

The Orphic Search for Eurydice in Alice Rohrwacher's *La Chimera* (2023)

Alice Rohrwacher overtly acknowledges her film *La Chimera* (2023) as an adaptation of the Eurydice myth by adorning the opening credits sequence with non-diegetic toccata fanfare from Monteverdi's *Favola d'Orfeo* (1607). By so doing — and by returning to the fanfare at one key moment later in the film — Rohrwacher renders the viewer into a “knowing” (Hutcheon, 2013) participant in her masterful adaptative treatment of the mythological love story. Arthur's elegiac pursuit of the missing Beniamina, which resonates among all characters in the film, becomes in Rohrwacher's hands a powerful adaptation of the Eurydice myth.

Rohrwacher's screenplay treats many elements beyond the pedestrian in this classical mythological expression of Orphic artistic brilliance, withering loss, and failure to regain lost love. Instead of engaging in the invention of elegiac discourse, as Vergil then Ovid did, Rohrwacher's god-gifted lover perfects divinized tomb robbery. The plague of the *tombaroli*, whom Rohrwacher to an extent lionizes in her narrative, is contextualized amid her social commentary on unemployment in lovely Umbria. But the film employs the archaic Etruscan backdrop to deliver intriguing interplay between the Orpheus figure and the several women of his world, both those he rejects (as the women of Thrace) and those fixing to destroy him as maenads would. One of the women, Melodie, breaks the film's fourth wall at one point, looking directly into the lens to observe that Etruscan society, had it remained vibrant, would have empowered the women of (the film's) today beyond contemporary understanding. In this feminizing milieu, Arthur's breathtaking discovery of an Etruscan sculpture group of Artume, the *potnia theron*, flirts narratively with the mythological destruction of Actaeon; but the Eurydice theme prevails. All this works between versions of “Vorrei spiegarvi o Dio” (Mozart KV418, *Così fan tutte*) sung both diegetically and non-diegetically by sopranos of varying vocal talent. The women in this Eurydice adaptation are the central focus.

Rohrwacher's films to date feature the psychological complexities of powerful women, young and old, experiencing mystical life in contemporary Italian societies. The Eurydice in *La Chimera* speaks never a word; but her draw upon all the characters, even from beyond the grave, causes them to submit within the film to the mystical divine. That submission effects in every character certain transformations. *La Chimera*'s adaptation of the classical myth allows for expedited and rich deepening of all characters in the narrative.

I include in my paper a brief summary of Rohrwacher's use of classical mythological motifs in her other notable films, especially those in the trilogy completed by *La Chimera*, i.e. *Le Meraviglie* (2014) and *Lazzaro Felice* (2018). In question here is whether the common theme of apiculture woven into Rohrwacher's triptych might allow one to see an adaptive connection to Aristaeus, a la Vergil's (or Cornelius Gallus') invention of bee keeping.

Rohrwacher's beautiful *chimera* or "pipe-dream" continues its remarkably long run at important American art-cinemas. Classicists who do not yet know the film deserve an opportunity at CAMWS to dip into this fascinating adaptation of the Eurydice myth.

Works Cited

Hutcheon, Linda. 2013. *A Theory of Adaptation*. 2nd edition. Routledge.

La Chimera (2023), screenplay and direction by Alice Rohrwacher; Tempesta Films and RAI Cinema.

Lazzaro Felice (2018), screenplay and direction by Alice Rohrwacher; Tempesta Films and RAI Cinema.

Le Meraviglie (2014), screenplay and direction by Alice Rohrwacher; Tempesta Films and RAI Cinema.