

ORPHEUS

A Poetic Drama

by

Owen Barfield

*To M.C.B. and A.F. who lovingly produced ORPHEUS
in an unambitious way in Sheffield in 1948.*

A NOTE ON THE PRODUCTION

In Act I Scene i, it is preferable that the actors on the stage, other than **Orpheus** and **Eurydice**, should not actually speak, but should accompany with appropriate gestures and arm-movements the **Choruses** speaking their lines. This is not essential however. But if **Nereus**'s long speech is actually spoken by the actor representing him, it should be accompanied by appropriate movements on the part of the **Nereids**.

The events of Act II Scene i begin a few minutes before the conclusion of those in Act I Scene ii.

The movements of the denizens of Hades at the opening of Act III Scene i should be in the nature of a dance, but jerky and automatic, like badly animated films. Masks may be worn.

The howling of **Cerberus** in this scene should, if possible, emerge from **Hades**' amplified voice in the manner of a defective radio set making noises.

The events of Act IV Scenes i and ii take place simultaneously.

CHARACTERS IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

First Chorus	<i>A male voice, or voices</i>
Second Chorus	<i>A female voice, or voices</i>
Eurydice	<i>A Nereid</i>
Nereus	<i>A Sea-god, father of Eurydice and the other Nereids</i>
Orpheus	<i>Son of Apollo and the Muse Calliope</i>
Aristaeus	<i>Son of Apollo and Cyrene</i>
Charon	<i>The Ferryman of Souls</i>
Hades	<i>The God of the Underworld (the name, as in Homer, also designates his Kingdom)</i>
Persephone	<i>His Queen, daughter of Demeter, the earth-mother</i>
Sisyphus	<i>A wicked soul in torment</i>
Tantalus	<i>A wicked soul in torment</i>
Arethusa	<i>A nymph, daughter of the river Peneus, and sister of Cyrene</i>
A Satyr	
Cyrene	<i>A nymph, the mother of Aristaeus</i>

Nereids, Danaïds (*wicked souls in torment*), Animals, Maenads (*devotees of the wine-god, Dionysus*), River-nymphs, *voices of a Herald and of Ascalaphus (Hades's spy in the form of an owl)*

Act I, scene i

(Left: Sea. Right: Rocky shore. Rainbow. Music. Nereids. To them enter more Nereids dancing, among them Eurydice. A roll of thunder:)

First Chorus

Storm is stopping: stiller grows the sea:
 Now only the arch of Iris' bow
 Tells of the recent wrath of Uranus.
 Old Nereus beneath nodding in his cavern
 Draws into his dream the dropping Calm: 5

Second Chorus

Creeping from their cover his countless daughters,
 Sporting and splashing in the spume and spray,
 Lie all alive to the lap of waters;
 Laughing they beckon the lazy Calm.

First Chorus

No man can name them with nice discernment, 10
 Mark one maiden from many others,
 As they thrid through the throng of each other —
 Or grasp their grouping: there grows together
 A knot of Nereids and anon disperses:
 See! two or three: twenty — thirty: 15
 Teasing and tugging at a toy — what is it?

Second Chorus

Enough! Enough! Nereus rises:

(Nereus rises from the sea.)

The Leader of the First Chorus *(for Nereus)*

Darling daughters! Dance around me!

Second Chorus

How does it happen that they heed him not?

First Chorus

What are they whispering, one to another? 20

Second Chorus (*dispersedly for some of the Nereids*)

To lift its limbs and let them fall,
 To see them like seaweed slowly waving
 Within the water! Oh, what a game!
 A strange starfish! to stroke its rays,
 Touch and tickle and twist them about! 25
 What a funny fish! What fat fins!
 Pale and pink as a pearly shell
 And soft as a sponge! What a silly toy!

Leader of the First Chorus (*for Nereus*)

Leave it alone! Let me see it!

First Chorus

Nereus sees now the new plaything, 30
 Brine-drenched body, buffeted by the sea,
 Of a shipwrecked sailor: severed was its head
 By the surge smiting on sharp reefs.
 The sea-god starts — sickens strangely.
 Huge horror of Heracles, 35
 Mazing his memory, is moulding his words.

The Leader of the First Chorus (*for Nereus*)

Leave it alone! Let it be!
 Never go near it: I know the shape!
 Lovely little laughers, now listen to me:—
 Slumbering and sleeping on a slope of rock 40
 Once I was. One came walking,
 Striding over the strand; he was stronger than I.
 He had a head: a hard round knob
 Sat on his shoulders, like shore on sea.
 He lashed me lying asleep on the rock — 45
 Me, the master of the moving waves!
 Oh the agony, as I awaked
 From sleep into self!
 I tried to stretch — was strapped helpless!
 I struggled to struggle! stock-still! 50
 Muscle could not twitch! madness was upon me . . .
 Then Metis came, mother of Wit
 Wheeling down in a winged shape
 With soothing counsel. Sky sent her.
 Being checked by force from changing place, 55
 She bid me to change my being's self,

The Leader of the First Chorus (*for Nereus*)

We shun your shape as shadows the sun:
Will have no hero haunting these our shoals:
Begone quickly from the gods at ease!

Orpheus

Weak as a woman's the weight of my arm,
Soft my skin is and shrinks from shock;
No hero am I.

90

The Leader of the First Chorus (*for Nereus*)

Your head is hard!
I like not your look.

Orpheus

I go at once, if you grant what I ask —

The Leader of the First Chorus (*for Nereus*)

Speak then and begone! the shore suits you.

95

Orpheus

The name of the Nereid, whom now I see . . .

The Leader of the First Chorus (*for Nereus*)

Enough! No names the Nereids have.

Orpheus

Though she know not her name, a name has she.
Of all things in earth, and air, and sea
Zeus guards the names in a golden urn,
A curious casket.

100

The Leader of the First Chorus (*for Nereus*)

And keeps the key.

Orpheus

One key of his grace gave he the Muses,
Memory's daughters. My mother was one.
When most my song soars in splendour,
When ether blossoms in bursts of sound,
Like a butterfly born on its tremblings
Flits my mother, a messenger from Zeus —
Hovers over my head with heavenly wings:

105

They brush my lips: Love engenders:
 The tip of my tongue tastes a name 110
 Unuttered before by any mouth,
 Fresh and dewy from the depths of the urn.

The Leader of the First Chorus (*for Nereus*)

What a whirr of words! You weary me.

Orpheus

Her name: tell me!

The Leader of the First Chorus (*for Nereus*)

I know it not.
 Now get you gone: graceless asker! 115

Orpheus (*to the Nereids:*)

Dancers, dance me that dance again!

Second Chorus (*confusedly, for Nereids' mocking*)

“Dancers-dances-that-dance’s-game!”

Orpheus

Again, I said, I said again.

Second Chorus (*as before*)

Again, he said, he said again!
 Ha ha ha ha ha ha! 120
 What whirring words. Wonderful creature!
 Again! ha ha ha ha!
 Jabber and jargon and jibberish!
 What land-language! To listen and laugh!

Orpheus

Mother of my mother — might you but help me. 125

Meaning’s mystery I would make them feel!

Listen, ladies, you laugh at “again”

As a silly sound. Say if you never

Heard sweet echo over the sea

Answer back to the angry roarers 130

An angry roar?

Mock and mimic the mewling of gulls

With mewling of gulls? Your mouths mocked me

But a moment back: they mimicked my mouth.

Will you play but a game to please me now? 135

Pretend you be Echo — an easy task.
 What Echo would do I'll do with my lyre:
 Do with your dancing what Echo would do!

The Leader of the First Chorus (*for Nereus*)

Laughers, leave him! I like not this game.

(**Orpheus** begins to play the same music, the **Nereids** to dance the same dance as before. When dance and music are at their height, suddenly **Orpheus** breaks off. Dance and music cease.)

Orpheus

Eur-yd-i-ce! 140

The Leader of the First Chorus (*for Nereus*)

Listen not! Listen not! Leave him! Come!
 Answer not, Nereid! Or all is lost!
 Thetis was named; the thief Peleus
 Who bound her down — she bore him a son
 (When the name is come, the Nereid goes).

145

Second Chorus (*for the other Nereids*)

Listen not! Listen not! Leave him! Oh, come!
 Not to answer him! Nereid! Sister!

Eurydice

Not to answer him — Orpheus — I . . .

(**Orpheus** turns and begins to walk away.)

Second Chorus

Not to follow him! Nereid! Nereid!

(**Orpheus** walks slowly off without looking back, **Eurydice** following behind.)

Second Chorus

Not to follow! Oh, Nereid! Turn!

150

— *Curtain* —

Scene ii

(Scene: A grassy slope with a tree growing on it and at some distance from the tree a thicket of rose bushes forming a kind of arbour entered by a natural arch. In the distance, on the one side, mountains; on the other, the sea.)

(The curtain rises discovering Orpheus and Eurydice seated.)

Eurydice

Orpheus! Love! She grows bewildered:
It was otherwise at first
When you led her from the water —

Orpheus

Was it sweeter in the water?

Eurydice

And she followed where you led, 5
High upon this moveless ocean
Of the trees and the mountains,
Where the mountains never fall
And the valleys never rise —
Over brown earth, over green earth — 10

Orpheus

Was it better on the brown earth?

Eurydice

It was otherwise. Even after,
When she dared to overtake you
And they wandered hand in hand,
Orpheus with Eurydice, 15
Looking through their twice two eyes
Out upon this frozen ocean
And were pleased with what they saw.

Orpheus

Was Eurydice more happy?

Eurydice

She seemed otherwise —
Oh Orpheus! 20
Now it is *you* who follow

Where she leads — your eyes that follow
 Or, when I repose, they rest
 Even as now, like the moonlight
 Falling blank upon the water, 25
 On my face and on my breast.

Orpheus

Does its falling — do they hurt you?

Eurydice

Dear, the white hands of my father
 Laid on my bowed head in blessing
 Rested not more lightly — yet —

Orpheus

Yet? 30

Eurydice

Yet I know not. Listen . . . Look!
(She takes up a handful of earth.)
 Earth will crumble, but earth will not
 Vanish away between my fingers
 Leaving nothing — like sand.
 When I do the thing with sand, 35
 If I rub my fingers together,
 When I shake them, they are clean.
 Poor Eurydice's soiled fingers!
 Who shall lave them?

Orpheus *(taking her hand and kissing it)*

Lips of Orpheus!

Eurydice

Lips that summoned and she followed! 40
 Lips that sang! loved lips! Oh, Orpheus!
 You have changed! I remember,
 I remember how your singing
 Once unfroze this silent ocean
 And unlocked the lakes of land 45
 And unlocked the shapes of things:
 Once you sang of all I gazed on
 Till its self was your singing,
 Till the mountains sank to valleys,
 And the valleys rose to mountains 50

And the sky and earth and air
 Floated all together, ringing,
 Speaking with the tongue of Orpheus.

 You have changed! Now bare
 Is the earth, the sky is silent 55
 Emptied of the voice of Orpheus,
 Emptied of the life of Orpheus,
 Robbed of their great gift of Orpheus.
 When I see them, I see nothing.
 All his songs are now of one — 60
 One — Nereid — and she —

Orpheus

Chides him!

Other sages chide their pupils
 For neglect to learn the lesson,
 But Eurydice the tyrant
 Scolds them when they learn too well! 65
She is “otherwise”!

 Eurydice,
 Praise me not for voicing nature!
 When the Whole speaks through me,
 I am not. The languid urchin
 Vibrates to the moon-thrilled sea 70
 But, abiding not, is nothing.

