Anna Mik, "Entry on: Hadestown (album) by Anaïs Mitchell ", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/228. Entry version as of October 07, 2026.

Anaïs Mitchell

Hadestown (album)

United States (2010)

TAGS: Eurydice Hades Orpheus Persephone Underworld

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

General information	
Title of the work	Hadestown (album)
Title of the Album(s)	Hadestown
Studio/Production Company	The album is produced by Righteous Babe Records; distributed by United For Opportunity
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States; United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2010
First Edition Details	First performance of a rough version of this 'folk opera' took place in 2006; the second version was performed by the group Hadestown Company in 2007. There were also further versions, as the project expanded.
Running time	Running Time of the album is 57 min
Format	Audio released on CD March 9, 2010; available in various formats, also on Spotify and iTunes
Official Website	hadestown.com (accessed: August 3, 2018)
Available Onllne	On Spotify (accessed: August 3, 2018).
Genre	Musicals , Soundtracks*
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Anna Mik, University of Warsaw, anna.m.mik@gmail.com

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Creators

Anaïs Mitchell, photographed by Mark Fearon on October 11, 2008 (accessed: May 23, 2018). The file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike.

Anaïs Mitchell , b. 1981
(Author of lyrics, Musician, Vocalist)

Anaïs Mitchell is an American songwriter and singer. She released five albums, among which *Hadestown*, with songs based on Greek mythology (mainly on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice). Her first album was *The Song They Sang When Rome Fell* in 2002, and is also inspired by the classical antiquity. Before the releasing of *Hadestown* she traveled around the world, staying close to various political and social issues. Then she gathered her ideas and composed a political/social/mythical musical experience – an idea of her own. Her music style can be described as folk jazz, even though she uses and mixes various styles and genres.

Source:

Spotify link (accessed: June 26, 2018).

Bio prepared by Anna Mik, University of Warsaw, anna.m.mik@gmail.com

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Additional information

Adaptations

Hadestown (2016), musical, directed by Rachel Chavkin – a development of the same story and theme.

Summary

Track listing:

1. "Wedding Song" featuring Justin Vernon – 3:18
2. "Epic (Part I)" featuring Justin Vernon – 2:22
3. "Way Down Hadestown" featuring Justin Vernon, Ani DiFranco and Ben Knox Miller – 3:33
4. "Songbird Intro" – 0:24
5. "Hey, Little Songbird" featuring Greg Brown – 3:09
6. "Gone, I'm Gone" featuring The Haden Triplets – 1:09
7. "When the Chips are Down" featuring The Haden Triplets – 2:14
8. "Wait for Me" featuring Ben Knox Miller and Justin Vernon – 3:06
9. "Why We Build the Wall" featuring Greg Brown – 4:18
10. "Our Lady of the Underground" featuring Ani DiFranco – 4:40
11. "Flowers (Eurydice's Song)" – 3:33
12. "Nothing Changes" featuring The Haden Triplets – 0:52

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13. "If It's True" featuring Justin Vernon – 3:03
14. "Papers (Hades Finds Out)" – 1:24
15. "How Long?" featuring Ani DiFranco and Greg Brown – 3:36
16. "Epic (Part II)" featuring Justin Vernon – 2:55
17. "Lover's Desire" – 2:05
18. "His Kiss, The Riot" featuring Greg Brown – 4:03
19. "Doubt Comes In" featuring Justin Vernon – 5:32
20. "I Raise My Cup to Him" featuring Ani DiFranco – 2:10

The story is focused on the well-known motif from Greek mythology. Mitchell exploits the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and their journey to the Underworld (called Hadestown). Each song corresponds to another episode of the story which is not yet clear but become clearer on stage, as the music was transformed into the musical).

1. The album opens with the track "**Wedding song**", where Orpheus and Eurydice are discussing their future together. When the bride is concerned about the wedding arrangements, Orpheus assures her of his music's power, and sings:

"[…] The birds are gonna make the wedding bed
And the trees are gonna lay the wedding table
And the rivers are gonna give us the wedding band."

He doesn't seem troubled about the money, as artist should celebrate something more than the material culture.

2. Then, in the song "**Epic (1)**" Orpheus gives the description of the Underworld, with the river Styx and stones in it – representing human

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souls which have already been lost. This unfriendly environment is no place for artists and dreamers, but for those who lost their faith in the possibility of a good life and just try to survive.

3. Next, Hermes (in "**Way down Hadestown**") sings about the Hadestown, a land that is not a land of a poverty (not for all anyway) although it does not differ much from hell. As Eurydice sings:

"[…] Everybody dresses in clothes so fine
Everybody's pockets are weighted down
Everybody's sipping ambrosia wine
In a goldmine in Hadestown […]"

Orpheus represents a different point of view:

"[…] 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 […]"

As we learn that the land is divided into rich and poor districts, similarly to societies living there. This defines the scene of the album and the classical myth begins.

Hadestown is also home for Persephone (only in winter time) and her husband Hades, king of the Undergrounds, who is described as vicious and unforgiving boss for people that work for him.

4. ("**Songbird Intro**" instrumental)

5. In the "**Hey, Little Songbird**" song, Hades tries to convince Eurydice to leave Orpheus – who as a poet, he will not be able to provide for both of them – she being a beautiful young girl should not waste her life with someone like him.

