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Orpheus and Ficino

THIS CHAPTER and those that follow describe something of the career of the myth of Orpheus during the Renaissance. It should come as no surprise that there is no sudden or easily perceptible change in the treatment of the myth; allegorization, euhemerization, the encyclopedic treatment of mythology – all these go on apace. What is new is not easy to define. For Jean Seznec in his *Survival of the Pagan Gods*,¹ there is a 'reintegration' of the figures of pagan mythology, that is, they are divested of their medieval accretions and restored to classical form. This, however, is a brief moment of glory that belongs to the early Renaissance (the end of the fifteenth century) and soon fades. C.S. Osgood in his *Boccaccio on Poetry* remarks, 'The Renaissance, with its advance in classical scholarship, knew more and more about mythology, but took it less and less seriously. With the increase of knowledge the conviction of reality declines, at least in artistic use, and the old myths tend to become mere playthings, material of applied ornament and superficial decoration.'² The truth of both these comments can, I believe, be seen in the treatment of mythology by the Florentine Neoplatonists. Though their fanciful and antiquarian treatment of myth leads to trivialization by less earnest minds, the figures of myth themselves do for a brief moment recover in their hands something of their classical brilliance and their integrity. This is especially true of Orpheus.³

In his poem *Altercazione*, Lorenzo de' Medici takes a rest from his civic duties to wander among the fields and hills and muse on the virtues of the pastoral life. He encounters a philosophical and somewhat cynical shepherd, who tries to convince him that life in the country is tough and hard, and that those aspects of city life that disgust Lorenzo – ambition, acquisitiveness, and so on – are present in the country too. The polemic is stilled by the sound of a lyre:

... una nuova voce a sé gli trasse
da più dolci armonia legati e presi.
Pensai che Orfeo al mondo ritornasse ...⁴

(A new voice drew them towards itself, bound and taken captive by its sweeter harmony. I thought that Orpheus had returned to the world.)

It is Marsilio Ficino, who for the next five Cantos expounds in terms very close to his own *De voluptate* the nature of true happiness.

The identification of Ficino and Orpheus might be dismissed as a mere literary compliment appropriate to the contrived pastoral setting, if it did not recur with such frequency in a wide variety of literary forms and contexts. A poem of Naldo Naldi for instance traces the career of Orpheus' soul from Homer to Ficino.⁵ Each recipient inherits some aspect of Orpheus' gifts: song for Homer ('cantavit numeros novos'), ethical teaching for Pythagoras ('mores edocuisse proprios'), piety for Ennius. After the death of Ennius the soul of Orpheus must wait 1600 years for its next incarnation:

Marsilius donec divina e sorte daretur
indueret cuius membra pudica libens.
Hinc rigidas cythara quercus et carmine mulcet
atque feris iterum mollia corda facit.

(Until Marsilius should be granted by divine fate, whose chaste limbs he may willingly put on. Hence he soothes the unyielding oaks with his lyre and his song and softens once more the hearts of wild beasts.)

The conclusion echoes the opening ('mulcentur silvae'), and this together with the syntax (it is the soul of Orpheus that is the subject of 'mulcet') and the 'iterum' (once again) suggests that it is Ficino and he alone in whom Orpheus truly lives again. For him alone is reserved the privilege of inheriting the whole of Orpheus.

Andrea Ferucci's bust of Ficino which stands in the church of Santa Maria dei Fiori makes the same point in stone. Ficino is represented in the guise of the mythical lyre-player, his face alight and his mouth half-open to sing, and between his hands he holds, like a lyre, a volume of Plato.⁶ Poliziano puts it slightly differently: 'his lyre ... far more successful than the lyre of Thracian Orpheus, has brought back from the underworld what is, if I am not mistaken, the true Eurydice, that is Platonic wisdom with its broad judgment' ('longe felicius quam Thracensis Orphei ... veram ni fallor Eurydicen hoc est amplissimi iudicii Platoniam sapientiam revocavit ab inferis').

But Orpheus' voice and lyre are not only a metaphor to describe Ficino's

teaching. They are meant literally too. As Corsi tells us in his biography, 'He set forth the hymns of Orpheus and sang them to the lyre in the ancient manner with incredible sweetness, so people say.' ('Orphei hymnos exposuit, miraque ut ferunt dulcedine ad lyram antiquo more cecinit.'⁸) Johannes Pannonius says much the same: 'You restored to the light the ancient sound of the lyre and the style of singing and the Orphic songs which had previously been consigned to oblivion.' ('Antiquum cytharae sonum et cantum et carmina Orphica oblivioni prius tradita luci restituisses.'⁹) Cosimo de' Medici finishes a letter of invitation with the words: 'Farewell. And do not forget your Orphic lyre when you come.' ('Vale et veni non absque Orphica lyra.'¹⁰) Naldi wrote a pair of couplets to the image of Orpheus painted on Ficino's lyre: 'I am that Orpheus who moved the woods with his song,' ('Orpheus hic ego sum, movi qui carmine silvas ...'¹¹) Philippe Callimaque accompanies the gift of a shirt from Poland with some verses:

Orphea sed verum faciet te barbara vestis
cum tibi sit cantus illius atque lyra.¹²

(This foreign costume will make you a true Orpheus, since you already have his singing and his lyre.)

There can be no doubt then that Ficino played an 'Orphic' lyre, emblazoned with a picture of Orpheus; and that as he played he sang 'antiquo more' the Hymns of Orpheus. What is more difficult to decide is how seriously all this should be taken. Is it an important ingredient in Ficino's philosophy, or is it mere metaphor and play? Poliziano we will remember is nicknamed Hercules by Ficino for his skill at slaying the monsters of textual corruption. Landino is Amphion. It is hard to re-create the atmosphere of the Academy at Careggi, but the intense interest in and concern about man's soul and destiny was accompanied by a large ingredient of make-believe. The aesthetic and imaginative qualities of classical mythology provided a sense of 'detachment and joy'; but at the same time, as we shall see below, the content of the myths was treated seriously not simply as allegory, but as a set of symbols which if correctly read offered an understanding of higher levels of reality. So too the festivals and hymn-singing – on one side a 'jeu erudit,' on the other a seriously intended religious ritual. So that our question was wrongly formulated – metaphor and play were taken very seriously by the Florentine Neoplatonists. At the most profound level the activities of the Academy were 'a game of symbols and forms.'¹³

Ficino's epistolary, with its gently bantering tone and its delight in puns and word-play, gives us some insight into this closely meshed world of

communication where the line between metaphysics and good manners cannot always be determined. Two appropriate examples. First, Ficino writes a letter to Cavalcanti complaining that the latter will not visit him; he has tried in vain the lyre of Orpheus; but Cavalcanti is made not of stone or wood, but of iron.¹⁴ Second, Ficino writes to Cosimo de' Medici a letter accompanying a translation of the Orphic *Ὑμνος Οὐρανοῦ*, the *Hymnus ad Cosmum*, in which he says that he was singing the hymn, 'ritu Orphico,' to relax his mind, when the news arrived of Cosimo's offer of financial support. The last line of Ficino's translation of the hymn runs: 'Hear my prayer, Cosimo, grant a quiet life to a reverent young man.' ('Exaudi nostras, Cosme, preces vitamque quietam pio iuveni tribue;') there are subtle changes from the Greek – *κλῦθ' ἐπάγων ζωὴν ὁσιάν μύσῃ νεοφάντῃ* – especially 'quietam,' 'tribue,' and the direct address to Cosimo.) Ficino continues: 'By some instinct of divine inspiration you seem to have heard at that very moment at which I sang the hymn, and to have granted me the very things that the prayer was asking for.' ('Tu autem celesti quodam afflatus instinctu exaudisse videris eo ipso tempore, quo a nobis relatus est hymnus, atque eadem que vota obsecrant tradidisse.')¹⁵ Do we take this as gratitude for patronage expressed in an elegant pun, or an assertion of the power of the Orphic hymns?¹⁶

We have evidence from a hostile witness, Luigi Pulci, not only that Ficino was well known, indeed notorious, for his singing and chanting, but also that they were an integral part of his philosophizing. In his Sonnet 90 he describes Ficino as 'lo dio delle cicale,' and in Sonnet 145 he speaks of those who:

Aristotil allegano e Platone
e vogliono ch'ella in pace requiesca
fra suoni e canti e fannosi una tresca
che t'empie il capo di confusione.¹⁷

Finally, if we need further evidence that Ficino himself took his singing and playing seriously, the following well-known passage is conclusive: 'This age, like a golden age, has brought back to the light those liberal disciplines that were practically extinguished, grammar, poetry, oratory, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and the ancient singing of songs to the Orphic lyre.' ('Hoc enim seculum tanquam aureum liberales disciplinas ferme iam extinctas reduxit in lucem, grammaticam, poesim, oratoriam, picturam, sculpturam, architecturam, musicam, antiquum ad Orphicam Lyram carminum cantum.')¹⁸ The climax of the list of achievements that mark the dawn of a new golden age is 'the ancient singing of songs to the Orphic lyre.'