He who says: Lo, what I gaze on
 Is the same as even now,
 He abides and knows and loves it,
 Clinging: steadfastness is all. 75

Once you sighed: What is a lover?
 From yourself I learnt the answer:
 Seeing less, he sees more clearly,
 Knowing less he knows more nearly,
 Steadfastness is all. Unending 80
 Is the might of constancy.

Through the part, the little wicket,
 Shines the glory, burns the Whole,
 And Orpheus, finding new earth, air and sea,
 Still hymns them all, hymning Eurydice! 85

Eurydice

What? I fear you! like a stranger's
Beat your words upon my shore!

Orpheus

Like a stranger's! Oh most cruel!
This, the very thread that bound us!
Nay, but you *shall* understand! 90
Help me, now, Mnemosyne!
 Listen: many many days
Orpheus lingered with his lyre
Watching, charmed, the Nereids dancing
Over silver-sanded bays: 95
They were as waves to him,
Melting one into the other
In the laughter of their glancing
And indifference of their ways,
Till — as sleepers grow uneasy, 100
Unaware that they are waking,
As the dawn creeps colder —
He was slowly disenchanted.
Nereid passed with flashing hair:
Orpheus saw that she was fair, 105
But he only thought: — “not *that* one!”
Till I shouted: “She is *there*,
She herself!” . . . till the day
When my mother gave me strength
Greater than your mighty father's — 110
When she touched my trembling lips
And they opened like a flower
On your name: Eurydice!
Oh Eurydice, this power
Even now is moving me 115
When you think me like a stranger
When you start, as from danger!

Eurydice

Oh cease not! Your word is magic!
Orpheus! Master! At my feet?
Say, was this — this your meaning 120
When you spoke of “constancy”?

Orpheus

Even the same.

Eurydice

Oh, lovely thing!

Yet I fear — oh man, I fear!

Travellers love the journey better

Than the goal they travel to.

125

Having mastered once my name,

Till you weary of the same?

The same Eurydice year after year?

Why do I speak in this strange way?

I fear!

Orpheus (*takes his lyre and plays*)

Hear you?

130

(*He plays again, this time pointedly repeating one of the phrases over and over again.*)

Heard you? Heard you? Which was sweeter?

Did you weary of “the same”?

Sweetness is song’s life-blood. Then blame not me,

If my sweet songs are all — Eurydice!

Eurydice

Oh my lover! I am nothing!

135

I will chide no more! Yet — Orpheus —

If’t be true, as you persuade me,

You have found a deeper beauty —

Oh, how can I not be jealous?

I who never see this beauty,

140

I who may not share it with you,

As we shared in the beginning,

When we sacrificed together?

Orpheus’ singing gave me eyes,

Eyes to see the world he sang of.

145

Now he sings of what he gave me.

So the gift is all in vain:

Eyes may never see themselves!

Orpheus

Fairest, in our cup of pleasure

Is this drop the only pain?

150

Had I means to melt it wholly —

Tell me, what would follow then?

Eurydice

I know not — I may not tell you.

Orpheus

I *have* means. Hephaestus lately
 Made for golden Aphrodite
 By her own command this —

155

Eurydice

Oh!

Orpheus

What? Alas, what see you? Show me!
 Where? Where?

Eurydice

The tree-bole moved!
 There! the root — the lichen-spotted —

(A serpent rears its head from the foot of the tree.)

Orpheus

Hush! Be stone! 'Tis death to hasten!
 Hush! Oh lyre of Orpheus, help us!
 Save us with your mystery!

160

(Orpheus plays over the same melody as before. He repeats the melody, this time repeating the phrase in it. The third time, the phrase is repeated three times, and so on, until at last he is playing the one phrase over and over again. The serpent sleeps.)

Charmed! Asleep! Strange! I knew
 I had power to bind with music
 Other beasts, but not the Serpent —
 Now my music, strong and new,
 Lulls him too, lulls him too!

165

Eurydice

Come away — elsewhere! I fear!

Orpheus

No. It sleeps. It sleeps enchanted!
 Gongs and trumpets would not rouse it.
 Nothing now can penetrate its
 Stillness save a treading heel.

170

Stir we not!

Hephaestus lately
 Made for golden Aphrodite
 By her own command this engine,
 Which my musical fingers copied
 Deftly for my darling!
 (*He gives her a mirror.*)

175

Take it!

(The light dims slightly. Eurydice shudders. She raises the mirror and looks into it.)

What say you?

Eurydice *(slowly)*

I have business with this lady in the bower. Anon
 I will return.

Orpheus

Leave me your scarf, while you are gone!

180

(Eurydice unbinds her scarf and throws it to him, as she disappears into the arbour. Orpheus raises the scarf to his lips and buries his face in it.)

Second Chorus

But who is this approaching?

First Chorus

Firm of tread,
 His gait and gear are like a countryman's.

Second Chorus

His sunny curls reveal Apollo's child.

First Chorus

His confident heel is weighty on the ground.

Second Chorus

Look in his eyes!

First Chorus *(after a brief pause)*

I have seen —

Second Chorus

Be still! Be still!

185

And watch what time and action shall fulfill!

(**Aristaeus** enters, wearing thick gloves and carrying nets.)

Aristaeus

Quick! Have they come this way?

Orpheus

This way?

Aristaeus

The swarm!

Orpheus

The swarm?

Aristaeus

Ye gods! Wake up! I am following my swarm —

(*Looking up into the tree:*)

A swarm of bees! Wake up, man! Are they here?

Orpheus

I am awake, I neither saw nor heard them.

190

Aristaeus

Ah, then they must have veered some other way.

(*He begins to go.*)

Orpheus

Unless they passed without my noticing!

Aristaeus (*stopping and looking*)

What in the world could be more noticeable!

Orpheus

Unless a man's own thoughts were swarming —

Aristaeus

Swarming?

Orpheus

Ye gods! Wake up! Swarming around their Queen!

195

Aristaeus

Their Queen?

Orpheus

O you know nothing of the heart!
Farewell! Follow your swarm and fill your hive!

Aristaeus (*dropping his nets, approaching nearer to Orpheus and looking him up and down*)

I know your carping kind — wind-swollen stripling —

Orpheus

I was too brusque. I crave your pardon, Sir —

Aristaeus

Who think, because we yeomen go about
Without a zither slung about our shoulders,
We are outcast from harmony — have no hearts
Because we do not wear them on our sleeves —

200

Orpheus

I said not so.

Aristaeus

You looked it.

Orpheus

And repented!
Will you not tell me —

Aristaeus

Listen! A month ago
My only son, Actaeon, saw the Goddess
Enter the bath; and, for this accident,
She — set her gods on him. And he, my son,
Was torn to pieces and devoured by them.

205

Orpheus (*horror-struck*)

Zeus! and you still can spare a thought for bees!

210

Aristaeus (*sternly*)

Earth stands not still, because a farmer longs
To die — the goats want milking just the same.

Orpheus

Yet grief —

Aristaeus

Hateful exertion physics grief.

Orpheus

Grief, unresolved in music, is a wolf,
A starving wolf that hollows out the soul — 215

Aristaeus

Silence! . . . Besides, when all goes prosperously,
The gentle hum, intense, of fanning plumes
About the brood is harmony enough,
Thrilling, and filling with warmth the hollow skep,
Even as my Father's lute-string's fill the sky — 220
Father Apollo!

Orpheus

Apollo! "Father Apollo!"
What, are we brothers?

Aristaeus

Aristaeus I!
My mother is the river-nymph, Cyrene.

Orpheus

My mother is the Muse, Calliope,
Who named me Orpheus.

Aristaeus

I must find my bees! 225
Thereafter we will talk.

Orpheus

I shall be near.

(Aristaeus goes offstage.)

Orpheus *(starting)*

The serpent! Ha, how comes it I forgot
To warn my brother! And he passed so near!
I will despatch it now.
(He moves towards the tree.)

(Eurydice appears in the entrance to the arbour, richly adorned, and with her flowing hair bound up in the fashion of a Greek lady.)

Eurydice

Come!

(Orpheus turns at the sound of her voice, hesitates a moment, looking back at the tree, then follows her. Faint music.)

Aristaeus *(re-entering near to the spot where he left his nets:)*

Dolt, to forget the gear! 230

(He picks up his nets, then looks up and round:)

Where is my brother gone?

(The music swells a little louder.)

What is this place?

(He looks fixedly at the arbour, as the music again increases slightly in volume, though it is still not loud. Musingly:)

Harmony!

(He sits dejectedly:)

O let be! What use? What use?

The Voice of Orpheus *(from within the bower; distant and dreamy)*

This is the moment! Seize it! Seize it! Trap the Fates!

The dragon sleeps. The dragon sleeps. Wide stand the gates.

Aristaeus *(still thinking of his son)*

To walk with the eyes shut were to go blind, 235

To walk with the eyes open was to look,

To see ambrosial flesh was to desire,

To lust was to pursue — all innocent!

The Voice of Orpheus *(as before)*

I am among the golden apples of the West.

The Voice of Eurydice *(from within the bower; distant and dreamy)*

Lo, where my golden apples round thy cheeks are pressed. 240

Aristaeus

Little Actaeon! Artemis and her hags,

Her barren hags, to uphold chastity

By murdering — Actaeon! — that soft throat

And all the snarling fangs! No! No! No! No!

His tender nape, where, when he was a baby, 245

His hair came down into a twisted point!

Actaeon! Gods! My Son — never again!

The Voice of Eurydice (*as before*)

The thirsty earth drinks deep cool draughts of blessed rain.

The Voice of Orpheus (*as before*)

And thanks the Sun with blossoms open wide — Again!

Aristaeus

The air is strange here. It revives my strength. 250

The Voice of Orpheus (*as before*)

Make me immortal! Condescend! Thy votary lift!

Aristaeus

The breeze is full of laughters, little ones,
Like little roguish boys that sparkle round
Ripe mouths and breasts and necks, to keep us kissing!

The Voice of Eurydice (*as before*)

Thus Aphrodite thanks Hephaestus for his gift! 255

The Voice of Orpheus (*as before*)

Yea! yea! Where now is Orpheus?

The Voice of Eurydice (*as before*)

Where Eurydice?

The Voice of Orpheus (*as before*)

The weary land turns home at last and slips into the sea!

Aristaeus

I feel them on my cheek. I see them not.
When have I felt them so before? Ho! *Pan!*
Pan! It is thou! I know thou art near this place! 260
Yea, I hear all thy whispered promises:
I to be glad again — Yea, I accept.
Where art thou? Hush! I hear them now — voices!

Orpheus (*as before*)

Eurydice! delicious! Orpheus gropes forlorn! Whither?

Eurydice (*entering from the bower, looking back*)

I go to fetch the joy of my return! 265

Aristaeus

The quickening breeze blows through my hair: my blood,
Spurning black humours, leaps in longings warm:
Old summers rustle through my memory —

(seeing Eurydice)

A nymph!

(He chuckles:)

O Pan, this was most like thyself!

Dear god of opportunity! Lady!

270

Eurydice

What is this? What are you?

Aristaeus

Lady!

Eurydice

My Lord!

(Aside:)

So alike, and so unlike!

Aristaeus

Comfort and joy!

(He places his arm round her.)

Eurydice *(bewildered)*

Master?

Aristaeus

Sweet mistress! Wilt thou have it so?

Come! we will go together!

Eurydice *(breaking away from him:)*

O no! no!

Aristaeus

Cold? Then by force!

Eurydice

Oh!

(He rushes at her. Eurydice shrieks and runs from him, passing the tree:)

The serpent! I am stung!

275

(She falls to the ground.)

Aristaeus (*kneeling and embracing her:*)

One kiss, O nymph, one kiss! Still fragrant is thy breath!
Still warm thy dazzling bosom!

Eurydice

Ah, how cold is death!

