



## Innovation in the Rewrite of the Orpheus Myth: A Case Study of the *Eurydice* Drama by Jean Anouilh using Gilbert Durand's Mythology\*

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MYTH recreation or rewrite has been a very common practice in many French literary works of the first half of the 20th century. Drawing on an original approach enjoying the reading and revisiting ancient myths, a large number of renewed authors throughout the 20th century were engaged in recreating and retelling myths. In view of the fact that literary works mirror the social and political evolutions within a given society, the twentieth-century French literature demonstrates a reflection of the influential events during this century, revealing their close relations with the events in the society. The first and second world wars and the occupation of France were significant events which affected France in the twentieth century. Being affected by adverse consequences of such social events, most of the authors and artists in this century endeavored to find the reality or to make critiques of their society's conditions through resorting to art and literature as well as reflecting their society's problems.

Myths are narrations which easily carry original thoughts at different times and under different social, political and cultural conditions. The archetypal roots in myths and their meta-temporal feature make myths—through literary forms—reflect the human's novel perspective towards the contemporary world.

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Through rewriting the myths, twentieth-century authors have indicated the gaps between human relationships and the lack of unity in the present world compared to the ancient world. They have properly made use of myths so as to present their viewpoints. The rewrite or modernization of ancient texts is, therefore, an approach to adapt them to the concerns and preferences of the contemporary people. Orphée of Jean Anouilh is among playwrights who attempts to bring to the fore his society's concerns through rewriting myths. In his well-known works, he tries to depict the contemporary humans' challenges by means of recreating myths. In his Drama *Eurydice*, which is a rewrite of the Orpheus myth, the writer attempts to convey new and original constructions. Using a differing construction and new form, he recounts the story of a woman as the title explains. Anouilh altered some aspects of the original myth; consequently, the pure love between Orphée and Eurydice is an ironic and derisive rewrite of the classical myth. The main questions here are what contemporary social conditions and consequences contribute to the retelling of this myth and whether it sounds reasonable to state that the innovate approach for rewriting this myth is based on the changes and shifts in the twentieth-century moral values or not. Having in mind the relationship between the retelling of this myth and the context of the myth, the present study aims to examine the discourse of the mythical elements within the text regarding the cultural context of the society. This article, which builds on the Gilbert Durand's method for examining myths, analyzes mythemes in Anouilh's drama. This method of criticism helps the researchers study and examine the meaningful units of the original myth in the rewrite with due attention to the society's conditions. The present investigation examines the changes and shifts triggered by the transmutations in the moral values of the twentieth century illustrated in the rewrite of this myth.

Any rewrite of a myth, along with keeping its central mytheme (the central element) which remains unchanged in all forms of the myth, introduces innovations by causing extensive changes in the secondary mythemes. The characters in Anouilh's drama have lost their mythical aspects; therefore, they have been affected by the secondary mythemes and have been adjusted to the context of the twentieth century. In Anouilh's rewrite of the drama, Orphée is not a great hero but an ordinary street violinist immersed in his boring and ordinary life. In the drama, violin, that is the harp in the original drama, has lost its magical capabilities of producing wonderful music. Except for grabbing the attention of Eurydice, it serves no other function. Unlike the ancient Orpheus, the contemporary Orphée is no longer a demigod or a legendary hero. He is more like a gullible and naive antihero.

With this rewrite, the author underlines his current society's concerns and problems. The characters turned out to be seemingly free and very lonely people who have been corrupted by the modern society's fraud and

deceptions. Eurydice, the daughter of Apollo and the wife of Orphée, is altered into an ordinary character in Anouilh's rewrite. She is a theater performer and has been trapped in her troubled past. When her past issues are revealed, she prefers to change the direction of her life and leave her lover, rather than to come to terms with them. The pure love between the two is polluted with egotism and hypocrisy; therefore, we witness a decline in human's moral values.

Notwithstanding this, we finally find out that the ironic and simple love narrated at the beginning of the story is now a vehicle for getting into the humans' soul and immortality for finding the truth and essence of the world. There are also some changes introduced at the end of the story. By these changes, the author wishes to mirror the present-day humans' death fear and inabilities. In his rewrite, Orphée is incapable of coming to terms with Eurydice's death. He consequently wants to die so as to join her. That is said that, in the ancient myth, after enduring an immense amount of suffering, Orphée travels the underworld with the purpose of finding love, but she comes back to the world of the living after losing love. Orphée, in the original myth, fails to achieve immortality and reaching his love. In the rewrite of the myth, however, Orphée, who is under the influence of Monsieur Henri, finds death as the only remedy for his sufferings. Therefore, for him, death is the only route to love. This suggests that love is stronger than death.

In Anouilh's drama, the secondary mythemes, under the influence of the identity crisis, distrust, modern slavery in the twentieth century, the gap between generations as well as individualism, have witnessed an extensive change. The elements of myth and the secondary mythemes have changed due to historical and cultural issues. It can be stated that Anouilh's rewrite of an ancient Greek myth was capable of representing the modern society's concerns through some changes in the secondary mythemes.