Ovid Rewriting Virgil:
Two Versions of "Orpheus and Eurydice"

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The fact that Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso, 43 BC–AD 17) writes with a serious concern to emulate his predecessors has been generally acknowledged by scholars of Latin literature. This ambition is evidenced by his own works, which contain lists of authors with whom Ovid hopes to associate himself.[1] Among these earlier poets, Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro, 70 BC–19 BC) fascinates Ovid the most. Virgil died when Ovid was still in his early twenties; for Ovid, Virgil's status as a canonical author is beyond doubt.[2] Ovid is ever conscious of his belatedness, and, as Sara Mack observes, Ovid "made no attempt to avoid comparison with Vergil" (107). Thumbing through the works of Virgil and Ovid, one will certainly notice the significant amount of overlap in the subject matter they deal with. For instance, in Books 13 and 14 of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid writes about the Trojan war, Aeneas' wanderings and the founding of Rome, which are the central themes of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In other words, Ovid openly borrows from Virgil, and his borrowings, under scrutiny, are frequent and copious. W. R. Barnes is even led to assert that "Virgil is everywhere in Ovid" (257), and the Virgilian omnipresence in Ovid has indeed attracted much critical attention. R. A. Smith dedicates an entire book, *Poetic Allusion and Poetic Embrace in Ovid and Virgil* (1997), to the discussion of the relationship between the two Augustan poets. Joseph B. Solodow compares Virgil and Ovid throughout *The World of Ovid's* Metamorphoses (1988) even though the book is, as its title suggests, primarily on one single work by Ovid. Such critical consensus urges the reader to read Ovid with Virgil in mind, even more so when it comes to an Ovidian revision of the Virgilian model. With deliberate allusions to and modifications of the Virgilian

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[1] Or, in Ovid's own words, "*forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis*" ("and perhaps my name will be mixed with theirs"; *Ars Armatoria* 3.339). Richard J. Tarrant in "Ovid and Ancient Literary History" provides ample instances of Ovid's reference to specific authors in his poetry, see particularly p. 15.

[2] For Virgil's influence on later Roman poets and his status as a canonical author, see Richard F. Thomas's *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* and Richard J. Tarrant's "Aspects of Virgil's Reception in Antiquity."

texts, Ovid activates the reader's memory of the Virgilian texts and encourages the reader to see through his texts to the Virgilian sources, thereby creating a high degree of intertextual interest and paradoxically displaying his originality by means of appropriation.[3] The effect of Ovid's intertextual practice depends essentially on the reader's recognition of Ovid's appropriation of Virgil's subject matter and language. In this regard, Ovid's retelling of the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice in the *Metamorphoses* is a prime example. Based on a comparison between the two versions of the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice respectively in Virgil's *Georgics* 4.457–527 and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 10.1–85 and 11.1–66, this paper attempts to elucidate how Ovid makes use of revisions, consisting of omissions in *Met.* 10.1–16, alterations in *Met.* 10.55–64 and additions in the rest of the tale, to transform a Virgilian tragedy into an Ovidian comedy and in the meantime challenge his reader to discern the humor at play in his intertextual practice.

Comparison between the Virgilian and the Ovidian versions of the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice is not a new topic in the study of Augustan poetry. William S. Anderson prefaces his commentary on Ovid's account with a contrast between Virgil's earnest voice and Ovid's frivolous tone. For Anderson, Ovid's account is a parody, "puncturing . . . the sentimentality [of Virgil's account] with courtly urbanity" (475). Anderson's comparison, nevertheless, is done at Ovid's expense. Witness Anderson's observation when he comments on *Metamorphoses* 10.12–39:

> . . . the decision to plead with the powers of the Underworld, stated in a
> self-consciously rhetorical *ne non temptaret* 12, sounds more like flamboy-
> ance than serious mourning. Whereas Vergil prudently avoided the challenge

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[3] Here I adopt Joseph Farrell's notion of intertextuality as presented in "The Virgilian Intertext." By "intertextuality" Farrell refers to the poetic practice sometimes designated as "allusion," "imitation," or "reference," i.e., the phenomenon that "some poets deliberately cultivate an allusive style, and thus encourage their readers' expectation of seeing through one text to its source or model" (222). Farrell further argues that "Virgil's extensive cultivation of intertextual resources does not mark him less 'original' than other poets" and that "Virgilian intertextuality shows every sign of being distinct creation" (223). The intertextuality existing between Virgilian sources and Ovidian revisions can be interpreted in the same vein as Farrell's exposition of Virgil's employment of the poetics of intertextuality as a powerful tool to communicate his original ideas. For a thorough discussion on the phenomenon of intertextuality in Latin literature, see Stephen Hinds' *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry*.

