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"IT'S A SAD TALE... BUT WE SING IT ANYWAY": EXPLORING THE INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN RETELLINGS AND UTOPIAN PERFORMATIVES IN ANAÏS MITCHELL'S *HADESTOWN* (2019)

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In a contemporary musical theatre landscape where retellings are resurfacing and acquiring attention from producers because of the familiarity they might offer to audiences (see Taylor and Symonds 2014), Anaïs Mitchell's *Hadestown* (2019) is one of the latest successes in the Broadway industry. A sung-through contemporary folk musical directed by Rachel Chavkin, the musical offers a retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, a tragic love story that narrates Orpheus' journey into the underworld in order to save Eurydice. An aspect that particularly stands out in the musical is the role hope plays in it, both within the narrative and the medium of storytelling itself. The musical establishes Orpheus as the embodiment of hope for social change, as well as engaging in politics of hope and resistance by telling the story again and again even though it ends tragically, and both the audience and the characters know that.

Considering this, the article attempts to examine the potential relationship between retellings and Jill Dolan's "utopian performatives" (2005), contending that although as she argues they

cannot be predicted and the concept was not originally applied specifically to retellings, the latter offer a perfect vehicle to engender the former. In order to explore this relationship in Mitchell's *Hadestown*, the article will depart mainly from a narrative, textual, and performance analysis that will explore the ways in which the piece uses elements that range from the narratives portrayed to costumes and historical references used to challenge and contest the hegemony of the original sources. Ultimately, this article will argue that the aspects above mentioned can potentially engender utopian performatives throughout the performance that might inspire the audiences to consider different, better possibilities for both the past and the future, thus establishing retellings in musical theatre as potentially transformative.

Keywords: *Hadestown*; musical theatre; utopian performatives; retellings

1. Introduction

Retellings, or new interpretations of already established stories, have a rich and nuanced history in Western mainstream musical theatre, and neither Broadway nor the West End have shied away from using retellings to attract audiences with familiar stories[1]. In fact, retellings as well as adaptations have been a safety net for these institutions, mainly because as Taylor and Symonds argue "producers build on audience familiarity with the basic materials and generate a new market for something that is familiar enough to appeal but which appears to be different" (Taylor and Symonds 2014, 235), and, at the same time, having these musicals on stages with access to mainly international audiences (see Kenrick 2008) can be incredibly beneficial to offer representation for underrepresented communities. Moreover, it is possible to take this sense of familiarity further and use it not only to challenge the

[1] Notable examples in the last decades include Lucy Moss and Toby Marlow's *Six* (2017) and Dave Malloy's *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812* (2012).

hegemony of the original stories and expose the intersectional (see Crenshaw 1989) structures of power that might be present in them, but also to contest these and offer the audiences that attend these performances an opportunity to reimagine stories in a potentially more subversive way.

Nonetheless, despite previous successes and the potential to be regarded as political and socially charged works, there is still a severe lack of scholarship in academia regarding contemporary musicals, sometimes dismissed because of their popular nature (Taylor and Symonds 2014, 234), and there is an even more noticeable critical lack when it comes to the specificities of retellings and their potential radicalness in contemporary musical theatre. With the aim of filling this gap, the present paper will take *Hadestown* (2019) as a case study, a sung-through musical written by Anaïs Mitchell and directed by Rachel Chavkin. Developed as a "DIY community theater project in Vermont in 2006-7" (Mitchell 2020, 3), what started as an experimental concert that evolved into an album has now become a Broadway musical that won eight Tony Awards in the 2019 season, including the award for the best musical. This show departs from the original Greek story of Orpheus and Eurydice, the story of a tragic love that narrates Orpheus' journey as he manages to get into the underworld using his musical abilities to rescue Eurydice, his wife, who has been killed by a snake bite. Orpheus manages to convince Hades to let Eurydice go, but Hades only agrees with the condition that Eurydice would have to walk behind Orpheus all the way up to Earth, Orpheus being forbidden to look back to make sure she was there. In the original tale, as well as in the musical, the story ends with a doubt-ridden Orpheus looking back to see that Eurydice was in fact behind him all along, sentencing her to the Underworld forever (Hard 2004, 708). Considering the basic premise of this retelling, this article will explore how the stories on stage relate to the original sources, focusing particularly on how they not only contest and arguably successfully subvert the hegemonic narratives of the original stories, but also help the audiences reimagine the past as well as the future, thus potentially engendering utopian performatives. As Dolan argues, "utopian performatives persuade us that beyond this "now" of material oppression and unequal power relations lives a future

