. Hermes clearly has a soft spot for humans and Orpheus more specifically as he takes the role of his mentor. Because of this, he is critical towards his own kind, the gods, and by extension, towards himself. Hermes knows that the decay of the world is the gods’ doing; and, even if he is not as responsible for this as Hades, he despises himself for it. The messenger god holding himself in very low regard is seen through sentences such as “It ain’t because I’m kind” (De Shields 2019a, 3:22). Hermes often presents himself as mean and arrogant in times when he is actually helping humankind. He does this because he does not want to get recognition for his actions, he does not want to paint himself as the saviour. The fact that he is covering his true feelings and intentions can be seen in “Road to Hell (Reprise)”, the second to last song of the musical. After Orpheus’s failure and his separation from Eurydice, Hermes is left by himself to sing a capella in a few lines where we see him lament the outcome of the story. Hermes sings “He could have come so close” (De Shields 2019c, 1:12) and “To know how it ends / And still begin / To sing it again / As if it might turn out this time” (De Shields 2019c, 2:20). Hermes expresses these words with pain, which shows that he truly wants Orpheus and Eurydice to succeed every time he begins to sing the story again and that it causes him pain to see their tragic end.

Once having seen Hermes’s true personality and intentions, the meaning and implications of his words in previous songs of the musical are understood differently. In “Wait for me”, when Eurydice has decided to leave for HADESTOWN and Orpheus asks Hermes where she is, the god responds with “Brother, what do you care? / You’ll find another muse somewhere” (De

Shields 2019d, 0:22). Hermes masks his true feelings, trying to delay that inevitable moment of heartbreak for Orpheus. They have the following dialogue:

Hermes: Just how far would you go for her?

Orpheus: To the end of time / To the end of the earth.

Hermes: You got a ticket?

Orpheus: No.

Hermes: Yeah, I didn't think so / 'Course, there is another way, but— / Nah, I ain't supposed to say.

Orpheus: Another way?

Hermes: Around the back / But it aint easy walkin', jack / It ain't for the sensitive of soul. (Carney and De Shields 2019b, 0:50)

His apparent reluctance only leads to him telling Orpheus how to go, giving him all the information that he needs to survive his journey to the Underworld. Hermes's actions and decisions clash directly with his words and attitude, because he sees the damage Hades and Persephone have done to the world and feels guilt for his privileged position. In other words, Hermes sees himself as unworthy of recognition, even when he is doing the right thing, because he feels responsible for the selfish actions of other gods.

With the most recent productions of the musical, and as an effect of Orpheus's change, Hermes has had an evolution too. In early versions of the musical: "Hermes was on Team Hades [...], and he clashed with the anti-establishment Orpheus" (Mitchell 2020, 85). Having Orpheus shift from his revolutionary attitude at the beginning of the musical to a more ignorant one, organically moved Hermes to the position of resistance to Hadestown. As a result, the song "Way Down Hadestown" changed. In this song, the audience begins to see all the horrible things that happen in Hadestown, and the lines criticising Hades that were initially sung by Orpheus, are now sung by Hermes. These are lines such as "Mister Hades is a mean old boss" (De Shields 2019e, 3:14). Apart from that, Hermes is the only one who calls Persephone out for her actions: Hermes is critical of her when she comes back to the Overworld to bring spring and he asks why it has taken her so long. He is, however, alone in this as the mortals are too distracted by the promise of the good weather they have been craving.

Hermes, despite having a negative view of the world due to his hatred for deities and himself, is a character that is driven by hope. His role in the musical is to, again and again, tell the story of Orpheus, his pupil, separated from his soulmate and left in a state of depression. Every time Hermes tells the story, he witnesses Orpheus's decay from an innocent boy to an insecure man. As a result, Hermes is sombre, mournful and exhausted, but he finds hope in the usefulness of the story he tells repeatedly.

