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ESSAYS

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Nicholas D. Cross

The Grateful Dead's "Saint Stephen" is one of the most emblematic songs of 1960s psychedelic rock. The music—sometimes frenetic, sometimes serene—guides the listener through a journey of exploration. Blair Jackson described it as "a cryptic rocker" (1983, 94). From the ethereal introduction and the jaunty theme and B-lick to the meditative bridge and back again to the surging E-jam and coda, the song ranges across several musical spaces. The lyrics, too, meander and evoke a mixed bag of images and impressions. They are full of allusions, figures of speech, and paradox. "So much about this song," David Dodd argues, "feels ancient and at the same time hallucinatory, we are left in an altered state of consciousness by the words alone. And the music just helps that along" (Dodd 2013). Together, the music and the lyrics possess an enchantment that rivals its titular character. Although it is titled "Saint Stephen," the song as a whole fits the mythological figure Orpheus, who, like the song itself, navigated the preternatural

areas of the human experience. Several of those who have suggested this have maintained that there is a multivalent application to Orpheus as well as to other figures named Stephen. But this essay maintains that Orpheus is a much more suitable prototype for Stephen. Who, after all, could better portray the singer of the dead's secrets than the Dead?

But "Saint Stephen" reflects a very specific Orpheus, a composite of the Dionysian (revelry and irrationality) and the Apollonian (solitude and self-reflection). The first part of this essay looks at how Stephen-Orpheus embodies these two elements that Friedrich Nietzsche argued were crucial for a cultural hero, and have been the subject of several studies of the Dead. "That is, as fundamental as the Dionysian element is to understanding the rapture experienced at Grateful Dead concerts," writes Stanley Spector, who has done more work on this topic than anyone else, "it alone cannot satisfactorily account for this phenomenon. We need to add a discussion of the Apollinian principle of art as well" (2007, 197; cf. Johnston 2007; Spector 2014; Wood 2020, 1–29). Although Nietzsche hardly thought of Orpheus, mentioning him only two times in *The Birth of Tragedy* and with disregard elsewhere, his view of the symbiosis of Apollo and Dionysus is appropriate to this song's presentation of the legendary singer.

The second section covers the song's particular interpretation of the most famous part of Orpheus' story, his *catabasis* (descent to the Underworld). Unlike most versions which depict a lover who goes to the nether regions to recover his deceased wife and fails in that attempt, "Saint Stephen" portrays the quest ending in a triumph. The music follows its own oscillating journey to the Underworld and back, leading through Dionysian and Apollonian territories, and the "Orphic" lyrics present a character who succeeds in his venture. Although the character is somewhat oblivious as to what happens to him on his venture, he has his music and through it he obtains a favorable outcome. Just as Stephen represents a union of Dionysus and Apollo, the song also presents a reunion of Orpheus and his deceased wife.

"Saint Stephen" was one of Robert Hunter's first lyrical compositions for the Dead. He wrote it in 1967, though it had been in development for some time. Earlier in the decade he had participated in a psychedelic

drug study funded by the CIA's MK-ULTRA program at the Menlo Park Veterans Hospital, in which he was paid to take psychedelic substances and report on his experiences. "It'll be fun!" he remarked to a friend at the time. "I'll take my typewriter and no telling what'll come out" (McNally 2002, 42). Indeed, it became a transformative experiment for him. His notes rivalled those of Aldous Huxley's who had recorded his own psychedelic experiences in *The Doors of Perception* in 1954. Hunter's, however, were more creative than expository. "His ability to articulate hallucinations," comments Dennis McNally on these notes, "would serve him well in the future" (2002, 43). Afterwards, he continued to experiment with drugs, which led to a creative lyrical output (Wood 2003, 46–53). While his friend Jerry Garcia formed what came to be known as the Grateful Dead, Hunter moved from California to New Mexico, where he wrote "Saint Stephen," along with "China Cat Sunflower" and "Alligator" (Tamarkin 1986, 25; Meriwether 2007, 54–56). Garcia and Phil Lesh composed the music for "Saint Stephen" and included it in Dead concerts for about a year before they recorded it in 1969 as the opening track of *Aoxomoxoa*, the band's third album (Barnes and Trudeau 2018, 129–131). The song remained in rotation at Dead concerts for years until the band retired it in 1983—on Halloween night, a night redolent of the singer of the land of the dead.

