Aimee Hinds, "Entry on: Awful Sound (Oh Eurydice) by Arcade Fire ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1128. Entry version as of November 15, 2026.

Arcade Fire

Awful Sound (Oh Eurydice)

Canada (2013)

TAGS: Underworld





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Awful Sound (Oh Eurydice)
Title of the Album(s)	Reflektor
Studio/Production Company	Sonovox; Merge Records / Arcade Fire; Markus Dravs; James Murphy
Country of the First Edition	Canada
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English, French
First Edition Date	2013
First Edition Details	Arcade Fire, *Reflektor: Awful Sound (Oh Eurydice).* Sonovox; Merge Records / Arcade Fire; Markus Dravs; James Murphy, October 28, 2013, 6:13 min.
Running time	6:13 min
Format	CD, Vinyl, Digital
Official Website	arcadefire.com (accessed: September 22, 2020)
Available Onllne	iTunes (accessed: September 22, 2020) Spotify (accessed: September 22, 2020)
Genre	Indie rock*, Narrative song*
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Aimee Hinds, University of Roehampton, aimee.hinds89@gmail.com

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Creators



Arcade Fire, photographed by Andreas Meixensperger on June 20, 2014 (accessed: June 16, 2020). The file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.

Arcade Fire (Music Band)

Arcade Fire are a six-piece Canadian band, originally formed in 2000 by Win Butler and former member Josh Deu. They have released five albums to date. Current members are as follows:

Win Butler (b. 1980) and brother Will Butler (b. 1982). Born in California, they were raised in Texas. Win moved to Montreal, Canada to attend McGill University in 2000 where he studied for a BA in Religious Studies, and Will followed, moving to Montreal in 2004 to join Arcade Fire.

Régine Chassagne (b. 1976) studied Jazz Voice at McGill University, where she met Win Butler in 2000. Chassagne was born in Montreal to parents of Haitian descent who left Haiti during the dictatorship of Francois Duvalier, which has prompted the band to undertake activism and fundraising for Haitian causes.

Richard Reed Parry (b. 1977) is from Ottawa, and studied electroacoustics and contemporary dance at Concordia University. Parry has been involved in several other acts including The National, New International Standards and Little Scream, as well as writing commissioned music. Parry joined the band just before the break-up of its original line-up in 2003, bringing in new members to help re-form the band, including former core member Sarah Neufeld and remaining members Tim Kingsbury (b. 1977) and Jeremy Gara (b. 1978), both Parry's band members from New International Standards.

Kingsbury is originally from Guelph, Ontario, and Gara is from Ottawa; both are involved in various side projects, including Sam Patch which they are both part of.

All the band members play several instruments and often swap roles between sets.

Sources:

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Win Butler: Profile at Wikipedia (accessed: July 7, 2020).

Will Butler: Profile at Wikipedia (accessed: July 7, 2020).

Régine Chassagne: Profile at Wikipedia (accessed: July 7, 2020).

Richard Reed Parry: Profile at Wikipedia (accessed: July 7, 2020).

Tim Kingsbury: Profile at Wikipedia (accessed: July 7, 2020).

Jeremy Gara: Profile at Wikipedia (accessed: July 7, 2020).

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

It's Never Over (Hey Orpheus): a companion song on the same album

Summary

This song loosely narrates the death of Eurydice. Although he is not mentioned by name in the song, the second person perspective and the relative place of the song on the album (as a companion to *It's Never Over (Oh Orpheus)* suggests that it is being sung from Orpheus' perspective. The lyrics do not directly reference ancient versions of the myth but narrates the version of events as told in the 1959 film *Orfeu Negro* (Eng: *Black Orpheus*; dir. Marcel Camus), from which the mythic events can be roughly extrapolated.

The lyrics seem to narrate the death of Eurydice from Orpheus's perspective, up to the point at which he tries to rescue her from the Underworld. Contrary to what the listener may understand from the ancient source material, Orpheus makes it fairly clear that Eurydice does not (or has not) reciprocated his feelings ("but when I say I love you/ your silence covers me; I was so disappointed/ that you didn't want me; there's so much inside you/ that you won't let me see"). The song opens with Orpheus lamenting Eurydice's disinterest in him and closes with his lament for her death. The lyrics are quite repetitive, with the "awful sound" that is referenced throughout apparently being the sound of Eurydice hitting the ground, but also a probable reference to Orpheus's role as a musician.

Analysis

The song is loosely based on the death of Eurydice, mostly presenting the lament of Orpheus in the aftermath of her death. Songwriter Win Butler explained to *Rolling Stone* in 2013 that one of his favourite films is *Black Orpheus* and that this film was an inspiration for the album *Reflektor*. The film is based on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice but is set in Rio de Janeiro during the Carnival. Butler's reading of the myth is based on this cinematic reception; he compares the Orpheus myth to Romeo and Juliet, calling it "the original love-triangle". Black Orpheus does have elements of Romeo and Juliet in its story, as Orfeu's character is engaged to another woman during his pursuit of Eurydice, however, this element is not present in ancient

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versions of the myth.

