

## Dissecting Orpheus in Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!*

At the opening—and again at the closing—of *Moulin Rouge!*, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec sings “Nature Boy.” Dressed as the Magic Sitar in the fictional theater production of *Spectacular! Spectacular!*, he chants “The greatest thing you'll ever learn / Is just to love and to love in return.” These verses frame and emphasize the overarching theme of passionate love through the medium of music.

That some form of personification of Love and Music lies at the heart of the Orpheus myth will be no surprise to classically trained reader. But what might be surprising is that in the publicity surrounding *Moulin Rouge!*, Baz Luhrmann insisted that this film was his expression of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. Strong scholarly work on the classical allusions in *Moulin Rouge!* has already been begun, especially in detailing the counterpoints in allegory between both character and plot.

My contribution to this subject, however, takes the analysis to a more abstract level. I argue that Luhrmann wanted not only to combine plot and character in order to create a new story, but that he used the idea of love emerging from music as an aesthetic theory in itself, emblematic for the very creative process of his original, cinematic production. This aesthetic philosophy and method creates a creative framework for the theme of rebirth in this ancient myth. I believe that Luhrmann was contemplating the Dionysiac ritual of *sparagmos*, central to the theory of drama and musical drama, as a working aesthetic for this film. This presentation will focus on musical composition of the film (rather than the static visual hybrids or the cinematic editing techniques), and in particular on duets sung between the Orpheus character Christian and the Eurydice character Satine. Therefore, the doubling of images, songs and episodes provide a

recurring structure in the film just as cyclical structures the twin deaths of Eurydice in the ancient myth. The first sequence I will analyze is titled “Elephant Love Medley.” This song, like the majority of songs in the soundtrack, is a medley from covers of well-known, popular songs. In contrast to “Elephant Love Medley,” the sole original piece for the soundtrack, to my knowledge, is “Come What May,” the quintessential love song of Christian and Satine. By isolating and counterpointing these two episodes from the film, it will be apparent how Baz Luhrmann uses the idea of dismembering a body of artistic work—such as excerpts that comprise medleys—and elects either to leave those pieces randomly scattered, or, alternately, to create unity by imposing aesthetic order on the disorderly process of creative production.

To preview some images and clips, see this prezi:

[http://prezi.com/xrgsf0nqhbyk/?utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=copy&rc=ex0share](http://prezi.com/xrgsf0nqhbyk/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share)

### Bibliography

Cyrino, Monica Silveira. 2010. “To Love and Toulouse: The Orpheus and Eurydice Theme in Marcel Camus’ *Black Orpheus* (1959) and Baz Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge* (2001)” *Classical and Modern Literature*.

Girard, R. *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1977.

Luhrmann, Baz. *Moulin Rouge!* 2001. Fox Studios, Sydney, Australia.

Luhrmann, Baz, and Catherine Martin. 2001. *Moulin Rouge: The Splendid Illustrated Book That Charts the Journey of Baz Luhrmann’s Motion Picture*. New York: Newmarket Press.

Ovid *Metamorphoses*.

Vergil *Georgics*.