

The Anti-Orpheus: Queering Myth in Ducastel et Martineau's *Théo et Hugo dans le même bateau* (Paris 05:59)

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Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau's 2016 film *Théo et Hugo dans le même bateau* (Paris 05:59: *Théo & Hugo*) concludes on an Orphic note. As the two titular characters leave Théo's studio at dawn, Théo realizes that he has forgotten his phone and starts to return for it. Hugo stops him from behind, telling him: "Si tu te retournes, si tu regardes en arrière, tu perds tout ce que je t'ai promis" 'If you turn around, if you look back, you will lose everything that I have promised you' (Figure 1). The reference, of course, is to Orpheus's losing his beloved Eurydice while bringing her back to earth from the underworld because he ignored Hades's order not to turn back to her until he reached the light of the upper world. But while Orpheus famously looked back and lost his beloved, Théo looks forward, not backward. "On va de l'avant" 'We are moving forward,' Hugo then tells him. The final shot of the film shows them descending five flights of steps together into the dawn instead of one of them ascending alone without the beloved to the earth's light. With Théo not looking back, the young men can and likely will be together for the long-term—as Hugo promised Théo in the previous scene. In an interview



Figure 1: Orpheus or Eurydice?: Do not Look Back. Last scene of Théo et Hugo dans le même bateau (Epicentre Films).

published in the French magazine *Têtu*, co-director Jacques Martineau remarks that, as he began the script, he wanted to “work on the [Orpheus] myth.”¹ The film gestures forward to an entirely new interpretation of the story, refusing to look backward on many of the traditional elements of the myth.

Concluding with such an explicit Orphic reference may seem odd in light of the rest of the film. The first seventeen minutes are constituted by explicit sex in the basement of a gay sex club, certainly not part of the tradition of the myth. A key part of the story, too, is that Théo learns that Hugo is HIV+, and because the two had unprotected sex in the club, he seeks preventive treatment at the hospital to destroy any potential virus. The rest of the film treats their budding relationship as they move through Paris on foot, on bicycles, and in the metro, ending on a very optimistic note far removed from the tragedy of Eurydice’s double death. The film seemingly rejects the basic elements of this hyper-canonical myth of male-female love as presented by such artists as Ovid, Virgil, Monteverdi, Haydn, Valéry, Gluck, Stravinsky, Rilke, Rodin, Anouilh, and many others. The myth circulates in innumerable popular texts, including Robert Graves *Greek Myths* (published as *Les mythes grecs* in numerous editions since 1958) and a 2016 children’s version titled *Orphée l'ensorceleur* ‘Orpheus the Enchanter.’ On screen, director Jean Cocteau made an Orphic trilogy, including the classic 1950 film *Orphée*. Ducastel and Martineau’s contribution to the tradition diverges substantially from its predecessors in ways not limited to the sexuality of the main characters: the film does not focus on triumph over death or the underworld or on the anguish of the male poet in the face of his human limits.² It does not follow theorist Maurice Blanchot’s interpretation of the myth as Orpheus’s mistake in trying “to exhaust the infinite” by “possess[ing]” Eurydice “while he is destined only to sing about her” (101). Nor does it seek to establish or reaffirm a male poetic voice as anchored in the loss of the female beloved. What then does this same-sex love story do to the foundational myth?

While homosexuality and the Orphic myth may strike one as incompatible in the twenty-first century, the lengthy literary tradition does not lack same-sex sexuality. The ancient Greek poet Phanocles notes in a fragment that the Thracian women killed Orpheus because he spurned them but loved Calais instead (Hopkinson 45-46). After the poet loses his beloved in Ovid’s highly influential version in the *Metamorphoses*, he turns to pederasty—much as he had turned to look at his beloved. As Ovid writes: “He set the example for the people of Thrace of giving [*transfere*] his love to tender boys, and enjoying the springtime and first flower of their youth” (70, 71). The Italian Renaissance humanist Angelo Poliziano continues the Ovidian tradition in his important play *Orfeo* (1480), referring to pederasty as “the sweetest and mildest love” (273). Virgil, however, offers an antidote to the Ovidian tradition in *The Georgics*: after his loss, Orpheus does not give in to pederasty but remains firmly chaste: “No thought of love or wedding

song could bend his soul” (255).³ Ovid’s inclusion of “transferred” love provokes anxiety, is censored, and is condemned in the European middle ages and Renaissance (Mills; Crawford; Ingleheart; Puff), but then it is largely forgotten in later works.