of reproducing the ineffable song by which Orpheus conquered death, Ovid deliberately contrives a pompous, unconvincing speech, full of witty sophistication, devoid of true emotion. (475)

Anderson's observation implies that Virgil makes sensible artistic choices whereas Ovid elaborates on details in a way that does not befit a tale of pathos. Conversely, David West in a paper entitled "Orpheus and Eurydice" attacks the widely held view that Ovid's version of the story is an inferior parody of Virgil's treatment in the *Georgics* (Hill 124).[4] Following West's lead, D. E. Hill in his "From Orpheus to Ass's Ears: Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.1–11.193" provides a section-by-section comparison marked with line numbers. Hill's comparison shows "how far Ovid has gone to answer and comment on the Virgilian model" (126). While Anderson's commentary aims at the interpretation of individual lines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Hill's article deals with Orpheus' entire song running throughout Book 10 of the *Metamorphoses* up to 11.193. Neither critic specifically discusses the intertextual effects brought about by comparing Ovid's revisions with Virgil's account. To do justice to Ovid's poetic ingenuity in rewriting the Virgilian canon, this paper will focus on how Ovid's revisions create for the reader the pleasure of recognizing the intertextual tensions generated when the Ovidian account is read alongside the Virgilian model.

Before we embark on the discussion, some general remarks concerning the settings where the episode occurs are in order. Virgil's account of the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice is placed toward the end of the fourth book of the *Georgics*. The narrator of this tale is the sea-god Proteus, who tells how Aristaeus, a great civilizer and discoverer of techniques, loses bees in an epidemic because he has offended a spirit by causing the death of Orpheus' wife, Eurydice. Though inserted into the story about how Aristaeus is punished by the loss of bees and then instructed to breed a new swarm from the rotting of an ox's carcass, the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice is

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[4] West's paper was read to the A.G.M. of the Joint Association of Classical Teachers in May 1985. I have not been able to obtain a copy and have consulted D. E. Hill's references to his views in "From Orpheus to Ass's Ears: Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.1–11.193."

self-contained. For our purpose here the framing story of Aristaeus can be bypassed.[5]

Ovid's account starts at the beginning of the tenth book of the *Metamorphoses*. In 10.1–85 Ovid follows the Vrigilian plot, relating Orpheus and Eurydice's doomed marriage, Orpheus' visit to the realm of the dead, his failed attempt to retrieve Eurydice, his return to the upper world, and his subsequent rejection of all women's love. While Virgil concludes his account with Orpheus' death and his tongue lamenting continually even after death (*Georg.* 4.520–27), at *Metamorphoses* 10.85 Ovid shifts the focus of his narrative from the tragedy of Orpheus and Eurydice to another tale, the transformation of Cyparissus. Orpheus's death and his ultimate reunion with Eurydice in the Underworld are not revealed until the beginning of Book 11, where Ovid expands greatly on the Virgilian model. In the following discussion, we shall see that by giving a witty twist to Virgil's account, Ovid invites the reader to consider the classical bereavement myth from a cheerful perspective.[6]

Ovid's mischief starts from the very beginning of his tale (*Met.* 10.1–16), which is shown by his deliberate omission of Virgil's careful description of the scene and the mood. Witness first Virgil's opening of his account, Proteus' narration of the cause of Eurydice's death and Orpheus' distress at this sudden calamity:

> illa quidem, dum te fugeret per flumina praeceps,
>
> immanem ante pedes hydrum moritura puella
>
> seruantem ripas alta non uidit in herba.
>
> . . . .
>
> ipse caua solans aegrum testudine amorem
>
> te, dulcis coniunx, te solo in litore secum,
>
> te ueniente die, te decedente canebat. (*Georg.* 4.457–59; 4.464–66)
>
> (She, indeed, while escaping headlong from you along the river,
>
> The maiden doomed to die did not see a savage water-snake

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[5] For a thorough treatment of Book 4 of the *Georgics*, see M. Owen Lee's *Virgil as Orpheus: A Study of the* Georgics, pp. 91–100, and Gian Biagio Conte's *Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets*, pp. 130–140.

[6] Critics have observed that regarding the divergence from Virgil's tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, Ovid may have drawn on his own imagination. See, for instance, R. A. B. Mynors' commentary, p. 315.

Lying at her feet in the tall grass upon the bank.

. . . .

