Elżbieta Olechowska, "Entry on: Once Upon a Time… (Series, S05E12–21) by Adam Horowitz, Edward Kitsis", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/936. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Adam Horowitz , Edward Kitsis

Once Upon a Time… (Series, S05E12–21)

United States of America (2011)

TAGS: Acheron (River) Cerberus Cocytus (River) Eurydice Hades Heracles Hercules Lethe (River) Megara Orpheus Pandora's Box Phlegethon (River) Styx Underworld Zeus



Logo of the television series. Uploaded by Florian64190, retrieved from Wikipedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 (accessed: January 7, 2022).

General information	
Title of the work	Once Upon a Time… (Series, S05E12–21)
Studio/Production Company	ABC Studios
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2011
First Edition Details	*Once Upon a Time…* (S05E12–21). Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz, creators and showrunners of the whole series wrote scripts for episodes 12 and 23, Andrew Chambliss & Dana Horgan scripted episode 13, Jane Espenson (14), Jerome Schwartz & David H. Goodman (15), Tze Chun & Dana Horgan (16). Directors: Ralf Hemecker (directed episode 12), Billy Gierhart (13), Alrick Riley (14), Eagle Egilsson (15), Steve Pearlman (16), Romeo Tirone (17, 19), Eriq LaSalle (18), Ron Underwood (20), Jerome Schwartz (21); October 23, 2011 – May 18, 2018 (Season 5, episodes 12–21: March 6, 2016 – May 8, 2016), episode length: 43 minutes.
Running time	7 seasons x approx. 22 episodes, episode length: 43 minutes
Date of the First DVD or VHS	August 16, 2016 (DVD:Region 1); October 18, 2016 (DVD: Region 2)

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Official Website	abc.go.com (accessed: January 20, 2020)
Awards	2016 – Teen Choice Awards: Choice TV Show: Fantasy/Sci-Fi *Once Upon a Time*, Choice TV Actress: Fantasy/Sci-Fi Lana Parrilla, Choice TV: Liplock Jennifer Morrison & Colin O'Donoghue, Choice TV: Villain Greg Germann (Nominated).
Genre	Fantasy fiction, Mythological fiction, Retelling of fairy tales*, Television series
Target Audience	Crossover (Teens, YA)
Author of the Entry	Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

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Creators



Adam Horowitz by Gage Skidmore. Retrieved from Wikipedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 (accessed: January 7, 2022).

Adam Horowitz , b. 1971
(Director, Producer, Scriptwriter)

Adam Horowitz graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1994 where he studies communication and political science. During his studies, he was a major contributor to the *Daily Cardinal*, the student newspaper. He moved to Los Angeles with his university friend Edward Kitsis. They worked there as writers on several television shows, including the revival of the 1970s ABC series *Fantasy Island*. In 2005, they were both hired as writers and producers (in 2006 as co-executive producers) by ABC for the series *Lost* and continued working for the show until its final season in 2010, honoured by the Writers Guild of America (WGA) Award for Best Dramatic Series in 2006 and nominated for this award twice (2007 and 2010). They continued working for the ABC creating *Once Upon a Time* (2011–2018), a seven-season fairy tale/mythological fantasy situated in part in a small contemporary American town, and in part in a magical realm. In 2013, they created with Jane Espenson and Zack Estrin a spin-off series *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland* (based on Lewis Carroll's novels and Disney movies motifs) which was designed as a one season show and broadcast in 2013–2014. When *OUAT* ended in May 2018, Kitsis and Horowitz extended their exclusive contract with ABC Studios for another four years (until 2022) and began working on a remake of Steven Spielberg's *Amazing Stories* series for Apple TV+.

Source:

Profile at onceuponatime.wikia.com (accessed: January 20, 2020)

Bio prepared by Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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Edward Kitsis by Gage Skidmore. Retrieved from Wikipedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 (accessed: January 7, 2022).

Edward Kitsis , b. 1971
(Producer, Screenwriter)

Edward Kitsis graduated from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1993 with a degree in radio, television, and film studies. After graduation, he moved to Los Angeles with his university friend Adam Horowitz. Eventually, they were both hired as writers for the short-lived (13 episodes) remake of ABC's *Fantasy Island* and later for other shows. In 2005, they started writing and then producing *Lost*; in late 2006, they were promoted to supervising producers, and later to co-executive producers. They won the Writers Guild of America (WGA) Award for Best Dramatic Series in 2006 and were nominated for this award again twice, in 2007 and 2010. From 2011 to 2018, they worked on *Once Upon a Time*. For details of their continuing collaboration, see Adam Horowitz's bio.