that might be different, one whose potential we can feel as we're seared by the promise of a present that gestures toward a better later" (Dolan 2005, 7), and this article would like to use this understanding of utopian performatives to argue that retellings in musical theatre might be the perfect vehicle to create the sites of hope that Dolan proposes, which will be further explored below.

In order to do so and ultimately argue that mainstream musical theatre can be as radical as subversive, the paper will be mainly grounded on textual and lyrical analysis. Although some references to the musical styles will be made throughout the article, the analyses will be mainly based on the narrative and lyrics, relegating the musical analysis to a secondary plane. To a lesser extent as well, the article will carry out some parts of a performance analysis, focusing particularly on the choice of aesthetics, costumes, and staging, which in this musical seem more relevant than ever to understand their connection to contemporary Western societies, the attempted subversion of the original tales, and utopian performatives.

2. "It's an Old Song": Establishing the Theoretical Framework

As previously stated, arguably one of the greatest benefit retellings offer is the radical potential to reimagine the hegemony or at the very least question it, but before getting more in depth into that idea and its relationship with utopian performatives it is important to establish what retellings are and what exactly they entail as storytelling devices, particularly when it comes to musical theatre. As foundational scholar on adaptations Linda Hutcheon argues regarding musical theatre and retellings, "the stories themselves are retellings, the stories (mainly oral) are adapted in a medium to a text in the form of a play, and then it is adapted by the performers, directors, music…" (Hutcheon 2006, 39), which comes to show the complexities of the retellings when it comes to musical theatre in particular, for there are a lot of aspects throughout the adaptation process that must be individually considered. However, Hutcheon also argues that at the very core, in the most simplistic way to look at musical adaptations,

> Musicals use the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on. But the stories they relate are taken from elsewhere (2006, 3).

This, of course, does not mean that retellings are exclusively limited to musical theatre, nor does it mean that the term has not undergone several stages of edition and redefinition. Developed originally as a psycholinguistic term to analyse the communicative differences that mainly had to do with memory retention, adaptation scholarship has been constantly updated, particularly considering the extremely subtle differences that lay between the modern concept of retellings and the concept of adaptations. As Hutcheon pointed out, the similarities between the two terms are mainly questioned in the modes to which they are adapted, that is, the difference is that adaptations might include an extra layer of intermodality as opposed to a retelling, which might be used more as an umbrella term.

Further adding to these already established points raised by Hutcheon, Jeremy Scott coins the term "restorying" (Scott 2021, 23) as an alternative to the retelling, which is invaluable to understand how *Hadestown* operates. According to Scott, the term "retelling" can be divided into three subcategories to best capture the specificities of different types of restorying. The first one is the understanding of restorying as recycling, the second one is restorying as recontextualising, and the last one is restorying as reinterpretation (Scott 2021, 24). In the case of the musical that this paper is concerned with, and acknowledging that the lines between the three categories might not be as fixed as one might claim, the term that seems to best encapsulate the type of retelling it is is that of the restorying as recontextualising. In this category, as Scott explains, the new story uses an original source that is significantly altered at many layers such as the medium or the story itself, giving the story what he calls a "new creative impetus" (Scott 2021, 25). This idea is backed up by Julian Woolford, who argues that "the great musicals that have been created by adapting from sources such as plays, short stories, novels, films, etc. have always added value to the source material" (Woolford 2013, 34), ultimately