(*She dies.*)

Aristaeus

Clay in my arms! O empty hell! So Pan keeps faith!
(*He rushes offstage.*)

Orpheus (*offstage, louder than before*)

My arms are too long empty! Where art thou, my life?

Second Chorus (*for the Soul of Eurydice*)

The great deep rises round. I cannot see my father!
I sink! My husband! O great rock, be firm for me!

280

Orpheus (*entering from the arbour and looking about him but without seeing Eurydice:*)

What, no reply! Aha! my roguish lady wife!
Orpheus is coming: soon upon his widowed cheek
You shall pay heavy forfeit for this game of hide and seek!

— *Curtain* —

Act II scene i

(The River Styx. Eurydice with Charon in a boat in front of a curtain concealing the back part of the stage.)

Eurydice

I sink! My husband! Oh great rock! be firm for me!

Charon

Well, I like that! I've worked this ghastly boat
For ever since the Titans crashed: afloat
Both day and night — if you're not satisfied,
You can ghastly well stay on the other side!

5

Don't you be anxious, Lady, in this gloom —
Safe as a coffin in a ghastly tomb
And caulked as tight she is. Feel better? There!
I could see you was plucked. The change of air
Makes some of 'em turn green a bit —

Eurydice

Why does he glare?

10

Charon

Sometimes they shivers and sometimes they whines —
You're not like that — Let's see your burial lines!
Properly stamped, I hope, and duly marked?
Should have produced 'em before you embarked.
Come on, let's see it!

(Aside:) Doesn't seem to hear!

15

Or do you want to spend a hundred year
Wandering up and down the wrong side, Miss?
Speak up! Here, this won't do! I can't have this.
What d' you suppose the rule's intended for?

Oh very well, then, back we go to shore!

20

(Makes a show of putting the boat about.)

Eurydice

What a whirr of words!

Charon

What's that? Oh well — for once — I don't like breaking
The rules: you'll give a written understanding

For proper burial? Will you?

(Aside:) She means yes.

As I was saying, it's a heavy boat 25

To take across. I only get the groat

One way! Not much to get a drop to keep

The cold — My ghastly eyes, the ghost's asleep!

Ahem! . . . Ahem!

(He bangs the gunwale with an oar and then shakes her more and more roughly, but with no effect.)

Come on, wake up! You can't die here, you know! 30

Wake up! Wake up! Hoy ho! Hoy ho! Hoy ho!

(Gives it up.)

Here, what's all this? What am I 'sposed to do?

I think I'll leave this job, I really do.

Nothing goes right and proper — it's a sin —

Ever since that great hero butted in . . . 35

Stands on the bank, still living if you please:

"Charon? Oh, Charon, I am Heracles:

Take me across at once!" I says: "I can't,

You're breathing!" Then he answers: "No I aren't."

"Liar," I says, "you are, you know you are!" 40

You don't catch me acting irregular!"

"Oh well," he says, "suppose I am! What now?"

"Aha," I says, "produce your golden bough!"

That dishes him. You could see he was riled,

But more surprised like — like a ghastly child. 45

"Take me across!" he says. I says: "I won't!"

"Take me across!" he says. Cripes, if he don't

Stamp like a tyrant — fairly lets it rip!

"Look here," I says, "old son, none of your lip!

Didn't you hear me say just now you can't 50

Without a golden —" "Golden bough my aunt!"

He yells. Before I knew what he had done,

He'd jumped into the boat and sowsed me one

That knocked me silly; next across the stream

He forced her like a darting quinquereme 55

Straining her planks . . . gets treated like a god!

And, when he's gone, I get a year in quod.

(The boat has now reached the farther shore.)

Oy! Here we are, aground!

(Standing up and raising his left arm in salute:)

Hail, Hades!

*(The curtains part, disclosing, brightly lit, the centre part only of the stage. Two thrones side by side, on one of which **Persephone** is seated, while **Hades**, who has risen from the other, advances down stage towards the boat.)*

Charon (*again raising his left arm in salute:*)

Hail, Hades! Charon with one soul on board
Reports delivery and salutes his Lord.

60

Hades

What name?

Charon

I don't know, Sir, I've done my best.
I can't get nothing out of this deceased.
It's all one with the way things happen now, Sir,
Since that man crossed without a golden bough, Sir.
I would have stopped him: No, I says, I *won't*.
Take me across! he says. Hanged if he don't
Stamp like a tyrant — "Golden bough my aunt!"
He yells. Before I knew what —

65

Hades

Yes, we can't
Go into all that now. Is she interred?

Charon

He'd jumped into the boat and knocked —

Hades

You heard!

70

Charon

Yes. That is, No. Well — not to say *interred*
She isn't. But I understand she's making
Arrangements.

Hades

Did you get her undertaking?

(**Charon** *nods.*)

Written?

Charon

Yes, written, yes.

Hades

The usual file —
That's all I want.

Charon (*saluting:*)

Farewell, Hades, and Hail!

75

Charon returns —

Hades

You fool, you haven't thought —

Tell Rhadamanthus to prepare the Court.

Charon

I'll go at once.

(*Exit Charon towards Hell.*)

Persephone (*who has risen and come forward to join Hades:*)

Oh, that uncouth old man!

Poor shrinking ghosts! Why, why do you insult them

With such a shocking welcome? This was my task!

80

I would take them by the hand and lead them gently

And by such soft gradations of approach

As Hesperus ushers daylight towards the dark.

Out of deep sweet fresh sleep they should awake

To find that they were dead. Oh, I would be

85

As tender as a shepherd with his sheep.

Hades

Persephone, why does she come asleep?

Persephone

She is born of the waves, wherein the world

Swims helpless still. She can see nothing here.

It is all so hard and small and close at hand.

90

I know her well.

She is a Nereid of the sunlit sea.

I have seen her dancing with her dancing sisters

On the bright Aegean's wind-broken floor.

She is a Nereid of the moon-thrilled sea.

95

She will follow me sleeping, as the flood

Follows the wandering moon. Come, Nereid, come!

(*She helps Eurydice, who moves like a somnambulist, up on to the stage.*)

Hades

What's that you say? She is of Nereus' kind?

No reason for indulgence to my mind
 Or weak concession. No. Quite the reverse. 100
 A cause for special caution and a curse.
 The fountain Arethusa late I found
 Prying and poking past us underground,
 Gurgling a crumbling way through limestone rocks,
 And running round old granite with lax locks. 105
 Officious nymph, of whom I took no heed.
 Yes, and what followed after she was freed?
 The moment she poured out into the air,
 She ran and told your Mother where you were!

Persephone

Alas, poor Hades — and poor Demeter! 110

Hades

Who robs me of my Queen for half each year!

Persephone

Gentle, to need me so!
 (*To Eurydice:*) Come, Lady, come!
 I will conduct you to Elysium!

Hades

Stop! Will you stop! After I've just explained!
 She must be cross-examined, judged, and chained. 115

Persephone

No! You forget your oath. You may not touch
 With your infernal chains a sleeping soul.
 When I became, from a reluctant thrall,
 The not unwilling queen of all your dead,
 It was upon these terms. You are not free 120
 To fetter any souls which are not free!

Hades

Good! That was good, my love! But now — let's see: —
 To seek to bind me by a rule I made
 Implies a rule that rules must be obeyed,
 Therefore, if chains must wait, the usual test 125
 By the same token must be closely pressed:
 The usual test when my good Minos makes,
 The subject (I have often noticed) wakes!

Persephone

Others perhaps — not she! She is not the same.
 The questions and the probings and the noise 130
 And all your pin-pricks will but make her sleep
 Sounder than ever.

Hades

We can only try!
(Drives a needle into the thigh of Eurydice, who does not move.)
 Why, this is really extraordinary!
 Nereid, you say? Or nymph or naiad? Well,
 We shall make something of her yet in Hell. 135
 Though how she, an immortal, came to die
 Is what you love so much — a mystery!

Persephone

Dear vulgar God! Will you not leave it so?
 You see you cannot choose but let her sleep.
(She assists Eurydice to lie down.)
 We know not what the living are about 140
 Since Heracles —

Hades

Will you please leave that out!

Persephone

Then, when she wakes, I shall take her hand
 And lead her gently to Elysium.

(During the ensuing lines Hades and Persephone retire together to the throne, on which they seat themselves.)

Hades

She will not wake. How can she? What should wake her?

Persephone

Say — something still unknown to you and me. 145

Hades

In that same instant, then, she shall be chained!

Persephone

No! I shall lead her to Elysium.

Hades

How do you know she will agree to go?

Persephone

Why, what should cause her to wish otherwise?

Hades

Say — something still unknown to you and me! 150

Aha!

To introduce the concept ‘unknown cause’

Is in discourse the most extreme of flaws.

If we infer what *must* be from what *might*,

Then each effect implies its opposite, 155

Which is absurd.

Persephone

Oh, you are wonderful!

I love to feel you thinking with such fire

Of nothing!

Hades

Hm! Not *when*, but *if* she wake,

She will be chained at once — make no mistake.

Persephone

Inexorably fixed in your resolve 160

As you are famed to be! Then, if you cross me,

How shall I murmur at the thing I love?

But tell me this. Tell me, why do you strive

To bar the entrance to Elysium?

Hades

There is a plant which prospers far too well 165

In that mild air — Disloyalty to Hell!

Above they call it “Goodness.” Underground

We strip away that high falutin’ sound

And call it — faugh! the thing’s a poison tree —

The very core of *all* disloyalty — 170

The rest can Hell, in systematic course,

Or by persuasion straighten or by force:

Here the right treatment for each soul, soon found,

Turns the lone eagle to the social hound:

We force some souls, like parrots, to recite 175

And learn by repetition to think right;

Others from lectures learn that they pursued

Even in selflessness a private good!
 Misers who lend, still hoard, their vested pelf;
 Selflessness, as an act, posits a self, 180
 And that's the seat of conscience, treason, rot,
 The running sore, the itch, the leprous spot,
 The nasty pimple from the plague of life
 That swells, with death in contumacious strife.
 Who strives to become better, strives to excel: 185
 All must be equal, all be one, in Hell.
 And rightly to be one is, not to be,
 To cease out of existence into me!
 I am the self denied, the breathed-out breath,
 I am the One, I am the All, for I am Death! 190

(After a few moments' silence, an owl hoots.)

Persephone

I hear Ascalaphus!

Hades

My best of spies!
 Ascalaphus, than whom no spy in Hell
 Ever sneaked better, or sneaked half so well!
 You changed him to an Owl! 'Twas through his eyes
 I pierced the dangerous ferment of that Scum 195
 Of Hell — the spirits in Elysium!
 Their stubborn stand against our corporate death
 Amazed me: I enquired what lay beneath,
 And learned from him the truth — the Blest up there
 Somehow keep contact with the Upper Air! 200

Persephone

True, but you stopped it: all the ways you closed.
 Guarded the passes — even the earthquake faults
 Are crammed with loads of boulders. Where is the danger?

Hades

It is not stopped. There's something passes still.
 I cannot check it, tighten it how I will. 205
 I need the eyes of Argus. Rumours tell
 That *bees* crawl down through crannies into Hell:
 Fat, winged bees out of bright sunlight come
 Visiting blossoms in Elysium.

Persephone

Or do they carry back into the light 210
Some precious essence of the virtuous dead?

Hades

Equally undesirable, my love!

Persephone

Why does this intercourse vex you so much?
When summer carpets the earth-crust with flowers
And all the upper air bursts into life 215
Humming and whelming, as warm floods of sleep
Sing round the prone limbs of a weary man,
I pass above and walk among the flowers
Beside my Mother. When the dark returns
And the black frost sparkles the vigilant air, 220
I too return below to be your Queen
And hold intense discourse with your sharp wit.
I also am a traveller to and fro:
Have I done any harm by being so?