Hermes knows that Orpheus's deed has the power to change the world, and takes it upon himself to make sure the song reaches its full potential. Hermes makes peace with the disgust

he feels about his privilege by sacrificing himself. He takes the pain of singing the same dramatic story again and again, almost erratically, just to make the world a better place. As Wilson puts it: “*Hadestown* presents storytelling as a repeated act of hope” (Wilson 2021, 191). Additionally, in “Disrupting Heteronormative Temporality through Queer Dramaturgies: *Fun Home*, *Hadestown* and *A Strange Loop*”, Sarah K. Whitfield argues the following about Hermes’s performance: “to see the possibility of what could be, in spite of ‘the way that it is’ is an essential act of storytelling, and of humanity” (Whitfield 2020, 5). In that way, Hermes is the one who gives meaning to *Hadestown*, it is his storytelling that highlights the purpose of this work. However ambitious it may be, *Hadestown* aims to have an effect on the world. Mitchell highlights both her purpose as the writer of the musical and that of Hermes as the narrator in an interview for *Vogue*: “The act of telling is worthwhile. We still have got to live, to make art, to love each other, whether or not the end is going to be sad” (Mitchell in Felsethal 2016). And that is the purpose of *Hadestown*: moving audiences and possibly changing the way they view the world by using the fundamentally human action of telling stories. Understanding that it is through stories that people tell their truth and understand others is vital to comprehend *Hadestown*’s importance.

An interesting aspect of the musical that summarises the attitudes and intentions of the three gods is the way they address mortals. Hades usually refers to them as “my children”, showing how he views himself as superior to them, they are his dependents. The word “children” does appeal to the closeness that Hades needs his workers to feel in order to reproduce his discourse and follow him mindlessly, but Hades will not go as far as to present himself as an equal. Additionally, this word also alludes to Hades’s belief of the immaturity of mortals and his view of himself as the adult that looks after them and is in charge. In contrast, Persephone and Hermes most commonly use “brother” and “sister”. Despite using the same words, these two characters use them with different intentions, aligning with their feelings towards humans. Because Persephone sees mortals as the ones that give her the praise she needs to feel good about herself, her use of “brother” and “sister” are only ways of helping her express the feeling of community and closeness she wants them to feel. She uses this in “Livin’ it Up on Top” and in “Our Lady of the Underground”; songs in which, as explained before, her need to be admired is seen. Hermes, however, uses these terms when presenting the mortals to the audience, in “Road to Hell”: “You can tip your hats and your wallets / Brothers and sisters, boys and girls / To the hardest-working chorus” (De Shields 2019b, 3:04). This is followed by Hermes’s signalling to the ensemble and giving time for the audience to applaud them. The messenger god uses these terms of closeness in times when it is the humans who will be

admired. This shows the fact that he feels equal to them in terms of value as beings, despite the fact that he understands their difference of position.

Additionally, the other characters that are presented as opposites to Hermes are the Fates. These three women who haunt people and appeal to their deepest fears and anxieties. In Ancient Greece, the Fates were usually represented as a group of three women who personalised destiny: past, present and future (Giesecke 2020: 49). As a matter of fact, they are presented in this way:

There was three old women all dressed the same / And they was always singing in the back of your minds / Everybody meet the fates (De Shields 2019b, 1:11)

The Fates have a parallel role to Hermes: what Hermes is to Orpheus –a guide–, the Fates are to Eurydice. Unlike Hermes, however, the Fates do not have deeply developed personalities or arcs because their role is rather metaphoric. They are quite flat as characters: haunting, witty and negative; just like they are in Greek mythology. Because they do not have other intentions than tormenting people indistinctively, they do not ascribe to either side of the conflict and rather serve to further emphasise other characters' traits and developments. As a matter of fact, Eurydice being followed by the Fates wherever she goes is indicative of her distrust and scepticism. As the role of the Fates is to voice character's fears and anxieties, Eurydice often being visited by them shows that the feeling that she is most accustomed to is fear, while Orpheus being guarded by Hermes accounts for his confidence, his hopefulness. Towards the end of the musical, we learn that Hades is also haunted by the Fates, which explains his jealousy and his internal conflict on whether he should let the young couple go or not. Like Eurydice, Hades is deeply negative and trusts that things will go wrong, especially when he is not in control.