transforming "the work into a new greater artwork in the art of the adaptation" (Woolford 2013, 34). Another scholar that agrees with these ideas is Bud Coleman, who further argues that "concerning story and characters, a minority of musicals feature an original plot; most are adaptations of source material that first existed as a novel, short story, news article, comic book…" (Coleman 2017, 372). As a final remark on the term and understandings of retellings in musical theatre, it is interesting to note that Scott argues that "all type of restorying perform some kind of ideological function" (Scott 2021, 39), which is an idea that is reinforced by the fact that the musical chosen as case study for this article is indeed using the retelling or restorying to subvert the ideological hegemonies of the original stories. This ideological hegemony, in the source stories of *Hadestown*, is arguably framed within a cisheteropatriarchy, meaning that the stories are told from a male gaze (see Mulvey 1975) that leaves the female characters overall voiceless and without much agency. *Hadestown* challenges this by engaging with the stories from a more feminist and anti-capitalist ideological framework, contesting and subverting the expectations of a Western cisheteronormative narrative. While it is not the first adaptation to challenge the hegemony through the challenging of the canonical narratives, it is still valuable to consider that as Annika C. Speer points out in her review of Sharon Friedman's *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works* (2008) "hijacking the original text encourages audiences to rethink and challenge previous conceptions, thus altering the primacy of the classical text and making audible the voices of those who have been silenced" (2010, 234), which is what *Hadestown* manages to do.

Building on the previous point and moving towards the politics of hope, it is easy to see how by their very nature as recontextualised texts, in this case grounded on myths, retellings in musical theatre might offer a chance to reimagine the world through a lens of hope. Going back to Jill Dolan, she contends that "performance can describe, through the fulsome, hopeful, radically humanist gesture of the utopian performative, how social relationships might change" (Dolan 2005, 141) and retellings are a great way to exemplify what Dolan is trying to explain. Although Dolan does not consider many retellings in her book *Utopia in*

Performance[2], it seems quite safe to relate utopian performatives to the idea of retellings. For example, the "potential of elsewhere" that Dolan refers to in her book can be easily seen in contemporary retellings such as *& Juliet* (2019) *Wicked* (2003). The idea of hope and utopian performatives in relation to retellings gain special significance when we consider *Hadestown*, then, which despite knowing that it is going to end in a tragedy and the audience is warned at the very beginning of this, persists on explicitly defending how they will "sing it again and again" (Mitchell 2020, 249), wishing that next time it will turn out better, being guided by hope and faith for a better future. Although we cannot argue that *Hadestown* is necessarily a utopian performative due to the impossibility of predicting the moments that define it (Dolan 2005), it is possible to argue that the form and content of retellings lend themselves towards the possibility of utopian performatives. This engenders a potential for subversiveness and radicality, especially if we consider that as Dolan points out, "audiences form temporary communities, sites of public discourse that, along with the intense experiences of utopian performatives, can model new investments in and interactions with variously constituted public spheres" (Dolan 2005, 10), meaning that a lot of potential lies in the community that is created among the members of the audience that experiences utopian performatives. Finally, in terms of the politics of hope and the importance of it, it seems crucial to mention the contributions by Henry Giroux, who also made a case in favour of an "educated hope" (Giroux 2003), contending that "hope is one of the preconditions for individual and social struggle" (Giroux 2003, 98) and also "a referent for civic courage and its ability to mediate the memory of loss and the experience of injustice as part of a broader attempt to open up new locations of struggle, contest the workings of oppressive power and undermine various forms of domination" (Giroux 2003, 98). This relationship between hope and social struggle is also reflected in *Hadestown*, as will be further analysed below. All of these scholars ultimately argue in favour of hope, utopia, and utopian performatives as sites of resistance with

[2] It does include an example of a retelling, which is that of a Medea, but it is a short mention.

the potential to question and challenge the hegemonic forces such as capitalism or cisheteropatriarchy, and it is precisely through this contextual and theoretical framework, which lends itself well to the musical analysed below that the following sections will be written, dissecting which elements of the piece are the ones that make this interpretation possible.