Hades

You are Persephone. You trace your birth 225
Back to Demeter, Mother of the Earth,
But she —
(*indicating Eurydice:*)
I do not trust these water beings!

Persephone

What do you fear?

Hades

I will not let my act
Facilitate some vague subversive pact —
The little leak that ends a cataract! 230
“Pact” did I say? The word should have been “brew.”
Contact amounts to mixture with that crew!

Persephone

Pact between *whom*?
(*Raising her arm in salute:*)
Hail paramount Hades!
Lord of the Styx and frightened of the bees!

Hades

If bees were always bees and nothing more, 235
 Your last remark, I grant, would be a score,
 Ascalaphus — before you spoilt his eyes —
 Once spotted Proteus through that same disguise,
 Proteus, of whom we nothing (to be strict)
 Can even predicate, much less predict, 240
 The formless, watery god — the life of Light
 Undarkened into form! O, once those bright
 And beauteous beings mingle with the Blest: —

Herald (*offstage*)

Oyez! Oyez!
 Hades, Lord of Cocytus, Acheron, 245
 Avernus, Lethe, Styx and Phlegethon:

(Hades rises to his feet, as the Herald utters his name, and during the rest of the speech comes forward to where Eurydice is lying.)

Whereas a deceased person (name unknown)
 Is charged forthwith to appear before the throne
 Of Rhadamanthus, and whereas Charon
 By affidavit duly sworn hath shown 250
 Said corpse to have been cremated blood and bone,
 Said ashes sealed within an urn of stone
 With customary rites all duly done —
 Now then the Infernal Lords conciliar
 Summon said soul to answer at the bar! 255

Persephone

I still believe that I shall have my way!

Hades (*pulling the sleeping Eurydice roughly to her feet:*)

The rules must be observed. She may not stay.
 Now, royal advocate, will you escort
 This non-committal client to the Court?
 She may need the assistance of an arm. 260

Persephone (*rising and coming forward:*)

I will. Your judges cannot work her harm.
(She takes Eurydice by the hand and guides her out still sleeping.)

Herald (*offstage*)

Oyez! Oyez!

(Hades turns and faces the exit, draws himself up and raises his arm in salute.)

Herald

Hades, God of Cocytus, Acheron,
Avernus, Lethe, Styx and Phlegethon . . .

— *Curtain* —

Scene ii

(Darkness. Orpheus is seated beside a glowing fire, alone.)

Orpheus

Dark!

The very sun is dark!

How shall I go on breathing here in space

Dark with the vanished brightness of her face?

(Sings:)

Eurydice! Eurydice! 5

Smooth-gliding nymph, bright wife,

Who floated down the river of my life

Sleeping and waking by my side,

Clothed in her beauty's seamless vesture

And slipping liquid without pause 10

From gesture into lovely gesture!

Lovely in motion, beautiful in rest,

She filled with light the light

But filled more full the night,

When all my round horizon was her breast. 15

Come back, oh Queen, oh bride,

Whose kisses are my only laws!

Hateful my heavenly birth!

Flesh — of my flesh the monarch and the thrall —

Be in my veins my life, my blood, my all! 20

Again

Be thou possessed!

Thine arms about me placed

Melt me in streaming ocean: mine around thee pressed

Draw down my music spirit to the earth, 25

To be the girdle round thy waist,

And lo!

My mother and the Muses and their train

Troop from above below

And are enchanted in the solid sphere 30

And caught down here!

Hush! Said I so?

This dreaming with the streaming blood

Leads me on, and leads me to no good.

Back! Orpheus! Back! for fear. 35

Oh traitor bard! Oh sacrilegious Son!

What! like some gross ox trampling holy ground!
 I will be steadfast in my misery.
 I see her gazing as she used — oh, song!
 Out of my misery 40
 Pass thou into a strain more high and strong,
 Where thou shalt of Eurydice be found
 Worthy in sense and sound:
 (*Sings:*)
 Sing me, oh Muse, how once I groped for hours
 Brooding in anguish on my coming years 45
 When, like white dew that falls on purple flowers,
 A silence fell athwart my storm of tears:
 The iron band across my breast was broken
 And for a time such grief was its own balm:
 It was evening; “Orpheus!” my name was spoken, 50
 “Lift up thine eyes and in the blue find calm!”
 I gazed intense and rose into wide ringing
 Fields of bright ether where Apollo sings
 And saw the solid earth beneath me swinging
 Soft in the shadow of the spirit’s wings . . . 55

Her soaring ended,
 My soul descended
 With folded wings
 In humbler wise.

Oh, lovely Creature! 60
 Oh holy Nature!
 Now first I saw thee
 With open eyes!

One came to meet me
 And soft did greet me 65
 A blue-robed goddess
 Out of the night.

Crowned with the stars,
 Her feet on flowers
 Her dark eyes shining 70
 With beauty bright.

And without ceasing
 She breathed out blessing
 Upon all creatures

Brought to birth. 75

Those that could kill me
 With love did fill me!
 No thing was hateful
 In all the earth.

Quenched was my yearning 80
 And I all burning
 To fall before them
 In sacrifice.

Persephone!
 I gazed on thee 85
 And thy great Mother
 With open eyes!

Persephone!

(Orpheus observes for the first time that he is surrounded by a ring of listening animals.)

Encircled by my listeners once again!
 Dear creatures, sitting crouching at my feet, 90
 Dear friends, who come to help me ease my pain
 With your still presence! Say, what can I do?
 You have saved me from madness. My pent soul
 You have set free, calling it out of prison
 Into you on the wings of its own song; 95
 What would you have me do in recompense?
 How shall I serve you? Answer me!

They cannot answer me — save with my voice.
 It is their bridge. I will sing to them again.
 And listen while I sing:

(Sings:)

Eurydice! 100
 Smooth-gliding nymph, bright wife,
 Who floated down the river of my life
 Clothed in her beauty's seamless vesture
 And slipping liquid without pause
 From gesture into lovely gesture — 105
 Lovely in motion, beautiful in rest —

The Swan

Proud arched above the waters, breast to breast,

I float; in my unearthly whiteness
 Gathering the Cloud-gatherer's brightness,
 I become Leda's groom 110
 And fill with dazzling Helen her dark womb.
 I fill with light the light,
 But always cruel night
 Shoots from my frowning forehead looped to kiss
 Itself in the clear water. In cold spite — 115

The Swan & the Serpent (*simultaneously*)

[I hiss! I hiss!
 [You hiss! You hiss!

The Serpent

In your neck's tortuous length
 Strives Zeus's sinewy strength.
 You become Leda's groom
 And fill with Clytaemnestra her dark womb — 120

The Swan

Till at the last
 My song is sweet because my life is past.

Orpheus

I hear, O Serpent — and I hear, O Swan!
 (*Sings:*)
 Thine arms about me placed
 Melt me in streaming ocean. Mine around thee pressed 125
 Draw down my music spirit to the earth
 To be the girdle round thy waist —
 As ivy round the slender birch-tree clinging —
 So we be one flesh, let the spheres cease singing!

The Bull

Stars cease singing — 130
 Music caught
 Into body —
 Stamp and snort —
 Pulses throb,
 Having new 135
 World to fashion,
 Work to do —

Master fear!
 Scarlet warns —
 Courage rises — 140
 Lock horns!

Get kind!
 Chew cud!
 Thicken muscle,
 Milk and blood. 145

Trust in girth,
 Bones' weight —
 Trust in earth —
 Pan is great!

Orpheus

I hear, oh Bull! But yet — 150

The Ass

An invisible warder keeps placing himself in my track!
 They are blind — let them whip me! I feel not the lash, let it crack!
 No force shall compel me too far! Back! Back!

Orpheus

I hear, oh Ass! Oh obstinately wise!
(Sings:)
 The iron band across my breast was broken 155
 And for a time deep grief was its own balm.
 It was evening; "Orpheus!" my name was spoken;
 "Lift up thine eyes and in the blue find calm!"

The Eagle

I gaze upon the sun. High where I hover
 In the zoned atmosphere he harps and sings 160
 Through me, beside me, round me, under and over —
 His Word that weaves about me is my wings.

I rise, I drink of that eternal fountain —
 I swoop — Hahee! I am the eagle, I! —
 Low in the vale — then high above the mountain, 165
 To lace with living soul the empty sky.

For, when the Father seeks another bearer
 To raise his chalice to his glorious wine,

Some mortal youth becomes a new sky-farer
 Caught up on strong wings, and those wings are mine! 170

Orpheus

I hear, oh Eagle!

(Sings:)

One came to meet me
 And soft did greet me,
 A blue-robed goddess
 Out of the night. 175

Crowned with the stars,
 Her feet on flowers,
 Her dark eyes shining
 With beauty bright.

And without ceasing 180
 She poured out blessing
 Upon all creatures
 Brought to birth.

She stilled their needing —

The Lamb

Peacefully feeding 185
 My close lips wander
 Over the earth,

Take in her sweetness —
 Then in all meekness
 Give back to man 190
 His Mother's wealth.

I keep back nothing,
 Give first my clothing
 To part among them
 And last myself. 195

Orpheus

I hear, oh Lamb!

You creatures — helpless creatures — I am full of pity,

Pity for the dumb pain behind your eyes!

I desire nothing for myself. No! No!

Nothing for Orpheus. Oh, I am on fire 200

That burns and scorches not! I thrive upward!
I could be Semele and not die. Oh Zeus!

The Nightingale

Tereu! Tereus! Tereus!
Philomela! Philomela!
Of my own vile abuse 205
Forlorn bewailer,

Wove in rich tapestry
My own sad story,
Sister, to send to thee,
Not for vainglory. 210

A candle clear and small
Shows through the night
By shadows on the wall
Its constant light.

So Philomela's song, 215
As once her art,
Is Tereu Tereu, Procne's bitter wrong,
Not her own smart.

Drawn moan and hurrying jets
Pour from my tree; 220
My woe never forgets
Procne Procne.

Orpheus

I hear, oh Nightingale!
You beasts — oh, you all tell me different things:
Speak, one of you with more authority; 225
Which way am I to turn? What shall I do?

The Lion

Lift up, oh lover, thy heart; let it carry thee
Manfully over the river of death!
Stride into Taenarus! Out upon Cerberus!
Ride on the enemy, rush to the innermost: 230
Fall at the feet of the seat of Persephone
Pour her the gift of thy rhythmical breath!

Lift up, oh lover, thy heart: into Erebus

Courage shall carry thee, riding on blood.
Listen in faith to thy heart — 235

Orpheus

Oh Lion, cease! You have mistook your man:
I am not one to wear the lion's skin.
It is not, and it cannot be, my way.
Besides, you bid me listen to my heart
As to an oracle — what folly! 240

It tells me different things at different times,
First to stay weeping by my darling's tomb,
Then to become a priest, and then to seek
The Maenads in their orgies — why, my heart
Is no more one, one guide, one guardian 245
Than you have all one voice. Have you one voice?
Oh then speak out and tell me what to do —
Oh speak!

All the Animals

Help us, oh Orpheus!

Orpheus

How?

All the Animals

Seek out
In Hades' realm her whom thou know'st on earth,
Our mother and our queen, Persephone. 250

Orpheus

Strange counsel, when I bade you — Oh, I will!
Eurydice — oh, whither am I led?
I follow — follow whom? Art thou my friend
Or my own soul made visible to haunt me?
I think I am alone . . . Persephone!

(The fire dies down, as Orpheus rises to his feet, and the animals are no longer visible.)

The Nightingale *(offstage)*

Drawn moan and hurrying jets
Pour me from my tree;
My woe never forgets
Procne Procne.