Throughout the musical, the relationship that Orpheus has with the Fates is representative of his arc. The first time he encounters them is on his way to the Underworld, where the Fates question his decision to walk the hardest road to Hadestown. Unlike Eurydice, Orpheus is able to fight them by singing his song, relieving himself from his own destructive thoughts. This scene directly parallels the one in which Orpheus and Eurydice walk back to the Overworld. In "Doubt Comes in", Orpheus is yet again haunted by the Fates, but his song is now useless. He lets them get to him, and reproduces the negative thoughts they sing to him, which eventually leads to the breakdown of his confidence and the tragic end of the story.

The remaining character in *Hadestown* which is a direct reference to Greek theatre is the chorus. In *Hadestown*, the chorus has a highly similar role as in Greek tragedies as it is the

embodiment of the people. In Act I, the chorus represents the living, poor mortals of the Overworld; whereas in Act II, the chorus is made up by the workers of the Underworld. The chorus gets this introduction by Hermes:

Hard times in the world of men / Lemme introduce you to a few of them / You can tip your hats and your wallets / Brothers and sisters, boys and girls / To the hardest-working Chorus / In the god's almighty world!
(De Shields 2019b, 2:58)

4. Casting and race in *Hadestown*

Colour-blind casting has been common element in media of all types for the last few decades. This practice, also known as non-traditional casting, is understood as the casting of actors without taking their race into account and it results in a racially diverse group of actors in a production. Colour-blind casting is applied to a wide range of projects: those that cast actors and actresses of all races from their conception (*American Gods*), new productions of works that have been traditionally cast with Caucasian actors and actresses but are now re-conceived with racially diverse casts (the 2021 production of *Annie Live!*), filmic adaptations that ignore the original works' descriptions of characters and realism to the era they are set in (the *Bridgerton* series or the 2021 *The Green Knight*) as well as productions that cast actors and actresses of colour for historical figures that were Caucasian (Channel 5's *Anne Boleyn* or *Hamilton*). Although most of these productions do take genetics into account when casting characters that are part of the same family, the 1997 filmic adaptation of *Cinderella* decided to go further in its "colour-blindness". As one of the most representative productions when talking about colour-blind casting, this film features an African-American actress, Brandy Norwood, as Cinderella and a Filipino-American actor, Paolo Montalbán, as the prince. Furthermore, this production's king and queen are Victor Garber, a white actor, and Whoopi Goldberg, an African-American actress. As for the multiple ways in which colour-blind casting can be viewed, McGinley states the following:

What has variously been described as the colorblind, nontraditional, or multiracial casting [...] can be understood alternately as a celebration of what Donatella Galella describes as the "optimism of symbolic racial progress" in the age of Obama (a supposed transcendence of painful histories of racialization, racial discrimination, and racial violence), the illumination of racial logics of texts that were previously suppressed by all-white (and therefore "unmarked") productions, and as opportunity for actors of color to perform roles usually designated as "white". (2016, 1)

Colour-blind casting seems to represent an ideal world where people of all races can occupy any position in society. Despite being generally considered well-intentioned, this practice has received its fair share of criticism. The idea of not taking race as a vital factor in the creation of one's identity seems to create clashing opinions. By staying untrue to reality, colour-blind casting seems to be better received when the productions where it is featured require a degree of fantasy or abstraction, while it causes controversy when applied to works that are supposed to represent reality or History faithfully. On this, Brater states that "Many argue that multiculturalism is far less radical than it might seem [as] it backs away from militating for structural change" (2010, 152). Many critics seem to hold the opinion that leaving

one's racial prejudices behind completely is impossible and that there will always be a degree of bias as well as an effect in audiences when they see actors of colour playing certain roles. In that sense, numerous productions are now considering a more racially-conscious, though still diverse, approach.

Although *Hadestown* may be categorised as having colour-blind casting, the identity consciousness can be felt through multiple aspects, such as its use of musical genres that have traditionally, though not exclusively, been conceived as African-American: namely jazz and blues. *Hadestown* leaves behind racial issues to centre around a more abstract comment on society and economy, while counting with a diverse cast. Rather than setting aside the implications of having people of colour playing these characters, Mitchell invites the assumptions that the audience may have to be part of the interpretation of the musical. The abstract nature of this production helps her achieve this. As expressed by Wilson:

It is understandable that in trying to weave together many political themes, *Hadestown*'s creative team chose to focus on economic inequality and labor exploitation rather than race. However, the presence of a consciously chosen multiracial cast tells spectators to read the power dynamics between gods and mortals, the wealthy and poor, main characters and narrators, as also racialized. (2021, 192)

