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The Orpheus of Virgil and Ovid: *fleBILE nescio quid*



SHORTLY AFTER OCTAVIAN won the battle of Actium and Civil War gave place to Golden Age, the poet Virgil, whose earlier collection of pastoral poems had given such promise, published his *Georgics*, a didactic work of four books that indeed justified the high expectations of his friends. No small part of his achievement, though covering barely seventy-five lines in *Georgics* 4, was his narrative of Orpheus. Many readers, if they recall nothing else in detail from the poem, remember with strong emotions the affecting story of Orpheus' tragic loss of Eurydice and the inconsolable mourning that marked his pathetic life thereafter and that coloured his death. Virgil's account, concentrating as it does on violent and ultimately thwarted passions, is an emotional tour de force.

Not long after the turn of the century, Ovid embarked on his *Metamorphoses*, and no doubt before his exile in AD 8 he had completed his own story of Orpheus, roughly thirty-five years after Virgil's. It is a story of great charm and wit, typical of some of the best material in Ovid's delightful poem, but, like so many of Ovid's passages, it cannot be fully savoured without the knowledge of Virgil that Ovid of course could assume in his earliest Roman audiences. Quite consciously viewing the mythic materials in a different way from Virgil, placing his story in a long poem quite different from Virgil's didactic work, and setting his story in a context at variance with Virgil's, Ovid has given the same myth a new interpretation. He has concentrated on the grief of Orpheus, like Virgil, but, unlike Virgil, he cannot or will not immerse himself subjectively in that tearfulness, at least not for long. The final song of the dead Orpheus, which haunts Virgil and Virgil's reader as the epitome of tragedy, is carelessly tossed off by Ovid as 'something or other pathetic' ('*fleBILE nescio quid*' in *Metamorphoses* 11.52). The change in the narrator's attitude toward Orpheus, striking in itself, necessarily entails a new perception of the mythical figure, a new literary appropriation of the myth.

With these two richly different views of Orpheus, the products of the two greatest poetic talents of Rome, I shall be concerning myself in this essay. These views mark the beginning of a tradition of reinterpretation of Orpheus and Eurydice, which has shown extraordinary vitality well into our own century.

I ORPHEUS IN *GEORGICS* 4

Virgil's story of Orpheus is an obvious intrusion into the basic format of the *Georgics*. The narrative style of the tale is not in keeping with the didactic approach; its mythical contents are patently at odds with the realistic subject of *Georgics* 4, that is the day-to-day problems of a farmer tending bees; and the high emotionality of the account differs appreciably from the sensible, often good-humoured irony with which Virgil views the 'monumental problems' of the diminutive bees in their anthropomorphic society. Virgil justifies his story as follows: he proposes to explain how to cope with the crisis when an entire swarm of bees dies. Therefore, he describes an Egyptian practice which supposedly generates bees from the putrefying hide of a dead calf (4.281ff). Having done this, he introduces the originator of this practice, mythical Aristaeus, and embarks on a long mythological elaboration of how it all began (315ff). Aristaeus, when all his bees died, complained bitterly by the riverside, and his mother, the nymph Cyrene, brought him down to her home beneath the surface, fed and comforted him, then sent him off to Egypt to learn the reason for the death of his bees (333ff). In obedience to her commands, he captured the wise sea-god Proteus and compelled him to speak the truth (415ff). Proteus told him that he was suffering the consequences of inadvertently causing the death of Eurydice; he had tried to rape her, it appears, and, while running away from him, she accidentally had gone too close to a poisonous snake on the river bank (453ff). When Proteus had impressed upon Aristaeus his guilt, Cyrene gave him instructions in the way to placate Orpheus, Eurydice, and the angry Nymphs who were her friends (530ff). Four bulls and four cows were slaughtered on the altars of the Nymphs; their corpses were left to rot; and after eight days a swarm of bees rose from the bodies, ready to serve Aristaeus. Thus, the immediate reason for the story of Orpheus is to explain to Aristaeus the loss of his bees: he has accidentally caused Eurydice's death, and as punishment, his bees have been killed.

I shall come back later to the deeper poetic reasons for introducing Orpheus in this context. For the present, however, let us ignore the context and concentrate on the story itself. It may be briefly summarized, because Virgil has established the outlines for all successive versions of Orpheus' loss of Eurydice; and these details will sound very familiar to most readers.¹

Bitten by a poisonous snake, Eurydice died, amid general lamentation from friends and her devoted husband Orpheus. After mourning her day and night, Orpheus resorted in desperation to Hades, appealing in passionate song to the powers of the Underworld. They were deeply moved and granted him Eurydice, on condition that she follow him out of Hades and that he not turn to look at her until they reach the open air and daylight. Unable to contain himself, Orpheus turned near the surface, and Eurydice was snatched from him, back to Death. This time, none of the powers of Hades would grant him a hearing. When he continued his mourning and refused to make the best of the remainder of his life by remarrying, his violent rejection of Thracian women resulted in his death by dismemberment at their hands. Most of the pieces of his corpse were scattered about the fields, but his head fell in the Hebrus River and floated out to sea, still singing its pathetic lament for lost Eurydice.

Although Virgil's is the first surviving account of Orpheus and Eurydice which specifically focuses on his failure to recover her entirely, there are good reasons, in my opinion, to believe that the Latin poet was working in a familiar Greco-Roman myth.² In the first place, Virgil does not develop his account with the fullness that one would require in an unfamiliar tale, not even in the sequence of the fatal turning-around of Orpheus, precisely where, according to some scholars, *new* material enters. In the second place, the total economy of *Georgics* 4.281ff makes it evident that Orpheus' experiences play a distinctly subordinate role to those of Aristaeus, so much so that the familiar Orpheus seems called upon to elucidate unfamiliar details in Aristaeus. Indeed, it is highly likely that the *new* features invented by Virgil inhere in the Aristaeus-story, that he is the first to link Orpheus and Aristaeus. Perhaps the link suggested itself because the given, familiar motifs of Orpheus' tragic experience offered rich material for colouring and interpreting the unfamiliar and novel story assigned to Aristaeus. Exactly when the story of Orpheus' failure originated remains a point of contention among scholars. I myself am inclined to agree with those who go back before the Hellenistic period as early as fifth-century Greek literature (presumably tragedy) and art for the source.

Virgil does not tell of Orpheus' experiences as though the details of the story were unfamiliar to his readers. Rather, he relies on the familiar, and introduces his own special emphases. From the beginning, the narrative focuses on Orpheus. Although, at the time of Proteus' narration, the husband is quite as dead as his wife, nevertheless he, not Eurydice, is said to have caused Aristaeus' punishment. Orpheus is said to be still raging ('saevit' 456) over his loss; the feelings of Eurydice are not mentioned. Since Virgil is probably the first to link Orpheus and Aristaeus, the narrator must explain Aristaeus' guilt and Orpheus' anger at him. These are shown briefly by means

of a common story-motif appropriate to the rural world: Aristaeus (obviously with erotic intent) pursued the nymph Eurydice, who, while trying to escape him, failed to see a poisonous snake, which bit and killed her. Virgil renders this episode in three relatively bland lines (457-9), and minimizes the role of Eurydice by not naming her and by avoiding qualifying details other than calling her 'girl doomed to die' ('moritura puella' 458), an 'elegiac' phrase which serves more to replace a full, pathetic description of her death than to make us weep. Indeed, the snake gets more emphasis in the three short lines than either Aristaeus or Eurydice. Once the narrator has removed Eurydice, without any notice of the death-scene itself, he can establish his desired emphasis on lamentation. Four lines suffice to report the way her friends the Dryads weep for her and how the pastoral scenery echoes this grief (460-3). That general grief serves to preface the more powerful and, for the narrator, more significant misery of Orpheus:

ipse cava solans aegrum testudine amorem
te, dulcis coniunx, te solo in litore secum,
te veniente die, te decedente canebat. (464-6)

(Orpheus himself, attempting to console the agony of his love on the hollow shell of his lyre, sang of you, darling wife, of you on the lonely shore by himself, of you as the sun rose, of you as it set.)