Source:

Profile at onceuponatime.wikia.com (accessed: January 20, 2019)

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Additional information

Casting	Ginnifer Goodwin as Snow White, Jennifer Morrison as Emma Swan, Josh Dallas as Prince Charming, Colin O'Donoghue as Captain Hook, Lana Parrilla as the Evil Queen, Greg Germann as Hades, Jonathan Whitesell as Herc, Kacey Rohl as Megara, David Hoflin as Zeus.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Spin-off *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland* (2013)
Summary	The second volume of season 5 (episodes 12–21) features characters from Greek mythology, these episodes are entitled: *Souls of the Departed*, *Labour of Love*, *Devil's Due*, *The Brothers Jones*, *Our Decay*, *Her Handsome Hero*, *Ruby Slippers*, *Sisters*, *Firebird*, *Last Rites*. The last episode of the season (23), *The Untold Story*, is not included in the summary, as it is a recap of the whole season, mentioning a single object inspired by Greek mythology, the Olympic crystal which plays an important role in the other episodes. The main plot could be summarized as follows: after Emma Swan's boyfriend, Killian Jones (aka Captain Hook), dies, Emma decides to descend to the Underworld – styled here as Hades, the realm of the dead in Greek mythology – to bring her beloved back to life by sharing with him her heart, similar to what Snow did previously to revive her husband, David Charming. The ruler of the Underworld, Hades is

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revealed to be, surprisingly, a former lover of Zelena, a modern version of the Wicked Witch from *The Wizard of Oz*. He plans to improve his gruesome lot by travelling back in time to prevent his brother Zeus from assuming power and to seize it for himself. He is hoping to exploit Zelena's time-travelling powers combined with her desire for revenge, to help him get what he wants. However, true to the series theme of redemption for all, Zelena becomes much less of a villain and reconciles with her sister. While she believes in Hades' love for her and eventually gives him the kiss of true love which reboots his heart, learning of his duplicity brings her back to her reformed villain's senses. It is Zelena who in an act of bravery and desperation becomes the saviour, annihilating her lover with his own weapon, the restored Olympian crystal. Zeus is so grateful for his irredeemable brother's demise that he lets Killian return to the world of the living.

Some side plots focus on people that the main characters meet in the Underworld, starting with an eternally young Hercules who in Snow's magic past helped her stand up to bandits and in the present is performing odd jobs requiring brute strength. It is a consequence of having been killed by Cerberus who also killed a young girl Megara, now imprisoned and guarded by the infernal dog. Hercules remains in the Underworld because he was unable to complete his last labour (killing Cerberus) and it became his unfinished business anchoring him in an antechamber to the afterlife. The upper part of the Underworld which looks like real life Storybrooke but somewhat ruined and deserted, without any vegetation and in monochromatic hues, a sort of purgatory, the place where the dead with unfinished business wait for an opportunity to move on to a "better place". In Hercules' case, it is Mount Olympus. It is implied in the story, that Olympus plays the role of heaven and may be the destination for all people who solve their unfinished business. The heroes from the Storybrook who came to save Captain Hook liberate both Hercules and Megara, allowing them to ascend to Olympus. They also break Hades' power over the former Evil Queen's mother, the evil Cora and her good husband Prince Henry. Such activities meet of course with furious opposition from Hades whose aim is to prevent anybody from leaving.

Analysis

The advantage of studying recent audiovisual productions is that the creators intentions are expressed in various interviews and reviews,

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like in the case of *OUAT*: "The idea is to take these characters that we all know collectively and try to find things about them that we haven't explored before. Sometimes it's a story point, sometimes it's a thematic connection, sometimes it's a dilemma they face in both worlds that is similar. We are not generally retelling the exact same story as the fairy tale world." — *Executive producer Adam Horowitz*;

Even this mythological part of the series abounds in themes typical for fairy-tale fantasy: hope, optimism, true-love, villains and heroes, monsters to be vanquished, goodness and integrity rewarded, etc. "Horowitz and Kitsis said that if *Lost* was ultimately about redemption, *Once* is about hope, a word we hear bandied about a lot in the pilot."* The authors treat fairy tales the same way they treat mythology which is for them just another fairy tale passed through the sieve of Disney animation and known best by the audience in this particular variety.