Although Hunter never explicitly linked the song to Orpheus and his *catabasis*, later work showed he was well acquainted with the legend. Throughout Hunter's oeuvre there are allusions to classical antiquity in general and to Orpheus specifically (Smith 2007, 92–98). The most obvious is his "Reuben and Cherise," which appeared on the Jerry Garcia Band's 1978 album *Cats Under the Stars*. In *A Box of Rain*, the lyricist clearly associates this song with Orpheus who descended to the Underworld out of love for Eurydice (1990, 181). His poem "A Strange Music" (1991), written about the First Gulf War, opens with lines reminiscent of a Greek epic: "Sing, Muse, of death in battle and of the shining wreaths of victory." In 1993, he even published his own English translation of the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Moreover, Orpheus was the subject of numerous artistic media in postwar America (Segal 1989, 171–198; Bernstock 1991; Mellers 2008, 143–165).

It is not unreasonable to suppose that Hunter had the same interest in Orpheus in the 1960s when he composed the lyrics to "Saint Stephen," though he rebuffed efforts to pin down the song's allusions. Asked about the character in an interview with *Relix*, Hunter answered, "it was just St. Stephen" (Dym and Alson 1978, 28). It was a stance he maintained over the years: "when asked who specifically, Uncle John—or St. Stephen—is," he commented in 2005, "I have to think someone's missed the point." Yet he admitted that it is possible to track down the influences on any given song and "achieve a gnostic synthesis of the song that may forever change the way you hear it. It may deepen the experience, or just explain it away" (2005, xx). That is indeed the case with "Saint Stephen."

Dead scholars have posed several possibilities for Stephen's identity, nearly all of them named, predictably, "Stephen" (Dodd 2005, 61). Most think it refers to the first Christian martyr of the same name (Blackburn n.d.; Schlief 1995; Dodd 2005, 93; Friedman, Harman, and Issen 2017; Price 2021). In the Acts of the Apostles (6–7), Stephen's miracles and teachings about Christ made him popular with the public but also a target of opposition from the religious authorities, who stoned him to death. "At a time when it was still possible for the Dead to see their music as an agent of radical change in society," write Alan Friedman, Gary Hartman and Barney Issen, "the messianic reference is apropos" (2017).

In retrospect, Hunter seemed to agree with this interpretation. "I didn't know who the real St. Stephen was until after I wrote it," he admitted in a 1986 interview. "He turned out to be the first Christian monk or something" (Tamarkin 1986, 25). The addition of "or something" could be due to his failure to remember specifics or suggest that he is not convinced of the interpretation. Far from deciding the issue, his words allow for the possibility that there was some other influence on his portrayal of Stephen. Lawrence "Lars" Schlief (1995) suggests that Orpheus is "the annotationally centralized character" of not only this one song but also the entire *Aoxomoxoa* album. Yet, like medieval writers who conflated Orpheus and Christ, he still detects a similarity between the legendary musician and the Christian martyr. This view, however, is dubious. Besides the onomastic equivalence, there is little in the song that resembles the biblical Stephen. There is a much better case for Orpheus.

The legend of Orpheus is of great antiquity and has endured to the present day, but there has never been a canonical version. Beyond his birth in Thrace (modern Bulgaria), the ancients were ambivalent about everything in his story. While it was commonly accepted that he was the son of the muse Calliope (named at the end of "Saint Stephen"), some claimed that Apollo was his father but others said that it was the Thracian king, Oeagrus (Linforth 1941, 23–26; Guthrie 1952, 41–48). The discrepancy in his paternity is reflected in the disagreement over which divinity he worshipped. Although possibly the son of Apollo, some authors connected him and his followers to Dionysus. It may be, as William Guthrie suggested long ago, that Orpheus was a mediator between the religions associated with Apollo and Dionysus (Guthrie 1952, 41–48).