Why was Orpheus so important to Ficino? Before attempting an answer

we must be sure what we are trying to account for. The presence of references to and quotations from Orphic teaching in Ficino should occasion no surprise. One important ingredient in the unique hotchpotch that makes up Ficino's philosophy is of course the writings of the Greek Neoplatonists in general and Proclus in particular. It became an orthodoxy to the Neoplatonists that Plato was drawing on Orpheus in developing his own philosophy. 'In every respect Plato imitates the teaching of Orpheus,'¹⁹ says Olympiodorus; or in the words of Proclus: 'All Greek theology is the offspring of the Orphic mystical doctrine.'²⁰ We shall have occasion to discuss below the significance of Orpheus the *poeta theologus* for Ficino and his contemporaries. My purpose now is merely to show that we should rather remark the absence than the presence of Orphic quotations in the followers of the Greek Neoplatonists.

But it is the whole figure of Orpheus, three-dimensional and real, not just his theoretical teaching, that is drawn into Ficino's thought. And this I believe is something one does not find in Proclus or in the later eastern Neoplatonic tradition. For the Byzantine artist the image is justified in that it raises the mind to God; for the Renaissance artist the image is also enjoyed and explored for its own sake.²¹ Myth grows from allegory into symbol, and as it grows it puts on flesh. One can see the process occurring by comparing the abstract moral allegorizing of Landino with the concreteness and plasticity of Poliziano, for whom the illustrative moment has its own autonomy, its own right to exist and be cherished.²² One can only guess how much is owed to Gemisto Pletho who brought his baggage of Byzantine Neoplatonism to Italy by way of Islam and Zoroastrianism, giving it a new exoticism and a new paganism.²³ The gods of antiquity acquire again a significance as powers within the universe; nothing perhaps that was not already present in the Henads of Proclus, but introduced afresh into a Christian context. More important, however, is the continuity of the iconographic tradition through the western Middle Ages and its meeting with the rediscovery of ancient art. However much he is sucked bloodless by the allegory that spreads from Boethius and Fulgentius, Orpheus remains a person in the illustration of the manuscripts of the *De consolazione* or of *Ovide moralisé*.²⁴ Pletho's use of pagan mythology, like his hymn-singing, is self-conscious and intellectual: for Ficino and his companions at Careggi it is rather a mixture of aesthetic delight and simple piety.

Perhaps the most familiar image of Orpheus to the Italian Renaissance is that of Orpheus the civilizer. The *locus classicus* is Horace *Ars Poetica* 391ff: Orpheus the first poet is the first to soften the hearts of the 'stony and beastly people' and set them on the path to civilization.²⁵ His instrument is his

eloquence (for Boccaccio the lyre is 'oratoria facultas'²⁶). Since Fulgentius²⁷ Orpheus has been allegorically interpreted as *Oraia phone* – beautiful voice; in William of Conches and Nicholas Trivet he is that divine eloquence which the Christian must aim to combine with true wisdom.²⁸ For Clement and the early apologists Orpheus prefigures the *logos*, which leads men to the truth and announces the coming of the New Jerusalem.²⁹ These elements interwoven provide a key concept for the Renaissance, what Buck calls 'die spezifische Bildungsidee.'³⁰ Humanism represents the moral action of the word fashioning the raw materials of primitive man into a civilized member of a community. As Boccaccio puts it: 'He makes wild beasts gentle, that is to say bloody and rapacious men whom eloquence often recalls to gentleness and humanity.' ('Feras mites facit, id est homines sanguinis rapacesque, quos saepissime eloquentia revocat in mansuetudinem et humanitatem.'³¹) And Landino describes how 'loquenzia' leads men, who are like wild beasts dwelling in the woods without laws or customs, to live together in a community and submit themselves to justice: 'and this is precisely what the poets meant when they said that Orpheus could make the wild beasts tame with his lyre, make the rocks and woods move and halt streams in their courses; that he could with his sweet speech bring to civilization men who were insensitive to virtue as though made of stone and who were crazed and maddened by the pleasures of the body.'³²

This is a social and political programme. Orpheus is the statesman or legislator who with his *dolce parlare* brings men to live together in communities. This civil life is the essence of *humanitas* – man is a political being. In Ficino the emphasis is rather metaphysical and moral. The skilful speaker is replaced by the artist, who looks within himself to discover the harmony of the cosmos, and by artistry leads others to an understanding and beyond. Indeed the artist not only reflects, he creates; he is 'costruttore de sé.'

sic species terris, vitae sua forma, suosque
dis honor, ipsa sibi tandem sic reddita mens est.³³

(Thus the earth is given its beauty, life its shape, the gods their honour and mind itself at last becomes itself.)

The artist by fashioning our perceptions of the sensible world and by his privileged access to its secrets is able to act on it and change it; those magical powers which Orpheus lost in Horace's euhemeristic interpretation are, as we shall see, returned to him with interest.³⁴

And there is a corresponding deepening in the concept of *humanitas*. It is

that by which man is defined and it consists in the capacity for love. 'Venus [significat] humanitatem.'³⁵ Humanity is the love that extends throughout the universe as manifested in man. Thus, the effect of Orpheus' song is to lead man to love.

What is the song he sings? Not far behind Orpheus the civilizer comes Orpheus the theologian. Here we are dealing with a figure of a different order, not a mythical hero, redefined by allegory, but a historical personage (for such he undoubtedly was to the *quattrocento*), religious teacher, and author of a number of works (especially the *Rhapsodic Theogony*, the *Argonautica*, and the *Hymns*) which had a great influence on the period in general and on Ficino in particular.³⁶ We have seen that to the early Neoplatonists he was the theologian par excellence. Already for Porphyry he is 'the oldest and foremost of all theologians.'³⁷ He is the *ἐξηγητής*, the interpreter of reality, who speaks *ἐνθέω στόματι*, inspired of God.³⁸ Christian and pagan vie for his adherence. Orpheus, says Augustine, is said 'to have predicted or spoken truth of the Son of God or the Father' ('De Filio dei aut Patre vera praedixisse seu dixisse perhibetur'³⁹). So too in the early Renaissance he is the *theologus poeta* to Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Salutati.⁴⁰ Indeed by this time Orpheus has become one in a chain of poets and teachers who represent the unbroken tradition of the *prisca theologia*. There are various different versions of the line of descent, but the chief recurrent figures are Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato. Orpheus holds a key position as the first of the Greeks to belong to the *theologi* and as the teacher of Pythagoras and Plato. Plato for Numenius is nothing else than Moses speaking Greek.⁴¹ Orpheus is the go-between in the liaison between Hebrew and Greek. The results of this doctrine are far-reaching: pagan religion is not something to be shunned and feared, but a source of truth, a partial evolution. Religion is treated not as a revelation, but as a natural evolutionary phenomenon depending for its development on a few individuals of superior knowledge and will-power. Christianity is a continuation of ancient theological thought. Whether it marks the end-point is a question never fully answered.⁴²

It would be a vain task to enumerate all the doctrinal elements in Ficino that can be traced to Orphic influence. The Neoplatonists had demonstrated that given the will and the ingenuity anything can be shown to be Orphic, and thus they emptied the exercise of much of its meaning. But several examples should be given, both for their intrinsic importance, and also as examples of method. It is as cosmologist that Orpheus is most familiar. In the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius as later in the 'Orphic' *Argonautica* he sings to the heroes of the Creation of the World, how Chaos came before the world and the other

gods, and how love came to being in the bosom of Chaos.⁴³ The primacy of love in Orphism is one of the most important things that Ficino learned from it. 'Omnia enim ex te sunt' (for all things come from thee), says the Orphic *Hymn to Venus* in Ficino's translation. In *Convivium* 1.3 Ficino quotes 'Orpheus': love is 'antiquissimum, se ipso perfectum, consultissimumque' (very ancient, perfect in itself and very wise), and then offers the following exegesis. He starts by outlining the levels of reality: God, Angelic Mind, the World Soul, the World Body. Of the worlds created by God, each was a *chaos*, so an unformed world, before it became a *mundus*. Let us follow the creation of Mind. In the first place God creates its substance or essence. At the first moment of creation this is shapeless and dark. As it is born of God, it turns towards God, its origin, through some inborn appetite. And once turned it is lit up by the rays of God's light. Its appetite is inflamed by that brightness. So it devotes itself entirely to God ('totus inhaeret'); and thus it is fashioned. So before the *mundus* (cosmos), there is *chaos*; the turning to God is the beginning of love; which in turn leads to the fashioning and shaping of the cosmos. Orpheus is thus right in saying that love is 'antiquissimum'; it is 'se ipso perfectum' (which Ficino interprets as meaning 'se ipsum perficiendum' or self-perfecting) since the object created completes its own creation by turning in its love towards its creator – the importance of this idea will become apparent when it is applied to man the artist; and it is 'consultissimum' because all wisdom is the result of the love that turns the mind to God so that it shines with God's brightness. The passage as a whole provides an instructive example of the way in which Ficino adapts an Orphic passage to his own peculiar brand of Christian Neoplatonism – the three hypostases, the triad of procession, rapture, and reversion, and the overwhelming emphasis on the love of God.