While no one transfers their love to tender boys, Ducastel and Martineau’s film does reopen the largely lost tradition of a male-loving Orpheus. Part of the reason for reopening that tradition is related to the reason why Orpheus turns to boys in the first place. On one level, he cannot have the woman he loves so deeply, so he turns to boys to never “cheat” on her with another woman. He can still enjoy the physical aspects of sexuality without being with another woman (Makowski 29).⁴ Ovid writes that Orpheus “shunned all love of womankind” (71) because of the bad experience with Eurydice or because he had “made a promise” (70), either to her or to himself. His poetry subsequently becomes a replacement for lost love, channeled into his lyre and inventing the very idea of poetry as loss. But on another level, his queer turn upends a system of male-female love—resembling what we might today call “heteronormativity.” In becoming a pederast, Orpheus leaves behind a constraining system of gender and sexuality predicated on the ideal of eternal, true love. The longest portion of Ovid’s Orpheus narrative in the *Metamorphoses* is constituted by a series of his songs after the turn to boys: “But now I need the gentler touch [*leviore lyra*], for I would sing of boys beloved by gods, and maidens inflamed by unnatural love and paying the penalty of their lust” (75, 74). Orpheus turns his back on heavy-handed or normative narratives of lost love in favor of new lighter narratives, beginning with the story of Jupiter and Ganymede. *Théo et Hugo*, too, refuses the Orphic narrative of eternal heterosexual love in favor of a new narrative of love predicated on potentiality instead of on the necessity of loss. If queer cinema works against the grain of what Nick Davis calls “epistemic buttresses” of “normative models of sexuality” (8), here it is the episteme of the foundational myth that is refused.

In many ways, the film follows Frankfurt School theorist Herbert Marcuse’s idea in *Eros and Civilization* that Orpheus is a generative figure opposed to the “performance principle” (161). Reason and suppression, he writes, are antagonistic to “whatever belongs to the sphere of sensuousness, pleasure, impulse” (161). Orpheus recalls “the experience of a world that is not to be mastered and controlled but to be liberated—a freedom that will release the power of Eros now bound in the repressed and petrified forms of man and nature” (164). Marcuse concludes his discussion with the role of Orpheus’s “homosexuality” in this liberation: “he rejects the normal Eros, not for an ascetic ideal, but for a fuller Eros [and] he protests against the repressive order of procreative sexuality” (171).⁵ Orphic Eros is what Marcuse calls “the Great Refusal,” or “the negation of *all* order” which “reveal[s] a new reality, with an order of its own, governed by different principles” (171, emphasis in original). For Marcuse, it is in aesthetics that the “reality principle must

be sought and validated” (171), and Ovid’s version succeeds in serving this function. Ducastel and Martineau’s film—I argue here—appropriates and reconfigures elements of the Orphic myth, refusing a normative love story based on loss and repression and crafting a Marcusean “order” not grounded in the woman’s dead body. The film reorders mythic elements and gives them new meaning by queering not so much the characters as much as the traditional narrative elements of the myth themselves, including Ovid’s.

Turning the Back on Orpheus

If Marcuse reads Ovid’s Orpheus narrative as refusal, the cinematic refusal is not strictly speaking a story about refusing the performance principle. While the Ovidian narrative begins with the lovers’ wedding and later leads to refusal with Orpheus’s transferred love, the opening scene in the film establishes anti-repression first, reversing the entire direction of the classical narrative and frontloading Marcuse’s liberating power of Eros. No character ends up in a state of negation since negation is established from the start as the precondition of the narrative. The opening shot follows a middle-aged naked man heading downstairs to the cave-like underworld of the sex club. Here, the underworld is not a space to dominate, but one in which to experience pleasure, corresponding to Marcuse’s idea that Orpheus’s “deed . . . ends the labor of conquest” (162). The scene sets the stage for the rest of the film’s “non-repressive erotic attitude toward reality” (167). Beginning instead of ending with non-repression opens the cinematic narrative up to new textual sequencings and to new gendered possibilities, all free of repressive tradition from the start. For this reason, the striking scene is so very different in content and tone from the love story to come in the rest of the film: it does the labor of establishing a new order that will permit the ensuing love story to be liberated from Orphic convention. With this opener, Hugo and Théo do not have to become pederasts or to “transfer” their love to males in order to un-repress the reality principle, as Marcuse’s Orpheus does. In fact, they are not a pederastic couple at all. The film evokes the possibility: Théo may seem younger, doing an internship as part of his education, while Hugo has a job as a notary and looks a bit older. But any possible age-based opposition never holds. Most visibly, Théo penetrates Hugo in the sex club, but in a broader sense neither character has an aged-based role of any kind. The younger Théo pays for their food, to give but one example. Freed from the constraints of the Ovidian narrative trajectory, pederastic representation does not have to serve the function of refusing sexual normativity. But the liberation also functions more broadly. Sex and gender roles are not predetermined by mythic structure. The opening scene reconfigures the gender order, signaling that neither character will always parallel Orpheus or Eurydice. Théo may not turn to look at Hugo in the final scene, but he does not equal Orpheus in the film. Instead, then,

after the opening scene, the film recasts Marcuse's Great Refusal in favor of recurring, diffuse refusals that do not force gender or sexual roles on any individual character.