— *Curtain* —

Act III, scene i

(The Realm of Hades, brightly lit. On one side Sisyphus rolls up a slope a stone, which constantly returns to him. In the centre the Danaïds pass briskly to and fro, each carrying a pitcher in one hand. On the other side Tantalus is seated: a bunch of grapes and a cup of water continually approach and recede from his lips. All are in chains.)

(Enter Hades on a higher level; he speaks into a concealed microphone and his voice issues from an amplifier.)

Hades

Stop!

You loyal shades, all busily employed
About your everlasting tasks — avoid!
That pleasing point of time again draws near
When Hades condescends to incline his ear
And all are free, and all are bound by rule,
To voice the bliss of which their hearts are full.
Speak, each of you in turn: —

5

Sisyphus

Regular rolls my stone, loud my chain clanks.
Sisyphus' bosom swells with heartfelt thanks
To thee, oh Master of the world's whole wealth,
Less careful of thy gold than of my health,
Rich without labour, who didst yet invent
Employment, so that I might be content:
Hail, Hades!

10

15

First Danaïd

New draughts we fetch, new draughts fresh from the spring.

Second Danaïd

And each new draught the very latest thing!

Third Danaïd

Hail, empty pitchers, filling up our lives!

Fourth Danaïd

Hail, sacred right to be unfaithful wives!

First Danaïd

We hate hypocrisy, humbug and cant. 20

Second Danaïd

We spend our whole time getting what we want.

Third Danaïd (*setting down her pitcher*)

Oh, Thou who freed our heads of useless weight!
(She stands erect and, with a grimace, raises both hands above her head, palms inward, as though to steady a pitcher resting on it.)

Fourth Danaïd

And kept us slim and kept us up to date!

All

Hail, Hades!

Tantalus

With panting passionate devotion burns 25

Tantalus towards that God from whom he learns

How to extract such lasting sweets of sense

From the nice threshold of experience;

To cultivate the green and tender shoot

Of passion, and arrest the dying fruit; 30

To approach fruition, but avert it — just —

And swoon eternal in the lap of lust;

To store the thrill, to lick the prurient lip

In one long squirm of being about to sip!

Hail, Hades! 35

Hades (*speaking as before*)

Hail Hades! So too must my greeting be.

Am I not you, dear Shades? Are you not me?

Your servant-master you unite to bless

With love and praise — he looks for nothing less.

Take back that love — and so your hearts will prove 40

How Hades' bosom swells with —

(Howling offstage)

Down Cerberus!

Cerberus! Down Cerberus! Cerberus! Down Cerberus!

I say the love in your own hearts must prove

How Hades' bosom swells with answering love!

Proceed then — but reflect: though out of view, 45

I still hear all you say, see all you do.

(Exit)

(Sisyphus, Tantalus, and the Danaïds resume their movements.)

Orpheus *(offstage. During the song he enters. Sisyphus gradually ceases moving and stands listening, spellbound.)*

Persephone!

Goddess and Guardian have my soul

In thy safe keeping!

Persephone!

50

I have called on thee

Waking and sleeping.

Persephone!

The breath of mortals syllabbling thy name

Streams forth from Earth, like the autumnal flame

55

From opening pods,

When the globed fruit forms naked and all whole

Drops towards the nether gods —

Persephone!

(To Sisyphus:)

Friend, what do you there?

60

Sisyphus

Regular work. Your song still fills the air.

Orpheus

What purpose will it serve when it is done?

Sisyphus

I thank my God it never will be done.

Orpheus

What purpose does it serve, then, in the doing?

Sisyphus

Its own; my happiness, and Hades' will.

65

Orpheus

How is it then you stop and talk to me?

Sisyphus

Your song reminded me of other things:

There was a country...

(He falls into a reverie and remains silent.)

Orpheus *(stepping past Sisyphus towards the Danaïds, and singing. During the song the Danaïds gradually cease moving and stand listening to him.)*

Persephone!

Mother and Maiden — and my steadfast goal! 70

Persephone,

Mistress of night and death!

Persephone,

I have felt thy breath

When the night cometh after day hath been 75

And the bright manifold of heard and seen,

The garish world,

Seeps through my closing eyes into my soul,

To bloom there furled —

Persephone! 80

First Danaïd

Whose was that voice singing a kind of hymn?

Second Danaïd *(to Orpheus:)*

We have not stopped because we wish to hear.

Third Danaïd

What is there in your past that makes you sing?

Orpheus

My Mother's milk was Hippocrene's spring.

The Danaïds

His mother's milk! 85

(They giggle.)

Fourth Danaïd

We thought it sounded somewhat out of date!

First Danaïd

Poor soul! try something fresher! Drink from this!

(Several offer him their pitchers.)

Orpheus

Ladies, I thank you heartily, I will.

But this is empty! So is this! And this!

Second Danaïd

Oh, that's because we left off keeping on.

90

Third Danaïd

You see, the pitchers are all full of holes.

Fourth Danaïd

That's why the water keeps so pure and fresh.

Orpheus

But how do you contrive to drink of it?

First Danaïd

We don't. We have the right to carry it.

Orpheus

Carry it where?

First Danaïd

To carry it, you know!

95

Orpheus

Who are you?

Second Danaïd

We are called the Danaïds.

Orpheus

What did you do then, when you were alive?

Third Danaïd

We killed our husbands on our wedding night,
All of us all of them.

Orpheus

For what vile crime?

Fourth Danaïd

To make quite sure that there would be no children.

100

Orpheus

Yes. I had heard . . . Mnesonyme!
I called on thee amid the Nereids once,
So help me now again!

(*To the Danaïds:*) Can you recall
The *taste* of water?

First Danaïd

Taste?

Second Danaïd

Has it a taste?

Orpheus

Remember! Close your eyes! Cupped hands — cool tongue — 105

Third Danaïd (*dreamily*)

There was a stream ran through my father's garden...

(*The other Danaïds close in around her, murmuring eagerly.*)

Orpheus (*stepping past the Danaïds towards Tantalus and singing. Tantalus ceases moving and stands listening.*)

Persephone!

I am come alive into the place of death.

Persephone!

Receive my anxious breath 110
Into the living mystery of thy name!

Persephone!

I came alone,

I left the good beasts and their bodies warm; 115
Their breath and friendly eyes

I lost by sacrifice —

Oh then, save me from harm!

Be near me to lift me from despair —

Guide me back whole into the upper air,

Persephone! 120

Tantalus (*recovering himself and beginning his movements as before:*)

To approach fruition, but avert it — just —

And swoon eternal in the lap of lust,

To store the thrill, and lick the prurient lip —

Orpheus

Fool, when you *know* that you will never sip!

Tantalus

To know what truths to pick and which to leave 125

Is poesy — some call it make-believe,
 This is the poetry of life — to get
 Anticipation sifted from regret:
 To look before and never look behind,
 Chew the sweet kernel and eschew the rind . . . 130
 I cannot keep it up! Oh, misery!
 Oh singer, there are live coals in my breast!
 You have made me remember.

Orpheus

Why, poor soul,

I meant no harm to you.

Tantalus

Sing, sing again!

Tantalus! Tantalus! I was a man! 135

Orpheus (*beginning to sing:*)

Persephone —

The Voice of Hades (*from the Amplifier:*)

To approach fruition, but avert it — just —
 And swoon eternal in the lap of lust,
 To store the thrill, and lick the prurient lip . . .

Tantalus (*reluctantly*)

In one long squirm of being about to sip. 140
(Shrieks with agony.)

Sisyphus, the Danaïds, and Tantalus (*begin to move again as before, reciting simultaneously:*)

Regular rolls my stone . . .
 New draughts we fetch . . .
 To store the thrill . . .

Orpheus (*loudly and commandingly*)

Stop!

(All cease moving.)

Orpheus (*like one in a nightmare:*)

Down, mounting horrors! Monstrous shapes and sounds!
 Persephone! You cannot hide her from me!
 Ho! Phantoms, back, I say! Persephone! 145

(The shades fall back on each side, disclosing, in a brighter but softer light, at the back of the stage, Eurydice standing asleep. Immediately behind her, but on a slightly higher level, Persephone. Orpheus walks up stage towards them, with bowed head, as if groping his way:)

I feel the light upon my dazzled eyes.

I dare not look.

(Kneels without looking up.)

Lady, all blest and blessing — at thy feet

I cast myself in humblest sacrifice.

I, living, on the altar of the dead;

150

Oh fold me in the shelter of thy robe

Against the horrors that assail my heart.

(Looking up:)

Eurydice! Oh unbelievable!

Floods of forgotten hope roar through my heart —

Oh honey hidden in the heart of gall!

155

Horrors! What horrors? Why we are alone here!

Eurydice — dear Shade — Eurydice!

Smooth-gliding nymph, bright wife,

Eurydice!

(Eurydice does not stir.)

Orpheus *(passionately:)*

Eurydice, awake! Eurydice!

(Orpheus rises to his feet and steps back a pace.)

Persephone

Beware!

(Orpheus, in fear and trembling, reaches out his hand towards Eurydice. As he does so, Persephone covers her face.)

The Voice of Hades *(from the Amplifier:)*

What ails my love?

Orpheus *(touching Eurydice and starting violently:)*

Warm!

160

(He drops his lyre, which breaks in two.)

Eurydice

Stars moving through a solemn saraband

All in the light of day; no, they are men,

Tall men and goddesses, bowing and passing

And loving one another with their eyes!
 And I will join them and be one of them:
 I come — ah! how did I not see it there
 Yawning betwixt me and the shining ones?
 The chasm! The chasm! I am afraid. I thought
 I had died already. Is once not enough?
 I will look up to them . . . the vision fades. 170
 It fades.

(Opening her eyes:)

Where am I? Who are these? Orpheus!

(As Eurydice raises her arms to embrace Orpheus, attendants step forward from each side and fasten chains on them.)

Persephone

Break off these chains! But break them off, I say!
 I claim this spirit for Elysium!
 Hades! Help, Hades!

Hades *(enters)*

My Queen, my love, though absent, I have heard 175
 Where I was seated, every single word.
 Each stir, each breath, by secret stingy nerves
 Has reached my throne.

(Howling offstage)

Cerberus, quiet! Down, you swine, down! Lie down!

I know what each deserves.

No, do not interrupt! We may agree 180
 Without a quarrel still. No, pardon me!

In the first place I formally deny
 That souls have rights at all. But secondly
 I heard one singing; it was not alone 185
 The shrill, the blinding sweetness of his tone

(Though this was much), the shape too of the sound
 Found favour, as it rang from roof to ground:
 To make the air of Hell sigh with *your* name
 Gave him *(I do confess it)* a strong claim,
 In short it melted me. And for his pains 190
 I give *him* leave to break the Nereid's chains.

Persephone

I grudge you not your reasons and your rules.

She will be free to join the blessed spirits,
As I foretold at first that she would be.

Hades

As you foretold at first! Quite free to come 195
And go betwixt here and Elysium.
(*To Orpheus:*)
Well, will you set her free?

(*Orpheus breaks the chain from Eurydice. They embrace.*)

Thirdly — if she prefers, not otherwise
(Her freedom once again I emphasize) —
If she prefers to seek the upper air, 200
Nothing shall hinder her from going there . . .
Only — if such her choice she must remain
There, and then *here* — and never seek again
Admission to Elysium —

Persephone

What is this?

Hades

Unless she shall approach the gates of bliss 205
With her beloved Orpheus at her side:
Then, and then only, shall those gates stand wide.
(*Exit*)

Persephone

Be not deceived when Death pretends to offer life!

Eurydice

Eurydice was, is, and shall be Orpheus' wife.