As happens with most Broadway musicals that have had multiple productions with different casts and understudies, *Hadestown* has counted with a high number of actors throughout the years. Because of this, it is almost impossible to analyse the effect of each actor and actress has had on each of the roles. Consequently, the focus will be on the 2017 cast, which is the most recognisable one, as well as some tendencies in terms of racial casting for each of the characters throughout the productions. Although the racial background of all of the actors that have played each character is sometimes ambiguous or unknown, we will be considering broad terms to analyse the way racial stereotypes and connotations play a role in the different productions.

As mentioned in a previous chapter, Hades has been played by a white actor in all American productions of the musical except one. Patrick Page is the most known actor for this role, and the 2021 features the African-American actor Kevyn Morrow. In the article where Wilson explores the implications of race in *Hadestown*, she poses this question about the effect that this change has: "Could it be that initially the creative team tied Hades's economic power to whiteness but later decided to de-emphasize this?" (2021, 191). It is clear that Hades's original and ongoing conception as a white man has its connotations and references to the real world. An African-American man singing "Why We Build the Wall?" brings up an entirely different effect.

Besides the clearly marked implications of Hades's race, the rest of the cast has been racially diverse with some interesting implications. While Orpheus has typically been played by white men (Reeve Carney being the most notable), Eurydice has typically been played by women of colour. After Anaïs Mitchell's own original rendition of the character of Eurydice, she has been most notably played by African-American actresses and actresses of Asian descent, being the US-born to a Filipino-Mexican family Eva Noblezada the 2017 production's Eurydice. The racial difference that has often existed between the two actors adds on to the differences in personality of the two characters. Orpheus's whiteness, in *Hadestown's* abstraction of the United States, makes him more likely to believe in a better future, to retain his innocence; whereas Eurydice's subalternity may account for her scepticism for the world she lives in. Moreover, this adds the dimension of race to the identity issues that question the idea of choice that was explored previously. By creating a racial difference in the couple, the casting directors aligns the character's personalities with the reality of racial issues and the creation of identities in the United States. This adds on to the messages and the links that are created in *Hadestown* with the real world. Persephone is most recognisably been played by Amber Gray, whose ethnicity is unknown but identifies as biracial, which possibly signals how racial ambiguity is used among celebrities as an attractive trait. The Fates are typically played by a group of racially diverse women, which possibly alludes to their exoticism and mystery.

The analysis of the casting of Hermes for the 2017 production of *Hadestown* is quite productive in this sense. The casting of André De Shields, as an African-American man in his 70s but also as an openly homosexual actor, had an impact on the role that had only been played by Caucasian men. Until then, *Hadestown*, with the presence of this actor as its messenger god and narrator, told a different story, and the casting directors Duncan Stewart and Benton Whitley were aware of this when they casted him. In an interview for *Vox* where they reflect on their choice for Hermes, Whitley expresses the following:

We saw all kinds of men, all ages, all ethnicities. But when André walked out, everyone turned to each other and was like, "I think this is the new way we want to tell the story. This is our Hermes." I think his placement in the show then informed a lot of the tone and storytelling that came thereafter. (in Grady 2019)

With this, Whitley shows his understanding of how De Shields's race, age and sexuality transforms Hermes's role. The identity of the actor gives new meanings to what the character says or sings onstage which transcend to the audience. In relation to this, Whitfield argues that "[t]he performance of Hermes collides with and is inseparable from the presence and meaning of De Shields on stage" (2020, 5). The essence of Hermes's character as a storyteller is, as has been explained, very human; but it is also enriched by De Shields's performance of it through

his identity. Whitfield states that: “While telling stories against the dark may be a deeply humanistic desire, it has a unique meaning and consequence for oppressed and marginalized communities, and a particular history in Black culture” (2020, 2). Because of this, the message behind Hermes is clearly affected by the performance of the actor.