"Saint Stephen" as a whole presents a composite Orpheus, one who embodies Dionysian and Apollonian features, but emphasizes the former in its opening. Dionysus exemplifies, among other things, primordial emotions and excess (Nietzsche 1992, 36). The music of the introduction and theme evoke these Dionysian ideas: as the song begins, it erupts in a frenzy of instruments. The god of wine and ritual ecstasy was also connected with Thrace, Orpheus' home; Orpheus seems to have been a devotee of Dionysus early in his life. Dionysus was also a god of existential transitions and Orpheus, too, was capable of crossing the impassable boundaries of life and death. Like Dionysus who recovered his mother Semele from the Underworld, Orpheus made a similar journey to recover his wife (Oldfather 1989, 4.25.4). And both, therefore, were associated with rejuvenation and identified by the revitalizing symbols of flora.

Stephen holds a rose, the most common symbol lyrically as well as visually for the Dead, as exemplified in Mouse and Stanley's iconic poster, FD 26 (Cushway 2012, 34–35, 38–39). Those who see the biblical Stephen in this song consider the rose a symbol of martyrdom, but in artistic representations of the saint he usually holds a censer, a book, a palm, or a stone—not a rose (Dodd 2005, 62). Nor did Hunter personally correlate roses with martyrdom. In fact, it was quite the opposite, as he commented on his 1974 song "It Must Have Been the Roses":

> I've got this one spirit that's laying roses on me. Roses, roses, can't get enough of those bloody roses. The rose is the most

> prominent image in the human brain, as to delicacy, beauty, short-livedness, thorniness. It's a whole. There is no better allegory for, dare I say it, life than roses. (Jackson 1983, 152–153)

A rose is incongruous for a martyr, but it is not for Orpheus. In fact, his moniker was "the bard of Rhodope," referring to his hometown in the Rhodope ("rose-faced") Mountains in Thrace. Who better to carry a rose, Hunter's symbol of the land of the living, than one who, alive, entered the Underworld and returned to life again?

Roses were also prominent decorative elements of ancient festivals to Dionysus (Géczi 2008, 28–29). Like the god, who was presumed to have originated in the east, the rose has its roots somewhere near Persia. The fifth-century BCE poet Anacreon associated Dionysus with "the rose and the garland twine" (Campbell 1988, 44).[1] The rose garland— "country garland in the wind and the rain"—is also associated with wine and romance. In poetry, worshippers of Dionysus are often portrayed with garlands of roses (Evelyn-White 1914, 7.42; Wiseman 2013, 5.335–360). "Hail lord Dionysus, faithful of garlanded wine-drinkers, you always are present at merry feasts," wrote the fifth-century poet Bacchylides (Nauck 1889, 19, 49–51). Nietzsche, too, noticed this: "The character of Dionysus is covered with flowers and garlands; panthers and tigers walk under its yoke" (1992, 37). The symbol of the rose garland underscores Stephen's connection to Dionysus and his follower Orpheus.

Holding a rose, Stephen goes in and out of a garden, perhaps a rose garden. The garden can be symbolic of Orpheus' *catabasis* and its Dionysian attributes. As a romantic symbol, the rose, too, can signify separated lovers, as Barre Toelken pointed out in his study of folklore metaphors (1995, 41). The part of the legend in which Orpheus and his wife find themselves on opposite sides of life also had several versions. In the poetry of the Roman poets Ovid (Melville 1986, 10.1-85; 11.1–66) and Virgil (Ferry 2006, 4.452–526), the central motive for Orpheus' journey was love. After Orpheus and the nymph Eurydice married, a snake bit the new bride causing her death. In an attempt to recover her, Orpheus descended to the Underworld. Through his musical abilities he was able to enchant the ferryman and the guard dog Cerberus and approach

Persephone and Hades. His singing softened their hearts and they agreed to release Eurydice to him on the condition that he not look back as they returned to earth. Orpheus, however, did just that. It is a tragic love story in which a lover twice loses his wife.