3. "Is Anybody Listening?" The Shift in Female Characters' Narratives

As we have established, part of Hadestown's success lies in the ability to rely on the mixture of atemporal stories with underlying political criticism, which ensures the relevance of the story while at the same time making sure that the audience is already familiar with it. Considering its nature as a recontextualised text, there are several aspects of the musical that help engender a sense of utopian performative, as the mere fact of being a restorying allows the re-envisioning of a past that has always been understood through a certain ideological framework[3] and which this musical challenges by subverting expectations based both on the source materials and Western understanding of gender norms and sexuality. As such, one of the most interesting aspects of this musical is its potential subversiveness regarding the storylines of female characters, especially those of Eurydice and Persephone. As Wolf argues, "musical theatre has always been the terrain of women and girls, from its vibrant female characters to its passionate female fans" (2011, 6), and *Hadestown* embodies and takes further this idea giving their female characters a voice, which challenges the silence that permeates the original myths while at the same time engaging with the politics of seeing and being seen (see Solga, Phelan, Diamond) and mirroring and contesting a greater historical context of silencing female voices in theatre and performance that has permeated from the theatrical practice to the theory in academia (see Case 1988). By reimagining characters who have been canonically

[3] Mainly cisheteropatriarchy

stripped of their voices, particularly when it comes to having any sort of agency in relation to their fate (see Beam 2021) the musical takes figures which have been relegated to the margins in a subaltern position (see Spivak 1988) and places them as central in their own narratives. In Eurydice's case, in the original tale she is bitten by a snake and sent to the underworld, where she stays without being able to actively do anything to change that except for waiting for Orpheus to come and rescue her (Hard 2004, 708). Similarly, Persephone is known for having been kidnapped by Hades and having her fate decided between Hades and Demeter, her mother, without her being able to oppose these arrangements (Hard 2004, 181). This means that in terms of female agency, the stories were very limited to the historical context, which is why retellings play such an important role. The representation of these particular characters is especially pivotal on stage, because as Dolan argues if we want to do feminist readings they should be, and are, "grounded in the belief that representation-visual art, theatre and performance, film and dance-creates from an ideological base meanings that have very specific, material consequences." (Dolan 1988, 2). Beautifully worded by Dolan, what this comes to say is that representation, and especially *good* representation is crucial, for it has ramifications that extend to real life, beyond the fiction of the stage in this case. This is the reason why how Persephone and Eurydice are portrayed in this musical is subversive in as much as it gives them an agency and voice that they have not had.

On the one hand, Eurydice is granted a voice and a choice. In fact, while in the original sources she is merely the object of desire for Orpheus, the casualty that drives the plot forward, in this musical almost every choice she makes is made by herself. There are several instances in the musical that exemplify this, the first one being how Orpheus and she meet for the first time, where she is not easily won by him and his idealism (Mitchell 2020, 32). She resists the encounter and challenges every single line Orpheus directs her way, afraid to trust anyone (Mitchell 2020, 35). It can be read as a mirror for the individualism and isolation that capitalism as a system requires from its integrants, as will be further explained below, and consequently she is more prone to question it when someone tries to get closer to her. Within the limited free will that living within such

a system entails, in the musical she is portrayed as a woman who is capable of not only thinking critically but also capable of making her own decisions, which is why the choice to get married is ultimately up to her, granting her an agency that the original source does not offer. Another moment that exemplifies this agency is when she goes to Hadestown. Instead of being bitten by a snake and dying, in this musical it is an active choice to go to Hadestown (Mitchell 2020, 116). Granted, it should be questioned how much agency there is in a decision that has been made because of the horrible living conditions that the extreme capitalism has perpetuated in this fictional world, considering as well that the decision has been made with Eurydice unaware of all the consequences of the choice she was making, but it is still up to her to a certain extent to make this decision. Although not perfect, there is a certain agency that this character finds in the narrative framework of this Broadway musical.

On the other hand, Persephone is granted some sort of agency as well, portrayed to have been in love when she first decided to stay with Hades. At the point where the musical starts, she is arguably in a toxic relationship that is based on Hades' desire to own everything, including Persephone, and thus gets extremely jealous when she goes back to earth (Mitchell 2020, 100). The concept of ownership is also easily extrapolated to the workings of capitalism, where the desire for possessions and additional acquisition are some of the pillars that keep the system afloat. However, what I want to focus on here is the fact that she is able to change that. Even though she is in a toxic relationship and severely alcoholic (Mitchell 2020, 185), she is still able to question and challenge Hades' actions and she is not "a blameless victim" (Mitchell 2020, 185) as we can see for example in the song "chant," which is analysed below in relation to utopian performatives. Ultimately, these reimaginings of the stories allow the audiences to imagine not only a better future but a better understanding of the past, with characters that have not been heard finding some sort of agency and thus challenging the hegemony of history as well as engendering the possibilities for utopian performatives via the hope that is instilled in the audience seeing this change.