Consoling his sorrowful love with his hollow lyre,

Of you, sweet wife, of you to himself on the lonely shore,

Of you as day came, of you as day went down he used to sing.)[7]

The anaphora featuring the repetition of "te" in the four hemistiches of 4.465–66 creates a strong musical effect. But for the third-person reference "secum" (4.465) and "canebat" (4.466), the reader may well mistake 4.464–66 for Orpheus' own words. The singsong quality produced by the alliterative "t" and "d" in 4.465–66 particularly encourages the reader to think this way, since Orpheus, reputedly a meritorious musician, is mourning for his wife with "caua . . . testudine" ("hollow lyre"). In other words, though reported by the internal narrator Proteus, lines 4.465–66 act out Orpheus' elegy. Conversely, Ovid does not present Orpheus' actual lament but gives a summary of the situation instead: "quam satis ad superas postquam Rhodopeius auras / deflevit vates . . ." (*Met.* 10.11–12 "For her enough to the upper world after the Thracian / Bard has mourned . . ."). When read alongside Virgil's emotionally-charged elegy, Ovid's understatement of Orpheus' mourning strikes the reader as a wry comment on Virgil's sentimentality. For Ovid, Virgil's highly emotional enactment of Orpheus' elegy is "enough," and perhaps even overstated or so embarrassingly exaggerated that Ovid does not want to have more of it, as the word "satis" ("enough") in *Met.* 10.11 connotes as well as denotes.

After the brief account of Orpheus' lament, both Virgil and Ovid tell that Orpheus descends into the Underworld in order to retrieve Eurydice, yet Ovid revises the Virgilian account by truncating Virgil's meticulous description of Orpheus' entrance into the Underworld. Virgil tells that

Taenarias etiam fauces, alta ostia Ditis,

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[7] The English translation of Virgil's and Ovid's verses is my own. I provide the translation to assist the reader less than fluent in Latin in following the discussion.

> et caligantem nigra formidine lucum
>
> ingressus, Manisque adiit regemque tremendum
>
> nesciaque humanis precibus mansuescere corda. (*Georg*. 4.467–70)
>
> (Entering even the jaws of Taenarus, the high doors of Pluto,
>
> And the grove gloomy with dark terror,
>
> He visited both the spirits of the dead and the terrifying king
>
> Whose hearts did not know how to be softened by human prayers.)

The details in Virgil's lines construct for the reader pseudo-presence on the scene. Guided by the meticulous description, the reader shares Orpheus' perspective and emotions. The Ovidian account, in contrast, whisks the reader along with Orpheus through a rapid succession of Underworld inhabitants:

> . . . ne non temptaret et umbras,
>
> ad Styga Taenaria est ausus descendere porta
>
> perque leves populos simulacraque functa sepulcro
>
> Persephonem adiit inamoenaque regna tenentem
>
> umbrarum dominum. . . . (*Met*. 10.12–16)
>
> (. . . lest he not try the ghosts as well,
>
> He dared to descend through the Taenarian gate to the Styx,
>
> And through the light-weighted people and the buried ghosts,
>
> To Persephone he came and to him who held the unpleasant realm,
>
> The lord of ghosts. . . .)

Listing perfunctorily the kinds of beings Orpheus meets on his journey downward, these lines serve mainly as a transition from the upper world to the Underworld. Following this brief transition is Ovid's first addition to the Virgilian text, Orpheus' speech to Pluto and Persephone (*Met*. 10.17–39).

The Ovidian Orpheus' speech flaunts rhetorical flair and merits lengthy quotation:

> . . . pulsisque ad carmina nervis
>
> sic ait: "o positi sub terra numina mundi,
>
> in quem reccidimus, quidquid mortale creamur,
>
> si licet et falsi positis ambagibus oris
>
> vera loqui sinitis, non huc, ut opaca viderem
>
> Tartara, descendi, nec uti villosa colubris
>
> Terna Medusaei vincirem guttura monstri
>
> causa viae est coniunx, in quam calcata venenum
>
> vipera diffudit crescentesque abstulit annos. (*Met*. 10.16–24)
>
> (. . . plucking the strings to his songs
>
> He said: "O deities of the world placed under the Earth,
>
> Into which we, who are created mortal, fall back,
>
> If you permit me to lay aside ambiguities of a false mouth
>
> And speak the truth, I did not descend here to see the dark
>
> Tartarus or to bind the three snake-shaggy necks of Medusa's
>
> > monster.
>
> The cause of my journey is my wife: a trodden snake injected
>
> Its poison into her and took away her prospering years.)

Note the contrast between the Virgilian and the Ovidian accounts. While Virgil attempts to enact Orpheus' elegy through the third-person narration of Proteus (*Georg*. 4.464–66), here Ovid gives the reader an actual plea, a song accompanied by his lyre (*Met* 10.16, "pulsisque ad carmina nervis") directly from Orpheus' mouth. Ovid's introduction of Orpheus' first-person voice in this speech is significant in two aspects. Firstly, in the Virgilian account the potentially dramatic interchange between Orpheus and the king and queen of the Underworld is completely omitted; Ovid's addition makes up for what is left out by Virgil. Secondly, in the Ovidian account Orpheus becomes a full-fledged character who voices his grievances without the mediation of a narrator. In his plea to Pluto and Persephone, the Ovidian Orpheus demonstrates his

rhetorical skills on top of his musical prowess.