What may be the most mythic element of the film in visual terms is the dramatic change from the scene in the sex club to the outside world. After Hugo and Théo decide to leave the basement together, they quietly ascend the dark, steep stairs, hand-in-hand, to pick up their clothes and pay for their drinks. At first, it may look as though an Orphic Théo is leaving the dark underworld for the upper world. Ovid describes the way up as "a steep path, indistinct and clouded in pitchy darkness" (69), and in his book of myths Robert Graves describes "le sombre passage" (44) 'the dark passage' (112). But in this case, although the passage suggests the mythic movement, no one looks back on the beloved while making his way through the darkness, overturning the Orphic turn and correcting the tragic nature of the myth.

But, in fact, this playful moment comments on the use of the myth itself as Hugo performs infidelity to the mythic topos. They exit the club, and Théo moves along the street but cannot locate Hugo. It appears first as though Hugo has disappeared and that Théo has lost him unexpectedly in the ascent from the basement club.⁶ Hugo appears from his hiding place with outstretched arms, like Eurydice as she fell back to Hades (Figure 2). But the gesture is anti-Orphic, evoking a detail to show that the myth will be employed in new ways. As the two



Figure 2: Not Eurydice. From Théo et Hugo dans le même bateau (Epicentre Films).

lovers leave the hospital after Théo's treatment, they navigate numerous halls, exit the building, and then close a large gate as they leave the enclosed building grounds for the outside world. They close the gate and walk out together, with no turn and no look back, turning a blind eye to the mythic transition from the underworld to earth. Ovid's Orpheus made a promise and turns to boys, but no one here has made a promise to the Orphic tradition. A shot of the two ascending side-by-side from the basement club focuses on their naked buttocks, avoiding reference to genitalia, because this Orphic narrative will resist gendered roles based on sex (Figure 3). No single character will be Orphic or hold a single gender role taken from the myth.

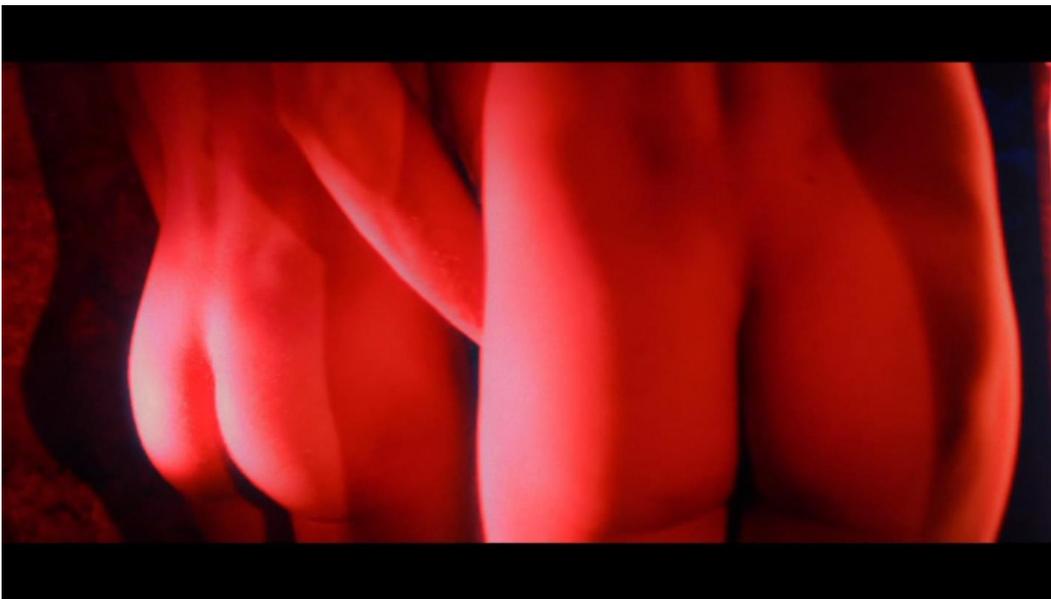


Figure 3: Orpheus or Eurydice?: Backside Ascending. From Théo et Hugo dans le même bateau (Epicentre Films).

Looking is a recurring action in the film, but in ways that transform the infamous look back. During a scene in the metro late in the film as the two characters head to Théo's apartment, they fix their gaze on each other for the duration of the ride from one stop to another (Figure 4). With the ride a kind of spatial transition not unlike Orpheus's ascent, looking upon the other in this case does not lead to the disappearance of the beloved and it is not an act of any one person. As they leave the metro station, Théo gratuitously turns and faces Hugo in



*Figure 4: Looking at the Beloved without Loss. Metro scene from *Théo et Hugo dans le même bateau* (Epicentre Films).*

the exit door, reinforcing the idea that looking back on the beloved at the exit of an underground space does not have to end tragically. Their initial sexual act in the club emerges out of an orgiastic scene with indistinct bodies and develops into sex between the two of them, where they gaze upon each other in an exaggerated way, each shown as if in a spotlight or halo. The heightened homoerotic gaze serves the function of transforming the Orphic look back, its recurrence replacing the single tragic error with an ongoing image of connection. If Orpheus looks back because he was, according to Ovid, “afraid that she might fail him” (69), here the characters’ gaze is one of faith in connection instead of anxiety over human loss. Conversely, not looking is not the issue that it was for Orpheus who feared not looking at Eurydice. As they begin having sex in the club, Hugo says that keeping his eyes closed helps him be with Théo. His first words of the film reveal that not looking can be a form of presence and intimacy, not a cause of anxiety about potential loss.