It is clear from the context that the participle 'solans' does not denote the success of his consolation, but the effort that unfortunately proves vain. The love of Orpheus, which determines all his subsequent acts, is sick ('aegrum' 464), and it prescribes the kind of song he sings; song does not charm away his grief. Virgil uses his subjective style in 465-6 to express through repeated apostrophe ('te' at the beginning of both lines and at the central caesurae) his sympathy with the situation. However, although ostensibly he addresses Eurydice, it seems to me that the apostrophe serves rather to characterize the way Orpheus continuously but vainly sings, pathetically addressing his dead Eurydice, 'dulcis coniunx' to him while alive. Still inconsolable, Orpheus goes down to Hades. Virgil does not directly explain why, presumably relying on his audience's familiarity with the story. Only in his indirect description of the powers below as 'hearts that do not know how to be softened by the prayers of men' (470), does he suggest that Orpheus pleads for Eurydice's release.

Virgil does not cite the words of Orpheus' musical prayer. He prefers to indicate its dramatic effect by describing the way various residents of Hades were moved ('cantu commotae' 471). From the diverse classes of dead, whose reactions he further qualifies by simile (471-80), the poet goes on to note select figures of mythical Hades (Cerberus, the Eumenides, and Ixion) who

were struck dumb and motionless by the charm of Orpheus. Then without pausing over the decision of Hades and Proserpina to release Eurydice or the conditions they set – another indication of familiar details – the narrator jumps directly to the journey back to life. We are suddenly shown the pair as they are about to emerge into the daylight (485). As Virgil tells it, though, Eurydice is the subject of the three lines that deal with the journey; it is she who had almost escaped her misfortunes, almost reached the upper air. Apart from focusing on Eurydice, the poet does not colour the description by a single qualifying adjective or adverb or by a verb, metaphorical or not, that might capture our feelings. In sharp contrast are the four lines that follow, accounting for Orpheus' fatal action in turning around; these are the most densely packed lines in the entire story:

cum subita incautum dementia cepit amantem,
ignoscenda quidem, scirent si ignoscere manes:
restitit, Eurydicenque suam iam luce sub ipsa
immemor heu! victusque animi respexit. (488-91)

(... when sudden madness possessed the heedless lover, surely pardonable if the powers below knew how to pardon: he stopped, and by the first light from above, forgetting, alas, the conditions, his reason overcome, he looked back toward his own dear Eurydice.)

Orpheus' backward glance, for all the poet's qualifications, cancels out the journey of Eurydice. Virgil's seven-line sentence (485-91) is a brilliant example of the utility of the so-called *cum-inversum* structure. The three lines about Eurydice, which seem to be carrying the main events of the passage, lull the audience into security. However, the *cum* clause of 488, far from subordinating what follows to what precedes, in fact focuses on the principal actions: first 'restitit,' then 'respexit.' Two verbs, and the rest is qualification. Orpheus is a victim of madness and love together, pardonable by human standards but unpardonable here where gods were judging, of irrationality and failure to remember the penalty. The light, which alone gives a setting, comes, as my translation makes emphatic, not from the subterranean world but faintly penetrates from above to the travellers. In the Latin, Virgil has violently separated object from verb in 490-1; the separation connotes the total impossibility of Orpheus' rash desire. He looked back at Eurydice, his beloved ('suam'), and at that very moment, by consequence of the act itself, she ceased to be his. Indeed, he hardly saw her and failed utterly to touch or embrace her.

Orpheus' rash deed of irrational passion receives a generalized comment from the narrator and a triple roll of thunder wells up from Hades below. Then comes the more poignant comment of Eurydice. For Virgil, who has

wisely avoided trying to duplicate Orpheus' charmed song among the dead and only indirectly suggested some elements of his lament above ground in 464ff now produces the only direct speech of the entire story, the last pathetic words of Orpheus' wife.

illa 'quis et me' inquit 'miseram et te perdidit, Orpheu,
quis tantus furor? en iterum crudelia retro
fata vocant, conditque natantia lumina somnus.
iamque vale: feror ingenti circumdata nocte
invalidasque tibi tendens, heu non tua, palmas.' (494-8)

'What is this, what great madness,' she said, 'has destroyed both poor me and you, Orpheus? Now again the cruel fates summon me back, and sleep (of death) drowns my swimming eyes. Goodbye: I am carried off, surrounded by massive darkness, holding out powerless hands to you, alas not yours to have.'

Virgil allows her to protest at the 'furor' which has caused such damage, but she does so in such a way as to attenuate Orpheus' guilt. Although we know, and he does also, that it is *his* madness which she names, Eurydice sounds as though she could be blaming a cosmic force that has victimized them both. Apart from that initial outcry, her speech is more a means of narrative than of fixing her misery. New symbols replace the hopeful ones that had begun during the journey upward: instead of light, night and sleep now surround, bury, and drown their victim; instead of upper air, the cruel fates below possess her; instead of acting as the subject of free, vigorous verbs of motion, Eurydice now becomes the helpless object of the verbs of 494-6, the unhappy passive subject of 'feror' in 497, and the only active verbal form is the final participle 'tendens,' which epitomizes her pathetic condition. As she vainly holds out her hands to him, she answers his passionate actions of 491 and also of 501 ('prensantem nequiquam umbras'). The hyperbaton separating 'invalidas' from its noun 'palmas' and the inserted pathetic 'heu non tua' accomplish similar results with, and echo, the hyperbaton of 490-1. Orpheus tried to make Eurydice 'his' rashly and prematurely; therefore, she has ceased to be 'his' forever.

After this unique speech, Virgil maintains Eurydice as subject for another four lines (499-502), in order to describe her disappearance from Orpheus. He has looked back at her and caused her disaster, so Virgil appropriately stresses her loss in visual terms: she vanishes from his sight, and correspondingly she cannot see him, as he desperately tries to hold on to her and speak to her. She had almost reached the upper air, where she would have become warm flesh and blood again; now she slips away from his sight and grasp, like smoke dispersed into thin air. By making Eurydice subject, Virgil elegantly conveys the reversal of affairs. Orpheus' action has victimized her; now, as

death once again takes her, her involuntary act of departure punishes and ruins him. With that, our attention shifts to him and his pathetic situation, his feelings of love and loss compounded by an inevitable sense of guilt. He has hardly caught a glimpse of her, and he is frustrated in his attempt to touch her or to speak to her the many things he obviously has to say. Virgil remembered this poignant context and reused it when describing the final encounter of Aeneas and his 'dead' wife Creusa in the nightmarish horror of burning Troy: like Orpheus, Aeneas is made the object affected by her departure, vainly expressing his emotions and trying to communicate with her ('lacrimantem et multa volentem / dicere deseruit' Aeneid 2.790-1).

Virgil neatly compresses events now by co-ordinating Eurydice's departure ('neque illum ... vidit') with the refusal of Charon to transport Orpheus across the Styx for another appeal ('nec passus transire' 502-3). It is easy for us to imagine how Orpheus rushed back to the Styx and tried to reach Hades again, but Virgil's attention fixes on Orpheus the helpless, suffering lover, unable to act, only to be affected. That helplessness is further stressed by a series of deliberative questions:

quid faceret? quo se rapta bis coniuge ferret?
quo fletu manis, quae numina voce moveret? (504-5)

(What should he do? Where should he go now that his wife had been snatched away a second time? With what tears could he touch the Shades, what gods could he move with his song?)

The answer comes in unmistakable fashion in a final lapidary line about Eurydice, indeed lost forever:

illa quidem Stygia nabat iam frigida cumba. (506)

(She was already cold, swimming now in the Stygian skiff.)

He cannot cross in Charon's boat to recover his beloved, warmly responding Eurydice, because she is a cold spirit departing from him in that very boat.