The *OUAT* Hades killed Kronos using the Olympian crystal (not the stone sickle), later broken in half by Zeus who assumed the top divine job. Hades was given dominion over the Dead – a bitter-sweet reward which he considered an exile and plotted to overthrow Zeus. The story of Hades, a mythological figure, is driven by fairy tale motifs: his heart stopped beating when he became the god of the Underworld, to restart it he needed a true love's kiss, an unlikely event given his universally hated and despised persona. Hades plays the role of irredeemable villain who time and again is faced with opportunities to do good but chooses evil. In all this extravaganza of reformed villains, he brings in a reality check (evil exists) even more than the Dark ones who are either too abstract to be taken seriously, or like in the case of Rumpelstiltskin and of Emma the Dark Swan, are surrounded by mitigating circumstances: and we must not forget it. A lesson and a reminder for viewers.

The Underworld is strongly inspired in its nether regions by Greek mythology. The five subterranean rivers named each for its specific qualities, flow through and create an infernally poetic, and emotionally charged scenery. Acheron is the green river of sorrow and of the lost souls who look like nasty, whitish Dementors eager to drag people under the sickly waters. The remaining four are Lethe, the yellow river of oblivion, Phlegethon, the flaming river of fire, Cocytus, the steaming river of lamentation that flows into the Acheron, and the mighty Styx, the blue river of hate, which divides the world above from the world below. The elusive hope of salvation manifests itself in

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a luminous passage opening above the infernal fires and letting those who solved their unfinished business reach the "better place."

The upper part of Hades' realm is reachable by ferry. The *OUAT* ferryman, certainly inspired by the mythological Charon, is a silent, hooded figure, a reminder and symbol of the sinister destination of his vessel. Until the sadistic Hades decided to destroy it, there was a phone booth in the Underworld, the departed souls could use it to communicate with their still alive loved ones. A hidden low-tech lift connects the surface to a deep underground structure; its most mythological level contains the royal hall surrounded by the infernal rivers. Other levels house dungeons guarded by Cerberus and various chambers where special punishments are being dispensed. One of them is a mill where Cora, born a miller's daughter, is condemned to eternal labour by Hades for failing to convince her daughter Regina to leave the Underworld. The lift reaches down to the lowest level where a stump of an ambrosia tree still remains. The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice has its own upbeat version in *OUAT*: the lovers escape and live happily ever after having eaten of the divine ambrosia fruit. Hades brags about eliminating this means of escape by destroying the tree.

The choice of the Greek mythological version of the afterlife, to which the characters descend to bring back someone recently deceased, or for some other vital reason, appeals to creators of television fantasy series as a "reality" already established in the popular imagination. It can be tweaked according to whatever the plot requires. There is little or no risk of offending religious beliefs, the Athenian prosecutors who could bring charges of impiety are long gone. Such choice is natural in recent fully mythological series, like *Atlantis* (2013–2015) or *Olympus* (2015), less so in *Lost Girl* (2014–2015), a supernatural story inspired mainly by Norse mythology and fairy tales. And yet, the Underworld in the *Lost Girl* is a hybrid between Hades and Valhalla; the title character is revealed in season 5 as Hades' daughter – a surprise to her and to the viewers.

OUAT's Underworld episodes were broadcast in 2016, later than the almost simultaneous (2015) airing of the same theme in *Atlantis* and *Olympus*. It is most likely a coincidence without any direct inspirational connection but it certainly indicates a strong appeal of the theme for the creators and for the audiences.

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	* Hale-Stern, Kaila, "On the TV show *Once Upon a Time*, all of your favourite fairy tale characters are trapped in Maine", October 16, 2011, io9.gizmodo.com *We Come from the Future* (accessed: January 20, 2020).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Acheron (River) Cerberus Cocytus (River) Eurydice Hades Heracles Hercules Lethe (River) Megara Orpheus Pandora's Box Phlegethon (River) Styx Underworld Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Coming of age Fairy tale references Pop culture references
Further Reading	Campbell, Josie, "*Lost*'s Kitsis, Horowitz Start At The Beginning With *Once Upon A Time*", August 25, 2011, available online at cbr.com (accessed: January 20, 2020). Olechowska, Elżbieta, "Between Hope and Destiny in Young Adults Television Series *Once Upon a Time*, Season 5, Episodes 12–21 (2016)" in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Hope. The Ancient Myths as Medicine for the Hardships of Life in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2022, 593–610.

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