5. Conclusion

Hadestown is, in multiple ways, ground-breaking. It is true that it ascribes to some of the conventions that dominate modern Broadway, such as the technique of rewriting. Through its use of 1930s America as an abstract setting and Greek mythology as its main source, *Hadestown* revisits motifs and themes that are known for its audiences. In spite of that, Anais Mitchell's work stands out in the context of Broadway musicals for its origins as a folk opera and its unconventional use of jazz and blues music. *Hadestown*'s slow pace and consistent use of instrumental or minimalistic music deviates from most Broadway musicals, which tend to be highly dynamic. Moreover, Mitchell chooses very specific sources for her rewriting process. Firstly, 1930s Dust Bowl America is an era that is well known enough for audiences to recognise while being quite underrepresented in media. Secondly, Greek mythology is disconnected enough from North American culture for it to be felt as innovative for audiences while creating fascination in the general public of the US.

Additionally, *Hadestown* creates an interesting effect for the audiences of Broadway musicals: middle and high-class Americans. In its addressing of economic inequality, it targets a very specific message about agency over social change at audiences that are not used to it. Putting the social group that believe to lie comfortably between the poor and the rich in the position of rooting for the protagonist, the poor revolutionary hero (Orpheus), against the villain, the extreme capitalist tyrant (Hades), leaves these audiences unable to hold their position of comfort anymore.

Thematically, *Hadestown* not only stands out among Broadway musicals, but also in the culture of the United States as a whole. This work breaks with many of the foundational ideas that have been reproduced throughout the History of the United States. Apart from its themes about economic inequality, *Hadestown* actively escapes from the myth of the American dream. This work breaks from the typically American tropes of heroes who overcome their obstacles and succeed in their quest. The story of *Hadestown* is one about Orpheus's failure, his breakdown and the loss of his lover. The hero of this story only manages to change the world partially and it is actually the villain that gets a happy ending as opposed to the hero. Through its bittersweet messages about change and revolution, Mitchell defies the ideas that are so engrained in American culture about the agency of the population over the fate of their country through revolution.

6. Bibliography

- Bareilles, Sara. 2016. *Waitress (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. DMI Soundtracks, Spotify.
<https://open.spotify.com/album/1E1tdqgLmyi03P0TJhGuw8?si=hVKNhLruR82JyctL9XTClg>
- Baruh, Lemi and Levent Soysal. 2010. "Public Intimacy and the New Face (Book) or Surveillance." *Handbook of Research on Social Interaction Technologies and Collaboration Software*, 392–403. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-60566-368-5.ch035>
- Benjamin, Nell and Jeff Richmond. 2018. *Mean Girls (Original Broadway Cast)*. Atlantic Records, Spotify.
<https://open.spotify.com/album/6m7n9JuAOMcy8X3ntO0Ktf?si=j0He1-KvRxOyi9PwRfy99g>
- Benjamin, Nell and Laurence O’Keefe. 2007. *Legally Blonde The Musical (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Ghostlight Records, Spotify.
https://open.spotify.com/album/7os43c6BUhMJkDUaEtDufk?si=BNO2_769TLGB45I8HP7Jzw
- Blackman, Jewelle, Yvette Gonzalez-Nacer and Kay Trinidad. 2019a. "Gone, I’m Gone." Track 16 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Blackman, Jewelle, Yvette Gonzalez-Nacer and Kay Trinidad. 2019b. "Word to the Wise." Track 34 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Blossom, Henry and Victor Herbert. 1906. *The Red Mill*. Montana: Kessinger Publishing.
- Brater, Jessica, Jessica Del Vecchio, Andrew Friedman, Bethany Holmstrom, Eero Laine, Donald Levit, Hillary Miller, et al. 2010. "'Let Our Freak Flags Fly': Shrek the Musical and the Branding of Diversity." *Theatre Journal* 62, no. 2: 151–172.
- Carney, Reve, Amber Gray, Eva Noblezada and Patrick Page. 2019. "Chant." Track 12 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Carney, Reeve and André De Shields. 2019a. "Epic I." Track 5 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Carney, Reeve and André De Shields. 2019b. "Wait for Me ("Hey, the big artiste...") [Intro]." Track 17 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.