The Ovidian Orpheus' declaration of the purpose of his journey is followed by a well-contrived argument which targets audiences both inside and outside the text:

> posse pati volui nec me temptasse negabo:
>
> vicit Amor. supera deus hic bene notus in ora est;
>
> an sit et hic, dubito: sed et hic tamen auguror esse,
>
> famaque si veteris non est mentita rapinae,
>
> vos quoque iunxit Amor. (*Met*. 4.25–29)
>
> (I have wished to be able to endure, nor will I deny that I have tried:
>
> Love conquered [me]. This god is well-known in the upper zone;
>
> Whether he is so here, I do not know: yet nevertheless I suppose
>
> he is so here,
>
> If the story of the old-time ravishment is not false,
>
> Love also joined you.)

The Ovidian Orpheus confesses his distress and appeals to both reason and emotion: he is conquered by Amor ("Love"), just as Pluto has been, and Pluto's marriage with Persephone testifies to Amor's irresistible power. Instead of closely following the Virgilian model, Ovid creates an eloquent Orpheus to make the scene more dramatic. If Virgil omits the dialogue between Orpheus and Pluto and Persephone, as Anderson observes, out of prudence (475), Ovid relishes the double challenge of filling the Virgilian gap in his, not Virgil's style. Much like his Orpheus who seizes the occasion to argue for his case, Ovid seizes the opportunity to tell Virgil's tale in his own way. The result is that the reader is both intrigued and compelled to find out how Ovid teases out the untold details of the story.

The Ovidian Orpheus' rhetorical flair is further demonstrated by the intricacy of his argument. Invested with an orator's voice, he boldly asks for a second life on behalf of Eurydice. He reasons with Pluto and Persephone about the situation:

omnia debemur 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;

quodsi fata negant veniam pro coniuge, certum est

nolle redire mihi: leto gaudete duorum. (*Met*. 10.32–39)

(We owe you all things, and delaying a little while

Later or sooner we hasten to one abode.

We all move hither, this is the ultimate home, and you

Hold the longest reign of humankind.

She also, when of ripe age she spends her rightful years,

Will be yours by law: instead of a gift I ask for an enjoyment;

But if the fates deny this favor to my wife, it is certain

That I will not want to go back: Rejoice in the death of two.)

The force of the Ovidian Orpheus' speech works on two levels, within the text and beyond the text. Orpheus' appeal to Pluto and Persephone within the text functions beyond the text as Ovid's appeal to the reader for the latter's approval of Ovid's argument superimposed on Virgil's reticence. In Virgil's omission Ovid sees his opportunity to emulate his predecessor, that is, to display his poetic ingenuity by convincing the reader of his Orpheus' persuasiveness. Ovid achieves this with a great sense of humor. To win the approval of Pluto and Persephone and of the reader, the Ovidian Orpheus takes a surprising route. Instead of protesting against the cruelty of fate, the Ovidian Orpheus initiates negotiation in realistic terms. What he asks is not "munus," a revived Eurydice as a free gift, but "usus," the enjoyment of the company of Eurydice, who now does not belong to him but rightfully to Pluto and Persephone.

In other words, Orpheus strives to obtain a loan,[8] which he is bound to repay since "tendimus huc omnes"—all will come to the Underworld sooner or later, Eurydice and he himself being no exceptions. The Ovidian humor is given full play at the end of Orpheus' speech: Orpheus threatens to stay in the Underworld if his request is not granted. Thus Ovid makes his Orpheus a resourceful rogue, determined to *talk* his and Eurydice's way out of the Underworld. Ovid's emphasis on Orpheus' eloquence is particularly striking when the reader recalls that Virgil does not give any word from Orpheus when meeting Pluto and Persephone but presents Orpheus' second elegy which is sung by his tongue when his head is severed from the body (*Georg.* 4.525–27). With the Virgilian text in mind, the reader recognizes Ovid's mischief: the Ovidian Orpheus' speech is a playful extension of Virgil's description of Orpheus' lamenting tongue. If Orpheus' tongue sings even after Orpheus' death, how much more eloquent, Ovid wonders, it should be when Orpheus is still alive! The reader who is able to pick up Ovid's cue goes back and forth between the Virgilian model and the Ovidian revision, gradually realizing that Ovid exploits the intertextual effect produced by his revision to make his poetic voice distinctively heard beyond Virgil's via his Orpheus' song.