Older versions, from the Greeks, were not love stories but tales of a mystical musician. An early painting that hung at Delphi portrayed Orpheus, with lyre in hand, traveling to the Underworld without any reference to his wife (Jones 1918, 10.30.6). Early literary references to Orpheus' journey say that his purpose was to retrieve an unnamed woman but they do not include the backward glance (Kern 1963, 45, 61; Norlin 1980, 11.8; Oldfather 1989, 4.25.4; Kovacs 1994, 357–362). Eurydice was not named until a second-century account that even suggested she returned to earth with Orpheus (Kern 1963, 62). Far from representing the *catabasis* as a tragic love story, the Greeks depicted it as a gallant endeavor.[2] Orpheus follows in the footsteps of Odysseus, Theseus, Heracles, and Aeneas, all of whom had Underworld experiences that were represented as heroic deeds (Clark 1979). As discussed below, while the character in "Saint Stephen" is less valorous and discerning of events, he does possess musical skills and regains his lost wife.

By traveling in and out of the Underworld, the Dionysian rose-bearer would also be moving in and out of life. Like a shaman, Orpheus had experiences and knowledge of the physical and the metaphysical worlds (Reist 1999; Goia 2006, 69–88). Mary Goodenough suggests that the garden motif in the Dead's music represents "a sacred place of cosmic unity," a place in which contrasted opposites coexist (2013, 53). Rilke, too, loved roses and employed them in his poetry as a device to signify the reconciliation of opposites (Strauss 1971, 214–215). The garden that Stephen-Orpheus passes through is that liminal space between life and death. There is, writes philosopher Charles Segal, "a mythic vision of the unity between life and death as the inseparable poles of a single reality. It is this unity that enables the Orphic voice to cross from the living to the dead" (1989, 35). This was a power that was attributed to "Orpheus of the double realm" but not to any historical individual named Stephen (Strauss 1971, 177–217). This is not a song about death but about life snatched from the jaws of death.

Some have argued that the character is Stephen the martyr because "wherever he goes the people all complain." Dodd, for example, comments on the preaching of the biblical Stephen: "No one enjoys being told difficult truths. They can get you killed" (2013). That, of course, is not unique to the martyr; it also applies to Orpheus. Returning from the Underworld, he shared what he had learned there. But the Orphic mysteries were recondite. The author of the Derveni Papyrus, a commentary on a fifth-century work attributed to Orpheus, said that his teachings were framed as allegories that were "strange and riddling to people." It was a deliberate strategy on his part, says the commentator, "not wishing all men to understand" (Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006, 130–131, 138–139). Pausanias commented that Orpheus was "a proud man and conceited about his mysteries," so much so that he refused to submit his mysteries to judgment at the annual competition at Delphi (Jones 1918, 10.7.2). The Roman geographer Strabo labeled Orpheus a charlatan wizard who beguiled many with his music and soothsaying; others he provoked until they killed him (Jones 1924, 7, fragment 18).

Dionysus, too, did not look favorably on these revelations, which signaled Orpheus' shift toward Apollo. According to the Greek tragedian Aeschylus, in a lost play called *Bassarae*, after his *catabasis* Orpheus abandoned Dionysus for Apollo. Every morning he would climb Mount Pangaion to welcome the sun god (Kern 1963, 45; cf. Tortorelli Ghidini 2013, 144–158). Second-century scholar Eratosthenes thought that Orpheus learned something in the Underworld that prompted his conversion from Dionysus to Apollo (Kern 1963, 113). The Latin author Hyginus said that when Orpheus stood before Hades and Persephone, he sang about the gods but did not include Dionysus in his song (Kern 1963, 117). Nor did his subsequent renunciation of women win him any praise with the Meanads, female followers of Dionysus. In one tradition, the god caused the Maenads to attack him and tear apart his body, in a way similar to what the Titans had done to Dionysus (Kern 1963, 45; Ferry 2006, 4.520-522; Melville 1986, 11.1–43). The people all complained, indeed.