Another important doctrine associated with Orphism is the insistence on the unity and singleness of the *cosmos*. This issue is one that is fundamental to all Greek philosophy and religious thought. It has been called the problem of the One and the Many: 'how shall all be one, yet each thing apart?'⁴⁴ This is expressed philosophically in words ascribed to Orpheus' pupil Musaeus: *ἐξ ἑνὸς τὰ πάντα γίνεσθαι, καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἀναλύεσθαι* (everything comes to be out of one and is resolved into one);⁴⁵ and mythologically in the so-called *κατάποσις Φάνητος*: Zeus according to the myth swallowed down Phanes the first-born and the whole of his creation.⁴⁶ 'Here was a system which, on the side of doctrine, taught of the absorption of everything, gods included, into one god, and their rebirth from him again, and on the side of active religion taught the complementary idea of the worship of one god above all others.'⁴⁷ Zeus, in the words of a hymn which in some form dates back to

Plato, is beginning, middle, and end.⁴⁸ Or, as Ficino puts it translating an Orphic Hymn,⁴⁹ Jupiter, the sky, is 'omniparens principium omnium omniumque finis.' Jupiter contains within himself all the other gods; they are his powers. Orpheus 'deos omnes in uno collocat Jove.'⁵⁰ For the Neoplatonist such teachings could be used to support the emanation from and return to the One. 'A bono in bonum omnia diriguntur' (everything is directed from the Good to the Good), read one of the mottoes on the walls of the villa at Careggi. For the Christian they might seem to offer support to monotheism and the doctrine of the Trinity.⁵¹ They provide some standing room for the Christian Neoplatonist, a justification for accepting the multiple gods of paganism while remaining within the confines of Christian orthodoxy.

Orpheus, of course, is not just *theologus* but *theologus poeta*. He is the first poet to celebrate the mysterious principles that underlie the universe. It is because he is a poet, because he has skill and inspiration, that he is able to understand and is privileged to tell of these mysteries. He sings *ἐνθέω στόματι*; he is possessed with the *furor divinus*. He is an artist and this world, this 'bel tempio,' is a work of art; he has privileged access to its secrets and to the mind of its architect. Here myth and pseudo-history come together; the singer with his lyre is the one who understands cosmic secrets:

Hor se la tua lyra havessi Orpheo
Canterei come et gli elementi et il mondo
Ditermindò e infinito il signor feo
In numero creò misura et pondo
Tempio si bel che tre persone sembra
Nume divino mirabile et profondo.⁵²

(Now if I had your lyre Orpheus, I would sing how the infinite Lord established and made the elements and the world, created in number, measure and weight a temple so beautiful that it resembles three persons, a divine godhead, marvellous and profound.)

The lyre, given, as Gafurio tells us,⁵³ to Orpheus by Mercury and by Orpheus to Pythagoras, confers the divine right, like the sceptre of Agamemnon. It represents the harmony of the spheres, its seven strings standing for the seven planets.⁵⁴ And it is more than a symbol; mathematically the intervals of the Orphic lyre are the structural basis of the entire visible universe⁵⁵ and of the human soul.⁵⁶ It offers an assurance on the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm. Man by exploring his own interior space finds a structure in the microcosm identical with that of the macrocosm.⁵⁷ He finds the lyre within himself and 'explicates' it, as Cusanus put it.

'Neque ex aliquo extrinseco, sed ex propria mente' (and not from something outside himself but from his own mind).⁵⁸ The lyre makes explicit the assumption that underlies all Platonic 'realism' that the route to the truth lies through introspection, that the structure of the mind is identical with the structure of reality: 'Begin by considering thyself and better still, end with that.'⁵⁹

For Ficino there are two types of music. First there is the divine music, which is itself divisible into two – the music in the mind of God and the music of the spheres. And then there are the *imagines* of the divine music in the human soul. This reflection of the divine music is expressed in various forms and at various levels – as reason, imagination, discourse, song, instrumental playing, and dance.⁶⁰ 'We see then that the music of the soul gradually spreads to all the limbs of the body. And it is this that orators, poets, painters, sculptors and architects express in their works.' ('Videmus igitur animae musicam gradatim ad omnia corporis membra deduci. Quam etiam oratores, poetae, pictores, sculptores, architecti in suis operibus imitant.') It is not only the musicians in the narrow sense but all the artists who express this divine music of the soul.

God granted us these two types of music 'so that through the former [ie, the divine] we might imitate God himself in our thought and feelings [music is thus a paradigm of the mind of God], and through the latter we should celebrate the name of God for ever with hymns and instrumental music.' ('Ut per illam quidem deum ipsum cogitationibus affectibusque imitemur per hanc vero Dei nomen hymnis sonisque semper celebraremus.'⁶¹)

This then is the most obvious explanation for Ficino's own hymn-singing. But if we examine his analysis of the physical basis of music we can begin to understand what he thought was the precise effect of these hymns of praise. In his letter *De musica* to Canisianus he describes how singing and instrumental music start from the mind, the imagination, and the heart (of the player) and are translated into movements and controlled disturbances of the air; these impulses strike the *spiritus* of the listener, being itself composed of air. The *spiritus* is the *nodus* of soul and body – the meeting-point of the physical and the psychological. Thus the impulses can easily be translated back into psychological terms and reach the imagination, heart, and innermost mind of the listener. ('Nam cum cantus sonusque ex cogitatione mentis et impetu phantasiae cordisque affectu proficiscatur, atque una cum aere fracto et temperata aereum audientis spiritum pulset, qui animae corporisque nodus est, facile phantasiam movet, afficitque cor et intima mentis penetralia penetrat.'⁶²)

What exactly is the *spiritus*? The simplest answer is found at *Convivium* 6.6. We consist of three parts, *anima*, *spiritus*, and *corpus*. *Anima* and *corpus* being very different in nature are held together by *spiritus*, which is 'a very

fine and transparent vapour, generated from the subtlest part of the blood through the heat of the heart' ('Vapor ... tenuissimus et perlucidus, per cordis calorem ex subtilissima parte sanguinis genitus'). It acts as a go-between transmitting the *animae vires* to the body, and transforming sense-experience into the purer perceptions of the imagination. As it is 'an airy vapour from the blood' ('aereus sanguinis vapor') it is tempered and nourished 'by scents and sounds and songs that consist of air' ('aereis ... odoribus sonisque et cantibus'⁶³).

What we have been talking of so far is the *spiritus humanus*, that which links the human body and soul. But there is also a *spiritus mundanus*, which 'interconnects the sublunary world with the translunary.'⁶⁴ *Spiritus* in its fullest sense is 'a divine influx, flowing from God, penetrating through the heavens, descending through the elements and finishing up in lower nature' ('Divinus influxus, ex Deo manans, per coelos penetrans, descendens per elementa, in inferiorem naturam desinens'⁶⁵). It is 'an uninterrupted current of supernatural energy [which] flows from above to below and reverts from below to above, thus forming a "*circuitus spiritualis*."⁶⁶

The musician plugs into this current. The aim of his hymns is to bring the *spiritus* of man into accord with the *spiritus mundi*; or more particularly to make man accessible to the *influence* of the *spiritus* of a particular astral body. This is brought about in the first instance by our own predisposition, by an act of love; and only then by the magical techniques of song, light, and scent. It is important that the music, perfume, etc be appropriate to the deity being invoked. 'Our *spiritus* is in conformity with the rays of the heavenly *spiritus*, which penetrates everything either secretly or obviously. It shows a far greater kinship when we have a strong desire for that life and are seeking a benefit that is consistent with it, and thus transfer our own *spiritus* into its rays by means of love, particularly if we make use of song and light and the perfume appropriate to the deity like the hymns that Orpheus consecrated to the cosmic deities ...' Ficino then gives a list of deities and the appropriate scents. 'For the *spiritus*, once it has been made more akin to the deity by emotional disposition, song, perfume, and light, draws a richer influence from it.' ('Spiritus noster radiis illius [ie, spiritus caelestis] tam occultis quam manifestis omnia penetrantibus [est conformis]. Evadit etiam longe cognatior, quando erga vitam illam [caelestem] vehementer afficimur, consentaneum illi beneficium exoptantes, atque ita spiritum nostrum in illius radios transferentes amore: praesertim si cantum et lumen adhibemus, odoremque numini consentaneum quales Orpheos hymnos mundanis numinibus consecravimus ... Spiritus enim per affectum, cantum, odorem, lumen, cognatior affectus numini, uberiores haurit illinc influxum.'⁶⁷)

Ficino in his hymn-singing is in part drawing on a Neoplatonic tradition.