6. In "**Gone, I'm Gone**" Eurydice makes her decision to go to Hadestown. It seems like a betrayal of Orpheus, but the Fates defend the young girl who simply opts for survival:

"[…] Wouldn't you have done the same?
In her shoes, in her skin
You can have your principles
When you've got a bellyful
But hunger has a way with you

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There's no telling what you're gonna do […]"

7. The Fates also open the next song "**When the Chips Are Down**" with lines:

"Life ain't easy, life ain't fair
A girl's gotta fight for a rightful share […]",

This lines express Eurydice's desperation and tough choice that she had to make. The poor, especially poor women, have to fight for their rights, even though it requires sacrifices. There is no place for love or sentiment in this cruel world – "[…] And the first shall be first. / And the last shall be last […]".

8. "**Wait for Me**" is a short, but very important song in this album. Orpheus calls Eurydice and announces his decision – he is coming with her, even though the land of the dead might also mean death for his art. Hermes leads the way, but Orpheus seems to know it very well.

9. Next comes "**Why We Build The Wall**," probably the most famous song of the album. Sang by Hades and his subjects, it defines their mutual agreement: I, the god, keep you in, but it's not a prison – the wall keeps you free from something much worse that is lurking outside. This something would be poverty, and work (that is never finished), a treasure worth preserving.

10. "**Our Lady of the Underground**" is a proper introduction to Persephone, the boss' wife. She appears to be very sure of herself (the opposite of what we would imagine in a girl kidnapped to another realm). She represents everything that everyone misses:

"[…] 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 […]"

Persephone would use those things to get whatever she wants, as she possesses all that Hadestown citizens lack – features of life. She gives them hope and points to the crack in the wall. Persephone offers a little escape from the nightmare that they live and convinces them: "[…] What the boss don't know, the boss won't mind."

11. "**Flowers**" sang by Eurydice expresses the young girl's longing for

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an end to her misery and her wish to commit suicide. She highlights that human life is as short, delicate, and meaningless as petals of a flower – although it still might be beautiful, it easily fades.

12. The Fates sing "**Nothing Changes**" about the concept of pre-determined life: there is nothing that we can really do about it:

"That's the way the river runs
So why get wet? Why break a sweat?
Why waste your precious breath?
Why beat your handsome brow?
Nothing changes."

13. This message seems slowly to reach Orpheus who suspects Eurydice is going to Hadestown – which really means that she will die. In the song "**If It's true**," he wonders, if his lover is truly gone from this world. Orpheus is afraid of what he suspects might be true.

14. ("**Papers – Hades Finds Ou**t" instrumental)

15. "**How Long?**" is a musical dialogue between Persephone and Hades. The goddess tries to convince her lover to show mercy to Orpheus and Eurydice. She uses their own love to show Hades that they share a similar experience. God, as cruel as he is, truly loves Persephone, and in this song, he shows his "human" side. However he still does not believe in people's good intentions, because they have ruined their own world by being reckless and inconsiderate.

16. The "human" side of Hades is further explored in "**Epic (2)**," where Orpheus describes how "Heavy and hard is the heart of the king," until he sees Persephone in her mother's garden. When he misses his wife, his heart is as soft as Orpheus' – the heart of a man who loves a woman.

17. ("**Lover's Desire**" instrumental)

18. In "**His Kiss, The Riot**" Hades seems to be fed up with Orpheus and his plan to get Eurydice back. He perceives Orpheus as a weak and reckless romantic who does not care for the girl at all. Hades is done with him, as he sings: "Dangerous, this jack of hearts / With his kiss, the riot starts." Afraid of losing control of his kingdom, Hades sums up his strategy of ruling Hadestown. He also designs a plan according to which Orpheus will be able to save Eurydice only, if he

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does not look at her on their way back from the underground kingdom.

19. "**Doubt Comes In**" Orpheus's heart, when he and Eurydice return from Hadestown. He wants to check if his lover is still there for him and calls her name. She responds to him and tries to calm him down.

20. "**I Raise My Cup to Him**" closes the album and the story retold by Mitchell. We don't really know what happened to Orpheus. As Eurydice sings to Persephone: "Pour the wine and raise a cup / Drink up, brothers, you know how. / And spill a drop for Orpheus / Wherever he is now." Both women mourn and celebrate the love that have died in Hadestown.

Analysis

It might seem that *Hadestown* is just another Broadway-type musical album, with its dramatic love story based on a classical myth. But this assumption is not quite accurate.

Of course, the story would seem to be typical for the musical genre; however, the connection to the modern America reality and its problems might be the most important issue raised in this album – an issue that was previously explored on Mitchell's concerts and theatrical workshops. It can be noticed in at least several tracks, such as: "When the Chips are Down," which comments on the problems of poverty, or – even more so – in "Why We Build the Wall," where Hades sings to his subjects what an excellent idea it was to build the Wall (the song was composed before Trump announced his run for president, however, the connection ironically seems to be more than relevant).

The album is a novelty in the world of music industry. Although it is not entirely revolutionary, the songs must be treated as forming one story. It resembles an audiobook, but instead of listening to the classical story about the Orpheus and Eurydice, we are treated to a long ballad, that can be easily related to the socio-political contemporary American reality.

The myth was adapted and set in a very specific, neo-liberal context of modern America. Hell – here called Hadestown – is a metaphor for the American society. The main problem discussed here is poverty affecting the majority of contemporary civilization. In the world of

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	consumption there is no place for love – every Orpheus, and every Eurydice must make tough choices in order to survive. This world is unforgiving and our fate is already sealed. Just like when the Fates sing: "Nothing Changes," and love must die.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Eurydice Hades Orpheus Persephone Underworld
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Death Diversity Love Society Values
Further Reading	Spotify link of the Author (accessed: August 3, 2018). Reviews: • In Drownedinsound by James Skinner (accessed: August 3, 2018). • In "The Guardian" (accessed: August 3, 2018).

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