Persephone

I see the choice is made! Well, listen then: 210
Orpheus, who summoned me so piously;
Eurydice, so helpless in my charge
Till but a moment back. This God of death
Is keener than you know, malevolent
And omnipresent; even when you embrace, 215
Remember he is with you in your arms,
Orpheus, and in your arms, Eurydice.

Eurydice

I fear!

Orpheus

Teach us to overcome him in your strength!

Persephone

Orpheus!

Orpheus

Lady!

Persephone

Eurydice!

Eurydice

I hear.

220

Persephone

Approach. Give me your hand in mine, and yours.

(*To Orpheus:*)

Is it your will to serve this other soul?

Orpheus

I do affirm it is my constant will.

Persephone (*to Eurydice:*)

Is it your will to serve this other soul?

Eurydice

I do affirm it is my constant will.

225

Persephone

Orpheus, to conquer death, you must return,

Following Eurydice, back to these realms

And she may guide you to Elysium;

But first you must go back up to the world,

To do and suffer many things alone —

230

Orpheus

Alone?

Persephone

Alone with her, who is a part of you,

You part of her.

Orpheus

We shall dare all together.

Persephone

Yes, but you will not see her all the while,
 She will not pose for you to gaze on her.
 You will think you have lost her. Are you strong
 As you are musical?

235

Eurydice

Orpheus, Orpheus,
 You will be near to me through doubt and dark!

Orpheus

Eurydice!

Persephone

Come then, leave gazing on her
 And do as I shall bid you; much depends
 Upon the conduct of your journey back,
 Being the first thing that you have to do.
 I will go on before; follow me, Orpheus,
 And fix your gaze upon me: do not stop
 Or turn or look behind. Eurydice
 Will follow you, and so we reach the Light.

240

245

(They follow her as bidden. As she reaches the exit, Persephone turns and addresses Orpheus:)

Orpheus, the broken pieces of the chain
 Divided by the magic of your singing.
 Lie ready to your hand; links forged in Hell
 Are quiet to arrest and weighty to retain:
 Take one of them and bear it back with you
 Into the life that flows and flows away,
 You may have need of it.

250

Orpheus *(stooping and picking up a broken piece of the chain)*

Lead on, lead on, divine Persephone!

The Voice of Hades *(from the Amplifier:)*

Lead on, lead on, divine Persephone!
 But Orpheus, listen: on Eurydice

255

Turn not to look! One single furtive glance
 Shall rob her wholly of this final chance
 To find her way back to the upper air —
 I gave it, I will take it back, I swear. 260
 I would have left them free, officious Queen,
 To guide themselves — *you* chose to intervene.
 Take therefore as a gift from Hades' hands
 This sanction making law of your commands.
 You urged them — I *compel* them, to be free: 265
 Lead on, lead on, divine Persephone!

(Exeunt, one by one, Persephone, Orpheus, Eurydice. Sisyphus, the Danaïds, and Tantalus resume their occupations.)

— *Curtain* —

Scene ii

(Another part of Hades.)

Ascalaphus *(offstage)*

Tu wit! tu woo!

Hades *(enters, looking up)*

Work for you here, Ascalaphus. Now hark!
Cease your bird noises and attend and mark:
You shall transform yourself to a weak wraith
Of this same Nereid and abuse *his* faith,
Appear to him —

5

Ascalaphus *(offstage)*

My Lord, how can this be?
If I appear before his startled eyes
Like one who walked *behind* him, my disguise
Will not deceive. All will be thrown away.

Hades

Most true, I had forgot — some other way —
The Queen protects his eyes; well then, his ear —
You can assume her voice? Quick, let me hear!

10

Ascalaphus *(offstage, imitating Eurydice)*

Orpheus, Orpheus! Be true to me, be true!
Alas, I am forsaken . . .

Hades

That will do!
Fly after them! But one thing more, good spy!
Ere you start working, give one clear owl-cry
And I will hear and put my cunning in you
To teach you what to say.

15

*(The stage darkens. During the ensuing lines at first **Persephone** and afterwards **Orpheus** dimly appear Left and move across to Right. Exit **Persephone** Right. Just before **Orpheus** has finished crossing the stage, **Eurydice** enters Left. Both come to a standstill.)*

Orpheus

Lead us, oh star-crowned goddess, Queen of death and night,
Across the dreadful threshold swung twixt dark and light.

20

Eurydice

Invisible, behind thee, ever treads more near
Eurydice, thine own one; falter not, nor fear!

Orpheus

I see thee not, Eurydice, and art thou there?

Eurydice

And seest thou thy heart, and seest thou the air?

Orpheus

I see thee not, Eurydice, art thou my wife?

25

Eurydice

Thy light, thy strength, thy soul, thy very self, thy life.

Orpheus

I see thee not, Eurydice —

Eurydice

For we are one —

Two sounds that form one word, two strings that sound one tone,
One in divine Persephone, on whom we gaze,
One in her blessing on us and one in her praise.

30

Orpheus

I see a pale grey glimmer fall athwart our way —
I think it is the faint tip of the flame of day:
It brightens — ah!

Eurydice

What startles thee? What may this be?

Orpheus

Persephone! Persephone! Persephone!
Our guardian, our guide, our rock amid the shades —
Her voice replies no more: her form in daylight fades.
Oh Bull, stamp in my blood! Roar, Lion, in my heart,
That Orpheus may find strength to play his constant part!

35

Ascalaphus (*offstage*)

Tu wit! tu woo!

(*Imitating Eurydice:*)

Orpheus is strong, so strong he has no need of me!

40

Orpheus

What words are these? Our hope hangs on my constancy —

Ascalaphus (*offstage, imitating Eurydice:*)

Cold constancy! There was a time when thy love *burned*.

Thou wast not constant in those days with thy back turned!

Orpheus

Oh love, love, what then wouldst thou have me do or be?

Ascalaphus (*offstage, imitating Eurydice:*)

Only this one thing, Orpheus — turn thy face to me!

45

Orpheus

She faints — (Oh fool, fool, blindly trudging on!) I must

Comfort her — turn to her . . . If I do, she is lost!

Mnemosyne! Who am I? I am riven apart!

What shall I do? What shall I do?

Ascalaphus (*offstage, imitating Eurydice:*)

Look in thy heart

And do its present bidding, and that shall be right.

50

Orpheus

No. I obey the goddess in my heart's despite.

On, on! How lonely now, how desolate the vale!

Ascalaphus (*offstage, imitating Eurydice:*)

Alas, how far away still sounds the nightingale!

The Nightingale (*faintly*)

Drawn moan and hurrying jets

Pour from my tree,

My woe never forgets

Procne, Procne.

55

Orpheus

Forget? Am I forgetting, in the harsh false name

Of gods and duty, her for whom alone I came?
 Mnemosyne! Who am I? I am riven apart!
 What shall I do? What shall I do?

60

Ascalaphus (*offstage, imitating Eurydice:*)

Obey thy heart!

Orpheus

I will obey the goddess — “I”? What I or me
 Is not the heart?
 (*He turns*) Eurydice! Eurydice!

(*Arms appear and pull her back into the wings.*)

My own! My own! Oh snatching arms! Oh hideous shades!
 Her voice replies no more, her form in darkness fades!

65

— *Curtain* —

Act IV Scene i

(The source of the river Peneus in the vale of Tempe. The curtain rises discovering Aristaeus standing or kneeling before a deep pool, formed by the springs at the source of the river.)

Aristaeus

Mother Cyrene, great Mother Cyrene,
 Thou region spirit of this crystal source,
 Whence old Peneus, fountain of our being,
 Pours forth his life and flows and flows away —
 Mother Cyrene, hear me, hear me, hear me! 5
 Why didst thou give me life against my will —
 Life everlasting, if their tale were true?
 And I cannot even keep myself alive!
 Why did they make me hopeful of the skies,
 Saying my natural father is Apollo, 10
 Training me to the service of his altar
 With toil and trouble at the hives all day?
 “To draw the strands of his bright hair,” they said,
 “To focus glory into taste,” they said,
 “To charm the liquid light from far and wide 15
 Into the golden wonder of the comb.”
 Lies — lies! All lies! The pedagogue — the priests!
 There is no solid ground beneath the feet
 O prudent, righteous, and industrious men!
 Oh, Mother, Mother, I have lost them all 20
 Dropping to earth, not singly but in swarms,
 Like rotten clusters from a yellowing tree!
 Drought and disease! The vaulted hives like tombs,
 Empty and silent — all my bees! all gone!
 They might have killed me when they killed my son! 25
 Oh, you have been too kind! Burn down my sheds!
 Root up my trees and trample on my crops
 And make a special culture of black bugs
 To gorge upon my vines! Oh Mother, Mother!
 Empty and silent — all my bees! all gone! 30
 Mother Cyrene, great Mother Cyrene,
 Mother Cyrene, hear me! help me! hear me!
(After a pause:)
 I fear this place! I speak into the water,
 But things of earth are near. Who listens there?
 They are all round. Who listens there? Who mocks? 35

The nymph, Arethusa (rising from the pool, to Cyrene, below:)

Sister, you heard aright! It is your son
 Standing in tears upon our Father's banks
 Calling you by harsh names — and seeking help
 From the eternal fountain of his being —
 Unhappy Aristaeus!

Cyrene (*offstage*)

Bring him down!

40

Being a man he shall converse with gods.
 Make room, oh waters now! heap yourselves back
 Into two hills! Peneus' flood, obey!

(Enter a Satyr)

Satyr (*to Aristaeus:*)

Stay! Are you a mortal man?

Arethusa (*to Aristaeus:*)

Your mother calls. Follow! Follow me down!
(Exit)

45

Aristaeus (*to Satyr:*)

I am about to learn. Mother, I come!
(Exit)

Satyr

Evoe! Evoe! Evoe!

(A wild throng of Maenads emerge from hiding and swirl to and fro. At length they divide into three groups and begin to chant:)

First Group

Zeus-begotten!

Second Group

Iacchus! Iacchus!

Io!

Third Group

By Titans torn,

First Group

Torn to pieces; nearly forgotten,

Second Group

Io!

Third Group

And still unborn!

50

First Group

From side —

Third Group

Whose?

First Group

Zeus's.

Second Group

Iacchus! Iacchus!

First Group

To womb —

Third Group

Whose?

First Group

Semele's.

Third Group

Earth-born!

Second Group

Wine-god!

First Group

God of juices!

Second Group

Iacchus! Io! Iacchus! Iacchus!

Third Group

Tamer of grapes and bees!

55

All

Iacchus io Iacchus!

Iacchus! Iacchus io!

*(The **Maenads** break up and again rush to and fro, eventually pressing in a throng round the **Satyr**.)*

Maenads

Do the Thing!

The Thing! The Thing! Do the Thing! The Thing!

Do the Thing!

*(The **Satyr** holds up his hand, and the **Maenads** gradually fall back in a rough semicircle with the **Satyr** in the midst.)*

Satyr *(putting on ridiculous airs)*

What! I am Zeus; the clouds I gather:

Back! Stand back, for the great All-Father!

Goddesses — nymphs — where find I one

To fix my wandering fancy on?

60

First Maenad *(advancing to the middle)*

Stepping alone on the flowery floor —

Very demure, very demure —

I am divine Persephone.

When will my Lover look on me?

65

Satyr

Upon your lips I print my kiss.

(They embrace, amid ribald applause.)

First Maenad *(kissing him warmly)*

And I do this! And this! And this!

(She lies down and produces a straw doll, which she holds up to him.)

See! I have born a babe to Zeus!

Second Maenad *(stepping forward)*

I am great Hera!

Satyr *(grimacing)*

Here's the deuce!

70

Second Maenad

Show me the darling!

(Takes the doll.) There you are!

(Tosses it to the Maenads.)