It has taken Virgil scarcely fifty lines to cover this portion of the narrative. In the remaining third of the story, we watch Orpheus lamenting once again, this time in the sure conviction that he has lost Eurydice forever. He heads back to Thrace, finds a lonely, chill, bleak spot under a hollowed-out cliff by the Strymon River, and month after month he sings of his pathetic loss. (Virgil says nothing of his guilt, but inevitably, from the way the narrative elaborated the motives behind his looking back, we are entitled to assume that his anger at Aristaeus has been mixed with anger at himself.) The song still exerts a powerful charm, though it serves no purpose whatsoever: Orpheus tames wild tigers and stirs oak trees (510). In a five-line simile, the narrator

catches some of the chief elements by which this protracted grief may be assessed:

qualis populea maerens philomela sub umbra
amissos queritur fetus, quos durus arator
observans nido implumis detraxit; at illa
flet noctem, ramoque sedens miserabile carmen
integrat, et maestis late loca questibus implet. (511-15)

(Like a grieving nightingale in a shady poplar tree, which complains of her lost young, which a tough plowman has spied and snatched, still fledglings, from her nest. She weeps all night long; perched on a branch, she keeps repeating her unhappy song and fills the forest far and wide with her mournful complaints.)

Here one finds unquestionable sympathy for the nightingale and for Orpheus. The bird is the innocent victim of the unfeeling farmer, robbed of her young, and her complaint is patently justified. It is conventional to think of the nightingale's song as beautiful and sad, especially since it is associated with the gloom of night-time. To that extent, she matches and colours the pathetic plight of the human singer. Orpheus, however, is not merely a victim. He is a man with the capacity to make rational choices, to deal creatively with his grief, and not to go on indulging himself eternally in vain lamentation. He could have a future. The bird indirectly points to such a future, because nightingales mate again, construct new nests, and tend new nestlings in instinctive response to nature's ever-continuing vital process. Moreover, Orpheus is not a guiltless victim. Although Aristaeus may be somewhat comparable to the 'durus arator,' Orpheus himself mainly bears the responsibility, as we have seen, for the conclusive loss of Eurydice. He has failed to come to grips with his own 'furor.' The bird also indirectly points to that complex background of guilty passion, for, by calling it 'philomela,' Virgil inevitably reminds his audience of the well-known myth in which mother and sister killed the son of Tereus, to punish his outrageous crimes of lust, and were then transformed into birds, the mother into a forever mourning nightingale.³ Thus, Orpheus' grief is certainly pathetic, but somehow an inadequate response to the human situation, as the simile suggests.

From the simile, Virgil returns to renewed description of the inconsolable singer. Rejecting any thought of marriage, any love (516), Orpheus continues to haunt the lonely, icy Thracian landscape, and continues to sing his monotonous complaints on the loss of Eurydice. A woman scorned is dangerous enough. But when Orpheus spurns all the Thracian women, they turn on him and tear him limb from limb. A grotesque tradition had it that only his head escaped the wrath of the women: it fell into the river Hebrus and

somehow floated out to sea, and, in some versions, across to the island of Lesbos. With marvellous finesse, Virgil manages to use this tradition to catch and epitomize the tragedy of Orpheus, in the last five lines of his narrative:

tum quoque marmorea caput a cervice revulsum
gurgite cum medio portans Oeagrius Hebrus
volveret, Eurydicen vox ipsa et frigida lingua,
a miseram Eurydicen! anima fugiente vocabat:
Eurydicen toto referebant flumine ripae. (523-7)

(Then, too, his head was torn from his marble-white neck, and as the Thracian Hebrus carried it along, rolling it in the midst of its wild waters, 'Eurydice' the voice and cold tongue called out, 'poor Eurydice,' with its failing breath; and the banks along the river echoed back: 'Eurydice'.)

The main theme of this story is the pathetic, but essentially futile and ultimately suicidal, grief for a loss that cannot be altered. Virgil exhibits that complicated narrative technique which is later so powerful an element of the *Aeneid*: he conveys his strong sympathy for the deep feelings of a human being, but he does not shirk the necessity to judge 'furor' as human inadequacy. Men possess both rich feelings and reason with which to control and channel those feelings; mere indulgence in sentiment is wrong.

This story of Orpheus, which Virgil puts in the mouth of the prophetic Proteus to explain to Aristaeus why pestilence has wiped out his bees, has deeper functions. The fact that the theme conveys both sympathy and negative judgment for Orpheus and that the details of the story make more of Orpheus' guilty act of insane passion than of Aristaeus' attempt to rape Eurydice suggests that Proteus has been made to say things which serve the poet's larger purposes. Those purposes are to elaborate the meaning of Aristaeus' myth, namely, the resurrection of the beekeeping activities by renewal of the swarm. It does not take much effort to realize that the story of Orpheus has been told in such a way as to replace the guilty Aristaeus rather swiftly with the passionate and hence guilty Orpheus; and that is because Virgil aims to develop significant parallels and contrasts between the two men.⁴ Both Aristaeus and Orpheus experience serious losses; Aristaeus is as deeply disturbed in his way by the death of his bees as Orpheus is by Eurydice's death. Like Orpheus, Aristaeus takes his stand by a river and pours out his complaints (319-20). Aristaeus like Orpheus has no desire to live and invokes a curse on surrounding nature that is comparable to Orpheus' dedication to cold, lifeless landscape. Aristaeus descends beneath the surface of the water, in order to recover his bees, much as Orpheus descends to Hades in pursuit of his wife.

It is at this point, in the circumstances surrounding these descents, that the

ways of Orpheus and Aristaeus part, and the poet now starts to stress the differences between the two. Whereas Orpheus plunges into a dark and alien realm, but manages to affect it by his passionate appeal, Aristaeus is welcomed into a friendly domain presided over by his mother, the nymph Cyrene, is wined and dined, then is given advice and encouragement by which he eventually achieves his goal. Orpheus by his passion compels those stern rules of Hades to soften, though they were conditioned never to grow soft at the appeal of human beings; but because of that same passion, he loses Eurydice, being unable to follow the inflexible law set by Proserpina. Aristaeus, however, no longer acts on the basis of passion or grief after he leaves his mother's realm, and therefore he proceeds along a direct, though difficult, course to secure new bees. First, he must exert himself to use heroic violence and master the sea-god Proteus, in order to force from him an explanation of his loss. Virgil patently models this particular Proteus-sequence on the famous episode of *Odyssey* 4, in which Menelaus captured Proteus and forced key information from him.⁵ The implication is that Aristaeus is taking on the character of an active epic hero.⁶

When he has learned that his guilt toward Eurydice has earned him his punishment, that the gods have in effect avenged Eurydice by killing the bees, Aristaeus can face that guilt and act to reverse it. In this, he differs strikingly from Orpheus, who never, as Virgil tells it, analyses or understands his grief and so, by simply indulging his misery day after day, month after month, fixed in that cold and solitary Thracian setting, becomes an emblem of inertia and death. He is 'miserabilis' as we first hear of him (454); his powerful lament is comparable to the 'miserabile carmen' (514) of the nightingale; he hears Eurydice call herself 'miseram' (494) as a result of his 'furor'; with dying breath his separated head moans out 'a miseram Eurydicen' (526), and these last words are echoed back by the river banks. In sharp contrast to this protracted unhappiness, pathetic but inert, the mood of guilty Aristaeus changes swiftly from wretchedness to brisk and hopeful resolution. Cyrene dismisses both his anguish and his guilt. Her very first words after Proteus ends his story and vanishes, his task done, work upon those feelings: 'Son, don't let your unhappiness get you down,' to put it a bit freely ('nate, licet tristis animo deponere curas' 531).⁷ There are precise acts he can initiate which will earn him forgiveness from the angry gods, free him from guilt, and then win him new bees.

To further the contrast with Orpheus, the ritual acts enjoined on Aristaeus by his mother involve sacrifice of bulls, cows, a sheep, and a calf, whose deaths, appeasing the hostility of the dead, become the means to life. Leaving the corpses by the altars where he has slaughtered them, Aristaeus returns nine days later to pacify the shades of Orpheus by a sheep, of Eurydice by a

calf, and discovers buzzing in the 'wombs' ('utero' 556) of the eight cattle-corpses a swarm of bees that rise in a cloud and hang from the branch of a tree, ready for him to possess. Out of death new life has been 'born,' thanks to the benevolent advice of Cyrene and the vigorous, unemotional, purposeful actions of Aristaeus. Orpheus almost resurrected Eurydice, but his irrational passions caused her final death, and then those same passions froze him in inactivity and ultimately brought about his death.

