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Dakota Lane

The Orpheus Obsession

United States of America (2005)

TAGS: Eurydice Fate Odyssey Orpheus Underworld





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Orpheus Obsession
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2005
First Edition Details	Dakota Lane, *The Orpheus Obsession*. New York: Katherine Tegen Books, 2005, 273 pp.
ISBN	9780060741730
Genre	Bildungsromans (Coming-of-age fiction), Romance fiction
Target Audience	Young adults (recommended for readers aged 14+)
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il

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Creators



Dakota Lane , b. 1959
(Author)

Dakota Lane is an American author, illustrator, photographer, journalist, and teacher. She was born in Brooklyn, New York, and studied at San Francisco State University. She has published four young adult novels, *Johnny Voodoo* (1996), *The Orpheus Obsession* (2005), *The Secret Life of IT Girls* (2007) and *Gothic Lolita* (2008). In 1997, *Johnny Voodoo* was celebrated by the American Library Association as the year's Best Book for Young Adults.

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

The Orpheus Obsession is the coming-of-age story of sixteen-year-old Annoshka Stargirl. She loves photography, and has a habit of imagining her life as a movie. She lives in upstate New York with her mother, who is depressed and remote, and her beloved budgie Zach. Her father moved out years ago and rarely makes contact. Anooshka's stylish older sister, Zoetrope Zallulah Moon (known as ZZ Moon), has already left home and rents an apartment in New York City. At the start of the summer holidays, on Anooshka's birthday, the sisters spontaneously visit a local maze, and stumble across a photoshoot of a hip upcoming musician named Orpheus. ZZ Moon is already a fan, and Anooshka, who has never heard of him, is equally enchanted by his good looks and cool charisma. Anooshka begins to obsessively listen to Orpheus' music, and read his online blog. Her two friends, Agnes and Raphael, tease her about her crush, but Anooshka is convinced that she shares a deeper connection with Orpheus than his other fans. Using knowledge gleaned from his blog posts, she goes to New York and persuades ZZ Moon to accompany her to Constellation, an exclusive restaurant and rooftop bar of which Orpheus is part-owner. Though he is surrounded by his keepers and other admirers, Orpheus singles Anooshka out and they share a private moment looking through the telescopes on the balcony. He invites her on to his tour bus while Moon waits nervously outside, and through the course of a long, wild night of partying, the pair share intense conversation and moments of physical attraction.

Following this encounter, Anooshka's fixation with Orpheus intensifies, and she returns to Constellation but this time fails to find Orpheus. Seeking to escape the powerful summer heat, she goes to the museum and views Gauguin's tropical paintings. Later she is astounded to find that Orpheus' latest blog post is a rumination on Gauguin's art, and is thrilled at the synchronicity of their thoughts and feelings about the world. Though her friends and sister warn her to be careful, she again returns to the restaurant and this time meets Orpheus, who remembers her name, and abandons his coterie to spend the night with her. They walk the streets, eat cheap Chinese food, and finally go back to his apartment, where, despite his earlier declaration that he will not sleep with her, they have sex. Orpheus goes on tour the next day and Anooshka is devastated when he fails to contact her. Returning home, she learns that while she was with Orpheus her pet budgie escaped and was killed by her mother's

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unruly, neglected dog. Anooshka spirals into deep grief over the loss of her pet and Orpheus, whose blog posts make no mention of their special connection. ZZ Moon makes her sister an exquisite beaded necklace using some of Zach's feathers, and she returns to Constellation once again, wearing this special adornment. Orpheus is not there, but she runs into Scarlett, one of the mean girls from school, who shocks Anooshka by revealing intimate details about Orpheus, because he has used the same flirtatious lines on her. After discovering that he has also made a play for ZZ Moon, Anooshka runs away and spends a few days living rough in the underground subway. She is befriended by a homeless woman named Odessa, with whom she shares stories of her childhood. Emerging from this otherworldly experience, Anooshka finally makes contact with her family. She gradually recovers from her obsession with Orpheus by imagining cinematic scenarios in which he declares his undying love for her, or is transformed into an insect that she mercilessly squashes. A year passes, and another summer begins.

Analysis

The novel's allusions to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice form a backdrop to this contemporary narrative about the teenage experience. Its attitude to myth and its enduring power is somewhat ambiguous. When Orpheus tells her the story of his namesake, she responds with sarcasm, "Oh, goody – history and myths! Just those words make my mind go dead. But something in his tone hooks me." (p. 79). While Orpheus the rock star has inherited the mythic figure's musical talent and melancholy allure, it is Anooshka who re-enacts his search for his lost beloved. In reversing the dynamics of the original myth, the text encourages reflection on the representation of Eurydice, who traditionally remains a remote, elusive figure, objectified by the devotion of her lover. In addition, the contemporary setting and themes of Lane's narrative supply very different reasons for Anooshka's ultimate failure to locate her Orpheus, who is cast as narcissistic and selfish.

The intensity of their romantic connection (Orpheus says "I could spot you in a room of a thousand because you would see me seeing you" (p. 199)) is titillating, but ultimately revealed to be a sham, as Orpheus exploits his stardom to sleep with as many women as he can. On his blog, Orpheus says "every myth has tiny little secrets stuffed inside." (p. 245). Lane's text implies that there is more to the myth of Orpheus

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and Eurydice than a simple love story.

The city of New York is granted mythological status. The text details the grittiness of the city streets at the height of summer. The exclusive top-floor restaurant Constellation resembles Mount Olympus, where the city's elite hip crowd congregate, resplendent in their eccentric fashion and with bizarre appetites. Anooshka's descent into the subway beneath the city is a form of katabasis. She prays to God for a sign, and immediately sees an arrow, pointing down. The name of her companion, the ancient bag lady Odessa, evokes the female form and mythical journey of the *Odyssey*. Later, Anooshka writes "of course Odessa was not tangible…No human could be that good" (p. 260). The episode has a dreamlike quality that contrasts with the candid reality of Annoshka's first person account. She says:

"This is the place people go to when they're in between, when they have to hide. No one knows about this place above. They've heard, but no one comes into this tunnel without a reference. Then how did you take me in? I ask Odessa. Because, baby, you were referred by God." (pp. 254–255).

Orpheus himself conflates the classical and biblical traditions, declaring "You know Orpheus and Eurydice are really just Adam and Eve" (p. 196). The story also engages with eastern religious traditions via a taxi driver who tells Anooshka that he is the reincarnation of a cobra. (p. 232). This revelation helps to comfort her after the loss of Zach the budgie. On his blog, Orpheus refers to the popularity of the cult of Orphism in the ancient world, writing that "the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice was just a tiny part of the religion, but their wild story is the only part of the religion that everyone remembers. probably because they were even cooler than romeo and juliet." (p. 79).

This variety of intertextual allusions contributes to the postmodern character of this novel, which features multiple forms of textual communication. Anooshka's storytelling is juxtaposed with Orpheus' blog posts, real and imagined conversations between family members, childhood memories, and fantasy film scripts. Each chapter opens with a line from one of Orpheus' songs, and black and white photographs

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	appear throughout the text, ostensibly images captured by Anooshka of her friends, strangers, and parts of the city. Orpheus himself does not appear within the photographs, adding to his mystique and status as an object of fantasy.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Eurydice Fate Odyssey Orpheus Underworld
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Animals Appearances Boys Coming of age Depression Desires Family Fashion Friendship Identity Life Loss Love Parents (and children) Sexuality Siblings Storytelling Teenagers Truth and lies Youth
Further Reading	Review at kirkusreviews.com (accessed: March 20, 2019).

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