The film dismantles the topos of Eurydice following Orpheus to the light of earth. Virgil notes that Proserpine imposed the condition of her “following behind” (253), and as she falls back she is “stretching towards [him] strengthless hands” (255), an image taken up by many other purveyors of the story. In a different register, leading by hand-holding plays a key role in the repositioning of the two figures: Hugo takes Théo’s hand as they go into the room with the intern at the hospital, for instance, but it is a gesture of possibility, not loss. The concept of leading the other is removed from gender: neither equals Orpheus leading his

beloved since no one always leads the other. Much of their walking is side-by-side instead of with one person following the other. While walking along the street, they realize that they are not heading in any direction, and Hugo says to Théo: “Je te suis” ‘I am following you’ to which Théo responds: “Moi aussi, je te suis. On va tourner en rond” ‘I am following you too. We’re going in circles.’ Random circulation replaces the spatial linearity of the myth, the movement from the underworld to the upper world. In some cases, the camera follows the two characters as they walk next to each other, with the viewer placed in Eurydice’s position, but neither are we lost by any character’s turn, further distancing the mythic roles from any single body. Anyone, including the viewer, can appropriate a mythic position. Numerous somber passageways suggest the path to the upper world from Hades: the long halls of the hospital, the hallway leading to Théo’s studio, the streets on the way to an all-night kabab shop, a stairway leading from one sidewalk up to another, and more broadly the streets of Paris in the middle of the night. There is no single movement to the upper world as the narrative turns in spatial circles unfaithful to the myth. Instead, the entire film and its nighttime setting, ending at 6 a.m. as the sun begins to rise, embodies the path to the light of the upper world from Hades, making time, not space, the new narrative passageway.

If time takes over space’s role, the film removes time’s mythic function as well as space’s. At certain moments, the screen displays the time of night. We are made aware of time and its passage, and the film ends precisely at 6 a.m. on Monday morning, which the viewer learns when Hugo tells Théo to stop and look at his phone and the time changes from 5:59. But the point is not that time is passing or that time is regulating the characters’ actions, rather that time exists in a queer mode. For Marcuse, the Orphic mode refuses “the inevitably repressive work-world” (195), a key element of unrepression since labor and work help keep unfettered sexuality at bay. Here the characters resist a temporality that would in a repressive order be defined by work and work time, a Sunday night preparation for Monday morning work. While discussing their jobs, Hugo tells Théo that he is a notary but that he is not working on this particular Monday and that he has some freedom from normal work hours. What Marcuse calls “play” replaces normative labor: the film is largely made up of random movement, conversations without function or goal, flirtation, and other playful elements, affirming Marcuse’s idea that “play is *unproductive* and *useless* precisely because it cancels the repressive and exploitative traits of labor” (195, emphasis in original).

Telling Stories of Gender

After Orpheus becomes a pederast in Ovid, he sings about “boys beloved by gods, and maidens inflamed by unnatural love” before the Maenad women

dismember him. There are no songs per se in the film, unlike in the directors' earlier musical films *Jeanne et le garçon formidable* (*Jeanne and the Perfect Guy*, 1998) and *Crustacés et coquillages* (*Côte d'Azur*, 2005), but the parallel with Orphic song is embedded in the form of encounters with three characters: the hospital intern that takes care of Théo's potential infection, the Syrian immigrant working at the kebab shop, and the maid taking the metro to work. As the two main characters leave the hospital, they remark that there seem to be only two types of people at this time of night, women and gay men, or as Théo puts it in terms reminiscent of Ovid's boys and maidens: "La nuit appartient aux femmes et aux pédés" 'The night belongs to women and homos.' Hugo and Théo do not recount the characters' stories, but these non-normative narratives of people functioning very late at night or very early in the morning have the valence of Orpheus's songs. They do not prove or reveal poetic virtuosity or replace lost love, as Orpheus's songs do, but instead they suggest stories about other types of people in terms of profession, gender, age, and ethnicity. The competent intern is assigned the night shift at the hospital and clearly knows much about HIV. The Syrian man talks suggestively about the lack of freedom in Syria, where he used to live, and the woman in the metro talks about her need to work because of a lack of a sufficient pension, referring to her past life of amorous excess. The maid in the metro mentions that she is from Yvetot, a Norman village known as the hometown of novelist Annie Ernaux whose work famously bridges the gap between sociological descriptions of lived daily life and poetic prose. Her novels *Journal du dehors* (*Exteriors*, 1993) and *La vie extérieure, 1993-1999* (*Things Seen*), in particular, describe snippets of daily life, many of which take place on the metro or the RER (suburban commuter train). As this connection intimates, there is a quotidian naturalness to the maid's narrative—as there is to the other two narratives—all three of which convey something suggestively poetic behind or around the encounters in the hospital, the kebab shop, and the metro.