The other Maenads

We are the Titans. Ha, ha, ha!

Seize it! Tear it! Toss it about!

Worry it! Pluck the red heart out!

(They tear the straw doll to pieces and fling the straw about. A red rose drops out of it, which the Satyr picks up.)

Satyr

Within my side this heart, still warm

75

I'll hide, to shelter it from harm.

(Meanwhile, the Maenads pick up the straw and one of them fashions it into a doll again.)

Satyr *(putting on his airs again)*

I am great Zeus; the clouds I gather:

Rum dum dum for the great All-Father!

Goddesses — maidens — seek I one

To shower my fiery favours on.

80

Third Maenad *(advancing)*

I am a mortal maiden pure —

Very demure — very demure —

Cadmus's daughter, Semele:

What if a God should stoop to me?

Satyr

Upon your lips I print my kiss.

85

(Kissing her by force.)

Third Maenad

Who is it who has dared do this?

Presumptuous man — expect the rod —

(Starts.)

Whom do I see?

All the Maenads

The God! The God!
The Flame! The Thunderer! Zeus! Zeus!

Third Maenad

Why dost thou come as mortals use? 90
Come to me, dear, tomorrow night
Clothed in thy glory and thy might —
Tunic of azure, vest of gold —

Satyr (*approaching her*)

Poor foolish maiden . . . I come . . .
(*Towers above her, and at the same time hands her the rose.*)

All (*shouting suddenly at the top of their voices:*)

BEHOLD! 95

Third Maenad (*falling to the ground and after a pause building up the straw doll, which has been given to her*)

Scorched and blasted! The Sky all flame
Was thy father, child; I name thy name: —

All (*shouting*)

Dionysus!

Satyr (*taking the doll in his arms, while one of the Maenads squeaks to imitate a baby crying*)

Poor pretty thing! Did they make it wink?
What was it crying for?

Maenad (*in a squeaky voice for the baby*)

A drink! 100

(*All laugh.*)

Satyr

Give it some water then.

(*A Maenad fetches water and makes as if to give it to the doll. A noise of spluttering.*)

Oh dear!

Not what it wanted at all, I fear!
Semele's Son, the juice must first
Work in earth that shall quench thy thirst,
And thou shalt wake it; for men shall twine, 105
By thee instructed, the fruitful vine,

And the grape shall swell and there cometh wine!
 Semele's Son, the Earth shall make
 Smooth sweet liquor, thy thirst to slake.
 By thee instructed the men shall know
 How to hoard what the bees bestow,
 And the hive shall hum and the honey flow.

110

First Maenad

That is enough! Now stop the Thing!

Second Maenad

Where is the man you swore to bring?

Satyr

I found one here, but he would not stay;
 See now, another one comes this way:

115

Third Maenad

His mouth is mine,

Fourth Maenad

His cheeks,

Fifth Maenad

His eyes!

Sixth Maenad

I'll kiss his neck,

First Maenad

His shoulders,

Second Maenad

Thighs.

Third Maenad

Back,

Fourth Maenad

Belly,

Fifth Maenad

Buttocks,

Sixth Maenad

Knees,

First Maenad

Hocks,

Second Maenad

Side . . .

Satyr

Hush! or you'll frighten him! All hide!

120

Oh, it's the lonely one who sings —

What if he scorns you all, poor things!

Third Maenad

Scorns? What manner of man is this?

Satyr

Says he's forgotten how to kiss.

Fourth Maenad

We shall remind him —

Fifth Maenad (*raising her foot*)

Maenad trips —

125

Sixth Maenad

Maenad smothers him, lips on lips —

First Maenad

Maenad clutches him round the waist —

Second Maenad

Artemis keep all maidens chaste!

Satyr

You laugh — but you may lose your pains.

Third Maenad

Is it water that flows through his veins?

130

Satyr

Some say so — others . . . come more near —

They say — this in your private ear

(Whispers.)

(The Maenads howl with execration and fury.)

Fourth Maenad

Vile!

Fifth Maenad

Monstrous!

Sixth Maenad

Shall such flesh still live?

We'll take all him he will not give!

Third Maenad

His mouth is mine!

Fourth Maenad

His cheeks!

Fifth Maenad

His eyes!

135

Sixth Maenad

I'll suck his neck!

First Maenad

His shoulders!

Second Maenad

Thighs!

Third Maenad

Back,

Fourth Maenad

Belly,

Fifth Maenad

Buttocks,

Sixth Maenad

Knees,

First Maenad

Hocks,

Second Maenad

Side.

Satyr

Hush! You are warning him! Quick! All hide!

(The Maenads scatter and conceal themselves. The Satyr seats himself to one side.)

(Enter Orpheus. He still carries the broken piece of chain instead of his lyre. Without seeing the Satyr he seats himself and begins to sing sentimentally.)

Orpheus

Forever are you mine, Eurydice,

Inexorable Lethe's icy stream

140

That reaves the lover from his lost Lady —

How shall be drowned your image in my dream?

(Pause)

Do you remember still, my dear, my dear?

All the passionate names you heard me sing?

Does your dead heart cry, when my voice comes clear:

145

This is the man who called me "smooth-gliding"?

The pleasant places where we planned to meet,

The brave clean laughter and the splendid days —

Intimacies intolerably sweet —

Satyr *(singing)*

Though pork and greens are better in some ways!

150

Orpheus *(turning with a start)*

You mock at beauty — well, it is your trade.

Satyr

Oh beauty, thou art beautiful and sweet!

Orpheus

Why do you mock me in my wretchedness?

Satyr

Hearing a false note makes me laugh, like tickling.

Orpheus

What is there false in singing my lost love? 155

Satyr

Because true sweetness always tastes of earth.

Orpheus

Oh, I will try no more to cheat myself!
 Oh, Faun, I have forgotten how to sing!
 Say what you mean! Has grief no taste of earth?

Satyr

Earth changes every moment, earth grieves not, 160
 Though nothing lasts, nor comes the same again.

Orpheus

There is no lilt without the same again.

Satyr

Poet, who never listened to the birds!

Orpheus

Grief suffered is the bones of constancy.

Satyr

Constancy — I have heard the word before, 165
 Like loyalty — the thing they do in Hell —
 Loyal to Hades they, and here on earth
 You men must all be loyal to the past
 And go about like dogs wearing a chain,
 Pretending that to-day is yesterday! 170

True loyalty is living with the earth.

Why, man, I see your chain there in your hands!

Throw it away, and be a man indeed!

Orpheus

Faun, you are foolish — you are wise — oh Zeus,

I cannot even speak now like one man! 175
 Riven apart! What good has ever come
 Keeping the chain? Why then — away with it!
(Throws it into the water.)
 Weak fool! It was Persephone's command.

Satyr

But try now, Orpheus, if you cannot sing!

Orpheus *(after a pause, intoning solemnly)*

The grandson of Heracles lived comfortably ever after, 180
 Eating black-puddings while he watched a trilogy,
 Pillowed upon his doxy's ripening bust.
 Phoebus Apollo got more marks than Pan.
 It was the mastersinger Marsyas who began piercing
 The astute projections . . . Pah! 185

(To the Satyr:)

Well, why do you not mock?

Satyr

You cast away false sweetness with the chain.

Orpheus

Sweetness, perhaps, not falseness. I have done!
 The lilt, the lilt is gone, the lilt is gone!

Satyr

Sweetness is never music without strength. 190

Orpheus

What shall I do, oh Faun, what shall I do?

Satyr

Bring sacrifices to the Earth-born God.

Orpheus

Dionysus? Of what is the sacrifice?
 Where? How is it performed?

Satyr

I know those that will teach you . . .

Orpheus

Well, speak out! 195

Who are these teachers? Where?

Satyr

I speak of Maenads,

Orpheus

Why of such?

Satyr

Whose hair

Floats level in the wind above their bodies'
 White rippling waves of passion: at such times
 The might of earth is in them. Give them Orpheus!

200

Orpheus

So, when a swimmer drifts upon a wave,
 You say its might is *in* him.

Satyr

You split words!

No wonder all the Muses flee away!

Orpheus

Thoughts may be false as well as sweetness, Faun!
 Daughters of Memory have fled from men,
 But not because their thinking was too straight!

205

Satyr

Yet these same Maenads never lost — the lilt.

Orpheus

Our goat-foot doctor cures unhappy men
 By making happy animals!

Satyr

You need

Not sneer at beasts, if what they say is true!

210

Orpheus

What?

*(The **Satyr** approaches and whispers to **Orpheus**.)*

Orpheus (*calmly*)

The vilest slanders cannot prick despair.

Satyr

Well, have you never wished to?

Orpheus

Often.

Satyr

Oh,

Cast off your crusting pride, and join the rout!

Orpheus (*shaking his head:*)

It is not and it cannot be my way.

215

Satyr

You are earth. Earth wants earth. Flesh will have flesh.

Orpheus

Somewhere beyond earth. Once —

Satyr

What?

Orpheus

I know not.

Satyr

“Know not!” “I know not!” Why, you stammering fool,
Do you say you are greater than the God
Who sprang from earth and made the earth his care?

220

Orpheus

I said not so.

Satyr

Then join his devotees!

Orpheus

I cannot — will not —

Satyr

Which?

Orpheus

I do not know.

Satyr

God's blood! This is too much!

(Aside:)

I will be calm!

(To Orpheus:)

Song rises from the bearing of the blood!

Then trust in earth — surrender to the blood —

Joy will bring back the power of song again.

225

Orpheus

It may be you are right. I cannot come.

Satyr

Come with us — or say why you cannot come.

Orpheus

My troth is plighted to Eurydice.

A Maenad *(concealed)*

Unnatural!

230

Satyr

To live without joy is to flout the gods.

Orpheus

My joy is buried with Eurydice.

A Maenad *(concealed)*

Blasphemy!

Orpheus

I will be silent, if I cannot sing

Out of my sorrow and my love —

Satyr

You fool!

235

This parrot-cry of yours has made them mad.

Orpheus

My sacrifice is to Eurydice.

Satyr

Your sacrifice will be to Dionysus!

I wash my hands of you.

(Raising his voice:) Heard you all this?

Orpheus

Eurydice!

240

The Maenads *(still concealed)*

Unnatural! Monstrous! Blasphemy! Flesh! Flesh!

Satyr *(suddenly springing back from Orpheus)*

And blood! And Blood! Evoe! Evoe!

Maenads

Iacchus, io iacchus! Iacchus, iacchus io!

(They rush from all sides upon Orpheus, who covers his head with his hands.)

Seize him! tear him! Toss him about!

245

Worry him! Pluck the red heart out!

Orpheus *(sinking to his knees beneath them)*

Eurydice!

— *Curtain* —

Scene ii

(As the curtain descends on Scene i, the Chorus begins at once to recite:)

First Chorus

But Aristaeus on the watery floor
Stands swaying like a lily-stalk —

Second Chorus

a pearl

Embedded in a solid steep green swirl
Of waters, whose wide roaring in his ears
Has robbed him of himself.

First Chorus

But Cyrene

Draws near her son and takes him by the hand
And heartens him,

5

Second Chorus

till he begins to see

The nymphs and naiads, with their rainbow veils,
Drymo, Phyllodoce, and Beroë
And Arethusa and Deïopeia,
And many more whose names I cannot tell,
Sitting and spinning green thread shot with grey,
Among whom Clymene, with busy wrists,
Sits telling tales that often make them laugh.

10

First Chorus

He strives to speak. Cyrene answers not
But gravely guides his slow bewildered steps
Into a pumice grotto,

15

Second Chorus

seats herself,

Calls to the nymphs to bring her bread and wine
And set them on the board.

First Chorus

Cyrene rises

To pour new strength into her fainting son,
Pouring libations to Oceanus.