Thus the tragedy of Orpheus serves to establish the 'heroic' stature of Aristaeus and to provide a foil which sets off the values he embodies. For the myth of Aristaeus, designed by Virgil to conclude the thematic development of the *Georgics*, epitomizes some of his key insights into the complex moral significance of the farmer.⁸ The ultimate purpose of the beekeeper and all the other specialists in the farming world is to make Nature productive, to enhance life-giving and life-continuing forces and control as much as possible destructive forces. The means by which he operates to gain his end are not gentle; he cannot afford to indulge his own sentimentality (like Orpheus) or to permit destructive passions in his beasts or luxurious growth in the wrong plants. The beekeeper, for instance, calmly observes a 'duel' between two would-be 'kings' of the swarm, then calmly kills the loser (4.90). To prevent the swarm from dispersing, he should pull the wings from the 'kings' (4.106-7). He doesn't have to deal with erotic passions such as those which plague horses and bulls, for bees possess a nature superior to that of beasts in that (according to Virgil's time) they are free of sexual needs: 'neque concubitu indulgent, nec corpora segnes / in Venerem solvunt' (4.198-9). As he works for the total productivity of the swarm, the beekeeper deals unsentimentally with individual bees and, in the perspective of general renewal, feels no surprise or regret at the deaths of single insects. When one works with Nature, death is a regular phenomenon, but one can be dispassionate about individual deaths if one knows that the swarm, the herd, or the species lives on. At best, a single bee will survive hardly seven years, but, under intelligent management, the swarm can be considered deathless: 'genus immortale' (208).

Virgil views the farmer as the symbol of the compromised individual in a world of responsibility. He must act responsibly and intelligently and morally to ensure the productivity of his fields, trees, animals, and bees; he must also act ruthlessly and unsentimentally, subordinating the individual to the larger group. If one concentrates exclusively on the farmer's ruthlessness, one can represent him as a guilty enemy of Nature, a rough unfeeling plowman like the one in the simile (512) who robbed the nightingale's nest. However, when we place this ruthlessness, this destructiveness of individuals, this 'guilt' in the total context of creative purposefulness, the pathetic

individuals must be regretfully rejected, even the passionately loving Orpheus, that singer of the most moving songs myth has ever imagined. The 'durus arator,' the guilty but energetically purposive Aristaeus, should be our model. Orpheus, Virgil's first elaborate dramatic character, is the prototype of those magnificently flawed individuals Dido and Turnus of the *Aeneid*.

II OVID'S ORPHEUS IN THE *METAMORPHOSES*

Born in 43 BC and raised in his native Sulmo, Ovid came to Rome as a young man to further his education and, by his father's wishes, to prepare for a career based upon mastery of rhetoric.⁹ It was just in this period that Virgil published his *Georgics*, and this poem will have exerted strong influence upon the young Ovid. But poetic activity in Rome was not confined to Virgil: in this same vital decade of the 20s, Horace completed work on his *Satires* and *Epodes* and then devoted his efforts exclusively to the *Odes*, which he published in 23; Tibullus and Propertius were shaping the genre of Roman elegy. Ovid's genius was such that, having assimilated without apparent effort the rhetorical techniques his father had commanded, he deliberately chose to give himself to poetry, whose various styles and conventions he also quickly assimilated. The two poets who most impressed him throughout his long career were those complex and persuasive students of passion and moral obligation Propertius and Virgil. At the age of forty, a mature poet, indeed the only talented poet still alive of those who had worked during the 20s, Ovid began composition of the *Metamorphoses*. When Augustus suddenly exiled him, in AD 8 at the age of fifty, to the shores of the Black Sea, he had all but completed the fifteen books of that hexameter masterpiece of myth. Although in earlier works like the *Heroides* and the mock-didactic *Ars Amatoria* Ovid's stylistic and thematic obligations to, and ambiguous attitude toward, Virgil manifest themselves, it is in the *Metamorphoses* that we encounter the fullest use of Virgil, indeed one of the most ingenious adaptations of one masterful poet by another.¹⁰ Ovid uses both the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*, but, for our purposes, study of the way he adapts Virgil's Orpheus is especially significant, because, as we have seen, the unhappy singer not only epitomizes major themes of its poem but also anticipates Dido and Turnus of the *Aeneid*. What will emerge is that Ovid transforms the Virgilian tragic failure into a character entirely appropriate to his different poem: a melodramatic, egoistic poet of overblown rhetoric and shallow self-indulgent sentimentality. Ovid's Orpheus serves as a particularly ironic comment on poets and their personalities, on the poetic environment of Augustan times.

It will be useful, I think, to show how Ovid has taken the story told by Virgil and organized it to suit his own purposes. The two parallel columns summarize the key elements of each poet's lines on Orpheus.

Virgil *Georgics* 4

Aristaeus tries to rape E. (457)
In flight, E. fails to see a snake.
Her death not reported. (458-9)
General mourning of E.'s friends and surrounding nature. (460-3)
Focus on Orpheus' grief. (464-6)
O. even enters the jaws of Taenarus and braves the fearful darkness of Hades in an effort to soften the heart of the powers of Death. (467-70)
[He sings, but Virgil leaves that fact implicit and gives no details of what he included in the song.]
The effects of O.'s marvellous song:
a) The bodiless dead crowd around him ('simulacraque ... defunctaque corpora vita') like birds taking refuge from darkness or a winter storm. (471-80)
b) Legendary monsters, Cerberus and Eumenides, are charmed; archetypal tortures (Ixion alone cited) briefly stop. (481-4)

[Virgil leaves the business with the gods implicit; he refers to the conditions of E.'s return, 'legem' 487, only in a retrospective parenthesis.]

O. and E. have almost reached the upper air, and E. is on the verge of escaping Death. (485-7)
In a storm of complicated emotions, O. looks back. (488-91)
All O.'s efforts are nullified; thunder of doom sounds. (491-3)

Ovid *Metamorphoses* 10-11

Orpheus marries Eurydice under ominous conditions. (1-7)

E. wanders in meadows with friends. (8-9)
A snake bites E. in the heel, and she dies. (10)

O. sufficiently mourns E. above earth. (11)

O. decides to try his luck with the Shades, and so boldly descends through the gate of Taenarus past the 'simulacra functa sepulchro' [phrase from *Georgics* 4.472-5] to Persephone. (12-16)

O. strokes the strings of his lyre and sings at length, a supremely clever *suasoria* to persuade Death to give back E. (17-39)

The effects of O.'s marvellous song:

a) The bloodless spirits weep. (41)
b) All five of the archetypal tortures (Tantalus, Ixion, Tityos, Danaides, Sisyphus) are halted; the Eumenides weep for the first time. (41-6)

Persephone and her husband cannot resist O.'s plea. (46-7)

They summon E., who limps in. (48-9)

O. gets E. back, on condition ('legem') that he not look back until he has emerged from Hades. Otherwise, the gift will be cancelled: 'aut irrita dona futura.' (50-2)

O. and E. start up the dark path and almost reach the edge of the earth above. (53-5)

In fear and love, O. looks back. (56-7)

E. voices her criticism of 'furor,' her feelings of desperation, then adds 'vale' as she dies again. (494-8)
She disappears, like smoke into thin air, away from O., who tries to hold her and speak to her. (499-502)

O. tries to get Charon ('portitor Orci') to ferry him across for a new appeal. But he has to recognize that E. is indeed lost. (502-6)

He goes back to Thrace, sits down at the foot of a bare cliff by the lonely Strymon, and for seven months weeps out his misery to the cold stars. (507-9)
O. charms tigers and trees. (510)

Simile of nightingale. (511-15)
No love, no thought of marriage can distract O. (516)

He continues to haunt the frozen, bare Thracian fields, lamenting the loss of E. and the vain gifts of Dis ['irrita dona,' model for *Metamorphoses* 10.52]. (517-20)
The Thracian women resent rejection. (520)

Ovid specifically denies that E. complains about her husband. (60-1) She merely whispers the single word 'vale.' (62)

As soon as O. looks back, E. slips away from his grasp. (57-9) He can barely hear her last word as she goes back to Hades. (62-3)
The effect of this second death ('gemina nece') on O. is conveyed by reference to two obscure characters of myth. (64-71)

O. appeals to Charon, but the 'portitor' bars his passage. (72-3)

O. remains seven days on the bank of the Styx, without food, weeping. (73-5)
He climbs up into the mountains of Thrace, to complain of the gods of Death, for three years. (76-9)

[This motif, much expanded, added later, 86-144.]