4. "To See How the World Could Be in Spite of the Way That It Is": Utopian Performatives and Storytelling

Although several elements come together to engender a space which is predisposed to utopian performatives, like the shift in the female characters mentioned above, none of them are as vital as the narrative framework in which the story is situated. *Hadestown* does not engage with utopian performatives solely through the politics of retelling and reimagining female narratives, but rather they do so through politics of hope mixed with the politics of storytelling. Being the stories they are narrating as pervasive throughout history as presumably well known by the general public, it is safe to assume that almost everyone in the audience, knows how the story ends. In fact, even if the audience is not aware of the original source, the musical goes a long way to state it from the very beginning, which brings us to the first song, "Road to Hell" (Mitchell 2020, 9), sung by Hermes. The song starts with him addressing the audience and thus positioning himself as the figure of the storyteller, a pivotal figure that evokes those plays represented in Ancient Greek, which bridges the gap between the source material and the material moment of the representation. The first song is characterized not only by being the one that presents every character to the audience, but also by being the one that plays with the tragic nature of the story. At first, Hermes sings that "It's an old song!/ it's an old tale from way back when/ it's an old song/and we're gonna sing it again" (Mitchell 2020, 10). This, once again, evokes in the audience the long history of these particular stories being narrated at the performance, reminding them that this is a recontextualising of narratives that have been passed down through generations. Hermes goes on to explain that "See, someone's got to tell the tale/whether or not it turns out well/maybe it will turn out this time" (Mitchell 2020, 13), which reminds the audience that the tale might not have the happy ending that the audience might be expecting. However, it is interesting to note that Hermes is already engaging in politics of hope by daring to verbalise his desire for a better outcome for the characters and by proxy for a better future. In the final section of this song, which plays with the repetition of lyrical structures, he blatantly states that "it's a sad song!/ it's a sad tale, it's a tragedy/it's

a sad song/ we're gonna sing it anyway" (Mitchell 2020,13). It is that last sentence, the one that says that even though they know it is a sad story they will tell it anyway, that once again nods to the sites of hope that are created by narrating stories whose outcome the audience already knows yet cannot help but imagine that this retelling, this re envisioning of a tragic tale, will offer a more positive ending.

These instances of hope are brought back to the material reality of the musical, ending the story with the same fate as the original source, that is, Orpheus losing Eurydice. A reprise of the first song is included at this point of the story, where Hermes sings that "It's an old song/that's how it ends/that's how it goes/Don't ask why, brother, don't ask how" (Mitchell 2020, 246). At this point of the reprise the story starts again from the very beginning, bringing back the circularity of the narrative and bringing into material reality the sites of hope that they are engendering. Hermes goes on to say that he learned from Orpheus "to know how it ends/and still begin to sing it again/as if it might turn out this time" (Mitchell 2020, 246), which is particularly relevant when the motto of Orpheus as a character is his ability to "see how the world can be, in spite of the way that it is" (Mitchell 2020, 247). He is, in fact, the physical embodiment of hope and resistance against a hegemonic system that thrives at the expense of exploitation as will be analysed in the following section. However, I would like to finish this one by talking about the last song of the piece, arguably the one that has the most potential to engender a utopian performative. This song, called "we raise our cups" (Mitchell 2020, 253), is the only instance of the musical where all the characters and not only Hermes address the audiences, breaking the fourth wall. By directly addressing the audience, they engender a sort of communitas (see Dolan 2005) not only within the audience but also with the performers themselves. The lines between stage and audience are blurred as the audience is encouraged to make a toast in honour of Orpheus along with the performers. They "raise their cups" for those who, in spite of adversities, in spite of tragic endings, continue singing, consequently creating a moment incredibly well suited for a utopian performative. As we can see in the videos that they have uploaded to social media (see Hadestown), it is the moment where the