Ovid's second addition to the Virgilian text occurs at the Underworld scene (*Met.* 10.40–48), where Ovid builds freely and playfully on Virgil's description of Orpheus' musical charm, making this addition appear to be a comic relief in a tragedy. For this scene Virgil focuses mainly on creating a bleak ambience of the Underworld (*Georg.* 4.471–80). He tells about the ghosts of various statuses whose lives end in regret and failure, removing his protagonist Orpheus temporarily from the description. Then in *Georg.* 4.481–84 Virgil shifts the attention back to Orpheus, concentrating on the effect of his music on the audience:

> quin ipsae stupuere domus atque intima Leti
>
> Tartara caeruleosque implexae crinibus anguis

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[8] Rolfe Humphries translates "pro munere poscimus usum" in *Met.* 10.37 as "I am asking / A loan and not a gift" (235).

Eumenides, tenuitque inhians tria Cerberus ora,

atque Ixionii uento rota constitit orbis.   (*Georg*. 4.481–84)

(Indeed the very household of Death, the innermost Tartarus,

And the Furies with blue-green snakes woven in their hair were

    amazed,

And Cerberus, opening wide its three mouths, kept silent,

And the circle of Ixion's wheel stopped in the wind.")

Virgil's vivid depiction, however, does not appear to be "satis" ("enough") for Ovid. He expands the Virgilian account of four lines to eight lines and includes more examples illustrating the charm of Orpheus' song:

Talia dicentem nervosque ad verba moventem

exsangues fluebant animae; nec Tantalus undam

captavit refugam, stupuitque Ixionis orbis,

nec carpsere iecur volucres, urnisque vacarunt

Belides, inque tuo sedisti, Sisyphe, saxo.

tunc primum lacrimis victarum carmine fama est

Eumenidum maduisse genas, nec regia coniunx

sustinet oranti nec, qui regit ima, negare,

Eurydicenque vocant. . . . (*Met*. 10.40–48)

(At him speaking thus and strumming the strings to his words

The bloodless spirits wept; Tantalus did not catch

the fleeing wave, and Ixion's wheel stopped in wonder,

The vultures did not pluck at the liver, the Belides were disengaged

From their urns, and you, Sisyphus, sat down on your rock.

Thereupon, tradition holds, for the first time the cheeks of the Furies,

Who were overcome by his song, became wet with tears; neither the

    regal consort

Nor he who ruled the lower world could continue to deny the

> imploring man,
>
> They summoned Eurydice. . . .)

Interestingly, the three-headed Cerberus of Virgil's line 483 is left out in Ovid's passage; instead the dog is mentioned in a roundabout way in Orpheus' speech to Pluto and Persephone (*Met*. 10.21–22; "nec uti villosa colubris / terna Medusaei vincirem guttura monstri"). Ovid transforms the physical presence of Virgil's Cerberus into a legend,[9] which may be read as a subtle indication of Ovid skeptical attitude toward the existence of the three-headed monster. Virgil merely says the Furies are amazed (4.481–83, "stupere . . . Eumenides"), but Ovid claims that tradition says this is the first time they are moved to tears (10.45–46). The interpolation "fama est" ("tradition holds") seems to lend authority to the claim but actually undermines its credibility. Inspired by Virgil's description, Ovid gives his imagination free rein and adds more characters—Titoys with vultures plucking at his liver, the Belides putting away the broken urns with which they draw water, and Sisyphus resting on the stone which he is supposed to push uphill. This Ovidian expansion is characterized by a wry sense of humor. Here the Ovidian narrator appears to be carried away by his own narrative, for he makes his story wilder and wilder, not aiming at an accurate report at all. The direct address to Sisyphus is particularly comic. It reminds the reader of Virgil's apostrophe to Eurydice in *Georg*. 4.464–66 but the original pathos is drastically pared down. The list of audience is so long that it amounts to a digression. Though starting off with Virgilian sources, Ovid adds a witty twist and indulges in mischievous innovations.

Ovid's third addition to the Virgilian text is the exact condition for Eurydice's return and the journey upward (*Met*. 10.50–54). With this addition Ovid both prepares his reader for the climax of the tale and intensifies the intertextual interest. Virgil's description of the couple's departure from the Underworld is sketchy and obscure:

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[9] In Greek mythology, the last and the most difficult of the twelve labors Hercules performs for Eurystheus is to descend to the Underworld and bind Cerberus.

iamque pedem referens casus euaserat omnes

redditaque Eurydice superas ueniebat ad auras

pone sequens (namque hanc dederat Proserpina legem).

(*Georg*. 4.485–87)

(And now retracing his step he had evaded all mishap,

And the restored Eurydice, following behind,

Had come to the upper world (for Persephone had imposed this

condition).)