20

(Curtain rises. The scene is under the river Peneus. Aristaeus, Cyrene, and an attendant nymph holding a cup are seen separately within a grotto. Some of the nymphs are without.)

Aristaeus

The great deep rises round; I cannot see,
I cannot feel the ground I stand upon.

Cyrene

Oceanus, Oceanus!
Offspring of Earth and Sky, 25
Horizon-wide,
Take into thy pure tide
My dark libation!
Pour!

(The nymph pours wine from the cup. Music.)

Aristaeus

I stand beneath all rivers; all are one 30
Great globe of waters; I am lost in them.

Cyrene

Oceanus, mighty Oceanus,
Let mingle with thy brine
The purple stain of wine!
Receive from us, 35
Oceanus,
Contamination!
Pour!

(The nymph pours as before. Music.)

Aristaeus

I am awake. I dimly see above, around,
High halls and mighty rivers meeting underground. 40

Cyrene

Oceanus, boundless Oceanus,
O thou whose living pulse can never stop.
Let the firm body of each rounded drop
Diffuse its essence through thy formless whole,
Let man's warm suffering soul, 45
Enter thy working stream,

And rouse thee from thy dream
 To inspiration!
 Pour!

(The nymph pours as before. Music.)

Cyrene

The God hears and accepts: I prophesy: 50

Second Chorus *(for Cyrene inspired, rhythmically)*

Bowing to the trident, the tritons dance
 And the waves sparkle; wild white horses
 Prance round promontories; Proteus is very old,
 Sitting upon the sea off the shore of Thrace,
 Nine times older than Nereus is he. 55

What is, what was, what will be he knows,
 Cunning is needed: he knows not that he knows;
 He is all creatures except himself,
 He is life shifting from shape to shape;
 He is life flowing and flowing away. 60

First you must seize him — fix him into form:
 Fetter will be found for you, forged in Hades,
 Near to where I stand, though I know not where.
 But cease not, oh my son, cease not from gripping:
 The more he changes, chain him still the more: 65

Hold on till the time when he turns again
 Back to the form you first found him in.
 Then press no more; Proteus will prophesy,
 Reach down to the roots of your ruin at last,
 And show you a remedy sure and certain. 70

Cyrene

The God has left me. What have I been saying?

Arethusa *(to a group of nymphs at the side, who are busy with something:)*

Well, let us show it to Cyrene first.
 Our sister will know what to do with it.

Cyrene

What is it, Arethusa?

Arethusa

Something strange
 Phyllodoce found lying on the ground — 75

Cyrene

It speaks into my blood. I know. I know.
 As if you had already shown it me,
 And I had spoken — I have — said I not: —
 “Fetter will be found for you, forged in Hades
 Near where I stand.” . . . Why do you hold it back?
 Bring it here: I must give it to my son.

80

Arethusa

I do not understand you.

Cyrene

Show it me!

(Arethusa holds up the head of Orpheus.)

Fetter! This is a man’s head. What now?

Arethusa

Ah!

Cyrene

Why do you start?

Arethusa

The thing stirred in my hands.

Cyrene

The lips are moving.

Arethusa

Ah!

The Voice of Orpheus

Eurydice!

85

Arethusa

I am afraid no longer.

Cyrene

Set it down!

It is too holy to be tampered with.

Lay it down gently on the river bed.

Father Peneus will have care of it,
 And urge it gently down his winding course
 Into the bosom of Oceanus. 90

(Arethusa sets the head down.)

A Nymph *(to a group of nymphs with her on the other side, who are busy with something:)*
 Ugly!

Second Nymph

Jagged and rusty.

Third Nymph

Bury it deep.
 Bury it underneath the white clean sand
 And let our Father wash it smooth again
 For us to dance upon.

First Nymph

But show it first
 To Cyrene, our sister. Cyrene! 95

(A nymph holds up the fragment of Eurydice's chain.)

Cyrene *(to Aristaeus:)*

Behold the fetter!
(To the nymph:)

Bring it here to me.

First Nymph

We love it not. We mean to bury it.

Cyrene

Bring it to me!

(The nymph gives her the chain. To Aristaeus:)

My Son:
(She holds out the chain.)

Take it and use it.

Chorus *(for Cyrene, inspired, who stands holding the chain, and as if still addressing Aristaeus, but in a prophetic manner:)*

Grip him! Grasp him! He will grind his teeth, 100

Awake in a wink, working to elude you
By shifting of his shapes. A sheep he will become,
A lion or a bull or a bird beating
With airiest wings, and then air itself,
Then a snake, then an ass, animal or element,
A flickering flame, flowing water.
But cease not, oh my Son, cease not from gripping!
The more he changes, chain him still more!

105

(Aristaeus takes the chain from Cyrene's hands.)

— *Curtain* —

Scene iii

(Similar to Scene i. Aristaeus alone standing in the centre of the stage behind a large recumbent black bull.)

Aristaeus

The time has come.

Satyr *(entering)*

Are you a mortal man?

Aristaeus

I am a man. Go, and disturb me not.

I sacrifice...

(Starts) "Are you a mortal man" —

Someone has spoken thus to me before.

You — it was you!

Satyr

Yes, and thereat you dived

5

Into the river, leaving me alone

Without an answer.

Aristaeus

Not without a victim!

You and your rabble horde tore limb from limb

Orpheus, the husband of Eurydice.

Satyr

How should you know of this? No trace was left

10

After my maidens took their pleasure of him.

Many animals devoured the severed limbs

Scattered about the ground: his gory head

I took myself and hurled into the stream.

How do you know?

Aristaeus

From Proteus, who knows all.

15

Satyr

But how did you make Proteus tell you all?

Aristaeus

I bound him fast from changing.

Satyr

With your hands?

Aristaeus

No, with a chain my mother found for me,
 Forced him to keep a fastened form,
 Forced him to prophecy. Reluctantly 20
 He told me all the story of those twain,
 Eurydice and Orpheus; and because
 I, even I, was guilty of their woe,
 My bees dropped dead and all my flocks were stricken.
 I was grown desperate of a remedy! 25
 Proteus divined the anger of the gods,
 He bade me choose a black unblemished bull
 And in this place, hard by where Orpheus died,
 Sacrifice to Eurydice's wronged shade.

Satyr

Evoe!

Aristaeus (*starting up and threatening him with the sacrificial knife*)

Silence! What treachery is here?

Satyr

No harm! 30

Aristaeus

No harm! Were you not signalling to your crew
 Of drunken prancing harlots?

Satyr

They are changed.
 Since that dread day they tore the Thracian bard
 And half devoured his quivering flesh, it seems
 Feasting and rioting delight them not. 35
 They walk demurely followed by their friends,
 The animals.

Aristaeus

Animals?

Satyr

Those that day

Who fed upon his body after them.
 Oh Man, that was a holy sight to see:
 Different in kind, not growling, without greed
 They took those dreadful commons. Let them share
 The gods' meal also. Quick!

40

*(He beckons to **Maenads** offstage.)*

My bristling fur
 Prompts me of good approaching. Evoe!

*(Enter **Maenads**, and after them, the animals as in Act II, scene ii.)*

Aristaeus

So be it! Shades of Eurydice, hear my prayer! I have sinned much. I have caught down the music of the spheres into the mechanic rhythm of my own heightened pulse; I have surrendered to the clamour of the blood, and all my strength has been but the alien strength of the lust in me. Shades of Eurydice, hear my prayer!

(He kneels.)

Oh bull, willing sacrifice, bound by no thongs upon the altar, wilt thou indeed renounce the thunder of thy hooves, the coursing of thy blood, thy snorting and pawing upon the ground, thy sitting and the slow pleasant motion of thy jaws? If not, arise and go. Thou knowest thou art free!

*(A pause. **Aristaeus** raises the knife, to strike.)*

Satyr (to the Maenads:)

Shout, when the blow falls. Let no groan be heard!

*(All shout as the knife falls. Dead silence. A faint atmospherical rustling is heard. At length the amplified voice of **Hades** speaks.)*

The Voice of Hades

Back! Back! You shall not pass!

The Voice of Orpheus

Hades, our time is come!

We pass, my lady leading, to Elysium.

The Voice of Hades

Think you I shall cease fighting?

The Voice of Eurydice

Nay, fight on Hades!

Farewell, I cannot see thee now for clouds of bees.

60

Fight on, fight, hate, devour — and so, even so, shall sweet
 Out of the strong come forth, out of the eater meat.

(During the speaking of the next few lines, the rustling gradually dies away.)

The Voice of Orpheus

Thy love breathes in this air; it is so soft and bright.

The Voice of Eurydice

Thy music has gone up from earth into this light.

(From the interior of the bull's carcass a light begins to glow and grows steadily brighter as the scene proceeds.)

Aristaeus

Look, Satyr, look, a light grows in the dark.

65

My prayer is answered. I am saved.

Satyr

O hark!

First Maenad

Where are we, Sister, where are we?

Second Maenad

I dreamed a horrible dream.

Third Maenad

There sounded a voice which woke me.

Fourth Maenad

The light all strange doth seem.

The Voice of Eurydice

Lo, where the bees stream up through crannies on to earth!

Second Maenad

Evil things were done in my dream, aiai, aiai.

70

The Voice of Orpheus

Their bodies soaked in light, to which thy love gave birth.

First Maenad

Evil things were done in my dream, and the doer was I.

Third Maenad

There sounded a voice that woke me, a strange voice crying: Sweet
Out of the strong shall come forth, out of the eater meat.

The Lion

I am the Lion, the King of beasts; on the mountain-slope, 75
Roaming at large and swiftly, I followed the antelope.
I deemed that I had good hunting, I felt my heart rejoice;
And I was crouched all ready to spring, when I heard that voice:
I lifted my head and listened: A strange voice crying: Sweet
Out of the strong shall come forth, out of the eater meat! 80

Aristaeus (*kneeling beside the carcass of the Bull, to the Satyr:*)

Black and bubbling ferment
Worketh up like yeast
Down in the dark entrails
Of the butchered beast.

Satyr

Like the singing sweetness, 85
Far and faint and deep
Rising round my senses
As I fall asleep.

Like the slumbrous shimmer
Heat spreads over things, 90
Hum and whine and buzz
Innumerable wings.

Aristaeus

See, ye gods and mortals,
Gendered of the warm —
See the honey-makers, 95
Swarm on swarm on swarm.

One mysterious body
Of a myriad lives!
Happy Aristaeus!
Overflowing hives! 100

All the Animals

What is here for us? We followed the Lion. The Lion's will
Worked in us. Wherefore are we brought hither, oh Man!

Aristaeus

Be still!

For I hear the voices of gods talking to one another:
The lady Persephone calling across to the great Earth-Mother.

The Voice of Persephone

Have I used well, Demeter, the man's good gift of his breath? 105

Second Chorus

Thou hast done well, Persephone, I rejoice thou art wedded to Death.

The Voice of Persephone

Have I done well, oh Mother, promising much in a sign?

Second Chorus

Thou hast done well, oh Maid, and I hold thy promise as mine.

The Voice of Persephone

Shall his agony profit at all? Shall Man at the last be whole?

Second Chorus

He shall ascend Parnassus awake and find his soul: 110

Proteus shall work unsleeping for ever, and forms shall flow

As the meanings of words a poet has mastered. It shall be so

That Zeus shall abandon to Cronos the antique starry crown,

And softly out of Olympus the high gods shall come down

Shedding ambrosial fragrance in clouds that for ever abide, 115

And earth shall be covered with blushes and make herself sweet as a bride.

And her light shall be liquid as honey, her air taste good like bread

In the mouths of them that dwell upon earth, and all shall be fed.

— *Curtain* —

FINIS