The lyrics of this song reference *Black Orpheus* more closely than ancient versions of the myth, although they engage with the mythology through the context of the cinematic reception. Kierkegaard's *The Present Age* and a trip to Haiti were other inspirations for *Reflektor*, according to Butler (Doyle, 2013); while this song and its companion are not necessarily typical of the band's work, these shared inspirations tie them into the rest of the album.

The concept of reflection (which comes through Kierkegaard) is significant within this song lyrically, through lines such as "we know there's a price to pay for love in the reflective age". (Reflection as a concept also provides other subtle nods to classical reception elsewhere on the album. The track *Afterlife* is not explicitly tied in to classical reception but lyrically seems connected to both *Awful Sound* and *It's Never Over* through metaphorical description of the end of a relationship, and the video to the title track *Reflektor* in which the band members gaze at themselves in a pool, subtly referencing the myth of Narcissus.)

Unlike the following song on the album, *It's Never Over (Hey Orpheus)*, as Rothman (2013) points out, this song barely recognisably references the myth, although a listener familiar with *Black Orpheus* would likely be able to make the connections through the film; this is unlikely to be the case for young listeners given the film's age and relative unpopularity. The Eurydice of the song is apparently rather less keen on Orpheus than the Eurydice of ancient versions of the myth ("please stop running now, just let me be the one"). The lyrics are not clear in their relationship to the mythical source (again, more closely referencing *Black Orpheus*):

Oh, how could it be, Eurydice

I was standing beside you

By a frozen sea

Will you ever get free?

Just take all your pain

Just put it on me

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So that you can breathe

When you fly away

Will you hit the ground?

It's an awful sound

There are several references to Eurydice's demise, through the "awful sound" of her hitting the ground, again, doesn't make a lot of sense in terms of ancient versions of the myth (in which Eurydice is killed when a snake bites her), but references *Black Orpheus* in which Eurydice is accidentally electrocuted by Orpheus as she hangs from an overhead wire, that she does fall from upon her death:

You fly away from me

But it's an awful sound

When you hit the ground

It's an awful sound

When you hit the ground

There are a few oblique references that those with knowledge of the myth might understand through the mythology itself, which appear to refer to Orpheus's plan to cheat death and fetch Eurydice:

I know there's a way

We can make 'em pay

Think it over and say

(I'm never going back again)

But I know there's a way

We can leave today

Think it over

Like *It's Never Over (Hey Orpheus)*, the final verse of the song reflects the end of this part of the story. While it is suggestive of the

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myth, it is much more clearly referencing *Black Orpheus* which has an even more futile ending than the ancient source material, with Orpheus dying with the dead Eurydice in his arms:

We know there's a price to pay

For love in the reflective age

I met you up upon a stage

Our love in a reflective age

Oh no, now you're gone

Unlike in *It's Never Over (Hey Orpheus)*, the end of this song refers to Eurydice's "first" death, before Orpheus' attempt to rescue her, and so the line "oh no, now you're gone" is, in the context of the two songs together, not entirely futile. As the song (on its own) does not reference Orpheus's attempt to rescue Eurydice, it is harder to read in terms of the mythology, as it is missing this defining characteristic of the myth. The reference to the "awful sound", as well as being a euphemism for Eurydice's death (a subtle reference to death which introduces the theme without being inappropriate for younger listeners), may also be a reference to Orpheus's fame as a musician, through lines such as "your silence…it's an awful sound".

As a contemporary rock/ alternative band, Arcade Fire are not targeting an audience of young children, but certainly young adults and possibly older children will be amongst their fans, and will likely have a different understanding of the song than adults, especially given Butler's reliance on *Black Orpheus* which is not part of children's culture. As the myth of Orpheus is so prevalent it is probably that younger listeners would recognise who was being alluded to by Eurydice's name, but unlikely that they would, from the lyrics, have an understanding of any ancient versions of the myth through this song.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Underworld

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Intertextuality Reconciliation Success and failure

Further Reading

Reviews:

- In Spin by Jem Aswad (accessed: September 22, 2020).
- In NME by Hazel Sheffield (accessed: September, 2020).

Doyle, Patrick, "Win Butler Reveals Secret Influences Behind Arcade Fire's 'Reflektor'", *Rolling Stone*, published October 22, 2013 (accessed: September 22, 2020).

Rothman, Lily, "Brush Up on the Greek Myth That Arcade Fire Is Singing About", *Time*, published October 29, 2013 (accessed: September 22, 2020).

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