The condition for Eurydice's safe return is only hinted at by the parenthetical remark (namque hanc dederat Proserpina legem). Virgil's oblique reference to the "legem" offers Ovid another chance to fill in the gap. Ovid supplements Virgil's elliptical narration with a straightforward statement:

hanc simul et legem Rhodopeius accipit Orpheus,

ne flectat retro sua lumina, donec Avernas

exierit valles; aut inrita dona futura   (*Met.* 10.50–52)

(And in the meantime the Thracian Orpheus received the condition

That he should not turn his eyes backwards until he

Left the Avernus valleys; or the gift would be in vain).

By spelling out the exact terms of the "lex," Ovid carefully builds up the momentum toward Orpheus' violation of the condition. Moreover, while Virgil omits the journey upward, Ovid provides details of the steep, dark and difficult path: "carpitur adclivis per muta silentia trames, / arduus, obscurus, caligine densus opaca" (*Met.* 10.53–54, "Through [regions of] still silence an ascending path was taken, / Steep, indistinct, thick in shaded darkness."). Compared with Virgil, Ovid creates a much more vivid picture of the journey by evoking both auditory ("muta silentia") and visual imagery ("obscurus, caligine densus opaca"). Ovid's description of the journey back to the upper world supplements both Virgil's omission of the journey

upward and his own omission of the journey to the Underworld. While Virgil presents a meticulous description of Orpheus' entrance into the Underworld (*Georg*. 4.467–70), Ovid whisks his Orpheus off to meet Pluto and Persephone (*Met*. 10.12–16). The interest of Ovid's description of the journey upward lies in the intertextual play at work on two levels, firstly between the Virgilian and Ovidian texts and secondly within Ovid's own text.

Following the departure from the Underworld is the climax of the story, Orpheus' backward glance at Eurydice (*Met*. 10.55–64). Here Ovid revises Virgil by presenting an alternative explanation of Orpheus' fatal mistake. The Ovidian revision, though narrated in a plain, matter-of-fact tone and therefore standing in stark contrast to Virgil's elevated style, maintains its link with the Virgilian model by playing on the keyword "amare" ("love"). Witness Virgil's narration first:

> cum subita incautum dementia cepit amantem,
>
> ignoscenda quidem, scirent si ignoscere Manes:
>
> restitit, Eurydicenque suam iam luce sub ipsa
>
> immemor heu, uictusque animi respexit.   (*Georg*. 4.488–91).
>
> ("When sudden madness caught the incautious lover,
>
> [A madness] to be pardoned indeed, if the spirits of the dead knew
>
>   how to forgive:
>
> He stopped, and on the verge of daylight, forgetful, alas!
>
> Defeated in his resolve he looked back at his Eurydice.)

These four lines can be summarized as "restitit et Eurydicen respexit" ("He stopped and looked back at Eurydice"). Yet Virgil interpolates a highly elusive state-ment ("subita incautum dementia cepit amamtem, / ignoscenda quidem, scirent si ignoscere Manes") and an agitated exclamation ("immemor heu, uictusque animi") to delay Orpheus' crucial mistake and thereby keep the reader in suspense. Conversely, Ovid describes the climax in straightforward and thus more intelligible terms:

> nec procul afuerunt telluris margine summae:
>
> hic, ne deficeret, metuens avidusque videndi
>
> flexit amans oculos, et protinus illa relapsa est" (*Met.* 10.55–57)
>
> (They were not far off from the margin of the upper world:
>
> Fearing that she might fail him and eager for the sight of her,
>
> The lover turned backward his eyes, and immediately she slipped.)

Virgil attributes Orpheus' backward glance to "dementia," or later referred to as "furor" in Eurydice's speech (*Georg*. 4.495), foregrounding the inscrutability of fate and fallibility of man. Ovid's revision, however, explains Virgil's mysterious "dementia" with the statement that Orpheus looks back at Eurydice out of his concern and fervent love for her. Though approaching the climactic moment with a somewhat detached attitude as opposed to Virgil's strong emotional involvement, Ovid's linguistic play on amans/amantem reveals his debt to Virgil and simultaneously displays his originality in his revision. While the Virgilian text presents Orpheus as the victim of "subita . . . dementia," signified by the accusative "amantem" which functions as the object of the verb "cepit," Ovid changes it to the nominative "amans" which modifies the unstated subject "Orpheus" and thereby stresses Orpheus' active role in his fatal mistake. Ovid's linguistic play on amans/amantem exemplifies his poetic ingenuity in incorporating Virgilian sources yet giving his reader a new slant on the tale.