At first, Stephen is a Dionysian figure. Bob Weir's enthusiastic ululation at the end of the first verse reinforces this, as do the unanswerable questions about the *catabasis* that are put forth throughout the song.

"Did he doubt or did he try?" The moonlight-dipped ladyfinger that writes "What for?" across the morning sky; and finally, "Did it matter? Does it now? Stephen would answer if he only knew how." On the one hand, these questions reflect a comfort with ignorance and obscurity, a Dionysian characteristic that the anti-rationalist Nietzsche celebrated. It was in Greek tragedy, a Dionysian medium, that true life—arduous and mystifying—was reflected (Nietzsche 1992, 81–104). The questions that the song poses are left unanswered until "the bye and bye." Orpheus—whose name etymologically might mean "darkness," though that is disputable—reflects an acceptance of uncertainty.

The Dionysian principal fascinated the counterculture of the sixties, just as it did Nietzsche. The philosopher, though he seemed to prioritize Dionysus over Apollo, saw the two gods in an agonistic symbiosis. The counterculture, however, dismissed Apollo in favor of Dionysus (Carlevale 2005, 79–92; Lecznar 2020, 130–160). For example, the Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse wrote in his highly influential *Eros and Civilization* that "Orpheus is the archetype of the poet as *liberator* and *creator*. He establishes a higher order in the world—an order without repression" (1966, 170; emphasis his). Although the counterculture exaggerated the Dionysian elements, the Stephen-Orpheus character incorporates the Apollonian as well.

Nietzsche had described the Apollonian in terms of *principium individuationis* (the principle of individuation) (1992, 44–47). Unlike the universal Dionysian that loses its self in the group, the Apollonian is a solitary figure who focuses on self-identity and restraint. One of the famous maxims inscribed on Apollo's temple at Delphi was "*gnothi seauton*" (know thyself). Orpheus embarked on his *catabasis* alone and afterwards scaled a mountain each morning by himself. The Apollonian is cerebral and its music is contemplative. Verse three shifts to these aspects. Orpheus' musical skills were the key to his performance in the Underworld, though it was with a lyre, not "a golden bell," that he descended "clear to hell." Some of the earliest Greek representations of him highlighted this. An early sixth-century relief on the Sicyonion treasury at Delphi depicted him as a *kitharode* (lyre-singer) aboard the famous ship the Argo (Linforth 1941, 1–2). In the fifth-century bas-relief in the National Museum

in Naples, the one that so moved Rilke to write "Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes" in 1904, he is portrayed with a lyre (Freedman 1996, 206–208; Sorenson 2016, 452–458). Apollonius of Rhodes placed him first in the list of Argonauts and emphasized that he was included for his mystical musical abilities (Green 2007, 1.23–34). Several accounts claimed his singing moved stones, trees, animals, and all of nature (Frazer 1921, 1.3.2; Smyth 1929, 1629–1631; Vellacott 1973 562–563; Oldfather 1989, 4.25.2). Some attributed these skills to his relationship to Apollo. "From Apollo came," wrote fifth-century poet Pindar, "the master lyrist, father of songs, renowned Orpheus" (Race 1997, 4.314–316). Whereas he followed in the footsteps of Dionysus when he embarked on his *catabasis*, it was primarily as an Apollonian musician that he succeeded in it.