O. avoids women's love, either from despair or because he has promised E. (79-81)

Thracian women are resentful. (81-2)

O. advocates pederastic love. (83-5)
[The remainder of Book 10, some 650 lines, represents O. singing his advocacy of boy-love and, conversely, his misogynistic conclusions about women's love.]

Women tear O. apart. (521-2)

His head floats down the Hebrus to the sea, still lamenting E. (523-6)

River banks echo the name of E. (527)

Even more resentful, Thracian women attack O. and tear him apart. (11.1-50)
Carried down to the sea by the Hebrus the head and lyre combine to moan out 'flebile nescio quid,' a veritable marvel. (50-3)
River banks echo the 'flebile.' (53)
The head floats across the Aegean to Lesbos, where Apollo prevents a snake from attacking it. (54-60)
O.'s shade rejoins that of E., and at last the couple can walk in security. (61-6)

From this summary presentation of the two narratives, it should be evident that Ovid expects his audience to know Virgil's poem and to relish the changes that he the later poet has made, not only in detail and organization but also in tone and theme. Using these parallel columns, we may quickly discern where details and organization vary, then look more closely to determine the effect on theme and tone.

To begin with, Ovid abandons the Aristaeus-frame for his story. Since that was, as we saw, probably the invention of Virgil devised to make Orpheus a significant foil to the beekeeper, we may be sure that, in abandoning it, Ovid has found a new thematic context for Orpheus. His justification for introducing the tale is a naïve contrast with the previous one, that of Iphis and Ianthe, which ended with two lovers marrying, destined to live, as they say, happily ever after. From happiness to misery: terrible omens surround the marriage of Orpheus and Eurydice. Therefore, Eurydice's snakebite comes as she is quietly walking through the meadows, not running in panic from a lecherous pursuer. By eliminating the guilt of the would-be rapist, it seems to me, Ovid has streamlined his narrative and potentially given it a more tragic form. Without another character for us to blame, Orpheus could be depicted in heart-rending manner.

In fact, having 'improved' Virgil, Ovid ostentatiously ignores his opportunity and the pathos of the bereaved husband. We note first that he does not use the device chosen by Virgil, namely, an ample description of general grief among Eurydice's friends (who were with her when she suffered the bite and died) and in the surrounding landscape, to prepare for Orpheus' even profounder grief. Instead, he briefly and indifferently refers to those initial lamentations of Orpheus alone, merely to emphasize the decision to visit the Underworld. This follows directly on his objective report of Eurydice's death in the single matter-of-fact 'she died' ('occidit' 10). Ovid continues: 'When

the Rhodopeian bard had sufficiently bewailed her to the upper air ... ' ('Quam satis ad superas postquam Rhodopeius auras / deflevit vates'). That adverb 'satis' is damning, no matter how one views it, whether as the thought of the narrator or as the feeling of Orpheus. For us who have read Virgil, it seems incredible that Eurydice could ever be mourned sufficiently.

The most obvious distinction between Virgil and Ovid resides in Virgil's restraint and Ovid's total exuberance at the point in the story where Orpheus sings in Hades. It would be simple-minded to sneer at Ovid for failing to realize that he could never equal what was by definition in the myth unique, namely, a song that overcame the flinty hardness of Death. Ovid knew it as well as Virgil did. And so the song he assigns Orpheus is anything but unique: it makes no emotional appeal whatsoever, but works with cheap, flashy, and specious rhetoric to persuade Hades to go against his own nature. As a consequence, Orpheus strikes us as a third-rate poet-orator who, assigned the task of creating an inimitable song and trying to regain Eurydice, can only mouth commonplaces or try to devise clever but lifeless points ('colores') and so win applause. He starts off in canonic fashion by swearing that he speaks the truth (19-20). Then, he carefully denies that his purpose there is either to be a tourist or, like Hercules, to capture Cerberus: he has come to recover his wife. 'I wanted to be able to endure her death,' he asserts (25), thereby stressing again the chasm that lies between him and Virgil's inconsolable singer, who never even thought of enduring his misery. 'I tried, but Love conquered' (25-6). It is the first time in this strangely told story that the concept of love has been mentioned, and Ovid presents it as a chill abstract noun, a calculated point in persuasive discourse that has nothing in the previous narrative or in Orpheus' character to support it.

Orpheus affects to wonder whether love is known in the Underworld, until he conveniently remembers - Ovid wittily refers to an earlier episode in *Metamorphoses* (5.346 ff) - that *Amor* had united Persephone with her husband. However, to compare the romantic passion supposedly linking him and Eurydice with the mere lust and rape by which Pluto secured his wife, to force the comparison on us by explicitly alluding to the familiar version of rape, 'veteris rapinae' (28), suggests the shallowness of Orpheus' love and the awkwardness of his rhetoric. Ovid will not let him speak affectionately and convincingly of his wife. Invoking the fearful, cavernous silence of the Underworld (29-30), ridiculously inept, Orpheus finally asks for Eurydice back. Why should the request be granted? We could easily imagine dozens of compelling reasons that are based on human needs, on the tragedy of life cut short and marriage just begun. And yet Ovid makes Orpheus turn tragedy and genuine grief into tawdry rhetoric:

omnia debentur vobis paulumque morati
serius aut citius sedem properamus ad unam.
tendimus huc omnes, haec est domus ultima, vosque
humani generis longissima regna tenetis.
haec quoque, cum iustos matura peregerit annos,
iuris erit vestri: pro munere poscimus usum.

(32-7)

(All things are owed to you; after lingering a little, sooner or later we all rush to the same place. We all head in this direction, this is our last home, and you two possess the longest mastery over the human race. This woman, too, when she has completed her proper span of years, in the maturity of age, will come under your control. I merely ask to borrow her; I'll count it as a gift.)

Almost every phrase in these six lines was a commonplace for Roman ears, the trite baggage of expectable words about death. For three lines, Orpheus rings the changes on the topos: We all must die. The next three lines focus on the metaphor of Death's dominion over us. But what turns this into inimitable rhetoric for Orpheus is the way he inverts its normal usage, exploiting his unusual dramatic opportunity. At the human level, those commonplaces function in protreptic (very often, for example, in Horatian *Odes*) to urge us to make the most of our lives while we can, or, in consolations, to encourage us to accept death, the common lot of all men. Orpheus 'cleverly' turns this all around: he addresses it not to mortals, but to the very deities who are never threatened by Death, the lords of Death themselves. They are thus obsequiously reminded of their power and asked to 'loan' Eurydice for a few years. This song has plumbed the depths of bathos; it is utterly frigid. In the Roman audience, it should have elicited smiles; Persephone should have burst into laughter. From the smaller earlier changes of emphasis, we may have suspected it; now we know that Ovid has taken away the tragic mood that Virgil sought. He has not allowed this Orpheus to express any sincere feelings for Eurydice.

In the way the two poets reported the effects of the song, there are two phases. Virgil spent ten lines describing the way Orpheus moved the lifeless spirits, as if he almost vitalized them by his warm human passion; hence, the symbolic value of the bird-simile (473-4). As Virgil realized, the responses of these masses of dead human beings would far more effectively convince us of the magic of Orpheus' singing than would the fabulous reacting of mythical monsters and incredibly tortured figures. Ovid quite consciously chooses to emphasize the fabulous: after three words to dispose of the normal dead ('ex-sanguis flebant animae' 41), he elaborates five lines of striking changes among the damned. Whereas Virgil contented himself with saying that the wheel on

which Ixion was spread stopped rolling (484), Ovid not only 'outdoes' Virgil – Ixion's wheel is stunned ('stupuit' 42) – but also reviews the other archetypal damned. He ends up with a hilarious alliterating apostrophe to Sisyphus: 'You sat down on your stone, Sisyphus' ('inque tuo sedisti, Sisyphus, saxo' 44).