characters are physically closest to the audience, singing in a line. The fourth wall is broken as some of the characters might toast with members of the audience throughout the song or at the end (see Harris 2021), making them complicit in their politics of hope. Interestingly, Persephone actually implies that community and remembering is what will help Orpheus, encouraging everyone to sing so that "let all our singing follow him/and bring him comfort" (Mitchell 2020, 253). With this line she is also arguably acknowledging the retelling nature of the story, possibly saying that it is through musicals like this, which remember and reimagine the original stories, that it is possible to keep the memory of the sources alive. As Here Blumer argues, "individuals acting collectively frequently broke with the routinized mundanity of daily behaviour [...]. In doing so, they created a social space necessary for innovative thought and action" (Blumer, qtd. in Schehr 55). What this means is that when facilitating a moment where the audience becomes part of a community with a shared hope and goal, the musical is engendering a potential for change and questioning of the hegemony through hopeful politics, subtly calling to action those in the audience.

5. "We're Standing with Him": Utopian Performatives and the Call for Collective Action

Another aspect that the musical utilises to engender utopian performatives is that of the concept of community, and particularly the community as a survival strategy necessary within a capitalist system that thrives on the division between the exploiters and the exploited. The idea that community is necessary as a survival strategy has been developed by several scholars, and even though some cases have been made against the romanticization of this ideal and the potential problematics that their inner workings present (see Joseph 2002), it is still a useful concept to analyse in this musical, particularly in relation to the group of workers. As it has been previously mentioned, the idea of Hadestown evokes an extreme

capitalist system, where Hades is the absolute king[4] and exploits the dead as workers for his machinery, and the group that perfectly encapsulates the power of community and the dangers of the lack thereof within such a system is that of the workers.

The first song that heavily features them is "Chant" (Mitchell 2020, 100), where they are first seen working. The line that is most repeated throughout this number is that of "keep your head low, you gotta keep your head low" (Mitchell 2020, 100), which hints at the type of labour exploitation that does not allow them to stop working or to take a minute and focus on something outside work. Being that the most obvious inference, however, there is also another aspect that those lines are referring to in a more indirect way, which is that of isolation. A crucial characteristic of capitalism is that it encourages individualism and competitiveness as opposed to collaboration, and at the beginning of the musical, when the workers have no hope nor understanding of a possible better future, isolation is all they have. This is further enhanced by the iconicity that the Broadway production uses to depict the workers as a faceless and nameless mass of working class, namely the costumes that are limited to a jumpsuit with a basic shirt that is heavily reminiscent of the famous painting of New York workers "Lunch atop a Skyscraper" (1932). They cannot look up not only because they cannot stop working but also because it perpetuates their isolation, the lack of human connection with those around them. This hopelessness within the rules of the system prevents the workers from establishing ties with the rest, which at the same time prevents them from forming a community to engage in politics of resistance and resilience that will allow them to imagine a better future.

This state of mind is somewhat explained for the first time throughout the song "why do we build the wall" (Mitchell 2020, 134), where it is particularly evident that there is some sort of systemic brainwashing going on from Hades' part. In this song,

[4] Hades being the embodiment of capitalism is accentuated by the depth of his voice register, which as Taylor and Symonds point out might be used to indicate evil in the same way that a high and light voice could be used to indicate goodness and femininity (2014, 40)

which structurally works as a broken dialogue between Hades and the workers, it is exposed that they are overworked and justify this through the politics of "us vs. them". Hades asks questions about why they are building a wall, to which the workers reply that they are doing so to keep poverty and the enemy outside of it and thus keep them safe. Although it was not originally intended to reflect any real-life situation (Mitchell 2020, 137), the audience is inevitably drawn to connect these lyrics with contemporary American politics that the right-wing Republican party with Donald Trump at its lead encouraged. As the group of people who represent the exploited and the oppressed in a capitalist society, the workers are arguably a community who share the same struggle, but who seem to lack the agency to do anything about it because they have no hope for a better future. It is not until Orpheus arrives and unknowingly becomes the embodiment of hope and desire for a better future that the workers in Hadestown are inspired to start questioning the system that isolates and exploits them, ultimately leading to a civil unrest. With a song that starts questioning the system, it comes to "tell the broader story of the Workers' awakening and Orpheus' emergence as an unwitting political leader" (Mitchell 2020, 180), which is evidenced in instances such as when they wonder "if it's true that there is nothing to be done" (Mitchell 2020, 173) or stating how