The image of the Apollonian Orpheus is reinforced in the bridge, in which the song transitions musically as well as thematically. Resembling the movement in Orpheus' *catabasis*, the arpeggiated guitar chords leads the listener "lower down and lower down again" before the unanticipated sounds of a glockenspiel returns the scene back to earth. Now Stephen-Orpheus is in the waning moonlight at the break of dawn. Orpheus had great respect for the nighttime celestial body of light. He was a devotee of the moon goddess Hecate, along with Dionysus and Apollo, and established her worship on the island of Aegina (Jones 1918, 2.30.2). The first *Orphic Hymn*, a collection of poetry attributed to the bard, invoked the moon and the entire eighth hymn was dedicated "To the Moon" (Athanassakis and Wolkow 2013). It was said that he taught the moon and the sun, both luminous bodies and in rotation (as he believed), are "an analogue of each other" (Kern 1963, 92). As noted above, Aeschylus wrote that every morning Orpheus greeted the sun as it chased away the darkness. Four times in "Saint Stephen" appear the words "sun" or "sunshine," and the same number for "dawn" or "dawning." These images of light raise connotations of Apollo.

In the early morning—as the "Sunlight splatters dawn with answers, / Darkness shrugs and bids the day good-bye"—Stephen engages in writing and formulating cryptic pronouncements, acts associated with Apollo, the god of prophecy. Some in antiquity believed Orpheus invented writing (Kern 1963, 123; cf. Detienne 2003, 131–136). There are many extant

writings associated with him. In addition to the *Orphic Hymns*, artifacts of all sorts—gold tablets, gemstones, vases, terracotta figurines, rings, medallions, tomb frescoes—survive with inscribed Orphic statements (Graf and Johnston 2007, 167–186; Bernabé and San Cristóbal 2008). Many of them have to do with the mysteries and the afterlife. In these writings "a lot of fleeting matters" are "spurned" for those of serious subjects—"treasons" that angered Dionysus but delighted Apollo. The messages hit the reader like "sharp and narrow" arrows. Arrows, too, are symbols of Apollo, the god of the golden bow.

As the new day commences, a voice commands Stephen to "Wrap the babe in scarlet colors, call it your own." A baby appears again in the penultimate song on *Aoxomoxoa*, "What's Become of the Baby?" Some have identified this as the same baby. For example, Dodd asks, "Could it be that the baby who is lost is the same child who was wrapped in scarlet covers in 'Saint Stephen'? If so, then this child could be Orpheus" (2005, 93). Schlief, too, notices this recurrence and poses that the baby is "the 'central' child-character" of the entire album (1995). It is an attractive thesis for the album as a whole, but there is little to support this for the babe in this specific track. Alternatively, it could be Orpheus' own child. After all, the voice commands him to call it his own. It was on their wedding day that Orpheus' wife died so it is unlikely that the babe could have been born before his *catabasis*. But perhaps, if Orpheus succeeded in rescuing his wife, as some sources suggested, this babe was born to the couple after their return. Of course, in a psychedelic song such as this, not every lyric is explicable, a position that returns to the Dionysian contentment with the realm of mystery. Even though the identity of the baby is questionable, the broad outline of the song reflects the story of Orpheus, one who combines Apollonian and Dionysian features, and who returns to earth with his wife.

In the first three verses of "Saint Stephen" the Dionysian hero had descended to the Underworld. In the bridge he returned as a more pronounced follower of Apollo. The experience must have been unnerving, so much so that he is left with unanswered questions. By verse four, with the return to stimulating music and a quickened pace, he is fully reintegrated to the land of the living. He has recovered his composure

in verse five. With Apollonian confidence, the song announces: "Saint Stephen will remain, all he's lost he shall regain." In an image evocative of Greece, from now on, Stephen will remain in his earthly home, on the "seashore washed by the suds and the foam." But more than that, he will also be reunited with that which he had lost, the purpose of his descent. This pronouncement does not at all apply to Stephen the martyr, but it does to a specific version of Orpheus. It engages with the long history of stories about the *catabasis*. Did he doubt that his wife was behind him? Did he try to reach for her as she slipped away from him for the second time? Perhaps not. The lyrics ask the listener to question the popular version and its tragic ending.

