

A Note on the Play  
By Kristopher Karcher, Dramaturg

In 1917, following the disintegration of her first and only marriage, poet Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) published a poem entitled “Eurydice” in the magazine *The Egoist*. The poem draws inspiration from the ancient Greek myth, in which Orpheus descends to the underworld to retrieve his deceased bride, but loses Eurydice forever by turning to look back at her on the journey home, against the strict instructions of Hades, god of the underworld. The seven sections of H.D.’s poem illustrate stages of Eurydice’s personal growth following Orpheus’s betrayal. The poem is, of course, an allegory for the demise of the poet’s own marriage, portrays Eurydice as angry at Orpheus for his lapse of resolve; she accuses him of being “ruthless,” “arrogant,” and a multitude of other invectives. By poem’s end we see a new Eurydice. One who has grown. One who is beautiful. And one who can survive without the man who looked back.

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice has been revisited in many different ways: through fine art, opera, music and drama. During the Renaissance, artists portrayed Orpheus heroically: as a magical musician who lost the love of his life to an awful trick of fate. This vision of Orpheus remained entrenched until H.D.’s poem shifted our perspective, forcing a view of Eurydice as more than just the hero’s passive love interest.

With her version of Eurydice, Sarah Ruhl—twice a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama—gives this ancient character new dimensions for a contemporary audience. She also shares some of her own story in the process. Like H.D.’s poem, Ruhl’s drama is semi-autobiographical. Struggling to mourn her father’s death, Ruhl wrote Eurydice as a way to reconcile herself with her loss, and to speak with her father once again. As you watch our staging of Eurydice, consider the final lines of H.D.’s poem:

*At least I have the flowers of myself,  
and my thoughts, no god  
can take that;  
I have the fervour of myself for a presence  
and my own spirit for light;*

*and my spirit with its loss  
knows this;  
though small against the black,  
small against the formless rocks,  
hell must break before I am lost;*

*before I am lost,  
hell must open like a red rose  
for the dead to pass.*

Thanks to H.D, Sarah Ruhl, and plenty of other feminist visionaries, Eurydice has shed her helpless image and has become a hero and a tool for women to share their own stories. Everyone can find a little part of themselves in this new Eurydice. Let her guide you. Let her tell your story. And never look back.