

Discipline: “Interpreting Poetry”

Lecturer: O.V. Karbashevskaya

Theme 1. Poetry in the System of the Fine Arts

Self-Study 1

2.3. The Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in Time-Arts

2.3.1. Music

As for the given classical myth in music, its reinterpretations were made in Italy, Germany, Austria, France and other countries. The following list represents some of the composers and their works, dating from the 17th up to the 19th c.:

- Italy – by Ottavio Rinuccini (1562–1621), “Eurydice” (1600) and by Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643), “Orpheus” (1607);
- Germany – Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787), “Orpheus and Eurydice” (1762);
- Austria – Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), “Orpheus and Eurydice” (1791);
- France – Jacques Offenbach (1819–1880), “Orpheus in the Underworld” (1858).

It is noteworthy that the musician cannot tell the Orpheus myth clearly to one who has never heard it. But to those who already know the plot, the composer’s work reinforces in musical sound emotions suggested by the story. Moreover, such portions of the story as wondrous playing musical instruments are better conveyed through music than through the medium of any other art.

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Self-Study 2

2.3. The Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in Time-Arts

2.3.2. Verbal Art (Literature and Folklore)

Roman Literature: Virgil’s “Georgics” and Ovid’s “Metamorphoses”

The original Greek myth was first written down, fictionally interpreted and thus preserved for us by Roman literature. The discussed Greek myth in its current form was initially told by Roman poets Virgil (70 BCE–19 BCE) and Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE).

Firstly, the myth comes in the context of Virgil’s didactic poem on farming “Georgics” IV (c. 29 BC). Literally, the title Georgics means “poems or books dealing with agriculture or rural topics”. This is a practical guide for the farmer about ploughing, growing trees, tending cattle, and keeping bees. The instructions are interspersed with poetical digressions on such topics as the beauty of the Italian countryside, the joy of the farmer, when all is gathered in, and the moral values of the country life.

Virgil’s myth of Orpheus comes at the end of the last book about bees. It is enclosed within the story of demigod Aristaeus. Aristaeus was an inventor of bee-keeping and, as son of Apollo, Orpheus’s half-brother. According to Virgil, Aristaeus’s bees have died of a mysterious plague. The hero learns that he is being punished for the two deaths: of Eurydice, who was snake-bitten while fleeing his advances, and of Orpheus’ one. Fortunately, Aristaeus does penance and magically creates a new hive of bees.

Secondly, the Greek myth of Orpheus in Roman literature was told in the poem “Metamorphoses” X-XI (c. AD 8/10) by Ovid (43 BC–AD 17). “The Metamorphoses” (c. AD 8/10) is a collection of mythological and legendary stories. They are arranged in chronological order from the creation of the world to the death and deification of Julius Caesar, Roman general and statesman. Ovid described the creation of the world as the first metamorphosis of chaos into order, and Julius Caesar’s death and deification as the culminating metamorphosis. Here Julius Caesar transforms to star to preside over divine destiny of Rome. Overall, Ovid’s “Metamorphoses” consists of 15 books and the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice comes in books 10 and 11.

The difference between Virgil’s Georgics and Ovid’s Metamorphoses is in rendering the conclusion of the myth. At the point when Virgil’s broken hero is wandering off to die, Ovid’s protagonist is starting to narrate tales of unhappy love and wicked women.