Ovid's alteration to the Virgilian text extends to his treatment of Eurydice's reaction to Orpheus' mistake, where he revises Virgil by providing a completely opposite account. The Virgilian Eurydice's farewell speech to Orpheus is full of pathos:

> illa 'quis et me' inquit 'miseram et te perdidit, Orpheu,
>
> quis tantus furor? en iterum crudelia retro
>
> fata uocant, conditque natantia lumina somnus.
>
> iamque uale: feror ingenti circumdata nocte

inualidasque tibi tendens, heu non tua, palmas." (*Georg*. 4.494–98)

(She said, "Who destroyed both you and wretched me,

   Orpheus?

What great madness? Look, cruel Fates

Are calling me back, and sleep is closing my swimming eyes.

Now farewell: I am carried away, surrounded by the immense night,

Stretching out my weak hands to you, alas! [I am] no longer yours.")

Virgil focuses on the helplessness of the situation and Eurydice's dejection. In contrast, Ovid neglects Eurydice and directs the reader's attention to Orpheus instead, stating that "bracchiaque intendens prendique et prendere certans / nil nisi cedentes infelix arripit auras" (*Met*. 10.58–59, "And stretching out his arms to be grasped and striving to grasp, / nothing except the yielding air did the unlucky man seize"). By having Orpheus stretch out his arms ("bracciaque intendens") towards Eurydice, Ovid reverses Virgil's depiction of Eurydice's "invalidasque . . . tendens . . . palmas" towards Orpheus. More importantly, while Virgil's Eurydice blames Orpheus for his folly, Ovid silences Eurydice's reprimand with the observation that "non est de coniuge quicquam / questa suo (quid enim nisi se quereretur amatam?)" (*Met*. 10. 60–61, "Nothing about her husband / Did she complain of (For what could she complain of except that she was loved?)"). Note that Virgil highlights Eurydice's complaint with direct speech but Ovid makes his Eurydice return to the Underworld without a word. Ovid's rhetorical question "quid enim nisi se quereretur amatam?" seems to be directed at the Virgilian Eurydice's complaint. The Ovidian narrator's parenthetical comment on the situation reveals Ovid's detached amusement at the Virgilian Eurydice's emotional direct speech.

Ovid's fourth addition to the Virgilian text is Orpheus' pederasty (*Met*. 10.83–85), which is completely absent from the Virgilian text. Virgil relates Orpheus' rejection of love and marriage, his lament and his brutal death caused by the Ciconian women (*G*eorg. 4.516–22), concluding with the depiction of Orpheus' tongue singing of Eurydice even when his head is severed from his body:

> . . . Eurydicen uox ipsa et frigida lingua,
>
> a miseram Eurydicen! anima fugiente uocabat:
>
> Eurydicen toto referebant flumine ripae. (*Georg*. 4.525–27)
>
> (. . . "Euryidice!" with his voice and his cold tongue
>
> "Ah, wretched Eurydice!" he called while his soul was fleeing:
>
> "Eurydice!" the riverbanks resounded all along the stream.)

Ovid's elaboration on the wonder of the Virgilian Orpheus' incessantly singing tongue has been pointed out in our earlier discussion of the Ovidian Orpheus' speech to Pluto and Persephone (*Met*. 10. 17–39). What concerns us here is Ovid's addition of a surprising piece of etiology: the Ovidian Orpheus transfers his affections to boys and thereby becomes the first Thracian pederast:

> ille etiam Thracum populis fuit auctor amorem
>
> in teneros transferre mares citraque iuventam
>
> aetatis breve ver et primos carpere flores. (*Met*. 10.83–85)
>
> (He was even the originator of [the practice of] the Thracian people
>
> To transfer love onto tender youths and while young
>
> To enjoy the brief springtime and the first flowers.)

Ovid's dabbling in etiology makes a dubious appendix to the Virgilian text: the Ovidian Orpheus keeps his loyalty to Eurydice by having recourse to boys! Ovid's added information regarding Orpheus' predilection for boys deviates greatly from Virgil's consistent account of Orpheus' unswerving devotion. This peculiar addition reinforces Ovid's characterization of a resourceful Orpheus and reveals Ovid's further mischief in twisting the classical bereavement myth.

Ovid's fifth addition comes at the beginning of the eleventh book of the *Metamorphoses* where he relates the Ciconian women's attack on Orpheus and the wonders Orpheus' music performs (*Met*. 11.1–43). Virgil spends only three lines

(*Georg*. 4.520–22) on how Orpheus is killed by the Ciconian women, but Ovid gives a 43-line account of the Ciconian women's savagery and Orpheus' brutal death (*Met*. 11.1–43). Note that Ovid stresses the amazing affective power of Orpheus' music. Ovid's description of Orpheus' musical charm anticipates accounts of miracles frequently found in medieval hagiography:

> . . . et hastam
>
> vatis Apollinei vocalia misit in ora,
>
> quae foliis praesuta notam sine vulnere fecit;
>
> alterius telum lapis est, qui missus in ipso
>
> aere concentu victus vocisque lyraeque est
>
> ac veluti supplex pro tam furialibus ausis
>
> ante pedes iacuit.   (*Met*. 11.7–13)
>
>   (. . . and she sent
>
> Into the singing mouth of Apollo's bard a spear,
>
> Which, covered with leaves, made a mark without a wound;
>
> Another woman threw a stone, which, sent in the air,
>
> Was conquered by the harmony of the bard's voice and lyre,
>
> And, as if asking forgiveness for such frenzied undertakings,
>
> Lay before his feet.)