We studied the way Virgil brought all his poetic powers to bear upon the moment when Orpheus looked back at Eurydice and lost her forever: the complex sentence he constructed, the dense series of moral terms, the blend of sympathy and blame, the emphasis on Eurydice as victim both through the unique speech he assigned her and through the device of 'seeing' the whole experience through her dimming eyes.¹¹ Virgil devotes eighteen superbly crafted lines to this critical sequence (485–502); Ovid handles it neatly and objectively in eleven (53–63). By limiting Orpheus' motives to fear, eagerness, and love ('metuens,' 'avidus,' 'amans' 56–7), Ovid rules out the powerful Virgilian theme of 'furor' and all the guilt which compounds the husband's later laments. He obviously knows what he is doing, for he goes on to reduce the fine Virgilian speech of Eurydice to the bare 'vale' and to state expressly (as if correcting Virgil) that Eurydice had no reason to complain of a husband actuated solely by love (60–1). Thus, a grand human tragedy becomes simplified into insipidity. However, when Ovid so ostentatiously denies Orpheus' guilt and so clearly refers back to Virgil's narrative, he invites us, I think, to look at things another way, to view Orpheus as a shallow, self-satisfied, self-indulgent 'lover' who could never perceive his own guilt, who would have to imagine Eurydice being grateful to him for his (doltish) passion even in her final moments!

Ovid has prevented Eurydice from playing any meaningful role in his narrative. He has eliminated her superb Virgilian speech; he has not allowed Orpheus to apostrophize her, to speak to her directly, or to describe her movingly in his laments. His only memorable detail about her was the bathetic innovation, that at Persephone's command she limped up (49). If Ovid's tale does this to Eurydice, we should not be surprised that it taints Orpheus' grief after her final disappearance. We can see this best in the comparative effects of the similes inserted at this juncture by the two poets. Virgil creates a convincing narrative framework concerning Orpheus' lonely song under the icy stars of Thrace, within which he sets the richly suggestive simile of the nightingale.¹² Our sympathies and our critical faculties are brought into play, and the wider thematic relevance of the story is called to our attention by the key detail of the 'durus arator.' Ovid's tactics tend to remove us from Orpheus, to make him an object of distant, learned mythology. He starts from a clever phrase: the 'double death' of Eurydice ('gemina nece' 64); and here, as elsewhere, cleverness produces a frigidity

which destroys appropriate feeling in the audience. Then, instead of describing warm active feelings of grief, he capitalizes on the opportunity to record a secondary metamorphosis, as he often does elsewhere, and has Orpheus so stunned ('stupuit' 64) by misery and shock as to seem petrified. We may perhaps be thankful that this unusually loquacious Orpheus has been rendered wordless here and relish the note of black humour. According to our narrator, then, Orpheus may be likened to a pair of men who indeed changed into stones: one man who saw Hercules carry up the monstrous Cerberus out of Hades and became stony in terror, a second who saw his wife metamorphosed into stone as punishment and prayed successfully, in innocence and love, that he might share her metamorphosis.

As we look more closely at these comparisons, recondite allusions to otherwise unknown myths, we suspect that Ovid has something else in mind than to provide a double insight into the way that Orpheus was petrified at the loss of his wife. Terror *could* be natural emotion, but here it is manifestly inept, because it calls attention to the selfish nature of the husband rather than to his regrets for her. (If we chose to be irreverent or insisted on Ovid's irreverence, we might suggest that the analogue for Eurydice in this simile is the three-headed Cerberus!). The second comparison seems more complex and insidious. Ostensibly it deals with Orpheus' love, but it also stresses the 'crimen' of the wife. Since, though the story itself is unknown, its basic elements parallel those of other tales, we can reconstruct the outlines as follows: Lethaea was beautiful, too beautiful, and in her foolish pride ('confisa figurae' 69) she provoked the anger of some female deity, most typically of Juno or Venus, who turned her into an ugly stone. Now absolutely none of that fits Eurydice. She may have been beautiful, but that detail is irrelevant to, and not mentioned by, either Virgil or Ovid. She certainly never did wrong or provoked a goddess's jealous fury. Lethaea's husband willingly took on her fate. Orpheus does no such thing. Indeed, as we shall see, Ovid changes the ending and makes the bard die not for his love of his wife but from his hatred of women. Thus, while Virgil unflinchingly requires us to perceive Orpheus as guilty (though pathetic), Ovid deflects the motif of guilt here most naughtily on to Eurydice.¹³

Both Virgil and Ovid follow Orpheus back to the banks of the Styx, where he appeals in vain to Charon to ferry him over again. Virgil subjectively conveys the man's torment by a series of so-called rhetorical questions that help to capture our sympathy. The stark line (506) about Eurydice, cold in death, aboard the very skiff that Orpheus longs to take, produces a strong contrast and implies Orpheus' realization of the finality of his loss. No time is specified. Ovid, however, all too realistically observes Orpheus for seven days after Charon's refusal. As befits a man in mourning, he must be

'squalidus,' his beard growing more and more unkempt. Then, since he is spending seven days in a region that cannot provide him food, the poet must call attention to that fact and immediately extract a rhetorical point from it: grief and tears were his 'food' ('cura dolorque animi lacrimaeque alimenta fuere' 75). Again, the cleverness forces us to savour the wit of the narrator at the expense of the mourner's grief. It seems like a pattern of calculated frigidity to alienate us from Orpheus.

Another insidious 'improvement' on Virgil appears soon after. Virgil said that Orpheus spurned 'Venus' (which has to be sex with women) and marriage (516); then, after another three lines about the continuing lament, he quickly comes to the resentful Thracian women ('spretae matres' 520) and their fatal attack on the bard. Ovid records the same rejection of sex with women, very pronouncedly and redundantly specifying 'femineam Venerem' (80), and he reports the women's resentment: 'multae doluere repulsae' (82). But he also speculates, and invites us to do so too, as to the reason for Orpheus' decision. Our options are: either he had promised Eurydice or he was discouraged, disgusted, or somehow 'turned off' by his abortive first marriage. This speculation and the highly indefinite rationale for the alternative I have cited second ('seu quod male cesserat illi' 80) raise the spectre of an egoistic husband who literally blames his wife for dying, even though he has been the cause, and then decides that marriage isn't worth the trouble. And now Ovid finishes off Orpheus by revealing the reason for the unusual and seemingly needless stress on *female* sex in 80: Orpheus reacts against women and marriage by deciding to gratify his sexual needs hereafter with boys. Ovid makes him the originator ('auctor' 83) of male homosexuality, a stereotyped shrill advocate who soon will couple his argument for pederasty with a violent misogyny. Not only does that alter our impression of Orpheus' grief, but it also decisively colours our view of the Thracian women's resentment and wild attack on the bard later. He has not only spurned them, as in Virgil, from loyalty to Eurydice; he has actively attacked them and viciously twisted the idea of female sexuality, having forgotten Eurydice. He deserves their hostility.

The long gap in Ovid's narrative between this final perverse development of Orpheus' selfish grief and his death further weakens any latent sympathy. As those who analyse the structure of the *Metamorphoses* comment, Orpheus' personal experiences dwindle and appear to function as a mere frame of little import for a series of very effective stories in 10.106ff.¹⁴ However, the stories, which are mainly told by Orpheus and which are *all* relevant to his new pederastic and misogynistic attitudes, cumulatively function to make us ignore his feelings about Eurydice (as over and dead) and force us to concentrate on the new interests, which cause his murder.¹⁵

Earlier, Ovid had skipped over the Virgilian detail of how nature responded to the husband's lament. Now, as his Orpheus begins to advocate love of boys, a host of trees come running (90ff). In themselves, the trees emphasize the new setting for Orpheus' song, no longer icy mountains but a shady, level patch of grass on a green hill, a cheery pastoral environment. Then, to make it clear that both singer and theme have changed, we hear that young Attis, now a pine tree, and Cyparissus 'puer,' now a cypress, have joined the throng of trees which respond to Orpheus' song. It seems obvious that this song features pretty young boys, not Eurydice.