Plotinus tells us that it was possible to provoke astral influences *εὐχαῖς ἢ ἀπλαῖς ἢ τέχνῃ ᾄδομέναις* – by prayers either delivered in a simple straightforward way or *technēi*, artistically, with special skill.⁶⁸ Proclus, we are told, studied and sang the Orphic hymns and practised Orphic ritual.⁶⁹ Whether they were the same hymns that Ficino translated and sang, we cannot be sure. Each of the latter as they have come down to us is prefaced by instructions on the appropriate perfume to burn during performance, and the whole collection is prefaced by an address from Orpheus to Musaeus in which he promises to teach him *θυηπολία* – the proper way to perform sacrificial rites. Most scholars are agreed that the hymns are of relatively late composition (third-to-fourth century AD), and that they did in fact serve as a hymnal for an eclectic pagan sect that described itself as Orphic (although there is little evidence of specifically Orphic doctrine in the hymns' content).⁷⁰ Gemisto Pletho recurs as an important but shadowy figure in the handing down of this tradition. He does not in his surviving works mention either Orpheus or the Orphic writings. But we know that hymn-singing played a large part in his reconstructed paganism, and that he devoted a chapter of his *Nomoi* to 'Hymns to the Gods' and another to 'The Arrangement of the Hymns.' We have evidence also that he copied out fourteen of the Orphic Hymns. It may be that it was Pletho's appearance at the Council of Florence in 1438 that awakened in the West an interest in this ritual practice. There are, however, significant differences in the motives underlying the hymn-singing of Pletho and that of Ficino. As Walker tells us⁷¹ Pletho saw the effect of the hymn-singing as subjective rather than objective. It did not actually reach the gods, but prepared or 'moulded' our imaginations. Ficino's motives are more direct and straightforward, and closer to the theurgic tradition of Iamblichus and Proclus. The singing of hymns can prepare man's *spiritus* to receive the influx of *spiritus* from a particular astral body. Music recovers its powers of magic, its ability to exploit and turn to advantage the forces of the phenomenal world. 'Nothing is more effective in natural magic,' says Pico, 'than the hymns of Orpheus, if the proper music, mental concentration and other circumstances which the wise are aware of be applied.' ('Nihil efficacius hymnis Orphei in naturali magia, si debita musica, animi intentio et caeterae circumstantiae, quas norunt sapientes, fuerint adhibitae.'⁷²)

The astral deity most frequently invoked is the sun. Ficino, like Orpheus on Mt Pangaeus, is 'Apollinei modulator carminis'⁷³ (he tunes Apollo's song). Here he is consciously following the tradition of the *Platonici*: 'Julian and Iamblichus composed orations to the sun. Plato called the sun the

offspring and visible image of God; Socrates as he greeted the rising sun often experienced a state of ecstasy; the Pythagoreans sang hymns to the sun on their lyres ... God indeed has set his tabernacle in the sun.'⁷⁴ The sun is the leader of the heavenly bodies; they dance to his tune: 'This troupe of Muses sings and dances without stopping, as Orpheus says, shaping their tune to the command of Apollo.' ('Haec Musarum chorea cantat saltatque perpetuo, ut ait Orpheus, musicis modulis ad Apollinis ipsius imperium.'⁷⁵) As the tabernacle of God, or the son and visible image of the highest deity, the sun in some way represents that deity within the sensible world. 'Light is so to speak a sort of divinity in this temple of the world bearing a likeness to God.' ('Lumen est quasi numen quoddam in mundano hoc templo Dei similitudinem referens.'⁷⁶) The invocation to the sun then is something more than an attempt to exert a magical control over the forces contained within phenomena; it is an attempt to lead the soul to an understanding of God.

The sun stands as a symbol for God. Each level of reality has its appropriate mode of perception – sense-perception, discursive reason, intuitive reason – and the objects of perception take the appropriate form: 'Among angels examples and ideas; among souls reasons and concepts; in the physical world shapes and images.' ('In angelis exemplaria et ideae; in animis rationes et notiones; in orbis materia formae atque imagines.'⁷⁷) The relationship between the images of the sensible world and the ideas of the angelic is one of identity at different levels or reality. This world is the 'tertius dei vultus' – the third face of God. Nature is seen not as a chain of causes and effects, but as a set of signs and symbols.⁷⁸ 'The world is the book in which God's eternal wisdom has written.'⁷⁹ The whole cosmos is held together by obscure links and sympathies both between levels and within levels. To communicate with the world of *anima* (soul), we use science or magic; to communicate with the world of *mens* (mind), we use 'the comparative method,' what Ficino calls *Orphica comparatio*; that is, we pursue the images or symbols of the phenomenal world to their originals (this applies as much to the myths as the physical objects of the world; allegory is reified into symbol). Man being of a double nature cannot proceed direct to the level of the angels. He must first traverse the world of *anima*.⁸⁰

The *Orphica comparatio* is then a kind of symbolic description; at the literal level Ficino is talking about the nature of the sun; but what he is really talking about is the nature of God.⁸¹ The comparison of the sun to God is however something more than an example of method; it also contains for Ficino the essential Orphic mystery, the symbolic explanation of unity in multiplicity: God is 'the eye by which all eyes see, and, according to Orpheus,

the eye which sees everything in every object, and truly sees everything in himself.' ('Oculus quo omnes vident oculi, et, ut inquit Orpheus, oculus qui cuncta in singulis inspicit, ac re vera omnia conspiciunt in se ipso, dum esse se perspicit omnia.'⁸²) 'And so the divine mind, as it is infinite, is properly called by the Orphics the infinite eye.' ('Quapropto divina mens cum sit infinita merito nominatur ab Orphicis ἄπειρον ὄμμα, id est oculus infinitus.'⁸³)

The singer (or artist) performs in an inspired state 'aroused by the Muses' frenzy' ('musarum concitus oestro').⁸⁴ 'Then his eyes burn, and he rises up on both feet and he knows how to sing tunes that he has never learnt.' ('Tunc ardent oculi, tunc planta exsurgit utraque, / et quos non didicit comperit ille modos.'⁸⁵) It is this state of God-given frenzy, this *furor divinus*, that enables the mind to perceive and understand the symbolic structure of the universe. It is *divinus* because it comes from God and raises to God. The artist under the influence of this madness is free to range beyond his normal limits, he is lifted to the height of heaven like Ganymede on the back of the divine eagle. The state of inspiration is visible in the rapt expression on the face and the 'Orphic' pose.⁸⁶ There are four phases or levels of *furor*, the poetic, the sacerdotal, the prophetic, and the erotic. The first calms the agitation of the soul, the second prepares it for exaltation, the third raises the soul from its own level to the level of the angels, and the fourth unites the soul with God.⁸⁷ For Ficino, Orpheus is possessed of all four *furores*: he is poet, priest, prophet, and lover. Only he and David have this status; only he among the pagans comes so close to God.