- Carney, Reeve and Eva Noblezada. 2019. "Come Home with Me." Track 3 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Carney, Reeve. 2019a. "All I've Ever Known." Track 8 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Carney, Reeve. 2019b. "Chant." Track 12 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Carney, Reeve. 2019c. "Epic II." Track 11 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Carney, Reeve. 2019d. "Epic III." Track 31 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Columbus, Chris. 2005. *Rent*. Columbia Pictures, 135 min.
- De Shields, André. 2019a. "Any Way the Wind Blows." Track 2 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- De Shields, André. 2019b. "Road to Hell." Track 1 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- De Shields, André. 2019c. "Road to Hell (Reprise)." Track 39 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- De Shields, André. 2019d. "Wait for Me ("Hey, the big artiste...") [Intro]." Track 17 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- De Shields, André. 2019e. "Way Down Hadestown." Track 9 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Debessonnet, Lear and Alex Rudzinski. 2021. *Annie Live!* Sony Pictures Television, 127 min.
- Felselthal, Julia. "Hadestown Will Be Your Next Musical Theatre Obsession." *Vogue*, May 23, 2016. <https://www.vogue.com/article/hadestown-anais-mitchell-interview>
- Fierberg, Ruthie. "How Michael Krass Used Fashion to Make *Hadestown's* Players into Singular Characters." *Playbill*, May 20, 2019. <https://playbill.com/article/how-michael-krass-used-fashion-to-make-hadestowns-players-into-singular-characters>
- Fuller, Bryan, Michael Green, Neil Gaiman, Craig Cegielski, Stefanie Bern, David Slade and Adam Kane. 2017. *American Gods*. Starz.
- Giesecke, Annette. 2020. *Greek Mythology A to Z*. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers.
- Grady, Constance. "Hadestown's Casting Directors Explain How They Built Its Tony-nominated Ensemble." *Vox*, May 28, 2019.

<https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/5/28/18635512/hadestown-casting-directors-broadway-tonys>

- Gray, Amber and Eva Noblezada. 2019. "We Raise Our Cups." Track 40 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Gray, Amber. 2019a. "How Long?" Track 29 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Gray, Amber. 2019b. "Livin' it Up on Top." Track 6 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Gray, Amber. 2019c. "Our Lady of the Underground." Track 21 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Gray, Amber. 2019d. "Way Down Hadestown." Track 9 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Greenspan, Charlotte. 2012. "Death Comes to the Broadway Musical." *Daedalus* 141, no. 1: 154–159.
- History*. "Dust Bowl." A&E Television Networks, October 27, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/dust-bowl#:~:text=The%20Dust%20Bowl%20was%20the,failed%20across%20the%20entire%20region>.
- Iscove, Robert. 1997. *Cinderella*. Walt Disney Television, 88 min.
- Johnson, Catherine. 1999. *Mamma Mia!* Polydor Records, Spotify. <https://open.spotify.com/album/6LFLGHU6Rw2sAMrjax6f5t?si=kjTE16LrTsaXIAkZ6OMFLw>
- Jones, Dan. 2021. *Anne Boleyn*. Fable Pictures.
- Lerner, Alan Jay and Frederick Loewe. 1956. "Wouldn't It Be Lovely," track 3 on *My Fair Lady*.
- Lowery, David. 2021. *The Green Knight*. A24, 130 min.
- Marlow, Toby and Lucy Moss. 2018. *Six: The Musical (Studio Cast Recording)*. 6 Music Ltd, Spotify. <https://open.spotify.com/album/5jTDaLFNQovRyjNcWe4cZh?si=NmQeVIuYTHKGkYqVXPMf-w>
- McGinley, Paige A. 2016. "Reconsidering 'the American Style': Black Performers and Black Music in Streetcar and Cat." *Theatre Journal* 68, no. 1: 1–15.
- Miranda, Lin Manuel. 2020. *Hamilton*. Walt Disney Pictures, 160 min. <https://disneyplusoriginals.disney.com/movie/hamilton>

- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2020. *Working on a Song: The Lyrics of Hadestown*. New York: Penguin Random House.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019a. “All I’ve Ever Known.” Track 8 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019b. “Any Way the Wind Blows.” Track 2 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019c. “Chant.” Track 12 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019d. “Chant (Reprise).” Track 30 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019e. “Come Home with Me.” Track 3 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019f. “Epic I.” Track 5 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019g. “Epic II.” Track 11 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019h. “Epic III.” Track 31 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019i. “Gone, I’m Gone.” Track 16 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019j. *Hadestown*. Sing It Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019k. “How Long?” Track 29 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019l. “Livin’ it Up on Top.” Track 6 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019m. “Our of the Underground.” Track 21 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019n. “Papers (“You’re not from around here, son...”) [Intro].” Track 25 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Lady Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019o. “Road to Hell.” Track 1 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019p. “Road to Hell (Reprise)” Track 39 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.

- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019q. “Wait for Me (“Hey, the big artiste...”) [Intro].” Track 17 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019r. “Way Down Hadestown.” Track 9 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019s. “We Raise Our Cups.” Track 40 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019t. “Wedding Song.” Track 4 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019u. “Why We Bild the Wall.” Track 19 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Mitchell, Anaïs. 2019v. “Word to the Wise.” Track 34 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Molleson, Kate. “Orpheus for the Age of Trump. Anaïs Mitchell on her Folk Opera Hadestown.” *The Guardian*, June 14, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/jun/14/anais-mitchell-hadestown-show-donald-trump-orpheus>
- Noblezada, Eva. 2019a. “Any Way the Wind Blows.” Track 2 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Noblezada, Eva. 2019b. “Gone, I’m Gone.” Track 16 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Noblezada, Eva. 2019c. “Wedding Song.” Track 4 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Overall, Christine. 1992. “What’s Wrong with Prostitution? Evaluating Sex Work.” *Signs* 17, no. 4: 705–24.
- Page, Patrick. 2019a. “Chant.” Track 12 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Page, Patrick. 2019b. “Chant (Reprise).” Track 30 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Page, Patrick. 2019c. “Papers (“You’re not from around here, son...”) [Intro].” Track 25 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Page, Patrick. 2019d. “Why We Build the Wall.” Track 19 on *Hadestown (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*. Sing it Again, compact disc.
- Read, Bridget. “The Liberating, Radical Politics of *Hadestown*.” *Vogue*, June 7, 2019. <https://www.vogue.com/article/hadestown-radical-politics-labor-review>.

- Rhimes, Shonda. 2020. *Bridgerton*. Shondaland.
- Schwartz, Stephen. 2013. *Wicked (Original Broadway Cast Recording / Deluxe Edition)*. Verve (Adult Contemporary) MC, Spotify. <https://open.spotify.com/album/1woCvthHJakakroP6dXNxs?si=i2OI73YORK26X-HSpMX3rw>
- Service, Tom. "Stuck on Repeat: Why We Love Repetition in Music" *The Guardian*, April 29, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/apr/29/why-we-love-repetition-in-music-tom-service#:~:text=Music%20of%20every%20genre%2C%20every,same%20things%20again%20and%20again%3F&text=%E2%80%9CIt%20is%20a%20principle%20of%20music%20to%20repeat%20the%20theme.>
- Shakespeare, William. 1597. *Romeo and Juliet*. Macmillan Readers (2006).
- Sharman, Jim. 1975. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Michael White Productions, 100 min.
- Shelley, Mary. 1818. *Frankenstein*. London: Penguin Classics (2012).
- Stoker, Bram. 1897. *Dracula*. London: Penguin Classics (1993).
- Webber, Andrew Lloyd and Tim Rice. 1979. *Evita*. Verve (Adult Contemporary) MC, Spotify. <https://open.spotify.com/album/1EouxVBwsa075eOl2xuMEw?si=1LTmaC-NQOGRpTnQoQzfSg>
- Whitfield, Sarah K. 2020. "Disrupting Heteronormative Temporality through Queer Dramaturgies: *Fun Home*, *Hadestown* and *A Strange Loop*." *Arts* 9, no. 2: 69. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts9020069>.
- Wilson, Nia. 2021. "Hadestown: Nontraditional Casting, Race, and Capitalism." *TDR: The Drama Review* 65, no. 1: 188–192.
- Wise, Robert. 1961. *West Side Story*. The Mirisch Corporation, 152 min.
- Wise, Robert. 1965. *The Sound of Music*. 20th Century Fox, 174 min.
- Woolf, Stacy. 2008. "Defying Gravity': Queer Conventions in the Musical 'Wicked.'" *Theatre Journal* 60, no. 1: 1–21.