It has frequently been noted by scholars that, unlike his contemporaries, Ovid shows no personal interest in pederasty. Therefore, when he 'builds Orpheus up in this fashion, we might well expect him to undercut the homosexuality. In fact, as the stories of boy-love unfold, Ovid's inescapable conclusion forces itself on us, if not on silly Orpheus, that boy-love ranks far below heterosexual love in terms of affection, mutual concern, and chances for extensive happiness. Cyparissus dies out of ridiculous grief for a dead deer rather than living for the satisfaction of Apollo. Apollo tries again with the boy Hyacinthus, but accidentally kills him while they are competing in the discus-throw, and again he is balked of his love (162ff). At the end of Book 10, Orpheus further contradicts his theme by singing of Adonis, who much prefers hunting to dallying with Venus, and consequently gets himself ripped open by a boar's tusk and dies in lamenting Venus' arms. Only one boy manages to survive to gratify his lover, and that is Ganymede, whom Jupiter snatches up to Olympus to be his cupbearer and who becomes the cause of discord with Juno ('invita Iunone' 161). Thus, Orpheus' advocacy of pederasty has proved self-contradictory: three out of four instances end with the death of the silly unresponding boy and the concomitant lamentation and frustration of the divine lover. Thus, this kind of love results in frustration similar to that from which Orpheus supposedly reacted in revulsion.

In support of his pederasty, Orpheus proposed to sing the misogynistic theme of how 'girls were driven wild by illicit passions and earned punishment by their lust' (153-4). Three stories, which are non-pederastic, might be considered in connection with this theme: those of Pygmalion (243ff), Myrrha (298ff), and Atalanta (560ff).¹⁶ The first of these starts from supreme misogyny and ends with perfect romantic love: Pygmalion reacts immaturely against all women after seeing a few prostitutes, tries to find satisfaction not with boys but with a statue of a beautiful woman, and ends by preferring the mortal and fallible woman to the statue. Here there is no illicit passion, and the ideal love of man and woman leads to happy marriage. The second story does indeed portray Myrrha acting on illicit passion and committing incest with her father, for which she is punished. However, the

account also undermines Orpheus' misogyny, because Myrrha exhibits a rich moral awareness and struggles against her passion; and, once her turpitude has been exposed, she willingly faces her penalty, and instead receives mercy, if not a kind of honour: she becomes a tree of precious myrrh. As for Atalanta, she clearly constitutes no argument for misogyny. She tries to avoid marriage because of a threatening prophecy, and she causes the deaths of numerous suitors until Hippomenes softens her heart. Against her own interests, with a maidenly modesty that earns our approval, she lets herself be defeated in the race and awarded as prize to the male, whose passions have been emphasized. Orpheus the singer fails to single out anything illicit in her behaviour, and indeed it is Hippomenes who by his lust brings punishment on them both. Thus, the stories of this supposedly incomparable bard fail to prove his points: boy-love ends in lamentation, not happiness; girl-love refuses to be reduced to a simple formula of libido and punishment, and in two cases out of three the girl is innocent and worthy of the romantic feelings of her husband. Ovid's Orpheus is weirdly incompetent.

When finally the bard stops singing, the moment comes for the Thracian women to exact their revenge. Ovid elaborates a marvellous scene in which Orpheus at first charms all the missiles the women hurl at him. Then, as the uproar drowns out the music, the women close in, first disposing of the audience of animals, snakes, and birds before tearing the singer apart. At this death, Ovid introduces the detail which he had refused to Eurydice, namely, the general mourning of nature (11.44ff). He follows this by his last significant parallel with Virgil:

membra iacent diversa locis; caput, Hebre, lyramque
excipis, et (mirum!), medio dum labitur amne,
flebile nescio quid queritur lyra, flebile lingua
murmurat examinis, respondent flebile ripae. (50-53)

(His limbs lie here and there about the fields; but his head and lyre are welcomed by you, river Hebrus, and – a veritable marvel – while they float down the river, the lyre laments something or other tearful, the lifeless tongue mutters a tearful message, and that tearful something is echoed back by the river banks.)

Ovid warns his audience of his tone by the apostrophe to the river and then by his ingenuous parenthetical 'mirum.' It is evident that this Orpheus cannot, as Virgil's could, sing with dying breath of poor Eurydice. For this one has long ago forgotten Eurydice and made the silliest of adjustments to grief by turning against women to boys. Ovid rejects him, and invites us to also, as he indifferently describes the last song of his 'hero,' once so flashily rhetorical and never before at a loss for clever words, as 'flebile nescio quid.'

In the total mass of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid's eighty-two lines about Orpheus' loss of Eurydice at the beginning of Book 10 and the long-postponed sequel about the singer's death at the opening of Book 11 do not possess major significance. They certainly do not operate in rich thematic antitheses with the chief themes of the epic, as Virgil made his Orpheus-story function. Nevertheless, Ovid did develop, I would maintain, more than a facile parody of Virgil. Whereas Virgil had made his central object the portrayal of irrational love as 'furor,' faulty though pathetic, Ovid inspects Orpheus' love and finds it wanting.¹⁷ He ignores the love of husband and wife at the time of marriage and scants Orpheus' grief when she first dies: Orpheus laments 'enough' to the upper air! Love first appears as an uncoloured abstract noun in the rhetorical argument for the release of Eurydice, in a context that makes Orpheus a cheap orator-poet, not a convincing lover. Love returns a second time as a participle ('amans' 57) to qualify the act of looking back. By this point, however, our impression of the shallowness of Orpheus' feelings should be well formed, and we cannot respond with the sympathy that Virgil generates in us. By his organization alone Ovid has revealed his emphasis: twenty-three lines for the rhetorical song in Hades versus eleven lines for the entire episode of losing Eurydice the second time. Thus, when he affects expressly to 'correct' Virgil and to insist that Eurydice had no cause of complaint (except that she was 'loved' 61), the irony is hard to mistake. Somebody is protesting too much. Guilt, which here is ostentatiously denied for Orpheus, is next implicitly shifted to Eurydice by the simile about Lethaea (68ff). Finally, Orpheus rejects Venus altogether and advocates that men should transfer their *amor* to boys. This seems a carefully planned thematic development. Orpheus' love lacks *furor* because it lacks genuine commitment; it is a self-indulgent masculine love that cannot perceive or feel the woman as a person, that blames Eurydice for dying, and that gives up women because they aren't worth the inconvenience. Ovid, exploring the tension between male and female, has opened up a rich vein for future adaptations of the myth.

But Orpheus is for Ovid more than a flawed lover: he is also a flawed poet. Virgil lays little emphasis on the poetic side of his Orpheus; it is subordinated entirely to the theme of unwise passion and uncreative grief. Hades and the animals and trees do not respond so much to his art as to the vital human warmth of his love. Ovid's Orpheus is a performer, egotistic, calculating, self-dramatizing. Having decided that he has sung enough to the unresponding upper air, he descends to Hades and tries his dubious art on a new audience. His patent devices turn passionate love into clever frigidity, but, ironically, his audience is so indiscriminating – like so many contemporary Roman audiences of performing poets and *rhetoires* – that he bewitches it. We

should not be fooled. For lack of an audience after Eurydice's disappearance, he cannot emote: he is struck dumb, petrified ('stupuit' 64).¹⁸ When, after three years of singing to the icy mountains, he comes down to grassy hills and a pastoral setting and tries out his new self-serving pederastic themes, he captures a prejudiced audience, a thicket of trees that include some metamorphosed boys who were once loved by gods. He continues this song and elaborates it with its antithesis, a misogynistic perversion of women's feelings of love, and now he miscalculates his audience. Even though the song gets out of hand and promotes a conclusion quite other than he intends, nevertheless the Thracian women take Orpheus according to his proclaimed misogyny and destroy their enemy.