Ficino also speaks of certain conditions which free the soul from everyday concerns and open it to the 'influxus mentium superiorum' (the influence of higher minds). These he calls states of 'vacatio' or 'alienatio': 'When the influence finds our reason unoccupied or devoting itself to the mind, it shows it something of those things which pertain to the universal knowledge of eternal matters or to the governance of the cosmos.' ('Quando mentium ille influxus rationem nostram sortitur ociosam, sive menti vacantem, ipsi aliquid ostendit eorum quae ad universalem aeternarum rerum cognitionem seu mundi gubernationem pertinent.'⁸⁸) Among the seven types that he mentions are sleep and syncope, melancholy and, greatest of all, 'the chastity of a mind devoted to God.' Orpheus 'in the wilds of Thrace' after the second loss of Eurydice lived close to the Gods and learnt to think as they did ('eadem quotidie cogitat, quae caelestia numina cogitant facere'); he abjured the love of women and lived a life of chastity; and he sought solace for his loss in the music of his lyre and in the loneliness of nature. It was a period of introspection, of melancholy self-examination.⁸⁹ As Chastel describes it, Ficino regarded melancholy as a physiological condition necessary in order to

achieve exceptional mental states; it was a prerequisite for *furor*. It was induced by the planet Saturn, who stands in antithesis to Venus, like the love and strife of Empedocles. Venus joins together and Saturn sets apart. The anguish that comes from self-absorption and loneliness detaches the soul from the world of appearances (Saturn destroys the kingdom of Jupiter), jerks it out of its natural position, so that it is free to move either up or down. The proper remedy for melancholy is sublimation – the *furor divinus* then catches up the dissociated mind and raises it to God.⁹⁰

Orpheus the self-conscious artist. The phrase brings together two themes which are of great importance for Ficino and his time. The notion of the dignity of man, which gets its best-known treatment from Pico della Mirandola, is already familiar to classical antiquity. 'There are many marvels,' says the Chorus of Sophocles' *Antigone*, 'but nothing is more marvellous than man.' And some 600 years later a similar sentiment is expressed in the Chaldaean Oracles: 'O man, invention of nature at her boldest.' (ὦ τολμηροτάτης φύσεως ἄνθρωπε τέχνασμα.⁹¹) In the Hermetic writings there is a significant difference of emphasis. It is not so much man as a creation who is held up for our attention, but man the creator. Man's special status stems from the intermediary position of the human soul which can range from the bestial to the divine. 'Man is a great miracle, a creature fit to be worshipped and honoured. For he crosses over to the nature of a god, as though he were himself a god ... God composed him out of both natures, divine and mortal, and thus it was arranged through the will of God that the constitution of man was superior even to that of the gods.' ('Magnum miraculum est homo, animal adorandum atque honorandum. Hoc enim in naturam dei transit, quasi ipse sit deus ... [deus] ex utraque natura composuit, divina atque mortali, et sic compositum est per voluntatem dei hominem constitutum esse meliorem et deis.') And his privileges are manifested in his power to create; it is as 'artifex' that he is 'deus in terris.' The startling conclusion is reached that man shows these powers to the highest degree in the creation of the gods, ie, the bringing alive of statues. 'Just as the Lord and Father made the eternal gods so that they should both be like him, so let mankind fashion its gods in the likeness of its own face.' ('Sicut pater ac dominus, ut sui similes essent deos fecit aeternos, ita humanitas deos suos ex sui vultus similitudine figuraret ... statuas animatas sensu et spiritu plenas.'⁹²) Pico is not the first to present a strange and disconcerting mixture of humanism and occultism. Man's creative powers are shown best in the practice of theurgic magic.

Ficino is clearly drawing directly on this tradition. In Book 14 of the *Theologia Platonica* he cites both the passages from the oracles (Chapter 1)

and from the *Asclepius* ('magnum miraculum' in Chapter 3). In Book 13, Chapter 3, where his object is to prove the immortality of the soul by showing the extent of its power, he deals at length with the notion of man the 'artifex.'⁹⁶ 'It is a remarkable thing that the human arts fashion on their own whatever nature herself fashions, as though we were not the servants of nature but her rivals.' ('Quod mirabile est humanae artes fabricant per seipsas quaecunque fabricat ipsa natura: quasi non servi simus naturae sed aemuli.') Man controls the elements and the other animals that inhabit the world; in this respect, 'vicem gerit dei' (he stands in for God). But more than this, he creates for the pleasure of creation and for the delight in sense experience. 'Hence proceeds the unspeakable variety of pleasures which bring delight to the five bodily senses, pleasures which we ourselves devise by our own genius.' ('Hinc proficiscitur innarrabilis varietas voluptatum hos quinque sensus corporis oblectantium, quas ipsimet nobis proprio ingenio machinamur.') (This aesthetic delight in the senses is something new that the Florentines gave to Neoplatonism; one cannot imagine Plotinus, for all his sense of beauty, saying anything like this.) This creativity manifests itself in textiles, paintings, sculptures, buildings, artistic activities which may not in themselves be functional or useful, or even pleasant; but they satisfy man's aesthetic need to create. Similarly 'musicae consonantia ... oratorum facundia,' 'poetarumque furores' are activities we pursue even though they bring no material benefit, but are often hurtful ('sed plurimum noxiae'). We are imitating the activities of God the creator. We are equipped with an 'artifex interior' (the soul) which uses as its instruments the tongue and the hand. We are doing in our own way what God is doing: 'So our mind conceives within itself by thought as many things as God creates in the universe by thought. Just so many things does it express in the air by speaking, does it write with a pen on paper, does it fashion in matter by manufacturing.' ('Ergo tot concipit mens in seipsa intelligendo quot deus intelligendo facit in mundo. Totidem loquendo exprimit et in aere. Totidem calamo scribit in chartis. Totidem fabricando in materia mundi figurat.')

If we ask how this can be so, how the mind can conceive what does not already exist in nature, the answer is that everything that is possible, that has potential existence, already exists in the infinite mind of God. Now the human mind has the capacity to conceive possibilities that do not exist. It can proceed to infinity. 'Quis infinite progreditur? ... mens certe haec facit.'⁹⁷ The mind in fact can conceive something 'which, as possible, is already real in God.'⁹⁸ Man the artist follows in the footsteps of God the artist. Man 'prolongs the divine act.'⁹⁹ The motive in both cases is aesthetic.

Creation starts from within. 'Begin by considering thyself.' This emphasis

on the inner life of man, on the importance of the will as a dynamic and creative force, is common in the Renaissance writers who precede Ficino, and of course owes much to St Augustine. For Petrarch 'man's inner life is a continual process of self-creation.'⁹⁶ Orpheus-like, man through his studies softens his own spirit and tempers his own wrath ('mollitque animos et temperat iras').⁹⁷ We must start from within ourselves, 'abs te itaque ad te occurre,' says Traversari; for within ourselves, 'in ore nostro et in corde nostro,' we will find the divine.⁹⁸ 'The soul,' says Ficino, 'on its own through its own activity continually fashions itself and completes itself by the continual exercise of the intellect and the will' ('Per se ipsum operatione sua se format semper et perficit, semper intelligendo atque volendo'). For Poliziano, in his *Nutricia*, man fashions himself through his art.⁹⁹ Poetry once again becomes a form of making.

sic species terris, vitae sua forma, suusque
dis honor, ipsa sibi tandem sic reddita mens est.

(Thus the earth is given its beauty, life its shape, the gods their honour and mind at last becomes itself.)

Man is the creator and what he creates is himself. 'Ogni dipintore dipigne sè.' What we see is the 'arrangement and shape of his very soul' ('dispositio praeterea et quasi figura quaedam animi ipsius inspicitur').¹⁰⁰ 'For in such works the soul expresses and provides an image of itself, just as the face of man looking in the mirror provides an image of itself in the mirror. Especially in conversations, songs, and instrumental playing the creative soul is brought into the light.' ('Ita enim seipsum animus in operibus istis exprimit et figurat, ut vultus hominis intuentis in speculum seipsum figurat in speculo. Maxime vero in sermonibus, cantibus atque sonis artificiosus animus se depromit in lucem.')

And lastly and above all, Orpheus the lover and prophet of love. Love is of course the overriding concept in the system of Ficino. It explains the relationship between the different levels of reality, between microcosm and macrocosm, between man and his fellows, between man and God. This is not the place for a full exposition of its role. What might be of interest would be to discover how much Ficino owes, or thinks he owes, to the teaching of Orpheus. A partial way of doing this is to examine the most important 'Orphic' quotations in the *Convivium*. We have already discussed the first of these (love is 'antiquissimum,' 'se ipso perfectum,' 'consultissimum'), and have seen how it is used as a basis for the Neoplatonic triad of procession, rapture, and reversion, for the nature of creation and of the love of the created for the

creator. At the end of 3.2, Ficino quotes a line from the *Hymn to Eros*: *μόνος ἅρ' τοιῶν πάντων οἴηκα κρατύνεις* (You alone control the reins of all these things).¹⁰¹ Love is the power that produces harmony in all things. This leads into a discussion of love as the master ('magister') and controller ('gubernator') of the arts. What artists or craftsmen in their various crafts seek to achieve is a state of love. Take the example of the doctor who tries to bring about accord between the humours. Or the musician who tries to discover which intervals are harmonious, 'which notes show greater or less love for which notes' ('qui numeri quos numeros aut magis aut minus diligant'). They blend tones and rhythms, 'so that they should become as friendly as possible' ('Ut amici potissimum fiant'). 'Every art indeed is an expression of love, since it is an endeavour to impose order upon formlessness.'¹⁰²

It is thus appropriate that Orpheus should call love (3.3) *εὐπάλαμον, διφυῆ, πάντων κληίδας ἔχοντα* (inventive, double-natured, holding the keys of everything).¹⁰³ As to its double nature, there is a sacred and a profane Venus, like the two musics of Urania and Polyhymnia. And like the latter, the profane Venus can, if properly used, lead the mind upward to contemplation. That it holds the key to the universe is clear from the fact that everything strives for its own perfection and it is love that unlocks the door and brings that aspiration to the light. 'All the parts of the world, because they are the works of a single creative artist, and, as components of the same construct, are all alike in their essence and manner of existence, are bound together each with each by a sort of mutual affection, so that love can properly be called the perpetual knot or link of the universe.' ('Omnes mundi partes, quia unius artificis opera sunt, eiusdem machinae membra inter se in essendo et vivendo similia, mutua quadam caritate sibi invicem vinciuntur, ut merito dici possit amor nodus perpetuus et copula mundi'.) All the hidden and secret relationships that exist between objects within the sensible world and that permit the practice of Orphic magic, all the symbolic intermeshing of different levels of reality that permits the soul to ascend through *Orphica comparatio*, are evidence of the presence of love in the universe.