> 'Cause the ones who tell the lies
> Are the solemnest to swear
> And the ones who load the dice
> Always say the toss is fair
> And the ones who deal the cards (deal the cards)
> Are the ones who take the tricks
> With their hands over their hearts
> While we play the game they fix (Mitchell 2020, 175)

Interestingly, the structure of the song exposes the process by which the workers become increasingly inspired by Orpheus. At the beginning the song is mostly a solo, Orpheus singing to himself about his frustration with the system. However, soon enough Orpheus' lyrics are being accompanied by the workers' humming and harmonies, until they culminate in a dialogue based on repetition where, as Orpheus sings the lines, the workers echo his words increasingly convinced. Through the interaction with this

song, the workers find the sort of hope that they needed to contest what has been imposed on them, to contest Hades and his power in opposition to the workers' complete lack of agency. In fact, by the time the chant's reprise comes into play they are in a full-on revolution against Hades. Instead of dialoguing lethargically with Orpheus, they start talking to Hades himself, wondering why they "turn away when their brother is bleeding" or why they "build a wall and then call it freedom", which is at its core a challenge to everything they have been taught to know and an answer to the call for collective action that Orpheus was putting forward for them. Furthermore, the notion that they most question is that of the freedom they supposedly have, asking "If we're free/tell me why/I can't look in my brother's eye" (Mitchell 2020, 188) and "If we're free, tell me why we can't even stand upright? If we're free, tell me when we can stand with our fellow man" (Mitchell 2020, 189-190). This can be easily extrapolated to the extreme capitalist conditions that workers in the real world sustain. As the United States of America's neoliberal system's basic premise is that of freedom and as the nation heavily identifies itself with the concept of freedom as well (see Larson, Nolan), the fact that this is represented in Broadway is highly relevant, for it exposes the underlying exploitation of not only the nation but the industry of Broadway as a whole, consequently questioning the hegemonic system in place.

Another concept that the workers question throughout the chant reprise is that of the agency they lacked. Resigned to a fate of labour exploitation, the workers do not dare think of a different future without Orpheus' help. Two very telling lines of the song, which follow a similar style and wording, are those of "If I raise my voice if I raise my head could I change my fate" (Mitchell 2020, 189) and "Could I change the way it is?" (Mitchell 2020, 189). We can see here that they start not only questioning but hoping for a better future through resistance and resilience. In fact, it is the hope for different living conditions for the workers that incite them to resist against Hadestown's system, which is enhanced by the fact that Orpheus, the dreamer, shows them the very possibility of hope. It is precisely then, through the hope of a better future and questions such as "Why do we turn away instead of standing with him?" (Mitchell 2020, 189) that the workers start to actually look at each

other, to acknowledge each other and create a community that will fight back against the oppressive material conditions they live in.

The final song that primarily features the workers as a resisting community is the "wait for me reprise", which is sung towards the end of the musical when Orpheus is allowed to take Eurydice home. At this point, the workers start to see the light at the end of the tunnel with Orpheus' fate, and thus start believing that if it is possible, if Orpheus can get out, then so can they. This can be seen especially in the following fragment:

> Show the way so we can see
> Show the way the world could be
> If you can do it, so can she
> If she can do it, so can we
> Show the way
> Show the way the world could be
> Show the way so we believe
> We will follow where you lead (Mitchell 2020, 229)

As this illustrates, in the musical it is enough for one person to hope for a better future to inspire a whole community and challenge the hegemony by reimagining the life they have in favour of something that is more appealing in terms of not being exploited and oppressed.

As we have seen in this section, even though it is true that utopian performatives cannot be predicted, it is easy to see how these songs and dramatic moments offer infinite potential to achieve so. Through the retelling of a well-known story and the extrapolation to a somewhat contemporary critique of extreme neoliberalism, the musical is getting the audiences to pay attention to the underlying issues that the system represents, which is in part possible because the audience is already acquainted with the story and thus able to focus on the parts that differ. Furthermore, the audience becomes a community not only with the performers but also among themselves, establishing what could be a "political community" (see Mouffe 1991), that is, a community that is "held together not by a substantive idea of a common good but by a common bond, a public concern" (Mouffe 1991, 77). This in turn engenders the understanding of the audience and the theatre as a site of imagining alternative relationalities in relation to politics and in

relation to other human beings, which might enhance the presence of utopian performative moments.