Although many accounts, past and present, mention Orpheus' backward glance and, as a consequence, the second loss of his wife, there are others that end with a reunion. Some Greek writers appeared to describe a successful Orpheus (Norlin 1980, 11.8; cf. Linforth 1941, 16–21; Bowra 1952, 119–120; Dronke 1962; Sansone 1985; *contra* Graf 1986, 81–82; Heath 1994). Early Christians appropriated the singer to represent Christ as psychopomp, a guide of the souls of the dead, and therefore he had to accomplish his mission (Friedman 1970, 38–85; Herrero 2010, 139–144). In *Sir Orfeo*, the Middle English lay, the hero rescues his wife, Queen Heurodis, from fairyland and returns with her to rule his people in Traciens (Thrace) (Friedman 1970, 175–194; Fuentes 2010). Jacopo Peri's *Eurydice* (1600), the earliest surviving opera, omitted the backward glance and added a happy ending (*lieto fine*) for the couple (McGee 1982, 163–82; Buller 1995, 67). Christoph Gluck's Italian opera *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762) included the backward glance but also the couple's reunion on earth (Buller 1995, 77–78).

Not as common in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the reunion version returned in the Orphic Trilogy of Jean Cocteau, in particular the second film, *Orphée* (1950). The film opens with a famous but uninspired and irritable poet named Orpheus who feels the public hates him ("the people all complain"). After witnessing a brawl, he finds himself inside a Rolls-Royce with a radio that broadcasts absurd messages that are more impenetrable than those posed about Stephen. The next day, the chauffeur drives Orpheus to his home, but the poet is so captivated by

the radio that he loses all interest in his pregnant wife. When she dies, he is annoyed but ultimately regretful. Like Stephen who goes "in and out of the garden," he travels through a mirror that serves as an interdimensional portal to the Underworld. While he searches for his wife, he is filled with curiosity about the place, but his guide demands that he stop asking questions. The tribunal of the Underworld allows his wife's release on the condition that he never look at her again. Cocteau adds to the story a second death for the couple when Orpheus, still obsessed with the radio messages, accidentally looks on Eurydice in the car mirror. But he ends the film with yet another reunion of the couple, no longer cognizant of what has transpired but now filled with love for each other and for their expected child.

Cocteau's "poetic film" does not feature an exemplary hero who possess agency in his own story, but it presents an Orpheus who resembles Stephen. "Orphée and Eurydice are reunited in life, where Orphée finds himself strangely inspired," writes Arthur Evans on the ending of Cocteau's film. "Concurrent with his new-found inspiration, Orphée also experiences an attitude change with regard to his wife; he now seems deeply in love with her and affords to her his utmost attention and affection" (Evans 1977, 124). He has regained his lost wife and is about to welcome a new child. Domestically, he is a whole being—even though it had little, if anything, to do with his own personal qualities. It is a depiction that prefigures Stephen.

Cocteau's representation of Orpheus was fashionable among the counterculture. The Beat poets, for example, although they preferred to create their own personal mythologies rather than contemplate ancient ones, were fascinated with the Orpheus legend and Cocteau's representation of it (Lane 2017, 93–114). Jack Kerouac's first novel, an allegory of the new cultural and literary movement of which he would be a part, was titled *Orpheus Emerged*. The main character Michael, who wishes he could be Orpheus, "the *artist-man*," exclaims:

> [D]o you understand what I'm trying to say? When I could be
> the whole artist and man. Unchained! you see—for Prometheus
> is chained to a rock, God knows—unwounded, unlike Cocteau's

poet, or Henry James' artist; unsevered, Arthur, unsevered!
(2000, 97. Emphasis his)

Allen Ginsberg once told his assistant Randy Roark how he and the other Beats were mesmerized by the car radio in *Orphée*. "That scene—[Ginsberg] said—became an image that was useful to the poet—that poetry did not come from the rational mind, but as if from a higher state of consciousness" (Nichols 2012). Cocteau's movies made a similar impression on the Dead. The cover of *Aoxomoxoa*, which is a visual palindrome, conjures up Cocteau's mirror portal (Trist and Dodd 2005, 92n3).[3] Garcia, a film aficionado, loved the Frenchman's films. "If I'm going to make movies," he told Blair Jackson and Regan McMahon, "I'm going to make them on my terms. I'm not going to become a filmmaker as a career. I'll do it like Jean Cocteau—do a couple of tasty movies and that's it" (Jackson and McMahon 1985, 11). There is little doubt that Cocteau's Orpheus, the one who passes through a mirror (garden) into other dimensions and who regains all that he had lost, was on the minds of Hunter and the rest of the Dead in the sixties and informed their composition of "Saint Stephen."