In *Convivium* 5.11 Ficino again quotes from two Orphic Hymns, from the *Hymn to Night*: *δεινὴ γὰρ ἀνάγκη πάντα κρατύνει* ('terrible necessity rules over all'¹⁰⁴) and from the *Hymn to Venus*: *καὶ κρατέεις τρισσῶν μοιρῶν, γεννᾷς δὲ τὰ πάντα* ('and you rule over the three fates, and you bring everything to being').¹⁰⁵ Venus is the 'mater necessitatis'.¹⁰⁶ The principle of love is prior to and stronger than the immutable laws of nature. Love can raise man above the limitations of his corporeal state and give him freedom of will.

Ficino's love is a composite of Plato's sublimated sexual love, of Aristotle's 'scala naturae' yearning for the Prime Mover, of Plotinus' lonely relationship

with the One, of the Christian love of God for man and man for God. There are important additional ingredients: an emphasis on friendship and the social role of love from Aristotle and the Stoics, an elegiac quality from the Stilnovisti and Petrarch.¹⁰⁷ Orpheus as civilizer brings about a state of *humanitas*, which is defined as man's love for his fellows; Orpheus as theologian asserts the primacy of love as a cosmic force, as that which brings about creation, and thus acts as a go-between for Christian and Neoplatonist; as musician and artist he brings about a state of love by imposing order and shape; as one who loves and suffers he is privileged to be filled with the *furor amatorius* which leads the mind beyond understanding to the vision of divine beauty and to a state of joy.

amando, alla sua immensa latitudine
amplifichiamo e dilatiam la mente:
questo par sia vera beatitudine.¹⁰⁸

Orpheus has helped Ficino in many ways: to bridge the gap between pagan and Christian; to rescue Neoplatonic monism and restate it in Christian terms; to redefine the relationship between the first principle and the created world; to combine a sense of delight in the beauty of this world with an aspiration for the beauty that lies beyond;¹⁰⁹ to be aware of both the joys and sadness of existence, its permanence and its evanescence.¹¹⁰ Above all he enables Ficino to hold the balance between the ordered and stable cosmos of antiquity and the Middle Ages, and the new dynamic concept of man, the restless creator, Proteus and Chameleon,¹¹¹ ranging at will and creating his own space. He has contributed to this moment of equilibrium between two worlds.

And what has Ficino done for Orpheus? If the Middle Ages subjected him to *sparagmos*, Ficino has found his heart and brought him back to life – the musician, magician, and hierophant that he was in the beginning.

NOTES

- 1 Seznec *Survival of the Pagan Gods* tr Barbara Sessions (New York 1961) 184–215
- 2 Boccaccio *on Poetry* (Princeton 1956) Introduction 23
- 3 This paper offers no new thesis but a synthesis. It owes a heavy debt to many scholars, especially André Chastel *Marsile Ficini et l'art* (Genève 1954); D.P. Walker 'Orpheus the theologian and Renaissance platonism' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953) 100–20 and 'Le chant orphique de

- Marsile Ficini' in *Musique et poésie au XVIe siècle* 17-33; A. Buck, *Der Orpheus-Mythos in der italienischen Renaissance* (Krefeld, 1961); N.A. Robb *Neoplatonism in the Italian Renaissance* (1935; rpt New York 1968); P.O. Kristeller *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (New York 1954).
- 4 Lorenzo de' Medici *Scritti scelti* ed Emilio Bigi (Turin, 1955) 2.2-4
 - 5 *Supplementum Ficinianum* ed P.O. Kristeller (Florence 1937) II 262
 - 6 Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 48
 - 7 Poliziano *Opera* (Basel 1553) 310. The interpretation of Eurydice as 'broad judgment' (*εὐρεία δίκη*) is commonplace in the Middle Ages and goes back to Fulgentius *Mythologies* 3.10.
 - 8 C.G. Corsi *Vita Marsilii Ficini* 6 printed as Appendix I in R. Marcel *Marsile Ficini* (Paris 1958)
 - 9 Ficino *Opera* (Basel 1576) 871
 - 10 *Ibid* 608
 - 11 *Supplementum Ficinianum* II 262: 'Ad Marsilium Ficinum de Orpheo in eius cythara picto'
 - 12 *Ibid* II 225
 - 13 Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 74; for a discussion see 10f and 48f, and Robb *Neoplatonism* 57 n. 1.
 - 14 *Opera* 844 on Ficino's word-play, see Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 45.
 - 15 *Supplementum Ficinianum* II 88
 - 16 For a discussion of this passage and others see A. Buck *Der Orpheus-Mythos* 22f and D.P. Walker 'Orpheus the theologian' 102f.
 - 17 Robb *Neoplatonism* 165; see also *Morgante* 25.156-7 and 27.41. For Pulci's relations with Ficino and the Academy see Luigi Pulci *Il Morgante* ed R. Ramat (Milan 1961) 16f and Robb *Neoplatonism* 163-6.
 - 18 *Opera* 944. Ficino is almost certainly referring to himself: see P.O. Kristeller 'The scholastic background of Marsilio Ficino' *Traditio* 2 (1944) 272 n. 84.
 - 19 *In Platonis Phaedonem commentaria* 70c ed W. Norvin (Leipzig 1913) 58; Ficino *Commentarium in Philebum* in *Opera* 1216: 'Orpheus ... cuius theologiam secutus est Plato.'
 - 20 *Theologia Platonica* 1.6
 - 21 See especially Chastel 'Le Platonisme et les arts à la Renaissance' *Actes du congrès de Tours et Poitiers* (Paris 1954) 387ff.
 - 22 Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 144
 - 23 B. Kieszkowski *Studi sul Platonismo del Rinascimento in Italia* (Florence 1936) Chapter 2; Abbé R. Marcel, 'Le Platonisme de Petrarche à Léon l'Hebreu' *Congrès de Tours et Poitiers* 315; M.F. Masai 'Le Platonisme italien et le problème des influences byzantins' *ibid* 321; Kristeller *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* 15; 'The scholastic background of Marsilio Ficino' 259; Walker 'Orpheus the theologian' 107ff; Chastel 'Le Platonisme et les arts' 392 and *Marsile Ficini* 9f