The three representative encounters differ from the mythic tradition in an important way: these poetic moments are not created by Orpheus. If—as Sword writes—"Orpheus' transformation into the paradigmatic modern poet takes place only, so to speak, over Eurydice's dead body" (409), or if in Ovid Orpheus goes on to sing stories of boys and maidens after—or because of—the death of his beloved, in the film the poetic moments do not come from the poet after the death of the beloved but from the actual individuals. The maid on the metro, above all, is a figure of a poetic storyteller, an Annie Ernaux who tells her own story through relations to the "outside" world. Instead of proving Orpheus's poetic virtuosity, these external narratives create a sense of shared experience between the two main characters. If Orpheus's songs convey new kinds of amorous metamorphoses that do not exist in his own story or in his life and love with Eurydice, these three narratives contribute to producing the relation between the two lovers, as a narrative

form of Marcusean Eros. After the woman on the metro leaves, the two characters stare at each other for a long time, making clear that looking at each other does not mean that they will be lost but that they are creating something by watching each other. Yet, the look replaces the woman character—literally, since she was sitting where Théo is now sitting. They are not looking backwards onto a previous narrative, but forward toward a potential one with new, common experiences. Their metamorphosis is a connective narrative act in itself, buttressed by other narrative voices instead of only the male poet's own songs based on absence and loss. In fact, the metro scene highlights Ernaux's idea that the self is defined dialogically and that the inner self and external interactions cannot be separated, as summed up by her epigraph from Rousseau in *Journal du dehors*: "Notre vrai moi n'est pas tout entier en nous" (9, emphasis in original) 'Our true self is not entirely in ourselves.'⁷ The film is in part a story of encounters with people that the characters do not know but that help define them through random meetings. This inclusion of non-Orphic voices serves Ernaux's political aim, as expressed in *Retour à Yvetot* (*Return to Yvetot*): "écrire littérairement dans la langue de tous" (34) 'to write literarily the language of everyone' in order to "détruire des hiérarchies" (34) 'destroy hierarchies.' The narrative hierarchy established by the myth (male poet and his poetic subjects) is destroyed in part by the inclusion of three voices on their own terms—voices that take the viewer beyond the singleness of one love story into the idea of a dialogic love narrative.

More broadly, however, the move away from a single male Orphic voice re-visioning Eurydice's role in the tradition and offers a feminist way out of Western culture's obsession with the silent woman whose loss gives a poetic voice to the male poet. Early Greek sources of the Orpheus myth leave her anonymous (Bremmer 14-17). In Ovid, Eurydice says only one word: "Farewell" (69), as she dies her second death. If losing the beloved woman is to lose the ability to conquer death, or to lose the phallus itself, Eurydice may not even be a woman at all but a placeholder for an Orphic principle. Blanchot takes her as "the limit of what art can attain, concealed behind a name and covered by a veil" (99)—his own version of the eternal feminine. This sexism is also predicated on traits of hegemonic masculinity: Orpheus attempts to triumph over death like other heroes, he wants to possess Eurydice, and his poetic oeuvre seeks to replace the absent woman. As an uncaring man, he may be blamed for Eurydice's second death, and revised versions of the myth give her a voice to challenge Orpheus, including H. D.'s poem "Eurydice," Adrienne Rich's poem "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus," Margaret Atwood's poem "Orpheus 1," and Michèle Sarde's novel *Histoire d'Eurydice pendant la remontée* 'The Story of Eurydice's Return to the Upper World.' In such cases, Eurydice may have her own poetic voice or she may challenge Orpheus for his actions or for what Ovid's Eurydice calls his "dreadful madness" (255), but there is still no full exit from the mythic construct of male poetic gifts and male

control over the absent female body through art. *Théo et Hugo dans le même bateau* opts out of that gendered story with a male-male couple and reboots the myth in a way that feminist writings that give Eurydice a voice cannot do. It allows the myth to neither lay blame for the look back nor produce stable gender constructs that assign traits or roles to men and to women. In this sense, the same-sex couple does not stand in for homosexuality or rewrite the myth as about two gay characters, but rather rewrites the myth as a story not necessarily related to gender. Homosexuality queers the gender binarism produced over time by the myth, affirming Pierre Bourdieu's idea in *Masculine Domination* that homosexuality has great potential to unseat symbolic gender domination and help establish a new representational gender order (see 118-24). The new narrative is a new voice—part of Ernaux's "language of everyone" that has the effect of breaking an ancient gender hierarchy apart and opening up the myth beyond gender fixity.

