



School: School of Creative Industries

Researcher: David Almond

Project Title: *A Song for Ella Grey*

UOA: 27 - English Language and Literature

Research Statement

Almond, A. (2014) *A Song for Ella Grey*, London: Hodder Children's Books.

Almond's version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth explores the relevance of this ancient tale relevant to the lives of young people today. The setting is the present-day North East of England, in the streets, estates and schools of Tyneside and the beaches of Northumberland. Eurydice is Ella Grey, an ordinary sixth-former, who falls in love with Orpheus, who appears during a party on Bamburgh Beach. The tale is told by Ella's best friend, Claire, who can only watch as the passion flares and the tragedy unfolds.

Almond's research explores the ways in which specificity of language and location can enrich and give power to explorations of ancient myths and universal themes. In *A Song for Ella Grey*, Hades exists under the streets of Newcastle and its entrance can be found in the place where the Ouseburn flows out from beneath the city. The mythical and the tangible connect in Almond's writing, providing his young readers with a way of accessing the emotional core of the narrative.

A Song for Ella Grey draws on a deep understanding of the ways in which the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is rediscovered and reinvented for each new generation. Through years of reading, listening and viewing, Almond has explored the multiplicity of versions of the myth that have come down to us through history. His research included listening to Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, Toby Twining's *Eurydice* and Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. He watched cinematic versions, including Cocteau's *Orphee*; *Black Orpheus*, and read Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Don Paterson's *Orpheus*, *Performance* by Anthony Rooley, *Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism* by Algis Uzdavinyas and Ann Wroe's *Orpheus The Song of Life*.

The tale is written in an appropriately songlike manner. At times the prose breaks up into poetic form. The first person narrative draws in the reader, encouraging empathy and immersion in the story. Young readers' reviews of the book show that they were intensely involved in the tale, with one 15-year-old reviewer writing: "I found myself

with an ache in my chest as I was reading it, and I realised that I was feeling what the characters did”ⁱ.

A Song for Ella Grey won the 2015 Guardian Children's Fiction Prizeⁱⁱ and the 2015 Peters' Book of the Year (Teen Fiction), as well as being nominated for the Carnegie Medal in 2016.

The novel was adapted for the stage by Almond and was produced in Newcastle, at Northern Stage, with a chorus of Tyneside teenagers at its heart.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ *A Song for Ella Grey* by David Almond – review: 15-year-old reviewer on Guardian children's books site
<https://www.theguardian.com/global/2015/nov/17/564b4472e4b0a51fe2018843>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/gnm-press-office/2015/nov/19/david-almond-awarded-guardian-childrens-fiction-prize-2015>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/song-for-ella-grey-northern-stage/>