- 24 Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1970) Chapter v passim; Pierre Courcelle, *La Consolation de philosophie dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris 1967) 190f and plates 107 and 108.2; Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 136ff
- 25 silvestris homines sacer interpresque deorum
caedibus et victu foedo deterruit Orpheus
dictus ob hoc lenire tigris rabidosque leones;
... fuit haec sapientia quondam
publica privatis secernere, sacra profanis,
conubitu prohibere vago, dare iura maritis,
oppida moliri, leges incidere ligno.
- 26 *De genealogia deorum* 5.12
- 27 *Mythologies* 3.10; translated in L.G. Whitbread *Fulgentius the Mythographer* (Columbus, Ohio 1971) 96f
- 28 William of Conches and Nicholas Trivet, in their respective commentaries on Boethius; see Friedman *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* 105ff.
- 29 Clement of Alexandria *Exhortation to the Greeks* Chapters 1ff. For a discussion see above, Chapter 3 'The new song of Christ.'
- 30 Buck *Der Orpheus-Mythos* 14
- 31 *De genealogia deorum* 5.12
- 32 'Orazione fatta quando cominciò a leggere' in 'Studio i sonetti di M. Francesco Petrarca' in *Miscellanea di cose inedite o rare* ed F. Corazzini (Florence 1853) 133; Buck, *Der Orpheus-Mythos* 32 n. 47
- 33 E. Garin 'L'ambiente di Poliziano' *Atti del IV convegno internazionale di studi sul Rinascimento: Il Poliziano e il suo tempo* (Florence 1954) 21
- 34 A. Poliziano *Nutricia* ed Del Lungo 114-15; see Garin, preceding note, Buck *Der Orpheus-Mythos* 14ff, and Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 176.
- 35 Ficino *Opera* 805. He continues: '... est enim humanitas ipsa praestanti corpore nympha, coelesti origine nata ... eius anima spiritusque sunt amor et charitas.' For discussion see Kristeller *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* 113f.
- 36 The *Argonautica* and the *Hymns* were among the first 'Platonic' writings translated by Ficino (1462), although he did not publish them. His reasons for this are given in a letter to Martinus Uranius (*Opera* 933): 'Argonautica et hymnos Orphei ... edere nunquam placuit, ne forte lectores ad priscum deorum daemonumque cultum iamdiu merito reprobatur, revocare viderer, quantum enim Pythagoricis quondam curae fuit ne divina in vulgus ederent, tanta mihi semper cura fuit, non divulgare prophana.' The reason given should be taken seriously. Corsi (*Vita Marsilii Ficini* viii) describes the struggle that Ficino went through in reconciling his interest in pagan writings with his Christian conscience: 'cogitavit hoc tempore ... Orphei hymnos ac sacrificia invulgare, sed divino prorsus miraculo, id quo minus efficeret, in dies magis impendebatur, quadam, ut aiebat, spiritus amaritudine distractus ... tandem aperte cognovit

divinitus ea se pati, quod a Christianis plus nimio transfugisset.' But there is another perhaps more important reason implicit in Ficino's reference to the secrecy of the Pythagoreans. As Pico puts it (*Orphicae Conclusiones I* in *Opera* (Basel 1572) 106): 'secretam Magiam a nobis primum ex Orphei hymnis elicitam, fas non est in publicum explicare.' Ficino is in the Neoplatonic tradition in wishing to confine the most sacred writings to the elect. There is a curious similarity between Ficino's divine inhibition, and what Marinus has to tell us about Proclus, in *Procli philosophi platonici opera inedita* ed V. Cousin (rpt Frankfurt 1962) xxvii: for a long time he resisted requests to write a commentary on the Orphic writings, feeling himself *καλυθῆναι ... ἐναργῶς ἐκ τινῶν ἐνυπνίων*.

- 37 Porphyry, cited by Eusebius *Evangelica Praeparatio* 4 (470B); Kern 17
- 38 Proclus *In Rempublican Platonis* 1.72, 1; Kern 19
- 39 *Contra Faustum* 13.15
- 40 Boccaccio *De Genealogia Deorum* 14.16; Salutati *De laboribus Herculis* 1.1; Petrarch *Invective contra medicum* 3 (he describes Orpheus as 'maxime nobilitatus'); Buck *Der Orpheus-Mythos* 18
- 41 Walker 'Chant orphique' 22; *τί γάρ ἐστι Πλατων ἢ Μωϋσῆς ἀπτικίζων*, in Clement of Alexandria *Stromateis* 1.22
- 42 Kieszkowski *Studi sul Platonismo* 84, 88; for a summary see D.P. Walker *The Ancient Theology* (London 1972) 1ff; Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 157ff; Ficino *Opera* 25 and 871f.
- 43 Apollonius Rhodius *Argonautica* 1.494ff; [Orpheus], *Argonautica* 419ff. The latter scene is imitated in Poliziano *Manto* 1-30 in *Opera* 288f. The Creation is a regular and appropriate theme for the minstrel, the original imposition of order on chaos. See Virgil *Aeneid* 1.740ff, and *Beowulf* 90-8, with comment by H.R. Ellis Davidson *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (London 1964) 198.
- 44 W.K.C. Guthrie *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (1934; rpt New York 1966) 84
- 45 Diogenes Laertius 1.3
- 46 Proclus *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria* (ed E. Diehl) 28c (Kern 167); See also the Orphic Hymn to Pan 11.1-3 (ed Abel): *πανὺ καλῶ κρατερόν, νόμιον, κοσμοίο τὸ σύμπαν / οὐρανὸν ἢ δὲ θάλασσαν ἰδὲ χθόνα παμβασίλειαν / καὶ πῦρ ἀθάνατον· τάδε γὰρ μελεῖ ἐστὶ τὰ Πανός*.
- 47 Guthrie *Orpheus and Greek Religion* 100
- 48 Kern 168
- 49 *Orphei Hymni* 4.2
- 50 *In Platonis Phaedrum*, *Opera* 1371. Kieszkowski, 'Studi sul Platonismo' 116
- 51 Walker 'Orpheus the theologian' 115ff
- 52 Giovanni Nesi *Poema visione* Canto VII 24ff as cited in Robb *Neoplatonism* 51 n 2; Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 57ff
- 53 *De harmonia musicorum instrumentorum* (Milan 1512) 1.4

- 54 Ps.-Lucian *De astrologia* 10; Servius in Virgil *Aeneid* 6.645. See Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 54 n 61.
- 55 Chastel *ibid* 100. For this reason it guarantees the secret correspondences with the sensible world that afford the artist his magical powers: 'nonne sonante cithara quadam altera reboat?' *De vita* (*Opera* 555). See note 67.
- 56 See the *Commentarium in Timaeum* in *Opera* 1438ff; the Orphic Hymn to Apollo (quoted in *Theologia Platonica* 2.9 *ad fin*): 'tu sphaeram totam cithara resonante contemperas'; *De divino furore* in *Opera* 614: 'Jupiter ... coelum, quasi citharam quandam ... exagitant, coelestem efficit harmoniam.'
- 57 *Commentarium in Timaeum* in *Opera* 1453: '[Plato] putat ... animam inde (ie from music) natam musica similiter ratione citharam pulsare coelestem ... anima profecto non possit universam harmoniam diiudicare nisi ipsa harum causas in se haberet ... constat enim anima nostra ex omnibus proportionibus quibus anima mundi.'
- 58 *De ludo globi* (Paris 1514) II, fol clxv
- 59 Saint Bernard *De consideratione* 2.3 n 6; see Etienne Gilson *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (London 1936) 209ff; Chastel 'Le Platonisme et les arts' 397
- 60 *Opera* 651 (letter to Canisianus *De musica*); see R. Marcel in Walker 'Le chant orphique' 30.
- 61 *Supplementum Ficinianum*, I. 51-6, *De rationibus musicae*, addressed to Domenico Benivieni. Compare the analysis of music in *Convivium*, 5.1, 2, and 6. Beauty is 'the flower of goodness'; it manifests itself in *ratio*, *visus*, and *auditus* - these are, it is said, the three Graces of whom Orpheus speaks (Hymn 9.3): *ἀγλαΐη τε, θάλεια καὶ εὐφροσύνη, πολὺλόβε, Splendor, viriditas, laetitiaque uberrima*. The last of these, *laetitia*, is music, 'sincerum illud et salubre et perpetuum, quod in musica sentimus, oblectamentum.' Through the three Graces, beauty 'animos nostros movet atque delectat, delectando rapit, rapiendo ardenti inflammat amore.'
- 62 Cf *Commentarium in Timaeum* in *Opera* 1453: 'concentus autem per aeream naturam in motu positam movet corpus; per purificatum aerem concitat spiritum aereum animae corporisque nodum [text has 'notum']; per affectum afficit sensum simul et animum; per significationem agit in mentem. Denique per ipsum, subtilis aeris motum penetrat vehementer; per contemplationem lambit suaviter; per conformem qualitatem mira quadam voluptate perfundit; per naturam, tam spiritalem, quam materiale, totum simul rapit et sibi vendicat hominem.' See also the important page on the power of song in *De vita* 3.21 *Opera* 563.
- 63 *Opera* 609; for a discussion of *spiritus* see Walker 'Le chant orphique' 18-19 and 'Ficino's *spiritus* and music' *Annales musicologiques* (1953) 131-50; also Kristeller *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* 115ff.
- 64 E. Panofsky *Studies in Iconology* (New York 1939) 136