Turning Loss and Death

The topos of losing the beloved is repeated in the film, but not as something that happens once and for all. As he heads toward the hospital, Théo tells Hugo that he does not want to be accompanied, and the two separate. But Hugo appears later at the hospital as Théo is waiting to see a doctor and attends the consultation because he does not want Théo to be alone. Later, the two have an argument related to who was responsible for their unprotected sex, and an angry Hugo begins to leave Théo. But they reconcile. Again, Hugo leaves Théo in the final scene in the studio apartment, but then returns. The repetition of leaving-returning transforms the idea of love as loss or as total absence into the idea of loss as a regular, recurring part of a human relation and not mythic in stature.

Closely related to the film's portrayal of loss is the transformation of the relation to death. At bottom, the story recounts Théo's reaction to having had unprotected sex with an HIV+ partner, which he first imagines as a possible death sentence. But the hospital worker and Hugo convince him over the course of the film that the disease can be conquered, in the unlikely event that he has even contracted it in the first place, and Hugo promises to escort him through any treatment toward a normal happy life defined as a future together. With the narrative, broadly speaking, composed of a death sentence that is subsequently recuperated (in Théo's mind at least), the character of Théo reinscribes the figure of Eurydice as having never been in a real life-or-death situation to begin with. Death is not an absolute in the film, not what must be conquered by returning from Hades, but is instead a purveyor of potentiality and a springboard to love. Marcuse writes that Orpheus reconciles Eros and Thanatos, that he is "committed to the underworld and to death," and that he does not "convey a 'mode of living'" (165). Such is the relation that the two characters develop not in spite of—but because

of—HIV/AIDS, meaning that the virus incarnates the mixture of Eros and Thanatos and rejects death as fully negative. In a sense, the film depicts Orpheus when he is reunited with Eurydice in Hades after his own death—the final element of some versions of the story, including Jean Anouilh’s French play *Eurydice* (1941). Ovid describes their reunion: “Here now side by side they walk; now Orpheus follows her as she precedes, now goes before her, now may in safety look back upon his Eurydice” (125). Hugo and Théo, too, walk this way, alternate following each other, look in safety upon each other, but they do so in life, not death. That they follow each other (“Je te suis”) suggests that they have already landed in the same place as in Ovid, but without having to go through the entire myth. Their equality does not require them to have died and to be dead in Hades. A key representation of the mixture of Eros and Thanatos is the St. Martin Canal in northeast Paris along which they run at one point for no real reason. As they stop, Théo notes their “sprint romantique” ‘romantic sprint.’ The canal evokes a key sign of the barrier between life and death and between the living and the dead that Orpheus has to cross to regain his beloved—the River Styx. Much of act 3 of Claudio Monteverdi’s opera *L’Orfeo* (1607), for instance, is devoted to the poet’s attempt to cross the river. In Virgil’s version, Eurydice vanishes and Charon the ferryman did not “suffer him again to pass the barrier of the marsh” (255), and the River Styx signifies the limit behind which Orpheus cannot go again to rescue his beloved a second time. But in this case, the canal is a boundary that the characters move along, not across, because there is no linear crossing, no sense that death is an absolute outside the realm of Eros. Death does not belong to a single person nor is death the fault of a single person. Rather, the potential for death is communal, not a fate reserved for the woman: Hugo and Théo both admit that they are responsible for not using a condom, with no single person to blame, unlike Orpheus who unambiguously is to blame for looking back. In a notable image in the hospital, Théo takes pills to prevent viral transmission and the medical kit includes a madeleine, the Proustian symbol of memory, to take with his pills. Its ingestion does not bring back the memory of the mythic intertext however, but ignores it, forgets it in favor of a new narrative defined by potential death and its link to Eros.

The film tells another story related to death that moves in a new direction: it participates in bringing Jacques Demy, Ducastel’s mentor, back from the underworld by virtue of extending his Orphic work into a new cinematic direction. The film refers back to one of Demy’s lesser known films *Parking* (1985) about a French rock star named Orphée who loses his Eurydice.⁸ The film recounts the story in a modern setting, including references to same-sex love through the character of Calais, Orpheus’s lover in Phanocles’s ancient version, played in the film by Laurent Malet, who had played the role of Roger Bataille in Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s queer film *Querelle* (1982). The two men kiss in *Parking*, and Orphée twice sings the song “Entre vous deux” ‘Between you two,’ which centers on his