There is more good news to follow for Stephen-Orpheus, now a fully domesticated figure. Not only has he returned home with his wife, but he also still has his mother. For all the discrepancies in Orpheus' story, no one in antiquity denied that his mother was Calliope, the daughter of Zeus. She was the Muse of epic poetry, and Orpheus' own poetic traits were inherited from her. "Stephen, as an image of Orpheus," writes Schlief, "is 'spun' from the womb of Calliope . . . The image of 'calliope woman' is surrounded by a child's 'curious senses,' the 'spinnin' wheel and 'fortune' crawling like an infant" (1995). It is too much to say that Orpheus is an infant in these lines. More likely, these images of juvenilia relate to the domestic circumstances in which Orpheus, after his *catabasis*, has found himself. He is at home with his wife, mother, and perhaps a baby wrapped in scarlet.

The final lyrics of the song return to questions. "Can you answer? Yes I can / But what would be the answer to the answer man?" It is as though the lyrics are begging the listener to acknowledge the hero and the theme of the song. Could it really be that Orpheus and his *catabasis* are

the inspiration for "Saint Stephen," and Hunter never recognized it? "It's small wonder," Hunter commented on his ability to memorize the lyrics of popular songs, "that many [of my] songs are often fraught with allusions" (2005, xii). He never acknowledged that Orpheus was the inspiration for Stephen. He said it was the martyr Stephen "or something." It seems eminently possible, even likely, that the something Hunter hinted at was Orpheus. Yet, although Hunter was clearly familiar with the story of Orpheus in all its different adaptions, he never confirmed that Orpheus was the inspiration for Stephen. Hunter would be much more comfortable with a more open appreciation of the song. Nevertheless, there is a strong case for interpreting the song through the lens of Orpheus' story—the one that combines the Apollonian and Dionysian, as Nietzsche emphasized for a cultural hero, and that reunites Orpheus with his wife, as Cocteau and others depicted it. The song ends on a Dionysian note, with another rollicking jam and another whoop from Weir. Though commonly associated with death, Orpheus now exudes life.

As a commentary on the timeless tale of Orpheus' *catabasis*, the song engages with its own time. Identifying Stephen as the legendary bard instead of the biblical saint changes the mood of the song: read this way, it reflects the optimism of the sixties. Most of all, this interpretation goes to the heart of the resolutely triumphant tone of the song. Stephen as Orpheus reclaims this seminal Grateful Dead work as the anthem that generations of fans instinctively recognized as celebratory, a response that highlights Hunter's achievement. It is not a tale of martyrdom but of resurrection, not of loss but of reunion, not of woe but of wonder.

Notes

The views presented in this article are mine alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Naval Academy, the Department of the Navy, or the Department of Defense.

1. All dates for ancient Greek references are BCE.

2. Not everyone thought Orpheus' journey was heroic. In one of Plato's dialogues (Fowler 1925, 179D), Phaedrus called it "a coward's quest." When his wife died,

he believed, Orpheus was too faint hearted to be reunited with her in death and attempted to circumvent the inevitable. Hades, therefore, only gave Orpheus a phantom of his wife, not a real woman.

3. "We were having our first child so we were studying natural childbirth," says Ida Griffin, wife of *Aoxomoxoa* cover artist Rick Griffin. "In a way the whole thing [the album cover] is about reproduction and birth, life and death" (Cushway 2012, 89).

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