Inserted into a lengthy narration of the Ciconian women's persistent assault, Ovid's exaggerated description of Orpheus' musical charm lightens the grimness of the Ciconian women's violence, thereby preparing the reader for the comic denouement of his account.

Ovid's sixth and final addition to the Virgilian text comes at the ending of his account, the narrator's lament for Orpheus' death and Orpheus' ultimate reunion with Eurydice in the Underworld (*Met*. 11.44–66). This addition is partly characterized by Ovid's playful appropriation of Virgil's language, which is manifest in the narrator's apostrophe to Orpheus. The Ovidian narrator's apostrophe to Orpheus in *Meta-*

morphoses 11.44–46 is closely modeled on the Virgilian narrator's apostrophe to Eurydice in *Geogics* 4.465–66:

> Te maestae volucres, Orpheu, te turba ferarum,
>
> te rigidi silices, te carmina saepe secutae
>
> fleverunt silvae. . . . (*Met*. 11.44–46)
>
> (For you the sorrowful birds, Orpheus, for you the crowd of wild
>
>   animals,
>
> For you the hard stones, for you the trees which often
>
> Followed your songs, wept. . . .)

The anaphora featuring "te" occurring in exactly the same position as that in *Georg*. 4.465–66 amuses the attentive reader who recognizes the linguistic parallel. Ovid is obviously playing with Virgil's lines and inviting the reader to his literary game in which he revels in his role as *the* storyteller who has the Virgilian resources at his disposal. Ovid's linguistic appropriation in this context is humorous due to its incongruity, for he makes creatures (birds and animals) and even plants and inanimate objects (trees and stones) mourn for Orpheus in the way the Virgilian Orpheus mourns for Eurydice. Ovid drives home his humorous message with the statement that "lacrimis quoque flumina dicunt / increvisse suis" (*Met*. 10.47–48, "they also said that the rivers had swollen with their own tears"), a claim whose veracity is highly questionable due to its unknown source ("dicunt," "they say") and its hyperbolic sentimentality. The humorous effect of this passage depends again on the reader's memory of the syntax and emotion of the Virgilian text.

Ovid's extension of the plot at the ending of the story makes his version a patent comedy (*Met*. 11.61–66). While Virgil concludes his tale with Orpheus' death, Ovid supplements the Virgilian text with Orpheus' second and ultimate reunion with Eurydice in the Underworld. The Ovidian supplement centers on the appropriation and transformation of Virgil's catastrophic backward glance:

> hic modo coniunctis spatiantur passibus ambo

> nunc praecendentem sequitur, nunc praevius anteit
>
> Eurydicenque suam, iam tuto, respicit Orpheus. (*Met*. 11.64–66)
>
> (Here now in joined steps the two walk about,
>
> Now he follows when she leads, now he goes before,
>
> And now in safety Orpheus looks back at his Eurydice.)

The mindful reader will certainly recall that in the Virgilian text Eurydice follows behind ("pone sequens," *Georg*. 4.487) on the journey upward and that the critical moment of the tragedy is when Orpheus looks back ("respexit," *Georg*. 4.491). Here in the second reunion Ovid allows his Orpheus to follow ("sequitur") Eurydice, go before her, or walk by her side. Most importantly, Orpheus can now safely look back ("respicit") at Eurydice. Ovid deliberately appropriates Virgil's language and idea but transposes them from Virgil's calamitous context to a joyful setting. Concluding with the critical backward glance now rendered harmless, Ovid successfully transforms the Virgilian tragedy into an Ovidian comedy.

Ovid's purposeful modifications of the Virgilian text boast of his familiarity with the canon and, paradoxically, assert his originality by way of appropriation. The Ovidian account of the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice parades the later poet's mischievous revisions, challenging the reader to trace his account back to the Virgilian model and eliciting the reader's active collaboration in bringing out the humor at play in his intertextual practice. For the reader, constant awareness of Ovid's exploitation of intertextual effects greatly enhances the appreciation of Ovid's poetic virtuosity. By exploring the potentially comic side of Virgil's tragic account, Ovid establishes himself as Virgil's peer in the Latin poetic tradition.

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