heart swinging between two people (“mes deux enfants de l’amour” ‘my two children of love’) and culminates in “Comment choisir? Pourquoi choisir?” ‘How to choose? Why choose?’ Calais admits to himself that he is jealous of Orpheus’s relation to women.⁹ For Darren Waldron, the film juxtaposes heterosexuality “within the hellish subterranean universe” with same-sex desire “in the comparatively idealistic upper-world” (104). Demy’s Orpheus has in a sense conquered or moved beyond the constraints of the underworld by virtue of having been there and come back to a place where he can be partially queer—not unlike Marcuse’s Orpheus. Waldron cites Demy: “il faut réinventer le romantisme, réapprendre à aimer (103) ‘romanticism must be reinvented and we must relearn how to love.’ Ducastel and Martineau appropriate and transform this idea, extending it by means of rendering homosexual love—not bisexual love—a new form of Orphic love. In so doing, Hugo and Théo out the queer mythic elements much more than *Parking* does. Demy’s version may have brought bisexuality back into the story, but the basic elements of the myth remain largely intact despite the new setting and the appearance of Calais. Hugo and Théo’s homosexuality queers Demy’s Orphic myth in a way that transcends sexuality per se in favor of same-sex love as full-on potentiality and as reinvented romanticism.

Because Demy died of complications from HIV/AIDS and Hugo is HIV+ in the film, it is difficult not to link Hugo and Demy. Martineau and Ducastel’s musical *Jeanne et le garçon formidable* is about a woman who has trouble falling in love and then meets the perfect man who turns out to be an AIDS victim. The *garçon* is played by Demy’s son Mathieu Demy, evoking the possibility that the content of the film pertains to the director. For Hugo to embody potentiality with respect to love and death in an era when the illness can be treated and lived with is to open up the possibility of a reference to Demy’s illness. If the illness evokes the specter of death, Demy is retroactively made a specter, a kind of Eurydice both lost and returned at the same time by the Orphic film. But he is also a lost Orpheus whose cinema sings songs that remain present in the twenty-first century as the film’s hopefulness vis-à-vis the illness resurrects Demy’s cinematic songs and inscribes them into a new narrative.

Fragmented Bodies

One of the most well-known parts of the Orphic story is the destruction of the poet’s body into pieces. The Maenads celebrating Bacchic rites rip his body into pieces because they desire him and are frustrated that he is not willing to love them erotically, either because he is devoted to Eurydice or because he has become a pederast. Ovid writes that “the poet’s limbs lay scattered all around” (123) and the poet’s head famously floats along a stream singing until Orpheus’s “shade fled beneath the earth” (125). No one’s body is fragmented in this way in the film, but

it does make reference to corporeal fragmentation in the final scene. Hugo asks Théo to take off his clothes, and as he stands there naked, Hugo begins to describe his body part by part, including his ear, nipples, stomach, penis, and testicles. Hugo fragments his lover's body by describing its parts, but he then re-assembles it back into a fully clothed body as Théo gets dressed so they can go out for breakfast. Fragmentation is not the result of jealous women's punishment for pederasty, but rather is part of an incorporation into a corporeal Eros. During this corporeal moment, Théo stands naked explaining to Hugo why he has an odd cell phone number. He had to change his number because of his father who was calling him in part to harass him with homophobic rants. The homophobia of the Maenads—or in contextual terms, their violently anti-pederastic attitude—is transferred onto Théo's father, and the concept of fragmentation is transferred from its link to homophobia onto Eros. Fragmentation, then, embodies a story about potential Eros instead of death: Hugo tells Théo how much he likes his body parts, such that fragmentation produces eroticism instead of representing its impossibility. Hugo's fragmentation corresponds to Marcuse's idea of a resexualization of the body in the reality principle and its result, "a reactivation of all erotogenic zones" and "a resurgence of pregenital polymorphous sexuality" (201). The penis is one body part mentioned by Hugo, but one among many, making the "decline of genital supremacy" (201) a reality. A queer polymorphous fragmentation is also a symbolic mechanism for potentiality. Orpheus's bodily destruction is not the end of his life, but Théo's fragmented body points to the beginning of a love relationship whose future is clear but also yet to be determined. Marcuse takes Orpheus's dismemberment as punishment for "the establishment of a very different order" (170), but here the fragmentation affirms a new order in which two people do not have to follow normative myths of sexuality in the first place.

Erotic fragmentation has another representational function: it parallels the film's fragmentation of the Orphic story. Corporeal fragmentation does not end the film's narrative—as it ends Orpheus's life—but rather reveals how the ancient narrative has now, at the end of the film, been recast as pieces. Those pieces—as should now be clear—have come to constitute the film's narrative. The concept of fragmentation is transferred to narrative, with the fragmentation of the myth functioning as the renewal of the myth itself. The scene emphasizes potentiality in Théo and Hugo's relationship, but it also indicates the potential for new ways to rewrite mythic constructs for new ways of living, loving, and being.