- 65 Ficino *Theologia Platonica* 10.7
 66 Panofsky *Studies in Iconology* 132
 67 Ficino, *Commentarium in Plotinum* 38 in *Opera* 1747. If the magic is effective, the deities will reply 'vel instar Echo, vel sicut corda quaedam in cithara tremens, quoties vibratum altera temperata similiter'; *De vita* 3.21 in *Opera* 563.
 68 Plotinus *Enneads* 4.4.38. I am drawing in this section on D.P. Walker 'Le chant orphique', 19-22.
 69 Marinus, *Life of Proclus* (for reference see above note 36). The rituals (ἀποτρόπαι, περιβράντηρια, καθαρμοί) and the hymn-singing are mentioned in separate passages (18 and 20). The hymns were sung to cheer them up and allay their anxiety when Proclus was ill. They produced εἰρήνη and ἀταραξία. The passage continues: ἀρχομένων γὰρ ἡμῶν ὑμνεῖν, ἐκεῖνος ἀνεπλήρου τοὺς ὕνους καὶ τῶν Ὀρφικῶν ἐπῶν, τὰ πλεῖστα. καὶ γὰρ ταῦτά ἐστιν ὅτε παρόντες ἀνεγνώσκομεν. Walker 'Orpheus the theologian' 101.
 70 For a discussion see Guthrie *Orpheus and Greek Religion* 257-61.
 71 Pletho *περὶ Νόμων* ed C. Alexandre (Paris 1858) 150 and 186; Walker 'Orpheus the Theologian' 108 n 6. For references on Pletho see above, note 23.
 72 Pico *Orphicae Conclusiones* 2 in *Opera Omnia* 106. See also *Conclusiones* 4: 'sicut hymni David operi Cabalae mirabiliter deservunt, ita Hymni Orphei vere licitae, et naturalis magiae.'
 73 Poliziano in *Supplementum Ficinianum* II 282
 74 *Commentarium in Plotinum* in *Opera* 1745; Walker 'Le chant orphique' 19, 21f
 75 *Theologia Platonica* 4.1
 76 *Liber de lumine* in *Opera* 984
 77 *Convivium* 5.4 ed and tr S.R. Jayne *University of Missouri Studies* XIX 1 (1944)
 78 E. Cassirer *Dall' umanesimo all' illuminismo* (Florence 1967) 31ff; see also 30-4.
 79 Il mondo e il libro, dove il seno eterno scrisse i propri concetti, e vivo tempio dove pingendo i gesti e'l proprio esempio di statue vive orno l'imo e'l superno.
 Tommaso Campanella *Poesie* ed G. Gentile (Bari 1915) 16, quoted by Cassirer.
 80 See especially E.H. Gombrich 'Icones Symbolicae' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 11 (1948) 163-92; Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 71ff, 143ff.
 81 Kristeller *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* 97f; 'Orphica comparatio solis ad deum' *Opera* 826. 'Quapropter Orphicum mysterium illud si nolumus fateri verum, saltem parumper fingamus quasi verum, ut solem coelestem ita suspiciendo prospiciamus, in eo supercoelestem illum, tanquam in speculo, qui in sole posuit tabernaculum suum.'
 82 *Opera* 985; Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 83 and n 9
 83 *Theologia Platonica*, 2.10

- 84 Poliziano *Supplementum Ficinianum* II 283
 85 G.A. Campano *Supplementum Ficinianum* II 230; see letter to Ugolino in *Opera* 634: 'furentes canunt ... paulo post defervescente furore ipsimet non satis intelligunt, quasi non ipsi pronunciaverint, sed deus per eos ceu tubas clamaverit.'
 86 Landino in Dante *Purgatorio* 9.19f; Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 130f
 87 Letter to Naldo Naldi *Opera* 830; *Convivium* 7.14; 'De divino furore' *Opera* 612-15; letter to Pietro Dovuzzi *Opera* 927; Buck *Der Orpheus-Mythos* 18f
 88 *Theologia Platonica* 13.2
 89 For the melancholy Orpheus see the figure on a thirteenth-century MS at Reims representing the harmony of the spheres; illustration and discussion in Ch. de Tolnay 'The Music of the Spheres' *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 6 (1943) 86 and 89. Orpheus broods over the universe, his chin on his left hand, his lyre at rest in his right. For a more intensely introspective figure, foreshadowing romanticism (and recalling the suffering Christ), see the Teniers copy of Giorgione (discussed and illustrated below pages 136ff and figure 9).
 90 De Vita 3.22 in *Opera* 565; letter to Cavalcanti *Opera* 731f; Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 119, 164f
 91 Sophocles *Antigone* 332f; *Chaldaean Oracles* Psellus I 136^a; Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 59ff
 92 *Asclepius* 6 and 22-4. Cicero is of course another important link in the transmission; see the passages from *De natura deorum* 2.54-60 quoted by Giannozzo Manetti in his *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* ed E. Riley (Cornell University PHD 1964) 1.3-12.
 93 *Theologia Platonica* 8.16. Here is part of what precedes: '[mens] currit per omnia; per omnia inquam, non modo quae sunt, sed quae fuerunt eruntve. Neque id solum. Sed per illa etiam quae neque sunt, neque fuerunt unquam aut erunt. Multa enim excogitat quae forte esse possent, non tamen fient unquam; et multa quae esse forsitan nunquam possent, ipsa fingit ... Novas quoque semper rerum facies vi propria et quodam ordine fabricat, et rursus innovat alias.'
 94 Kristeller *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* 55ff; see 53ff.
 95 Chastel *Marsile Ficini* 66
 96 Cassirer *Dall' umanesimo* 24 comments that Augustine *Soliloquia* 1.7 might serve as the motto of Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*: 'deum et animam scire cupio. Nihilne plus? Nihil omnino.'
 97 Petrarch, *Secretum* II in *Opere Latine* ed A. Bufano (Turin 1975) I 162, quoting Virgil *Aeneid* 1.57; Robb *Neoplatonism* 29
 98 A. Traversari, *Epistolae* 13.526 ed Méhus (Florence 1759) II 639; see Robb *Neoplatonism* 41.
 99 'Si plasma a se stessa (i.e. l'umanità); e il nascere operoso ... dell'uomo costruttore di se'; Poliziano *Nutricia* 114-15 in Garin 'L'ambiente di Poliziano' 21.

- 100 *Theologia Platonica* 10.4; Chastel 'Platonisme et les arts' 396. The preceding quotation is ascribed to Cosimo (Chastel *Marsile Ficino* 66).
- 101 *Hymn* 58.8
- 102 Robb *Neoplatonism* 82
- 103 *Hymn* 58.4
- 104 *Ibid* 3.11
- 105 *Ibid* 55.5
- 106 Kieszkowski *Studi sul Platonismo* 55ff, 117
- 107 Kristeller *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* 287
- 108 Lorenzo de' Medici *Altercazione* 5.52-4
- 109 It might be added that Orpheus can be seen as representing the magico-scientific (or Promethean) attitude that seeks to change the phenomenal world from the outside, as well as the more strictly 'Orphic' mode which 'proposes to transmute the inner man.' For the terms and a discussion see W. Strauss *Descent and Return* 10f.
- 110 Robb *Neoplatonism* 111: 'Its [i.e. Neoplatonism's] sincerest followers so loved the beauty of the world and the greatness of the human spirit that they hungered to believe them both divine, and yet were aware of something vaster than either, continually apprehended behind the mutable variety of things, but continually evading their most ardent pursuit.'
- 111 Pico della Mirandola *De hominum dignitate; Opera* 315; Kristeller *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* 184

GIUSEPPE SCAVIZZI

The Myth of Orpheus in Italian Renaissance Art, 1400-1600

THE EARLIEST REPRESENTATIONS of Orpheus in Italian art belong in most respects to the medieval allegorical tradition. An example is the relief in the lower part of the Campanile (or bell-tower) of Florence Cathedral (figure 1). The Campanile decoration – which took nearly a century to complete – included a great variety of subjects of an allegorical nature. In 1437, as a conclusion to the work, the sculptor Luca della Robbia was entrusted with the commission of five reliefs in which the symbols of Music, Grammar, Philosophy, and two sciences had to be represented. Orpheus was chosen to symbolize Music and the relief, hexagonal in form, was completed and put on the wall two years later, in 1439.¹

The programme, although medieval in nature, demonstrated through the choice of some of the figures representing the Arts a shifting of interest from the biblical to the classical and mythological which is typical of the Early Renaissance. True, in the Cathedral of Chartres the man who represents Music is sometimes interpreted as Pythagoras; however, the common symbol for Music in the Middle Ages was the biblical Tubalcain, who for Vincent of Beauvais had been the inventor of that art. The appearance of Orpheus in this context is probably due to the association between the myth and music which had been re-established – on the basis of a new knowledge of Fulgentius – by Coluccio Salutati.² Chastel, after noticing that the introduction of Orpheus into the previous series of the Campanile reliefs is awkward, suggests that his presence does not refer to instrumental music (which was represented by Tubalcain), but rather to the 'superior music,' the 'ideal principle of spiritual life.'³

Was the inclusion of Orpheus due to the personal choice of Luca della Robbia? It is impossible to answer; but we can attempt to see how the sculptor envisaged this mythical character. Orpheus is represented playing and singing