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  
A male voice, or voices

Second Chorus  
A female voice, or voices

Eurydice  
A Nereid

Nereus  
A Sea-god, father of Eurydice and the other Nereids

Orpheus  
Son of Apollo and the Muse Calliope

Aristaeus  
Son of Apollo and Cyrene

Charon  
The Ferryman of Souls

Hades  
The God of the Underworld (the name, as in Homer, also designates his Kingdom)

Persephone  
His Queen, daughter of Demeter, the earth-mother

Sisyphus  
A wicked soul in torment

Tantalus  
A wicked soul in torment

Arethusa  
A nymph, daughter of the river Peneus, and sister of Cyrene

A Satyr

Cyrene  
A nymph, the mother of Aristaeus

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


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:

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,
Mark one maiden from many others,
As they thrud 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:
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?
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!
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,
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,
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
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 —
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!
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,
She bid me to change my being’s self,
Bid Nereus become not-Nereus,
And so escape — instantly hissed
A slippery snake — the snake was Nereus
Held by the body in that hero’s fist:
A frenzied hound, he frothed and barked . . .
By the neck knuckled and no freer!
Nor fared he better in fish’s form:
A dozen creatures he donned in vain
Writhing and wriggling to wrench himself
Loose from that grip —

Till at last he flamed
Upward in fire — up to Sky’s
Wide spaces for wandering in.
Ai! stupid hope! I was still the same!
Ai woe is me! Willy nilly
I gave away the guarded secret —
Golden apples in the gardens of the West
By the dragon watched: he drew all forth,
Before he would let me loose from his grip.
Mine was that mystery. Men got it.
Icy anguish eats out my heart,
As I tell this tale. Torture wracks me!
Mineral crampings! Movement! Movement!
Measureless motion shall make me better!
Delicate dances to do me delight!
In calm choruses, as our custom is,
Dance around me, darling daughters!

(Dance of the Nereids around Nereus, in the course of which enter Orpheus with his lyre. He stands looking on for a time and then begins to play, taking up the thread of the music. Gradually with his lyre he leads the music at the same time influencing it, so that it becomes less formless and more measured. The character of the dance changes accordingly. As dance and music cease:)

Orpheus
Do that again! Do that again!

Second Chorus
Startled Nereids stare at the stranger
Stepping forward. Their father frowns:
Roar of waters rings out in his word.
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.

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.

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.

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:
They brush my lips: Love engenders: 
The tip of my tongue tastes a name 
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!

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! 
What whirring words. Wonderful creature! 
Again! ha ha ha ha! 
Jabber and jargon and jabberish! 
What land-language! To listen and laugh!

Orpheus 
Mother of my mother — might you but help me. 
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 
An angry roar? 
Mock and mimic the mewing of gulls 
With mewing of gulls? Your mouths mocked me 
But a moment back: they mimicked my mouth. 
Will you play but a game to please me now?
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!

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).

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!

— 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,
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 —

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,
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!

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,
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?

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,
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!
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
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
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
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 —
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!
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
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.
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
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!
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!
Help me, now, Mnemosyne!
Listen: many many days
Orpheus lingered with his lyre
Watching, charmed, the Nereids dancing
Over silver-sanded bays:
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,
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,
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 —
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
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
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.
   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?
   (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!
   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,
   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.
   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?
   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 —

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!

    (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!

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.
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.)
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!

(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!
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.

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!

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 —

**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.

**Orpheus** (*horror-struck*)

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

**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!

(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,
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.

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,
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.

The Voice of Orpheus (as before)
Make me immortal! Condescend! Thy votary lift!

Aristaeus
The breeze is full of laughers, 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!

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!
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!
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!

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!
(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!

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!
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?

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!
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!
(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
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!
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 . . .
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!”
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.
“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
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
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!
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!
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
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.
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.
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.
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.
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!

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.

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
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
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
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.
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
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.

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

Persephone
No! I shall lead her to Elysium.
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!
   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,
   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
   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
   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 —
   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
   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,
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:
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!

(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
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!

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.
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
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
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,
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
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!
“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,
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,
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,
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
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!

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.

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!
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
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.
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!
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,
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
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.
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
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
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,
    “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 . . .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Persephone!
I gazed on thee
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,
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;
What would you have me do in recom pense?
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!
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 —
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
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 —

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 —

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
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 —
Music caught
Into body —
Stamp and snort —

Pulses throb,
Having new
World to fashion,
Work to do —
Master fear!
Scarlet warns —
Courage rises —
Lock horns!

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

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

**Orpheus**
I hear, oh Bull! But yet —

**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
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
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,
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!

**Orpheus**

I hear, oh Eagle!

*(Sings:)*

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

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

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

She stilled their needing —

**The Lamb**

Peacefully feeding
   My close lips wander
Over the earth,

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

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

**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
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
Forlorn bewailer,

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

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

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

Drawn moan and hurrying jets
Pour from my tree;
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;
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:
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!
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
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 Danaids 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: —

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!

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 Danaid
   We hate hypocrisy, humbug and cant.

Second Danaid
   We spend our whole time getting what we want.

Third Danaid (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 Danaid
   And kept us slim and kept us up to date!

All
   Hail, Hades!

Tantalus
   With panting passionate devotion burns
   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;
   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!

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
   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,
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!
I have called on thee
    Waking and sleeping.
    Persephone!
The breath of mortals syllabling thy name
Streams forth from Earth, like the autumnal flame
    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?

**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.

**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!
    Persephone,   
    Mistress of night and death!
    Persephone,
    I have felt thy breath
    When the night cometh after day hath been
    And the bright manifold of heard and seen,
    The garish world,
    Seeps through my closing eyes into my soul,
    To bloom there furled —
    Persephone! 70

**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!

    (They giggle.) 85

**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.  

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!  

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.  

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 —

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
Into the living mystery of thy name!
Persephone!
I came alone,
I left the good beasts and their bodies warm;
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!

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
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 . . .
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!

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.
(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!
(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;
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!
Horror! 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!
(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.
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
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
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
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
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 
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,
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 
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:
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, 
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.

**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.

**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 —

**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?

**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.

*(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.

**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
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.
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:
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 —

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!

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.

(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.
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?

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.

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!
Ascalaphus (offstage)
Tu wit! tu woo!
(Imitating Eurydice:)
Orpheus is strong, so strong he has no need of me!  

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!

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.

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.

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?

**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!

— **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,
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
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
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!
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!
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?
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!
   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)

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!

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!

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?

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?

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!

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
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.

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.
(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?
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!

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!

(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,
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.

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:

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! 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 —

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!

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
  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:
  This is the man who called me “smooth-gilding”?

  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!

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?

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,
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,
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!
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!
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,
Eating black-puddings while he watched a trilogy,
Pillow’d 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!
*(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.

**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!
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!

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**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!

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**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!

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**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.

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?

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.

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!

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!
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!

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!
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,

Second Chorus
till he begins to see
The nymphs and naiads, with their rainbow veils,
Drymo, Phyllodoce, and Beroë
And Arethusa and Deiopeia,
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.

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

Second Chorus
seats herself,
Calls to the nymphs to being 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.
(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,
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
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,
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.

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,
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:

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.
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.
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:
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.

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 —
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.

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!

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.

(Arethusa sets the head down.)

A Nymph (to a group of nymths 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!

(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,
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!

(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

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

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.

**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
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!
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!

**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.
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!  
(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 atmospheric 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.  
   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.
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.

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,
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!

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,
   Far and faint and deep
Rising round my senses
   As I fall asleep.

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

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

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

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?

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:
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,
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