6. "We Raise our Cups": Conclusion

If the last year in the Broadway industry has taught us anything (see Jones, Evans, Hiltner, Lewis, Siegel), it is that it engages in harmful practices that includes but is not limited to catering their performances to a very specific community that is in its majority a white and middle class audience (see Adler, Bennett), but this does not mean that the musicals do not explore social issues (see Wolf 12). In fact, it is precisely through art and by proxy the plays and musicals that are placed on the stage, mainly through giving a platform to those communities and offering representation and potentially transformative stories to the audiences, that these practices can start being contested. This idea of art being used to question the hegemony, or in other words, "the processes by which people consent to social rules that support the interests of dominant social groups" (Snyder-Young 4) has been suggested throughout the years by several scholars and philosophers, one of them being Jill Dolan, who argues that "since theater and performance direct our glances in just such constitutive ways, they offer a public space for renewing our critical attention to the machinations of dominant ideology" (Dolan 141). Although the namely public space of theatre has been put to a test this past years due to the global covid19 pandemic crisis, with plays being streamed and performance recordings being released, art and, in particular, as Dolan suggests, drama and performance, keep on offering a medium through which we can start challenging hegemonic systems in a more direct way, and in the best of times collectively. Some scholars, such as Taylor and Symonds, may counter argue that "as theatre has become increasingly commercialized, audiences have come to associate the musical not with politics or change, but with sheer entertainment" (Taylor and Symonds). However, as I have attempted to argue, not only do they challenge dominant ideology, but they can also potentially help reimagine the world as a more just place, which, considering the average white, middle-class audience member in

Broadway (see Dolan 106), it would mean that the message is reaching the people who most need to hear and understand these issues that are being raised.

Considering this context, I have pointed out that retellings, which have not been extensively analysed in relation to utopian performatives and musical theatre, engender the possibility of potentially creating utopian performatives, moments of hope which although cannot be predicted, can potentially be created in certain musicals, as it the case of *Hadestown*. Ultimately, what I have argued throughout this paper is that this musical is made for audiences to reimagine the past and consequently the future, to make them start questioning and challenging what has been told and especially how it has been told. Special attention has been given to how in *Hadestown* the nature of the retelling offers a possibility to somewhat give historically silenced female characters a voice and a possible agency, reimagining their fictional lives not as passive side stories but rather moving from the margins to the center of the narrative. Utopian performatives have also been explored in terms of the tragicality of the story and the resilience to never stop telling it in hopes of a better outcome. Finally, they have also been analysed in relation to the importance of hope when creating communities that will potentially lead up to a collective questioning of the system. All of this, as I hope I have made clear throughout the article, suggests that retellings in musical theatre offer infinite possibilities to explore how hegemonic systems and narratives can be challenged and potentially create utopian performatives that will encourage the audience to strive towards a change. This is further supported by academics such as Augusto Boal, who succinctly points out that "perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution (190). In fact, we need to remember that art does not exist in an isolated bubble far from ideologies, and these retellings with the potential to create utopian performatives as Dolan argues might have a material effect on the world, encouraging the audiences to take small actions towards change. Musicals, in the end, can be used as tools for activism, for as Bogart argues "artists and scientists are activists. They look at the world as a changeable and they look upon themselves as instruments for change" (Bogart 2014, 12). It is definitely not enough, and the

community should be striving to create a bigger change in both the industry and academia itself, but it is also true that we cannot expect every musical to be a call for immediate action that makes the audience immediately start fighting. Resistance is an endurance journey, and small steps towards change is still better than passively looking at the way things are without attempting to change anything. In the end, everyone should try to be a little bit like Orpheus, seeing the world in all its potential through politics of hope and resistance, seeing how it could be in spite of the way that it is, an ideal towards which this musical takes brave and very necessary steps. As Anaïs Mitchell wrote for Orpheus, "let the world we dream about be the world we're living now".

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