Elsewhere in the poem, Ovid studies artists at work, and he is obviously delighted to expose the inadequacies of those whose reputations in myth seemed most secure. The Muses in Book 5 take on the challenge of the Pierides to a poetic competition. Thanks to a prejudiced panel of judges, the interminable, ill-planned, unfocused song of Calliope triumphs, but we are not convinced. Athena competes in Book 6 with Arachne in weaving, and even she, for all her prejudice, can find no fault in Arachne's tapestry. She has to resort to her superior force to win. Thus, the exposure of the mythical marvel, Orpheus, is not surprising: he is viewed in the perspective of the all-too-familiar contemporary phenomenon of corrupt rhetoricizing poetry. Ovid, who himself was often tempted to exploit his rhetorical talents and to impress his audience by superficial cleverness, would have been particularly sensitive to this kind of poetic inadequacy. As Ovid knows, the artist cannot remove feelings from existential situations and weave cold-blooded clever arguments around an abstract Love: one loves a person. Pygmalion's failure as an artist and his success as a human lover are Ovid's potent response to the myth of Orpheus. And here again Ovid has opened up a rich vein for future adaptation: the tension between lover and artist. Thanks to Virgil and Ovid, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice became a subject for sophisticated presentation in art.

NOTES

- 1 I assume, with most scholars, that the story of Orpheus and Eurydice recounted in *Culex* 268–95 is post-Virgilian, indeed derivative from *Georgics* 4.453ff.
- 2 I follow the argument of K. Ziegler 'Orpheus' in Pauly-Wissowa *Real Encyclopädie* 18:1 (Stuttgart 1939) cols 1268ff. For a different viewpoint, see the introductory essay of this collection.
- 3 Earlier, in *Eclogues* 6.79, Virgil had already described the tragic actions of Philomela before she and her husband Tereus were metamorphosed. In *Georgics*

- 4.15 he refers to her sister, changed into a swallow, her breast stained with blood.
- 4 For important discussions in English on the connections between Orpheus and Aristaeus, see B. Otis *Virgil, a Study in Civilised Poetry* (Oxford 1963) 190ff; C.E. Segal 'Orpheus and the fourth *Georgic*: Virgil on nature and civilisation' *American Journal of Philology* 87 (1966) 307–25; and D.S. Wender 'Resurrection in the fourth *Georgic*' *American Journal of Philology* 90 (1969) 424–36. L.P. Wilkinson in his *The Georgics of Virgil, a Critical Survey* (Cambridge 1969) 120 expresses considerable scepticism about multiple relationships between the two figures. See now M.C.J. Putnam *Virgil's Poem of the Earth: Studies in the Georgics* (Princeton 1979) 290ff.
- 5 Cf *Odyssey* 4.351ff. For analysis, see Otis *Virgil, a Study* 196–7.
- 6 As Otis also notes, when Aristaeus weeps helplessly by the seashore, then receives help from his mother, he parallels Achilles in *Iliad* 18.22ff. Achilles is in the depths of despair over the death of Patroclus, and he has lost his armour (worn by Patroclus into battle). The sea-nymph Thetis, Achilles' mother, starts him on his recovery of heroic position. A somewhat analogous situation occurs in *Odyssey* 2.260ff: Telemachus, after his tearful failure in the Ithacan assembly, believing his father lost, goes disconsolately to the seashore and prays for Athena's help. Her prompt assistance initiates his successful development toward maturity.
- 7 We are earlier led to believe that Proteus will supply Aristaeus with the precepts necessary to cope with his guilt and recoup his losses (398). In fact, Virgil portrays Cyrene as the one who gives the relevant *praecepta* (cf 548). By this change, he intensifies the picture of benevolent concern for Aristaeus and for his life-giving tasks; and this increases the contrast with Orpheus. See Otis *Virgil, a Study* 209ff.
- 8 I am assuming that the story of the revised ending of *Georgics* 4 is untrue or, if true, not demonstrable in the present finished state of the text. The final lines, 559–66, are not part of the thematic development; they produce a familiar ancient coda of autobiographical data, by which the poet brings his audience back from the world of the poem to everyday life.
- 9 Our basic information about Ovid's career comes from his autobiographical poem, *Tristia* 4.10.
- 10 For Ovid's use of Virgil in general, see the recent work of S. Döpp, *Virgilischer Einfluss im Werk Ovids* (Munich 1968), especially his valuable review of relevant scholarship in his first chapter. G.K. Galinsky *Ovid's Metamorphoses, an Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Berkeley 1975) 217ff, analyses 'Ovid's *Aeneid*' in *Metamorphoses* 13 and 14. For the relationship between Virgil's and Ovid's Orpheus, see B. Otis *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge 1970) 74 and 184–5; my edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses, Books 6–10* (Norman, Okla 1972) 475ff;

and C.E. Segal 'Ovid's Orpheus and Augustan ideology' *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 103 (1972) 473-94). See now A. Primmer 'Das Lied des Orpheus in Ovids *Metamorphosen*' *Sprachkunst, Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft* 10 (1979) 123-37.

- 11 See above p 29.
- 12 See above p 32.
- 13 Ultimately, this reference to joint metamorphoses of Lethaea and husband may also look forward to Ovid's plan in Book 11 to reunite Orpheus with Eurydice after his death.
- 14 Cf Otis *Ovid as an Epic Poet* 183ff.
- 15 The story of young Cyparissus, handsome and beloved of Apollo (10.106-42), is told by Ovid himself, but it clearly anticipates Orpheus' announced theme of 152-3: boys beloved by gods ('pueros dilectos superis').
- 16 The brief story of the Propoetides (238ff), who were punished as prostitutes, is by definition exempt from passion and female libido.
- 17 Ovid does not view 'furor' as so easily culpable as Virgil tends to. Ovid's characters who are afflicted with passion, usually women, are aware of its dangers, but struggle in vain to overcome it. Ovid could have represented Orpheus in this manner, had he wanted to. Ironically, though, it is Orpheus' portrait of Myrrha that epitomizes Ovid's special sense of 'furor.' Myrrha, despite her incest, emerges a far more sympathetic person than Orpheus.
- 18 Note that Ovid eliminates Virgil's affective phrase, 'multa volentem dicere,' from his list of Orpheus' reactions. Orpheus, as Ovid presents him, apparently had *nothing* to say to Eurydice at this critical moment any more than at other times. He never speaks to her alive or apostrophizes her dead.

ELEANOR IRWIN

The Songs of Orpheus and the New Song of Christ

ORPHEUS, THE SINGER whose music moved animate and inanimate creatures, is a figure by which Christ and his power may be understood. Such was the interpretation of Clement of Alexandria, a Christian Apologist and a student of Greek philosophy. Other writers from the New Testament period on had used Old Testament figures as types of Christ: Melchizedek as a type of Christ's high priestly function and Isaac as a type of Christ's sacrifice, to name only two. But Clement took the daring step of typifying Christ through a figure of Greek mythology.¹

Clement was writing near the end of the second century of the Christian era, when Christians were at times severely persecuted and at times merely despised by the world in which they lived.² Many Christian writers of this period defended their community against the attacks and insinuations of their pagan neighbours. This defence usually took the form of showing that Christians were doing no harm to anyone and that, because the sources of their faith were older than in other cultures, their beliefs were superior to those of their opponents. Some of these writers attempted to demonstrate a dependence of Greek ideas on Jewish thought.³

Clement wrote his *Protrepticus* or *Exhortation to the Greeks* to explain to his readers in terms which were familiar to them the meaning of his faith and its superiority to their religious beliefs and practices.⁴ In this work he shows himself conversant with Greek literature and Jewish Scriptures, with Greek cults and Christian tradition. Quotations and verbal reminiscences are woven into his text with missionary zeal; for however much he may have admired Greek culture, he was quite certain that the Greeks had so far missed the 'greatest of good things' – salvation through Christ the Word (*Protrepticus* 12, 262; 1.86.25-6). Odysseus had his men bind him to the mast of his ship so that he might be restrained from responding to the Sirens who lured sailors to