The Horizon of the Upper World

With its suggestion that there is an optimistic future for the two characters and for the use of myth, the film participates in the area of queer studies that considers queerness not as disruption or anti-social, but as potentiality itself. José

Muñoz takes up Marcuse’s idea of refusal in *Cruising Utopia* (2009) and considers him as a queer theorist: “Queerness . . . is more than just sexuality. It is this great refusal of a performance principle that allows the human to feel and know not only our work and our pleasure but also our selves and others” (135). This queerness is aesthetic too, and such an aesthetic “can potentially function like a great refusal because art manifest[s] itself in such a way that the political imagination can spark new ways of perceiving and acting on a reality that is itself potentially changeable” (135). I take the film as a radically new perception of the Orphic myth, which has always been changeable and changed to a certain extent but usually while maintaining elements taken as structural and necessary. Muñoz takes Andy Warhol’s art as an example of “queer utopian aesthetics” (135), but for me it is *Théo et Hugo* that is imbued with such an aesthetic. Muñoz describes his own methodology as “a backward glance that enacts a future vision” (4), a phrase, needless to say, that suggests the Orpheus narrative. It is not the case that Orpheus’s backward glance ends the love story, but in a queer aesthetic, it looks toward a new utopian future and a new narrative of love.

The final scene of the film embodies what Muñoz argues that queerness can be, “a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (1). What interests him is “a forward-dawning queerness” (21) or a “horizon” (19). From this perspective, then, the film is not about same-sex love at all, but about seeing a queer mode of loving Orphically. As a result, the end of the film gestures toward newness itself. It is another world that



Figure 5: Dawn as Queer Potential. From Théo et Hugo dans le même bateau (Epicentre Films).

the film wants to move toward, not the other world of the underworld. The end of the film allegorizes forward-dawningness as Hugo leaves to head home and Théo opens the only window in his studio apartment. The view over Paris is the dawn, literally, as a new day is beginning (Figure 5). All Orphic reconfigurations can now be seen as the dawn of the dawn. Théo looks out on the horizon of the city because he is looking out on the queer horizon of potentiality. There is no need to get Eurydice to the light or to the dawn. That is why Hugo has to be elsewhere during this cinematic moment: the dawn cannot be the dawn of a relationship or the dawn that one lover romantically shows his lover in the window. Not turning its back on humans, dawn is about futurity itself.

Notes

1. He says: “Quand j’écrivais le scénario, je partais en balade autour de ma maison en Normandie et j’écoutais *L’Orfeo* de Monteverdi. J’ai eu envie de travailler sur ce mythe” ‘As I was writing the script, I would go for walks near my home in Normandy and I would listen to Monteverdi’s *Orfeo*. That gave me the desire to work on the myth.’ See “Martineau & Ducastel nous racontent ‘Théo & Hugo dans le même bateau.’”
2. Sword describes the reception of Orpheus as “enacting . . . the situation, anguished yet articulate, of the modern poet” (407). See also Strauss, Hassan.
3. Charles Martin translates the passage to maintain the idea of “transferring” in the original Latin: “Among the Thracians, he originated / the practice of transferring the affections / to youthful males, plucking the first flower / in the brief springtime of their early manhood” (344). Though the detail is often ascribed to him, Ovid does not invent the turn to pederasty, classicists note, and while Virgil’s competing version in *The Georgics* (Book 4) does not register this transformation, it may be aware of references to Orpheus’s turn to boys. See Fox, Makowski.
4. Anderson writes that in Ovid “boy-love ranks far below heterosexual love in terms of affection, mutual concern, and chances for extensive happiness” (45).
5. Marcuse theorizes homosexuality, but lacks interest in actual homosexuals. On this issue, see Floyd 140-45.
6. In an interview with *Têtu*, Jacques Martineau offers the following caveat about the use of the Orpheus myth in this scene: “je n’ai pas voulu sous-entendre que Hugo sortait Théo de l’enfer du sexe pour l’emmener vers l’amour. C’est

complètement autre chose, c'est plutôt une image de l'amour" 'I did not want to suggest that Hugo led Théo up from some kind of sexual hell toward love. It is something else entirely. Instead, it is an image of love.' See "Martineau & Ducastel nous racontent 'Théo & Hugo dans le même bateau.'" This idea of mythic elements as "images of love" corresponds closely to my thesis here.

7. On this key aspect of Ernaux's writing, including the idea of a "je transpersonnel" 'transpersonal I,' see for instance Boehringer, Hugueny-Léger, Ionescu, Johnson.

8. The film is in turn in dialogue with Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950), which lacks a queer element. Cocteau's Orpheus, Jean Marais, plays the role of Hadès in Demy's film. On this link, see Waldron *Demy* 100.

9. Waldron writes: "More than any other Demy film, *Parking* depicts a configuration of love and desire that is neither monogamous nor exclusively heterosexual" (*Demy* 103). On Demy's work as queer, see Waldron *Queering* 64-66, 146-49. On the "Demy revival" in recent queer film, see Rees-Roberts 109-12.

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